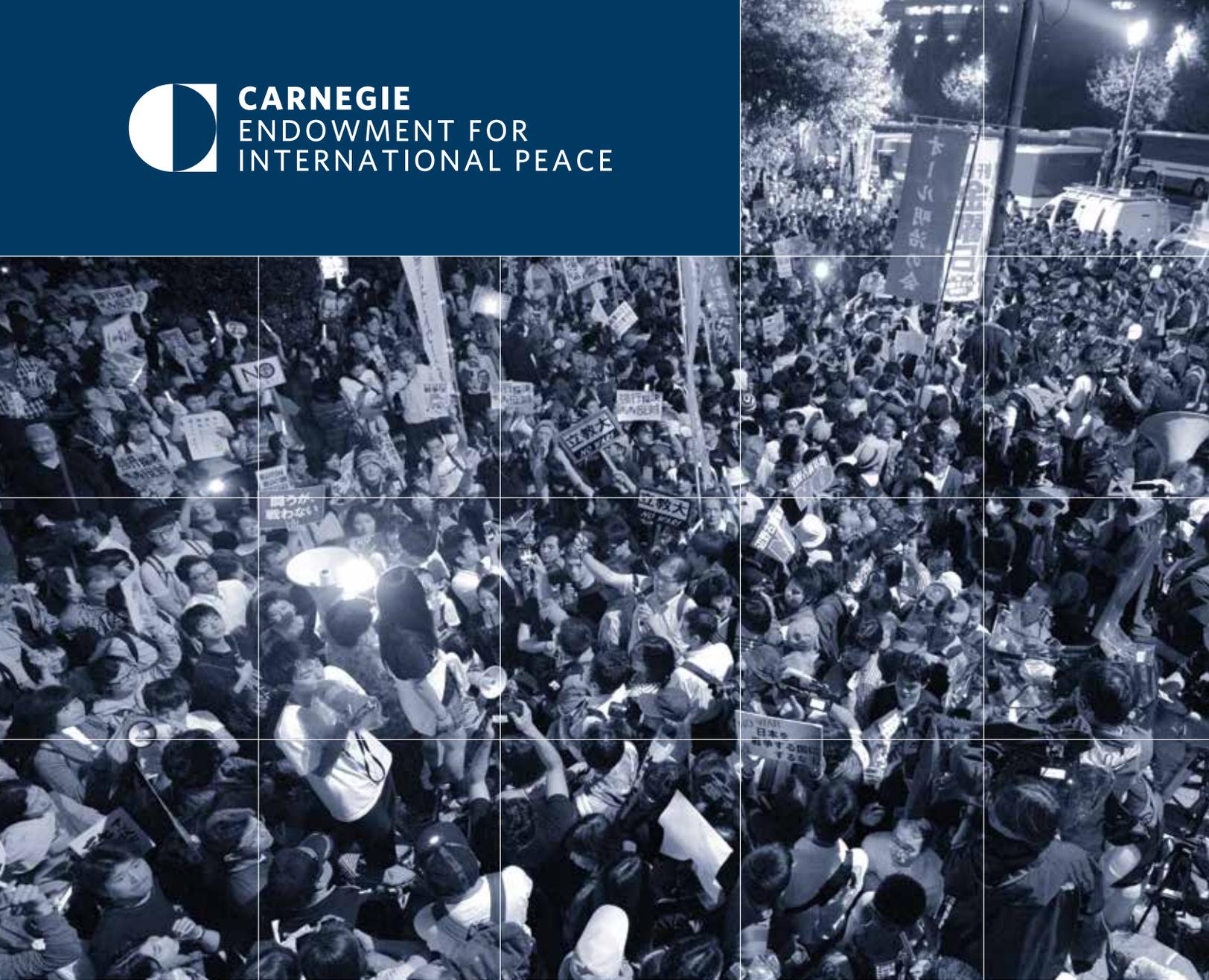




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THE COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBAL PROTESTS

Thomas Carothers and Richard Youngs

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Summary

Major protests have occurred around the world with increasing frequency since the second half of the 2000s. Given the superficial resemblance of such events to each other—especially the dramatic images of masses of people in the streets—the temptation exists to reach for sweeping, general conclusions about what is happening. Yet it is in fact the heterogeneity of this current wave of protests that is its defining characteristic. The spike in global protests is becoming a major trend in international politics, but care is needed in ascertaining the precise nature and impact of the phenomenon.

Characteristics of the Current Wave of Protests

Diversity of places. Unlike the last major global wave of protests that was associated with the spread of democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, protests are increasing now in every region of the world and in every type of political context.

Local triggers. The current wave of protests is triggered primarily by economic concerns or political decisions, not by transnational issues like globalization that animated some previous protests.

Long-term enabling causes. New information and communication technologies, troubled democratic transitions and democratic regression, economic change, and the growth of civil society organizations have created a global environment conducive to protests.

Not a new form of politics. The forms, methods, and aims of the current wave of protests do not overall represent a new form of politics, as some analysts have suggested. The idea of rebels without a cause does not apply very extensively across the array of recent protests; most demonstrations have specific grievances and aims.

Mixed Results

Limited democratization effects. Many nondemocratic governments faced with protests have been able to defeat them without making significant political concessions, yet the exceptions to this, like the experiences in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, are of notable importance.

Variable results when moving from protest to power. Although some protests have failed to translate protest energy into sustainable institution building or political contestation, others have led to the creation of new political parties or markedly affected subsequent electoral contests.

Blaming the foreigners. A striking element of the responses to recent protests is the frequency and regularity with which leaders now blame foreigners for the protests. This reflects, among other factors, leaders' inability to believe that there exists in their countries genuine civic sectors with legitimate, independent voices.

Introduction

Major citizen protests are multiplying. Just in 2015, significant protests erupted or continued in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Brazil, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Iraq, Japan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malaysia, Moldova, and Venezuela. The list of countries hit by major protests since 2010 is remarkably long and diverse. It includes more than 60 states that span every region of the world (see Annex).

Many of these protests have been profoundly important events in the countries where they have taken place. They are often large-scale gatherings of citizens who are determined to challenge fundamental policies or structures of power. Protesters have been prepared to confront harsh treatment by security forces and sometimes brutal repression.

It is hard not to have the sense from these events that something major is afoot in global politics. It appears that a new era of political flux is emerging as citizens demand more from their governments and mobilize in pursuit of their demands. In places such as the Arab world, protests have had major ramifications for politics, economics, and security.

Getting an analytical grip on this protest wave is essential for policymakers and political observers. Yet a lack of deep understanding—and, in some cases, active misunderstanding—is apparent in some Western media and analytical accounts of these events. Protests tend to resemble one another in certain basic ways, and this encourages simplistic analogies across very different contexts. They are photogenic events that naturally attract intense media attention at peak moments. This attention fades quickly when protests pass, leaving differences in motivations, implications, and results inadequately examined. Observers tend to focus on a few of the most striking protests and draw general conclusions that are then applied rather too sweepingly to the overall body of events. As a corrective, it is necessary to step back to view the overall landscape of protests and probe its many diversities and complexities. This paper attempts such an account.

Our starting question is the most basic one: Does the recent spate of protests actually represent an *increase* in frequency compared with the past? Certainly, the recent wave of protests has been unusually widespread and intense in some places. The Arab world, for example, has not for many decades experienced the degree of unrest that began to erupt in 2011. But is there really an overall increase when one takes a global perspective? The ever-growing ability of

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electronic media to get inside protest events and bring them to the attention of global audiences could be giving a false impression about overarching trends.

Turning to the question of *causes*, we examine both near-term triggers and longer-term enabling conditions. Some observers spotlight the anticorruption dimension, highlighting citizens' anger at systemic corruption and their willingness to go to the streets over it. Other observers focus on the punishing reality of economic austerity in many countries following the 2008–2009 financial crisis—many see economic problems as the common thread running through different protests. So, we ask, what near-term drivers and what longer-term political, economic, technological, and other changes are contributing to the protest surge?

Protests take many different *forms*. Some thoughtful analysts highlight the emergence of protests led by apparently spontaneous, largely leaderless social movements with little attachment to traditional political groupings or ideologies. Much protest activity today seems to be fueled by new communication technologies yet embraces little vision of institution building or specific goals beyond a rejection of existing elites and established power structures. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman writes, “Indeed, ‘The Square’ — as the

While conventional wisdom about the protest wave is not entirely incorrect, many of the most common ideas about it are applied too generally.

place for these newly networked political forces to gather, collaborate and pressure for change — is truly disrupting both traditional politics and geopolitics.”¹ In this view, many of the recent protests represent a kind of antipolitics, with profound implications for conventional thinking about political organization and change. This is an arresting argument, but is it accurate?

Also important is the question of *outcomes*—the effects that protests are having on the political lives of the countries in which they are occurring. Many of the hopes embodied in the Arab Spring protests have not come to fruition. Little change is apparent in other countries that have experienced protests, such as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Burundi, and Russia. Some observers detect a basic pattern of protest ineffectiveness: new protest movements seem to succeed in stirring up street activity but fail to translate protesters' energy into sustained political engagement and change. Again, a powerful fact if true—but is it?

While conventional wisdom about the protest wave is not entirely incorrect, many of the most common ideas about it are applied too generally. A central theme of our assessment is that the heterogeneity of protests around the world is one of their fundamental characteristics and that the temptation to reach for sweeping conclusions about what is happening can lead to a distorted view. The spike in global protests is becoming a major trend in international politics, but greater care is needed in ascertaining the precise nature and impact of the phenomenon.

Are Protests Increasing in Frequency?

Making rigorous quantitative comparisons across time regarding the frequency of protests is difficult due to the lack of a common measuring standard of precisely what kind of activity is being counted, not to mention the difficulty of simply tracking protests in some places. In China, for example, some 180,000 protest events occurred in 2010 alone.² Of course, many of these were small events focused on microlevel issues such as a corrupt mayor or an unfair ruling by a village council.³

Our interest is in major protests, ones that have potentially significant national-level implications for a country. Most such protests are relatively large, involving thousands of protesters, and last well beyond just a day or two. Yet it is not possible to define a straightforward numerical threshold—in some authoritarian settings, a relatively small number of protesters, even just several hundred people out on the streets of the capital denouncing the government, will resonate loudly and may constitute a highly significant political event. For example, the antigovernment protests in Azerbaijan in 2011 and 2012 never involved more than a few hundred people at any one time yet had major political reverberations.⁴ Likewise, the so-called Jasmine protests in 2011 in a number of large Chinese cities, where only handfuls of people turned up inspired by the Tunisian revolution, were enough to cause the government to ban sales of the flower and call a high-level review of social-order policies.⁵ Conversely, in some democratic contexts, especially in countries where protests are relatively common, a protest event of several tens or even hundreds of thousands of people may not be of great consequence or prove politically unsettling.

Nevertheless, despite the absence of exactitude in measurement, data from the past several decades do point to a fairly clear pattern of increasing frequency. Major protests multiplied in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with what is commonly called the third wave of democracy, but then decreased significantly throughout the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s. Protests began to accelerate again in the second half of the 2000s and have reached a new peak in the past five years.⁶

After an intense swell of protests in 2011, which were concentrated in the Arab world and Southern Europe, it appeared that the protest surge then began to ebb. But events of the last few years have confirmed a wide rise in major protests. In its *State of Civil Society Report 2014*, the global civil society organization Civicus talks of a “second wave” of dissent—after a concentration of revolts in 2010–2012, there was a lull as protest leaders regrouped and sought to assess successes and failures, and then a new burst of civic energy in 2013 and 2014.⁷

Several surveys and data-collecting initiatives provide an outline of this rise in global protests. The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT), a large-scale data-gathering project, reveals that “protest intensity”—calculated as the number of protests in a given month divided by the

total number of all events recorded that month—increased from 2010 to 2012 and has now stabilized at an ongoing level significantly higher than during the 1990s and 2000s. The 1980s saw the last relatively high level of protest intensity, with mobilizations linked to the final days of the Cold War.⁸

In similar vein, an extensive survey carried out by the Initiative for Policy Dialogue and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation reports a steady increase in the overall number of protests during the last decade. By this study's measurement, in 2006 there were 59 significant protests across the world; in 2013, almost double that number was recorded in just the first six months of the year.⁹ The average size of protests has increased from 2006 but began to climb at a steeper rate in 2010.

By region, the greatest number of protests has taken place in higher-income countries, followed by Latin America, then East Asia, then sub-Saharan Africa. The number of protests in North Africa and the Middle East has fluctuated more than elsewhere, with the most dramatic spike of any region in 2011. A major Economist Intelligence Unit report on global protests lists 69 states that experienced new protests between 2009 and 2013.¹⁰

Protests have hit not just a significant number of authoritarian countries but many semiauthoritarian states and democracies as well.

Compared with the last major wave of protests in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the current surge differs in at least two important dimensions. First, it is occurring in every region. The political tumult of the end of the Cold War period affected a wide range of countries, but it did not involve significant protest activity in some major regions, including the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and Western Europe. Second, the current wave affects every major regime category—protests have hit not just a significant number of authoritarian countries but many semiauthoritarian states and democracies as well. In contrast, the surge of protests several decades back was most dramatic in authoritarian contexts.

As in the previous era, regional contagion effects are clearly evident in the current protest phase. The wildfire-like spread of protests in the Arab world in 2011 was an unusually vivid example in this regard. Arguably, the recent and ongoing multiplication of protests in Africa against proposed extensions of presidential terms beyond existing limits is another example of regional contagion. Whether strong contagion exists across rather than within regions is less clear—although just as the dramatic events in Central Europe in 1989 resonated widely elsewhere, so the startling events of the Arab Spring in 2011 also inspired many civic activists in other parts of the world, such as the former Soviet Union, sub-Saharan Africa, and South and East Asia.

Short-Term Triggers

Why is this protest wave happening? In looking at causes, we distinguish between near-term triggers of protest and longer-term enabling conditions. Determining the triggers—even just of a single protest in a single country—is difficult. Protests may be sparked by a specific concern and initially focus on that but then swell as a result of other issues that matter to unhappy citizens. Within any large-scale protest, different participants are likely to be motivated by very different worries, and even just one individual protester may be propelled by a kaleidoscope of angry motivations.

Moreover, analysts and observers often view protests through the prism of their own specialist field. Democracy enthusiasts, for example, are quick to label large antigovernment protests as pro-democracy events. Corruption specialists are equally prone to see anger with corruption as the fundamental driver. Economists will seize on economic explanations for protests that political scientists are more apt to interpret as driven primarily by political factors.

Western analyses of the 2011 Egyptian protests that ousted former president Hosni Mubarak exemplified this phenomenon of multiple projected lenses. As observers scrambled to account for these startling, almost entirely unpredicted events, competing explanations flourished—that the demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square reflected Egyptians’ pent-up desire for social justice, quest for dignity, anger over corruption, hunger for democracy, frustration with economic inequality, and other yearnings.¹¹ The same complexity prevails in accounts of the Ukrainian protests in early 2014—with different analysts focusing on poor governance, repression, the lack of the rule of law, economic conditions, governmental policy toward European integration, and other factors.¹²

Within this complexity, protest triggers can be divided into a few basic categories. Some drivers are primarily political, such as a rigged election or the unconstitutional extension of a president’s term in office. Others are chiefly socioeconomic—whether very specific events, such as the removal of a fuel subsidy or the ejection of a particular social group from a piece of land, or more systemic trends, like sharp economic decline or rising inequality. And in between are triggers related to governance issues that combine political and economic elements, above all corruption, which entails the abuse of political power but also relates directly to economic conditions and fairness.

Recent large-scale protests in authoritarian contexts, such as those in Hong Kong in 2014 or in Syria and Libya in 2011, have been driven principally by political conditions. Protests have flared in many countries recording relatively high rates of economic growth. Socioeconomic troubles have sometimes been present, but usually less consequentially than political ones. Socioeconomic misery was, for example, a partial driver of the Syrian protests, yet just one part of the larger anger about the repressive, punitive, unaccountable Syrian state.

Political factors also appear to have been the main cause of most recent protests in semiauthoritarian contexts.¹³ In a number of cases, specific political issues served as triggers bringing out protesters angry about the broader climate of repression and corruption. Economic factors appear to have played only a secondary role in many of these cases, such as in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Malaysia, Russia, and Ukraine—though in Venezuela, economic discontent has been a forceful motivation driving recent protests.

In contrast to the protests in authoritarian and semiauthoritarian countries, recent protests in democratic states have generally been sparked by socioeconomic issues. These include tax hikes in Greece, austerity policies in the United Kingdom, indigenous rights in Chile, subsidy cuts in Nigeria, wage issues in South Africa, the cost of living and housing prices in Israel, and gender-based violence in India. These protests, initially at least, focused on a desired policy change, rather than on change in an overall governing system.

However, where democratic systems display chronically problematic governance, economically driven protests often evolve to adopt a more political and systemic focus. For example, the 2015 Brazilian protests over corruption in the oil sector have widened into a general anger toward the political elite. A similar evolution from socioeconomic to political concerns occurred with demonstrations in Nigeria in early 2012.

It is notable how frequently corruption now unleashes protests, whether in authoritarian, semiauthoritarian, or democratic countries. The corruption trigger is often set off by a specific revelation about the actions of particular politicians but then quickly cascades into a much broader wave of revulsion toward the whole governing system. As has been extensively documented and analyzed by corruption specialists, public awareness of corruption and anger about it have grown massively in the world during the past twenty years.¹⁴ Attention on this issue has become a way of talking about the arrogance of power generally, with angry citizens invoking the corruption label to describe any number of things that infuriate them about power holders—the way they tend to act with impunity, abuse citizens' rights, misuse state power, treat citizens with disrespect, centralize power, and much more. In this broader sense, the emphasis on corruption in protests in many parts of the world reflects a general pattern of civic anger about how state power is exercised.

Finally, the triggers of protests have become more country-specific. The recent wave is less related to transnational issues than were some protests of decades past. The eruption in the early 1990s of antiglobalization protests gave rise to interest in what two analysts called “transnational collective action.”¹⁵ Such actions for a time appeared to be the most interesting and meaningful trend in civic protest. This has now changed.¹⁶ While recent protests in different countries often grew out of similar issues, like corruption, most were strongly rooted in *national* political debates and concerns.

The era of transnational antiglobalization demonstrations has given way to much more localized protest. Most protests today are against very tangible and

actual hardships and problems—decidedly different from the earlier global justice movement that mobilized internationally against relatively generic evils of capitalism and globalization, and different from the antiwar focus of the generation that lived through the 1955–1975 Vietnam War. Protest against free trade—which was a primary catalyst for transnational social movements in the 1990s—today accounts for only a very small share of all mobilizations.¹⁷

Long-Term Enabling Factors

This analysis of triggers provides a better understanding of the major near-term impulses fueling recent protests. But to fully understand the protest wave, it is also necessary to consider the longer-term enabling factors at work, which encompass various elements of change—technological, economic, and political. Four such factors stand out.

First, the sweep of change in communication technologies facilitates protests in multiple ways. Such technologies make much more information available to people, giving them a greater awareness of how others are asserting themselves against entrenched power holders in other countries and of how their own political and economic conditions compare with those of others.¹⁸

These technologies, especially social media, create channels of communication among citizens and informal meeting places that greatly spur the creation of associational networks, as manifested in both formal and informal organizations.¹⁹ Technological advances also facilitate specific techniques that help make protests easier to organize, such as communicating instantly among large numbers of people; capturing and sending out visual evidence of activities and events; including governmental violence in response to protests; and easily accessing useful logistical information for potential protesters, like transportation routes and conditions. Even without succumbing to the temptation to view new technologies as revolutionary drivers of protest, and while acknowledging that such technologies also serve as tools for power holders to suppress protest in new ways, it is important to recognize the overall enabling effects of communication technologies for protests.²⁰

Second, global economic trends have been contributing to the protest wave in two different ways. Considerable economic growth in many parts of the developing and post-Communist worlds in the past ten to twenty years has brought with it the rise of new middle classes. These middle classes develop expectations beyond material goals and gain access to education, travel, communication technologies, and other resources that give them new perspectives and capabilities. It is striking that protest movements in numerous places, such as Azerbaijan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, and Ukraine, have been concentrated not among the poor but instead among the middle and upper-middle classes.

It is notable how frequently corruption now unleashes protest, whether in authoritarian, semi-authoritarian, or democratic countries.

In some countries, economic growth has been fostered by policies that result in socioeconomic exclusion of large numbers of citizens and glaring new inequalities, creating a broad bedrock of potential support for protests. The protests in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010–2011 reflected this phenomenon.

In contrast to this pattern of economic growth in many parts of the developing and post-Communist worlds, economic stagnation and sudden downturns in some countries have also contributed to the rise of protests. In Western democracies, especially in Europe, the 2008–2009 financial crisis aggravated and underscored the longer-term phenomena of persistently slow growth and the stagnation of the middle class, conditions that have underlain protests about socioeconomic issues in these countries.

Third, the larger cycle of democracy's global advance is part of the story. A wave of protests contributed to the onset of attempted democratic transitions in dozens of countries in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of those states have been grappling with difficulty during the last ten to fifteen years to bring their transitions to fruition by genuinely engaging, inspiring, and benefiting ordinary citizens. Opinion surveys show that citizens in most countries struggling to make democracy work prefer it to other political systems but are dissatisfied with how democracy functions in practice.²¹ Therefore, in a turn of the overall wheel of cause and effect, many of these countries have again become fertile soil for protests.

Moreover, the internalization of the norm of democracy in these states is strong enough that their citizens are also willing to protest when their governments abridge democratic rights and principles. Turkey is a good example in this regard. Despite its considerable economic successes, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government provoked protests in 2013 by overreaching its political powers and violating the democratic expectations of many Turkish citizens.

Even in those countries that stayed mostly outside the third wave of democracy, the larger trend of global political development in the past generation has increased citizen expectations that governments should be accountable to their people in meaningful ways. While the Chinese and Russian governments have been able to persuade many of their citizens that Western democracy would not be right for their countries, they cannot escape rising citizen demands for governmental accountability. It is telling that while developmentalists around the world are unable to agree on whether democratic norms are genuinely universal and should be supported through development aid, they have converged strongly in the past ten years around the need to make governments more accountable.²²

Fourth, another enabling condition is the tremendous growth of civil society organizations around the globe in the past two to three decades, especially in those parts of the developing and former Communist worlds where civil society was previously so weak. This growth is due not just to the widespread

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mushrooming of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Rather, civil society in all its many forms has expanded—professional associations, informal groups, religious organizations, labor unions, village cooperatives, indigenous organizations, women’s groups, financing collectives, student groups, and others.

And this expansion has occurred not only in those countries moving out of authoritarian rule that have managed to make significant democratic progress but also in those that have ended up with hybrid regimes, whether semiauthoritarian or of other configurations. Only in the very small number of countries suffering under genuinely despotic rule is there an absence of significant formal and informal citizen-based organizational life.

The existence of such organizations and activities is certainly not a guarantee that protests will occur. As discussed below, the relationship between civil society groups and protest movements is complex, and some movements operate outside most established civil society networks. And the rise of protests itself contributes to the growth of new civil organizations. But it is important not to overlook the way the broad, long-term organizational development of civil society in many developing and post-Communist countries has contributed to the new protest wave—whether by providing channels for citizens to express their grievances, institutional mechanisms to aggregate discontent, or opportunities for expressing dissatisfaction publicly.

New Forms of Protest?

How should the forms of civic action that make up the protest surge of the past five years be understood? Some analysts argue that the contemporary wave of civic mobilization represents something new and different in the forms, methods, and aims of protests. Some go so far as to suggest the current surge signals an emergent new form of politics itself. Assessing the strength of this line of argument is crucial to coming to grips with the overall phenomenon.

A Vision of the Unprecedented

Those observers who contend that something new and different is at work in the protest wave tend to highlight the idea that the demonstrations around the world are leaderless, spontaneous movements devoid of clear aims and relatively unconcerned with proposing solutions to problems or offering well-worked-out political manifestos.²³ They argue that protest has become almost an end in itself—the tactic of occupying central squares captures attention and constitutes a high level of political disruption for its own sake.²⁴ Protesters’ substantive positions are vague and open-ended and are generically antisystem.²⁵ In this view, the many recent outbursts of civic action are less “focused” than previous spells of revolutionary unrest; protesters are “rebels without a cause,” in the words of the Economist Intelligence Unit.²⁶

A number of these analysts see a close link between the increase in protests and the rise of new forms of social movements that have protest in their very DNA. These new groups differ from sustained, clearly articulated social movements of past generations, such as labor movements, the U.S. civil rights movement, or the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The groupings of today are diffuse and shifting in their organizational structures and memberships, and they link together different issue-based networks. They focus not on attaining concretely defined aims but on setting themselves up to counter power, remold social values, and create shared cognitive identities. These movements reject standard forms of leadership and choose symbolic acts of civil disobedience as their *modus operandi*.²⁷

In this account, the absence of well-developed solutions or coherent policy messages is the very point of current protests. They are designed to be a kind of mass theater that triggers bigger waves of disruption. They seek a different way of doing politics, rather than simply offering a standard series of policy recommendations.²⁸ Sidney Tarrow, one of the founders of new social movement analysis, saw “transgressive politics” coming to overwhelm “civil politics.”²⁹ Today’s social movements play a less specific or rationalized role of building collective identity than did previous movements, as they seek to foster a general identity of systemic hostility toward state power.³⁰

This view suggests that the global spread of protests reflects a fundamental shift in the relationship between citizens and the state—a more deliberative form of democratic politics is being forged in the crucible of protests. Politics professor John Keane argues that protests are the basis of a new form of “monitory democracy” in which citizens’ major participatory function is continuous evaluative oversight of state action.³¹ Donatella Della Porta, a political scientist who has written extensively on protests, insists that the phenomenon requires a whole paradigm shift in how analysts understand democratization.³²

A common element of this portrayal of contemporary protests as something new and different is the proposition that they have only a distant relationship to conventional, established civil society organizations, especially the world of professionalized NGOs.³³ Many protests are not long-term campaigns but short-lived revolts. In this view, a different kind of civic activism is at work, combining new technologies with more traditional forms of identity. In several cases, protesters have used crowdsourcing to support more comprehensive political manifestos.

Some analysts argue that these changes in activism require a fresh approach to conceptualizing civil society.³⁴ They talk of a second generation of civic activism taking shape, very much separate from or even in confrontation with the professionalized NGO sector. At a human rights conference in May 2015, one Tunisian activist put it frankly: “Wherever you go, you will see that the trust between governments and people is completely broke. But the trust between civil society and people is also going down. And this is one of the reasons why these revolutions — the Arab revolutions, but also other revolutions, like [the

2014–2015 unrest in the U.S. city of] Ferguson for example — are not organized by NGOs or organized civil society. They’re organized by the people themselves.”³⁵ These second-generation initiatives want to be seen as broad-based and inclusive movements, not as opposition activism focused on narrow causes often pursued by technocratic NGOs or as conventional political movements affiliated with existing parties or political agendas.³⁶

Further in this view, protests represent not only the changing nature of civil society but also a response to the changing nature of political parties. Parties are becoming more professionalized and less rooted in mass membership; protest has come to fill the gap by putting forward issue campaigns, local petitions, and discussion circles.

In Europe, some analysts see the new protests as grounded in a fragmented but highly active Left that has an uneasy relationship with mainstream party politics.³⁷ European protests and social movements have taken shape explicitly against the forms of cooperative citizenship that are promoted through formal EU initiatives.³⁸ Such protests represent a much more disruptive form of civic engagement or even a “counter-democracy,” as French thinker Pierre Rosanvallon put it.³⁹ In the words of British-Canadian journalist Leigh Phillips, they are “an end-run around democracy” and even encapsulate a broader trend toward more authoritarian leftism.⁴⁰

Reconsidering the Vision

This view of the rise in protests as new and different is compelling in some ways and captures some striking elements of some recent protests. But it risks overemphasizing features of a small number of protests, primarily European ones, and projecting them onto what is a highly diverse set of events around the world. Many of these protests do not seem very new or different in form, method, or aim from protests of past decades. Reading through the mushrooming literature on this topic, it is hard not to feel that a certain Western postmodernist romanticism is animating the analysis, reflecting a longing on the part of some Western scholars for signs that tired forms of politics in their countries—and, perhaps, in the rest of the world, too—are giving way to something fluid, innovative, and potentially transformative.

Yet in quite a few recent cases, protests are not spontaneous or leaderless movements but rather build on organizational work that existing civic bodies have carried on for years. In such instances, many of the protesters may not themselves be directly connected to established organizations, but the nucleus of the protests is linked to such groups. The Tahrir Square protests in Egypt in 2011 were built on the foundation that different Egyptian citizen organizations, such as Kifaya and others, had been developing for some time.⁴¹ As one

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scholar explains more generally, “The Arab uprisings were built on years of civil society movements in the region, online and offline.”⁴²

Positing a clear line between those people or groups involved in organizing protests and the world of formalized, professionalized NGOs is an oversimplification that ignores the heterogeneous nature of civil society in most countries. Many NGOs, including ones that receive external donor support, are not just a narrow circle of technocratic, capital-based advocacy groups that never venture into awareness raising, mobilization, or other building blocks of protest work. If one looks carefully behind the eruption of protests in many countries, what is striking is not so much the spontaneity of such events but instead the evidence of years of organizing and outreach that have created the basis for the actions. Some analysts note that the much-maligned large, professional NGOs have in fact been organized in a much less hierarchical fashion than normally assumed, and that NGO movements of the 1990s and early 2000s also comprised diverse local, community-based movements.⁴³

NGOs have no single or constant relationship with protest movements. In recent years, NGOs have sometimes stood aloof from such activism when they have judged electoral politics to be a more effective route to policy reform, but on some occasions, these groups have been among the most fervent organizers of radical protest.⁴⁴ As many protests have failed, some analysts detect a reversion to more traditional forms of politics. The new wave of protests has not so much displaced or sidelined NGOs as pushed them into a different function: the role of conduits between party politics and new movements.

Similarly, the idea of protest actions being separate from existing political parties or movements does not align with reality in a significant number of cases. In Venezuela, the roiling protests of the last several years have been tightly linked to long-standing opposition parties and personalities, as well as to some well-established civic groups. The intensity of the clashes between the government and the protesters is new in some ways, but the idea that the protests represent either new movements or a new form of politics is not correct. In Malaysia, the so-called Black 505 protests, spurred by accusations of irregularities in the May 2013 parliamentary election and by calls for electoral reforms, were orchestrated mainly by opposition parties. The same is true in Thailand, where the protests in 2013 and 2014 were organized by a political umbrella group of opposition parties, pro-military organizations, and student activist bodies.

Protests are sometimes driven initially by groups outside the existing spectrum of political organizations but then swell when such organizations join in. This was the case to some extent with the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey, where environmental activists played an initial sparking role, but then opposition parties became involved. When the government ordered in the police, who deployed particularly brutal tactics, a far larger number of people joined the protests—3.5 million across Turkey in mid-2013.⁴⁵ Workers’ groups also entered the fray, harnessing an undercurrent of frustration among poorer

classes that they had been excluded from the AKP's economic miracle and market reforms. The unifying motivation, according to polls, was to preserve democracy.⁴⁶

Even where protests start as the work of activists who are not associated with the established political groupings, if such activists achieve some successes, they may enter formalized political life, including by forming political parties and running for office.

The antisystemic energy that erupted in both Greece and Spain several years back in response to the economic failures of the established political parties has led not to a different kind of politics so much as to the entry into existing systems of new parties, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Protests leaders in Spain formed Podemos as a political party in large part because the grassroots protests (*indignados*) that burst out in 2011 as an expression of popular anger over economic conditions were running out of steam. As a party, Podemos has endeavored to retain the spirit of the protest movement: decisionmaking based on local circles; participative election manifesto preparation; and a narrative of being beyond Left and Right.

Following the ouster of Mubarak in Egypt, protesters formed a variety of political parties to compete in the 2011–2012 parliamentary election, though their success has been limited.⁴⁷ Likewise, some of the activists crucial to the 2014 Ukraine protests entered the government after the elections held later that year.

The idea of rebels without a cause does not apply consistently, or even very extensively, across the array of recent protests. The demonstrations in Burkina Faso, Burundi, and Senegal in response to attempts by sitting presidents to extend their time in office had a very defined cause—rejection of an extension of the presidential term. So too did the protests in Hong Kong, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela, and elsewhere. It is true that some protests clearly reflect a generalized anger toward the entrenched political establishment and an inchoate desire to sweep away many parts of the political system. But such sentiments often end up translating into relatively specific demands.

So, protests are often anchored in specific aims. Outside observers justifiably criticized the Occupy movement in the United States for its lack of clear programmatic demands, but this was more of an exception than the rule with regard to the nature of protesters' demands in different parts of the world. Most protests seem like actions quite decidedly aimed at producing changes on the part of power holders, not as ends in themselves or mere theaters of political symbolism.

Finally, the role of communication technology must be qualified. It is certainly the case that new technologies affect when and how protests happen. They enable the establishment of informal social media networks that sometimes end up constituting the backbone of protest organizing. They allow the

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distribution of vivid information that can fuel citizen awareness and anger that contributes to protests, such as the sharing of incidents of police violence in Iran in 2009 and in Egypt in 2010–2011. These tools help protesters reach a particular place at a particular time and be better informed about counter-responses by security forces.

Yet most of the protests in the recent wave nevertheless follow patterns of organization and implementation that seem similar to traditional protest models. They often start with a spark, then swell exponentially, and then persist over time with a smaller, core group of activists staying the course while the others drop out. Mobilizations follow familiar psychological patterns of tipping points with regard to elements such as the willingness of protesters to confront violence by security forces. Protests break into concentric circles of participants, from a small, dedicated nucleus of key organizers and activists to larger spheres of less sustained members.

New technologies are an enabling factor (and sometimes also a useful tool for security forces looking for novel ways to suppress protest, such as the use of face recognition from crowd photographs) but have not fundamentally or qualitatively transformed how many protests take shape and evolve. A major 2013 study of protest patterns found that while recent protests entail some new types of civil disobedience and tactics like those of the Occupy movement, most protests have taken the form of traditional rallies and marches.⁴⁸

Protests as Drivers of Change

How much change, and what kinds of change, have recent protests produced in the countries where they have taken place? Two broad ideas are heard in different quarters about the effects of contemporary protests. One is that the protests constitute an unfolding wave of disruptive, basically pro-democratic change that signals trouble for many nondemocratic governments. Another, much more cautionary idea holds that protests are proving effective at ousting leaders and at tearing governments down but not at building new institutions or new political processes or at devising positive solutions to problems.⁴⁹ As Thomas Friedman emphasizes, “This failure to translate their aspirations into parties that could contest elections and then govern is the Achilles’ heel of The Square People — from Tahrir Square to Occupy Wall Street.”⁵⁰

Contributing to Democracy, or Not?

With regard to the first, more upbeat of these two propositions, the record so far is questionable. Since the early 2000s, the world has experienced a pronounced stagnation, or even recession, in global democracy.⁵¹ The number of democracies today is no greater than it was at the start of this century. Of course, a significant share of protests in recent years, in the range of 25–30

percent, have been in democratic countries and therefore have not threatened nondemocratic governments.

Nevertheless, more than half of the protests have taken place in nondemocratic countries. In a small number of cases, nondemocratic governments have simply crushed protests with brute force. The government of Bahrain, with military assistance from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, harshly suppressed the massive protests by Shia citizens of the country in 2011 asking for a greater voice in politics. In 2005, a local dispute that sparked large protests in Andijan, Uzbekistan, was brutally stamped out by security forces that indiscriminately killed hundreds of protesters. Substantial violence has been used against protesters in other places as well, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Venezuela, and Yemen.

In most cases, nondemocratic governments faced with protests have been able to defeat them without making significant political concessions. Many of these governments are semiauthoritarian and have perfected a balancing act—they allow a limited amount of opposition political activity and independent civil society, both to release some political pressure in the system and to keep a degree of international legitimacy. Such an approach avoids the brittleness of political rule that afflicts fully authoritarian governments and can make them susceptible to sharp, unexpected tipping points when any challenge to their rule occurs. (This happened in Romania in 1989, when relatively small-scale protests snowballed into much larger demonstrations that led very quickly to the ouster of former president Nicolae Ceaușescu.)

When opposition to the rule of such semiauthoritarians boils over in the form of protests, the regimes recalibrate the balance that they have struck—tightening the screws of power and reducing the available political space. Governments use multiple tools to undercut protesters, ranging from orchestrated attacks on the opposition's legitimacy to the stepping up of police actions. In this fashion, governments such as those in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Jordan, Morocco, and Russia have been able to absorb, deflect, or neuter protests without having to use much open violence or give significant ground.

Yet in some nondemocratic countries, protests have had significant effects. These effects have sometimes been powerful but have not necessarily been pro-democratic. The 2011 protests in Syria and Libya turned into armed rebellions when the governments met the initial wave of protests with violent repressive measures. In Syria, those rebellions have ended up turning into a civil war that has torn the country apart; in Libya, where the revolts combined with external military intervention, the result was the ouster of the country's longtime dictator. In Thailand, sustained protests against the government contributed directly to the unsettled political conditions that triggered a military coup in 2014.

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But some effects of protests in nondemocratic countries have been clearly pro-democratic. At least some of the citizen mobilization in Africa against efforts by overweening presidents to extend presidential terms beyond constitutional limits has succeeded—for example, in Burkina Faso, Senegal, and, arguably, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as Niger. It is important to note that in other places where major protests on this issue occurred, including Burundi and Togo, presidents were elected in spite of such pressures. Rwanda and Uganda currently appear likely to reelect their presidents for further terms following recent constitutional changes. Nonetheless, enough successful cases of protest have occurred to have a chilling effect on leaders across the continent, especially in countries with empowered opposition parties.

Protests in some semiauthoritarian countries have pushed leaders to allow more space or have empowered opposition forces in ways that have at least started to rebalance lopsided political systems. In Cambodia, frustration after a disputed parliamentary election in July 2013 led to nearly a year of protests by a newly unified political opposition, culminating in a pact between the regime and the opposition that addressed a number of grievances related to governance and elections. While the Iranian government forcefully put down the country's 2009 Green Revolution and repressed its leaders, the uprising arguably contributed to a longer-term trend of pushback against the rule of Iran's then president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, resulting in the election of the reformist Hassan Rouhani as his successor in 2013.

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Even though many strongman leaders have been able to put down protests without too much difficulty, the protests nevertheless have weight in the minds of power holders and of many citizens. Russian President Vladimir Putin did not have much problem in countering protests against his rule in 2011–2012. Yet the very occurrence of these protests weighed heavily on him, as evidenced by his subsequent actions to limit space for free expression and association even more than before. The demonstrations cracked the facade of his status as unquestioned leader and made clear that there are some limits—no matter how murkily defined—to the level of centralization of power that Russians will tolerate.

Tearing Down the Old, Building Up the New

What about the assertion that where recent protests do manage to effect change, they are mostly able to tear down old structures but not foster sustained political institution building or effective participation in formal political processes? This line, which is quite widely heard in Western policy circles and commentary, seems to have grown out of the experiences of cases such as the 2011 Egyptian protests, in which protesters ended up being sidelined by other political forces; the 2011 U.S. Occupy protests, which fizzled out without

notable policy gains; and the 2004 Ukraine protests, in which demonstrators forced an election to be held democratically but struggled after that to channel their energy into deeper institutional reform.

Yet again, as with almost all other generalized propositions about the recent protest wave, a more varied assessment is required when the full range of recent protests is taken on board. Some protest movements have in fact led directly to the formation of new parties, as happened in Spain and Greece. In other countries, protests were built on the back of substantial existing institutions, like labor movements, that have had an ongoing role in political life during and after the protest phase. In Tunisia, independent labor unions played a significant part in spurring the 2010–2011 protests that drove former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali from power. Well after the initial antiregime revolts, protesters and unions worked together to create a consensus on new democratic rules.

Additionally, in a number of instances, protest movements did not transform themselves into new political parties but did have direct effects on the development or contestation of parties in the country. In Turkey, the Gezi Park protests ended up activating various sociopolitical forces and groups that had been unhappy with then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rule but had not previously taken concrete actions in that regard. This activation contributed to the revitalization of political party life among opposition forces, which resulted in crucial gains by the left-wing, pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey's June 2015 general election, at least temporarily blocking Erdoğan's party from achieving a parliamentary majority. In Romania, protests and related civic activism focused on governmental corruption helped build the base for further activism in 2014 that produced the surprising defeat of Victor Ponta in the runoff round of that year's presidential election and fueled broader public support for continued investigations and arrests relating to high-level corruption.

In Taiwan, protests known as the Sunflower Movement, angered by the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party's attempt to force an extensive trade agreement with China through the legislature, occupied government buildings in spring 2014 for two weeks. To diffuse the protests, the KMT pledged not to pass the trade agreement without further consultations but suffered a major defeat in local elections later that year, largely as a consequence of the party's perceived pro-Chinese sympathies highlighted by the protests. And finally, protests in Guatemala throughout 2015 sparked by an internationally backed corruption investigation culminated in the resignation and arrest of the president and other senior government officials.⁵² This unprecedented (at least in recent decades) uprising by Guatemalans marks a potentially historic rebalancing of the relationship between citizens and the state and an end to the long-standing Guatemalan pattern of state impunity.

Furthermore, many protests, especially in democratic countries, are focused on socioeconomic policy issues. Such protest campaigns or movements do not seek to transform themselves into formal political actors or to transform the

basic shape of governing systems. This is the case with the extensive recent protests relating to gender violence in India, housing and the cost of living in Israel, and police violence in the United States.

Although most of the issues that these protests address are deeply entrenched problems with no instant solutions, the protests have been consequential in terms both of pushing governments to prioritize and hasten responses and of changing societal attitudes toward the issues. A notable example is the series of protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 against discriminatory policing and police brutality. The demonstrations not only precipitated a federal investigation and subsequent report harshly criticizing racialized policing but also galvanized support for a nationwide movement of activists under the banner of Black Lives Matter and increased national awareness of the issue of police mistreatment of African-Americans.

Therefore, the overall picture with respect to the effects of the current wave of protests is diverse and complex. The protests are not engendering a wave of democratic change, as many nondemocratic governments hit by protests are proving able to survive them. Yet substantial effects have been felt in various nondemocratic countries, some of which point toward democratization, others toward general chaos and a collapse of effective state capacity, and still others toward greater political repression.

Although some protests may fail to translate protest energy into sustainable institution building or political contestation, in other cases protest movements either result in the creation of new political parties or have marked effects on subsequent electoral contests. And many protests, especially in democratic countries, have had impacts on socioeconomic policies, aiming at the level of specific policy reform rather than systemic change. The common view that today's protesters are destructive and not constructive fits at best some but certainly not most cases.

Blame the Foreigners

Another striking element of the responses to recent protests is the frequency with which leaders blame foreigners for the protests. Conspiracy theories about the source of protest movements are nothing new, yet it is striking how accusations of the foreign hand have now become standard practice among semi-authoritarian or authoritarian power holders faced with large-scale protests against them. Major protests in the wake of disputed election results in Russia in 2011 led then prime minister Vladimir Putin to assert, "We must develop forms of protecting our sovereignty, protecting ourselves from outside interference." Putin continued, "We should think about improving the legislation, and increasing penalties on those who are working on behalf of a foreign state and trying to influence the domestic political process."⁵³ In a speech quoted by the

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Telegraph, Erdoğan blamed “outside forces” for a “systematic project to tarnish Turkey’s image,” referring to the Gezi Park protests.⁵⁴

Similarly, during recent unrest and protests in Venezuela, President Nicolás Maduro claimed the country was facing an “unconventional war that the US has perfected over the last decades” and insinuated that the United States was undertaking a “slow-motion” Ukraine-style coup to “get their hands on Venezuelan oil.”⁵⁵ The assumed foreign hand is almost always an American one, generally the U.S. government, or else billionaire philanthropist George Soros or other private Western actors.

This emphasis on a foreign role in protests highlights the difficulty that many leaders have in accepting that their own citizens are turning against them. More generally, this view signals leaders’ inability to believe that there exists in their country a genuine civic sector—whether organized around NGOs, unions, or other groups—outside the control of the political establishment and with a legitimate, independent voice.

These leaders do not just brand protesters as foreign agents. They also undertake concerted actions to close off space for civil society organizations to form and operate.⁵⁶ In direct parallel with the increasing protests of recent years has come the well-documented and now much-discussed phenomenon of closing space for civil society in dozens of countries—nondemocratic but also democratic—around the world. These efforts to choke off civil society usually include an array of formal and informal measures, ranging from restrictive NGO legislation to public demonization of civil society actors, and almost always comprise pointed measures to reduce the flow of foreign support for domestic civic organizations.

This widening campaign in many countries against civil society is not just a response to protests. It is also a reflection of the discomfort that power holders in many places have with increasingly assertive, effective, and technologically adept nongovernmental actors pushing for policy reforms and normative change on a variety of social, political, and economic issues. With the domain of civic action having become more vital and influential in many developing and post-Communist countries than the domain of opposition political parties, power holders are responding by taking steps to constrain the space for civil society.

Conclusion

Major protests have been occurring with increasing frequency in the world during the past ten years, with an especially notable surge in the past five years, starting with the many protests in the Arab world in 2011. The widespread perception of a rising tide of protests is accurate and is not just a side effect of the ever-growing, instantaneous nature of global communications. The current surge of protests is more global than the wave that occurred during the late 1980s and

early 1990s, reaches every region of the world, and affects the full range of political systems—authoritarian, semiauthoritarian, and democratic alike.

The many different protest events often resemble and influence each other. Powerful regional contagion effects relating to protests have occurred, especially in the Arab world. Contagion—or, at least, demonstration effects—sometimes reaches well beyond specific regions, with protesters on one continent clearly having been influenced by protests occurring on other continents.

Some analysts have been tempted to interpret the protest wave in sweeping terms, highlighting what they perceive as common features of these events and holding out these aspects as dramatic, singular arrows of change in global politics, whether it is the emergence of a changed relationship between individuals and state power or the politically transformative consequences of new communication technologies. Yet if a broad, encompassing look is taken at this

protest wave, its most striking characteristic is diversity, not uniformity. This is true with respect to all of the key dimensions of the protest events.

Different protests have been propelled by very different drivers, and no single causal factor dominates. Today's protest wave is in part a reflection of citizen fatigue with corruption, in part a legacy of the global financial crisis, and in part a widespread rejection of economic austerity.

Moreover, multiple drivers are often present within any one outbreak of protests. And pinning down exactly what were the near-term and longer-term causes of any major protest event is remarkably difficult.

Numerous political, economic, technological, and other changes of the past few decades are contributing to the rise of protests. Such changes include the spread of democratic norms, a more general embrace of the need for governmental accountability, the mushrooming of both the concept and the practice of independent civic activism, the spread of communication technologies, the growth of new middle classes in some societies, and the increasing stagnation and pressures on existing middle classes in others. Yet no one of these factors captures a singular essence of the protest wave; the events are a sea of causal complexity.

Similarly, the protest wave is not a collection of new-style citizen movements marked by amorphous leadership, a lack of clear demands, and separation from existing political groupings or formalized NGOs. Some such movements have appeared in various places, but many of the protests are highly recognizable in terms of forms and methods, with articulated leadership, very specific programmatic demands, and close ties to both political parties and existing NGOs. Moreover, those protest movements that do have some characteristics of new-style citizen movements often turn out to be much more hybrid in nature, mixing new and old forms and methods.

With regard to the results that protests achieve, one should be wary of the general proposition advanced by some analysts that the contemporary protests are all about tearing down structures of power but not about achieving

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sustained political change. And one should be cautious in accepting any definitive conclusion either that the protests are reshaping the modern world or that they are much ado about nothing.

Once again, the true picture is one of heterogeneity. Political outcomes of major protests in recent years run a full gamut of results: no perceptible impact; no change in the formal political system but long-term shifts in public mentality that may presage future political changes; the ousting of a regime and at least an attempted process of democratic change; something akin to a democratic revolution; an antidemocratic coup; prolonged civil war; and generalized political chaos. While some protest movements have indeed foundered at the task of translating protest energy into sustained political engagement, others have made progress in this regard.

Governmental responses to protests are also highly diverse, constituting a wide spectrum from complete tolerance to the harshest possible repression. The frequency of violence in responses to recent protests is striking. So too is the broad pattern of governments blaming foreign actors for protests and reducing space for domestic civil society actors to operate and seek support from abroad.

This heterogeneity and complexity of the global protest wave highlights its place in the current era of tremendous global political uncertainty. The world started this century with expectations in many quarters that the political character of the 2000s would be largely democratic, as countries throughout the developing and post-Communist worlds worked steadily to fulfill the widespread democratic aspirations that burst forward so dramatically in the last decade of the previous century.

Instead, politics in every region is now defined by a bewildering assortment of conflicting patterns and trends, not simply away from and toward democracy but in other, still poorly defined directions as well. Political flux has replaced political transition as the contemporary currency of political change, with flux defined by risk, unpredictability, mutability, and multiplicity.

Political protests are very much a feature of today's world, with their complexity and diversity much more telling and characteristic of their age than any singular, overarching character or set of effects.

Annex: Significant National Protests, January 2010 to September 2015

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
May 2010	Greece	Free	Series of public spending cuts and tax increases
December 2010	Belarus	Not free	Alleged election fraud
December 2010	Tunisia	Free	Self-immolation of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in protest of the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation that he reported was inflicted on him by a municipal official
January 2011	Albania	Partly free	Revelation of corruption scandal involving incumbent deputy prime minister
January 2011	Algeria	Not free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and a copycat suicide of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi
January 2011	Azerbaijan	Not free	Protest in Tunisia and an antigovernment campaign organized on social media platforms
January 2011	Egypt	Not free	Protest in Tunisia and anger over police brutality; on January 25, a national holiday to commemorate the police forces, Egyptians took to the streets, calling it a day of rage
January 2011	Jordan	Not free	Sweeping victory of parliamentary elections by pro-government candidates
January 2011	Tanzania	Partly free	Protest in Tunisia, and the detainment of chairman of opposition Chadema, Freeman Mbowe, ahead of a rally against government corruption
January 2011	Yemen	Not free	Protest in Tunisia and the arrest of a prominent female activist who had called for an end to the thirty-three-year rule of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh
February 2011	Armenia	Partly free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and the anniversary of the 2008 protests, when ten people died protesting the presidential election result
February 2011	Bahrain	Not free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and the anniversary of the country's 2002 constitution
February 2011	Croatia	Free	Antigovernment campaign organized on online social media platforms
February 2011	Libya	Not free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and the arrest of a human rights activist in Benghazi
February 2011	Morocco	Partly free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and simmering discontent with slow-ing pace of political reform and worsening quality of democracy

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Austerity measures, unemployment, poverty, corruption, cronyism	Youth, students, low- and middle-income citizens, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, lack of freedoms, corruption, lack of transparency and government accountability, economic mismanagement	Opposition, general public, youth	Tens of thousands
Corruption, lack of freedoms, poor living standards, police violence, unemployment, lack of human rights	General public including students, teachers, lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, trade unionists, opposition politicians, and police officers	Tens of thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, lack of freedoms, political deadlock	Opposition, general public	Tens of thousands
Rising cost of living, high unemployment, lack of government accountability, lack of political freedoms	General public, youth	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, lack of freedoms, unemployment	Students, opposition	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, unemployment, poverty, corruption, demand for end to long-standing rule of then president Hosni Mubarak	Opposition, general public, Mubarak supporters	Hundreds of thousands or more
Corruption, inflation, unemployment, lack of public accountability	Opposition, youth, general public	Tens of thousands
Corruption, systemic mistrust, dissatisfaction with government	Opposition	Thousands
Demand for democracy, dissatisfaction with government, demand for constitutional and electoral reform, abuse of power, lack of freedoms, corruption, scarcity of natural resources and reserves	Human rights activists, journalists, opposition, youth, students, government supporters	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, democratic deficit, poor economic conditions, corruption	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for changes to constitution, demand for the end of monarchy, demand for democracy, demand for release of political prisoners, demand for end to use of torture	Shias, Shia activists, young members of both Shia and Sunni communities, youth	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, economic mismanagement, poor living standards	Opposition, students, senior citizens, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for regime change to bring an end to strongman leader Muammar Qaddafi's forty-one-year rule	Opposition, regime loyalists	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, poor democratic quality, corruption, lack of freedoms, demand for constitutional reform	Youth, general public	Tens of thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
March 2011	Syria	Not free	Protests in Tunisia and Egypt, and the arrests of at least fifteen children for painting antigovernment graffiti on the walls of a school in Daraa
March 2011	United Kingdom	Free	Coalition government announcement of public spending cuts
April 2011	Chile	Free	A growing divide in quality of education on the basis of social class
April 2011	India	Free	Anna Hazare's declaration of a hunger strike against corruption
April 2011	Uganda	Not free	Arrest of opposition leader Kizza Besigye, who called for peaceful Walk to Work campaign after losing third attempt at the Ugandan presidency
May 2011	Czech Republic	Free	Government measures taken to increase healthcare costs and raise the retirement age
May 2011	Mexico	Partly free	Killings resulting from drug war in Mexico
May 2011	Spain	Free	Frustration with rising unemployment rate, cost of living, and incompetent politicians unable to deal with effects of economic crisis
June 2011	Belarus	Not free	Simmering unrest from the December 2010 violent protest against alleged election fraud
June 2011	Greece	Free	Greek parliament's backing of midterm austerity bill, further increasing taxes and public spending cuts
June 2011	Panama	Free	Passing of a new law that opened up native lands to foreign mining and hydroelectric companies
July 2011	Malawi	Partly free	Worsening fuel shortages, rising prices, and growing unemployment rate
August 2011	United Kingdom	Free	Death of Mark Duggan, a twenty-nine-year-old man who was killed by officers from the Trident unit of the Metropolitan Police that investigates gun crime, according to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, an external government body that regulates the police
September 2011	Israel	Free	Economic slump and rising cost of living
September 2011	United States	Free	Anger over a financial system seen as favoring the rich and powerful at the expense of ordinary citizens
October 2011	Colombia	Partly free	Proposal by the government of President Juan Manuel Santos to reform higher education

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Demand for release of arrested and tortured children, dissatisfaction with government (and President Bashar al-Assad's predecessor and father, Hafez), lack of freedoms, poor economic situation, government repression	General public, youth, opposition, government supporters	Hundreds of thousands
Austerity measures, unemployment, economic mismanagement, poverty	Public- and private-sector workers, students, pensioners, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Demand for changes to education system, dissatisfaction with government response to environmental issues, unemployment	Students, youth, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, lack of transparency of political processes	Activist Anna Hazare and supporters, general public	Tens of thousands
Financial mismanagement, high cost of living, lack of freedoms	Opposition, activist groups	Thousands
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement	Students, trade and workers' unions, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government strategy in the war on drugs, lack of freedoms, corruption	Indigenous communities, general public from cities surrounding Mexico City	Hundreds of thousands
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement	Several anti-austerity and anti-government movements catalyzed by social networks, mobile networks, and the Internet; youth; the unemployed and impoverished; students	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, change of government, economic mismanagement	Youth, outside the established opposition mainstream	Thousands
Austerity measures, unemployment, poverty, corruption, cronyism, dissatisfaction with government, political failure, systemic mistrust	General public, low- and middle-income citizens, youth	Tens of thousands
Discrimination of indigenous peoples, avoiding the displacement of tens of thousands of indigenous people, protecting the environment and agriculture of native region	Indigenous communities, environmental activists	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, financial mismanagement, increasing autocracy, fuel and foreign currency shortages, poor human rights record	Activist groups, youth, students, general public	Thousands
Economic hardship, police brutality, racism, classism	Youth, poor, unemployed	Thousands
Demand for political change, economic mismanagement	General public, youth	Hundreds of thousands
Economic and social injustice	Urban educated youth, low- and middle-income citizens, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Defense of public education system against privatization of higher-education institutions	Students, student groups, teachers	Tens of thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
December 2011	Russia	Not free	Alleged election fraud
December 2011	Slovakia	Free	Leaked documents showing top politicians dividing kickbacks, lucrative jobs, and spheres of influence with powerful oligarchs
January 2012	Nigeria	Partly free	Fuel subsidy removal
January 2012	Romania	Free	Resignation of former deputy health minister Raed Arafat, who had criticized the draft healthcare reform bill that would have added private firms to the state health sector
January 2012	Senegal	Free	Then president Abdoulaye Wade's announcement of his candidacy to stand for a third term in the 2012 election, proposing an extraconstitutional presidential term
January 2012	South Africa	Free	General government neglect of the poor, lack of public services
March 2012	Colombia	Partly free	Bad performance and increasing cost of Bogota's public transport system TransMilenio
May 2012	Azerbaijan	Not free	Two days before the country hosted Eurovision, human rights activists and opposition protesters seized on the song contest to highlight the lack of freedoms in Azerbaijan
June 2012	Bulgaria	Free	New forestry act lifting restrictions on the development of a ski resort
June 2012	Togo	Partly free	Electoral reforms made in favor of the ruling party ahead of a poll later that year
July 2012	Mexico	Partly free	Alleged election fraud, media bias
August 2012	Tajikistan	Not free	Killing of rebel leader Imomnazar Imomnazarov, one of several former opposition field commanders who were granted amnesty for crimes they allegedly committed during the Tajik Civil War, and given state posts
November 2012	Argentina	Free	Antigovernment campaign organized on online social media platforms
December 2012	India	Free	Rape of a twenty-three-year-old woman and severe beating of her friend by six men in New Delhi
December 2012	Iraq	Not free	Detention of the bodyguards of a Sunni minister in Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's coalition government, which reinforced widespread Sunni perceptions that the premier is intent on eliminating his Sunni political rivals

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Corruption, cronyism, demand for regime change	Middle-income citizens, youth, opposition	Hundreds of thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, cronyism, economic mismanagement, lack of transparency	General public	Tens of thousands
Financial mismanagement, corruption, systemic mistrust	General public, labor unions	Tens of thousands
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, demand for resignation of then president Traian Băsescu and the centrist government of then prime minister Emil Boc	Opposition, youth, general public	Thousands
Long-standing ruler, perceived authoritarian drift	Opposition	Thousands
Lack of affordable housing, dissatisfaction with government's general neglect of the poor, widening income gap, economic mismanagement	Poor, black South Africans	Hundreds of thousands or more
Poor economic situation, poor public services, dissatisfaction with government failure to address local concerns	Students, general public	Hundreds
Dissatisfaction with government, poor human rights record, lack of democratic standards	Opposition, human rights activists	Thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, abuse of power	Youth, environmental activists, opposition	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for end to system allowing unlimited presidential terms, poor democratic quality	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, media bias, lack of transparency, demand for educational reform	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Civil unrest, dissatisfaction with government, poverty, economic mismanagement, systemic mistrust, cronyism, police brutality	Opposition, youth, general public	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, crime, insecurity, inflation, economic mismanagement	Opposition, middle-income citizens, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government's handling of increasing sexual violence cases against women	Urban, educated youth	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, grievances left unresolved when U.S. forces withdrew one year earlier, demand for discontinuation of democracy-hampering sectarian and ethnic quota system	Sunnis, youth, students, Iraqi civil society, trade unionists	Tens of thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
December 2012	Slovenia	Free	Government announcement of budget cuts in already financially troubled state
January 2013	Azerbaijan	Not free	Car accident involving the owner of the Chirag motel, the site of an alleged brothel, which authorities ignored repeated calls by local residents to shut down
January 2013	Pakistan	Partly free	Revelation of a series of big corruption scandals across the political system, a few months before the country's general election
February 2013	Bulgaria	Free	Hike in electricity prices
February 2013	Guinea	Partly free	Alleged election fraud
February 2013	Ireland	Free	Bank debts being passed on to Irish taxpayers
February 2013	Singapore	Partly free	Government announcement to increase the population through immigration
March 2013	Cyprus	Free	Bailout deal with EU that closed banks and seized large deposits
April 2013	Argentina	Free	General anger over a deteriorating economy and President Cristina Fernandez's efforts to reform the media and courts
April 2013	Armenia	Partly free	Alleged election fraud
May 2013	Italy	Free	Austerity policies and high unemployment
May 2013	Malaysia	Partly free	Alleged election fraud
June 2013	Brazil	Free	Increase in bus fares
June 2013	Bulgaria	Free	Appointment of media magnate Delyan Peevski as security chief, and disappointment in Bulgaria's subjecting of state institutions to private interests
June 2013	Egypt	Not free	One-year anniversary of Mohamed Morsi's inauguration as Egypt's president
June 2013	Turkey	Partly free	Police use of force to subdue otherwise peaceful protests about the redevelopment of Gezi Park in Istanbul
July 2013	Cambodia	Not free	Alleged election fraud

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, poor democratic standards	Labor unions, public- and private-sector workers, students, general public	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, abuse of power, lack of freedoms, unemployment	Opposition, residents of Ismayilli	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, demand for dissolution of parliament, demand for electoral system reform	Canadian-Pakistani cleric Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri and supporters, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, political failure, systemic mistrust, poverty, corruption, organized crime, conflict of interests between politics and business	Low- and middle-income citizens, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, systemic mistrust, political deadlock, electoral reform, ethnic rivalry and violence	Opposition, government supporters, youth	Thousands
Austerity measures, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, worsening economic conditions, unemployment	Opposition, public- and private-sector workers, trade and workers' unions, unemployed	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government's immigration policies, poor economic conditions, poor living standards, rising property prices and living costs	Youth, general public	Thousands
Corruption, economic mismanagement and collapse, abuse of power, lack of transparency, dissatisfaction with government	Bank workers, bondholders, general public	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, economic mismanagement, abuse of power, poor democratic quality	Opposition, middle-income citizens, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, poor democratic quality, economic mismanagement, corruption	Opposition	Thousands
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement	Labor unions, students, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for electoral reform	Opposition, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, economic mismanagement, police brutality, poor public services, excess spending on the World Cup	Youth, middle-income citizens, workers, opposition	Hundreds of thousands or more
Dissatisfaction with government, systemic mistrust, persistent poverty, corruption, organized crime, economic mismanagement	Opposition, students, celebrities, general public	Tens of thousands
Lack of freedoms, police brutality, unemployment, economic mismanagement, emergency laws, demand for electoral reform	Opposition, Tamarod (rebellion) campaign, general public, Morsi supporters	Hundreds of thousands or more
Dissatisfaction with government, perceived authoritarian drift, lack of freedoms	Environmental activists, human rights activists, students, youth, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, long-standing ruler, demand for political change, demand for resignation of Prime Minister Hun Sen, demand for increased wages for garment workers	Opposition, garment workers	Tens of thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
August 2013	Colombia	Partly free	Lack of government subsidies, low wages, low prices on exports, poor labor conditions
September 2013	Poland	Free	Large-scale layoffs triggered by economic slump
October 2013	Portugal	Free	Government unveiling of austerity plans
November 2013	Moldova	Partly free	Moldova's plan to sign a partnership agreement with the EU at a forthcoming EU summit in Vilnius
November 2013	Moldova	Partly free	A week before an EU summit in Vilnius at which Moldova was to sign a partnership agreement with the EU, opposition reacted to the recent pro-EU rally
November 2013	Ukraine	Partly free	Government refusal to sign a political and economic Association Agreement with the EU
December 2013	Ukraine	Partly free	Students beaten by police in Kiev's Independence Square
January 2014	Bangladesh	Partly free	Ruling party's refusal to establish a neutral caretaker administration to oversee the general election, and the opposition party's boycott of the election
February 2014	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Partly free	A rise in unemployment and a lack of stable employment conditions
February 2014	Venezuela	Partly free	Alleged attempted rape of a student
May 2014	Brazil	Free	One month before the opening of the football World Cup, a mega-event budgeted at over \$11 billion
July 2014	Ghana	Free	High cost of living, recurring energy blackouts
July 2014	China (Hong Kong)	Partly free	Seventeenth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China
August 2014	Pakistan	Partly free	Alleged election fraud
August 2014	United States	Free	Grand jury decisions involving the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray, among others, black men killed by white police officers
September 2014	Armenia	Partly free	Specific societal and economic policy issues such as trade tariff regulations, public transportation tariffs, and a contested pension reform plan
September 2014	China (Hong Kong)	Partly free	Chinese national legislature's announced plan for Hong Kong that would give residents a direct vote for the city's chief executive, starting in 2017, but only from a list of two or three candidates pre-approved by a committee of which most members are loyal to Beijing
October 2014	Azerbaijan	Not free	Criminal charges against journalists and civil society activists

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, widening income gap	Truckers, coal miners, coffee farmers, other laborers	Hundreds of thousands
Austerity measures, dissatisfaction with government, change in labor and social policies, unemployment, economic mismanagement	Labor union members, low- and middle-income citizens, general public	Tens of thousands
Austerity measures, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement	Labor unions, public- and private-sector workers, students, general public	Tens of thousands
Demand for democracy, demand for closer economic and cultural ties to the EU	Government supporters, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, dissolution of parliament, opposition to EU integration	Opposition, general public	Tens of thousands
Corruption, economic mismanagement, poor democratic standards	Middle-income citizens, students, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Corruption, economic mismanagement, police brutality, poor democratic standards	General public, students	Hundreds of thousands
Poor democratic standards, dissatisfaction with government, demand for election reform	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, poverty, unemployment, systemic mistrust, conflict of interests between politics and business	Low- to middle-income citizens, primarily workers laid off when state-owned companies that were sold off to private ownership collapsed	Thousands
Corruption, high crime rate, primary goods shortage	Students, youth, middle-income citizens, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, economic mismanagement, excessive spending on the football World Cup, poor public services	Youth, middle-income citizens, workers, opposition	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, corruption	NGOs, trade unions, workers, opposition	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for democracy and self-rule, universal suffrage	Occupy Central campaign and supporters, youth, general public	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, demand for removal of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, demand for snap elections, demand for electoral system reform	Opposition candidate and supporters, general public	Thousands
Police brutality, racial injustice, poverty, dissatisfaction with government	Youth, students, general public	Thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for change of government, demand for economic reform	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for democracy and self-rule, universal suffrage	Occupy Central campaign and supporters, general public, youth, students	Tens of thousands
Corruption, lack of freedoms, unemployment	Students, opposition	Thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
October 2014	Burkina Faso	Partly free	A proposed constitutional change to the electoral law and extension of the presidential term limit
October 2014	Hungary	Free	Government announcement of plans to enforce Internet tax from 2015
October 2014	Ireland	Free	Government introduction of water charges
November 2014	Albania	Partly free	Increase in taxes and energy prices
November 2014	Thailand	Not free	Amnesty bill for politically related offenses allowing former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra to avoid criminal charges
November 2014	Togo	Partly free	Opposition reaction to a march in support of President Faure Gnassingbé
January 2015	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Not free	A proposed extension of the presidential term limit
January 2015	France	Free	The attack and killing of twelve people in the offices of French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris
March 2015	Azerbaijan	Not free	Eighty-seven days before hosting the inaugural European Games, a mega-event budgeted at over €7 billion (\$8 billion)
March 2015	Brazil	Free	Thirtieth anniversary of Brazil's end to military rule and establishment of democracy in 1985
March 2015	Hungary	Free	On Hungary's National Day, a march held over allegations of corruption and a secretive nuclear deal with Russia
April 2015	Burundi	Not free	Burundian constitutional court's declaration of President Pierre Nkurunziza's third-term candidacy as valid, despite claims of unconstitutionality
May 2015	Guatemala	Partly free	A UN anticorruption agency report that implicated several high-profile politicians including then vice president Roxana Baldetti and then president Otto Pérez Molina
May 2015	Macedonia	Partly free	Revelations of wiretapping scandal involving Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his ministers, contained in taped conversations that appear to expose tight government control over journalists, judges, and the conduct of elections

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Poor democratic standards, dissatisfaction with government, perceived authoritarian drift	Opposition	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, poor democratic standards, perceived drift toward authoritarianism and away from the EU, systemic mistrust	Youth, students, low- and middle-income citizens, general public, opposition	Hundreds of thousands
Austerity measures, economic mismanagement, worsening economic conditions, dissatisfaction with government, tax rises and public spending cutbacks	General public, opposition	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, unemployment, poor living standards	Opposition, general public	Tens of thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, abuse of power	Opposition	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, demand for change of constitution to impose presidential term limit, poor democratic quality	Opposition	Thousands
Long-standing ruler, poor democratic standards, perceived authoritarian drift	Opposition, students, general public	Hundreds
Support for freedom of expression, religious and social tolerance, solidarity in values of liberty, equality, and democracy	Over 40 world leaders, general public	Hundreds of thousands or more
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, devaluation of the currency, corruption, excessive spending on the European Games, poor living standards, poor human rights record	Opposition, youth, general public	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, corruption, systemic mistrust	Middle-income citizens, youth, workers, opposition	Hundreds of thousands or more
Dissatisfaction with government, perceived authoritarian drift, cronyism, corruption, lack of transparency	Opposition, general public	Tens of thousands
Violation of constitution, long-standing ruler, perceived authoritarian drift, dissatisfaction with government	Opposition, youth	Thousands
Corruption, organized crime, dissatisfaction with government, demand for resignation of then vice president Roxana Baldetti and then president Otto Pérez Molina	General public, youth, urban, low- and middle-income citizens	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, corruption, poor democratic standards, perceived authoritarian drift, demand for resignation of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski	Opposition, Gruevski supporters	Tens of thousands

Start Date	Country	Country Status	Trigger
May 2015	Moldova	Partly free	Revelation of the theft of \$1.5 billion from the state-owned Savings Bank and private banks Unibank and Social Bank
June 2015	Armenia	Partly free	Hike in electricity tariffs
July 2015	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Partly free	The passing of a new labor law seen by some as violating workers' rights
July 2015	Iraq	Not free	Power cuts during heat wave
August 2015	Brazil	Free	A rise in unemployment and inflation, and an ongoing bribery and money-laundering investigation potentially linked to President Dilma Rousseff
August 2015	Japan	Free	Government's proposal to expand Japan's military role beyond self-defense under a reinterpretation of the country's war-renouncing constitution
August 2015	Lebanon	Partly free	Government's inability to deal with garbage collection in Beirut
August 2015	Malaysia	Partly free	A <i>Wall Street Journal</i> report alleging that payments of nearly \$700 million had entered Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's bank accounts in 2013

Motivation	Participants	Number of Participants
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government's failure to implement reforms oriented toward the EU	General public, activist groups	Tens of thousands
Economic mismanagement, corruption, mismanagement of the country's power monopoly, the Russian-owned Armenian Electricity Network	Youth, students	Tens of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, economic mismanagement, unemployment	Opposition, workers' unions, workers	Thousands
Corruption, poor public services, dissatisfaction with government's failure to improve basic services, poor economic conditions, dissatisfaction with role of religion in politics, demand for judiciary reform	General public, opposition, youth, mainly secular	Tens of thousands
Demand for impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, corruption, dissatisfaction with government, systemic mistrust	Opposition, poor, unemployed	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, opposition to security policy reform	Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy coalition members and supporters, students, opposition	Hundreds of thousands
Dissatisfaction with government, political dysfunction, erosion of political institutions, corruption, lack of public services, conflict of interests between politics and business, lack of transparency, unemployment	Low- to middle-income citizens, youth, unemployed, You Stink campaign and supporters	Tens of thousands
Corruption, dissatisfaction with government, lack of freedoms, demand for democracy	General public, members and supporters of the electoral reform group Bersih (clean), opposition	Hundreds of thousands

Note: This table seeks to present a widely representative but not fully comprehensive list of major protests between January 2010 and September 2015.

Sources: Factual material for the table was drawn from a wide variety of public news sources. Country status ratings are drawn from the Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World*.

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