

Social interactions influence the decision of education in Senegal

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We study the influence of belonging to a social group on the decision to schooling children in rural Senegal. The social group is defined by the caste and the geographical proximity. Our results show a strong influence of the social group in the schooling children decision.

We exploit a rich data set from Niakhar, a rural zone in Senegal to study how social interactions affect educational decision. Peer effects in education are widely studied in the literature but many of these studies analyze learning outcomes in the classroom context and few look into what happens in the case of sub-Saharan Africa. Our paper differs in the sense that we study how **social group schooling behavior** influences the decision to attend school for children in **rural Senegal**. Social groups are defined with caste membership and geographical proximity. While caste norms represent a key element in customs and social organization, few studies focus on the caste role in Senegal. We contribute to the economic literature by studying **caste norms** and attitudes toward education. Identification is an important challenge when it comes to disentangling the effect of social group behavior. We take advantage of the panel structure of our data to estimate a dynamic model and to control for fixed characteristics of individuals and social groups. We also implement different tests to convince that non-random assignment into social groups and geographical unobserved factors are not threats to the validity of our results. Our finding suggests that usual **economic determinants of schooling** are not enough to explain school attendance. The probability to attend school increases between 25 and 29 percentage points with 1% increase of the previous average attendance rate in the social group. Schooling behavior in the social group explains a large portion of the attendance decision. Social interactions appear to be more important for children from the royal caste. Furthermore, children from the royal caste tend to behave in the opposite way in terms of schooling compared to farmers or griots and artisans.

The evidence shown in this paper suggests that social interactions matter and should be considered to implement **educational policies**. Three mechanisms can explain this strong effect:

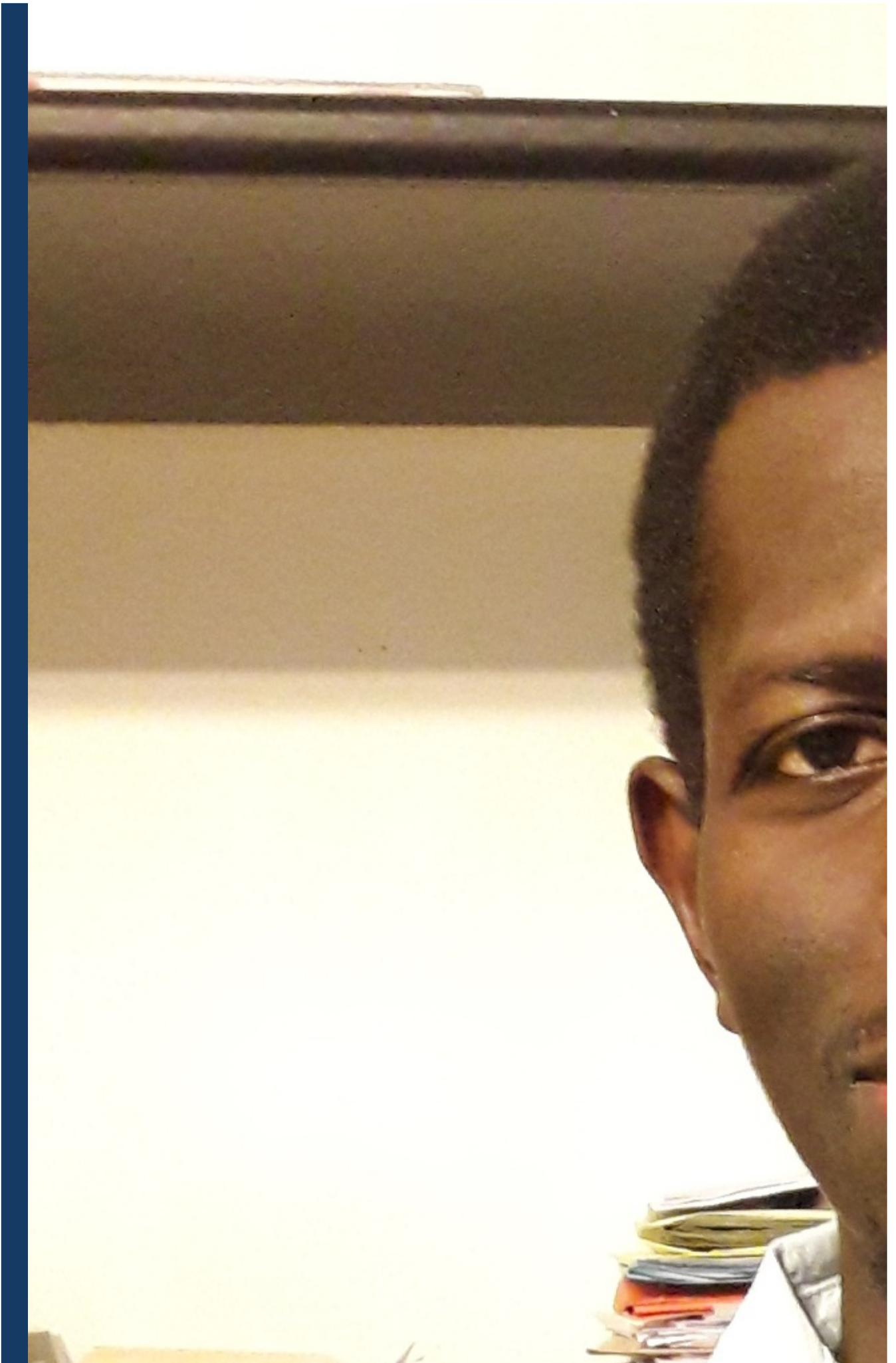
- Social norms: One of the main characteristics of caste groups is to transmit ways of thinking. Despite modernization and the loss of power of these traditional forms of social identity and organization, many of their cultural aspects still have great importance today. Geographical proximity and the identity carried by the membership to a certain village can also explain why people from the same village behave similarly in accordance with the prevailing norms.
- Ripple effect: People often behave like other members of their social group in response to fads or trends. Simply seeing, many children in the social group attending school could motivate a particular parent to send his or her child to school as well.
- Perception of the returns to education: If individuals notice that better educated people in their social category are wealthier, this may encourage them to enroll their children to school.

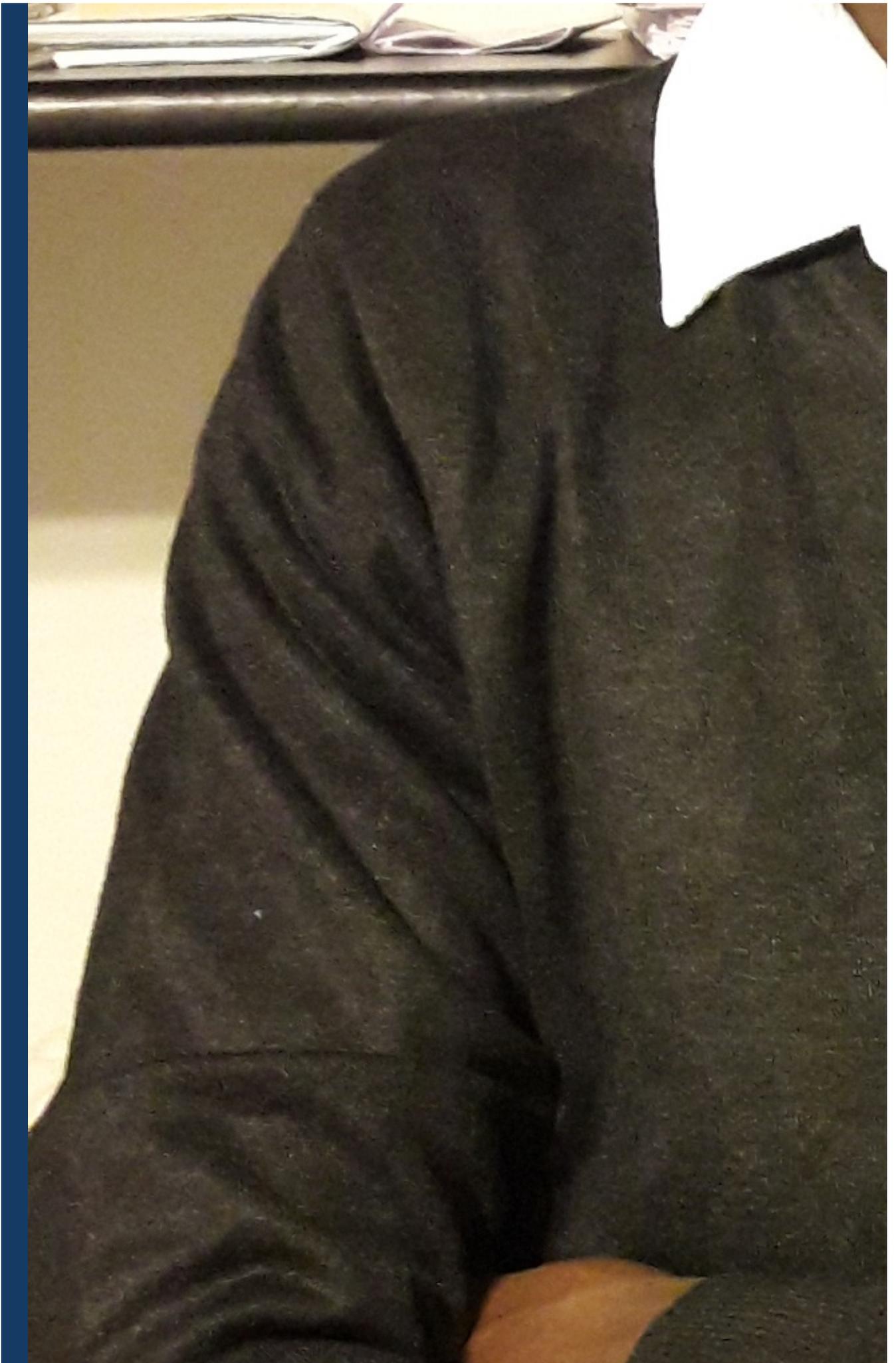


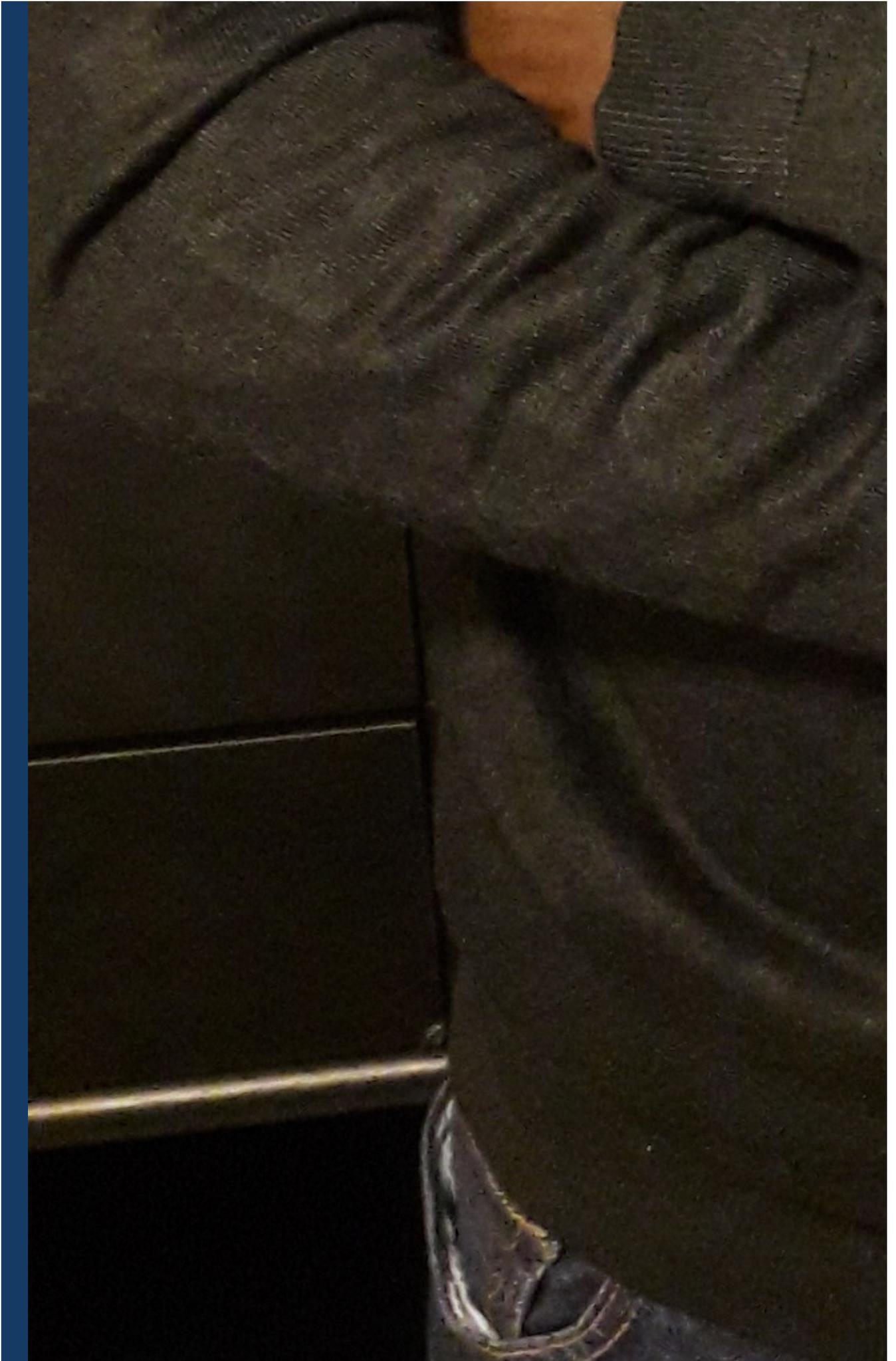
Fig. 1. Location of Niakhar













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Reference

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