

A large crowd of protesters in a city at night, holding flags and banners, with bright green laser lights illuminating the scene.

MARCH 2020

The Age of Mass Protests

Understanding an Escalating Global Trend

AUTHORS

Samuel J. Brannen
Christian S. Haig
Katherine Schmidt

A Report of the
CSIS RISK AND FORESIGHT GROUP

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Center for Strategic & International Studies
1616 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-887-0200 | www.csis.org

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Executive Summary

- Mass protests increased annually by an average of 11.5 percent from 2009 to 2019 across all regions of the world, with the largest concentration of activity in the Middle East and North Africa and the fastest rate of growth in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Analysis of the underlying drivers of this growth suggests the trend will continue, meaning the number and intensity of global protests is likely to increase.
- Protests have resulted in a broad range of outcomes, ranging from regime change and political accommodation to protracted political violence with many casualties.
- Factors that could increase the rate of protest include slowing global economic growth, worsening effects of climate change, and foreign meddling in internal politics via disinformation and other tactics.
- Russia, China, and Iran are notably active in suppressing protest movements within their own borders. They also advise and assist other country governments in suppressing protest movements, and in some cases meddle uninvited in other countries' protest movements by exploiting existing political cleavages.
- Three potential catalyzing factors, which could intensify the trend or make it more manageable, warrant particular attention: (1) the use of technology by protestors and governments alike, (2) the tension between shifting democratic and authoritarian government types, and (3) the need for improved understanding and responsiveness between governments and their citizens.
- To date, the U.S. government has failed to develop a systematic response to the rising tide of global protests. The United States has thus far treated each as an anomaly rather than a greater trend, failing to scale up U.S. capacity to achieve strategic ends, including by shoring up global democracy and pushing back against the spread of authoritarian tactics.
- The outbreak of the novel coronavirus in early 2020 appears to have temporarily interrupted the surge of protests from 2019 in Hong Kong and Iran, though protest movements from Canada to India continue.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We are living in an age of global mass protests that are historically unprecedented in frequency, scope, and size. Our analysis finds that the mass political protests that have captured media attention over the past year, such as those in Hong Kong and Santiago, are in fact part of a decade-long trendline affecting every major populated region of the world. The size and frequency of recent protests eclipse historical examples of eras of mass protest, such as the late-1960s, late-1980s, and early-1990s. Analysis of the root causes of these global protests suggests that they will continue and could increase in 2020 and beyond. While each protest has a unique context, common grievances overwhelmingly center on perceptions of ineffective governance and corruption.

We analyzed data related to mass protests from 2009 through the present and found that the number of anti-government protests increased around the world by an annual average of 11.5 percent between 2009 and 2019, though there was significant variation within regions and year to year. Viewed in this broader context, the events of the Arab Spring were not an isolated phenomenon but rather an especially acute manifestation of a broadly increasing global trend.

From Beirut to Barcelona, Hong Kong to Harare, more than 37 countries experienced massive anti-government movements in the last few months of 2019 alone. And over the course of 2019, anti-government protests occurred in 114 countries—31 percent more than just a decade ago. Heads of government resigned or offered to do so in Lebanon, Iraq, Bolivia, Algeria, Sudan, and Malta, and many more regimes deployed military and specialized police forces to contain protesters amid a groundswell of discontent (e.g., Hong Kong, Chile, and Iran). Internet shutdowns were also increasingly common, with India, Pakistan, Syria, and Turkey leading the world in this regard. The sheer size of protests in 2019 was also remarkable. On June 16, 2019, nearly 2 million of Hong Kong's 7.4 million citizens marched—nearly a quarter of the city's population. At the height of protests in Santiago, Chile, on October 25, 2019, crowds reached 1.2 million—also nearly a quarter of Santiago's 5.1 million residents.

Notably, advanced economies have not been immune to this wave of upheaval. In fact, civilian anti-government protests grew at a faster rate in Europe and North America than the global average. From the inauguration of President Donald Trump on January 20, 2017 to January 1, 2020, almost 11.5 million Americans participated in 16,000 protests across every U.S. state, which included the five largest demonstrations in U.S. history.

Even when accounting for population growth, the relative number of demonstrators over the past three years is likely higher than participation in either the anti-Vietnam War movement or the Civil Rights movement, which civil society organizers worked for years to organize. Environmental protests are also increasing; in the month of October 2019, the estimated number of environmental protests reached 4 million globally. These protest levels had not been seen since 2003 during the Iraq War.

In 2008, during the height of the Global Financial Crisis and ahead of the Arab Spring, former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski identified what he termed as a “global political awakening.” In his assessment, a new era of global activism had dawned. He wrote, “For the first time in history almost all of humanity is politically activated, politically conscious and politically interactive.” True to his prediction, governments and leaders around the globe are being tested by rising citizen expectations magnified by breakneck rates of change. Protestors are increasingly targeting public and private infrastructure and businesses, with knock-on societal and economic effects..

The objective of this report is to assess the best available data on the growing global trend of protests, underlying causes, and the negative and positive roles that outside actors play in these internal political dynamics. The conclusion of this report is a call for further study and policy consideration of a sweeping global trend (what those in the strategic foresight community refer to as a “mega-trend”). Governments around the world are largely unprepared for a surging tide of citizen expectations manifesting itself in mass political protests and other, less overt forms. Responding to the growing disconnect between citizen expectations and government abilities to deliver against those expectations could be the challenge of a generation. Further raising the risk to governments, Russia, China, and Iran are seeking to remake regional and global orders according to their interests, including through interference in and fomenting of protests. These governments also continue to brutally suppress internal political dissent within their countries and are exporting their “best practices” in suppression to states around the globe.

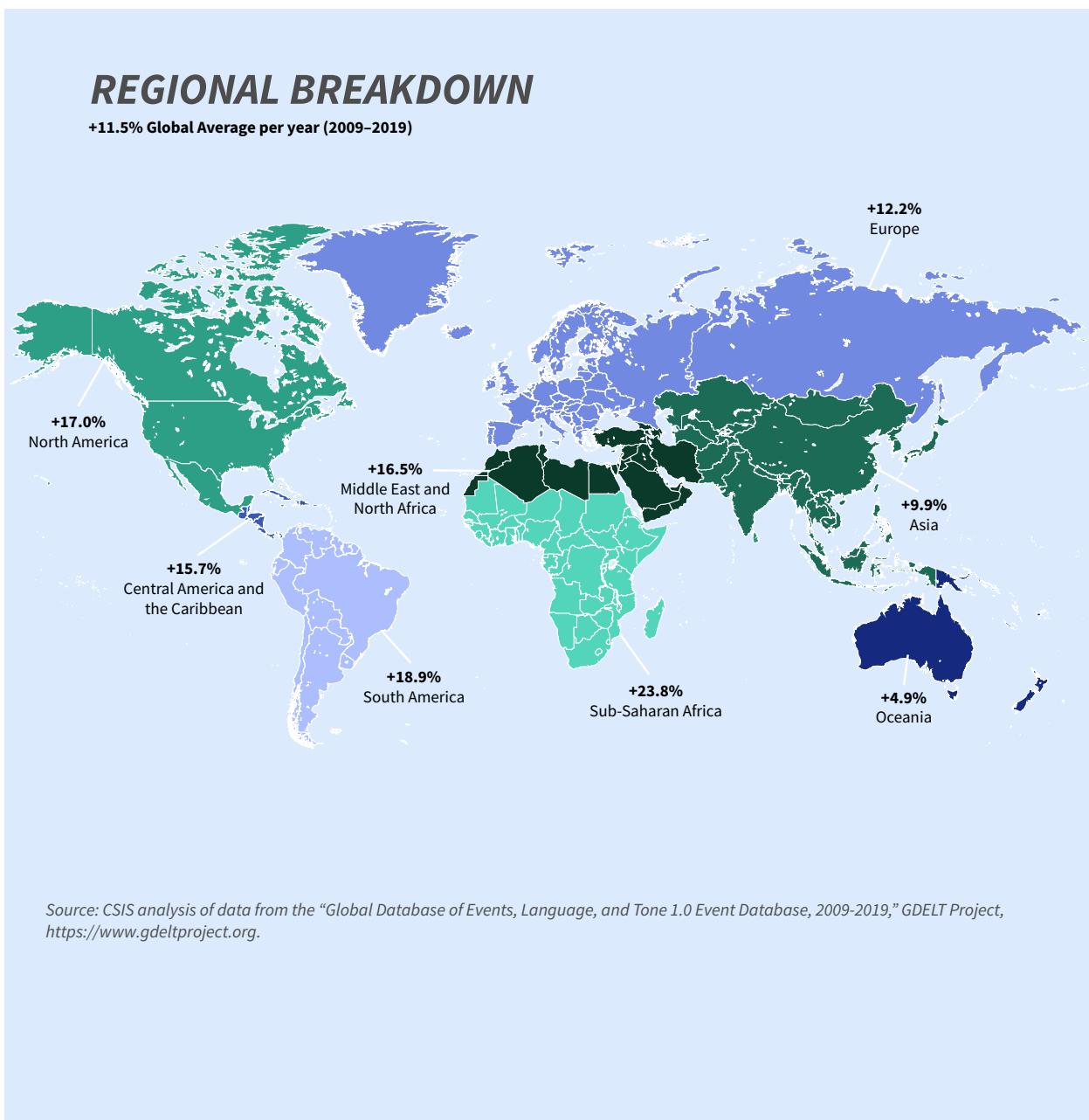
Global protests are increasingly events of major geopolitical consequence. Even when they do not achieve major political change, these events are a key signal within countries and across borders of changing relationships between governments and citizens. Those countries and governments that can understand the underlying grievances driving protests and take steps to reach accommodation or adapt their systems will achieve greater political stability, internal cohesion, and ultimately global competitiveness to advance their preferences and interests. That said, one worrisome signature of this era of mass protests is the common link of their leaderless nature. Citizens are losing faith in current leaders, elites, and institutions and taking to the streets in frustration and often disgust.

In Chapter 2, this report first provides a region-by-region assessment of the trendline with snapshots of key protest events in major countries. Chapter 3 offers an assessment of the underlying drivers of protest movements. Chapter 4 considers a growing global offense-defense contest between protestors and a growing number of governments in mobilization and suppression, including the role of malign global actors in promoting authoritarian tools, tactics, and procedures. Finally, the report authors offer a modest set of recommendations for how the United States and like-minded democratic nations

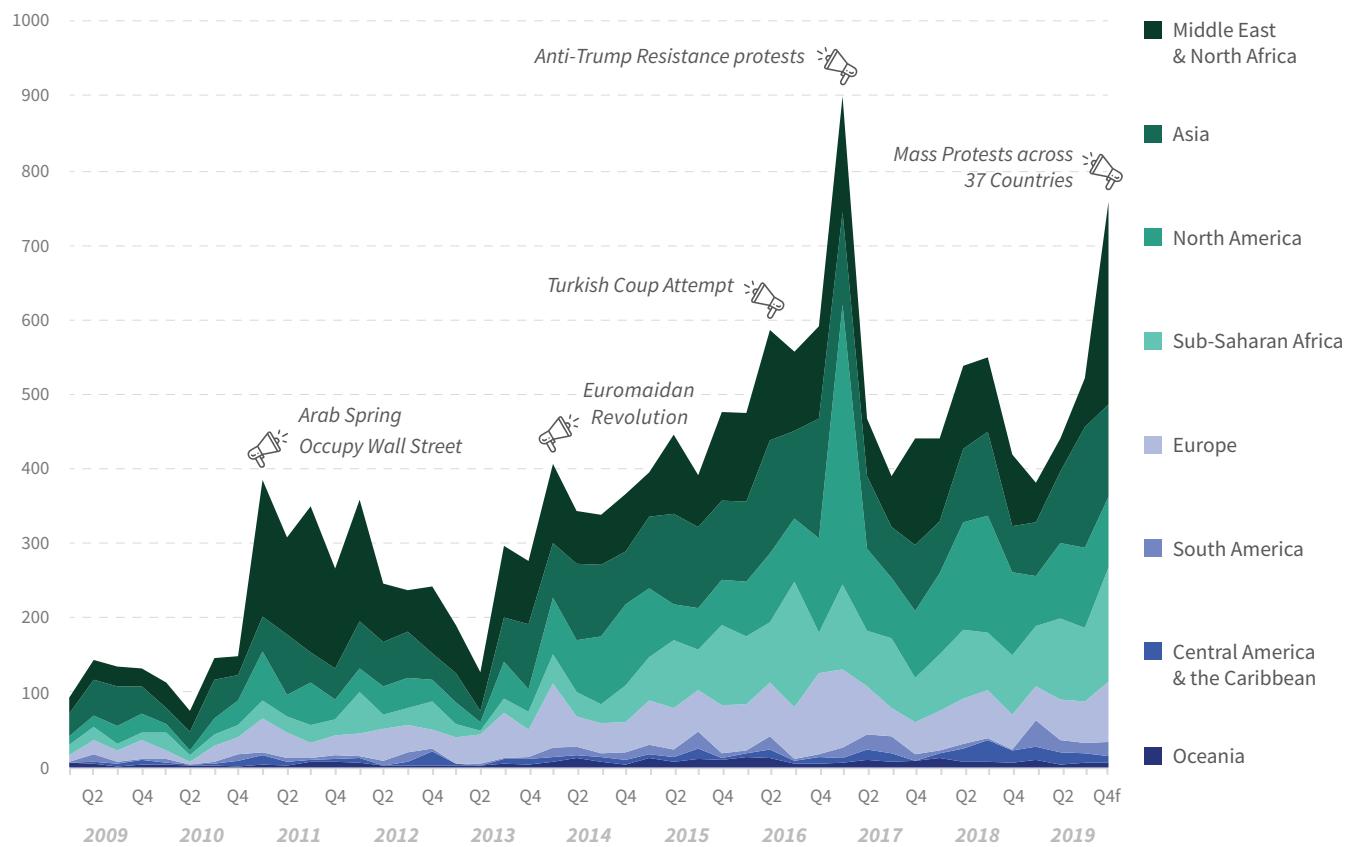
can respond to this growing global trend. The intent of this report is to catalyze a much-needed recognition of the global mega-trend of mass protests and the need for governments at all levels to understand citizen grievances and channel their energy and passion to position societies for advancement in a rapidly changing world. This report intends to spark a much-needed policy conversation on the topic in Washington and other democratic capitals worldwide.

In a great turn of history, protests have been muted in recent weeks likely due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which has impacted Hong Kong significantly, and has since spread to other protest hot spots such as Iran. The coronavirus will likely suppress protests in the short term both due to government restrictions in urban areas and citizens' own reluctance to expose themselves to large public gatherings. However, depending on the future course of this likely pandemic, government responses to the coronavirus may themselves become another trigger of mass political protest.

Chapter 2: Global Protests by Region



QUARTERLY CIVILIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS BY REGION (#)



NOTE ON PROCESS

CSIS's Risk and Foresight Group analyzed data from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT). The actual global numbers are likely higher than the estimates that CSIS developed for the following reasons:

- Due to machine coding accuracy concerns, strict event selection coding focuses specifically on anti-government protests and excludes riots, discontent against non-government entities, or certain issue-specific protests that target non-state entities.
- Machine coding errors necessitated heavy data cleaning, likely eliminating real protests from the dataset.
- Countries with strict press controls, where there is no robust local press or where protests are highly frequent events, are likely underrepresented given that the data relied on news reporting.
- Data for the last two months of 2019 were conservative projections.

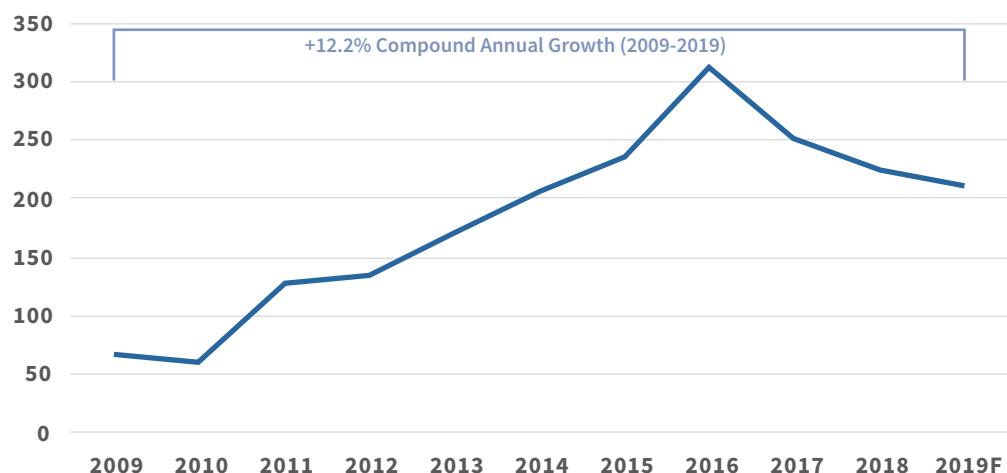
Full research methodology is presented later in this paper. These data track the number of annual protests rather than the number of people participating in each protest. They are useful for assessing the frequency of protest but not the size of protest movements.

Source: CSIS analysis of data from the "Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone 1.0 Event Database, 2009-2019," GDELT Project, <https://www.gdeltproject.org>.

Europe

Anti-government protests increased by an average of 12.2 percent annually between 2009 and 2019, roughly in line with the global average of 11.5 percent. There were 216.4 percent more protests in 2019 than 2009.¹ Numbers peaked in 2016 amid a confluence of political issues in multiple European countries, including a reaction to backsliding democracy and declining civil liberties at the hands of the Law and Justice party in Poland; alleged money laundering, tax evasion, and corruption disclosed in the Panama Papers that ensnared public officials across most of the European Union and led to a mass movement in Iceland; mass protests in the United Kingdom over Brexit; anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment across Europe, including Germany, the United Kingdom, Czechia, and France; and the Catalan independence movement in Spain.

CIVILIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN EUROPE (#)



Source: CSIS analysis of data from the “Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone 1.0 Event Database, 2009-2019,” GDELT Project, <https://www.gdeltproject.org>

In the past year, Europe has seen continued mass protests in France, the United Kingdom, Malta, Spain, and Russia. In the United Kingdom, an estimated one million people marched through London demanding a second Brexit referendum—the fourth major protest since the initial Brexit referendum in 2016.

In October 2019, three years after initial Catalan independence-related unrest in 2016, more than half a million demonstrators in Barcelona protested against the imprisonment of nine Catalan separatist leaders by the Spanish government. The initially peaceful protests were marred by nighttime riots and clashes between Spanish police, far-right activists, and pro-independence protesters.

France has experienced sustained unrest through the present. The yellow vests movement (“*mouvement des gilets jaunes*”), triggered in part by the impact of rising fuel prices on the

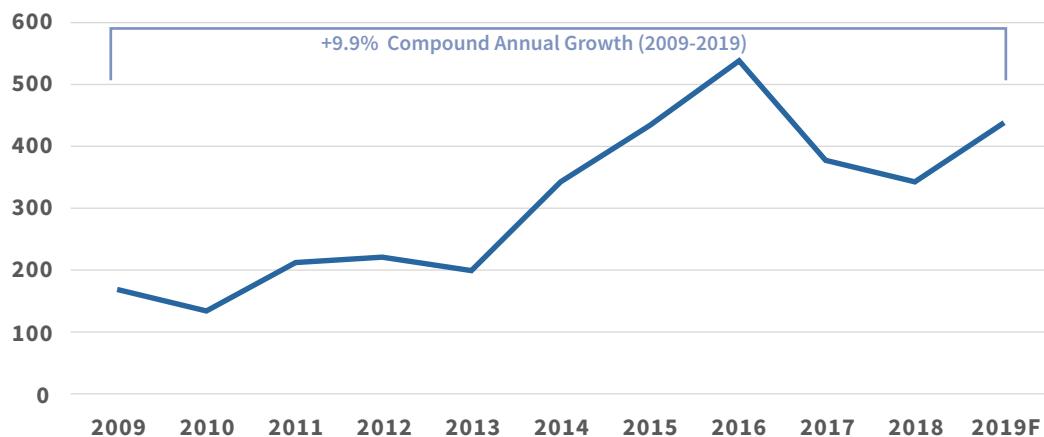
¹ GDELT data.

rural poor in 2018 and larger issues of inequality, sustained itself with the action of tens of thousands of demonstrators through 2019, though these demonstrations were smaller than the previous year. France also saw 800,000 people demonstrate in a general strike against potential government pension reform, triggering the longest sustained nationwide strikes and transportation disruptions in French history.

Asia

Anti-government protests increased by approximately 9.9 percent each year between 2009 and 2019, with the decade ending with 158.0 percent more anti-government protests than in 2009.² Despite the inclusion of spikes in India and Hong Kong in 2014 and 2019, anti-government protests increased in Asia more slowly than the global average, in part because of the population-dense sample size and repression in China possibly skewing the overall figures.

CIVILIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN ASIA (#)



Source: CSIS analysis of data from the "Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone 1.0 Event Database, 2009-2019," GDELT Project, <https://www.gdeltproject.org>.

Protests peaked in 2016 with large-scale events in Indonesia and enormous movements in India and South Korea. In late 2016, Islamist groups led mass protests in Indonesia, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets in Jakarta during an election cycle over spurious allegations of blasphemy by the city's incumbent governor. Indian forces killed a Kashmiri separatist leader, triggering mass civil uprisings; the government responded with force, injuring 17,000. That same year, India saw the largest protest event in human history, with up to 180 million informal workers and public-sector union members going on strike over labor rights. And in South Korea, millions participated in the Candlelight Revolution, demanding (successfully) the removal of President Park Geun-hye over corruption charges.

For Asia, 2019 was another high-water mark for unrest, with significant street protests

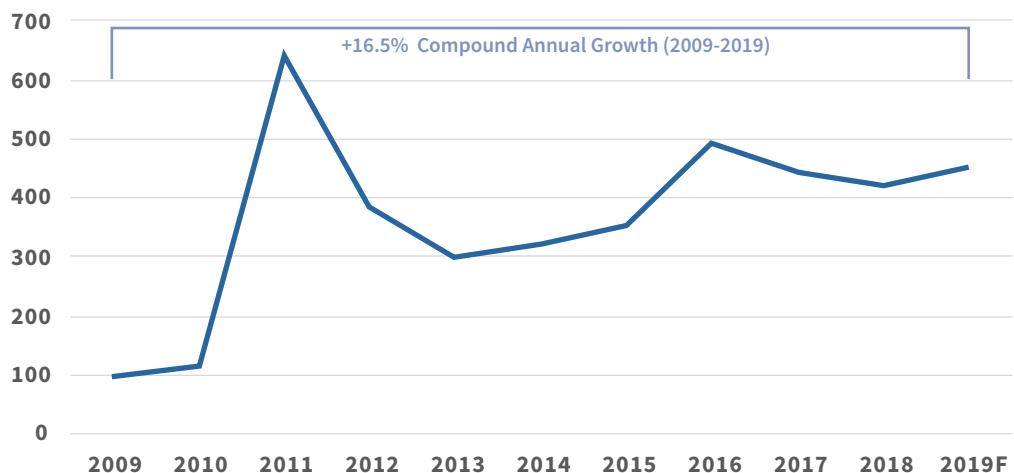
² Ibid.

in Hong Kong, India, Pakistan, Thailand, and Indonesia. Of these, the Hong Kong protests over Beijing's gradual encroachment on the city's democratic freedoms have received the greatest global attention. The mass pro-democracy campaign builds on the failed 2014 Umbrella Movement and has seen immense support within the city, with around 2 million protesters in the streets in June, a huge portion of the city's 7.4 million population. India also experienced a significant increase in protests in 2019, intensifying at year's end over Hindu nationalist policies viewed as targeting the country's Muslim population of around 200 million. This included India's withdrawal of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir and subsequent increasingly repressive measures taken to restrict information and movement in the region.

Middle East and North Africa

While the 2010-2012 Arab Spring protests marked a high-water mark for the world overall, the region has sustained very high levels of unrest, increasing at a rate of 16.5 percent annually since 2009—44.5 higher than the global average. Compared to 2009, 2019 ended with 290.5 percent more instances of civilian anti-government protest, with Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Azerbaijan all having faced mass protests.³

CIVILIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (#)



Source: CSIS analysis of data from the "Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone 1.0 Event Database, 2009-2019," GDELT Project, <https://www.gdeltproject.org>.

In Algeria, public discontent with corruption, government clientilism, economic stagnation, unemployment, and rising youth unemployment ignited mass unrest when the 20-year incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced that he was running for another term despite his severe health problems. On March 1, 2019, up to 1 million people took to the streets in Algiers, and President Bouteflika eventually stepped down.

During the 2019 protests in Lebanon which were sparked by planned taxes on gasoline, tobacco, and digital phone calls, more than 1 million people out of a population of 6 million took to the streets. Protesters' grievances included fiscal austerity, political corruption,

³ Ibid.

economic mismanagement, unemployment, Iranian influence, and endemic corruption in the country's sectarian system of governance, triggering the resignation of the country's prime minister.

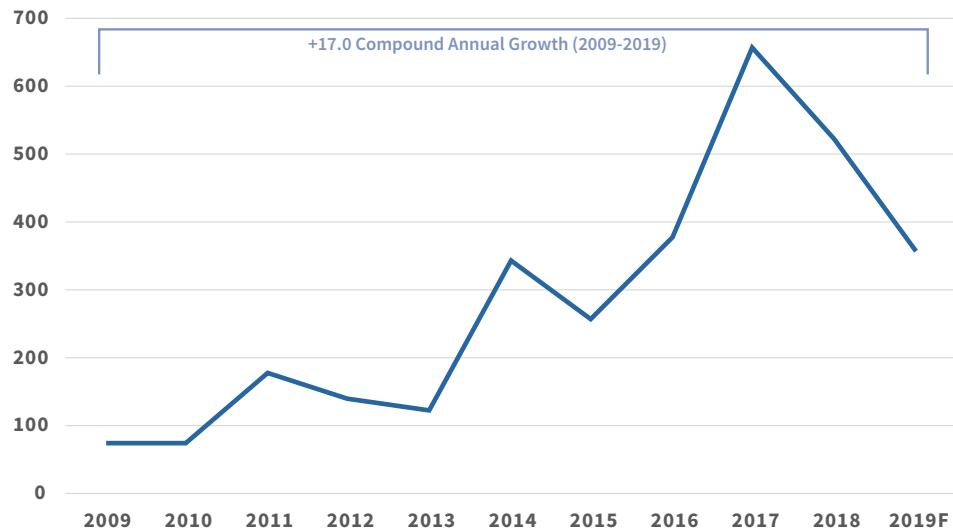
Iraq has experienced similar mass unrest, with thousands taking to the streets to protest public corruption, Iranian and U.S. influence, youth unemployment, economic stagnation, and poor public services. These protests were met with repressive tactics by the government and Iranian-backed groups but ultimately led to the country's prime minister committing to resign. These mass protests became a geopolitical flashpoint as an angry mob attempted to storm the U.S. embassy following U.S. military actions against an Iranian-backed militia. This spurred the U.S. targeted killing of a prominent Iraqi shia militia leader and the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani, which in turn escalated tensions between Iran and the United States in January 2020.

In Iran, frustration with the country's government related to economic stagnation and political repression boiled over in November 2019, with the proximate trigger of an increase in fuel prices sparking protests in at least 21 cities. While severe state response makes it difficult to assess the size of the protests, the unrest was likely the most severe since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Also politically unsuccessful but highly notable were the September 2019 mass protests in Egypt over public corruption and state repression. Thousands marched in cities across the country, including in Cairo and Alexandria.

North America

CIVILIAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN NORTH AMERICA (#)



Source: CSIS analysis of data from the "Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone 1.0 Event Database, 2009-2019," GDELT Project, <https://www.gdeltproject.org>.

By the end of 2019, anti-government protests increased by 379.7 percent compared to 2009, increasing at a rate of 17.0 percent each year—48.3 percent higher than the world average.⁴

Following the inauguration of President Donald Trump after the politically divisive 2016 U.S. elections, protests rose 330 percent in the first month of 2017 relative to the prior year, with the U.S. “Resistance” protests a prominent factor in the 2017 global surge in protest activities. Through the first three months of 2017, movements in the United States represented a remarkable 40 percent of all global protests, nearly doubling from the three months prior.⁵ Some of the largest protest movements of 2017 included the Women’s March, the People’s Climate March, the March for Truth (calling for investigations into the Trump campaign’s connections to Russia), the Tax March (calling for President Trump to release his tax returns), the National Pride March, the Day Without Immigrants and May Day protests in support of immigrants, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, airport protests against Donald Trump’s travel ban, the anti-abortion March for Life, and the March for Science.

Many of the protests in 2017 continued into 2019, including the Women’s March, the March for Truth, the March for Our Lives, and the March for Life. Further compounding these movements were mass mobilizations of primary school teachers in Illinois, California, Virginia, and elsewhere over salaries and pensions. Additionally, 2019 saw continued unrest over U.S. immigration policies, including law enforcement raids on migrant communities, the “family separation policy,” and detention camps.⁶

In 2019, Mexico saw instances of unrest, albeit they far smaller than prior protest events such as over alleged corruption by the former Nieto administration and over the 2014 Iguala Mass Kidnapping. In May 2019, several thousand people marched to demand the resignation of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador over unfulfilled campaign promises, including implementing anti-corruption measures, curbing military presence, and countering Donald Trump’s border plans.⁷ Later in August 2019, thousands of women took to the streets of Mexico City for the “glitter revolution” to advocate for women’s rights and demand broad changes to Mexico’s justice system.⁸

Central America and the Caribbean

Anti-government protests in Central America and the Caribbean have increased at an annual rate of 15.7 percent since 2009, with 330.8 percent more protests in 2019 compared to 2009. Anti-government protests grew 37.3 percent more quickly than the world average.⁹ Notably, protests doubled from 2017 to 2018 amid nearly simultaneous mass movements in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras, some of which continued into 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “2019: they year in US protests-in pictures,” Guardian, December 29, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2019/dec/29/2019-year-us-protests-in-pictures>

⁷ Azam Ahmed and Kirk Semple, “A New Revolution? Mexico Still Waiting as López Obrador Nears Half-Year Mark,” New York Times, May 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/10/world/americas/amlo-mexico-lopez-obrador.html>.

⁸ Tom Phillips, “Mexico’s ‘glitter revolution’ targets violence against women,” The Guardian, August 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/26/desperation-and-rage-mexican-women-take-to-streets-to-protest-unabated-sexual-violence-glitter-revolution>.

⁹ GDELT data.

In Guatemala, thousands protested President Jimmy Morales's decision to block the operation of a celebrated UN-backed anti-corruption body. This move came after the body facilitated Guatemalan prosecutors' cases against Morales's brother and son for graft and another case against the president himself which alleges \$1 million in illicit campaign financing. Indigenous protesters took to the streets in September 2019 as the Morales government officially expelled the body.

In 2018, Honduran protesters turned out over electoral discrepancies that paved the way for President Juan Orlando Hernandez to retain power, leading to violent clashes in the streets. Anti-Hernandez protests increased in 2019 after the president's younger brother was charged in U.S. courts with drug-trafficking. During the trial, drug-traffickers admitted to giving \$1.5 million to Hernandez's political campaigns in exchange for protection from police and security forces.

Long-simmering political unrest in Nicaragua reignited in 2018 over President Daniel Ortega's unpopular social security reforms, with protests expanding to include hundreds of thousands marching against a series of grievances, including extrajudicial killings, corruption, and repression. The government responded with a continuing violent crackdown, with President Ortega declaring political protests "illegal" following a massive general strike which demanded the release of political prisoners.

South America

No historical stranger to mass protest, South America saw a recent high-water mark for unrest in 2019, which ended with 466.7 percent more instances of anti-government protest compared to 2009.¹⁰ As with Central America and the Caribbean, the region is caught in a remarkable surge in protest activity—among the greatest relative increases in the world—with mass demonstrations having occurred in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Bolivia. Between 2009 and 2019, South America saw an 18.9 percent increase on average in mass protests each year, which is 65.4 percent higher than the global average of 11.5 percent.¹¹



Photo: Juan Barreto/AFP via Getty Images

Millions of Brazilians participated in nationwide protests against price hikes, cost of living, social service provision, and corruption in 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

In 2019, hundreds of thousands of protestors in Venezuela have demonstrated against President Maduro's controversial second inauguration, political repression, and economic crisis. These protests are still ongoing but appeared to peak in a coordinated effort to displace President Maduro by National Assembly President Juan Guaido in the spring of 2019, which ultimately failed.

In Bolivia, protestors citing election fraud successfully pressured incumbent President Evo Morales to resign after 19 days of mass demonstrations. Since then, counterdemonstrations from Morales's supporters have continued, leading to sporadic violence and the blockading of key transit routes.

Inequality, unemployment, corruption, and economic stagnation and crisis have been core triggers for mass movements in Chile, Columbia, and Argentina. In September 2019, thousands took to the streets in Argentina over food shortages and a worsening economic crisis. The country, in recession since 2018, has one of the highest inflation rates in the world and soaring unemployment rates. In Chile, demonstrations broke out over a subway fare hike in Santiago and quickly expanded due to anger over increased costs of living, inequality, and police repression, triggering promises of a new constitution. The intensity of protests caused the planned October Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit to be cancelled, with the immediate geopolitical consequence of setting back U.S.-China trade negotiations. And in Colombia, over a million people participated in weeks of national strikes against public corruption, potential austerity plans, and police repression and in favor of indigenous rights and the peace process that ended the country's decades of civil war.

Sub-Saharan Africa



Photo: AFP via Getty Images

Alaa Salah addresses protesters in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum during the Sudanese Revolution in August 2019.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw the largest increases in anti-government protests in the world, with annual protests increasing by 23.8 percent each year—more than twice the global average of 11.5 percent. Protests increased a staggering 746.2 percent between 2009 and 2019.¹² And the number of events peaked in 2019, with significant mass protest movements in Sudan, South Africa, Zimbabwe, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

The success of Algerian protesters in unseating President Bouteflika in 2019 appears to have inspired action elsewhere on the continent, including in Sudan, where rising basic goods prices triggered large-scale protests against the regime. These demonstrations expanded in size and scope as protesters took to the streets over an expansive list of grievances, including political repression, human rights abuses, austerity, inequality, corruption, and economic mismanagement. Protesters sustained eight months of civil disobedience, triggering a military coup against President Omar al-Bashir's 30-year tenure and facilitating the eventual transfer of power to a mixed military-civilian body. The success of these protests may in turn have inspired protesters in South Sudan.

In South Africa, rapid urbanization and subsequent growth of informal settlements have stressed the provision of municipal services, triggering frustration and protests through 2018 and 2019 in a number of major South African cities, including Johannesburg and Pretoria. These factors exacerbated underlying unrest over public corruption, economic mismanagement, and the highest youth unemployment rate in the world.¹³

In Zimbabwe, a 150 percent increase in gas prices exacerbated existing poor living standards and high levels of poverty, triggering major demonstrations over poor economic conditions in January 2019.¹⁴ The government responded with a heavy crackdown that resulted in multiple deaths and 200 arrests, effectively halting the protests after three days.¹⁵

Oceania

The absolute numbers of protests for Oceania are the lowest of any region assessed, an unsurprising event for the least populated region of the world. Furthermore, anti-government protests in the region also have increased less than half as quickly as in the rest of the world. However, protests have still increased on average by 4.9 percent each year, with 62.5 percent more protests in 2019 than in 2009.^{16,17} The majority of events took place in the region's most populated country, Australia, with a 2015 peak that included numerous causes, such as government funding for remote areas and indigenous peoples, climate change, refugee and immigration policies, and a far-right anti-Islamic movement.

12 Ibid.

13 “Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24),” World Bank Group, Accessed December 19, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>.

14 MacDonald Dzirutwe, “150 percent price rise fails to fill Zimbabwe’s fuel pumps,” Reuters, January 13, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-economy/150-percent-price-rise-fails-to-fill-zimbabwes-fuel-pumps-idUSKCN1P70KA>.

15 MacDonald Dzirutwe, “Fuel Prices protests in Zimbabwe turn deadly,” Reuters, January 14, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-economy-strike/fuel-price-protests-in-zimbabwe-turn-deadly-idUSKCN1P80RH>.

16 Calculated as compound annual growth rate to account for volatility in the data.

17 GDELT data.

MAJOR GLOBAL MASS PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN 2019

	ECONOMIC DISTRESS	POOR GOVERNANCE	INEQUALITY	CORRUPTION	INSUFFICIENT STATE SERVICES	RIGHTS & REPRESSION
LEBANON*	X	X	X	X		
IRAQ*	X	X	X	X		
EGYPT	X	X	X	X		X
LIBYA		X				X
TUNISIA	X		X		X	
ALGERIA*	X	X	X	X		X
AZERBAIJAN	X	X	X	X		X
IRAN	X	X			X	X
HONG KONG						X
INDIA	X				X	X
THAILAND						X
INDONESIA						X
PAKISTAN	X		X	X		X
UNITED STATES & PUERTO RICO*	X	X	X	X		X
SUDAN*		X		X		X
SOUTH SUDAN		X				X
SOUTH AFRICA		X				X
ETHIOPIA						X
ZIMBABWE	X	X		X		X
FRANCE	X		X		X	
UNITED KINGDOM	X					
SPAIN						X
RUSSIA			X	X		X
MALTA*				X		
ITALY		X	X			
VENEZUELA	X	X		X		X
COLOMBIA	X	X	X	X	X	
ECUADOR					X	
PERU				X		
CHILE		X			X	
URUGUAY						X
ARGENTINA	X		X			
BOLIVIA*				X		X
HONDURAS				X		
NICARAGUA	X				X	X
GUATEMALA				X		
HAITI	X	X	X	X		

*Government leadership change forced or offered following protests in 2019

Chapter 3: Root Causes of Unrest and the Continued Increase in Global Uprisings

Global Information Communications Technology (ICT)

As of 2019, 4 billion people—more than half of the planet—are now connected to the internet, more than doubling from the 1.5 billion connected in 2009. That connectivity is likely the greatest critical enabler for global protests. Because there have already been historical eras of mass protests and there is evidently a “contagion effect” across borders, digital connectivity cannot be said to be the sole driving factor of the overall trend in protests. Nonetheless, social media and virtual discussion boards clearly serve as concentrated hubs for proliferating grievances, discussing alternatives to the status quo, broadening protest support by connecting networks of aggrieved people, and ultimately spurring mass mobilization. Moreover, the internet facilitates more rapid transmission of information—and misinformation and disinformation, along with it—among a larger share of humanity than at any previous point in history. Facebook alone counts 2.4 billion active users.¹⁸ Social media is also increasingly displacing traditional sources of media as people’s primary source of information. For instance, the polling firm KONDA found that 77 percent of protesters heard about and then chose to participate in Turkey’s 2013 Gezi Park protests through social media or the internet, with social media serving as the primary source of news for 69 percent of protestors.¹⁹

Not only do the internet and social media spread information to a broader range of people, but they also create networks within which individuals can discuss and instantaneously spread politically activating information, often with a degree of perceived or actual anonymity. This relatively frictionless exchange of information provides a sense of safety in activities that may amount to political disobedience. As in the Turkish Gezi Park example, global data shows that social media users are the most likely to show up

18 Joe Myers, “Nearly a third of the globe is now on Facebook – chart of the day,” World Economic Forum, August 5, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/facebook-users-social-media-internet/>.

19 KONDA Research & Consultancy, *Gezi Report* (Istanbul: June 2014), http://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/KONDA_Gezi_Report.pdf.

to protests initially.²⁰ CSIS's Human Rights Initiative and the Pew Charitable Trusts, for instance, found that social media usage is closely linked to greater engagement on a wide variety of political issues. Social users are generally younger and more educated and thus more likely to be politically engaged in general. Social media also plays a notable role in convening dissenters and facilitating the organization of mass mobilization. In Russia, a 10 percent increase in penetration by social media platform VK increased the probability of protest by 4.6 percent and the number of protesters by 19 percent.²¹

Global Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

Mass protests draw most heavily on youth, and more than 42 percent of the world's population is under the age of 25.²² While global fertility rates have been falling since 1964 and global aging continues to increase at historic rates overall, many of the world's least-developed countries are experiencing youth booms. The economies of these countries are struggling to provide jobs for new workforce entrants, leaving significant percentages of youth unemployed. The global youth unemployment rate has grown by 37.2 percent since 1991—from 9.3 to 12.8 percent. In some regions, it is much higher, reaching 26.2 percent in the Middle East and North Africa. Youth unemployment has also reached 39.3 percent in EU-member Greece and an astonishing 53.2 percent in South Africa.²³ Beyond simple unemployment, the rise of underemployment outside the tracked unemployment rate has also increased in many countries, alongside frustration with prospects in the informal economy. According to one study of European countries after the Global Financial Crisis, every percentage point increase in unemployment rates could increase the likelihood of protests by as much as two percent.²⁴ Notably, underemployment and wage stagnation have increased significantly since 2001 within most advanced economies.²⁵

Perceptions of Inequality and Corruption

Global wealth distribution became more equal throughout the 1990s as globalization and rapid economic growth in developing countries brought hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.²⁶ Despite these relative global gains, income inequality within countries remains high across most of the world and has risen over the past decades within nearly every region. Since the 1980s, the top 10 percent of earners captured 57 percent of global income growth, and the top 0.1 percent captured more than the bottom 50 percent

20 Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson, "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square," *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 2 (2012): 363–79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x>.

21 Ruben Enikolopov, Alexey Makarin, and Maria Petrova, "Social Media and Protest Participation: Evidence from Russia," *Econometrica*, forthcoming, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2696236>.

22 Tariq Khokar, "Chart: How Is the World's Youth Population Changing," World Bank Blogs, April 17, 2017, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-how-worlds-youth-population-changing>.

23 "Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24)," World Bank Group, Accessed December 19, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>.

24 Maria T. Grasso, "Protest participation and economic crisis: the conditioning of political opportunities," *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 4 (July 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12153>.

25 "OECD Employment Outlook 2019: The Future of Work," OECD Employment Outlook 2019, May 16, 2019, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/the-young-and-those-with-low-education-have-seen-the-largest-increases-in-under-employment_117ad121-en#page1.

26 World Bank Group, Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016: Taking on Inequality (Washington, DC: 2016), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25078/9781464809583.pdf>.

combined.²⁷ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) currently tracks 60 countries with Gini coefficients higher than 40, a level which is widely recognized as dangerous.²⁸ The vast majority of these dangerously unequal countries are developing countries in Asia and Africa where the benefits of economic growth have accrued primarily to politically- and economically-connected elites, but notably, the United States is included on the list.

In 2019, the UNDP reported that it is not just that economic circumstances trigger unrest, but that perceptions of unfair treatment and a lack of opportunity and social immobility exacerbate societal tensions.²⁹ And it is perceptions, not necessarily empirical evidence of inequality and corruption, that are key triggers for unrest.³⁰ Over the last decade, an increasingly open media environment has likely changed individual perceptions of well-being as a broader cross-section of society has observed the living standards of the relatively wealthier and better-off (from the lives of Russian oligarchs to U.S. “coastal elites”). This has also generated greater awareness of regional differences in wealth within countries. The growth of the knowledge economy has further exposed the disparity between urban and rural areas. For example, the yellow vest movement in France began in response to fuel prices but evolved to include wider grievances among France’s working class, including economic stagnation, inequality, and high living costs. Since 2009, perceptions of inequality have grown most sharply in Southeast Asia, Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa.³¹

And often, where there is smoke, there is fire. Global corruption does appear to be on the rise, especially within the police and judiciary. The perception of inequality is perhaps the most important leading indicator of potential political instability. Corruption in justice systems directly degrades political and judicial institutions designed to contain and channel unrest and directly undermines the rule of law, which can exacerbate feelings that the wealthier and better-off are unfairly advantaged.³² Since 2006, electoral systems, institutions, political rights, and civil/legal rights have declined in 113 countries.³³ Public-sector corruption is also on the rise globally. There are high levels of perceived corruption in 122 countries as of 2018, and since 2012, perceived corruption has increased in 77 countries.³⁴ Pervasive corruption in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, and Lebanon were key

27 Facundo Alvaredo et al., The World Inequality Report 2018 (Paris: World Inequality Lab, 2018), <https://wir2018.wid.world/part-2.html>; World Bank Group, Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016; Kemal Dervis and Zia Qureshi, “Income Distribution Within Countries: Rising Inequality,” Brookings, Global Economy and Development, August 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/income-inequality-within-countries_august-2016.pdf.

28 “Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI),” United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports, Accessed December 19, 2019, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/inequality-adjusted-human-development-index-ihdi>.

29

30 James M. Olson, C.P. Herman, and Mark P. Zanna, “Relative Deprivation and Social Comparison: The Ontario Symposium,” Ontario Symposia on Personality and Social Psychology 4 (1986), <https://www.crcpress.com/Relative-Deprivation-and-Social-Comparison-The-Ontario-Symposium-Volume/Olson-Herman-Zanna/p/book/9780898597042>.

31 John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey D. Sachs, World Happiness Report 2019 (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/happiness-report/2019/WHR19.pdf>.

32 Institute For Economics and Peace, Peace and Corruption 2015 (Sydney, Australia: 2015), <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/04/Peace-and-Corruption.pdf>.

33 Data from historical scores from “Freedom in the World,” Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>.

drivers of protests. Linked to this global corruption problem is a crisis of confidence in major institutions around the world. While the exact numbers vary country to country, the 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer found that globally only 49 percent of people trust their governments.³⁵

Environmental Stress and Climate Change

Climate change has become a vector of political unrest due both to its direct effects on populations and economies and to its broad recognition and media coverage that has driven political activity. In the first instance, the effects of climate change, particularly as they impact food and water supplies, are increasingly linked to social unrest, including political violence. For example, before the Syrian Civil War, a three-year, climate change-linked drought severely stressed water supplies, leading to years-long crop failures and subsequent economic deterioration and displacement of rural farmers to poorly governed cities.³⁶ These displaced urban populations in turn became hotbeds of protest and dissent, prompting the savage crackdown by the Assad government. Recent studies suggest a broader relationship between climate impacts and conflict, with lower levels of rainfall and higher temperatures linked to political violence, especially where governance is poor.³⁷ In coming years, climate change is projected to further decrease freshwater availability, reduce agricultural productivity, increase the spread of infectious diseases, and force mass migration. These are all proven drivers of instability that are likely to prompt political protest, if not outright violence.

These trends are also set to intensify. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world is on course to warm by +1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2052 before reaching nearly +3.5 degrees Celsius by 2100.³⁸ At just +1.5 degrees Celsius, approximately 3.96 billion people worldwide could be exposed to heatwaves, and 14 percent of the global population could be vulnerable to severe heatwaves every five years. Similarly, average drought lengths are expected to increase by 2 months, leaving 3.34 billion people exposed to water stress, 350 million people in cities vulnerable to severe drought, and at least 114.3 million people exposed monthly to extreme drought. Beyond heat and water insecurity, between 2.3 to 27.8 million people are expected to be exposed to sea level rise annually, and climate factors could push 122 million people into poverty by 2030.³⁹

34 “Corruption Perceptions Index 2018,” Transparency International, Accessed December 19, 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018#summary>.

35 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report, Edelman, (New York: March 2019), https://www.edelman.com/sites/files/aattus191/files/2019-03/2019_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report.pdf.

36 Guy J. Abel et al., “Climate, conflict and forced migration,” *Global Environmental Change*, no. 54 (2019), 239-249, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378018301596?via%3Dihub#bib0215>.

37 Alisha Mueller, “The Relation between Climate Change and Violent Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Leiden University Repository, thesis, March 29, 2018, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/60958>.

38 Tom Miles, “Global Temperatures on Track for 3-5 Degree Rise by 2100: U.N.,” Reuters, November 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-un/global-temperatures-on-track-for-3-5-degree-rise-by-2100-u-n-idUSKCN1NY186>.

39 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Global Warming of 1.5°C (Geneva, Switzerland: 2018), https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf; Food and Agriculture Organization, The State of Food and Agriculture (Rome: 2016), <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6030e.pdf>.

COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES WITH CLIMATE PROTESTS IN 2019

ARUBA	AUSTRALIA	AUSTRIA	AZERBAIJAN
BAHRAIN	BANGLADESH	BELARUS	BELGIUM
BELIZE	BENIN	BERMUDA	BHUTAN
BOLIVIA	BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	BOTSWANA	BRAZIL
BRUNEI	BULGARIA	BURKINA FASO	BURUNDI
CAMBODIA	CAMEROON	CANADA	CAYMAN ISLANDS
CHILE	CHINA	COLOMBIA	CONGO DRC
COSTA RICA	COTE D'IVOIRE	CROATIA	CUBA
CURACAO	CYPRUS	CZECH REPUBLIC	DENMARK
DJIBOUTI	DOMINICA	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	ECUADOR
EGYPT	EL SALVADOR	EQUATORIAL GUINEA	ESTONIA
ETHIOPIA	FIJI	FINLAND	FRANCE
GEORGIA	GERMANY	GHANA	GREECE
GRENADA	GUADELOUPE	GUAM	GUATEMALA
GUINEA	GUINEA-BISSAU	GUYANA	HAITI
HONDURAS	HUNGARY	ICELAND	INDIA
INDONESIA	IRAN	IRAQ	IRELAND
ISRAEL	ITALY	JAMAICA	JAPAN
JORDAN	KAZAKHSTAN	KENYA	KIRIBATI
KOSOVO	KUWAIT	KYRGYZSTAN	LATVIA
LEBANON	LIBERIA	LIBYA	LIECHTENSTEIN
LITHUANIA	LUXEMBOURG	MADAGASCAR	MALAWI
MALAYSIA	MALDIVES	MALI	MALTA
MARTINIQUE	MAURITANIA	MAURITIUS	MEXICO
MOLDOVA	MAGNOLIA	MONTENEGRO	MOROCCO
MOZAMBIQUE	MYANMAR	NAMIBIA	NEPAL
NETHERLANDS	NEW CALEDONIA	NEW ZEALAND	NICARAGUA
NIGER	NIGERIA	NORWAY	PAKISTAN
PANAMA	PAPUA NEW GUINEA	PARAGUAY	PERU
PHILIPPINES	POLAND	PORTUGAL	PUERTO RICO
QATAR	ROMANIA	RUSSIA	RWANDA
SAINT KITTS & NEVIS	SAINT VINCENT & THE GRENADINES	SAN MARINO	SAUDI ARABIA
SENEGAL	SERBIA	SEYCHELLES	SIERRA LEONE
SINGAPORE	SLOVAKIA	SLOVENIA	SOMALIA
SOUTH AFRICA	SOUTH KOREA	SPAIN	SRI LANKA
SUDAN	SWAZILAND	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND
SYRIA	TANZANIA	THAILAND	THE BAHAMAS
NORTHERN MACEDONIA	THE GAMBIA	TOGO	TOKELAU
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO	TUNISIA	TURKEY	UGANADA
UKRAINE	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	UNITED STATES	URUGUAY
UZBEKISTAN	VANUATU	VIETNAM	YEMEN
ZAMBIA	ZIMBABWE		

Source: Data from "Statistics / List-countries," #FridaysForFuture, <https://fridaysforfuture.org/statistics/list-countries>.

In addition to aggravating underlying social issues, the politics surrounding climate change are increasingly becoming a point of intense social interest, with calls for climate action becoming a protest catalyst around the world. Over the past year alone, the organization of climate protests has accelerated exponentially. Entirely new transnational organizations, such as the youth-organized Fridays for Future and the more radical Extinction Rebellion, have created sophisticated operations and reach. In March 2019, some 1.6 million people protested for climate action across 125 countries. And over seven days in September 2019, somewhere between 6 and 7.6 million people participated in climate strikes in at least 150 countries.

While the data set analyzed for this report does not classify civilian anti-government protests by issue trigger, other data indicates a significant increase in climate-related protests over the past year in accordance with the emergence of the global climate action movement. While climate-related unrest has been particularly notable in Europe, the increasingly international nature of the growing global climate movement is on display in the United States as well. For example, U.S. environment-related protests in 2019 more than doubled from 2018, increasing by 268 percent. The upsurge in global climate unrest in March 2019 was marked by a 404.2 percent increase in monthly environmental protests in the United States from the year prior; during the global climate strike in September 2019, U.S. environmental protests increased by an extraordinary 844.7 percent from the year prior. Climate protests have centered on Europe and North America, but this phenomenon is not limited to the developed world. Metrics from Fridays for Future indicate climate protests in some 177 countries, including the entire Middle East and North Africa and the vast majority of Asia, Africa, South America, and Central America and the Caribbean.

Global Literacy and Education

Literacy and education levels facilitate access to information and are closely tied to political participation, including protests. The global literacy rate has reached 91 percent, enabling a greater portion of the global population to access the internet, including political information. And there remains room for improvement, which could facilitate further increased political engagement. This is especially true in South Asia, which is home to 49 percent of the global illiterate population. While literacy rates have grown slowly over the past decades, youth literacy rates are generally higher in most regions, reflecting increasing education access for younger generations.

Higher education levels translate to higher political engagement, and higher levels of education have broadly been found to correlate with increased frequency of mass protest, especially among individuals with higher levels of education whose incomes are inconsistent with their expectations. In democracies, increased political engagement can mean voting and political activism; in autocracies, it can translate to political protest—a reason why autocratic regimes often focus on control of professional classes and universities. Since 2009, the number of students globally enrolled in universities (tertiary education) has increased by 29.3 percent, from about 172 million to 223 million. Rising education has led to rising expectations of employment and economic gains—and likely portends more protests.

Cities and Urbanization

Urban centers have long been a focal point of social activity and the springboard for revolutions and unrest. Moving forward, the rise of the knowledge economy and the congregation of younger, better educated, and more politically activated people into geographically concentrated and better-networked areas will likely facilitate future protest movements.

Rapid and continued urbanization across the developing world could sow further seeds for discord. In 2018, 55 percent of the world lived in cities, and that proportion will increase to 68 percent by 2050. By that time, the United Nations also estimates that 2.5 billion people will move into cities in poorer countries. Not only is more of the world's population increasingly living where protests most easily occur, but the massive, often chaotic population shifts in states with weak administrative and resource capacities creates an impetus for dissent and civil uprising. Not only are poorer, often rural arrivals to cities moving into closer proximity to usually wealthier urbanites, but a rapid influx in migrants can stress municipal and government service provision, creating conditions of relative degradation for the new arrivals. The world's fastest growing urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are ill-prepared to handle the rapid growth they are experiencing.

Oftentimes, this can lead to the creation or expansion of slums and informal or illegal settlements to which cities are often unable or unwilling to provide services, including sanitation, clean water, and electricity. This highly unequal access to government services and living standards creates cycles of socioeconomic marginalization, creating the conditions for unrest. This trend can already be seen in places like South Africa, which in 2019 saw protests in urban areas over inadequate delivery of government services, especially in informal settlements. This can be further exacerbated by factors such as the inward migration of displaced persons from surrounding countries.

These TrendLines All Portend Growing Unrest around the World

By breaking down the underlying factors that drive mass protests globally, it is possible to understand some of their fluctuations and reasonably project trendlines for these factors. Shifts in ICT, youth unemployment, inequality, corruption, climate change, education and literacy, and urbanization all suggest that mass protest movements will only grow more likely around the world. It is time to rethink how the U.S. government, and the world, can address this trend.

Chapter 4: A Globalizing Offense-Defense Contest

Around the globe, states and demonstrators are caught in a type of arms race amid escalating protests. In these scenarios, governments aim to curb protests through a range of actions, including by leveraging technology as well as police and military actions. Meanwhile, demonstrators race to circumvent these measures and remain on the streets. There is also remarkable active exchange of information between protestors around the globe. This includes the adoption of “leaderless” movement structures, copycat behavior of specific protest tactics (e.g., how to neutralize or cope with the effects of crowd control measures such as teargas), and discussion about the selection of protest targets (e.g., major transit infrastructure, including airports).

The global ICT revolution has facilitated the ability for dissenters to organize and spread information. Technologies such as peer-to-peer encryption and mesh networks have allowed protestors to circumvent state control of digital infrastructure. This same revolution has of course also enabled governments to deploy new technologies to monitor, suppress, and root out dissent. Moreover, many authoritarian governments have sophisticated information warfare capabilities, such as troll farms to flood social media platforms with pro-regime content to counter grievances and anti-regime content.

“Best Practices” In Digital Repression

China leads the world in exercising total information control. This includes its immense investment in domestic censoring efforts (e.g., the “Great Firewall,” which employs a reported two million censors) and active experimentation with emerging technologies to exert even greater control over users. Notable among these are a social credit system (effectively a “credit score” for political obedience) and AI-enabled mass surveillance systems, including facial recognition and an algorithm capable of identifying individuals by their unique personal gait.

China has developed more targeted, intrusive, and physical techniques involving internment and political indoctrination against individuals who the state judges as potential dissenters. Some of its most oppressive tactics have been fielded in Xinjiang, China, where it has forced ethnic Uyghurs to download mobile applications and deployed additional digital systems to profile and contain the populace, often paired

COUNTRIES THAT HAVE CUT OFF THE INTERNET TO STIFLE UNREST*:

ALGERIA
BAHRAIN
BANGLADESH
BRAZIL
CAMEROON
CHAD
CHINA
DRC
CONGO
EGYPT
EQUATORIAL GUINEA
ETHIOPIA
GABON
INDIA
IRAN
IRAQ
LIBYA
MOROCCO
NORTH KOREA
PAKISTAN
SAUDI ARABIA
SUDAN
SYRIA
TOGO
TURKEY
UGANDA
UKRAINE
VENEZUELA

*non-exclusive

source: CSIS

with more traditional methods of forced reeducation. China also collects the DNA of individuals it is profiling, feeding it into biometric databases.

China has begun to export these repressive tools abroad. In Africa, the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei worked with Ugandan officials to hack into a dissident WhatsApp group. In Zambia, Huawei technicians allegedly helped the government access the phones and social media pages of opposition bloggers. China is also exporting mass surveillance tools to repressive governments across the world, particularly as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. These recipient countries include Ecuador, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Uganda, Iran, Egypt, and Morocco. Other Chinese companies, such as CloudWalk, Hikvision, and Yitsu, have also provided technological assistance to governments in creating systems able to identify threats to “public order.”

Chinese approaches to contending with unrest are spreading. Russia, which has taken steps to replicate China’s Great Firewall and censorship regime, explicitly focused on blocking potential collaboration between dissidents.⁴⁰ In early 2019, Russia passed a bill that allows Moscow to cut off internet traffic from foreign servers. This fragmentation and nationalization of the internet can be seen as a way to preempt the use of the internet as a tool to connect protestors.⁴¹ Russia runs large-scale internal and external disinformation operations, both to repress political dissent in its own country and to foment it in others. The government has forced bloggers and digital content creators to register as media agents, in part to monitor and track their work. The state has also adopted a

40 Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017), 484-501, https://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/how_the_chinese_government_fabricates_social_media_posts_for_strategic_distraction_not_engaged_argument.pdf.

41 Agence France-Presse, “Russia passes bill to allow internet to be cut off from foreign servers,” *The Guardian*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/11/russia-passes-bill-internet-cut-off-foreign-servers>.

digital sovereignty law and data localization requirements, allowing the state increased control over internet service providers.

China and Russia are not alone in these actions. In Tanzania, several censorship laws mimic those found in China.⁴² In 2019, the Spanish government requested that the software development platform GitHub remove repositories with APK files for an app that Catalan protestors were using to organize demonstrations, joining China and Russia in the list of countries that have requested such takedowns from GitHub.⁴³ Additionally, there is active intelligence exchange between authoritarian countries on approaches to suppression of political protest and dissent. Cuba helped Venezuela revamp its armed forces and military intelligence service, bolstered by two agreements that gave Cuba deep access to the Venezuelan army.⁴⁴

An additional tactic adopted by a growing number of countries is to cut off all internet access during times of unrest. The first significant example of this was in January 2011 during the Arab Spring, when routes to Egyptian networks disappeared from the internet's global routing table. This was followed by nationwide disruptions in other countries such as Libya. In 2016, protests in Ethiopia were stifled by a coordinated internet shutdown. In 2019, China attempted to disperse protesters in Hong Kong by launching a cyberattack on Telegram—a crucial coordinating tool with strong encryption. Iran's government also shut off internet access for several days in 2019 in response to the eruption of protests against rising fuel prices, with the country's largest mobile network operators going offline on November 16, 2019. This led to a near-total internet and telecommunication blackout.⁴⁵ In response to opposition protests in October 2019, the Azerbaijani government cut off the internet in the vicinity of the protests in an attempt to stifle coordinated dissent.⁴⁶ As a tactic, limiting internet access has become a key weapon in government toolkits for stopping protests.

Protest Movements across the World Take Inspiration from Each Other

Protesters in Hong Kong have provided direct inspiration, and at times direct instruction, for multiple mass movements around the world. In the aftermath of the failed 2014 Umbrella Movement, China targeted the movement's leaders for their role in the unrest. In part for this reason, the 2019 protest resurgence adopted an intentional, leaderless approach facilitated by internet communications. Such an approach keeps states from disrupting movements by detaining critical figures while also allowing protesters to avoid providing scapegoats to repressive regimes. Digitally driven leaderless movements have been on the rise since at least the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, but an increasing number

42 Woodhams, "How China Exports Repression to Africa."

43 "Censoring at the source (code): Spain joins Russia and China in GitHub censorship," Software, November 1, 2019, <https://www.software.com/src/spain-removes-github-repository-to-stop-protests>.

44 Angus Berwick, "Imported Repression: How Cuba Taught Venezuela to Quash Military Dissent," Reuters, August 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/venezuela-cuba-military/>.

45 Charlotte Jee, "Iran has shut off internet access for its citizens amid fuel price protests," *MIT Technology Review*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/f/614726/iran-has-shut-off-internet-access-for-its-citizens-amid-fuel-price-protests/>.

46 "Azerbaijan: Peaceful Rallies Dispersed Violently," Human Rights Watch, October 22, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/22/azerbaijan-peaceful-rallies-dispersed-violently>.



Photo: Manan Vatsyayana/AFP via Getty Images

Protesters obstruct the airport in Hong Kong in August 2019.



Photo: Alex Caparros /Stringer via Getty Images

Pro-Catalan Independence demonstrators copy Hong Kong protest tactics and target the airport in Barcelona in October 2019.

protesters adopted this strategy of unpredictability, evoking the hashtag while signing off on one of their organizing messages on Telegram.⁴⁷ The yellow vest movement in France adopted similar tactics at times, as have the Chilean protests against sexual assault.

The educational materials from Hong Kong protestors have also spread around the world. In Indonesia, demonstrators used instructional videos from Hong Kong on neutralizing tear gas.⁴⁸ Similarly, Catalan independence protestors spread informational pamphlets that still had instructions in Chinese.⁴⁹ In Chile, protestors repurposed infographics developed by Hong Kong protestors that provide instruction on protecting against police water cannons.⁵⁰

Hong Kong does not hold a monopoly on inspiration and education, which is increasingly professionalized and globalized, as indicated by the emergence of international civil society groups that spread tools and tactics on subverting government suppression. In 2013, for instance, the civil society group Access Now launched a hotline available in nine languages that provides technical advice and best practices for digital security, often to avoid government surveillance.

Furthermore, the pure contagion effect long familiar in global politics is also in play. The success of mass protests in toppling the long-term president in Algeria helped inspire a similar movement in Sudan.⁵¹ In turn, the success of protests in Sudan inspired a protest movement in South Sudan. In the United States, the success of teachers' strikes in West Virginia in 2018 helped trigger statewide protests in 10 other states that lasted through 2019. And the decades-old "cacerolazo" form of protest, in which demonstrators make noise by hitting pots and pans with utensils, found new life in 2019 in protests in Chile, Puerto Rico, Lebanon, and Colombia. Similarly, a Chilean anti-violence against women chant went viral in late 2019, spreading to Colombia, Mexico, France, India, the United States, and Turkey. Perhaps the best example of globalized protest tactics comes from the Extinction Rebellion and allied environmental groups, which have globally proliferated protest strategies designed per academic literature to be as disruptive as possible to command maximum public and media attention.

National Strategies to Address an Escalating Global Trend

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and United States often played a tit-for-tat game of promoting or repressing unrest to garner geopolitical influence in countries around the globe. The Soviet Union conducted a decades-long effort to empower leftist groups rebelling against perceived economic inequality and the legacy of Western colonialism in Latin America and Africa but also ruthlessly crushed protest movements within the

47 "How Catalan protest tactics are inspired by Hong Kong," Japan Times, October 21, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/10/21/world/catalan-protest-tactics-hong-kong/#.Xe599uhKgdU>.

48 William Yang, "How Hong Kong protests are inspiring movements worldwide," DW, October 22, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-hong-kong-protests-are-inspiring-movements-worldwide/a-50935907>.

49 "How Catalan protest tactics are inspired by Hong Kong," Japan Times.

50 William Cole, "Coming soon to a protest near you: Chilean demonstrators use LASERS on police as they copy dazzling tactics from Hong Kong protestors," Daily Mail, November 16, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7692483/Chilean-demonstrators-use-LASERS-police-copy-dazzling-tactics-Hong-Kong-protestors.html>.

51 "The Latest: Ex-President seeks forgiveness of Algerians," AP News, April 3, 2019, <https://apnews.com/aa98b1fad-64e4db084deff333051f5ea>.

Warsaw Pact. The United States promoted human rights, democracy, and free market reforms around the world while at other phases supporting repressive, often military-led regimes in countries such as Chile, Turkey, and Greece.

The conclusion of the Cold War itself and downfall of the Soviet Union were precipitated through popular mobilization and street protests, from the fall of the Berlin Wall through to the rejection of Communism within Russia. From that time through the Color Revolutions and up through the Euromaidan movement in Ukraine, Kremlin leaders have continued to suggest that there has been an intentional effort led by the United States to use mass protests to Western political advantage. Russian president Vladimir Putin stated in 2014:

In the modern world extremism is being used as a geopolitical instrument and for remaking spheres of influence. We see what tragic consequences the wave of so-called color revolutions led to . . . For us this is a lesson and a warning. We should do everything necessary so that nothing similar ever happens in Russia.⁵²

Russia has proven itself adept and aggressive in exploiting global unrest to build leverage and expand its geopolitical influence, sometimes by supporting imperiled autocrats and at other times by promoting discontent in targeted states. Following mass political protests in 2011-2013, the Russian government has increased its support to other autocratic governments facing protest movements. This has included financial support, information operations, and deployment of paramilitary and conventional military forces. Notably, Russian intervention to save leaders in Syria and Venezuela from popular uprisings restored its influence in regions where it had waned significantly over recent decades, and also cemented lucrative energy and weapons deals along the way.

At the Russia-Africa Forum in September 2019, Russia discussed what amounts to “disinformation as a service” offerings for regimes seeking to control domestic information environments, including through locally hired personnel and “troll farm” satellite offices.⁵³ Through more covert means, Moscow has also sought to foment protests within democracies in an effort to tip the scales for its favored candidates or to advance Russian interests. In 2013, Moscow likely financed and supported protests over energy price hikes against a Bulgarian government trying to reduce its energy dependency on Moscow. In that case, the government subsequently collapsed.⁵⁴ In the lead up to the 2016 U.S. election, there is also widespread evidence of Russian attempts to sow political discord along political and racial lines within the United States, attempting in various cases to turn out protestors for or against issues using fake social media accounts and sometimes fanning both sides of the flames to create political tensions or even violence.⁵⁵

52 Darya Korsunkaya, “Putin Says Russia Must Prevent ‘Color Revolution,’” Reuters, November 20, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-security-idUSKCN0J41J620141120>.

53 Davey Alba and Sheera Frenkel, “Russia Tests New Disinformation Tactics in Africa to Expand Influence,” New York Times, October 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/30/technology/russia-facebook-disinformation-africa.html>.

54 Heather A. Conley et al., *The Kremlin Playbook Vol. 1* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2016), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/1601017_Conley_KremlinPlaybook_Web.pdf.

55 This work was led by Russia’s Internet Research Agency. See Robert S. Mueller, Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, Volume I of II (Washington, DC: March 2019), 19-33, <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

China plays an increasingly important role in global protests additional to its export of digital authoritarianism. The Chinese Communist Party essentially views any political protest as a potential threat to its overriding concern of internal stability. Following the initial events of the Arab Spring, for instance, Beijing tightened internet controls and promised to attack corruption and consumer inflation.⁵⁶ Chinese foreign policy has for decades cleaved to the principle of political non-interference in other nations' internal affairs. In effect, this has allowed China to reject foreign criticism of its own domestic policies while pursuing its own interests in foreign relations with regimes agnostic of their politics and values. Additional to its exports of surveillance technologies, China has freely sold military hardware used against foreign dissidents and has provided political and economic cover to allied autocracies.

Beijing's instinctive support for incumbent regimes has become less tenable over the past decade amid its growing economic interests abroad, with Beijing instead opting to tactically adjust its policy toward global unrest based on its own strategic interests. During the early stages of the Libyan Civil War, Beijing announced that it had suffered significant direct economic losses in Libya, with 75 Chinese companies, including 36,000 Chinese citizens, exposed to the conflict.⁵⁷ Just days later in the UN Security Council, Beijing effectively authorized military intervention in Libya—the first time it had ever authorized military measures in a foreign country on human rights or humanitarian grounds.⁵⁸ And despite tens of billions of dollars in Chinese loans to support the Maduro regime, Beijing entered into talks with opposition leader Juan Guaidó in hopes that the Venezuelan opposition would guarantee repayment.

In addition to expressing new willingness to deal with opposition parties abroad, China has new capabilities enabling it to potentially foment or support unrest in other polities. During Taiwan's 2018 local elections and 2019 national elections, China launched disinformation campaigns using Russian-style bots and troll farms to sow greater political discord.⁵⁹ Such disinformation campaigns have proven useful in promoting social unrest, as Russian activities ahead of the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. presidential elections have shown.

Finally, Iran relentlessly meddles in the internal politics of other countries as it faces broadening political discontent domestically. Iran continues to play a double game when it comes to mass protests. Internally, it seeks to ruthlessly suppress political dissent of any kind. But across the Middle East, it is the largest state backer of political protest movements, using its broad political and proxy outreach. Additionally, it is the guarantor of governments and regimes facing political protest, especially in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. Iran also has developed broad information operations capabilities through traditional and social media.⁶⁰

56 John Calabrese, "China and the Arab Awakening: The Cost of Doing Business," *China Report* 49, no. 1 (2013), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0009445513479212>.

57 Michael Martina, "China Says Suffers 'Large-Scale' Economic Losses in Libya," *Reuters*, February 24, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/libya-protests-china-idAFTOE71N06L20110224>.

58 Calabrese, "China and the Arab Awakening: The Cost of Doing Business."

59 Lily Kuo, "Taiwan's Citizens Battle pro-China Fake News Campaigns as Election Nears," *Guardian*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/30/taiwan-presidential-election-referendum-on-ties-with-china>.

60 See Seth G. Jones and Danika Newlee, "The United States' Soft War with Iran," CSIS, CSIS Brief, June 2019, <https://csis.org>.

The most striking example of this was Iran's role in 2019 Iraq protests. Its militia forces and political network first backed beleaguered Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, whose government was criticized for corruption and paying obeisance to Tehran at the expense of Iraqi citizens. Iraqi forces, backed in some cases by Iran-aligned militias, cracked down on dissent, but ultimately Abdul-Mahdi agreed to resign (something he has still not actually done as of February 2020). Then, following a December 29 airstrike against the Iran-linked Kata'ib Hezbollah militia, Iran organized increasingly violent protests against the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad that ultimately played a role in the decision by the United States to authorize a strike against Qassim Soleimani, pushing the United States and Iran to the brink of war. Mass protests inside Iran and throughout the region will continue to represent a front in the conflict and competition between Iran and the United States for influence.

Chapter 5: Future Trajectory and Recommendations

The frequency and scale of mass protests reflects citizens' shifting expectations of government and elites. Protests sweeping the globe are born from a feeling that existing institutions and leaders are unresponsive and incapable. They flow from the same headwaters that feed populism, ethno-nationalism, and extremism—a sense that existing institutions and leaders are not meeting rising citizen demands. The overall outlook for this global protest movement is mixed at best. The movements rarely have a clean beginning, middle, or end, often becoming cyclical or gateways to greater instability, even when the immediate objectives or protestors are recognized. At other times, protests may further erode democratic governance, such as through the reintroduction of the military into politics.

There are a wide variety of pathways that protests can take, violent and non-violent, effective and ineffective.⁶¹ But the drivers of protests are only intensifying, with new factors likely to accelerate discontent. Three factors in particular could further accelerate protests: (1) a global economic slowdown; (2) mounting environmental pressures, including food and water shortages and climate-related price increases; and (3) increased meddling in the internal politics of foreign states, including through the broader use of disinformation.

There are also three “tipping point” issues to monitor.

1. Offense-defense technological competition between protestors and governments:

While digital repression has received growing attention, the countermeasures developed by protestors in countries around the world offer an interesting countertrend. While states such as China have begun to use AI-enabled facial recognition on a massive scale and Russia has continued to tighten internet controls to better handle unrest, protest movements are also adapting. In the face of censorship, apps and services such as Telegram and virtual private networks (VPN) serve as relatively secure—that is, low risk to users, thanks to encryption and masked

⁶¹ For an excellent assessment of the political outcome of recent protests, see Richard Youngs, ed., *After Protest: Pathways Beyond Mass Mobilization* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2019), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/10/24/after-protest-pathways-beyond-mass-mobilization-pub-80135>.

identity—information broadcast systems to subvert government media controls. Apps using mesh networking to create device-to-device networks within crowds also bring new capabilities that circumvent the overloading or shutting down of cell towers.

2. Democracy versus authoritarianism: Nonviolent protest is the pure expression of democracy—the rule of the people. Protests are therefore inherently threatening to authoritarian regimes, whose legitimacy hinges on obedience and whose systems do not have a regular outlet to express political preference or create change without violence. There is broad evidence that authorities in Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang, among other authoritarian capitals, are obsessed with the protest dynamic, as they seek to guard against it internally and increasingly manipulate it elsewhere to ends that violate other countries' sovereignty.

3. New modes of governance: Finally, protests should be viewed as a de facto referendum on national-level governance in countries worldwide. Over the past decade, national governments have seemed largely incapable of keeping pace with the expectations of populations at a time of massive technological and social change. The need for a new social compact between people, companies, and governments is apparent. The inability of existing institutions and leaders to adapt would carry consequences, ranging from prolonged periods of political unrest to state collapse.

Suggestions for Policymakers

This report intends to begin a conversation on an underappreciated and important global megatrend. On the basis of the facts presented here, the case is made for further study of the topic and to consider ways in which democratic governments in particular should respond. Failure to do so leaves the door open to malign actors, to the breakdown of order and societies, and to political violence and geopolitical shocks. The suggestions presented here are only the beginning.

Increase understanding of the global megatrend underway. The academic literature surrounding protests is vast, spanning the fields of sociology, political science, and communications.⁶² Protestors themselves, especially in the case of Hong Kong and the Extinction Rebellion, are steeped in many of these studies. Congress in particular should consider public hearings to enrich government understanding of current global protest dynamics. This could in turn inform the development of a set of tools that could empower pro-democratic elements globally and channel political energy on the streets into meaningful institutional reforms through collaboration with civil society groups, reformist elements within governments, and the use of existing U.S. and allied government foreign assistance tools and authorities.

Speak up for democratic values and protestors. What Washington says still matters deeply in the world. America itself was born from a protest movement, and the United

⁶² See, for example, Pamela E. Oliver et al., "Emerging Trends in the Study of Protest and Social Movements," *Research in Political Sociology* 12 (2003), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251631583_Emerging_Trends_in_the_Study_of_Social_Movements; R. Kelly Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs," *Information Communication and Society* 9, no. 2 (April 2006), p. 202-224, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13691180600630773>.

States is a leading global voice for nonviolent freedom of assembly and speech. Successful outcomes from peaceful protest movements can reinforce democracy globally, arresting the backsliding seen around the world over the past 12 years.⁶³ By treating each protest as *sui generis* and failing to articulate more general policy and support, the United States cedes the initiative to countries such as Russia and China, which can assign their own narrative to U.S. motives in any given case while deploying their own broad strategies and tactics to support their national interests.

Consider the global implications of technology regulation. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has struggled to balance the freedom of expression that technology enables with the security threat that it can represent in the hands of bad actors. Today, this debate about protecting individual rights and liberties versus national security is swirling around issues such as data encryption and online anonymity. Less considered by Washington policymakers to date has been the second-order effects of regulation of these technologies on the ability of citizens living under authoritarian regimes to engage in political discourse. The United States and other democratic nations are struggling to set responsible norms and standards in end use of technology balanced with values of free speech and political dissent. Authoritarian governments have seized on the lack of a coherent front between the United States and Europe in particular to set their own self-serving ends.

⁶³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (Washington, DC: 2019), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>.

Notes on Methodology

This analysis is based on data from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT). The GDEL Project is an open platform available for unrestricted academic research. It uses machine learning algorithms underwritten by Google's Jigsaw to effectively "read" all of the world's broadcast, print, and online news and identify and record hundreds of millions of real-world events. GDEL contains historical backfiles to 1979 and operates in more than 100 languages, making its data often more consistent and universal than some other sources (such as the frequently cited Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project), as it picks up events with less coverage in English-language media.

This dataset does, however, have limitations. While GDEL provides better language coverage, allowing for an improved degree of consistent global analysis than some other data sources, it does rely heavily on the English language, with the accuracy of its non-English coverage potentially subject to some error due to machine translation. For these reasons, North America and Europe are likely overrepresented, with areas with less English-language media coverage likely underrepresented. Moreover, it is reliant on the input of media coverage, so in countries with less media output or where media is highly controlled, coverage is likely to be reduced. The dataset does include small protest events in mainland China, which are made suspect by significant repression and media controls from Beijing. It was also noted in conversation with regional and country experts that in some locales protests are so historically common that they are not well covered or reported by local media. To reduce this bias, or at least make it more consistent for the purpose of identifying trendlines, the CSIS team broke the dataset down by region to compare trends by groups of countries.

The GDEL Project relies on machine learning and an automated coding system, which creates its own coding accuracy problems. To reduce the chance of incorrectly sorted events in the analyzed dataset, the CSIS-selected portion coded for very specific parameters, namely coding for individual instances of protest by civilian groups against governments between January 1, 2009 and October 31, 2019. Then, the dataset was further cleaned to reduce the likelihood of false positives by removing any events with fewer than three unique media confirmations. This increased the likelihood that a protest event actually occurred, though potentially at the cost of trimming information on protests in regions receiving less media attention. Additionally, CSIS combed the

dataset manually to remove identifiable false positives using the information origin data encoded in the original GDELT dataset. The data identifies individual instances of protest but cannot discern the number of demonstrators participating in each event, relying on at least three separate press accounts of the event to attest that it was newsworthy.

With the CSIS data set ending before December 31, 2019, it includes projections for November and December 2019 based on the average of the previous 12 months of protest events. If a major mass movement started after October 31, 2019 and thus was not included in the original GDELT data set, the data set developed by CSIS incorporated conservative estimates of protest events based on international media reporting.

While the final data set compiled by CSIS for 2009 to 2019 provides only a rough estimate of instances of civilian anti-government protest, it allows a glimpse into both regional and global trendlines for the past decade. The trendlines identified in the GDELT-based data were compared to roughly similar data sets. While the numbers varied based on different data collection techniques, the trends identified using the CSIS data could also be seen in data from the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. However, given coding accuracy problems, strict event selection criteria that excluded acts of discontent (such as riots and some instances of violent government repression), data cleaning, the absence of data for countries and regions such as North Korea and Kashmir, and conservative projections for the final two months of 2019, it is likely that CSIS estimates do not fully capture protests over the past decade. Rather, a representational picture is provided, which when compared with available reporting provides a global macro picture of events underway.

About the Authors

Samuel J. Brannen leads the Risk and Foresight Group at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and is a senior fellow in the International Security Program. He has previously served as a long-range strategic planner and adviser to senior leaders in government and business. The newly established Risk and Foresight Group is charged with providing decisionmakers with insights into the forces of change reshaping the global environment, from shifting demographics to emerging technologies.

Christian S. Haig is a research assistant with the Risk and Foresight Group in the International Security Program at CSIS. Prior to working at CSIS, he was a Scoville International Peace Fellow researching and writing on Department of Defense vulnerabilities to climate impacts at the Natural Resources Defense Council. He holds a BA in political science and peace, war, and defense from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Katherine Schmidt was a research intern with the Risk and Foresight Group in the International Security Program. She holds a BS in science, technology, and international affairs from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and researches the topics of China, Azerbaijan, and cyber policy.

Mass demonstrations utilizing modern protest tactics in Santiago, Chile in November 2019

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1616 Rhode Island Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20036

202 887 0200 | www.csis.org