CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract The Introduction of “World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century” provides the background and methodology of the study, including the countries covered. It also describes the structure of the volume chapter by chapter, from protestors’ demands and methods to achievements and repression, guiding the reader through the content of the book. An annex presents 250 methods of non-violent protest.

Keywords Protests · Social movements · Democracy · Crisis · Civil rights · Human rights · Social justice

1 BACKGROUND

The two first decades of the twenty-first century saw an increasing number of protests around the world. From Africa to Europe, from the Americas to Asia, people have taken to the streets demanding real democracy, jobs, better public services, civil rights, social justice, and an end to abuse, corruption and austerity, among many other demands. What these protests have in common—regardless of where they take place geographically or where their demonstrators are on the political spectrum—are

failures of democracy and of economic and social development, fueled by discontent and a lack of faith in the official political processes. The main findings of this study indicate that social unrest rose in every region during the period covered.

This book presents the results of a protest event analysis¹ undertaken in 2013 and 2020 by a team of four researchers.² The study analyzes data on 2809 protests, which made up more than 900 protest movements. These took place in 101 countries, and a great number of protests also crossed international boundaries. The research compiles data from 15 years of news reports available online, mainly in six languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish, although some research was contributed referencing news reports in Mandarin and Hindi) and published between January 2006 and December 2020. These reports covered a variety of protests, from demonstrations and strikes, to the campaigns of social and political movements, to unorganized crowd actions such as riots.³

This publication contributes to the analysis of protests in several ways. It expands the mapping of protests in the period 2006–2020 beyond non-violent protests (Leahey, 2013) and beyond English language big-data mining databases (Leetaru & Schrodt, 2013) as well as expanding the amount of information and the period covered by other websites such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Global Protests Tracker.⁴ This publication also provides new insights on areas earlier developed by scholars investigating who protests (Chen & Suen, 2017; della Porta, 2017), why (Barrett & Chen, 2021; Brannen et al., 2020; Brancati, 2016; Caren et al., 2017; Carothers & Youngs, 2015), methods of protests (Leahey, 2013; Sharp, 1973) and other issues.

¹ Protest event analysis (PEA) is a research method developed by sociologists over the past few decades to map, analyze and interpret occurrences and properties of large numbers of protests by means of content analysis, via sources such as newspaper reports (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002).

² This book updates earlier work presented in Ortiz et al. (2013).

³ Excluded from the research sample are those periods when protests escalate into armed conflicts in certain countries (e.g. Libya, Syria, Yemen); however, we have included protests in earlier years in these countries.

⁴ The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Global Protests Tracker focuses exclusively on major antigovernment protests since 2017, drawn from English-language news sources; it excludes rallies in support of political and personal causes. See: <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker> (last accessed on 4.8.2021).

Many have questioned why the world has been increasingly shaken by protests in recent years. Some authors have pointed to the enabling role played by rising protests in the preservation of civic space (CIVICUS, 2020a, 2020b), the development of communication technologies (Carothers & Youngs, 2015; Qureshi, 2017) and the political use of disinformation (Brannen et al., 2020). These are all important factors, though not all carry the same weight.

Structural factors like economic change and democratic regression are necessary to fully explain the surge in protests (Carothers & Youngs, 2015; Caren et al., 2017; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). From Marx to Tocqueville, authors have written about unequal structural conditions and consciousness of injustice as crucial factors for protests and rebellion. Today, inequality is staggering, estimated to be the highest in history (United Nations, 2020; Oxfam, 2020, 2021). Four decades of neoliberal policies have generated more inequality and have eroded incomes and welfare for both lower and middle classes (della Porta, 2017; OECD, 2019; Ortiz & Cummins, 2019; Puschra & Burke, 2013; Schiffrin & Kircher-Allen, 2012; United Nations, 2020). Additionally, the world is experiencing the unrest effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Barrett & Chen, 2021; Sedik & Xu, 2020).

Our analysis shows that the number of demonstrations has increased steadily since 2006 and that protests have become more political due to disappointment with malfunctioning democracies, frustration with politicians, and a lack of trust in governments. By 2020, there were fewer protests about a specific issue (e.g., an education policy reform) and more “omnibus protests” in which demonstrators raised demands related to many issues. Not surprisingly, the most prevalent demand of protesters around the world in the period 2006–2020 was for “real democracy.”

Since almost three thousand protests were reviewed in this study, they were classified into four main categories, by descending frequency of occurrence: (i) protests related to the failure of political representation/political systems, focused on a lack of real democracy, corruption and other grievances; (ii) against economic injustice and austerity reforms; (iii) for civil rights, from indigenous/racial rights to women’s rights and personal freedoms; and (iv) protests for global justice and a better international system for all, instead of the few. An innovation of the book is in the statistics and graphs presented on these and other points of focus, and the numerous examples from all world regions.

Who protests? 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). Our study confirms the increasing involvement of unorganized citizens, grassroots movements, and young and old persons. People have taken to the streets in the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* (Outraged) and “yellow vests” movements of Europe, the Occupy movement in the United States, and in the *Estallido Social* (Social Uprising) in Chile and other countries in Latin America. Trade unions continue to be a major organizing power, leading some of the largest protests in history.

What methods do protesters use? Our research identifies 250 methods of protest, presented in Annex B, updating the pioneering study of 198 methods of nonviolent action by Gene Sharp (1973). Based on our research and given the technological leap that has been ongoing since the 1970s, we have been able to identify more than fifty new methods from recent experiences, such as digital and online activism.

Peaceful protests are a fundamental aspect of a vibrant democracy. Historically, protests have been a means to achieve fundamental rights at the national and international level (Tilly, 1978; United Nations, 2012). However, protesters confront repression in many countries. The link between protests and repression, or how governments react violently or with legal actions to quell protests, is well documented (see for instance, Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; INCLO, 2013). Governments, as the legitimate policy-making institutions responsible to their citizens, are the most frequent target for protesters. Governments react in diverse ways, sometimes repressing protests and sometimes conceding fully or partially to protestors’ demands. The book examines both repression by governments, as well as protestors’ successful achievement of policy goals from governments during the period 2006–2020.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study investigates protests in 101 countries and territories representing 93% of world population⁵ (Fig. 1), setting each event in time and place and identifying a number of other properties, including: main grievances/demands, who is protesting, what protest methods they use,

⁵ Based on 2020 data contained in United Nations (2019).

Algeria	Democratic	Israel	Nepal	Spain
Angola	Republic of	Italy	Nicaragua	Sri Lanka
Argentina	Congo	Ivory Coast	Niger	Sudan
Australia	Denmark	Jamaica	Nigeria	Syria
Bangladesh	Dominican	Japan	Oman	Tanzania
Belarus	Republic	Jordan	Pakistan	Thailand
Bolivia	Ecuador	Kazakhstan	Palestine,	Tunisia
Bosnia and	Egypt	Kenya	Occupied	Turkey
Herzegovina	El Salvador	Kosovo	Territory	Uganda
Brazil	Ethiopia	Kyrgyzstan	Peru	Ukraine
Bulgaria	France	Lebanon	Philippines	United Arab
Burkina Faso	Germany	Libya	Poland	Emirates
Cameroon	Ghana	Macedonia	Portugal	United
Canada	Greece	Madagascar	Romania	Kingdom
Chad	Guatemala	Malaysia	Russia	United States
Chile	Haiti	Mali	Saudi Arabia	of America
China	Honduras	Mauritania	Senegal	Uzbekistan
Colombia	Hungary	Mexico	Serbia	Vietnam
Global	Iceland	Montenegro	Singapore	Western
Croatia	India	Morocco	Slovenia	Sahara
Czech	Indonesia	Mozambique	Somalia	Yemen
Republic	Iran	Myanmar	South Africa	Zambia
	Ireland		South Korea	Zimbabwe

Fig. 1 List and map of countries covered in the study, 2006–2020 (*Source* Authors’ analysis of world protests in media sources 2006–2020, see: <https://worldprotests.org/> [Covered countries are darkened])

who their opponents/targets are, and what were the results of the protests, including achievements and repression. The objective of the study is to document and characterize major protests from two years prior to the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis to the end of 2020, to examine protest trends globally, regionally and according to country-income levels, and to present the main grievances and demands of protesters in order to better understand the drivers of social unrest.

The study references the media sources and data presented in the interactive World Protests website (<https://worldprotests.org/>), developed by the authors with support from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and Global Social Justice/Initiative for Policy Dialogue. In order to control for bias in the selection of news sources, a widely recognized challenge within the protest-event analysis framework, this study includes at least one internationally or regionally recognized media source per protest (e.g., *BBC News*, *CNN*, *Al Jazeera*, *Le Monde*, *El Pais*, *The New York Times*, and similar sources in the six main languages used for research: Arabic, English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish), augmented by at least one local or independent news, academic, or organizational source. This strategy for overcoming selectivity bias nevertheless does not fully represent all protests taking place, nor can the strategy compensate for the fact that international sources are more readily available online for the whole period, while national and especially local sources are less accessible via the Internet the older they are (Klandermans & Staggenborn, 2002).

The representation of protest movements in our database is weighed by their duration in time. We follow 906 protest movements or episodes⁶ around the globe, which are responsible for thousands of protest events. To simplify, we have marked each active year of an episode as one event: this leads to 2809 protests events overall, which places this database and its results at a mid-point between the automated, big-data query databases such as the GDELT project⁷ and the analytical movement analysis method that can be found in projects such as the Global Nonviolent

⁶ We use the word episode when referring to an entire period to avoid confusion with the usual understanding of movement as one organized group, an episode can have multiple movements fighting towards the same goal, that is especially relevant in the case of omnibus protests.

⁷ The GDELT Project. <https://www.gdeltproject.org/> (last accessed on 3.8.2021).

Action Database.⁸ Our approach has enabled us to track movements in meaningful detail while at the same time presenting general statistics as to why, how, who and where people protest at the aggregate level. Please refer to the Annex A for further notes on the methodology and statistical methods used.

3 ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

For ease of comprehension, this book has a straightforward structure in which two central chapters are distinguished. The main core of the book is the analysis of data to understand who protests, why and how they protest, as well as documenting achievements and fallbacks. The last part of the book looks at selected key issues, such as the rise of populism and radical right protests; protests and inequality, women and corruption; the main protests by region and understanding how protestors' demands link to Human Rights and development policies. A summary concluding chapter closes the book.

This introductory chapter has focused on a brief review of the literature and methodology and outlines the rest of the book. Chapter 2 presents the analysis of world protests 2006–2020. Section 1 in Chapter 2 starts by an overview, the aggregated numbers of protests by year and world regions.

Sections 2 to 6 in Chapter 2 analyze the main grievances and demands of protesters in the period 2006–2020, and how they evolve over time. Section 3 focuses on the most numerous cluster of protests, those due to failures of political representation and political systems, such as grievances related to 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.

Section 4 in Chapter 2 centers on grievances against economic injustice and austerity reforms; this second most numerous cluster includes protests caused by inadequate jobs, wages and/or labor conditions; reforms of public services; corporate influence, deregulation and privatization; inequality; tax and fiscal justice; low living standards; agrarian/land

⁸ *The Global Nonviolent Action Database*. See <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> (last accessed on 3.8.2021).

reform; high fuel and energy prices; pension reform; housing and high food prices.

Section 5 in Chapter 2 presents the third most numerous cluster, civil rights' demands in areas such as 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 rights of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people (LGBT); immigrant rights; personal freedoms; prisoners rights and religious issues. This cluster also includes protests that sought to deny rights or reject equal rights for a group (e.g., against minorities such as migrants), generally linked to radical right protests.

Section 6 in Chapter 2 concentrates on demands for global justice, such as for environmental and climate justice; also grievances against the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the European Union and the European Central Bank (ECB) and other International Financial Institutions (IFIs), against imperialism; against free trade; in defense of the global commons; and against the Group of 20 (G20).

After the presentation of the main grievances and demands of protestors, each of the central sections of the book examines key aspects of world protests in the period 2006–2020. Section 7 in Chapter 2 analyzes who the main groups leading protests are, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs), grassroots, political parties/movements, workers' unions, students/youth, indigenous/racial groups, unorganized workers, religious groups, women/feminist groups, hackers, employers' organizations and prisoners.

Section 8 in Chapter 2 centers on the numbers of protestors in events, noting the problem of crowd estimates that are very different depending on the source. The protests included in this study have involved numbers ranging from a few hundred protestors to millions of demonstrators—more than 50 protests events in the period involved millions of people. The chapter also analyzes whether the increasing number of protestors and protests is enabled by improved civic space, civic conditions and political freedoms.

Section 9 presents the wide range of methods to protest commonly used in the period 2006–2020, such as marches and protest assemblies, blockades, occupations and other kinds of civil disobedience/direct action; internet activism and whistleblowing/leaks; vandalism and looting; strikes and walkouts; pot-banging/noisemaking, street music,

educational events; boycotts and legal/paralegal methods; hunger strikes and self-inflicted violence. Examples of each method are provided in the chapter. Additionally, Annex B presents a systematic list of 250 non-violent protest methods.

Section 10 in Chapter 2 looks at who protestors 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. The most frequent target for protestors, by a wide margin, is their own national government; other targets include institutions unaccountable to people such as corporations, the military, the financial sector, the European Union/ECB, the IMF and World Bank, as well as the United States of America's and China's imperialism.

Section 11 in Chapter 2 analyzes the achievements of protests, and the conditions for successful outcomes. Section 12 documents both violence by protestors as well as state-organized violence and repression in the form of arrests, injuries, and deaths. These two sections close Chapter 2 of the book.

Chapter 3 of the volume focuses on selected key issues. Section 1 in Chapter 3 brings attention to the rise of populism and radical right protests, looking at the shift from anti-authoritarian left-wing populist protests to authoritarian, far-right populist protests. The chapter reviews the traits of radical right protests across the world.

Section 2 in Chapter 3 looks at the relation between inequality and protests, examining inequality Gini coefficients (after tax and benefits) and protests, with trend lines showing that there are more protests in countries with increasing inequality, and vice versa, fewer protests in countries where inequality is being reduced. The chapter also analyzes data on democratic perceptions and looks at the correlation between the percentage of people who believe that governments serve the few, and the number of protests per country.

Section 3 in Chapter 3 presents a deeper look at corruption and protests, and Section 4 at protests for women's rights. The subsequent Section 5 takes a regional perspective, reviewing protests from the Arab Spring to the recent "Latin America Spring" and showing how ignored economic demands lead to political dissent.

Finally, Section 6 in Chapter 3 evidences how the large majority of demands that protestors put to policymakers are in full accordance

with Human Rights and internationally-agreed United Nations development goals. The book closes with summary conclusions, calling on governments to listen and act on the messages coming from protesters.

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