

Rebels without a cause

What the upsurge in protest movements means for global politics

A report from The Economist Intelligence Unit





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Preface

From the Arab revolutions to the Occupy movements, there has been an upsurge in popular protests in the past couple of years. Economic recession, hunger, poverty, political repression and corruption have all played their part in fuelling social unrest. Indeed, such universal sources of human discontent will always remain powerful drivers of political change.

But we also seem to be witnessing a new trend in the emergence of diffuse and less focused protest movements. These are often loosely organised, mobilise rapidly via social networks, and—most importantly—lack a coherent agenda or manifesto. Rather than engaging in political debate about alternatives to the status quo, these new-style protest movements seem mainly to be expressing disillusionment with political and business elites. Even (or perhaps especially) in democracies, there is a sense that vested interests have captured the political system. This essay—*Rebels without a cause: What the upsurge in protest movements means for global politics*—explores this trend, analyses what is specific and new about modern-day protests, and draws out the consequences for future global political developments.



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A new age of protest

We are witnessing a global upsurge of popular protest that is concentrated particularly in Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America. Other regions such as Asia and North America have been less susceptible, though have not escaped entirely. The mainsprings of the protests may be different—some are responses to economic distress, others are revolts against dictatorship, still others express the aspirations of new middle classes in fast-growing emerging markets—but all have common underlying features. The economic, social and political fallout from the 2008–09 global economic and financial crisis helps only partially to explain the upsurge of protest, but what appears to be decisive is the erosion of trust in governments, institutions, parties and politicians—what is generally termed “the crisis of democracy”. The striking features of the protests are their diffuse, inchoate character, their disavowal of politics and ideology, and their self-conscious rejection of organisation and leadership. It is therefore a misnomer to talk about a “new age of revolution”: today’s protest movements bear little resemblance to their 20th-century predecessors.

Within the generalised wave of protest, it is possible to distinguish between several broad types of protest movement:

- a) Those pertaining to the “Arab Spring”, the wave of anti-regime and pro-democracy protests and conflicts that began in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread to Libya, Jordan, Egypt, Yemen and other countries, sometimes also referred to as the “Islamist Winter” as a result of the success of Islamist parties in ensuing elections. Pro-democracy protests have also occurred in Russia and several countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
- b) There has been an increasing incidence of more traditional types of social unrest, such as strikes and anti-austerity demonstrations, in response to the continuing negative fallout from the global economic crisis of 2008–09, which has led to rising unemployment, poverty and inequality in many countries. In parts of Latin America, protests over the use of natural resources and indigenous rights also fall into this category.
- c) There is also a more amorphous category of protest that could be termed “new social movements” (NSMs), as exemplified by the Turkish protesters, the Indignados in Spain, the Occupy movements in New York and London, and the Pirates in Germany and other north European countries. Emerging middle classes in countries such as Brazil and India have taken to the streets to protest against corruption and to demand better health, education and other services and, in India, safety for women. Their causes are diverse, their participants are mainly young and middle-class, and their demands are inchoate, but their targets are generally political elites who are regarded as distant, self-serving and corrupt.

The catalysts for these various types of protest movement vary (the decades-long dictatorships in the Middle East, austerity policies in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, the building of megaprojects in Turkey, Brazil and Macedonia etc), but all of them share some common features that set them apart from the sorts of protests that were common in the 20th century.



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The drivers of unrest

The sheer number of protests spanning different time zones has caught the attention of commentators everywhere. In fact, protests have been building a head of steam for several years, certainly in Europe, where there have been recurrent episodes of unrest and many governments have fallen. Why are protests erupting now and what are their causes—is it simply a coincidence that unrest is sweeping across several continents at the same time?

The backdrop to the recent wave of protest is the 2008–09 crisis and its aftermath. The negative economic and social fallout from the crisis is important, although it alone cannot explain the upsurge of unrest. A recent study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), *World of Work Report 2013: Repairing the Social Fabric*, noted that social unrest has increased in 2011–12 relative to the pre-crisis period in 46 of the 71 countries covered. The ILO's index uses five weighted variables: confidence in government; living standard; local job market; freedom in your life; and access to Internet. The ILO carried out an empirical assessment to establish the link between its social unrest index and actual economic indicators. It concluded that economic growth and unemployment are the two most important determinants of social unrest.

Like The EIU's own social unrest index, the ILO found that Europe is the region most susceptible to social unrest as a result of the economic repercussions (recession, rising unemployment, growing income inequality) of the crisis and the post-crisis policy responses (austerity policies and regressive democratic trends). The countries that experienced the sharpest increases in the risk of social unrest in 2010–12 are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. The risk of social unrest also increased markedly in central and south-east European countries, among members of the CIS and in countries in South Asia. In the Middle East and North Africa the risk of social unrest peaked in 2008 and remained high afterwards. The risk of social unrest declined in Sub-Saharan Africa, which performed well economically in this period (2011–12), and in East Asia, South-east Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, reflecting a relatively swift recovery from the economic crisis.

Ironically, given the conclusions of its own research, the ILO criticises The EIU's social unrest index for weighting very heavily the institutional and political weaknesses of developing countries (we probably weight these factors more highly than others for developed countries too). However, our emphasis on the importance of this factor appears to be vindicated by recent developments, given that much of the recent unrest in both developed and less developed countries appears to be motivated by a deep sense of popular dissatisfaction with political elites and institutions.

The trust deficit

As we argued in our 2009 report, *Manning the Barricades*, economic distress is almost a necessary condition for serious instability, but by itself it is not sufficient. Declines in incomes are not always followed by unrest. It is only when economic distress is accompanied by other structural features of vulnerability that there is a high risk of instability. The underlying vulnerability to unrest depends on



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a host of factors, including the degree of income inequality, the state of governance, levels of social provision, ethnic tensions, public trust in institutions and a history of unrest.

On this basis, we suggested that Europe would be the worst-affected region, and we singled out Greece and the UK as the countries in western Europe most likely to suffer social unrest. And even during the economic boom of the mid-2000s we argued that eastern Europe was particularly vulnerable to external shocks because of the deep-seated popular dissatisfaction with political systems and democracy. In eastern Europe, the crisis has reinforced a pre-existing mood of disappointment with the experience and results of the 20-year transition. There has been a marked further decline in life satisfaction, support for markets and democracy, and trust in institutions—to a degree which, a few years ago, seemed to set the eastern half of the continent apart from the western half. However, in recent years southern Europe has rapidly caught up with the east in this regard, and western Europe is now not far behind.

Only by giving due consideration to the political dimension can we understand the mainsprings of the new age of protest and see the common denominators of seemingly diverse protests. It is the growth of popular distrust in governments, institutions, parties and politicians that is driving many of today's protest movements, whether in austerity-hit Europe or fast-growing Latin America. There has been a long-term secular trend of declining trust throughout the Western world since the 1970s; this accelerated and spread after the collapse of communism in 1989 and has sped up again since the 2008–09 crisis, as has been well documented in regular surveys by Gallup, Pew, Eurobarometer and others.

A Bulgarian political scientist, Ivan Krastev, has investigated the trust deficit in relation to recent events in Europe and other regions and discusses how the behaviour of political elites in managing the crisis has led to an erosion of trust and disappointment in democracy (The EIU's *Democracy Index 2012* discusses these issues too). Krastev says that the new populism is best understood as “the frustration of the empowered”: the spread of democracy worldwide is coinciding with a growing sense of disappointment with democracy.

This decline of public trust in democratic institutions helps to explain what the impoverished inhabitants of Sofia, Bulgaria have in common with the middle-class demonstrators in Taksim Square, Turkey. The protesters in Turkey are not motivated by economic hardship or dissatisfaction with the Erdogan government's handling of the economy—its economic record was the main reason the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was re-elected in 2007 and 2011. The unifying issue is dissatisfaction with Erdogan's style of government, its lack of consultation and its heavy-handed response to the protests. In Bulgaria, what started off as protests against higher electricity bills a few months ago quickly metamorphosed into generalised anti-government demonstrations complaining of corruption and lack of transparency, resulting in the fall of the centre-right government of Boiko Borisov. Within weeks of its election the new centre-left government found itself on the receiving end of popular protests against cronyism and corruption, and it is unlikely to serve a full term.



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A modern malady

So who are these new-age protesters, and what do they really want? In the main (though not exclusively) they are led by young, educated, middle-class individuals who resent their political leaders. They do not generally belong to political parties or trade unions and prefer the anonymity of Twitter and other social networks to the traditional political soap box—at least until they are carried aloft into the TV studios, when their social network mobilisations unexpectedly turn into mass protests. This happened with the five founders of the *tamarrod* (rebellion) movement in Egypt, all in their 20s, who started out organising a petition to oust President Mohammed Morsi and ended up being guests on prime-time TV talk shows.

The historian Francis Fukuyama argues that new protest movements are the result of the rise of a new global middle class, who feel alienated from the ruling political elite and who have a sense of entitlement that is not being fulfilled. The demanding new middle classes are not just a problem for authoritarian regimes or new democracies, according to Fukuyama, but for established democracies too. However, he notes that historically such movements have rarely succeeded in bringing about long-term political change, because they are minorities in their societies and have proved incapable of linking up and uniting with other social forces. All this is true as far as it goes, but there is a more fundamental reason why today's protest movements are unlikely to challenge the status quo or bring about substantive political changes.

“All gods dead”

There is a hole at the heart of the new protest movements, as other observers have noted, pointing to the absence of a clearly defined political purpose. We have the paradox of protests without politics in the classic sense of a contest of ideas. Twentieth-century-style politics—a clash of ideas and a commitment to fight for them—no longer exists in the second decade of the 21st century. If we look at the demands of the protest movements around the world, this becomes self-evident. Most of these movements centre on demands for dignity, inclusiveness, recognition, respect.

From Istanbul to Rio, London to New York and Madrid to Athens, protesters have self-consciously refused to engage in a process of political clarification—in favour of just making an emotional statement (indignation, victimhood, leave me alone, not in my name etc). Many protesters refuse to clarify what it is they are protesting against or fighting for, and even make a virtue of having nothing to say. The “silent man” in Taksim Square, Turkey, who stood without moving or speaking for eight hours, is a fitting symbol of the new-age protests.

Behind this silence is a sense of impotence. Krastev cites a study of protest movements carried out by the London School of Economics, which noted that many were not protesting against specific government policies as much as expressing a general belief that powerful interests have captured democratic institutions and that ordinary citizens are powerless to bring about change. This sense of powerlessness, of being on the receiving end of changes wrought by forces beyond the control of ordinary people, runs through many of the protest movements.



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Even when protesters do put forward formal political demands, they tend to be accepting of the status quo. So Bulgaria's protesters have demanded a reform of the electoral system and the country's institutions, an end to corruption and greater transparency. These demands suggest an inability in this age of anti-politics to conceive of a better alternative, no matter how disappointing the democratic fare on offer. The protest movements do not have any sense of being agencies of social change; in fact, they are often anti-change and express regressive ideas about growth and development.

The problem for the world's protesters is that they have been unable to come up with new ideas to fill the ideological vacuum. Most of the new protest movements deliberately eschew ideology, even making a virtue of their lack of political ideas. Most protesters might be able to identify what they are against, but not many can articulate clearly what they are for, or have a plan of how they are going to achieve their goals.

Or does it explode?

The exception to the apolitical trend of modern-day protests appeared to be the Arab Spring movements, which brought masses of people out on to the streets in a collective challenge to the anciens régimes of the region. Once people began to have a sense of their power to change things, as in Egypt in 2011, they became more determined to fight for what they wanted. However, what started as a potentially transformative movement for democratic change has ended up endorsing the removal of the first democratically elected president by a military coup.

Having failed to clarify their political objectives and organise themselves effectively, the original pro-democracy protesters in Egypt found their aspirations for democracy blocked by the military. They went out on the streets again to insist on an end to military rule and to fight for free elections, but they failed to rally the more conservative elements in Egyptian society behind their vision of a more secular democratic future. When the first democratic elections brought to power the Islamists—who have deep social roots and are well organised—the crowds came out on the streets again to demand their removal. That a military coup to remove the elected president and his party from power can be celebrated by protesters as a success—even as it entrenches nationwide divisions and threatens to precipitate civil war—suggests that Egypt's protest movement suffers from the same flaws as others.

There are likely to be more outbreaks of unrest in coming weeks and months, and more governments are likely to fall, but in most places the new-age protesters do not represent a serious threat to the status quo. Even in the Middle East, where regimes have fallen, there is a danger that real democratic change will be stymied, as the example of Egypt illustrates. Protest movements that do not elucidate and clarify their objectives and do not build an organisation to fight for them invariably fizzle out. Further, by disavowing politics, they allow the powers that be to reorganise while preserving the old political system. As one political science professor in Cairo observed, the *tamarrod* movement will probably vanish just like other youth coalitions “because they are about what they don't want, not about what they want”. They are no match for Egypt's military leaders, who will fight to defend their privileged position.

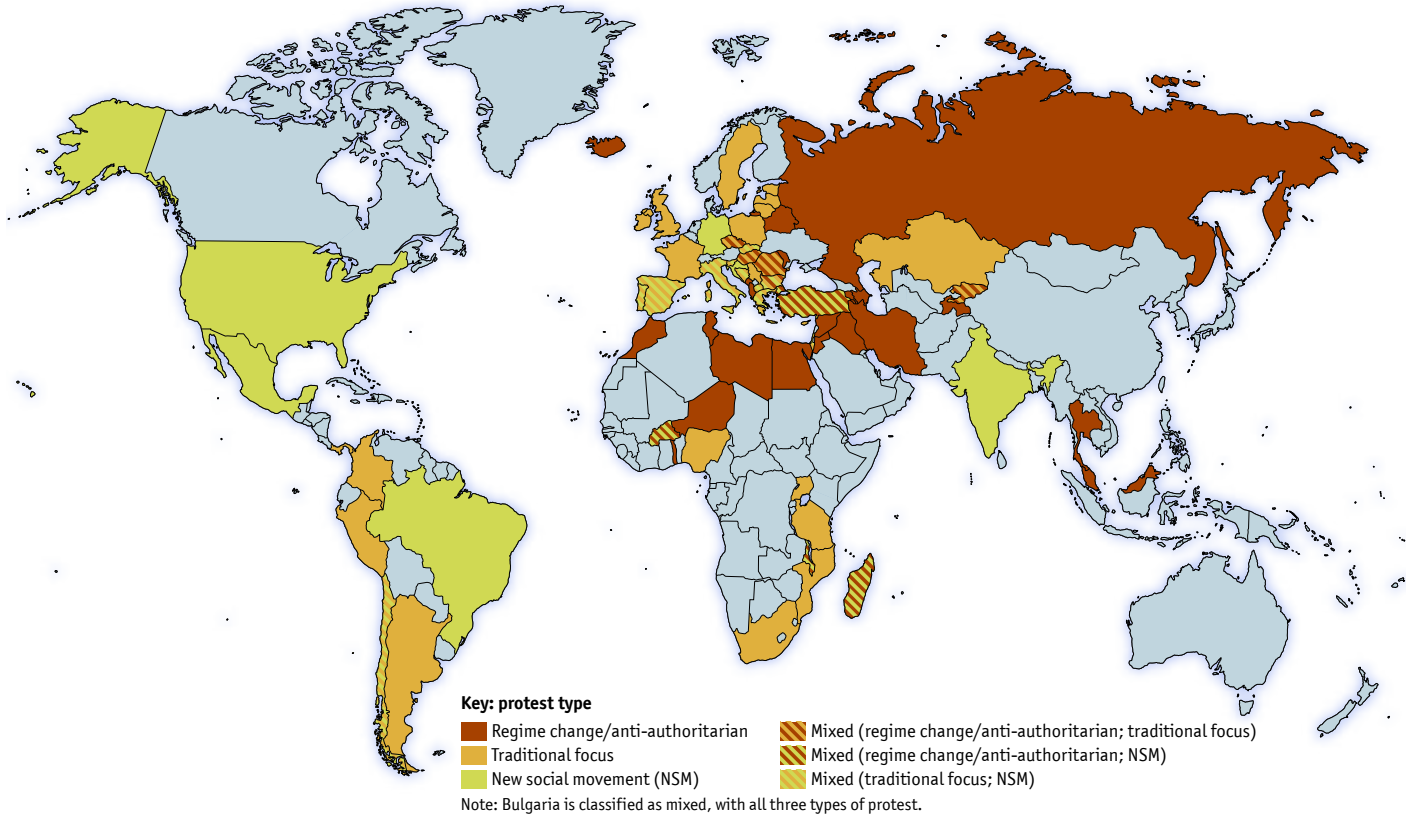


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The world in protests

(selected protests, by type and country, 2009-13)





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Appendix

The world in protests

(selected protests, by type and country, 2009-13)

Country	Protest date(s)	Protest type(s)	Protest focus
Albania	2009, Jan 2011 and May 2011	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	2009 protests triggered by alleged ballot-rigging in June election; these erupted again in January 2011, in copycat of Tunisia protests, and also had an anti-corruption focus. Four protesters killed by Republican Guard outside PM's offices. The May 2011 protests were triggered by alleged ballot-rigging in the Tirana mayoral election that month.
Argentina	Ongoing, large protests in 2012 and 2013	Traditional focus	Argentina has a strong tradition of protest, and demonstrations and labour strikes are frequent. Above and beyond these protests, a series of very large anti-government demonstrations (against corruption, insecurity and economic mismanagement) has taken place in the past six to nine months.
Armenia	Feb 2011 and Apr 2013	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	2011 protests led by opposition Armenian National Congress Party; 5,000-10,000 people marched through Yerevan to protest at democratic deficit, low growth and corruption. Linked to anniversary of 2008 protests, when ten people died in protests questioning the presidential election result. In 2013 opposition protesters contested the presidential election result, claiming electoral fraud.
Azerbaijan	Jan-Jun 2011 intermittent and Jan 2013	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	2011 protests led by opposition calling for early elections and questioning legitimacy of government. Explicit links to Arab Spring made by leaders, although demonstrations minuscule by comparison. Demonstrators arrested by police as soon as they started to gather. A series of small-scale protests in early 2013 focused on corruption in government and abuse of power.
Bahrain	Feb-Mar 2011	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Resentment continues to fester, especially among the predominantly Shia underclass, in the wake of the heavy-handed suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations in early 2011, and the continued periodic harassment of opposition leaders.
Belarus	2010	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Big, mostly peaceful protests following the presidential election—put down by force and suppression since.
Bosnia & Hercegovina	Oct 2009, Apr 2010, Apr 2012, Nov 2012, Jun 2013	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	2009 and 2010 protests triggered by cuts to war veterans' pensions, agreed as part of IMF stand-by credit. The 2010 and 2012 events, likewise, were triggered by overdue pensions payments for war veterans. The 2013 protests had a different focus, being triggered by failure of ethnically-based parties in parliament to agree new system of IDs, leaving babies born since Feb 2013 without official documents.
Brazil	Jun 2013	NSM	Protest over transport fares morphed into wider movement reflecting anger at corruption, poor public services and costly mega-projects.
Bulgaria	Jan 2009, Jun 2012, Feb 2013, Jun 2013	Mixed (all three types)	2009 protests had traditional focus, triggered by economic downturn, but also directed against corruption and organised crime. The 2012 protests were different, triggered by new forestry law, lifting restrictions on development of ski resort. The February 2013 mass nationwide protests were a response initially to high electricity prices, poverty and unemployment but became broader and increasingly anti-government in scope, and the government resigned. The June 2013 mass protests were triggered by appointment of a controversial media magnate to head national security agency. Reflecting broader concern over links between politicians and oligarchs, corruption, secrecy, etc.



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Burkina Faso	Feb-Jun 2011	Mixed (NSM; regime change/anti-authoritarian)	Triggered by soldiers mutinying over unpaid housing allowances and by a student's death in police custody. Spread to include protests over high living costs, autocratic government and official corruption.
Chile	2010-12	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Tensions with students escalated into widespread protests over the education system in 2010-11. The government alleviated tensions by cutting the cost of student loans, regulating poorly performing schools and spending more on education. Also, in recent years Chile has experienced an escalation in violence by Mapuche indigenous groups demanding land rights and more state support.
Colombia	Mid-2012, ongoing	Traditional focus	Failure to address regional and local concerns, combined with unmet promises by the administration, has created a wide range of protests. Most damaging have been labour strikes in the mining sector and a nationwide transport strike.
Croatia	Feb-Mar 2011	NSM	Up to 10,000 protesters gathered in Zagreb every day for several weeks, initially organised on Internet. Diverse group, protesting about government corruption scandals, opposition to EU accession, and to show support for indicted Croatian war veterans.
Cyprus	Mar 2013 (ongoing)	Traditional focus	Triggered by the collapse of the country's financial sector, which brought the Cypriot economy to its knees and led to severe austerity measures.
Czech Republic	May-Jun 2011, Sep-Oct 2011, Mar-May 2012, Nov 2012	Mixed (traditional focus; regime change/anti-authoritarian)	In the first mass demonstration since 1989, 40,000 people protested in early 2011 against austerity. Several months later, right-wing extremists led protests against the Roma community in northern Bohemia, in part triggered by rising unemployment there. In early 2012, 100,000 people demonstrated in Prague against the outgoing centre-right government and its austerity policies, and union-led demonstrations continued into May. In late 2012, a series of anti-government rallies took place in many towns, with an anti-austerity focus.
Egypt	Feb 2011, Jun-Jul 2013	Regime change/anti-authoritarian	In 2011, mass protests as part of Arab Spring brought down the multi-decade-long regime of President Hosni Mubarak. In mid-2013, the military intervened to remove the democratically elected president, Mohammed Morsi, after protests against the perceived centralisation of power around the Muslim Brotherhood.
Estonia	Mar/Oct 2012	Traditional focus	A national teachers' strike in March 2012—the largest strike in Estonia since independence—involved demands for higher wages. A month-long nationwide strike by medical personnel was held in October 2012, with unions demanding wage increases.
France	2009-13, ongoing	Traditional focus	Mainly anti-austerity and anti-reform protests, especially by public sector workers, which have also taken on an anti-government hue. Rioting has been a regular occurrence, including a particularly nasty outbreak of rioting in Grenoble in 2010, sparked by a police shooting. In 2013, the biggest protests of François Hollande's presidency have mobilised in response to a single issue, opposition to the gay-marriage bill.
Germany	Late 2011	NSM	The Pirate Party, a defiantly anti-political party, came to the fore in regional elections in late 2011, on the back of rising public cynicism about mainstream politics. The party's causes include freedom on the Internet and government transparency. Support for the Pirate Party has since fallen back, amid a lack of policy clarity.



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Greece	2010-ongoing/ May-Aug 2011	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Triggered by a series of public spending cuts and tax increases. Also a response to rising unemployment (especially among the young). Anti-austerity sentiment is mixed with broad public discontent with the corruption, cronyism and vested interests associated with the political elite. The 2011 protests were of a different type, starting out as anti-austerity protests, but focused on rejecting the political system. The protests were organised through social media by Direct Democracy Now!, also known as the Indignant Citizens Movement, and without political party or trade union affiliation (unlike most of the anti-austerity demonstrations and general strikes).
Hong Kong	2003 to present	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Hong Kong has seen regular protests in favour of democracy since the return to Chinese rule in 1997. While recent demonstrations have yet to match the scale of the 2003 marches against plans to introduce anti-subversion legislation, opposition to the government and China's constraints on local democratic development continues. Although most protests are essentially pro-democracy in nature, they share features with new social movements.
Hungary	2009-12 various	Mixed (traditional focus; regime change/anti-authoritarian)	In 2009 thousands protested against the government's handling of the economic crisis, and disapproval of the incumbents helped Fidesz come to power. In 2011-12, tens of thousands took to the streets to protest against a new media law, the government's takeover of independent institutions and a new constitution, denouncing the government's authoritarian tendencies and demanding transparency.
Iceland	Jan 2009	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Peaceful protests triggered by the country's banking sector collapse and motivated by unhappiness with the government's role in the economic and financial crisis. The protests were aimed at ousting the government, bringing about new elections and changing the constitution.
India	2011, 2012-13	NSM	Anti-corruption protests (2011) and women's safety (2012-13) protests were examples of youth and middle classes protesting against failures in governance. Somewhat influenced by social media, also relying significantly on pre-existing modes of mobilisation (word of mouth, activists, traditional media).
Iran	Jun 2009	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Alleged fraud in the June 2009 presidential election triggered the "green movement" pro-democracy protests that coalesced around Mir-Hossein Mousavi, a defeated reformist candidate. Estimates of the scale of demonstrations vary, but possibly 1m people protested in the capital, Tehran. The protests petered out in the face of heavy security crackdowns.
Iraq	Late 2012-13	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Sunni protesters expressing their perception of marginalisation and unfair treatment, voicing discontent at the increasingly authoritarian rule of the Shia prime minister.
Ireland	Mar 2012	Traditional focus	There were few street protests, but by the deadline for payment at end-March 2012 around 50% of households had not paid the flat-rate €100 local-services charge introduced in the 2012 budget.
Israel	Mid- to late 2011	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Mass peaceful protests occurred against widening income inequality in a once fairly egalitarian society and also against the high cost of living, especially rising house prices.
Italy	2009-13, ongoing	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement). Founded 2009 but came to the fore in February 2013 general election, when it won 25% of the vote. Anti-establishment protest movement, but also populist, anti-austerity, Eurosceptic.



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Jordan	Early 2011-13	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Protests against political system by Islamists and other disaffected groups including leftists and youth groups. Some modest electoral reforms but no major change in regime. Subsequent protests have been mostly smaller in scale, except in November 2012 when a major reform of subsidies was introduced.
Kazakhstan	Dec 2011	Traditional focus	Oil workers in western town of Zhanaozen went on strike for improved pay and conditions; violently quelled by authorities.
Kyrgyz Republic	Apr and Jun 2010	Mixed (regime change/anti-authoritarian; traditional focus)	The overthrow of the Bakiyev regime in April was followed by large anti-Uzbek protests calling for nationalisation of flagship Kumtor gold mine, often linked to rising Kyrgyz nationalism.
Latvia	Jan 2009	Traditional focus	10,000 protesters gathered in Riga to air political and economic grievances; several hundred were more militant and attacked government buildings.
Libya	2011	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Arab Spring protests led to civil war that culminated in the ousting (and death) of Muammar Qadhafi.
Lithuania	2009	Traditional focus	Anger at falling living standards and austerity measures led to protests of around 7,000 people in Vilnius, the largest since independence.
Macedonia	2010-13	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Anti-austerity protests have merged with NSM-type protests on occasion (thousands have protested against the "Skopje 2014" mega-building project), and have sometimes had an inter-ethnic dimension (eg Mar 2013, when Macedonians and ethnic Albanians fought with police in Skopje over a government appointment).
Madagascar	Jan-Mar 2009	Mixed (NSM; regime change/anti-authoritarian)	Triggered by public protests about the president's increasing authoritarianism and the perception that development had benefited a small elite. Protests became violent on both sides, and ultimately led to a military mutiny and the overthrow of the president, Marc Ravalomanana.
Malawi	2011	Mixed (regime change/anti-authoritarian; NSM)	Protests against the government's economic mismanagement and the increasingly autocratic rule of the then president, Bingu wa Mutharika.
Malaysia	May 2013	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Opposition alliance protested against results of the May 5th 2013 general election, calling for electoral reform and a change of government.
Mexico	2012, ongoing	NSM	Protests loosely co-ordinated by social networks and a student group, #yosoy131, before July 2012 elections. Focused against Enrique Peña Nieto (president since Dec 2012), criticising media bias and calling for better opportunities and transparency. Other episodes of social unrest have opposed education reform and have been led by the most radical group within the teachers' union.
Moldova	2009	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	In April 2009, when the ruling communists lost the election and there was big shake-up of political elite, protesters stormed parliament and were beaten back.



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Montenegro	Apr 2013	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Protests in the capital over re-election of incumbent president Filip Vujanovic, involving allegations of election-rigging and corruption.
Morocco	Early 2011-13	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Protests against political system. New constitution introduced and elections brought forward as a result, but little substantive change. Nevertheless, protests since mid-2011 have been very modest in scale.
Mozambique	Sep 2010	Traditional focus	Triggered by a 30% rise in bread prices and rising living costs. New communications technology facilitated the organisation of protests.
Niger	Feb 2010	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Large protest occurred against amendments to the constitution aiming to prolong the rule of the then president, Mamadou Tandja, and grant him wider powers. Days later the military overthrew the president.
Nigeria	Jan 2012	Traditional focus (but with elements of regime change/anti- authoritarian)	Government cut in fuel subsidy triggered widespread protest, which came to encompass wider frustrations with corruption, living standards etc.
Panama	2011-12	Traditional focus	Indigenous groups protested against a new law that opened up native lands to foreign mining companies in 2011. The government repealed the law in 2012.
Peru	2011, ongoing	Traditional focus	Protests over environmental impact of a US\$5bn mining project caused the operation to be delayed in 2012. The protests—of which there are a number ongoing at any one time around the country—also reflect a broader disillusionment with inequality and Peru's wide urban/rural divide.
Poland	2011-13, intermittent	Traditional focus	Anti-austerity protests have been intermittent in recent years, with the focus on rising redundancies, stagnating wage growth, healthcare and pension reform (including raising the retirement age to 67 from 2020). The protests have also expressed popular dissatisfaction with mainstream politics and have been anti-government.
Portugal	2009-13, ongoing	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Since 2009 too many anti-austerity protests to count, proliferated especially in 2013; also mixed in with NSM-type protests such as Geração à Rasca (Generation in distress), with protests focused on the plight of the disenfranchised, unemployed, etc.
Romania	Jan-Mar 2012	Mixed (traditional focus; regime change/anti- authoritarian)	Mass protests erupted across the country, triggered by health service reforms, developing into generalised revolt against the government's austerity measures, corruption and lack of connection with ordinary people, leading to the fall of the government.
Russia	2011-12	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Civil unrest broke out in Moscow in late 2011 and early 2012 in protest at conduct of parliamentary elections. Since his election for a third term as president in March 2012, Vladimir Putin has tightened controls over public protests and signed laws to stamp out dissent and weaken civil society. Although the protest movement had lost momentum by mid-2012, sporadic protests meant that it had not petered out altogether.
Serbia	2009-13	Traditional focus	Persistent, low-level labour unrest, strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations, hunger-strikes.



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Country	Protest date(s)	Protest type(s)	Protest focus
Singapore	2013	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Protests have traditionally been rare, but 2013 has seen three demonstrations attended by several thousand people. Two were prompted by concerns over immigration policy and the rising cost of living, while a third was prompted by concerns over government plans to tighten the regulation of online news websites.
Slovakia	2011-13, intermittent	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Protests in 2011-12 directed against austerity and unemployment, especially in eastern parts of the country. Teachers and health workers also protested over pay. Ahead of a snap election in March 2012, thousands protested in the capital, Bratislava, against corruption in government/business (the "Gorilla file" scandal).
Slovenia	2011-13	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Recurrent protests against recession, austerity and the banking sector crisis have come to focus also on corruption in government and business, resulting in early elections, in 2011, and the fall of another government in 2013.
South Africa	Ongoing	Traditional focus	The past couple of years have seen a marked escalation in protests—fuelled partly by the African National Congress Youth League—as well as industrial unrest across a number of key sectors, including mining, based on never-abating demands for higher wages.
Spain	2011, ongoing	Mixed (traditional focus; NSM)	Discontent about economic conditions and austerity have been key drivers of protest. But the Indignados' initial motivation was to bring about a change in politics, hence their disdain for traditional forms of political organisation. In their retreat from the orthodox, they abandoned any attempt to formulate a coherent political alternative.
Sweden	May 2013	Traditional focus	Triggered by police shooting. No clear political/social agenda among rioters, but underlying issues of unemployment and immigration. Largely concentrated among disillusioned youth.
Syria	2011-13, ongoing	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	The government's brutal response to protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the president, fuelled a violent insurgency that turned into full-blown civil war.
Tajikistan	Mid-2012	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Army sent in to eastern province of Badakshan to put down unrest: 60 killed.
Tanzania	Jan-May 2013	Traditional focus	Protests related to construction of a gas pipeline from Mtwara to Dar es Salaam, with residents wanting the gas to be used to generate electricity locally and create jobs.
Thailand	Ongoing since 2006 coup	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Alternating and often violent protests have broadly pitted the pro-royalist "yellow shirt" camp against the more populist-inspired "red shirt" camp that originally consisted of those loyal to Thaksin Shinawatra. A former prime minister, Thaksin was deposed in a September 2006 coup, and tensions between the two sides have simmered ever since. A recent development is the emergence of a "white mask" movement, also essentially anti-Thaksin, opposing populist economic policies.
Togo	Recurrent since Jun 2012	Regime change/ anti-authoritarian	Triggered by changes to electoral constituencies, and by dissatisfaction with decades of autocratic rule by the Gnassingbe family. Led to emergence of new political movements and delays in legislative elections.



Rebels without a cause

What the upsurge in protest movements means for global politics

The world in protests

(selected protests, by type and country, 2009-13)

Country	Protest date(s)	Protest type(s)	Protest focus
Tunisia	Dec 2010-Jan 2011, Feb 2013	Regime change/anti-authoritarian	In early 2011 the president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, was toppled in a revolution that provided the template for the wider Arab Spring. In 2013 there was a continuing element of Arab Spring-type unrest, with a pro-democracy anti-Islamist influence. Triggered by assassination of opposition leader.
Turkey	Jun 2013	Mixed (regime change/anti-authoritarian; NSM)	Unrest escalated after police used force to subdue protests about the redevelopment of a park. A broader complaint was the autocratic style of the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Social media played a major part in the spread of the protests.
Uganda	2011	Traditional focus (but with elements of regime change/anti-authoritarian)	So-called "Walk to Work" protests occurred throughout 2011, triggered by the rising cost of fuel.
UK	Aug 2011	Traditional focus	Triggered by police shooting. Underlying causes manifold and difficult to pin down, but concentrated among disillusioned youth.
US	2011, ongoing	NSM	Occupy protests such as Occupy Wall Street are a definitive example of the emerging new social movements. Corruption, capitalism, income inequality, and the power of political lobbying and big business are among the major themes of the protests.

Note: NSM : New social movement

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