

# Comments: Subjective Well-being and Peaceful Uprisings

- Decline in subjective well-being increases peaceful uprisings (Data: 119 countries, 2007-2014)
- Dichotomy - Grievances (perceptions) vs objective circumstances
- Objective measures capture conditions for a good life. Grievances (perceptions) – whether conditions have translated into a good life
- Tunneling effect – objective measures raise expectations, when unmet, can lead to frustration and resentment
- Additional: Lack of trust and data transparency. Widen gap between perceptions and reality. Lack of trust → objective reality unclear

# Measurement

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Cantril ladder scale – Best possible life (10) versus the worst possible life (0)

*“Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”*

– John Stuart Mill

- Thresholds (suffering – 4 or less)
- Expectations 5 years from now

## **Subjective Welfare consistency across time :**

- Tradeoffs over time (e.g. medical students)
- The idea of the best possible life changes across time: Social media
- Mobile phones per inhabitants (old phones vs smart phones)
- Mobile phone signal coverage/social media penetration (*Manacorda and Tesei 2020 – Econometrica; Enikolopov et al. 2020 - Econometrica*)
- Contagious protest (learning across regions) catalyzed by social media (Arezki et al., 2020)

# Policy Implications

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- Do peaceful protests matter? The example of Arab Spring – what came out of it?
- Good policy recommendation: Track subjective welfare. But if subjective welfare is declining, what should be done?
  - Overall measure – difficult to disentangle sources of subjective welfare
  - Breakdown of perceptions: Food and shelter index, Community basics index
- Political vs. economic perceptions (Abi-Nassif et al., 2020)

## **Technical: Instruments**

- Unclear how the instrument (deaths due to infectious and parasitic diseases) does not violate exclusion restriction (poverty measurement)
- Weak instruments - be careful about GMM (Bazzi and Clemens 2013 – AEJ macro)