



## An Analysis of World Protests 2006–2020

**Abstract** This section of the book “World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century” analyzes in-depth 2809 protests that occurred between 2006 and 2020 in 101 countries covering over 93% of the world population. This section focuses on: (i) major grievances and demands driving world protests, such as the failure of political representation/systems, anti-austerity, and for civil rights and global justice; (ii) who was demonstrating; (iii) what protest methods they used; (iv) who the protestors opposed; (v) what was achieved; and (vi) violence and repression in terms of arrests, injuries, and deaths.

**Keywords** Protests · Social movements · Riots · Democracy · Austerity · Civil rights · Social justice · Human rights · Repression

### 1 THE WORLD AWAKENS: PROTESTS INCREASE 2006–2020

There are times in history when large numbers of people protest about the way things are, demanding change. It happened in 1830–1848, in 1917–1924, in the 1960s, and it is happening again today (Schiffirin & Kircher-Allen, 2012). Since 2010, the world has been shaken by protests.

Our analysis of 2809 events reflects an increasing number of protests from 2006 to 2020. Protests occur in all world regions (Table 1) and

**Table 1** Number of protests in 2006–2020

	2006–2010	2011–2015	2016–2020	Total
East Asia and Pacific	98	144	136	378
Europe and Central Asia	119	319	368	806
Latin America and the Caribbean	92	164	171	427
Middle East and North Africa	53	85	70	208
North America	44	111	126	281
South Asia	26	37	38	101
Sub-Saharan Africa	76	138	155	369
Global Protests	68	83	88	239
Total	576	1081	1152	2809

Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

across all country income levels<sup>1</sup> (Table 2). The study found a greater prevalence of protests in middle-income countries (1327 events) and high-income countries (1122 protests) than in low-income countries (121 events).<sup>2</sup> There are also a number of international and global protests<sup>3</sup> that happened in multiple countries simultaneously, and their number also keeps increasing steadily over the years (239 protests).

With regards to the regional distribution of protests (Tables 1 and 3), Europe and Central Asia is the most active area (806 protests) in the period 2006–2020, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (427 protests), East Asia/Pacific (378 protests), Sub-Saharan Africa (369

<sup>1</sup> Country income group and regional classifications are taken from World Bank data sets, which use gross national income (GNI) per capita to classify every economy as either low-income, middle-income (subdivided into lower middle and upper middle), or high-income.

<sup>2</sup> The lower numbers in low income countries may be due to lesser civic participation because of hardship and more difficult living conditions or perhaps due to there being fewer international reports of protests in low income countries, and the fact that local sources are less accessible via the Internet the older they are (Klandermans & Staggernborn, 2002), as discussed in the methodology section.

<sup>3</sup> Since not all protests occur in a single country, income group, or region, the category “Global” has been added to the analysis of protests by country-income and region to reflect rising numbers of internationally-organized protests (239) which are due to both the increased ease of organizing across borders, growing awareness of the impact of undemocratic international organizations such as the G20 or the IMF, and the need for coordinated global action to solve issues such as climate change.

**Table 2** Number of protests by country income groups, 2006–2020

	<i>High-income</i>	<i>Upper middle income</i>	<i>Lower middle income</i>	<i>Low income</i>	<i>Global protests</i>	<i>Total</i>
2006	15	26	20	1	11	73
2007	28	26	33	2	12	101
2008	29	38	32	6	14	119
2009	46	33	24	5	16	124
2010	56	48	35	5	15	159
2011	80	61	49	8	18	216
2012	95	69	50	9	20	243
2013	103	60	46	10	18	237
2014	89	44	35	10	14	192
2015	88	47	34	11	13	193
2016	86	54	39	10	13	202
2017	93	52	45	11	17	218
2018	101	60	46	12	19	238
2019	106	59	51	9	18	243
2020	107	60	51	12	21	251
Total	1122	737	590	121	239	2809

*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

protests), North America (281 protests), the Middle East and North Africa (208 protests) and South Asia (101 protests). Because this study collected and organized information primarily by country, those regions with more countries tend to have a greater number of protests, and those regions with fewer countries (e.g., North America comprises only three countries; South Asia, seven) show a slightly lesser number of protests, although researchers tried to offset this by greater sensitivity to recording more within-country protests in world-geographical regions with fewer countries.

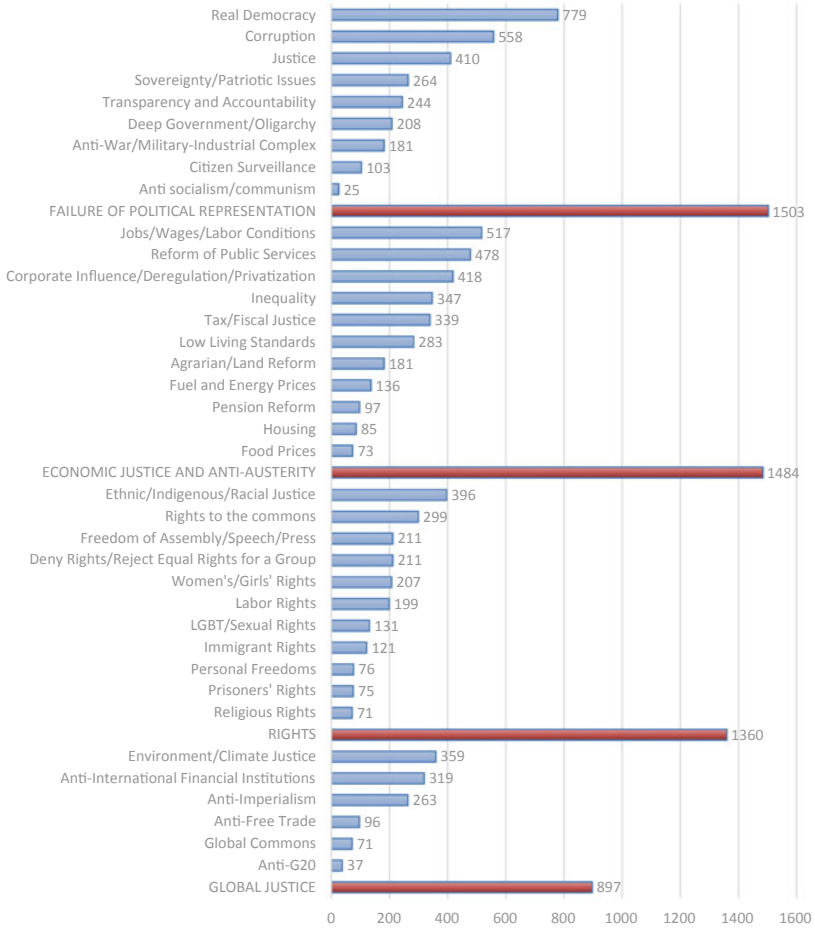
## 2 MAIN GRIEVANCES/DEMANDS

The 2809 protest events analyzed in this study can be classified into four different main categories related to the grievances and demands raised, and therefore to the issues that generated them: (i) failure of the political system; (ii) economic justice and anti-austerity; (iii) civil rights; (iv) global justice. These are summarized below and in Fig. 1, and are presented in

**Table 3** Number of protests by region, 2006–2020

	<i>East Asia Pacific</i>	<i>Europe Central Asia</i>	<i>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</i>	<i>Middle East &amp; N. Africa</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>Global Protests</i>	<i>Total</i>
2006	11	11	13	6	6	5	10	11	73
2007	17	18	15	12	7	5	15	12	101
2008	21	21	19	12	7	4	21	14	119
2009	22	29	19	9	11	4	14	16	124
2010	27	40	26	14	13	8	16	15	159
2011	34	55	35	23	16	7	28	18	216
2012	31	68	37	23	23	9	32	20	243
2013	32	76	34	14	24	10	29	18	237
2014	24	62	27	14	22	5	24	14	192
2015	23	58	31	11	26	6	25	13	193
2016	27	64	32	12	20	7	27	13	202
2017	26	70	32	10	24	9	30	17	218
2018	26	79	36	15	26	6	31	19	238
2019	29	78	37	16	27	7	31	18	243
2020	28	77	34	17	29	9	36	21	251
Total	378	806	427	208	281	101	369	239	2809

Source: Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

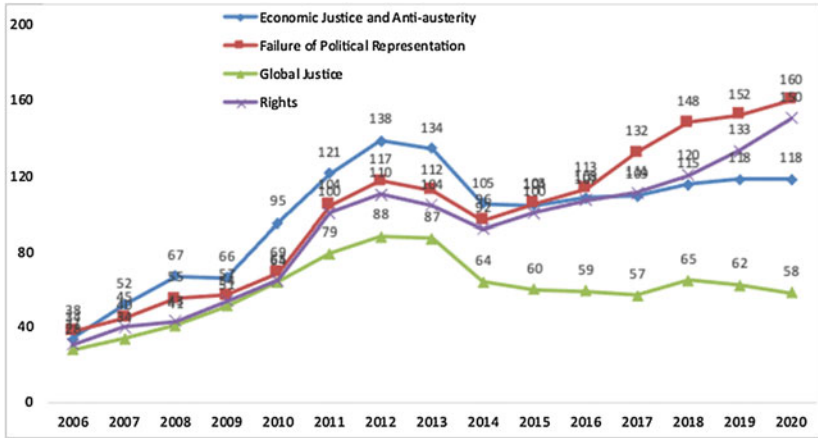


**Fig. 1** Number of protests by grievance/demand topics, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

more detail in the following sections. Note that for most protests, more than one grievance and more than one demand are involved. This means the categories of grievances and demands are not mutually exclusive: each protest event was “tagged” with the full set of grievances/demands found to have contributed to it.

- Failure of Political Representation and Political Systems: 1503 protests were on focused on a lack of real democracy; corruption; a failure to receive justice from the legal system; sovereignty and patriotic issues; transparency and accountability; the perceived power of a deep government or oligarchy; preventing war and restraining the military industrial complex; the surveillance of citizens, as well as anti-socialism and anti-communism.
- Economic Justice and Anti-Austerity: 1484 protests were focused on issues related to jobs, wages and/or labor conditions; reform of public services; corporate influence, deregulation and privatization; inequality; tax and fiscal justice; low living standards; agrarian/land reform; high fuel and energy prices; pension reform; housing and high food prices.
- Civil Rights: 1360 protests were for ethnic/indigenous/racial rights; a right to the commons (digital, land, cultural, atmospheric); freedom of assembly, speech and press; women and girls’ rights; labor rights; the LGBT rights; immigrant rights; personal freedoms; prisonersrights and religious issues. This category also includes protests that sought to deny rights or reject equal rights for a group (e.g., against minorities).
- Global Justice: 897 protests were for environmental and climate justice; against the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union/ECB, and other IFIs, against imperialism (United States, China); against free trade; in defense of the global commons; and against the G20.

How did these grievances evolve over time? Fig. 2 presents the number of protests by main grievance/demand. Beginning in 2006, there is a steady rise in overall protests each year up to 2020. Though generalizing is difficult, as the global financial crisis begins to unfold in 2007–2008, we observe an initial jump in the number of protests. Protests intensified with the end of fiscal stimulus and the adoption of austerity cuts



**Fig. 2** Number of protests by main grievance/demand from year 2006 to 2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

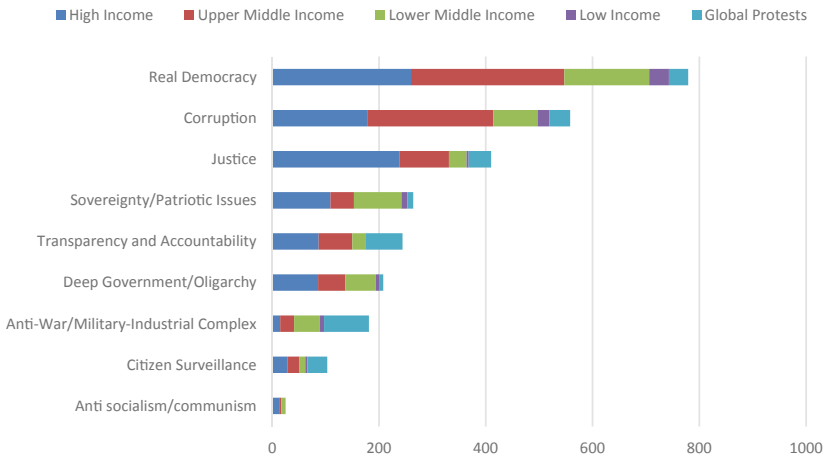
and cost-saving reforms worldwide after 2010, and they then peaked in 2012–2013. Protestors were primarily demonstrating for economic justice and anti-austerity reforms in the 2010–2014 period. Unresolved grievances, few decent jobs, poor social protection and public services, and failures of agrarian and tax justice, caused protests to become more political, sparking a new wave of protests starting in 2016, catalyzed by failures of democracies. Since 2016, protests have escalated, often becoming “omnibus protests” (protesting on multiple issues) against the political and economic system. Decades of neoliberal policies have generated more inequality, eroded incomes and welfare to both the lower and the middle classes, fueling frustration and feelings of injustice, disappointment with malfunctioning democracies and failures of economic and social development, and a lack of trust in governments. In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has accentuated social unrest.

Protests linked to civil rights also show a sharp rise throughout the covered period as well, mainly due to the presence of large demonstrations for indigenous and racial rights, women’s rights, freedom of press/speech, and the right to the commons. In recent years, a number of radical right groups have also protested against minorities, for patriotic matters, and for personal freedoms (e.g., refusing to stay home or to wear

masks during the COVID-19 pandemic). Global-justice related protests increase in the period, but at a more moderate rate than the other categories, with a slowdown after the peak was reached in 2012–2013. The following sections of the book present details on each of these main areas of grievances/demands.

### 3 GRIEVANCES/DEMANDS ON FAILURE OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Our study shows the most consistent reason for people around the world to protest is the perceived failure of democracies. About 54% of all protests considered between 2006 and 2020 (a total of 1503 protest events overall) relate to a failure of political representation and of political systems. This is the case not only in countries with autocratic governments, or in low-income countries, where 53% of protests were due to a failure of government to provide needed services, justice, and accountability, but also in high-income countries, where more than 48% of protests were related to a failure of political representation, as well as in over 61% of the protests in upper-middle-income countries (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3** Protests failures of political representation/political systems by income group 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)



Formal representative democracies are perceived around the world as having served the elites instead of the people. A deep crisis in political representation is felt and articulated even by average citizens (e.g., the middle classes) who do not consider themselves social or political activists (Puschra & Burke, 2013).

Table 4, Figs. 4 and 5 present key issues in the category of failure of political representation and political systems.<sup>4</sup> According to our analysis, such protests were more prevalent in Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and North America.

The main reasons why people protest about a failure of political representation and political systems are:

### 3.1 *Real Democracy*

This is the largest demand from around the world, present in nearly 28% of all protests counted and the single most prevalent protest issue to emerge from the study, as it is an issue in 779 protests. This kind of protest is understood to be based on the desire for a democratic society that responds to the needs of people, in which people participate directly in the decisions affecting their lives, as counterposed to a formal, representative democracy, that is perceived as often not respecting the “one person, one vote” rule, but instead to have been distorted to serve the interests of the elites and the powerful (Ranci ere, 2006). A typical example was the call for United States democracy to respond to Main Street instead of Wall Street after the 2008 financial crisis. Protests for real democracy exist in all regions and country-income groups. The regions with a higher prevalence of this category of protest are Europe and Central Asia (e.g., Belarus, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom), Latin America and the Caribbean (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile,

<sup>4</sup> Note that this table includes all instances of a demand or grievance. A protest may have more than one grievance/demand, given that demonstrators often focus on several issues (e.g., they may demonstrate against corruption and lack of transparency, while also calling for real democracy) for this reason the number of demands and grievances is larger than the total number of protests presented in earlier tables counting protest events. Therefore when this study asserts, for example, that corruption is a causal factor in 20% of all protest events, this does not mean that all other causes are to be found in the remaining 80%.

**Table 4** Protests against the failure of political representation/political systems by region, 2006–2020

<i>Grievance/demand</i>	<i>East Asia &amp; Pacific</i>	<i>Europe Central Asia</i>	<i>Latin America Caribbean</i>	<i>Middle East &amp; N. Africa</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>Total</i>
Real democracy	111	238	108	75	67	14	130	36	779
Corruption	118	161	62	45	60	15	58	39	558
Justice	55	115	57	10	108	3	20	42	410
Sovereignty/patriotic issues	23	95	35	19	21	11	49	11	264
Transparency and accountability	40	41	22	3	47	3	19	69	244
Deep government /oligarchy	11	76	48	11	21	1	32	8	208
Anti-war/military-industrial complex	19	8	20	21	8	3	18	84	181
Citizen surveillance	5	30	14	2	7	0	8	37	103
Anti-socialism/anti-communism	0	7	10	0	6	2	0	0	25
Total	382	771	376	186	345	52	334	326	1503

*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

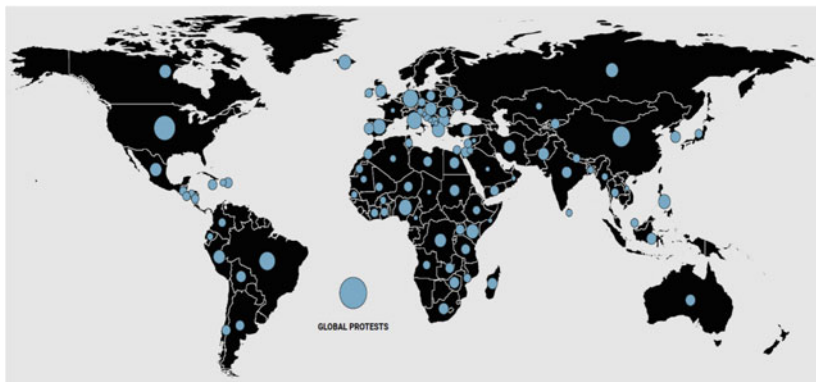


Fig. 4 Map of protests on failure of political representation and political systems, 2006–2020 (Source <https://worldprotests.org/>)

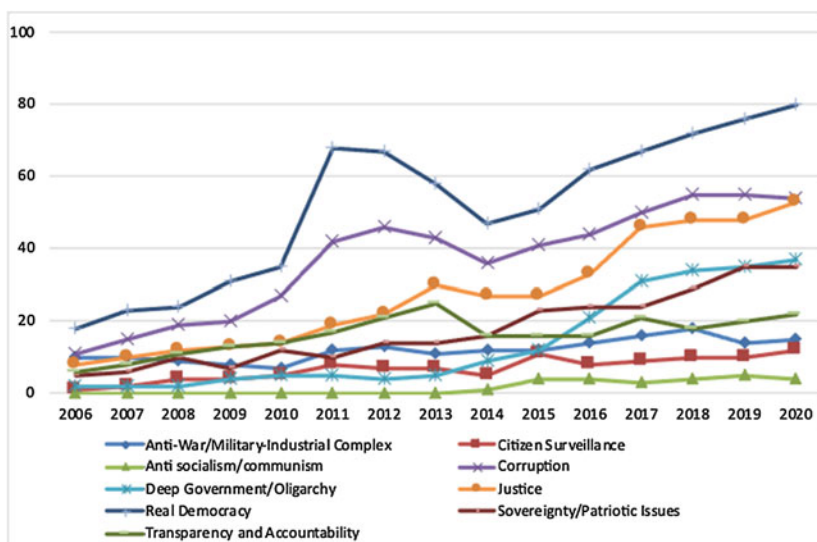


Fig. 5 Grievances/demands arising from the failure of political representation/systems by year, 2006–2020 (Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru), East Asia and the Pacific (e.g., Australia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand), North America (Canada, Mexico, and the United States), and Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). This issue was particularly relevant in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region at the time of the Arab Spring (e.g., Egypt and Tunisia) and later (e.g., in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco).

### 3.2 *Corruption*

Opposition to corruption is behind 20% of protests globally, with 558 events counted. Protests against corruption are often sparked by prior complaints over poorly delivered public services in health, transportation, education, and security, as exemplified by the massive 2013 anti-corruption protests in Brazil, which began as protests against rising bus fares. Similar protests are to be found in many other countries (e.g., also Egypt, Haiti, Iran, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen). A large number of protests are led by outraged citizens denouncing private-sector payouts to politicians, tax fraud, manipulation of policies in the interests of the privileged (e.g., Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, United States, and Zimbabwe). Contrary to public perceptions, corruption is not an issue of lower-income countries alone. Corruption is behind 16% of protests in high-income countries, 24% in middle-income countries and 18% in low-income countries. More on protests against corruption can be found in Section 3 in Chapter 3.

### 3.3 *Justice*

Justice, or failure to receive justice from the legal system (not conceptual kinds of justice, such as “environmental justice” or “economic justice”), is a cause of 14% of all protests, with 410 protests counted overall. An example can be found in the actions by “hacktivists” (digital activists) affiliated with Anonymous challenging unwilling state authorities to uphold laws against rape, child pornography and police violence or face public

exposure of the perpetrators' identities (e.g., in Canada and the United States). Other examples are finance activists asking for reparations for people who lost their savings due to banking crises (e.g., Italy and Spain) and solidarity marches with victims wanting justice from the legal system in case of house evictions, rape and others (e.g., Chad, Mexico, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom).

### 3.4 *Sovereignty and Patriotic Issues*

Sovereignty and patriotic issues appear in 9% (264) of protests at both extremes of the political spectrum. In recent years, patriotic matters have been elevated by right-wing parties and groups (e.g., in Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Serbia, the United Kingdom, and the United States); in Germany and Italy, for example, far-right nationalist groups demonstrated against an “open door” policy for Muslim immigrants and refugees. Sovereignty is also an ongoing issue for progressive protestors demanding that big powers stop interfering in national policy-making in developing countries (e.g., Ecuador, Ghana, Philippines, and Vietnam) and in indigenous peoples' matters (e.g., Brazil, Canada, Peru, and the United States). Finally, sovereignty is a main claim of territories/areas demanding independence (e.g., Catalonia, Hong Kong, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Tibet, and Western Sahara). This is further developed in Section 1 in Chapter 3.

### 3.5 *Transparency and Accountability*

Transparency and accountability are demands that lie behind nearly 9% of protest events worldwide, in 244 protests. This demand often focuses on policies perceived as not serving the majority of citizens (e.g., Australia, Greece, Iceland, Israel, and Spain). There are also many protests against failed transparency and accountability in developing countries when governments adopt regressive tax policies and public service reforms (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, Kenya, Philippines, and Thailand). This demand also appears in protests about election results perceived as fraud (e.g., Bolivia, Indonesia, South Korea, and the United States). Protests on transparency and accountability are frequently linked to corruption claims.

### 3.6 *A “Deep Government”/Oligarchy*

A “deep government” or oligarchy that manipulates policy-making is a cause of more than 7% of all protests (208 protests counted). Claims of an oligarchy secretly dominating the government is common among both left-wing and radical right-wing groups. Examples include progressive protests against the policies of autocratic leaders (e.g., in Belarus, Brazil, Italy, Lebanon, Russia, Turkey, and Uganda) as well as radical right protests against a supposed “deep government” that impedes advancement of the far right agenda (e.g. in Germany, Poland, and the United States).

### 3.7 *Anti-war Protests/Anti Military-Industrial Complex*

Anti-war protests and those against the military-industrial complex are a factor in more than 6% of protests, with 181 episodes counted overall. Protests by global networks working against war make most of the demonstrations, with most protests focusing on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Other protests focused on denouncing military/police abuses (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Sudan, and the United States), national military influence on governments (e.g. Bolivia and Brazil), foreign powers’ military intervention (e.g., Mali and Niger), and against United States military bases (e.g., Ghana and Japan). A number of nationally-coordinated anti-war/military protests also occurred in the South Asia/Pacific region (e.g., Myanmar and Philippines).

### 3.8 *Citizen Surveillance*

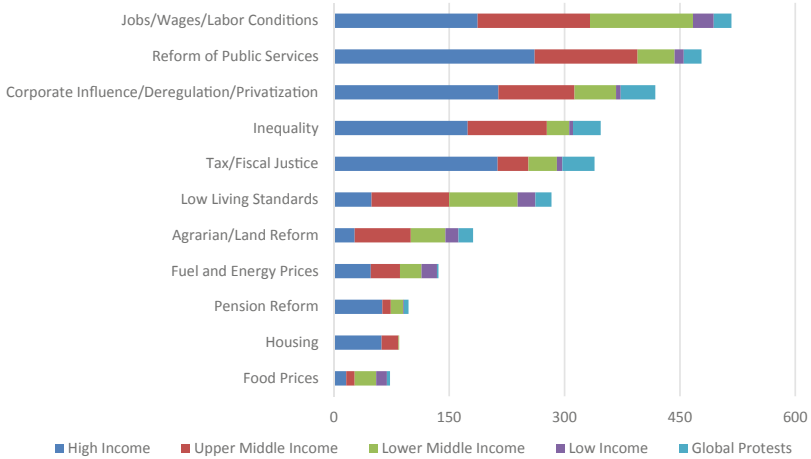
Surveillance of citizens by governments and of workers by corporations is a cause of 3% of all protests, with 103 episodes counted. Many protests—especially since the Manning/Wikileaks 2011 leak of United States diplomatic cables and intensifying with the 2013 case of surveillance whistleblower Edward Snowden—have focused on the actions of the United States. In other countries there have been protests against surveillance by national governments (e.g., Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Morocco, Netherlands, Philippines, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam) for spying on citizens and restricting the Internet. Germany, for instance, has experienced giant protests against regulation of social media and the Internet.

### 3.9 *Anti-socialism and Anti-communism*

This appears in less than 1% of protests (25) in the period 2006–2020. In recent times, anti-socialism and anti-communism have been linked to radical right protests in high-income countries (e.g., Germany and the United States), to opposition movements against Latin American left-leaning governments (e.g., in Bolivia and Ecuador) and to some conservative Muslim protests (e.g., Bangladesh).

## 4 GRIEVANCES/DEMANDS ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE/ANTI-AUSTERITY

The cluster of issues related broadly to demands for economic justice, including anti-austerity grievances, are the second most common reason why people around the world protest. Overall, 1484 protests in the period 2006–2020, or nearly 53% of total protests counted in the study, reflect people’s outrage at economic and social public policy failures and a perceived lack of broad-based development. Protestors have evinced strong demands for jobs and better living and working conditions, quality public services for all, tax and fiscal justice, equitable land and pension reforms, as well as affordable food, fuel and other goods (Fig. 6). Protests have accelerated because of the contraction of decent jobs as a result of the global crisis and the extension of austerity measures worldwide since 2010, affecting nearly four billion people—half of the world population—in 2017. Recently, the jobs crisis has been accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in more protests despite lockdowns. The majority of global protests for economic justice and against austerity have manifested people’s indignation at the gross inequalities between ordinary communities and rich individuals/corporations. The idea of the “1% versus the 99%,” which emerged a decade earlier during the United States protests over the 2008 financial and economic crisis, have quickly spread around the world, feeding earlier grievances against elites writing of the rules and manipulating public policies in their favor, while the majority of citizens continue to endure low living standards.



**Fig. 6** Protests for economic justice/against austerity by income group, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

Table 5, Figs. 7 and 8 present key issues in the category of protests for economic justice and against austerity cuts.<sup>5</sup> In general, such protests are more prevalent in Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and North America. Contrary to public perceptions, austerity measures are not limited to Europe: since 2010, many of the principal adjustment cuts/reforms have featured most prominently in developing countries (Ortiz & Cummins, 2019) and this is well reflected in our mapping of global protests.

The main reasons why people protest about economic justice, including anti-austerity demands, are:

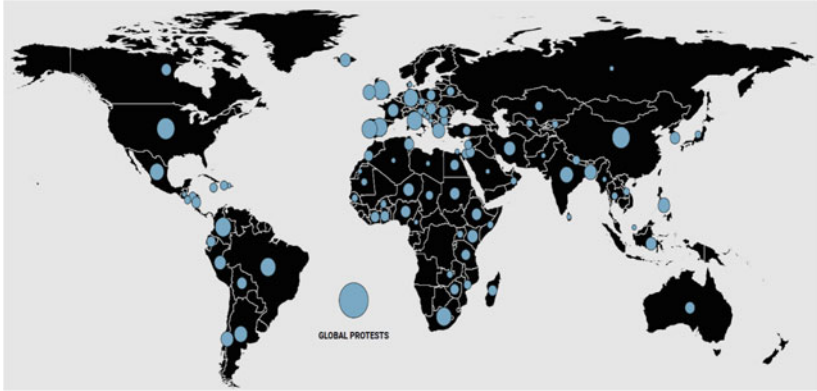
<sup>5</sup> Note that this table includes all instances of a demand or grievance. appears in a protest. A protest may have more than one grievance/demand given that demonstrators often focus on several issues (e.g., they may be demonstrating against the reform of public services, denouncing corporate influence, and complaining about low incomes). For this reason the number of demands and grievances is larger than the total number of protests presented in earlier tables counting protests as separate events. Therefore when this study asserts, for example, that reform of public services is a causal factor in 17% of all protest events, this does not mean that all other causes are to be found in the remaining 83%.



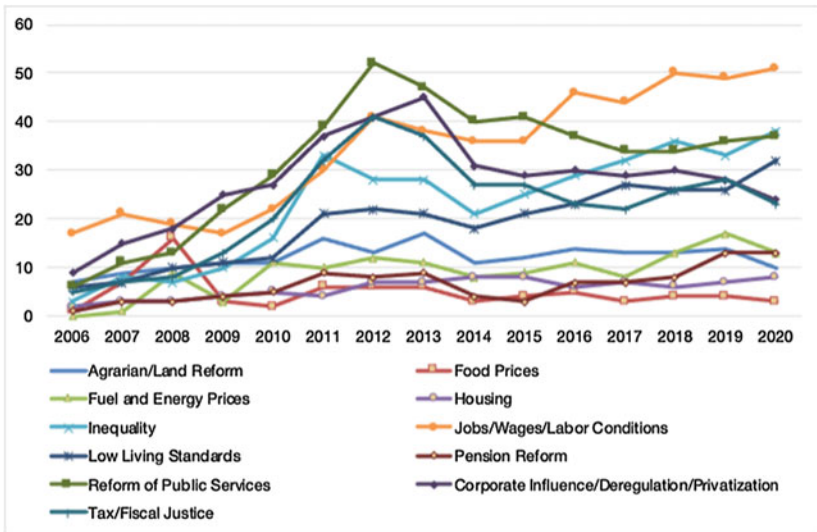
**Table 5** Protests for economic justice/against austerity by country region, 2006–2020

<i>Grievance/demand</i>	<i>East Asia &amp; Pacific</i>	<i>Europe Central Asia</i>	<i>Latin America Caribbean</i>	<i>Middle East &amp; N. Africa</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>Total</i>
Jobs/wages/labor conditions	61	120	73	67	43	16	114	23	517
Reform of public services	62	184	76	13	62	4	54	23	478
Corporate influence/ deregulation/privatization	51	151	93	4	54	4	16	45	418
Inequality	31	154	34	30	32	4	26	36	347
Tax/fiscal justice	13	186	30	7	28	3	30	42	339
Low living standards	31	45	82	28	6	6	64	21	283
Agrarian/land reform	29	8	63	6	17	15	24	19	181
Fuel and energy prices	11	26	24	16	23	6	28	2	136
Pension reform	2	39	29	0	17	2	2	6	97
Housing	19	43	5	0	16	0	2	0	85
Food prices	1	10	13	5	6	3	31	4	73
Total	188	662	373	96	199	43	223	175	1484

*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>



**Fig. 7** Map of protests on economic justice and anti-austerity, 2006–2020 (Source <https://worldprotests.org/>)



**Fig. 8** Grievances/demands on economic justice/against austerity by year, 2006–2020 (Source Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

#### 4.1 *Jobs, Higher Wages and Labor Conditions*

This is the most prevalent cause of economic and social-justice-related protests, appearing in 517 protest events in all regions, or in 18.4% of the total number of protests in the world, and reflecting the major jobs crisis that occurred before, during, and after the world financial and economic crisis of 2008, as well as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Protests demanding decent jobs occur virtually in all countries. Many national protests also have a specific focus on wages and better working conditions, as exemplified by the protests in Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Egypt, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

#### 4.2 *Reform of Public Services*

Reform of public services is a causal factor in 17% of all protest events counted—a total of 478 protests refer to reforms of education, health, water, and public transport, among others. Citizens marched against full and partial privatization, rationalization of services, budget cuts, cost-recovery measures, and other reforms that were perceived as reducing the quality and quantity of public services. Protests existed before the 2008 global financial crisis (e.g., in Australia, Chile, Egypt, Malaysia, and South Africa) but spiraled after 2010 with the adoption of austerity measures not only in Europe (e.g. France, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) but in a majority of developing countries (e.g., Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Sudan, Thailand and Turkey).

#### 4.3 *Corporate Influence/Deregulation/Privatization*

Corporate influence, deregulation, and privatization are issues present in 15% of protests worldwide (418 events) in the period 2006–2020. Protestors opposed policies that put the private interests of corporations and financial and other elites ahead of the rest of the population. In some developing countries, decades-long pressure from IFIs like the IMF and

the World Bank has resulted in deregulation and privatization in countries that are not able to deliver adequate services for their own people. For example, privatization was a key grievance in protests in Chile in the decade 2010–2020, as well as in Brazil, France, Greece, and Iceland. Protests against the privatization of electricity drew thousands into the streets in Australia in 2008 and in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. In 2013 in Delhi, India, 100,000 farmers and activists protested against land acquisition for private profit. In recent years, protestors have demanded the regulation of platform services (e.g., UBER, food delivery, etc.) in many countries, such as Colombia, Spain and the United States.

#### 4.4 *Inequality*

More than 12% of the world’s protests (347 protests) denounced inequalities in income, wealth and influence on policy-making and questioned democratic systems that were allowing rent-seeking by elites and corporations. The Occupy movement powerfully mobilized citizens with slogans such as “we are the 99%” and middle classes around the world demonstrated actively against government policy decisions that benefit the elites instead of the majority. In the Arab Spring, as well as in the more recent Latin American Spring, inequality ranked high amongst the grievances of demonstrators. People protested against inequality in countries like Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Egypt, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States. More on inequality and protests can be found in Section 2 in Chapter 3.

#### 4.5 *Tax/Fiscal Justice*

Tax/Fiscal justice claims are also found in 12% of events worldwide, specifically in 339 protests. Protests’ typical issues were focused on inadequate national taxation as well as a lack of international tax cooperation, both of which allow for limited wealth taxation and tax evasion that benefits the wealthy instead of the majority of citizens. Protests demanded: more income and wealth taxation (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Kenya); that governments fight tax evasion and illicit financial flows (e.g. Czech Republic, Germany, Philippines, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the

United States); lower taxes/VAT on basic products that people consume (e.g., Iran, Portugal, and Uganda); that governments stop transfers to the financial and corporate sectors (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States); improvement in inter-regional transfers (e.g. Greece, Italy, and Mexico); and adequate taxation of extractive resources (e.g. Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tanzania). The strength of the citizens' movements calling for governments to audit sovereign debts (e.g., Brazil, Ireland, Philippines, and Spain) and to repudiate nationalized private-sector debts must also be noted.

#### 4.6 *Low Living Standards*

The issue of low living standards is raised in 10% of world protests (286 protests), and this is often linked to: protests against inequalities (e.g., Philippines, Tunisia, and the United States); demands for decent wages (e.g., Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines); demonstrations against austerity cuts (e.g., Bulgaria, Israel, Spain, United Kingdom); and protests against the rising prices of goods and services (e.g., Brazil, Burkina Faso, Haiti, India, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Romania). Low living standards are a grievance behind nearly all protests for social protection reforms, pension reforms (e.g., Egypt and Nicaragua) and the protests to demand higher social benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Bulgaria, Chile, Lebanon, South Africa, and Spain).

#### 4.7 *Agrarian/Land Reform*

Grievances/demands regarding agrarian or land reforms appear in 181 protest episodes (more than 6% of the world total) in the period 2006–2020. In most countries, protestors contested changes to land laws and other reforms resulting in the loss of livelihoods to farmers (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sudan). Examples include: India, where landless farmers staged a 600-km march for land rights; China, where protesters demanded the end of land-grabbing and the protection of grasslands; and Sudan, where there have been violent police backlashes against protests that denounced land-grabbing—selling public land to foreign investors. In Colombia and Mexico, small farmers are protesting

the withdrawal of agricultural subsidies and/or competition of agricultural imports because of free-trade agreements or conditions set for loans from the IFIs.

#### 4.8 *Fuel and Energy Prices*

The removal or phasing out of fuel and energy subsidies—an element of fiscal austerity—and the resulting unaffordable energy prices have sparked 5% of protests in 136 countries (e.g., Algeria, Cameroon, Chile, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Peru, Sudan, and Uganda). While the removal of fuel subsidies can have positive environmental externalities when polluters are no longer subsidized,<sup>6</sup> a main problem is the inadequate compensation to the population. Energy and transport prices increase, resulting in higher prices for food and other basic needs of the population, normally living on low incomes in developing countries (Ortiz & Cummins, 2019). Often the IFIs recommend a small safety net targeted to the poorest—but this policy is insufficient, as it leaves the majority of the population worse off. Consider the cases of Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, and Ecuador. With the majority of Nigeria’s population living on less than 2 dollars per day, cheap petrol is viewed by many as the only tangible benefit they receive from the state, hence the massive protests since 2012 when Minister of Finance Okonjo Iweala removed a fuel subsidy that kept food and transportation costs low. In Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the price of heating rose by 400% and electricity by 170%: subsequent demonstrations ended in violent riots and the resignation of President Bakiyev. In Ecuador in 2019, after large riots, the government fled from the capital and had to stop a loan with the IMF that had proposed the cuts to energy subsidies and other reforms with negative social impacts.

#### 4.9 *Pension Reforms*

Opposition to pension reforms is behind 3.5% of protests globally, with 97 events counted in the period 2006–2020. The reform of social security and pension systems for cost-saving purposes is a main austerity measure

<sup>6</sup> See for example Oosterhuis, F. and Umpfenbach, K. 2014. “Energy Subsidies”, in: Oosterhuis and ten Brink (eds.): *Paying The Polluter—Environmentally Harmful Subsidies and their Reform*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

(e.g., raising contribution rates, increasing eligibility periods, prolonging the retirement age, and/or lowering benefits). These reforms have increased since 2010 in many European countries due to austerity pressures, resulting in widespread protests (e.g., France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom). A number of these protests were successful—in Latvia, Portugal and Romania, the national justice courts determined that the austerity adjustments were unlawful and pensioners were given back their earlier pensions. Developing countries have also experienced important protests against pension reforms, as the IFIs have generally proposed reforms more radical in nature, involving the privatization of pension systems despite the lack of evidence that private pension systems work better than public systems (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine); in fact, a majority of countries have reversed pension privatization (ILO, 2017).

#### 4.10 *Housing*

The right to an affordable decent home has been at the center of 85 protests around the world (in 3% of the protests studied), particularly after the housing bubble and the subsequent eviction of families unable to pay mortgages (e.g., Canada, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States). In Germany, protestors complained about rising prices resulting from the gentrification of city centers. Demands for public support for affordable housing have also profiled high in protests in Brazil, Chile, China, Philippines, and South Africa.

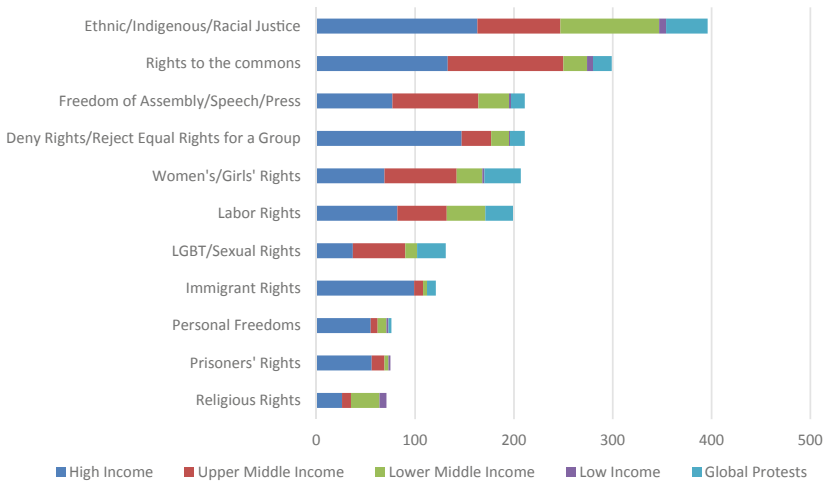
#### 4.11 *Food Prices*

Since 2007–2008, as international food prices have spiked to historic highs, with local food prices at near record levels in many countries, food-prices-related protests have represented more than 1% of world protests (73 protests). Food protests have an inverse relation with income levels, as they are virtually absent from high-income countries and frequent in developing countries such as Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon,

Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Peru, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, and Uzbekistan. Many of these food protests have ended in riots and revolts.

## 5 GRIEVANCES/DEMANDS ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights are a central issue in protest movements. Protests asserting peoples' rights occur in 1360 protests or 48% of all protests in the period 2006–2020, in issues such as ethnic and racial justice, rights to the commons, freedom of assembly and speech, women's rights, labor rights, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) and sexual rights, immigrants' rights, personal freedoms, prisoners' rights, and freedom of religion (Fig. 9). A small number (7% of total protests) have sought to deny rights or to reject the enjoyment of rights by specific groups of people, for example immigrants or racial minorities; this is linked to the rise of the radical right, as will be explained later in this study. Note that people's rights include also economic and social rights included in other



**Fig. 9** Protest for civil rights by country income group, 2006–2020 (Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)



sections (e.g., the right to education, the right to health, the rights to social security, the right to housing etc.).

Table 6, Figs. 10 and 11 present key issues in this category of protests civil rights.<sup>7</sup> Generally, these protests are more prevalent in Europe and Central Asia, as well as in North America. While the rights agenda appears more developed in higher-income countries, it is also evolving fast in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and the Pacific, and other world regions.

The main reasons why people protest about civil rights are:

### 5.1 *Ethnic/Indigenous/Racial Justice*

The greatest number of protests in the category of rights (396 protests, or 14% of the total) relate to issues of ethnic, indigenous, or racial justice. Perhaps the most widespread protests are against racism and demanding racial justice, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement started in the United States and spread internationally (e.g., Australia, Canada, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Portugal, and the United Kingdom). Protestors also demonstrate for indigenous rights and racial equality (e.g., Canada, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Kosovo, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, the United States, and Yemen). Sometimes indigenous peoples stand up against infrastructure projects or extractive industries in their native areas that would destroy their environment (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, and Tanzania). But indigenous peoples do not only demonstrate for specific issues affecting their territories, they also stand up for macropolicies, such as for the legitimate election results in Bolivia, for reforming the justice system in Cameroon, for agrarian/land reform in Colombia, against a loan with the IMF in Ecuador, for federalism in Nepal and, importantly, opposing

<sup>7</sup> Note that this table includes all instances in which a demand or grievance appears in a protest. A protest may have more than one grievance/demand given that demonstrators often focus on several issues (e.g., may be demonstrating for women's rights or LGBT and sexual rights). For this reason the number of demands and grievances is larger than the total number of protests presented in earlier tables counting protests as separate events.. Therefore when this study asserts, for example, that women's and girls' rights constitute a causal factor in 7% of all protest events, this does not mean that all other causes are to be found in the remaining 93%.

**Table 6** Protests for civil rights by region, 2006–2020

<i>Grievance/demand</i>	<i>East Asia &amp; Pacific</i>	<i>Europe Central Asia</i>	<i>Latin America Caribbean</i>	<i>Middle East &amp; N. Africa</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ethnic/indigenous/racial justice	26	56	64	38	103	14	53	42	396
Right to the commons	4	64	112	9	67	0	24	19	299
Deny rights to groups	14	120	9	7	36	8	2	15	211
Freedom of assembly/speech/press	47	66	25	22	25	1	11	14	211
Women's/girls' rights	29	33	19	58	14	6	11	37	207
Labor rights	50	43	20	7	41	1	9	28	199
LGBT/sexual rights	35	19	20	13	13	0	2	29	131
Immigrant rights	22	46	0	1	40	2	1	9	121
Personal freedoms	12	33	8	0	16	1	3	3	76
Prisoners' rights	8	22	14	19	10	0	2	0	75
Religious rights	5	10	0	28	9	9	10	0	71
Total	212	336	218	157	235	20	73	139	1360

*Source:* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

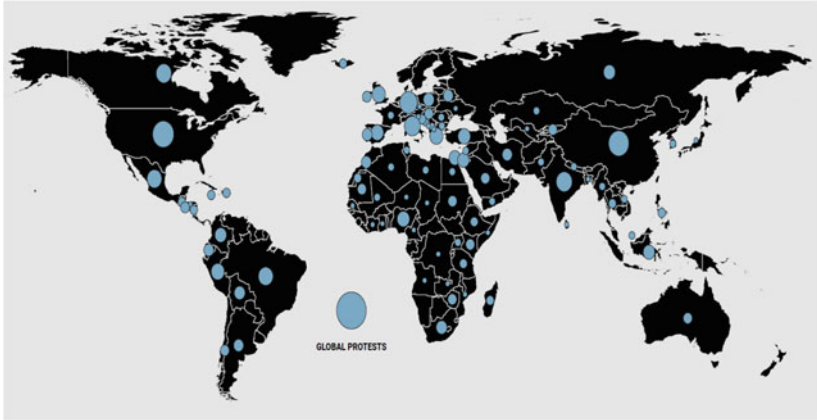


Fig. 10 Map of protests on civil rights, 2006–2020 (Source <https://worldprotests.org/>)

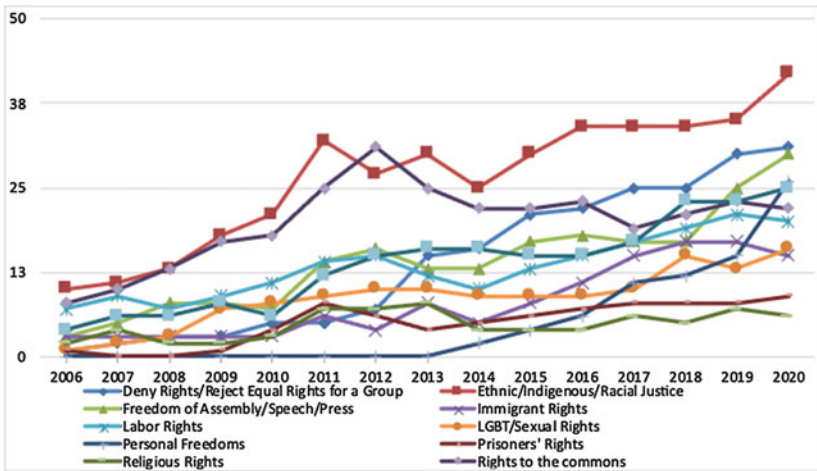


Fig. 11 Grievances/demands on civil rights by Year, 2006–2020 (Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

genocide against indigenous populations resulting from the lack of health support during the COVID-19 pandemic such as in Brazil. Sometimes protests are for short/medium-term issues, but more often are part of long-term struggles, such as in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, or in Tibet.

### 5.2 *Right to the Commons*

Assertion of rights to the commons<sup>8</sup> (digital, land/water, cultural, or atmospheric) is behind 10% of surveyed protests (299 protests) (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Demonstrations for the commons—from Occupy Wall Street in the United States to the “water wars” in Bolivia and Brazil—are against private management of public goods and generally demand that shared resources be managed at the local level. There are also protests to preserve and access the global commons, which is the driver of 19% of global protests, especially those regarding the Internet and protection of the climate and atmosphere. Examples include the Anonymous (a global hacktivist collective/movement) actions against censorship and anti-citizen surveillance.

### 5.3 *Deny Rights to Groups*

Linked to the rise of the radical right, a recent development is the increase in demonstrations against the rights of women, minorities and ethnic groups. Our study detected 211 such protests (7.5% of the total number of protests). For instance, anti-immigrant white-supremacist protests in Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United States; against gays or same-sex marriage in France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain; or against indigenous peoples rights in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and El Salvador. In Bulgaria and Hungary, people took to the streets against refugees and against the Roma; in Mali, against women’s rights; in Singapore, against immigrants; in Turkey, against Christians. In India, “cow vigilantes” and sympathizers

<sup>8</sup> According to Wikipedia (accessed January 2021), the commons are the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth; these resources are held in common, not owned privately. As part of culture, many consider Internet/digital issues a common.

have been protesting the spread of Muslims and communists. This is further developed in Section 1 in Chapter 3.

#### 5.4 *Freedom of Assembly/Speech/Press*

Freedom of assembly, speech, and the press is a concern in 7.5% of protests (in 211 protests). Key examples are Belarus and China, where the extension of these freedoms has been a main cause of demonstrations. The right to assemble has also been central in countries like Uganda, where demonstrations are not allowed, so people had to “walk to work” and “walk to pray” as a proxy for an explicit demonstration. People have also rallied for the freedom of expression, for instance in France after the Charlie Hebdo attack. Freedom of speech and teaching has also been an important concern in countries such as Hungary, India, Iran, Madagascar, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Turkey, and Zimbabwe. A notable case involving freedom of speech/media has been the arrest of Julian Assange in the United Kingdom. Given the large number of journalists killed when reporting hot issues, there have been demonstrations for freedom of press and against the harassment of reporters in Greece, Guatemala, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, and the Philippines.

#### 5.5 *Women’s/Girls’ Rights*

Women’s and girls’ rights were core to 207 protests or 7.4% of the world’s protests. A key protest for women’s rights was the #MeToo movement with multiple rallies and action days around the world, that included large protests against femicide (homicide against women) and rape, from Chad to the United States. In Latin America, the #NiUnaMenos equivalent also rallied against machismo, against patriarchal societies, and against the impunity of violence against women. Prior to #MeToo, there were also large demonstrations for gender equality, such as in Chile, China, India, Iraq, Israel, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Tunisia, and at World Social Forums (WSF). The case of FEMEN must be noted: FEMEN is an international women’s movement of topless female activists whose breasts are painted with slogans to attract people’s attention. A number of protests were for and against abortion, a heated topic (e.g., Argentina and Poland). More on protests for women’s/girls’ rights can be found in Section 4 in Chapter 3.

### 5.6 *Labor Rights*

Beyond the protests regarding economic justice, protests on specific labor rights were a concern in 7.1% of protests (199 protests). Protests for labor rights had a higher occurrence in the East Asia Pacific region (e.g., China, Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam) where economic growth in recent years has not been synonymous with the extension of labor rights or even the right to unionize/to free associate. Labor rights protests are also prevalent in Europe and Central Asia and in North America; other countries have also experienced protests for labor rights (e.g., Colombia, Mexico, and Pakistan).

### 5.7 *LGBT/Sexual Rights*

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered and sexual rights protests made up 4.7% of the world's protests in the period 2006–2020. These rallies have been prevalent in most world regions, often to protest the discrimination against and oppression of LGBT people in specific countries, as well as having been a key component of global protests.

### 5.8 *Immigrants' Rights*

Demonstrations supporting immigrants' rights appear in 4.3% of the surveyed episodes, in 121 protests mostly in the countries receiving migrants in Europe, North America, and East Asia. Note that this study does not discriminate between protests regarding internal migrants (e.g., China) or international migrants (e.g., Australia, Europe, and the United States).

### 5.9 *Personal Freedoms*

Protests on personal freedoms are a new, emerging category, mentioned in 3% of protests (76 events). It has become especially prevalent in rallies against the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with demonstrators objecting to stay at home orders (lockdowns) or to wearing masks, for example such as in Argentina, Australia, Chile, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A rise in this type of protest in recent years is linked to the rise of populism and the radical right. In some cases, such as in Bolivia and the United States, demonstrators

linked alleged fraud in election results with a perceived attack on their personal freedoms. However, in some other countries people protested because of more direct attacks, for instance, when street food vendors in Hong Kong were removed from the street by force, or when people in El Salvador demonstrated against gang violence making their lives unlivable. This is further developed in Section 1 in Chapter 3.

### 5.10 *Prisoners' Rights*

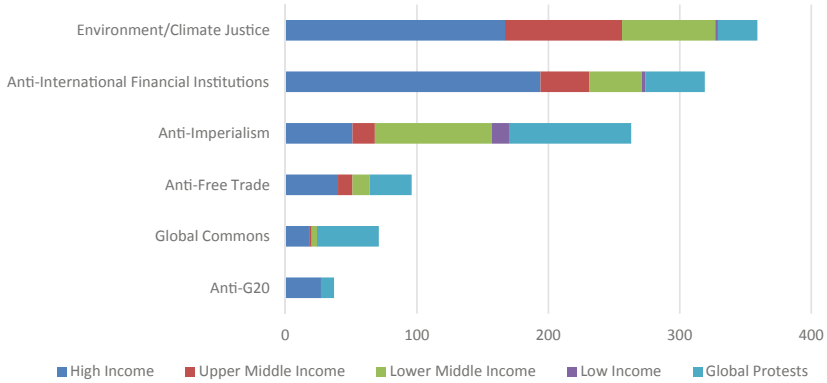
Protests and demonstrations regarding prisoners' rights and the fair treatment of prisoners represent just over nearly 3% of the world's protests (75 protests). Inhumane conditions have been denounced by prisoners in countries such as Bolivia and Brazil. These protests are often disturbingly graphic, as prisoners resort to extreme means such as hunger strikes (e.g., Occupied Palestinian Territory) or sewing their own lips (e.g., Kyrgyzstan) in order to attract media attention and to publicize their cause.

### 5.11 *Religious Rights*

Protests related to religion account for less than 3% of all protests (71 events), but this issue has been a driver of protests in the Middle East/North Africa region, reflecting the demands of the Arab Spring. Multiple groups dedicated to this issue are found in countries with an official religion (e.g., Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey). Religious rights influenced protests that were also held in other countries (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, France, India, Indonesia, Israel, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Turkey, and Vietnam).

## 6 GRIEVANCES/DEMANDS FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

Protests for global justice have demanded internationally concerted action on issues such as climate change, globalization, and sustainable development. Demonstrators have denounced the role of powerful countries and international institutions (such as the IFIs and the G20) in setting global norms and policies undemocratically, resulting in detrimental impacts on people and on the planet. Demonstrators have also denounced how the global economic system is unfair and keeps developing countries poor and underdeveloped. Protestors have stood up against globalization and free



**Fig. 12** Protest for global justice by country income group, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

trade, and against the World Bank, the IMF and other major institutions that are perceived to put corporate interests ahead of developing nations, leading to rampant inequality (Stiglitz, 2017). While most protests tend to focus on domestic issues (Brancati, 2016), protests for global justice often rely on a global network, for example like the Occupy demonstrations held on 15 October 2011 in 950 cities in 82 countries under the title “United for #GlobalChange.” Protestors have proposed new policy agendas for a more fair global order. “A better world is possible” is the motto of the annual WSF, an alternative to the meetings of powerful CEOs and personalities at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos. More than 30% of all the protests considered in the study (897 events) in the period 2006–2020 include the global justice component as one of their main issues (Fig. 12).

Table 7 and Figs. 13 and 14 present the key issues in the category of protests on global justice and their occurrence in world regions.<sup>9</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> Note that this table includes all instances in which a demand or grievance appears in a protest. A protest may have more than one grievance/demand given that demonstrators often focus on several issues (e.g., they may be demonstrating against the IFIs and also against imperialism). For this reason the number of demands and grievances is larger than the total number of protests presented in earlier tables counting protests as separate events. Therefore when this study asserts, for example, that anti-imperialism is a causal



**Table 7** Protests for global justice by region, 2006–2020

<i>Grievance/demand</i>	<i>East Asia &amp; Pacific</i>	<i>Europe Central Asia</i>	<i>Latin America Caribbean</i>	<i>Middle East &amp; N. Africa</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>Total</i>
Environment/climate justice	51	97	96	0	55	11	19	30	359
Anti-international financial institutions	2	185	39	22	11	3	12	45	319
Anti-imperialism	50	28	20	25	8	2	37	93	263
Anti-free trade	8	26	23	0	6	1	0	32	96
Global commons	2	0	4	0	18	0	0	47	71
Anti-G20	0	21	0	0	6	0	0	10	37
Total	323	532	362	184	334	34	129	363	897

*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

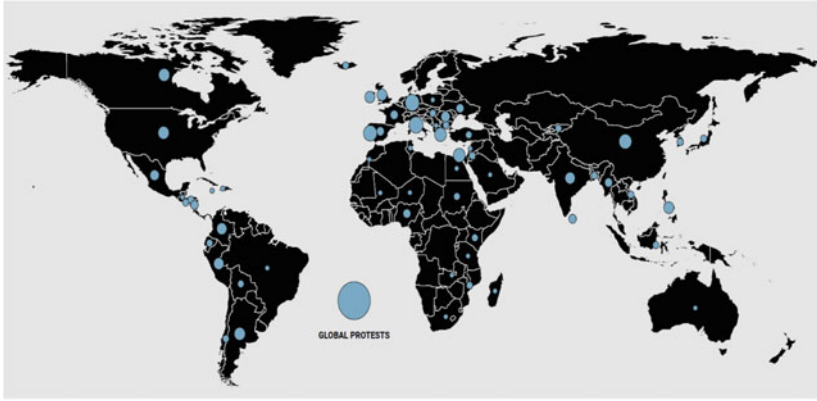


Fig. 13 Map of protests on global justice, 2006–2020 (Source <https://worldprotests.org/>)

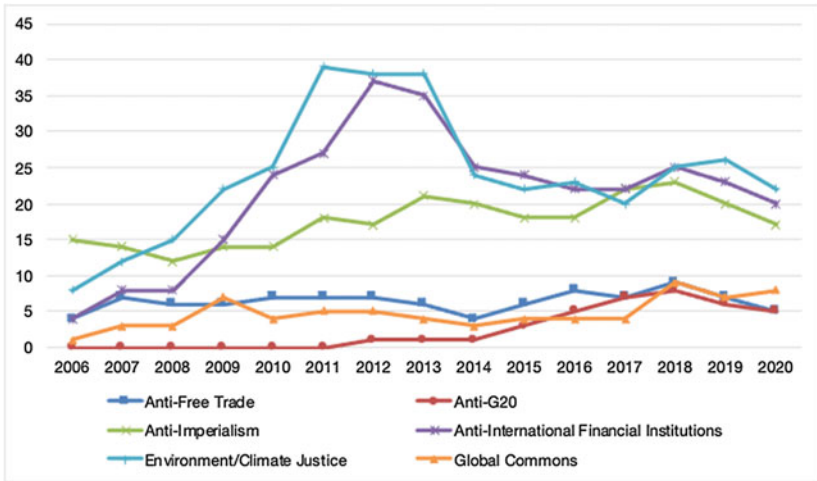


Fig. 14 Grievances/demands on global justice by year, 2006–2020 (Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

category of protests is more prevalent in Europe and Central Asia, North America, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and of course in global protests.

The main reasons why people protest about global justice are:

### 6.1 *Environment/Climate Justice*

Environmental and climate justice, based on the historical responsibilities for climate change and calling for urgent action to redress climate change and protect the environment, is a cause of nearly 13% of all protests, with 359 protests counted overall. Demands for environmental justice come often from indigenous communities and countries in the Global South (e.g., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, India, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania), as well as from people living in Northern countries (e.g., France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and at the global level (e.g., United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or UNFCCC, the WSFs). The WSFs frequently emphasize anti-nuclear protests, natural resource exploitation conflicts and the environmental impacts of infrastructure projects. Key examples are the protests organized by Extinction Rebellion, a decentralized, international and politically nonpartisan movement using nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the global climate and ecological emergency, as well as the School Strike for Climate movement led by youth activists such as Greta Thunberg.

### 6.2 *Anti-international Financial Institutions*

These are protests against the IMF, the World Bank, the European Central Bank, and other IFIs such as the regional development banks, representing 11.4% of all protests, with 319 events counted. These institutions are not democratic but take decisions behind closed doors that affect the lives of all citizens in a country, for instance, cutting wages, jobs, subsidies, and social benefits, or imposing labor and pension reforms with detrimental impacts on people, often abolishing democratically negotiated laws. As will be explained later in Section 11 (*Who Do Protesters*

factor in 9% of all protest events, this does not mean that all other causes are to be found in the remaining 91%.

*Oppose?*), the large majority of protests are against the IMF, followed by those against the European Central Bank—because of all of the European anti-austerity protests—and the World Bank. Protestors have decried policies and programs by the IFIs at the national level, and at the global level they demand the closure or reform of the IFIs.

### 6.3 *Anti-imperialism*

Anti-imperialism appears 263 times in the protests analyzed, representing 9.4% of total protests in the period 2006–2020. In this category are included protests that denounce the negative/oppressive influence of hegemonic states over less powerful countries and social groups. Most common are protests against foreign and economic policies of the United States of America (e.g., in Australia, Japan, Mexico, Philippines, South Africa, and also in the United States), protests against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Eastern Europe (e.g., Ukraine), as well as protests denouncing either Chinese (e.g., in Vietnam) or Israeli (e.g., in the Middle East) foreign policy.

### 6.4 *Anti-free Trade*

Opposition to free trade agreements is behind 3% of protests globally, with 96 events counted. Free trade deals are feared to undermine democracy and lower food safety, environmental, and labor standards. “People over profits” has been a motto of protests against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and against African countries ‘economic partnerships with the European Union. The effects of free trade agreements are at the core of protests involving food issues in Latin America and Asia (e.g., Mexico, Peru, and South Korea), as often local small businesses cannot compete with large international corporations; for example, the protests in India against the authorization given to Walmart and Tesco to conduct business in that country, or the protests by farmers and indigenous communities in Mexico and Peru because of the low prices paid for their corn and potatoes due to imported cheaper agrobusiness crops because of free trade agreements.

### 6.5 *Global Commons*

Protesting the lack of good governance of the global commons, global public goods that exceed the bounds of national governments and to which all countries and peoples have rights, is an emerging cause of protest, representing 2.5% of all protests, with 71 events counted. Demonstrations related to Internet governance occur at both the national (e.g., Argentina, Germany, and Poland) and global levels, in which movements such as Anonymous, the various national Pirate Parties and organized opposition to the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement have a pivotal role in campaigning for an open Internet as part of the global commons. Protests relating to governance of the climate and biodiversity (e.g., the People’s Summit on Climate Change, the 2009 *Klimaforum*, held during the UN Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen, and the *Cúpula dos Povos* in the UN Rio+20 Conference of the various WSFs) are also a significant factor in advocacy for the global commons.

### 6.6 *Anti-G20*

Although the G20 was created in 1999 as a forum for finance ministers and central bankers, it was turned into a summit for heads of state with the financial crisis in 2008, when President Bush called the first G20 summit in Washington DC. From then on it has been a target of global protests whenever its meetings take place. There have been 15 Summits since 2008. Anti-G20 protests represent 1.3% of the total protests, with 37 events counted. Demonstrators complain about the lack of transparency and openness, limited disclosure of processes and policy documents, all prepared behind closed doors, to be implemented later by countries with little say when impacts are detrimental to their citizens.

## 7 WHO PROTESTS?

### 7.1 *Main Groups Leading Protests 2006–2020: From NGOs and Trade Unions to Hackers*

Traditionally, a number of activists have been the main agents for change. These include political parties, workers’ unions, NGOs/CSOs, faith groups, and social service agencies. These “traditional agents” remain key organizers and participants in many campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, occupations, marches, and rallies. They are the most well-prepared and

**Table 8** Main groups leading protests 2006–2020

	2006–2010	2011–2015	2016–2020	Total
Non-governmental organizations/civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs)	250	457	383	1090
Grassroots	132	331	497	960
Political parties/movements	159	289	388	836
Trade unions	145	259	273	677
Social movements	16	117	414	547
Students/youth	53	144	179	376
Indigenous groups	62	100	109	271
Unorganized workers	62	77	117	256
Religious groups	42	82	104	228
Ethnic/racial groups	9	43	123	175
Women/feminist groups	0	13	90	103
Hackers	11	30	23	64
Government officials	5	24	25	54
Employers organizations	4	4	26	34
Police/military/militia	1	8	23	32
Prisoners	1	3	5	9

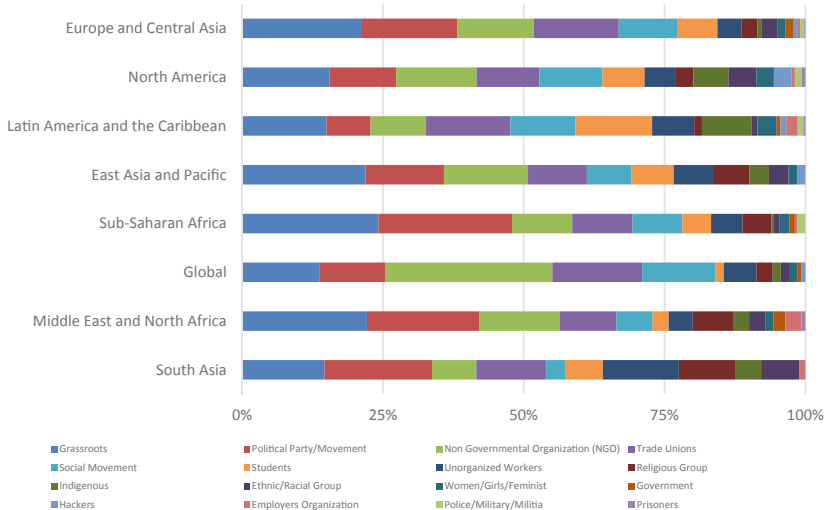
Source Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

organized; for example, trade unions are democratically elected, federated at national and international levels, and are still the main force behind some of the largest protests.

Table 8 presents the main groups leading protests in the period 2006–2020. The increase of political parties appears to be a normal result of the growing politicization of protests. However, it must be noted that there has been a significant increase in the role of “grassroots” and social movements in protests over the years, as well as that of students/youth, indigenous/racial groups, unorganized workers, religious groups, women, hackers, prisoners and even policemen/military.

## 7.2 Greater Grassroots Participation

Figure 15 shows the distribution of the main groups leading protests by region. Grassroots groups (in blue) appear in large numbers in Europe and North America, even though these regions also have the best organized (and best financed) NGOs/CSOs, political parties, and trade



**Fig. 15** Main groups leading protests by region, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

unions. The impact of grassroots groups is also large in East Asia and the Pacific, Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The increasing involvement of unorganized citizens, grassroots, middle-class people, young and old persons, and the relative decrease in the role of political parties/movements, is meaningful. Citizens have taken to the streets in the Arab Spring, in Europe (e.g. the *Indignados* and “yellow vests”) or in Latin America’s *Estallido Social* (Social Uprising). These citizens do not consider themselves activists and yet they protest because they are disillusioned with official processes, political parties, and the usual political actors associated with them. Recent research shows the increasing participation of the middle classes in protests, both in high-income and developing countries (Chen & Suen, 2017; della Porta, 2017).

Mass middle-class involvement in protests indicates a new dynamic: a pre-existing solidarity of the middle classes with elites has been replaced in countries around the world by a lack of trust and awareness that neither the prevailing economic system nor the existing political system

is producing positive outcomes for them. Alongside trade unions, civil society organizations and other activists, grassroots citizens have become organizers and participants in many direct actions (e.g., the occupation of public squares and streets, street “teach-ins,” and the blockades of roads and bridges). The fact that 28% of all the protests covered in the study include the demand for real democracy is due in no small measure to the growing ranks of the middle classes in protests.

## 8 NUMBER OF DEMONSTRATORS

### 8.1 *Some of the Largest Protests in History*

The protests included in this study have involved numbers ranging from a few hundred protestors to millions of demonstrators. Note that crowd estimates in relation to any protest are a controversial matter. Depending on the news source, estimates frequently diverge by tens of thousands, sometimes even by millions. Some protest event analysis relies upon police reports when a key research variable is the number of protesters (Klandermans & Staggenborn, 2002); however it is far beyond the scope of this research to conduct a fuller analysis utilizing police records in the many countries covered. Nevertheless, media sources report crowd estimates in the majority of protests analyzed in this study, 53 of which had one million or more protesters (Table 9).

During the period 2006–2020, the world has experienced some of the largest protests in its history; the largest protest recorded is India’s 2020 strike against government labor and agriculture reforms, which is estimated to have involved at least 250 million protestors. Table 9 shows the power of well-organized trade unions, as they have mobilized the majority of these protests. The overwhelming majority of the large protests relate to progressive issues/demands, such as: more and better jobs, wages and pensions; investments in health, education and public services; protection of farmers; action on climate change; racial justice; women and civil rights; against austerity cuts, corruption and inequality. However, a number of protests are led by radical right groups such as: QAnon protests in 2020 in the United States and globally; opposition to Muslims, migrants and refugees in Germany (multiple years); demonstrators in France protesting same-sex marriage in 2012; and the large protests against President Dilma Rouseff, Lula and the Workers Party in Brazil in 2013 and 2015.



**Table 9** Largest protests 2006–2020. Crowd estimates—more than 1 million demonstrators (selected protests)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Start year</i>	<i>Protest issue</i>	<i>Estimated crowd count</i>
India	2020	The largest coordinated strike in history: 250 million people protest against the government's plan to liberalize farming and labor	250,000,000
India	2013	Indian workers strike over rising prices, low wages, poor implementation of labor laws and privatizations	100,000,000
Global	2017	Calls to regulate social media, against citizens surveillance	87,000,000
United States	2013	Black Lives Matter, multiple years/protests	82,000,000
Brazil	2019	Against President Bolsonaro, education and pension reforms, budget cuts	45,000,000
Egypt	2012	Egyptians protest against President Morsi	15,000,000
Egypt	2011	Arab Spring: Egyptians rebel against President Mubarak	14,000,000
Brazil	2015	Against corruption, against President Dilma Rousseff and Lula	11,000,000
Germany	2017	Opposition to Muslims, migrants and refugees (multiple protests/years)	10,000,000
Global	2006	Protesters worldwide demand an end to the war in Afghanistan	6,000,000
Spain	2018	Spanish demonstrators protest femicides and rape, support women's rights, #Meetoo #NiUnaMas	5,900,000

(continued)

**Table 9** (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Start year</i>	<i>Protest issue</i>	<i>Estimated crowd count</i>
Italy	2013	Italian anti-government protesters demonstrate against the European Union and austerity measures	5,000,000
Portugal	2013	Portuguese workers strike over austerity	5,000,000
United States	2017	Me Too movement, women's rights	5,000,000
France	2015	After deadly attack on newspaper, march against terrorist violence and for freedom of expression	4,000,000
Global	2018	Youth activists protest the inaction of government on climate change	4,000,000
Greece	2008	Greeks strike over budget cuts and austerity	3,000,000
Portugal	2012	Portuguese protest austerity	3,000,000
Portugal	2010	Portuguese workers strike over budget cuts and austerity policies	3,000,000
France	2006	French students and citizens protest new labor law	2,600,000
Turkey	2013	Turks demand civil rights	2,500,000
France	2010	French protestors strike over pension reforms	2,375,000
France	2012	French demonstrators protest legalization of same-sex marriage	2,200,000
France	2009	French workers strike for economic justice against high cost of living, public jobs cuts, anti-austerity, in defense of employment and wages	2,100,000

(continued)

**Table 9** (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Start year</i>	<i>Protest issue</i>	<i>Estimated crowd count</i>
Brazil	2013	Protestors call for free transport and an end to Workers Party rule	2,000,000
Global	2013	Activists protest Monsanto and genetically modified crops	2,000,000
Indonesia	2012	Indonesian workers protest for better conditions and benefits	2,000,000
Italy	2009	Italians hold “No Berlusconi Day” in protest against Premier Berlusconi	2,000,000
Spain	2010	Spaniards protest cutbacks and austerity	2,000,000
Global	Yearly	1st May Labor Day each year	Millions
Global	2011	People around the world protest economic and social inequality	1,800,000
Kenya	2013	Kenyans demand justice for gang rape victim	1,800,000
Spain	2017	Catalonians demand independence from Spain	1,800,000
Italy	2007	Italians demonstrate against same-sex marriage	1,700,000
Spain	2012	Catalonians demand independence from Spain	1,700,000
Brazil	2011	Brazilians decry corruption, poor public services and lack of investment in education and health	1,500,000
Brazil	2005	Brazil’s Landless Workers Movement demands reforms and social justice	1,500,000
United States	2006	Americans demand immigrant rights	1,500,000

(continued)

**Table 9** (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Start year</i>	<i>Protest issue</i>	<i>Estimated crowd count</i>
Portugal	2007	Portuguese workers strike over government policies	1,400,000
China	2006	Hong Kong protests central government interference (multiple years)	1,300,000
United States, Global	2020	Q-Anon protests	1,280,000
Argentina	2012	Argentiniains protest President Fernández	1,000,000
Canada	2018	Canadians rally across country to call for bolder action on climate change	1,000,000
Chile	2016	Eliminate private pensions and demand a public pension system	1,000,000
Chile	2019	“Estallido social” Social outbreak demand public pensions, public services, new constitution	1,000,000
Colombia	2008	Colombian workers strike for better pay	1,000,000
France	2019	Protestors demonstrate against pension reforms	1,000,000
Global	2013	Bolivian president organizes People’s summit to protest imperialism and improve people’s lives	1,000,000
Italy	2011	Italian women protest against Berlusconi	1,000,000
Portugal	2012	Portuguese unions call strikes against austerity measures	1,000,000
Turkey	2007	Turks demand secularism	1,000,000
Yemen	2011	Yemenis demand democratic rule	1,000,000

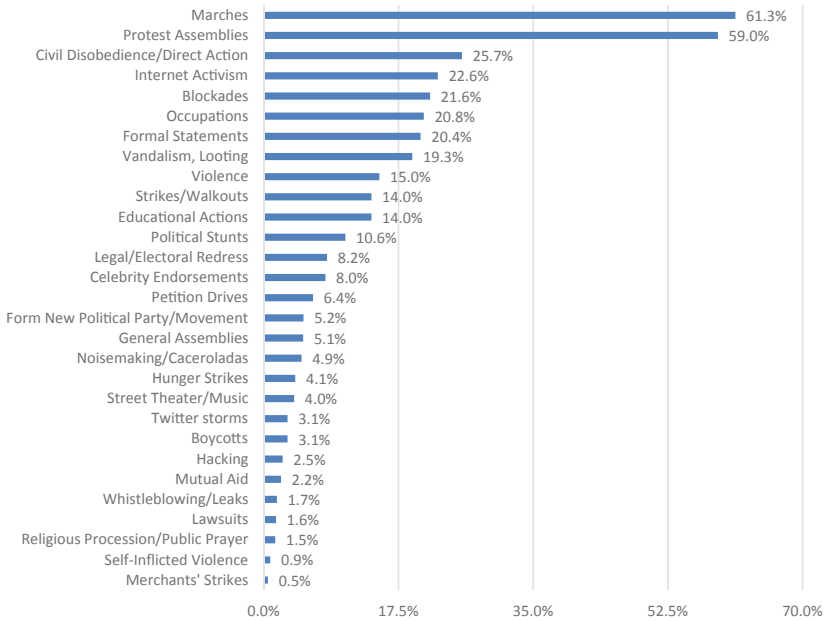
Source Media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

## 8.2 *Protests and Civic Space*

Are the increasing number of protests and protestors caused by improved civic conditions and political freedoms, or—to the contrary, do they have a tendency to increase when there is repressed civic space? To answer



(Sharp, 1973). Our research finds that marches and protest assemblies (or rallies), blockades, occupations and other kinds of civil disobedience/direct action, as well as Internet activism, are the most common methods of protest in the period 2006–2020, presented in Fig. 17.



**Fig. 17** Methods of protests 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

### 9.1 *Marches and Protest Assemblies/Rallies*

Demonstrations usually take the form of a public gathering of people in a rally or walking in a march. Together, marches, protest assemblies, and rallies are by far the most common methods of protest encountered in the study. They occurred in 1056 protests, in almost every country covered.

### 9.2 *Blockades, Occupations and Civil Disobedience/Direct Action*

Blockades are another common method of protest, identified in 21% of protests. Civil disobedience involving the occupation of a public square, street, government building, or factory—a tactic made notorious by the occupations of Tahrir Square in Egypt, Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Spain, Zuccotti Park in New York and Gezi Park in Istanbul—is the next most common method of protest, present in 20.9% of the protests. Other kinds of civil disobedience and direct action appear in 177 events. These two methods—to occupy and to commit civil disobedience—while against the law in most instances, are nevertheless becoming established as acceptable tactics to the middle classes acting in new social movements in all regions, for instance, women in Saudi Arabia who defy laws against their right to drive cars, or the “Walk to Work” and “Walk to Pray” protests in Uganda, when the government declared gatherings of more than two people to be illegal: these are examples of civil disobedience.

### 9.3 *Strikes and Walkouts*

Strikes and walkouts have been traditional protest methods used by trade unions to request better working conditions for workers at the company level or—less often—at the national level (general strike). We recorded more than 148 strikes of different types in the period 2006–2020. Most common are strikes by sectoral groups of workers and trade unions, including those by: Bangladeshi garment workers and by Chinese manufacturing workers demanding better working conditions and wages; miners in Colombia; truckers in the Ivory Coast; oil workers in Kazakhstan and Libya; merchants in Iran; electricity workers in Mexico; jeepney drivers in Philippines; metal workers in Turkey; and health workers in Kenya and South Africa demanding adequate equipment and support to fight COVID-19. For the purposes of analysis, we

have recorded even strikes by police and the military requesting better working conditions in Ecuador and Somalia, as well as global strikes like the ones organized by Amazon workers. National general strikes were organized in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, France, Greece, India, Portugal, and Spain. Today, strikes are also used by protest groups other than trade unions: there are examples of strikes to press governments to fight corruption and to improve democracy, as in Angola, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria; in Nepal, to end the rule of the king; in Pakistan, to denounce land grabs; in Yemen, to demand secession of the South of the country. People have also: struck for better pensions in Italy and the United States; protested low incomes in Egypt and Indonesia; and against privatization in Chile and Jamaica. Students and teachers also went to strike in many countries against education budget cuts, tuition fees, and curricula changes, for example in Canada, Chad, China, Denmark, Hungary, Japan, and Peru.

#### 9.4 *Vandalism/Looting*

Vandalism and looting were used in about 20% of the protests recorded in this study. This is a method condemned by defenders of nonviolent protests given the large arsenal of peaceful methods available for use in people's struggles (250 such methods are presented in Annex B). Of the cases recorded in the period 2006–2020, some examples are: radical right protests for a return to monarchy, against LGBT and corruption in Brazil; “we are hungry” protests against the COVID-19 lockdown, lack of jobs and social services in Chile and Senegal; against electoral fraud in Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Honduras and the United States; against austerity budget cuts imposed by the IMF in Ecuador and Greece; Oromia protests in Ethiopia; “yellow vests” protests in France and Ireland; anti G20 protests in Germany; violence by “cow vigilantes” in India; radical right protests against immigrants in Germany and Israel; and riots on rising fuel/food prices and low living standards in Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Mexico, and Zimbabwe. More on violent protests can be found in Section 12.



### 9.5 *Internet Activism and Whistleblowing/Leaks*

Online activism and digital campaigning have become main protest methods employed by social movements, using electronic communication technologies such as social media, email, and podcasts for message dissemination, organizing, and fundraising. For example, during the Arab Spring in 2011, millions of Egyptians rebelled against President Mubarak; for 18 days, Egyptians were able to broadcast videos and images of their struggle for the whole world to see using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, challenging the official government narrative issued by state media. Examples abound, for instance Nigeria’s youth began spreading tweets with the hashtag #EndSARS<sup>10</sup> to call for an end to police brutality, weeks later demonstrations took place in major cities and the hashtag #EndSARS had by then become a movement for social justice. The period covered by this study also captures the advent of a new era of civil disobedience/direct action carried out by computer hackers and whistleblowers who “leak” massive amounts of government and corporate data, from the publishing of Wikileaks “Iraq and Afghan War Diaries,” a set of 391,000 classified United States State Department cables and reports made public in October 2010 and linked by Amnesty International to the igniting of protests in Tunisia at the beginning of the Arab Spring.

### 9.6 *Pot-Banging/Noisemaking, Street Music, Educational Events*

Noisemaking has been a traditional method of protest. In most of the Latin countries, this takes the form of banging pots and casseroles (“*cacerolada*”), signifying the protest of ordinary women and men against the powerful. Drums have been used by protestors in several countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, India, Iraq, Israel, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, and the United States. Street music, theater, and educational events have been utilized in many peaceful protests. Protest songs have been strongly associated with social change movements. For instance, the Chilean anti-rapist song “A rapist in your path” has become a feminist anthem performed by women at mass protests all over the world.

<sup>10</sup> Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious unit of the Nigerian Police.

### 9.7 *Boycotts and Legal/Paralegal Methods*

Boycotts are an old method of protest, consisting of abstaining from using, buying, or dealing with a good, person, organization or country. For example, Palestinians have boycotted products made in the settlements, and Arabs have boycotted products from Israel. More than 20 boycotts were recorded in the period 2006–2020. Increasingly, activists and ordinary citizens are pushing groundbreaking legal action to force governments into action. Lawsuits are effective when a case is raised through legal channels, for instance, as it was pursued in the #MeToo movement in which many women went forward to sue male harassers; or by black New Yorkers launching a class-action lawsuit in 2013 to tackle discrimination by the police; or indigenous leaders in Brazil suing President Bolsonaro for crimes against humanity by targeting tribes and the Amazon rainforest; or the M-15 (the Spanish Occupy) suing Rodrigo Rato, former head of the IMF and of the Spanish private bank Bankia, recruiting pro bono lawyers and identifying more than 50 plaintiffs—people who lost their savings during the financial crisis because they had been defrauded by Bankia. In the face of the slow politics of climate change, activists and lawyers have also increased climate change litigation to advance progress. Another method is enacting People’s Popular Tribunals, or People’s Courts: while these hold no official power of jurisdiction, they represent an attempt to achieve symbolic justice for crimes against humanity. For example, there was a People’s Tribunal to judge free trade, violence, impunity, and peoples’ rights in Mexico (2011–2014); a People’s Tribunal Hearing took place in Brussels in 2014 to judge austerity measures imposed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF, designed to make governments adhere to strict fiscal policies, to restructure labor markets and social policies, resulting in violations of Human Rights and a rollback of democratic achievements.

### 9.8 *Hunger Strikes and Self-Inflicted Violence*

Hunger strikes were identified in 30 protests in the period 2006–2020. Prisoners in Kyrgyzstan went on hunger strike to denounce demeaning living conditions, demanding mattresses and better food; and prisoners in the Occupied Palestinian Territory struck to end administrative detention. In Hong Kong, people went on hunger strike to protest against

an extradition law and police violence; in India, demonstrators went on strike to save the Ganges from a hydroelectric project. Though more rarely employed, desperate methods such as self-immolation or protesters sewing their own lips together are also among the methods used, particularly for those in prison (e.g., Bolivia, Kyrgyzstan, and Malaysia). There are also those who do not see any method of protest other than suicide (e.g., Bulgarian protests against Borisov in 2013) or those whose dignity has been destroyed by deprivation and the brutality of the authorities (e.g., in Hungary, India, and Tunisia). Finally, there is Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in 2010 because of the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation inflicted on him by a municipal officials, which became the catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring.

For the list of 250 available non-violent methods of protest, see Annex B.

## 10 WHO DO PROTESTERS OPPOSE?

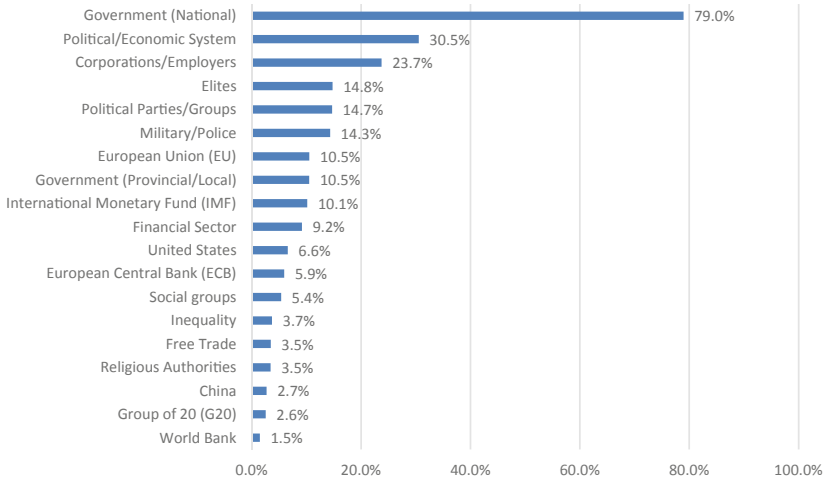
Just as key objectives of this research are to find out who is protesting (and how and why), it is also important to identify the main targets, or opponents, of the protests. Figure 18 reflects the main targets of world protests in the period 2006–2020.

### 10.1 *Governments*

The most frequent target for protesters, by a wide margin, is their own national government—as the legitimate policy-making institution responsible to citizens. Nearly 80% of all protests demand that governments take responsibility for economic, social, and environmental policies so that they benefit all, instead of the few. This is further developed in Section 2 in Chapter 3 (“Protests and the Perception that Governments Serve a Few”).

### 10.2 *Political/Economic System*

The next most frequent target for protesters is the inadequate political and economic system, which comprises 30.5% of all protests, reflecting significant discontent with the working of current democracies. Examples include: Australians protesting against the APEC trade agreement



**Fig. 18** Main targets of world protests, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

in 2012: Brazilians protesting corruption during the Rousseff, Temer and Bolsonaro presidencies (2015–2019); Canadian, French and German “yellow vests” protests; Chileans protesting during the *Estallido Social* in 2018; Congolese protesting corruption in 2012; and Egyptians and Tunisians uprisings during the Arab Spring.

### 10.3 Corporations/Employers

Together, corporations and employers are the third most common adversary of protests, appearing in 23.7% of total protests, relating to: (i) opposition to corporate vested interests influencing policy-making (e.g., Australia, Egypt, Germany, Greece, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States), (ii) labor disputes and requests to employers for better wages and working conditions (e.g., Bangladesh, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Ireland, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam), (iii) confronting private interests in natural resource extraction (e.g., Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Madagascar, Myanmar, Romania, and Vietnam), (iv) construction of infrastructure by corporations with negative environmental and social impacts (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, China,

India, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, South Africa, and the United States), and (v) local businesses' inability to compete with large foreign corporations (e.g., Colombia, India, Mexico, Spain, and the United Kingdom).

#### 10.4 *Elites*

Protests against the privilege of elites drive nearly 15% of total protests. For example, the global and United States Occupy movement against the richest 1%; the protest in El Salvador against the elite's power abuse, including the killing of Father Romero; Germany's Blockupy and Greek protests against bankers; protests against abusive landowners in India; demonstrations against the Mafia in Italy; protests against the new oil elites in Kazakhstan and Nigeria; protests against the drug cartels in Mexico; protests against feudal landlords in Pakistan; and against corrupt elites in Peru and the Philippines.

#### 10.5 *Political Parties*

About 14.7% of protests target specific political parties or groups (e.g., Canada, Egypt, Italy, Libya, Philippines, Russia, Tunisia, Turkey, and in the United States). More than 4% of protests target local governments.

#### 10.6 *Military/Police*

Taken together, these armed forces are the target of 14.3% of the world's protests. Protests against police brutality have been increasing over the years in all continents; an example can be found in the recent protests first in the United States and then globally against police brutality and for #BlackLivesMatter. Military intervention is another focus of protests, denouncing military abuses (e.g., Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan), and military presence (e.g., Mali, Niger, Japan, and the Philippines).

#### 10.7 *The European Union and European Central Bank (ECB)*

The European Union is a target in 10.5% of all protests, mostly against the imposition of measures not decided on democratically by citizens of a country, such as the imposition of austerity cuts and reforms in European countries. Closely linked are protests against the European Central

Bank (5.9% of all protests) for its role in inflicting adjustment policies in the region. Demonstrations focused upon the European Union have also occurred in countries where governments are entering into free-trade agreements with the European Union (e.g., Colombia, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, and Vietnam).

### *10.8 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank*

The IMF is a target of 10.1% of total protests, which are generally associated with policy conditions with negative social impacts linked to austerity cuts, such as the removal of subsidies, pension and labor reforms, wage bill cuts/caps, the rationalization of safety nets, privatizations, raising VAT rates, and others. By comparison, the World Bank is the target of only 1.5% of worldwide protests. Protests against the IMF at global level include virtually all of the 1st of May Labor Day events and all WSFs—the latter sometimes also at the time of the Annual Meetings of the IMF and World Bank, and of the World Economic Forum; at national level, protests generally occur when the government and the IMF sign a program loan, as this typically contains cuts in social services, for example, in Argentina, Bangladesh, Greece, Haiti, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Tunisia. In 2019 in Ecuador, riots against budget cuts and reforms agreed between the Moreno Administration and the IMF lasted for days until the government fled from the capital and postponed the IMF program loan.

### *10.9 Financial Sector*

Protests against the financial sector represent more than 9.2% of protests. For example, in countries where pensions were privatized or there are discussions about possible privatization that would benefit the financial sector and insurance companies (e.g., Brazil, Chile, and France). Protests against the financial sector were prevalent during the global financial crisis (e.g., Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States); for example, the Occupy Wall Street occupation of Zuccotti Park in the middle of the financial district in New York.

### 10.10 *The United States of America*

Protests against the United States represent 6.6% of all protests, and relate to anti-imperialism protests alleging the abuse of economic, political, and military power. These are particularly prevalent at the global level and in Latin America as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. They have often been linked to protests against military intervention or the presence of United States military bases (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, Japan, Philippines, and Ukraine). In Asia anti-imperialist protests frequently target China.

## 11 WHAT DO PROTESTS ACHIEVE?

In this study, “achievements” are understood as the set of direct and indirect responses from opponents or by society to a protest episode, responding in some measure to the grievances and demands raised by protestors. In this sense, our research shows that 42% of protests resulted in some kind of demonstrable achievement (Fig. 19). For example, in the period 2006–2020 there were many protests against GMOs and Monsanto. In 2013, one of the biggest global protests had a clear demand: stop GMOs Eventually, the objective of this protest movement

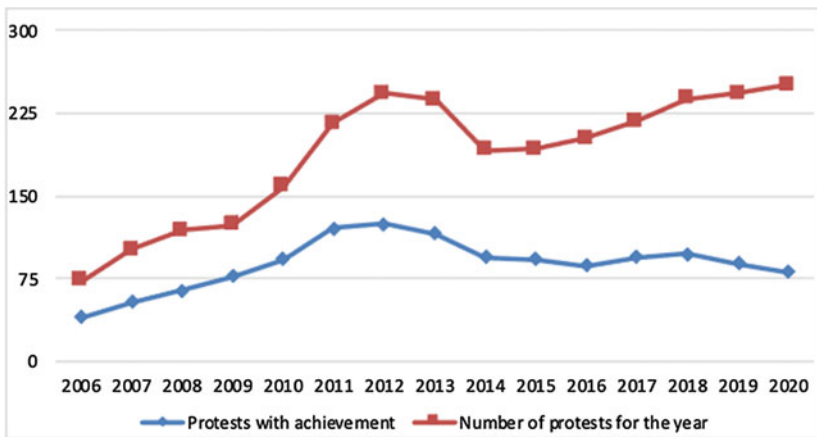


Fig. 19 Number of protests and achievements by year, 2006–2020 (Source Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

was achieved in Mexico, although not in other countries. In this study, that partial success is counted as an achievement, even though it was not fully accomplished. It must also be noted that success is rarely the result of one protest event alone, but rather of what we designate as a protest episode—this is, many years of protests insisting on the same grievance/demand.

Looking at the differences in achievement between the regions examined in this study, our analysis shows that in South Asia 61% of protest episodes (protests on the same topic over many years) achieved some demonstrable success, whereas global protest episodes have only had a 21% success rate. The rate of success is 50% for East and Asia and the Pacific, 48% for the Middle East and North Africa, 46% for North America, 45% for Sub-Saharan Africa, 39% for Europe and Central Asia, and 38% for Latin America and the Caribbean. In terms of country-income groups, it is in the lower-middle income countries where 50% of protest episodes have resulted in some kind of achievement, compared to 43% in upper-middle income countries, 42% in low-income countries, and 40% in high-income countries.

Focusing on the demands/grievances, the data shows that all the main areas have a similar rate of achievement. The achievement rate of the category “failure of political representation and political systems” is 42%; achievements include, for example, the adoption of a new constitution (e.g., in Chile, Iceland, and Morocco), changes to laws, the resignation of presidents/ministers (e.g., in Algeria, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, Peru, Romania, South Korea, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Ukraine, Yemen, and Zimbabwe), the exposure of government secrets (e.g., Manning/Wikileaks in the United States), or the holding of a dialogue on politically difficult issues (e.g., in China, Colombia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, and Poland).

Economic justice and anti-austerity protests also have an achievement rate of 42%. Achievements include labor victories (e.g., wage rises in Bangladesh, Chad or the United Arab Emirates in 2007–2008, the banning of UBER in Colombia in 2020); demands related to subsidies (e.g., Bolivia in 2010, Ecuador in 2019, and Nigeria in 2010, all these countries had subsidies reinstated after protests); land reforms (e.g., In Brazil in 2020 and India in 2012); taxes (e.g., Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast lowered taxes on basic goods after protests in 2008; a



tax on the Internet was cancelled in Hungary in 2014; a new tax bill was cancelled in Japan in 2018); pension reforms (e.g., attempts to reform pensions without adequate social dialogue were stopped in France in 2010, Nicaragua in 2013, Portugal in 2010, and Russia in 2018); reforms of public services (e.g., protesters in Ireland rebelled against austerity-induced water charges in 2016; in South Africa, students achieved the cancellation of fee increases in 2016); mining (e.g., El Salvador, Indonesia, and Peru); or labor market reforms (e.g., in France in 2006), among many others. There are also many protestor achievements linked to stopping or stalling urban development and infrastructure projects (e.g., after multiple protests, construction was stopped in Bulgaria, Chile, China, Guatemala, India, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, and Poland; Germany agreed to close all its nuclear power plants by 2022).

Civil rights also have an achievement rate of 42%; for example, after years of activism, in 2019 in Iran a law was passed stipulating hard penalties for acid attacks; in Saudi Arabia women were officially allowed to vote in 2015 and to drive in 2018; in Senegal, women could vote in the 2015 elections; in Pakistan in a 2006 law, protestors achieved the removal of *zina* (fornication crime) and the end of rape victims being prosecuted for adultery; in India education quotas for lower castes were preserved in 2006; in Indonesia freedom of religion was enforced in 2017 after protests against and for the Governor of Jakarta who was accused of committing blasphemy of the Quran; in Mauritania in 2020 the arrest of slave owners was an achievements against modern slavery.

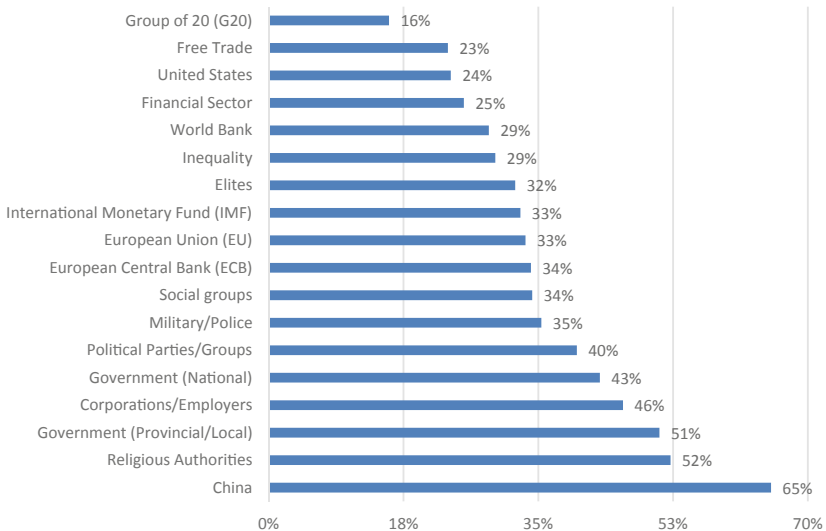
The global justice achievement rate is 41%, defined as some success, for example, after years of Africans protesting Economic Partnership Agreements with Europe, in 2020 seven countries (Botswana, Namibia, Cameroun, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Swaziland) have still not ratified the agreements.

Numbers may appear pessimistic in terms of the rate of success of protestors. However, these outcomes are not necessarily negative, since many of the protests are engaged with long-term structural issues that may yield results over a long period of time; incremental or short-term achievements may prove to be precursors to more comprehensive change.

The analysis of achievements leads us to differentiate between two types of protests. First, there are protests that could be identified as having “concrete” demands. This is the case for protests demanding a rise in wages (Bangladesh 2007), a reinstatement of subsidies (Bolivia 2010), or the halt of the construction of a dam (India 2010). Such demands can be

more achievable due to their concreteness and the fact that they usually do not challenge the status quo. A second category includes protests that are designed to achieve structural change, a complete change of power relations, in order to replace them with other systems based on different views of social justice (Izquierdo-Brichs & Etherington, 2017). Success in these types of protests is more complicated to achieve, as it would require a regime change. However, a number of cases can be identified in 2006–2020, such as the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt (2011), Iceland during the 2008 financial crisis, or the *October Revolution* in Lebanon. Although in such cases the system was not deeply transformed (some interpret changes as “concessions” by the political elites), these events can have a lasting impact that should not be underestimated.

This point is illustrated in Fig. 20. The more structural and distant the opponents are, the more difficult they are to fight, as we can see in the case of groups like the G20, the financial sector in a country, the IMF, or the ECB. When it comes to structural issues like free-trade, inequality, imperialism, distant elites, and the military, all protests against



**Fig. 20** Achievements by targeted opponent, 2006–2020 (Source Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

them have relatively low achievement rates. Protests against governments (both national and local), religious authorities, employers and corporations, have higher rates of success. Interestingly, a majority of protests against the Chinese government, normally on concrete issues, have a greater chance of achieving some result (65%), than those against the United States, which have only a 23% chance of success.

In terms of the methods of protest, the most successful—although not the most frequent—are merchant’s strikes, with a 75% achievement rate (e.g., Iran’s merchants achieving a reduction in the gold tax) followed by whistleblowing and leaks (71%), hacking (64%), and boycotts (63%). On the other hand, the less successful methods are general assemblies (23%), street theater (30%), noise making/pot banging (31%), educational actions (34%) and Twitter storms (36%). Vandalism/looting and violence only show a 43% success rate; note that self-inflicted violence is in a separate category, with a 50% success rate.

Regarding which groups of protesters have more success with their demands, those with the highest achievement rates unsurprisingly are employers/organizations (80% achievement rate), followed by the military/police (50%). The least successful are women (33%), then ethnic/racial groups (31%) and finally prisoners (25%).

It is also important to highlight that several of the achievements identified in the research relate to changes in public debates. This is an intangible success that however can have a significant impact in reframing debates and bringing issues into the global political agenda. This type of achievement should not be overlooked. Three examples illustrate this. The first one is Occupy Wall Street (2011), in which citizens protested against Wall Street bailouts, denounced inequality and the privileges of the financial sector in shaping the political agenda. The famous motto “We are the 99%” became a slogan heard in many parts of the world, pushing the inequality agenda to center stage. The second one is the UK Uncut (2011) movement, which also emerged during the 2008 financial crisis, denouncing austerity cuts and unfair tax practices of multinational corporations. This movement gave a push to the tax justice agenda. Lastly the #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos movements linked to women’s rights have set the agenda on gender justice and have encouraged girls and women all over the world to stand up for their rights.

## 12 VIOLENCE, REPRESSION, AND SURVEILLANCE

This chapter will address the issue of violence, both by protestors and against protestors. These two are highly asymmetrical. As presented, the levels of repression of protestors in terms of injuries and deaths are completely unjustified. Protests and other diverse forms of public participation are an essential part of democratic societies. A State's prerogative to use force with a view to maintaining law and order is guided under the norms established in international law. Universal and regional Human Rights agreements protect the right to protest, recognizing the rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and opinion, and freedom of association, including trade union rights (United Nations, 2012, 2013; INCLO, 2013).

### 12.1 *Limited but Increasing Protestors' Violence*

We first examine violence by protestors. Despite the large movements committed to non-violent protest, violence has occurred.<sup>11</sup> Figure 21 shows protests with violence by the crowd, vandalism, and looting. On average, about 20% of protests included some crowd violence, vandalism, or looting. The trend shows a minor but steady increase in violent protests.

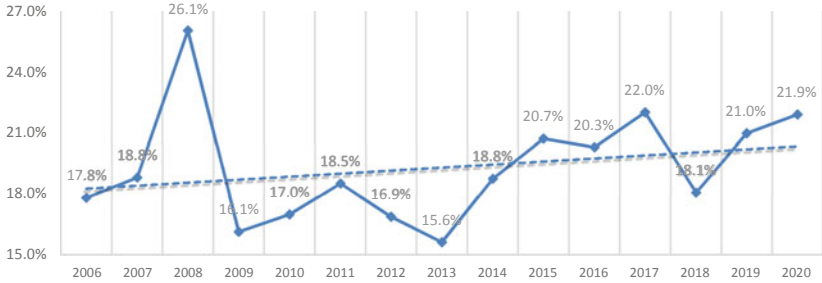
The spike in 2008 is caused by the large number of so-called “food riots.” Most food- and fuel-price protests were directly related to the removal of subsidies and the implementation of regressive taxes, often advised by the IMF and other IFIs. Many of these subsistence protests—which have spiked to historic levels since 2008—were labelled “riots” in the press coverage. Beginning in January 2007, “tortilla riots” were reported in Mexico, as farmers protested price rises upon implementation of the final stages of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the ensuing months commodity prices continued to climb, setting off miners' strikes and food price protests in Peru (Schneider, 2008: 41–47). In July, as commodity prices reached a worldwide peak,

<sup>11</sup> Note that protests taking place in countries experiencing armed conflict with external forces, civil war, or both (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) make counting protests by our research method impractical, in part because international news reports do not cover civil protests, and archives containing local sources in conflict zones are particularly difficult to access.

food riots were reported in India (in August), Morocco and Uzbekistan (in September), China, Mauritania, and Senegal (in November). By the end of 2008, more riots and violent protests to demand affordable food had been reported in at least 22 countries. In the run-up to the 2020–2021 Arab Spring, food protests were the dominant way to demand government accountability, especially in commodity-dependent developing countries. Food “riots” were not as violent as portrayed, and the violence often came not from protesters but from the police crackdown. Reports with rabid headlines then appeared, and governments took note of them, frequently implementing modest rollbacks and other concessions in the ensuing weeks or months. A good example is when Al Jazeera reported in September 2007 “Morocco rolls back bread price hike: violent protests force government to withdraw 30 per cent hike in bread prices.” The headline failed to accurately characterize the protest, which had been organized by the Moroccan Association for Human Rights as a peaceful sit-in. Nevertheless, the specter of violence gave the government the necessary cover to retract an unpopular policy.

Violence by crowds has also occurred in large “omnibus” demonstrations protesting hardship and many compounded issues, untenable systems, and lack of change (e.g., Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Germany, Greece, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Montenegro, Nepal, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Spain, Sudan, Syria, and the global protests against the G20), also when there is popular anger on a specific issue (e.g., the Dominican Republic’s suspension of elections, the killing of an ethnic singer in Ethiopia, election irregularities in Mali, the killing of 43 students in Mexico, and Israel’s intifada). It must be noted that far right or radical right protests tend to be more violent (e.g., in Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, India, Indonesia, Poland, Serbia, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

Vandalism/looting usually involves violence against property and/or symbolic places, for example, when French farmers vandalized the office of Macron’s party lawmaker protesting the European Union-Canada trade deal, or when they dumped several tons of manure and rotten vegetables in protest at falling food prices. Vandalism/looting has been an increasing method of protest, reported in countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Congo, Ecuador,



**Fig. 21** Riots and violent protests, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

Ethiopia, Germany, Greece, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Thailand, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

### *12.2 Increasing Repression and Surveillance of Protestors: Arrests, Injuries, and Deaths*

Repression of some kind—resulting in arrests, surveillance, injuries and deaths due to state-organized violence—is documented in 62% of the protests analyzed in this study. This is a soft figure, as reliable data on repression can be difficult to secure from news sources alone, and—as with the determination of protest size—it is beyond the scope of this research to conduct a special analysis of repression based on an examination of police reports and other such materials. However, an examination of repression as documented in journalistic sources suggests that more research needs to be done on what appears to be a wide disparity between the Global North and South in terms of the repression of protest by authorities and the coverage of protests in the news media. Many protests in countries of the Global South have a secondary presence in the international news media, often even when the number of protesters killed, injured, or arrested is very large and is therefore only reflected in local and alternative media sources.

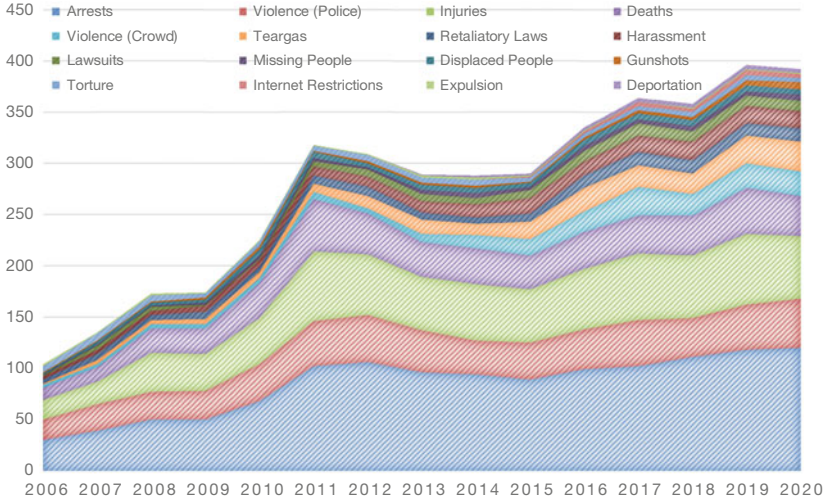
Table 10 presents the evolution of reported repression of protestors since 2006. With the number of protests increasing, in the period 2006–2020 there was a rapid increase of protestors’ repression, visualized in Fig. 22. The most common methods of repression are arrests, police violence, injuries, and deaths. Arrests occur in 45% of protests in 2006–2020 and close to half of all protests in more recent years (2016–2020). Police violence appears in about 27% of protests. While injuries and deaths have been decreasing slightly, they are very high, recorded in 19 and 17% of all protests respectively. It must be noted that arrests are directly linked to repression, but a number of the injuries and deaths may be a result of widespread violent clashes between opposing protest groups rather than between protesters and the authorities.

Other reported methods of repression in the period 2006–2020 include teargas, retaliatory laws, harassment, lawsuits, missing people, displaced people, gunshots, torture, Internet restrictions, expulsion, and deportation. Our research has also documented rising concern with some modes of repression which do not involve the use of physical violence.

**Table 10** Reported repression of protests, 2006–2020

	2006–2010 (%)	2011–2015 (%)	2016–2020 (%)	Overall (%)
Arrests	41.1	45.1	47.7	45.4
Violence (Police)	27.8	26.5	27.3	27.1
Injuries	23.8	18.5	18.6	19.6
Deaths	18.9	17.9	17.0	17.7
Violence (crowd)	3.5	5.7	10.4	7.2
Teargas	3.3	4.5	10.2	6.6
Retaliatory laws	4.2	5.4	7.1	5.8
Harassment	4.7	3.5	5.5	4.6
Lawsuits	1.9	3.1	4.5	3.4
Missing people	4.9	2.4	1.9	2.7
Displaced people	2.8	2.2	2.5	2.5
Gunshots	1.4	1.6	2.1	1.7
Torture	1.4	0.7	1.7	1.3
Internet restrictions	0.0	0.5	1.6	0.9
Expulsion	0.0	0.1	1.6	0.7
Deportation	1.2	0.6	0.3	0.6

Source Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>



**Fig. 22** Reported repression of protests, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>)

These new forms of control are enabled by new laws and arrangements between governments, private companies, and national security agencies, and are reported in a number of countries such as Australia, Canada, China, India, Iran, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.

According to media reports, the protests that generated the most arrests in the period 2006–2020 were—in order of largest number of people affected—in Hong Kong, Egypt, France, Iran, the United Kingdom, Russia, Sudan, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Cameroon, with 10,000–1000 arrests per protest (Table 11). The protests that resulted in the largest numbers of reported injuries were in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, followed by Egypt, Chile, Thailand, Ecuador, Lebanon, Algeria, Hungary, and Indonesia. In terms of deaths, the worst outcomes were Kyrgyzstan, Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Kenya and Iran; these countries reported thousands of casualties among protestors.



**Table 11** Protests with high numbers of reported arrests, injuries and deaths 2006–2020

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Protest grievance/demand</i>	<i>Estimated No.</i>
<i>Reported arrests</i>			
Hong Kong	2019–2020	Protesting extradition law and subsequent police violence	10,000
Egypt	2020	Protest demanding resignation of President Al Sisi and release of political prisoners	4300
France	2018–2020	Yellow vests anti-system movement	4000
Iran	2009–2010	Iran election protests	4000
United Kingdom	2011	London ++ riots after a man was killed by the police in the context of recession and austerity	3200
Russia	2011	Electoral fraud, against President Putin	3000
Russia	2019	Rejection of independent candidate in the Moscow Duma election	3000
Sudan	2011–2019	Sudanese protest leading to ousting of president Omar Al Bashir	2000
Chile	2011	Student movement against proposed education reforms	2000
Malaysia	2011	Against the privatization of water management	1700
Mexico	2017	Mexicans against hike in energy prices	1400
United States of America	2006	1st May Labor Day demonstrations demanding better jobs, justice for immigrants	1200
Canada	2010	Anti G20 demonstrations	1118
Cameroon	2008	Food and fuel price riots, low living standards	1000
United Kingdom	2018–2020	Extinction Rebellion	1000
<i>Reported injured</i>			

(continued)

**Table 11** (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Protest grievance/demand</i>	<i>Estimated No.</i>
Occupied Territory of Palestine	2018–2019	The Israeli blockade of Gaza	9000
Egypt	2011	End of the 31-year-old state of emergency, departure of president Mubarak, lack of democracy	6460
Chile	2019–2020	“Estallido social” social outbreak demand public social services, public pensions, new constitution	5400
Thailand	2010	Prime Minister Abhisit to stand down as he did not come to power legitimately, call for elections	2000
Ecuador	2019–2020	Against austerity cuts, reforms agreed with the IMF, and President Moreno	1500
Lebanon	2019–2020	October Revolution against corruption, lack of jobs, and calling for more public services	1200
Algeria	2010–2011	Democracy, state of emergency state, high food and oil prices	826
Hungary	2006	Protests in Hungary demanding the Prime Minister’s resignation after he was recorded admitting lies about the economic situation during the electoral campaign	800
Indonesia	2019	Presidential challenger Subianto claimed cheating on elections and refused to accept defeat	600
<i>Reported deaths</i> Kyrgyzstan	2010	Against President Bakiyev’s government corruption, high heating costs and living expenses, ethnic violence	2600

(continued)

**Table 11** (continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Protest grievance/demand</i>	<i>Estimated No.</i>
Egypt	2013	Military coup of July 3, 2013	2000
Occupied Territory of Palestine	2013–2014	Protesting Israel's imperialism and conflict	2000
Kenya	2007–2008	Outrage at election results declaring President Kibabi winner, other grievances	1500
Iran	2019–2020	Sparked by Increase in fuel prices, then expanded to include corruption and regime change reinforced in January 2020 by the shooting down of a Ukrainian airliner by Iran	1500
Egypt	2011	End of the 31-year-old state of emergency, departure of President Mubarak, lack of democracy	840
Ethiopia	2015–2018	Human rights abuses, distribution of wealth, political marginalization	500
Sudan	2011–2019	Sudanese protest leading to ousting of president Omar Al Bashir	200

*Source* Authors' analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/>

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