A Demonstration of Protest Cascades based on Timur Kuran's 1991 Article

Briefly present the most important points of Kuran's theory:
- People living in dictatorship "falsify preferences"—if they don't like the government, they keep it to themselves
- Each person's decision to participate in a protest depends on how many others are protesting (point out that one does not want to be the only one in the streets, but also that one might not want to be the only one sitting it out if everybody is participating)
- Some people have a harder time pretending to support the government than do others
  - Here it might be worth drawing tie to Socrates

Demonstration of Kuran's theory:

Have one index card for each student in the class. If you plan to play two rounds of the demonstration, write A on line 1 of each card and B on line 2. Next to each letter, write a number that signifies the number of other protesters that the student would have to see participating in order to decide to participate.

I usually play two rounds:

The first round I set up to illustrate that even unpopular political regimes can avoid being challenged collectively. I still include a 0 so that one student is the only one to participate in protest, but critically I make sure to skip 1 to avoid triggering a cascade of protest.

- A: {0, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 4, 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14}

Then, I do a second round to illustrate that small changes can trigger a cascade, even if the regime overall is more popular than that in the first case.

- B: {0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14}

Note that if a student is absent, make sure to not hand out the cards with the very highest numbers.

Disseminate these directions:

•We will play 2 rounds today
*We will start with the line of your card marked A.
•Do not show any of your classmates your number unless the dictator instructs you to
•To participate in protest, you should stand up
•You may not participate in protest unless you see at least as many people standing as the number on your paper. If you see at least that number raise their hands, you must participate in protest
Follow-up questions:

- How do you interpret having a high or low number?
- How might the Oath of Demophantos affect each person's number/willingness to participate in protest?
- Kuran and Teegarden were describing opposition to dictatorship. Do you think a similar model might shed light on protest, voting, etc. in democracies?
- How might social media affect this game?