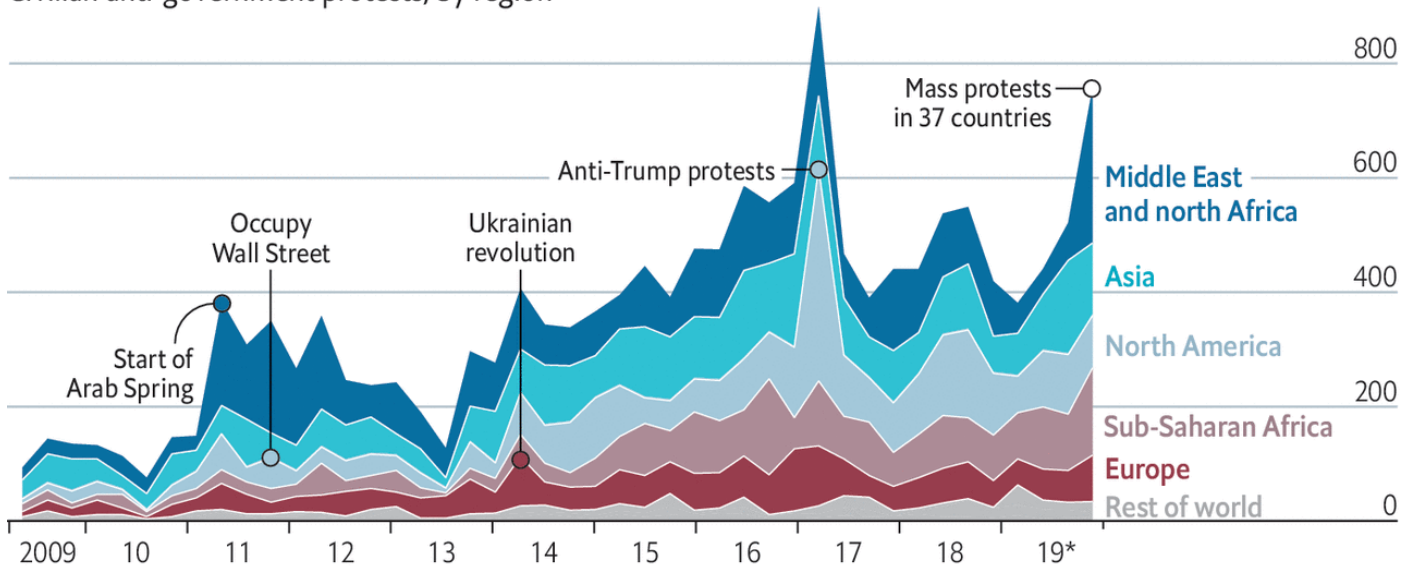


Menu

## Graphic detail

### Street politics

Civilian anti-government protests, by region



Source: "The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend", by S.J. Brannen, C.S. Haig and K. Schmidt, 2020

\*Q4 estimate

The Economist

### Daily chart

# Political protests have become more widespread and more frequent

The rising trend in global unrest is likely to continue

Mar 10th 2020



FOR MANY Westerners, the mention of mass-protest movements conjures images of long-haired youth demonstrating against the Vietnam war in 1968, or the toppling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. But the world has experienced more political uprisings in the past few years than ever before. In 2019 alone there were protests on every continent and across 114 countries—from Hong Kong to Haiti, Bolivia to Britain.

Such unrest is part of a growing trend, according to a [new report](#) by researchers at the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington-based think-tank. Using data from the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone—a repository of news articles—Samuel Brannen, Christian Haig and Katherine Schmidt found that the number of mass protests globally has increased by 11.5% per year, on average, since 2009. (Mass protests are defined as civilian anti-government protests, regardless of size, and excluding riots and protests against non-state entities.) Even after adjusting for population growth, the authors reckon that the number of demonstrators who have taken to the streets in recent years exceeds that of either the anti-Vietnam War movement or the Civil Rights movement.



Recent protests, despite their large numbers, seem more disparate than those of the past. Many share similar themes—including slow economic growth, climate change and government corruption—but are sparked by local events. In Hong Kong protests triggered by a bill allowing criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China spiralled into a broader struggle against the Chinese government's influence. In Chile demonstrations fuelled by a modest rise in subway fares broadened into anger about inequality and the cost of living. Results have been mixed. Some have brought about changes in government; others have been met with brutal repression.

Smartphones and social media have revolutionised the way in which demonstrations are organised, advertised and sustained. (Many governments, including those of India, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey, have responded to unrest by shutting down the internet.) Such tools also aid the spread of information, both real and fake, deepening existing political divides. None of these conditions are likely to change soon. Mass protests have existed for centuries. But their increased frequency may be here to stay.

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