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Economics & Business

14.06.19

FEMINISTISCHER STREIK

Editor's Note

Letter from the Editor:

A spark of social discontent has been thrown into humanity over this year. Every region of the world is showing dissatisfaction towards the current economic, social and/or political order.

From poor countries to the most advanced economies, humankind seems to be realizing that the current economic system is not entirely functioning; and although it has worked optimally for some populations, it is time to start caring about other factors besides economic growth.

While some countries are fighting for greater democracy or more affordable services (i.e. education, healthcare), others are fighting for a higher degree of respect towards human rights, or a more equal distribution of wealth.

The environment is another concern frequently remarked by protesters. Personalities such as Greta Thurnberg have served as significant influence over entire populations. Thurnberg's speeches and determination have mobilized social waves all over the world.

The increasing use in social networks and technologies has also made it easier for protest-organizers to spread out information; meanwhile, it has made it more difficult for governments to create biased propaganda and confusing facts about forced oppression.

Is this the beginning of the end of capitalism as we know it? *Will these protests become another inflexion point in the history of humanity? By using a geographical structure, this issue tries to explain the causes and potential consequences that this general discontent might generate in society.*

From the entire committee of Rostra Economica, we wish you, our reader, a successful end of your academic term, and an enjoyable, well-deserved winter break.

Happy 2020 and cheers to the beginning of a new decade!

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Editor-in-Chief



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Print run
2,000

For Advertising
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Printing
DrukWerkDeal

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The World Rage in 2019

Continuous protests sparked throughout the world, with people demanding more equal and fair treatment from their governments. This raises the questions: Why so many? And why all of them now?

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Looking Forward

Hope is the main outcome of this 2019. Hope that things may and actually can get better if we truly believe in a world which can be improved, and do not just accept what we are given right now.

Our History

Rostra Economica was founded in May 1953 as the new magazine of the faculty study association (SEF) of the faculty of economics at the University of Amsterdam. Its formal purpose was to provide current information and to publish, mostly, academic articles. However, the magazine also served as a means for students to reflect on the faculty. Through contributions by professors it connected the academic community at the faculty. Over time, Rostra Economica became an important part of the SEF, and a burden on the budget of the association. At one point, Rostra Economica represented over 90% of its budget.

To make the magazine financially sustainable, economics students of the University of Amsterdam and the VU University Amsterdam decided to cooperate. In 1965, at its 52nd edition, the magazine was re-named Rostra Economica Amstelodamensis, now published for both universities in Amsterdam. The marriage did not last long. In 1968, the magazine was discontinued after an argument between the SEF and the editorial board on the future cooperation with the VU. An attempt to start over was funded by the University of Amsterdam. The magazine, now called Rostra, started publishing again in 1970. It was a short magazine, hardly four pages long, and not at all appealing to students at the faculty. It seemed the magazine had lost its right of existence.

The new editorial board of 1972 did not agree with that notion. With a new layout and renewed enthusiasm to be more than an announcement bulletin for the SEF, the magazine gained new life. Topics were increasingly less academic and focused more on current affairs in economics and at the university. In 1981, the magazine celebrated its 100th edition. The magazine was again named Rostra Economica in 1986, a name it has retained until now. Under its new (and old) name, the magazine pushed on towards its 200th edition in 1994 and its 50th birthday in 2003. The magazine featured more and more interviews with key figures in economics and politics, from Nout Wellink to Mark Rutte.

Although the history of Rostra Economica has been vibrant to say the least, the magazine has gone through some of its biggest changes in the last ten years. In 2010, Rostra Economica was published in English for the first time. Recent changes in the media landscape did not pass by for Rostra Economica unnoticed either. When the magazine arrived at its 300th edition in 2014, it was clear that the future of the magazine is online. In 2015, Rostra Economica launched its new website, providing more content at a higher frequency. It is by no means the final destination of the magazine, as it continues to adapt to any challenges that the future brings.

Do you want to write for **Rostra** yourself?

We will be recruiting during this academic year.
Stay tuned to our **Facebook & Instagram** platforms
for more details, or send us an email to
rostra@sefa.nl



The World Rage in 2019

Photo: A protester in Beirut on Monday. Joseph Eid/AFP via Getty Images

2019 was a year of rights claiming. Continuous protests sparked throughout the world, with people demanding more equal and fair treatment from their governments. However, more than the protests themselves, what struck many people was the boundless spread of their occurrences and how the underlying reasons for the protests varied in each country, the ease with which information was spread in social media and the persistence of the mobilizations over time. Looking at Hong Kong, it can be observed that while the first demonstration took place at the end of March, manifestations still take place nowadays and have not lost magnitude.

This raises questions: Why so many? And why all of them now?

As many renowned journals have stated, it is difficult to outline a general connection that motivated millions of people to behave as such. There could not be more varied motivators (economic, political, social, corruption, etc...), which render it challenging to link the different movements. Whereas protests in Chile were sparked by a rise in metro ticket prices, which can be labeled as "economic", in Hong Kong struggles concerned legislative agreements with mainland China, thus a 'political factor'. It is also arduous because, even though social movements may have been sparked by specific happenings, the latter may have been just the straw that breaks the camel's back.

While it may be hard to connect the different motivators, a link may be found regarding how the protests spread, how they were organized and how people were influenced by something happening on the other side of the world. The latter was made possible due to social media and other communication platforms. While a downside of the speed in the circulation of information may be that fake news cannot be filtered, it is to be underlined how we can keep ourselves up to date in real-time with what is happening.

What was striking about these protests was also the front involvement of young people. According to the Guardian, 41% of the world population is under 24 years old: comparing them to their previous generation, they surely have

more tools that enable them to achieve their goals in life. Let's simply look at the role that social media plays nowadays, the broad access to education, overall higher living standards and free speech, which the previous generation barely had. Among many consequences, this also leads to higher expectations than before. When the young generation faces issues like inequality or corruption they have both the tools and willingness to stand up for their future, because they are aware of what they could lose and that if they do not promote such values nobody else will. The distrust of the current political class does not help either, especially since all protests were directly or indirectly related to governments' or local authorities' policies.

We must also be careful in labeling protests as a way to act against inequalities, as the renowned economist Tyler Cowen states in one of his Bloomberg articles. For example, Chile is the wealthiest country in Latin America with decreasing levels of inequality and in Haiti people were struggling with the overall economic situation rather than wealth distribution between poor and rich people. As aforementioned, often movements were caused by very specific requests, such as free Disneyland parking places for the yellow vests in Paris or the allowance to keep working with current nitrogen emissions in the Netherlands.

Surely this wave of protests destabilized the equilibrium of many countries, even those who were not directly involved, due to the ripple effect caused by globalization and the interconnection between countries. Is this a manifestation of democracy or are people just exploiting the enthusiasm of the moment to make non-necessary requests?

Marco Favaretti (Italy)

Studies Business Administration. Particularly intrigued by politics and environmental disabilities. Life's motto: We give our lives meaning. If you feel like life is meaningless, that's your fault!



LATIN AMERICA

On October 12th, 1492 Christopher Columbus arrived to the coasts of the American Hemisphere. Ever since this moment, the territories colonized by Portugal, France and Spain would suffer a racial fusion that eventually gave birth to Latin America *mestizo* population. This heterogeneity among races created social preferences for those of European ancestry, while the ones belonging to an alternative ethnic group fell down the hierarchical social ladder. Little did those populations know that this distinction between races, firstly established during the colony (but highly enforced during the 20th century migration waves from Europe), would prevail for centuries and create the most unequal and classist region in the world.

Today, apart from a more than evident inequality in wealth distribution, Latin American countries are complaining about high levels of corruption, insecurity, femicides and a lack of respect and inclusion towards minorities (e.g. Indigenous, LGBT+, African-Americans).

In 2019, Latin America has experienced a general regional awakening similar to the Arab Spring of 2010. While **Venezuela**, **Nicaragua** and **Bolivia** fight over a lack of democracy; **Chile**, **Ecuador** and **Haiti** show their discontent about social inequality and lack of opportunity. **Mexico's** violence is getting out of control while damaging its relation to its most beloved ally: the US. **Argentina's** inflation rates continue to skyrocket, while **Brazil** is facing the most severe deforestation of the Amazon. All of this combined with massive waves of migration across the region, especially from Central America and **Venezuela**.

More than one Latin American government has accused the Cuban and Venezuelan administrations to have a significant influence in most protests of the region. Their main purpose? To assist left-wing governments and eventually put an end to Latin America's economic dependence on Western nations. Whether these allegations are true or not is still a matter to disclose.

The easy access to technologies and social media has facilitated organization among protesters. In a region where dictatorships ruled for decades, media has a history of being highly censored and controlled by authoritarian regimes; however, as new forms of communication emerge, governments have a harder time restricting useful and relevant material. Citizens are now able to use several digital platforms to share information (e.g. WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Slack, Instagram, etc.).

Social mobilizations are not uncommon in Latin America. In fact, the region has a rich history concerning revolutions, starting with their wars of independence in the early 19th century. However, state repression is also highly present in the region's recent past and serves as a fuel to further mobilize citizens today. In this section we introduce some of the current Latin American protests and their common denominator.





Photo: Filip Gielda via Unsplash

The IMF's Spark: Argentina, Ecuador and Haiti

Latin-Americans say: enough is enough. Compared with the last century, people in Latin America are no longer willing to accept social inequality. This year, Latin America has seen a major increase in intense anti-government protests.

The region is considered as the most unequal in the world. Inequality undermines the region's economic potential and its population's quality of life. The poor redistribution of wealth increases poverty and reduces the impact of economic development.

Latin America and the International Monetary Fund

Historically, Latin America has been affected by a severe debt crisis. In the early 1980s, some countries of the region reached a point where their foreign debt became unsustainable. The debt crisis started when the international capital markets lost confidence in the possibility of fulfilment of debt obligations. This caused countries to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided loans to pay their debts. In return, the IMF forced Latin America to make reforms that would favour free-market capitalism. Free-market capitalism is an economic model preferred by wealthy and fully developed countries.

The IMF also forced Latin America to implement austerity plans and programs that lowered total spending, in an effort to recover from the debt crisis. This reduction in government spending further deteriorated social fractures in the economy and halted industrialisation efforts. Since the debt crisis, some countries in the region, have not been able to recover. Argentina is a prime of that. In an attempt to improve their situation, countries turned to the left-leaning governments. Many redistribution programs were designed to reduce poverty. However, they failed to solve the underlying structural problems.

When the IMF decides to become a lender of last resort for countries in difficult conditions, it automatically takes risks. Countries resort to the IMF for money typically when their economies are already under fragile or very risky conditions, which makes them vulnerable to many factors beyond di-

rect control.

For more than 50 years, the IMF has always trumpeted the same recipe, namely, economic liberalization and cuts to public spending.

Current Situation

Recent events in Argentina, Ecuador, and Haiti have raised the question of whether the IMF is really helping economies to recover. At the beginning of 2019, the countries agreed to IMF packages, of which Argentina's was the biggest in the organization's history. Presidents of the three countries were forced to announce austerity measures because of debt negotiations with the International Monetary Fund.

However, Ecuador suffered from a civil unrest that forced one of the package's key conditions to be rolled back. Haiti has seen sluggish growth and rising inflation. Whereas, Argentina collapsed into a currency and debt crisis that cost President Mauricio Macri his hope for re-election.

Ecuador



The IMF is a key player in the current crisis, as the institution offered Ecuador loans worth \$4.2 billion. Under the agreement, the government set austerity measures to reduce its public deficit, government spending, labour reforms and increase government income. The decree included, among others, the end of subsidies on fuels, after 40 years. Consequently, the price of diesel fuel, more than doubled. Gasoline prices rose as well.

It is important to consider the reasons behind the government and public reactions to the reforms. On one hand, Ecuador's economy has been weakening over the last six years. The size of the public sector and government spending escalated gradually, mostly financed by foreign debts. Ecuador's economic growth forecasts were positive, relying on the price of its major export, oil. In 2014, the price of oil suffered from a sharp decline. It is clear that Ecuador must take action to alleviate its weakening and vulnerable economy.

On the other hand, the increases in fuel prices would affect households with scarce resources. As they face low budget constraints, the changes directly affect their disposable income among the basic consumption goods and transport, for example. In addition, the increase in the price of fuels rises the cost of overall living through the increase in shipping costs for firms, which in turn increases good prices.

The unrest was triggered after the president made the economic announcements, which sparked massive public protests. A wave of national and international mobilizations took place for eleven days, in October. The day after the reforms made public, people went to the streets, a state of emergency was declared, and thousands of people were arrested or injured. At one point, the chaos drove Moreno and his government to depart the capital city, Quito.

The protests were led by indigenous groups and other sectors of society which were unsatisfied with the measures. Ecuadorians have a history of ousting presidents, driven mainly by the indigenous movements. Since the first major 'uprising' of 1990, indigenous movements have had constant participation in key moments of Ecuador politics. In less than 30 years, they have starred in the overthrow of presidents and fought for a plurinational state.



Violent clashes between security forces and protesters occurred in Quito. The unrest worsened an economy that was already deteriorated. Public transport, numerous market sectors and regular classes were discontinued. Many goods could not be supplied due to roadblocks in the main and strategic highways. Moreover, the incidents escalated all over the country into an economic and political crisis.

Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno and leaders of indigenous peoples reached a deal to cancel a disputed austerity package. The move followed with nearly two weeks of violent, widespread protests. The violent protests left at least 11 casualties, more than a thousand injured, and other thousand arrested.

Argentina



Argentina has been in a recession since last year, and has one of the highest inflation rates in the world, running at more than 54 percent. Unemployment has soared and the economy shrunk by 5.8 percent in the first quarter.

According to data from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization the country is also among the Latin American countries where hunger increased most during 2018.

Last year, the IMF also agreed to increase the size of its bailout to \$57bn, as Argentina's government agreed to cut pension benefits and public utility subsidies. The measures crippled the poorest sections of the society.

In Argentina, there was a tense calm waiting for the presidential elections. But the protests that shook other countries in the region became a throwing weapon in the final stretch of the campaign. But while Argentina is suffering a recession reminiscent of its economic meltdown at the turn of the century, the campaign was relatively calm. Macri and Fernández headed massive rallies without significant incidents.

However, it does not mean that the country was exempt from protests. There were several demonstrations during the year against the poor economic situation and the structural reforms of the IMF.

In August, members of social and political organizations protested against the economic crisis and against the government of Mauricio Macri, in Buenos Aires. The protesters occupied Plaza de Mayo, requesting improvements of social welfare, right in front of the Governmental building.

In September, people took to the streets against Macri. Argentine state workers demanded the Government to take action to fight inflation and unemployment, key points of the economic crisis that has worsened in Argentina. One of the central demands of the protests in the most indebted country in the region, according to figures from ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), is that the food emergency to fight hunger be declared.

Now, the elected president risks the rapid deterioration of his approval rating. For 2019, the IMF expects a 1.6% contraction, deeper than the 0.5% drop projected in Macri's budget, with an inflation of 34.8%.



Haiti

The ongoing protests have lasted for 16 months. According to the United Nations, last week's protests count with 42 casualties and more than 100 injured.

There is a crisis in Haiti, but it is not a current one. Haiti is the poorest country in the American continent. Around 70 per cent of its population lives in poverty. Its history is featured by fiscal deficits, corruption, economic mismanagement, and natural disasters that exacerbated the situation.

Since 2018, Haiti is going through an economic crisis due to high inflation and the constant devaluation of its currency, the Haitian gourde. Furthermore, the deepening economic situation is linked to the end of subsidized oil supply from Venezuela. The reason why Haiti had to seek oil with higher prices at the open market which turned its budget deficit worse. Forced to acquire a loan from the IMF, the govern-

ment agreed to implement the well-known structural adjustment program that included the elimination of energy subsidies and increases in fuel.

Violent protests erupted, and the economy aggravated further due to unpaid bills to gas suppliers by August, 2019. In 2017, the President, Jovenel Moïse, was elected amid allegations of fraud. Besides, he is involved in accusations of pocketing billions. Now, the protests demanded the resignation of the President, but Moïse has refused to budge.

The fuel shortages and the disruption of the protests have crippled the delivery of basic services, including the distribution of food and water, pushing Haiti toward a humanitarian crisis.

It is clear the reasons behind the massive protests in Latin America. A society that suffers from plagued with corruption, inequality, insecurity and decadent economies have to voice up. Governments, international entities and citizens from these countries must understand that their economies are sick. Fiscal deficits and income inequality have to be reduced. However, they should look for different policies than the typical IMF recipe. Reforms that consider the socio-economic circumstances of each country.



Achic Lema (Ecuador)

Third-year economics student from Ecuador. She believes that education and the equality of opportunities have the power to change the status quo of the vulnerable.





Photo: Caracas, April 26 by Horacio Siciliano via Instagram

Fatherland, Socialism, or Death: A Background of What Is Going On in Venezuela.

Two presidents and two National Assemblies working simultaneously in one country. How is this possible, and what circumstances lead to Venezuela being in this complicated situation. Let's have a recap since 2015.

2015: Parliamentary Elections

Parliamentary elections were held in December 2015. The opposition coalition (MUD) secured supermajority, two-thirds of the delegates, by winning 112 seats out of 167. The following day, the Supreme Court of Justice, well known for being biased towards Nicolás Maduro's government, suspended three opposition delegates for allegedly buying votes, which as of today, has not been proven. This meant the opposition party had lost the supermajority.

These three delegates were essential. With two-thirds of the delegates, the constitution gives the National Assembly the power and authority to remove the existing magistrates of the Supreme Court and officials of the National Electoral Council, and name new ones. None of this was achieved, and Maduro's loyalists still run the two institutions. Venezuelan regime has stayed in power because of its success in controlling all the existing institutions. Losing this would have hurt Maduro's power and destabilized his regime.

2016: National Electoral Council rules out recall vote

Through the powers of the National Assembly stipulated in the constitution, the opposition party went through with a recall referendum to oust Maduro from the presidency. Despite trying to sabotage the process, by giving fewer days than stipulated to collect the necessary signatures, all the

requirements were accomplished for an early election to take place. However, the National Electoral Council (CNE) once again showed their bias towards the government. After weeks of stalling the process, the CNE finally suspended the recall referendum arguing there were irregularities in the collection of the signatures.

Since the beginning, President Maduro classified the referendum as a coup d'état and stated a recall would not happen. It took the National Electoral Council the maximum amount of 90 days stipulated in the constitution to set a date for the signature collection and go through the results.

Yet, months later it took the CNE days to organize and audit a government's petition to sign a form against the United States. Despite the process being followed only by government sympathizers, the official amount of signatures made public by the National Electoral Council was 10 million. At the time, Maduro's popularity was at an all-time low, 22 percent. This extremely dubious figure raised questions as to how independent was the entity from the government.

2017: Constituent National Assembly

The Supreme Court of Justice is filled with judges pro-Maduro. After the loss in the election of the National Assembly, the Supreme Court transferred the legislative powers from the Assembly to itself. However, after international condemnation the decision was reversed. Still eager for more power, president Maduro illegally decreed a Constituent National Assembly to bypass the legitimate National Assembly, which he had lost control of 18 months ago.

Such action was unconstitutional as Venezuelan law indicates a Constituent National Assembly must be ordered by a referendum, which was not the case. This new institution is controlled entirely by delegates of the government's party and is used to override the National Assembly, the only sector where the opposition party has a majority.

Following the election for the Constituent National Assembly, Smartmatic left the country. Smartmatic was the company in charge of providing the technological platforms and support services for all the elections held in the country since 2004. The decision was made public by its CEO, stating they could no longer guarantee the validity of electoral results while claiming the turnout of the election had been manipulated by more than one million votes.

2018: Presidential elections

It comes with no surprise this was the presidential election with the lowest turnout since 1958. This election was undemocratic, and the whole process was rigged in favor of the government to perpetuate themselves in power. The Supreme Court of Justice banned the opposition coalition party (MUD), which included a total of 14 political parties including the four most supported within the opposition: Justice First (PJ), Democratic Action (AD), Popular Will (VP), and A New Era (UNT). If that was not enough, most of the opposition leaders were banned from running as president: Henrique Capriles Radonski, Leopoldo Lopez, Maria Corina Machado, and Antonio Ledezma.

With the opposition coalition party banned, the opposition altogether chose not to participate in the election because of a lack of guarantees and fairness. They called the vote a show of the government to give the impression of legitimacy that it lacks. The whole electoral process was heavily criticized by the international community and dismissed as illegitimate by the European Union, the United States, and the 14-nation Lima group. In the end, Maduro was re-elected for a new presidential term.

2019: Protests

Venezuelans have a million reasons to protest for a change in government. The most recent mobilizations began on January 10th of this year, when Maduro officially started his second term in office after undemocratic elections. These protests are led by Juan Guaidó and have three goals, the slogan of the opposition party: cease the usurpation, transitional government, and free elections.

Juan Guaidó is the president of the National Assembly. He is recognized as the Interim President of Venezuela by 54 governments, including the United States and the Netherlands. On January 23rd, he swore in himself as interim president following article 233 of the Venezuelan constitution. Under his leadership, Venezuelans have been protesting for a change in government.

In a report published on January 29th, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported there had been 40 deaths up to date, more than half being civilians killed by police forces. In the report, it was also mentioned detained

men and women were subjected to cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, including electric shocks, suffocating with plastic bags, sexual violence, and food deprivation.

When asked about the killings, Roy Chaderton, Venezuelan ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS) said: "when a bullet hits the head of a squalid one (referring to an opposition sympathizer), it goes through quickly and the sound is hollow, because they have an empty skull". Despite later apologizing, this statement shows the lack of empathy and how inhumane are the people governing the country.

Big events occurred on April 30th, when Leopoldo Lopez, an opposition leader who had been a political prisoner since 2014, was released by armed forces. This was the first time armed forces showed significant support towards Juan Guaidó and turned their back on president Maduro. A military uprising occurred, and a coup d'état almost took place. However, important figures of the current government who were going to take part in the transitional government backed away at last instances. This was a significant day because even the people president Maduro trusted the most were very close to betraying him, and it seemed the government was cracking apart.

With the current crisis in the country, Venezuelans are eager for a change. However, protests started slowly dying as the opposition party agreed on multiple occasions to commit to dialogues with the government, without any positive outcome. Venezuelans felt betrayed, stating this was a government's strategy to buy time and let the tense environment fade away. By agreeing to dialogues, people felt the opposition had other priorities rather than the slogan "cease the usurpation, transitional government and free elections".



Photo: via RTVE

Mateo Ricucci (Venezuela)

Second year Economics and Business Economics student from Venezuela. Interested in politics, economics and technology.





Photo: Edgard Garrido via REUTERS

“The Straw That Broke the Camel’s Back”: Is Economic Growth Enough for a Country?

*Idiom (English): “The straw that broke the camel’s back”→ A seemingly small or inconsequential issue, problem, or burden that proves to be the **final catalyst** in causing an overworked or overburdened person, system, organization, etc., to fail, give up, or collapse.*

On July 2nd, 1986 at 8 in the morning, student Rodrigo Rojas de Negri was walking through the streets of Santiago with a group of protesters. They were carrying eight car tires and a gallon of gasoline to raise a barricade and stop the city’s traffic. In a sudden turn of events, Rodrigo was captured by a military patrol. He was heavily wounded and sprayed with his own gasoline. After being burned alive, Rodrigo was transported to the outskirts of the city by the military units. He was later found by the federal police, and transferred to the emergency room of a nearby hospital. He died four days later due to severe burning wounds.

Rodrigo was only one of the victims affected by the 27-year-long dictatorship that intimidated Chile from 1973 to 1990. During this period, the country experienced severe economic growth, but citizens were commonly murdered, tortured or incarcerated. Today, Chileans try their best to not forget about this historical episode. However, recent conflicts have sparked memories among the population. These current events have served as an enormous reminder of the government oppression that the country has had up until now. The 27 year long dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet left Chile with an open wound that has recently been aroused.

An Example of Democracy

Chile is widely considered a Latin American example to look up to. Its thriving economy, low corruption and stable democracy have built an excellent reputation for the Southern Cone country. Income per capita is almost twice as the Latin American average; life expectancy is 4.5 years higher than the rest. Chileans also enjoy a much safer every-day life than their Latin American counterparts (World Bank).

Part of the successful economic growth that Chile has experienced relative to the rest of Latin America is owed to a group of economists known as the Chicago Boys. During the dictatorship, a group of Chilean economics students went abroad to study in the University of Chicago to become aware of the most avant-garde advancements in economic growth. These students were later drafted to become the most influential economic advisors of Pinochet. Yes, the country experienced massive boosts in economic output; but at the expense of thousands of evictions, human rights violations, and a historical, traumatic experience for most citizens. Today, it is difficult to find a Chilean that has not been directly or indirectly affected by Pinochet’s dictatorship.



Photo: Chicago Boys (1957) by Ernesto Fontaine

Wealth unequal distribution, social discrimination (i.e. classism) and a lack of opportunities for the middle and lower classes, are some of the concerns mentioned by the protesters, and they couldn't be more right. The OECD published a report that stated 33% of Chile's resources on the hands of the top 1% elite; making it the most unequal country in this organization. The richest in the country earn 13.6 times more than the poorest. Most cities are visibly divided between low- and high-income neighborhoods where residents are frequently reminded of their social class. Education, healthcare and water services were all privatized during the dictatorship, and are now highly inaccessible to the middle and lower classes.

Inequality; however, is not a rare phenomenon in Latin America. Oxfam forecasted the current trend of wealth accumulation in the region and their results showed that by 2020, the 1% elite would amass more than 99% of the region's wealth. The latter leads us to the question: Why has Chile (a prosperous economic nation) exploded while other countries remain silent? Rodrigo Pérez, a professor of economics at Santiago's Universidad Mayor explains, **"In Chile's case, the state is doing nothing in terms of redistribution or to diminish differences in people's incomes"**.

No son 30 pesos, son 30 años.

(It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years)

On October 18th, 2019 the Chilean government announced a spike of 30 pesos (0.09 USD) to the public transport cost. This was called "the straw that broke the camel's back". For decades, Chileans have been complaining about more than one issue ranging from unequal wealth distribution to a poor educational system. The increase in the subway price was the trigger that Chileans required to make their voices heard about a wider range of issues.

After the protests sparked, Sebastián Piñera, the current president of Chile, had no choice but to reverse the recent increase in subway costs, but it was too late. Chileans had woken up and they were not willing to back down. Their protest began as an unorganized, leaderless movement that had no direction; it was more of a general demonstration of social dissatisfaction. Students mobilized to Plaza Italia in Santiago, where they initiated a protest that was followed by miners, bus drivers, public employees, doctors, families, football teams, etc. Thousands of Chileans were showing their discontent and lack of willingness to live in a place where the country is portrayed as the democratic milestone of Latin America, but is clearly full with inequality and social discrimination. After a week of protests, on October 25th, Chile saw the largest social mobilization ever seen in 30 years. Sebastián Piñera was walking on a tight rope.

Water public ownership is another of the demands mentioned by protesters. In 1981, under Pinochet's regime, a model of private water management was established. A market-based order was put in order and state supervision was highly diminished. As a result of water privatization, entire communities run frequent water shortages that are rather devoted to profitable industries (e.g. mining, agriculture, etc.)



Photo: Martin Bernetti/AFP via Getty Images

State of Exception: Activated

As a result of the chaos and destruction that Santiago (among other cities) was experiencing, Sebastián Piñera activated the State of Exception; a set of legal tools to categorize a special situation within the country. By triggering this mechanism, human rights and basic freedoms may be easily violated as long as the legal instrument remains activated (legally speaking, it cannot remain active for more than 15 consecutive days). The State of Exception had not been activated since times of Pinochet, which further reminded Chileans of their abusive and oppressive past. The activation of the State of Exception seemed to have a similar effect to gasoline over fire. Thousands of Chileans remembered their parents, children, and siblings who were executed during the last State of Exception. They had promised not to forget how far human oppression may advance if no one puts a stop to it.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Chile, the amount of victims during the 27-year-long dictatorship was 28,459 tortures plus 3,227 executions. Meanwhile, over the past month, there have been 18 people murdered, 269 injured and more than 2 thousand detained. Furthermore, the amount of eye-related incidents has surpassed that of the 5-year-long Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



Photo: Mobilizations in Santiago de Chile. On top, the Mapuche flag is waving.

Basic History: Piñera's Mistake

It seems like Piñera could have forecasted Chileans reaction to state oppression if he had remembered the recent history of Chile. His most severe mistake was to bring back memories from the dictatorship. Chileans remember how their parents, brothers and sisters fought for a better country, and now they feel like it is their turn. After the state oppression was notoriously visible, citizens were no longer only asking for the above-mentioned claims; they were also demanding the resignation of Piñera, the adoption of new member of the Assembly and the redaction of a new constitution (the current one was drafted during the dictatorship [1980]).

It is apparent that Chile has been overlooked as a Latin American highlight. A stable democracy that is making its way to international markets and world competitive economies; however, Chileans are proving that the country has been focusing solely on economic growth, while ignoring human rights, wealth distribution and availability of basic services.



Photo: Jorge Silva via REUTERS

A lesson from Chile:

If the world continues on measuring a country's success solely based on averages of economic data; then we, as humanity, are condemned to search for eternal economic growth while disregarding other basic human aspects. Chile is the perfect example to show that economic growth is not the only indicator to measure the well being of a nation. As Nicolas Zarkozy (2010) puts it, "to speak about averages means to avoid speaking about inequality".

Economic data may portray a positive trend for a country. The recent episodes in Chile show that this economic growth is clearly **not enough**.

Alfonso Garza (Mexico)

Studied BSc Economics. Currently studying MA Latin American Studies. Interested in migration and its socio-economic consequences.





Thank You but NO

Two weeks of protest with fire and violence swapped across Bolivia as a reaction to the possible fraud in the election votes count down. On October 20th Bolivia held presidential elections, the two main competitors for the 2020-2025 presidential term were Evo Morales and Carlos Mesa. Let's step back and see how it all started.

Mr. Morales was the first indigenous president. He ruled the country for 14 years, stepping into position in 2006, after Mr. Mesa. Before his rule, indigenous people of Bolivia were treated as second sorted. His political campaign goals (throughout his three presidential terms) were the radical change among the farmers, unions and urban migrants, who have become his political base.

Booming gas supplies to Argentina and Brazil, coupled with mineral exports, helped to sustain average economic growth in Bolivia of 4.9% a year, after Morales took office in 2006. During his rule, 2.6 million people increased their wealth to the mark of middle class, according to figures from Bolivia's Social and Economic Policy Analysis Unit (UDAPE). It seems like everything is going smooth and nice, so what made his initial supporters change their minds?

Let's step back a few years ago into 2016. A series of demonstrations took place in La Paz, capital of Bolivia, with cheering slogans "Evo 2020-2025". Why in 2016? Turns out that during that year Morales's party Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) wanted him to campaign in 2019 for the fourth presidential term. To do so, the constitution had to be changed, which would allow him to run for the fourth consecutive term. The national referendum was held, people voted against it. "Thank you, but No" was a common saying around La Paz. Some citizens cheered for him, but the majority (52.3%) rejected the opportunity that would allow Morales to stay in power for almost two decades. As we know now, he disregarded the referendum and went against his people's will.

That was a match that started a fire of anger in the Bolivians' hearts. Mr. Morales was becoming increasingly autocratic, holding the power at all costs and alienating voters by ignoring his defeat in the 2016 referendum. The fire intensified when the vote count, that clearly marked Morales ahead but without the necessary spread to avoid a second round, was delayed for a day with the excuse of a failure in the system. To win the presidential election Mr. Morales needed at least 40% of the votes in the first round, plus a difference of more than 10 points ahead of Mr. Mesa. To prevent a second round of the election on December 15th, the vote count was "clearly manipulated", making Morales win in the first round.

After more than two weeks of violent unrest that left at least seven people dead, even police forces joined the protest. Evo Morales publicly resigned from his position and flew to Mexico for political asylum. But some "violent groups" continue their protest. Who will become the next leader? The Organization of American States issued an urgent call for the Bolivian assembly to meet "to ensure the functioning of institutions and to name new electoral authorities to guarantee a new electoral process". Right now, there are two figures with sharply different styles and personalities: Mr. Mesa, a sober historian and former president who was Mr. Morales's closest rival in the election, and Mr. Camacho, a firebrand Christian conservative leader of the civic committee of Santa Cruz, who did not take part in the October election, but has gained prominence since.

Oksana Sokil (Ukraine)

MSc Finance. Have you ever thought about little things that define you? Oksana can be described as a bundle of Odipus Poly Amorie, Guns N' Roses, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, film photography, ashtanga yoga and tennis.





Photo: Liberal Del Sur

Mexico City's Feminists Path to Radicalization

During the last years Mexico's reputation has been based on the violence that exists in the country. Not only has this damaged the image of the country, but violence has statistically increased overtime. Therefore, a particular group has demonstrated their discontent loudly: women. It has been reported that between 2007 and 2017, more that 124 feminist mobilizations have taken place in Mexico City. However, in the last years these mobilizations have drawn more attention as they have also increased the number of participants. Nonetheless, the rise of participation comes in hand with an augmented number of victims. Figures from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System show that, in the country, more that 3,200 femicides have been registered since 2015, and 1,199 homicides against women in 2019. In the capital, there has been 206 femicides in the last five years, and 18 of them were registered in the first half of 2019. Also, in the first six months of 2019, there were 1,800 cases of sexual assault in Mexico City. Ultimately, according to the United Nations: **9 women are killed in Mexico everyday.**

Every March 8th, women march around the world and Mexico City is not the exception, as feminist groups take on the streets every year. However, this march was not the most relevant one. On August 12th, thousands of women took the streets of Mexico City after a big scandal involving 4 policemen. A 17-year old girl filled accusations against these 4 policemen in Mexico City for allegedly raping her. The allegations say that the girl was walking back home at night after going to a party, afterwards, these policemen forced her to go into the car and proceeded to rape her among all of them. After this report saw the public light, thousands of people voiced their opinion on social media that ultimately organized the march on August 12th. During the legal trial it was reported that the process featured multiple irregularities; as a result, the police officers were free to return to their jobs. Furthermore, the Citizen Security Secretariat stated that there were no visual aids to prove the allegations, while the Attorney General's Office from Mexico City mentioned that the legal doctor appointed to carry out the usual medical procedures did not follow the correct protocol and thus the trial ended to show that no medical proof supported the allegations.

After the tense environment of these allegations, the march on August 12th saw a radicalized climate. The feminist groups that assisted the march started to paint murals, break windows, and vandalize national monuments. Feminists in Mexico were known to wear a green bandana to cover their face, however during this march they found a new symbolic feature: pink glitter. After the Security Chief confirmed that the 4 police officers accused were put back into service, protestors threw pink glitter to his face, and the video became viral. The protest introduced chants such as “They don’t take care of me, they rape me”, “I believe her”, and the famous one “Ni Una Menos” (Not One [Woman] Less)

As in many other protests around the world, there are few vandalers involved. However, after the march of August 12th took place, many other women joined the movement and expressed their opinions through vandalism. This helped the movement to gain attention, yet it polarized the population. The vandalistic acts performed during the protests helped to shift the focus of the media from the alarming women-related violence to the vandalism itself. The situation turned into what communication scientists call protest paradigm. Media coverage followed the events rather than the issue, which helped to see the protests through negative lenses and delegitimize the movement by framing it as destructive. Media outlets presented the opinion leaders, some of the government officials. These sources outlined negative opinions about the movement. They demonized, trivialized and criminalized the protests.

Nonetheless, feminist groups fostered the label of vandalers and the protests that followed the one on August 12th featured a larger group of feminists painting and breaking monuments. Some chants and aspects from the marches are inspired by other Latin American countries. However, Mexico City’s protests have followed a more radical path. The media keeps focus almost exclusively on the protests and the reports of new marches. Also, the public is divided by either supporting their acts and trying to link their actions to the main problem, or against the protests claiming that the end does not justify the means. Finally, after the last march on November 25th, the next big protest is programmed for the International Women’s Day, and Mexico is from both sides hoping this will stop.



Photo: Liberal Del Sur



Photo: Li-An-Lim via Unsplash

Guest Writer:

Emilio Gutierrez (Mexico)

Currently studying Communication Science at the UvA. Enjoys writing about sports and political affairs concerning his country of origin.





EUROPE

2019 has been marked by a series of mass protests, often catalysed and organised through social media. But can we really say that these events will symbolise a new “page” in world history? Only time will tell.

However, we can observe that social media and the Internet play an increasing role in elections and in the organisation of mass protests and acts of civil disobedience.

2019 has seen protests and social upheaval in several European countries like France, Romania and the Spanish region of Catalonia. We cannot generalise neither the factors that led to these protests nor the objectives of the protesters. Some were driven by mostly economic concerns while others were fuelled by political issues. Nevertheless, they all have in common a sense of dissatisfaction and the will to change the current “status quo”.

In France, the “yellow vests” protests have continued in smaller numbers than in 2018, but frequently in a very violent manner. In Romania and Poland, people have been standing up against corruption and fighting for a more democratic and socially liberal society. In Catalonia, protests in favour of independence have increased in intensity after the sentencing of several Catalan politicians to several years of jail for organising an illegal referendum in 2017.

In addition, strikes and protests concerning Climate Change have happened all around Europe and the world. Thousands of people have come to the streets demanding politicians to act and to implement measures that prevent global warming. They were inspired by the 16-year old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg to alert the world about the devastating impacts that climate change is already having.



Root and Branch Rundown on Romanian Protest Activities

Photo: Catalin Georgescu via Greenpeace Romania Facebook Page

Liviu Pop, a Romanian forest ranger, was responding to a tip about illegal logging. On the 16th of October 2019, the father of three was found shot in a ravine nearby the logging site. There was also Răducu Gorcioaia, a 50-year old man found dead a month prior. Just as Liviu Pop, he was a forest ranger. His body, showing serious head injuries, was uncovered in his car, very close to an illegal logging site he had been supervising. These two killings sparked a march of over 4,000 people in the streets of Bucharest and other cities across the country. The manifestations, fuelled by anger towards a network of illegal logging ignored by the government, come as the latest entry in Romania's long history of protests.

The story began in the winter of 2017. Spurred by posts on social media, the citizens of Romania took to the streets as a response to the government's plans to massively pardon prisoners and to decriminalise certain corruption-related offences. Over 30,000 citizens of the capital took part in the protest against the proposed bill - Klaus Iohannis, then president of Romania, along with an ensemble of party leaders and important social figures joined the fray. The movement sent ripples across the world, with smaller events being mounted in cities, both at home and abroad.

Protests continued to be staged the entire winter, following the government's lack of transparency and determination to support a reasonable justice system. The month of February was dotted by various protests, the greatest of them amounting to 600,000 people at a national level. Unrest brewed in the hearts of Romanians.

This went on for more than a year, with people constantly protesting against the government. The tipping point, however, came on the 10th of August 2018. The event, centred around the massive return of the Romanian diaspora to pressure the authorities, garnered over 100,000 protesters. They assembled in front of the government headquarters, the Victoria Palace, to stand up against the attempted modification of the criminal code and the dismissal of the Prosecutor General of the national anti-corruption agency. People also condemned the incompetence of the prime minister

and the incumbency of Liviu Dragnea as head of the lower house of the parliament, in spite of him being sentenced to prison. The protest in Bucharest was peaceful in nature.

Everything took a turn for the worse when the police force clashed with the protesters. Reportedly, whilst some of the participants were indeed violent, the majority consisted of peaceful demonstrators. None, however, escaped the tear gas grenades and the water cannons of the gendarmerie. The crackdown prompted international reactions, most notably from the European Commission. Its spokesperson denounced the violent reaction of the government undermining the independent judiciary system and the fight against corruption in Romania. On the 11th of August, people took to the streets once more, albeit in smaller numbers.

Constant public demonstrations reigned over Romania for the best part of the 2017-2019 timeframe. All of this happened on the background of an ever-shifting, unstable Social-Democrat government, which exchanged three prime-ministers in the time span of almost three years. Romania's quest for justice and transparency is long and back-breaking. Yet the people seem to hold onto hope. On the 10th of August 2019, over 20,000 citizens rallied in the capital city on the anniversary of the violent protest.

The Social-Democrat government has been ousted as of November 2019, yet the fight continues. Ultimately, it is not only their secular forests that Romanians need to be aware of. Even after 30 years since the revolution against the communist regime, the systemic corruption is still eating away at the roots of society's tree. These roots have to be cleansed. Otherwise, the trunk might soon fall.

Alin-Gheorghe Hampău (Romania)

First-year student in Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics. He enjoys reading and writing about all of the previously mentioned subjects. He also has a passion for historical dramas, fashion, video games and anything related to the fantasy genre. Will never back down from a Netflix marathon.





Photo: Via thelocal.es

Catalonia: A Postponed State

The last years have seen an increase in the support for the independence of Catalonia. Recently, some of the pro-independence protests have escalated in violence after the Spanish Supreme Court decided on 14 October 2019 the conviction of nine accused Catalan politicians and activists for the crimes of sedition, misuse of public funds and disobedience after their participation in the illegal Catalan independence referendum on 1 October 2017. They were convicted to jail sentences between 9 and 13 years.

To understand this movement, its origins and popular support, we must explore Catalan history and the definition of the Spanish State. It's critical to understand how a lack of dialogue between Catalan and Spanish society led to a situation of profound division of Catalan society and of political instability in Spain.

Catalonia is an autonomous community, self-designated in its Statute of Autonomy as a nationality, with 7.5 million inhabitants.

Despite calls for independence by a large part of Catalans, Catalonia was never an independent state. However, it has had some degree of self-government for most of its history, has an own language and some particular cultural features. From the Middle-Ages up until the 18th century Catalonia had its own institutions like the Catalan Courts, the Catalan Constitutions and the "Generalitat", the Government of Catalonia, which allowed the region to have some degree of autonomy from the central power.

With the end of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and the rise to power of the Bourbon kings, Spain became a centralised kingdom and local Catalan institutions were abolished. This led to an increased homogeneity between

Catalonia and the rest of Spain and to a decline of the Catalan language, despite efforts to promote Catalan language and culture in the 19th century.

The Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) saw two brief unsuccessful proclamations of independence of Catalonia, but also the creation of the first Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia in 1932. The bloody Spanish Civil War (1936-39), fought between the Nationalists of General Franco and the Republicans resulted in at least 500,000 dead and scarred the Spanish people. The execution of the president of the Generalitat, Lluís Companys, in 1940 left a big imprint in Catalan nationalists who keep on invoking his memory.

From 1939 to 1975 Spain lived under the fascist regime of the "Caudillo" Francisco Franco. During the Francoist regime Catalan institutions were abolished and Catalan language was sidelined in favour of Spanish.

After the death of Franco in November 1975, the Generalitat was re-established in 1977. With the Constitution of 1978 Spain became a democratic state under a Parliamentary Monarchy that recognized the right to self-government of nationalities and regions. This led to the creation of 17 autonomous communities that encompassed the whole country and not just the "historical nationalities" of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country.

Despite the autonomy of Catalonia, the powers of the regional government are limited, especially regarding tax-raising. The current Spanish political subdivision has never been completely accepted by all, in Catalonia or in Spain, as some prefer a more centralised government and others a truly federal Spain, while some defend a higher degree of autonomy only for historical "nationalities", like Catalonia.

An increasing will for further autonomy led to a change in the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia in 2006, approved by 78% of Catalans in a referendum. However, this Statute was contested and in June 2010 the Constitutional Court of Spain ended up rewriting 14 articles of the Statute.

This event marked a clear change in Catalans' opinion about independence. It served to reinforce the independentists' arguments that Catalans were trampled by the centralist government in Madrid and that Catalan institutions were overruled by the Spanish State.

This Court decision and the austerity measures implemented after the 2008 economic crisis triggered massive protests and the first local "popular votes" on independence. With the Spanish Constitution guaranteeing the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation" and the lack of dialogue from the centre-right PP government, the Catalan Generalitat unilaterally decided to call a referendum on the independence of Catalonia as a republic.

The "illegal" referendum of 1 October 2017 resulted in 92% of the voters voting in favour of independence but with a turnout of only 43% of the electorate, as most "constitutionalists" (those that want Catalonia to stay in Spain) did not vote in the referendum. The referendum was marked by a police crackdown on polling booths that resulted in hundreds of injured civilians.

This led to a suspended declaration of independence on 10 October by the President of the Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont. As no point of dialogue was reached with the Spanish Government, the Catalan Parliament unilaterally declared on 27 October 2017 the independence of Catalonia. This was quickly followed by a decision of the Spanish Senate to suspend Catalonia's autonomous powers invoking Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution. The Spanish government then dissolved the Parliament of Catalonia and called new regional elections, in which the pro-independence parties maintained their absolute majority in the Parliament.

Several Catalan politicians and activists were arrested in the weeks and months following the October 1 referendum, such as the President of the Catalan Parliament and the Vice President of Catalonia, while the President of the Generalitat escaped into exile. The conviction of nine of the Catalan leaders to heavy prison sentences on 14 October 2019 has reignited the protests in favour of independence and the calls for the liberation of the so-called political prisoners. However, this time, some of the protests have become violent.

The protests of the last month have also been marked by more "professionalised" protests called by the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) and by the newly-created "Tsunami Democràtic". This leaderless movement has organised its protests with a "bespoke" Android app that can only be accessed by an invitation by one of its users.

Nowadays, Catalonia is a profoundly divided society between frustrated independentists and those who want to stay in Spain. It's important to keep in mind that the right to self-determination is enshrined in international law, but also the concept of a "people" or a "nation" is hard to determine precisely.

We can recognise two main reasons that explain the current situation in Catalonia: the complex composition of peoples

in Spain and the political structure of the Spanish State, and a lack of dialogue that is not particular to Catalonia but to Spain in general.

The Catalan Independence movement has stirred up old feelings of nationalism in Spain that people thought had been buried with Franco. It explains why in one year, VOX, a party without any representation in national or regional parliaments, has grown into the third-biggest party in the Spanish Congress. This climate of high political disagreement when Spain still has a caretaker government is not conducive to solving the Catalan situation, especially when Spanish parties have no incentive to follow the path of dialogue and compromise as that may cost them votes. Therefore, any political agreement seems, for the moment, to be far away.

In the end, the Catalan independence discussion is not just about Catalonia itself but also about Spain in general. Spain is still searching for its identity. The consensus that followed the end of the Francoist regime seems to be threatened and needs dire reform if it wants to survive. Spain does better when it's united and not divided and when it recognises its own variety.

A path for dialogue between the Spanish government and the Catalan Generalitat should be followed and it should include a consultation that gives the choice back to the Catalan people. However, I'm not in favour of celebrating a referendum that leads to a crucial decision about a country based on a narrow majority. Half of the population of a region cannot be ignored regardless of the result. I also defend that Spain should have a debate about its own political organisation, perhaps moving in the direction of a Federal State.

Ultimately, the most important is to create an environment of dialogue, trust and respect, since it seems to me that it was the lack of it that led to such a divided situation in Catalonia.



Photo: Via america.cgtn

Nuno Sousa (Portugal)

Student of the Master's in Economics. Passionate about Economics, Politics and everything related to the European Union.





The True Face of France: *A Life of Protest or a Protest to Live?*

France is well known as a country of a strong tradition of protests, since the French Revolution, French have fought for the liberty, unity, and fraternity of the nation. Several governments have been witnesses of the anger and patriotic sentiment of the French to fight for their rights. In 2017, Macron stepped into position as a president in 2017. After the crisis of 2008, which severely affected the country, and poor former administrations, Macron proposed some policies to improve the economic situation of France and the living standards of people. The main goals of his electoral campaign were to promote laws to fight against the climate change, improve the labor reform and the to revive the economy. However, government policies are certainly creating social discontent, while producing economic changes.

In 1789, the first French protests took place in the Bastille, where poor people claimed to have rights as humans. Poverty was high, most of the French did not have education, work conditions were not adequate for workers, prices were high and peasants together with town workers (who made up the 93% of the population) paid the highest taxes in the country. Indeed, people were forced to go to war and to pay three-quarters of their income. Banks in bankrupt, corrupted systems of tax collection, income inequality, bad weather conditions and, inflation were some of the factors of the eco-

nomie ruin in France. Also, the widespread poverty in rural areas forced peasants to move to the cities to look for jobs, which worsened unemployment. The nobility (higher society) imposed higher taxes on the farmers in order maintain their living standards. The economic conditions of the poor were worsened even more. With the rising tension peasants started to build barricades as a desperate reaction to the country's economic issues.

The French Revolution became a symbol of the people's empowerment to fight against injustice and government inaction. The first French document that equally protect all citizens was Declaration des droits de L'Homme et du citoyen. It became the basis for a nation of free people, equally protected by the law. However, more protests took place after the movements of 1789, such as the Paris riots of 1968, when students at the Sorbonne University erected barricades in a challenge to the status quo. Around 9 million people protested for the improvement in education, salary increase and the ousting of the president, Charles de Gaulle. The violence of protestors lead to the government response with the National Assembly disembody and new election the very same year. Furthermore, the authorities implemented a 35% rise in the minimum wage and salary increases of ten percent.

There are certain disputes in France about political ideologies between left-wing and right-wing parties. Governments, who are associated with a socialist approach are recognized as left-wing parties, whereas authorities with capitalist approaches are known as right-wing authorities. In 2017, Emmanuel Macron was elected as the president of France, his main objectives were economic recovery and the fight against climate change. Furthermore, some of the laws implemented show support for the business sector, which is judged as a demonstration of the right-wing approach of the government. For example, the replacement of the wealth tax by the 30% flat-rate tax on income accrued by real assets. It reduced the tax burden for the business sector in order to reinforce investment. However, the public opinion diverges about the work of the government, leading to the rise of protests against the Macron's administration, specially from the working class.

The economic growth of France is determined by such factors such as government balance, private savings, and trade openness. In fact, the World Bank reports that from 2015 to 2018 the GDP per capita increased by \$5 000. In 2019, however, the index decreased by \$1000. The OECD Economic Surveys announced this year that the economic deceleration is caused by global uncertainties, the effects of social unrests, and the low rates of unemployment. Moreover, the expected slowdown in the main trading partners of France, such as Germany, can lead to even a bigger decrease of GDP. In September 2018, the budget deficit of France was the lowest of the last decade € 87 143 million, however, in one year it jumped to the highest one from 2009 (€ 109 013 million). Why does the government perform that deficit?

In general, France performs one of the strongest economies in Europe and globally, however, why do working class people feel abandoned by the government and why do they want to be heard? Given that France has had a budget deficit during the last years, one quick and effective way to increase revenues is through taxation. For instance, the tax-to-gdp-ratio of France has increased by more than five percent from 2009 to 2017, becoming the country with the biggest tax revenue percentage of the GDP among OECD countries. Tax revenue comes principally from social security contributions such as the lump-sum fixed tax rates in pensions of 7.5% for retired people. Nevertheless, it has more adverse effects on the purchasing power of people who do not have other income earnings apart from pensions. They cannot afford the cost of living in cities, such as Paris, where the cost of living is of above €920 without rent, according to a report from Numbeo in 2018.

The application of taxes often causes political risks, such as the increase in gas prices due to the implementation of green tax on fuels. It pulled the trigger of social discontent and, consecutively, a general turmoil in 2018. Protests are taking place for more than a year principally Paris, where the Yellow Vests, citizens from different socioeconomic backgrounds, join to show dislike for the Macron's government. The movement was initiated by motorists, who started displaying their hi-vis jackets in the windscreens of their cars, and posting it on social media. A Facebook page of more than one million of followers was created to unite people to protest against the government. They claim that the au-

thorities ignore the needs of ordinary citizens, however they have different demands, from healthcare improvements to increase of salaries. Thus, there are not clear representatives of the movement, as riots often lead to violence by a part of the marchers, such as the demonstration of November 17th, in the first anniversary of protests.

The wageindicator.org reported this year that the monthly minimum salary of this year is € 1521.22, but it is still not sufficient to incur living expenses and pay taxes. Furthermore, OECD Data reported in 2018 that the purchasing power parity (PPP) of the country reached the lowest level €0.78/\$1 in the recent decade. French PPP is much lower compared to other European countries, for example Holland (€0.80/\$1). Most of the French are middle-income citizens, which means that the burden of taxation affects to the majority of the population. Thus, people continue protesting to seek changes in the government's policies and administration to redistribute wealth. Protests also cause a slowdown in the economy, many stores are forced to shut down or be temporary closed to prevent losses due to insecurity, and transportation issues such as street closures.

As a response to protests, the French government performed a draft 2020 budget with euros 9.3 billion to reduce encourage investment and consumption, hoping to reduce protests. At the same time dropping the budget deficit still within the limits established by the European Union. Also, part of the government agenda to decrease unnecessary employment positions in the civil service sector. They are planning to cut 10 500 government jobs position. Reducing protests is a real challenge for the French government to achieve the national reconciliation and, restore economic activities to improve the living standards of citizens.



Cinthya Criollo (Ecuador)

As a future researcher and philosopher, her passion is to write analysis of global issues that concern people's lives. "Life is fascinating when you create. Show yourself!"





Sowing the Seeds of Revolt

Photo: NOS via nos.nl

In the past months, the Netherlands was paralyzed by farmer's protests several times. In large caravans of tractors, they travelled to Den Haag, causing the longest traffic congestion in Dutch history. The farmers protested the newly announced stricter norms for nitrogen emissions, aimed at reducing the emission of harmful nitrogen compounds.

These compounds are primarily emitted by the use of manure and the use of combustion engines. When emitted around nature reserves, nitrogen compounds cause certain plant species and algae to grow excessively. This pushes out other species and thus threatens biodiversity. The high court ruled on May 29th that previously established nitrogen standards have been breached structurally. This meant that about 18000 construction projects could no longer be granted a permit because they caused too much nitrogen emissions. However, the building sector is not the main emitter. Agrarians, particularly animal breeders, emit 60% of all nitrogen compound emissions. It would therefore make sense to start with reducing their emissions.

But the farmers are not willing to accept that. Hence, they got into their tractors and went to Den Haag, and later to their provincial governments. In four provinces they managed to get the new emission reduction plans cancelled. In recent emergency plans to cut emissions and save building projects in the short run, farmers also played a relatively small role in the short-term reduction of emissions.

The farmers can count on broad popular support. About 73% of the Dutch population says they understand why the farmers are protesting. Their argument that 'farmers put our food on the table' may be largely true, but Dutch farmers also put food on a lot of other tables in the world. With a value of 90.3 billion euros in 2018, the Netherlands is the world's second largest exporter of agrarian products. On such a small piece of land, it's easy to imagine this has environmental effects.

The organisation of farmers

Since the Second World War, the influence of farmers' organizations has increased. This has partially resulted in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which was founded in 1962. The CAP is essentially an extensive subsidy program for European farmers. In the period 2014-2020 alone,

CAP subsidies count up to 308 billion euros, one-third of the total European budget.

The effectiveness of these subsidies is often contested. They cause unfair competition, in particular for developing countries. Also, the subsidies often do not reach those farmers who need them the most to survive. In the Netherlands, 60% of all farmers subsidies go to farmers who would already earn above-modal income without the subsidies.

Still, the subsidies prove very hard to abolish or even decrease. One reason may be that a majority of MEP's on the EU's main farming committee have ties to the agricultural industry. Another reason is that the most powerful companies (which receive a majority of the subsidies) have set up extensive lobbying networks. This has caused some major agriculture reforms to be softened down to the point where they barely have any effect. The result is the rapid disappearance of bird and insect species, which the measures are meant to protect.

In the Netherlands, the farming lobby is also very present. The main lobby organization, LTO, managed to get almost all their suggestions into the last government's plans. LTO ranks as the 6th most influential lobby organization, despite the agricultural sector in the Netherlands only employing 2% of all workers. One can therefore imagine that, although the farmers protests might be good for the public image, the real political gears are grinding behind closed doors.

The farmers protests are likely to continue. If they succeed, people that do not have the same kind of political influence will have to bear the burden, while the largest polluters will have to do the minimum. Time will tell whether the current government will break under the environmental and legal pressures or will value their relations to the agricultural sector more. One thing is certain: the longer the nitrogen crisis takes, the more of the rare Dutch nature will suffer.

Joos Akkerman (Netherlands)

Economics student, currently taking a detour in programming. His interests fluctuate along with all the books he buys and never reads. He gets very happy from American electoral maps, having an aha-erlebnis and tomatoes.





MIDDLE EAST & ASIA

The recent history of the **Middle East** makes it a very conflictive zone. Its vast amount of resources, along with its low political instability has made this region a battleground for global powers. The means by which most of these countries were divided were part of a pact called the Sykes-Picot Agreements signed by Great Britain and France during the First World War.

These agreements would divide the once defeated Ottoman Empire into what it is most of the Middle East today. The pacts completely ignored differences in populations and conflictive areas. They were rather drawn with a ruler over a map spread out on a table at No. 10 Downing Street. Many political scientists still blame Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot for most of the current clashes in the region.

Asia has been under the spotlight of economic development over the past few decades. The Four Asian Tigers (Hong

Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore) have become an example of rapid economic development. While East and Southeast Asian countries used to rely on manufacturing and trade, these areas have become increasingly more competitive in other industries such as the financial and high-tech ones. Competitive edge in numerous spheres has made the continent ever-more economically open and powerful. However, values and political systems in countries such as China remain much more resistant to globalization and Western democratic influences. This year, the ex-British colony Hong Kong showed that democracy is in demand in this part of the world as well.

During more than six months of ongoing protests, Hong-kongers have been relentlessly fighting against the rising Chinese interference in its internal affairs and have encouraged protesters around the world to carry their demands forward.



Photo: Ahmed Jadallah via Reuters

Iraq's Plight for Freedom

Tuesday, October 1st of 2019, marked the eruption of the latest anti-government protest in Iraq. Thousands of protestors have taken to the streets to demand better services, more jobs, and an end to corruption within the political establishment. They are pointing to president Adel Abdel Mahdi's election promise of dealing with these problems and to how after he got elected, he has proven unable or unwilling to actually act on these promises. Civil uprisings in Iraq have happened on multiple occasions during the last few years. However, what makes this latest protest stand out is the rapid escalation of violence. The less-than-two-month-old protest has already cost hundreds of lives, while around 15,000 have been injured.

The country has still not rebuilt from the toppling of Saddam Hussein (2003). The younger generation is fed up with all of the politicians' empty promises. This generation cannot conceive how one of the world's largest oil producing nations is plagued by so much poverty and bad infrastructure. There is massive inequality between the Iraqi elite and average citizens. A clear example of this disconnection is the Baghdad green zone, a location within the city that regular citizens are not allowed to enter. Experts have long warned that this boiling social and economic frustration might lead to an explosive situation.

The call to demonstrate originated on Facebook after the demotion of the popular general Abdul Wahab al-Saadi. The general, who is a national hero to many Iraqis for leading the fight against the Islamic State, was transferred to a lower position after trying to fight the corruption of the political class within the counter-terrorism service (CTS). This angered many Iraqis who believe that if this legendary figure cannot stand up against corruption, then who can?

The size of the protest in the beginning of October was not absurdly large, but the violent response with which they were met was immense. As soon as the protestors tried to enter the Green Zone (which is the diplomatic and government area of Baghdad), they were met by security forces. These forces tried to disperse the protestors using tear gas and water cannons, but when protestors refused to leave, they opened fire using both rubber bullets and live ammunition. One person was killed that day and over 200 people were injured.

These actions started civil uprisings across the country. Thousands of protestors took to the streets to demand the resignation of president Mahdi. The government implemented a curfew – which prohibits vehicle and pedestrian movement between 12pm and 6am – on the 28th of October. At this time more than 220 people had died during standoffs between demonstrators and security forces

On the 31st of October president Mahdi resigned whilst giving a televised speech. He said that he would step down after the political blocks reach an agreement on his replacement in order "to prevent a vacuum". This, however, did not calm the protestors down since they have no faith that the government will actually follow through.

Both the United States and the United Nations have recently come out with statements. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has called upon the Iraqi politicians to take a series of measures to try and stop this humanitarian crisis. These measures include prosecution for all those who used excessive force, a call to all regional and international parties not to interfere with Iraq's internal affairs, and the submission of a new electoral law to parliament. The United States gave a statement stressing its concerns over the deaths of the protestors, saying: "Iraqi's won't stand by as the Iranian regime drains their resources and uses armed groups and political allies to stop them from peacefully expressing their views" ... "Despite being targeted with lethal violence and denied access to the internet, the Iraqi people have made their voices heard, calling for elections and election reforms."

Currently the protests are still ongoing and show no signs of stopping. The anti-government protestors are now in control of Khilani square, a strategic square in central Baghdad, while moving closer to the Green Zone. Demonstrators have also set up checkpoints and created their own civilian security in the area. Since the start of the protest more than 319 people have died, according to the Iraqi Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. This raises the question: how much more blood will have to be spilled before Iraq can be a free country for all of its people again?



Photo: Thaier Al-Sudani via Reuters

Rado Baarda (Netherlands)

Second year Economics and Business student and a first year Rostra Economica editor. Born in Amsterdam but grew up in Belgium. Fascinated by Law, Politics, and Economics.





Hong Kong: *So Lovely yet so Disobedient*

Photo: Anthony Wallace via AFP

November 11th was the breakpoint in my exchange in the captivating city of Hong Kong. I woke up to the news that all classes at the University of Hong Kong were cancelled as student protesters barricaded the campus to prevent police from arresting students who live in university halls. Day after day, classes had been cancelled until the final announcement that the whole semester in all Hong Kong universities was suspended for safety reasons. Protesters occupied universities and turned them into fortresses, with large stocks of bricks, molotov cocktails, first-aid medicine, food and various other supplies. They were preparing to reside within barricades for days once anticipated battles with the police start. Non-local students were strongly advised to leave the city that was expecting a bloodshed.

Although a large bloodshed such as the one that ended the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests has fortunately not occurred, long-lasting battles between young protesters and police did. The first one took place at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) where students metaphorically safeguarded the epicentre of (academic) freedom by setting roadblocks to push the police back from entering the campus. During the night of November 12th, riot police at CUHK fired more than 1,500 tear gas canisters, 1,300 rubber bullets, 280 bean bag rounds and 126 sponge grenades, to which protesters responded with molotov cocktails and bricks. The home of many students resembled an apocalypse that night.

The battle of CUHK incited students to protect other city's universities as well. Eventually, this led to the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (PolyU) becoming another sieged citadel. During the worst night of clashes between riot police and protesters at the PolyU, hundreds of minors, students, journalists and first-aiders ended trapped in campus, afraid of being arrested and beaten. Those who tried to escape were indeed arrested and often violently treated by the police.

But how did such a charming and peaceful financial hub arrive to this chaos?

It all began with peaceful marches this spring. More than 2 million citizens marched on June 16th protesting against

the extradition bill proposed by the Hong Kong government. The bill would enable Hong Kong citizens wanted in territories with which the city does not have extradition agreements, including Taiwan and mainland China, to be detained and extradited to these countries. Hongkongers were concerned that such bill would undermine the city's autonomy and its citizens' civil liberties by subjecting them to Chinese jurisdiction which differs from that of Hong Kong.

When the British returned their colony to China in 1997, Hong Kong was guaranteed the special arrangement called "one country, two systems" for 50 years. This means that the region was promised to preserve autonomy in various spheres until 2047 when it should fully become part of China. With this special constitutional arrangement, Hong Kong differs from mainland China in various aspects, some of them being judiciary, monetary and financial policies, education system, currency and social policies. For instance, Hong Kong's legal system is still based on English common law, while the Chinese one is a civil law system. However, as 2047 is becoming closer, China is trying to implement the "one country" part of the agreement more strongly to prepare the city for the transition, while the citizens of Hong Kong are resisting by defending the "two systems". This tension has become ever-more visible this year with initially peaceful demonstrations developing into a widespread chaos and violence.



Photo: Teele Rebane

Although anti-extradition bill demonstrations remained calm for months, the government did not listen to the protesters' demand to withdraw the extradition bill. Their voices were not only largely ignored but the police also started behaving more aggressively towards protesters without officers being held accountable for their actions. What started with tear gas and rubber bullets being thrown to protesters on June 12th, developed into widespread violence from both sides and an increasing polarization in the city. The constant lack of trust and dialogue between the government and its citizens aroused great anger and rage among activists. They claimed that the government and police should be held accountable for the unjust treatment of protesters and should listen to their citizens' demands instead of being "Beijing's puppets".



Photo: Anthony Kwan

Five Demands, Not One Less

Even though the extradition bill that started the movement was officially withdrawn in October, the government's ignorance and police aggression resulted with additional four demands. The most famous protest slogan "Five Demands, Not One Less" refers to the (1) complete withdrawal of the extradition bill, (2) retraction of the claim that protests were riots, (3) withdrawal of criminal charges against all protesters, (4) thorough investigation of abuse of powers by the police, and (5) immediate implementation of dual universal suffrage. Only the first demand of the five has been met so far. The last two demands are the most significant ones and also hardest to satisfy. The demand for dual universal suffrage reflects the protesters' request for a true democracy, primarily the ability to directly elect the Hong Kong Chief Executive.

Pro-Democrats' Landslide Victory in District Council Elections

Hong Kong citizens' desire for democracy was made clear in the District Council elections that were held on November 24th. Once relatively unimportant elections that are mainly concerned with communal activities such as rubbish collection and public transport recorded the historically highest

turnout of 71%. The elections were perceived as a referendum on protests this year, with a silent majority voting for pro-democratic candidates. Although these elections are of limited significance for the city's true governance, this is the first time in the city's history that pro-democratic candidates won the great majority of seats in the city's districts. 17 out of 18 districts have been won by the pro-democratic camp, all of which used to be dominated by pro-Beijing candidates. Despite the fact that all Hongkongers' lives have been affected by protests for months, from the suspension of public transport to tear gas entering residences, the majority's support for the pro-democracy camp officially demonstrated how unpopular the government's decisions have become.

The recent elections are a sign that Hongkongers are determined to maintain the "one country, two systems" arrangement, putting more weight on the latter part. Still, a strong atmosphere of uncertainty about the future is evident in the city. Everyone I have personally met during my exchange is restraining themselves from making predictions, especially those relating to a more distant future. 2047 still seems too far away to prevent younger generations from fighting for their demands and defending partial autonomy that was promised to Hong Kong. Hongkongers have grown up in a system different from the one in mainland China: without strong indoctrination, with a significantly lower national identification with China and with various freedoms China does not allow on its territories. These differences have for decades been the city's forte, enabling West and East to intertwine in one place. Recent protests show that the price for preserving this distinctiveness is rising, but citizens of Hong Kong are determined to preserve it.



Photo: Teele Rebane

Katja Komazec (Croatia)

Third-year PPLE student majoring in Economics & Business. She has spent this semester on exchange in Hong Kong and felt deeply in love with the city, its lion-hearted people, weather and nature. Also, she is a (hopefully not too annoying) eco-warrior.





AFRICA

Africa is currently experiencing a massive influx of Foreign Direct Investment, almost exclusively from China. Its history of colonization has not allowed the continent to fully develop relative to the amount of resources it possesses. Sudan has recently forced the resignation of Omar al-Bashir, former president of the country. Amid an increase in violence against women, South Africans have come out to the streets to demand greater security. Guinea was violently oppressed when citizens refused to accept the president's bid to adopt a new constitution. The Ivory Coast is facing thousands of evictions as a result of rapid urbanization in its largest cities. All of this (and much more) in less than a year...

Photo: Pawel Janiak via Unsplash



Photo: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jesse B. Awalt/Released

The Violent History of Sudan: Former President Faces Genocide Charges

One of Africa's longest-ruling presidents, Omar al-Bashir, was ousted on the 11th of April 2019 after ruling Sudan for three decades between 1993 and 2019. After months of intense protests, al-Bashir declared a state of emergency in the country in February 2019. Anyhow, the scheme did not save his reign. During his term, Sudan underwent bloody civil wars and lost a major share of its oil resources along with South Sudan in 2011. Especially the ongoing conflict in Darfur, Western Sudan since 2003, has made al-Bashir one of the most disreputable leaders in the world. Currently, Sudan's economy is withered by corruption, conflicts, and sanctions.

The Current Crisis

The anti-government demonstrations began in December 2018 as a result of a rise in bread prices. The Sudanese people all over the country, regardless of being a white-collar worker or a poor farmer from the countryside, took part in the intense demonstrations. The security service attacked the protesters with great force resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of arrests.

In February 2019, a women's rights activist Hala Al-Karib told Reuters that, "The price of bread was a trigger for protests, but it's not about bread, it's about equality. It's about dignity, it's about freedom." Economic hardships, such as climbing inflation, limits on bank withdrawals, and fuel shortages, are wreaking anger among the Sudanese population of 40 million. The annual inflation rate rose between November 2017 and 2018, from 25 percent to 68 percent. The protests well presented the Sudanese youth's frustration on the country - over 60 percent of the population is under 25 years old.

BBC reported in January 2019 how many Sudanese preferred to keep their money under their pillows rather than in banks as cash machines are often empty. In the capital Khartoum, long queues had become a norm wherever cash or bread was available.

The protests gained wide media attention due to the prominent role of women in the protests caused by the persisting political opposition on women's rights. As Karib indicated, "The government has an Islamic militant ideology which at its core aims to exclude women from the public space. For 30 years, women in Sudan have fought against this oppression, so it's no surprise they are out in significant numbers now."

The protesters demanded president al-Bashir's resignation for five months before he was forced to step down in April. He was replaced by a military-led transitional council for the next two years, after which democratic elections should be held. Currently, the country is led by a mixed civilian-military Sovereignty Council and a civilian prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok. Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan serves as the chairman of the Sovereignty Council. He has been accused of involvement in the cruelties during the military operations in Darfur in 2003, during his period as the chief of ground forces.

The Violent and Belligerent History of Omar al-Bashir

When al-Bashir was born in 1944, Sudan was still a part of the Kingdom of Egypt and Sudan, which was under British colonial rule. He comes from a rural family and often reminded the public of his poor background. Al-Bashir completed his studies at the prestigious national military academies in Cairo and Khartoum. Authoritarian Arab nationalism was the leading ideology in both institutions, yet Islamist ideas and activism were quickly gaining popularity.

Young al-Bashir had joined the Egyptian army and fought in the Arab-Israeli war in 1973. After returning to Sudan, he quickly climbed in the ranks of the military and led the fights in the civil war against the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army in the South of Sudan in the mid-eighties.

In 1989, al-Bashir led an Islamist-backed bloodless military coup against the civilian Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and his government. al-Bashir's first actions after the coup d'état included prohibiting political parties, controlling the press, and strict interpretation of Sharia law. Al-Bashir appeared in public with a Koran in one hand and a Kalashnikov rifle in the other, promising "to purge ... the enemies of the people and of the armed forces".

It has been unclear whether or not the Sudanese authorities will hand al-Bashir to the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague. There is still significant reluctance since some of those who fought for him in Darfur still retain considerable power and influence over the decision. However, in early November, the current prime minister Abdallah Hamdok reportedly said he would hand al-Bashir over to the ICC to take responsibility for his actions in Darfur. Al-Bashir has been in detention since he was forced out of power in April.

Currently, he is facing charges of possessing foreign currency, corruption, and receiving gifts illegally in Sudan. Anyhow, the trial has been widely criticized just to take the attention of the other more serious allegations. According to al-Bashir, he had received \$90 million in cash from Saudi Arabia for personal use, and it was not part of the state budget. Al-Bashir had told the investigators in the case that the money had been spent already, yet he could not remember how, nor he had any documents to prove any details.

Wars in Sudan

The conflict in the western region of Darfur began in 2003 when a rebellion against the Sudanese government broke out. The insurgents claimed that Sudan discriminates against the non-Arab population of the country. Besides the Sudanese troops, the government allied with the feared Arab militia Janjaweed in Darfur, which is known for its brutal actions.

The government and its allies responded to the rebellion by carrying out ethnic cleansing, which resulted in the former president al-Bashir's arrest warrants by the ICC. He is charged for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The United Nations has estimated that around 300,000 have been killed and approximately 2.7 million have been forced to leave their homes in Darfur.

During the Darfur conflict, also the war in the south of Sudan continued. The conflict between the Islamic north and southern Christians and Animists had started already before al-Bashir stepped in power. An agreement was made between the rebellions in 2005, which ended Africa's longest-ruling civil war. It had caused the death of nearly two million people. According to the peace treaty, a referendum was held in South Sudan, and they gained independence in 2011. Yet, the violence did not end in the region. Many say that the independence of South Sudan was the beginning of al-Bashir's end, and his regime was severely weakened. Sudan lost the majority of its oil plants as they were left on the other side of the border and reduced the critical oil revenues.

Tensions with the Outside World

At the beginning of al-Bashir's regime, Sudan rapidly became a center for Islamist radicalism. In the nineties, Sudan granted asylum for Osama bin Laden, the founder of the terrorist organization al-Qaida. As Sudan became one of the countries supporting terrorism, the U.S set constraints on Sudan in 1993, followed by extensive sanctions in 1997. In international politics, al-Bashir has always balanced between different regions and interests.

In recent years the western countries have tried to warm their relationships with Sudan. The main reasons have been antiterrorist measures for the U.S and blocking the refugee flow for the European Union. The U.S sanctions on Sudan were lifted during Donald Trump's presidency in 2017, but the Sudanese economy did not improve as desired, and inflation has been rising. Reuters reported in July 2018 how the prices in the import-dependent Sudan had risen the third fastest in the world only after South Sudan and Venezuela.

Relations to the Arab Spring and What Comes Next?

Eight years after the Arab spring in 2011, many reporters perceive that al-Bashir's fall is a part of new unrest in Africa and the whole Arab world. Only a week before, similar protests took place in Algeria, and the president of the last 20 years, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was forced to resign. Young populations, social media, and elderly leaders are provoking dissatisfaction, just like in 2011. For now, it will remain unknown whether peace and democracy will reach these regions any time soon or not. Yet, at least some of the people may feel in peace if al-Bashir will take responsibility for his actions in the ICC.



Photo: Albert González Farran via United Nations Photo

Roosa Näveri (Finland)

Business Administration student from Helsinki. Her passions are anything and everything between economics, politics, and sports. Besides, yoga keeps her sane.





BEYOND BORDERS

It is April 1763 and the 45th issue of *The North Briton*, a radical newspaper run by John Wilkes, is fresh off the printing press. The Seven Year War had just finished a couple of months ago. After intense negotiations, France and Britain had finally come to a peace accord and, John Wilkes was little but happy about it. He believed that the treaty was too lenient and harshly criticized King George III. By the time the ink completely dried off the newspaper, Wilkes was arrested for his criticism. However, this apparently small development did not go unnoticed.

The British middle class, already unhappy and with increased political demands, made use of the situation to voice their concerns. People took to the streets, shouting for liberty and freedom. The first documented social move-

ment was born. Whist the world today seems to exist in a different universe from the world in 1763, people still have the same concerns and the same methods of making them heard.

The past year has been marked by news of protests and movements all across the world. However, like any other part of society, movements are no longer bound to a defined territorial region. They spread fast across all networks. There are a lot of things going on and it can be easy to feel lost. With this section, we plan to look beyond the political protests that have shaped 2019. From the individual perspective of the people on the street to social media and climate change, we want to make you think about the chain of causation and look past the immediate causes.

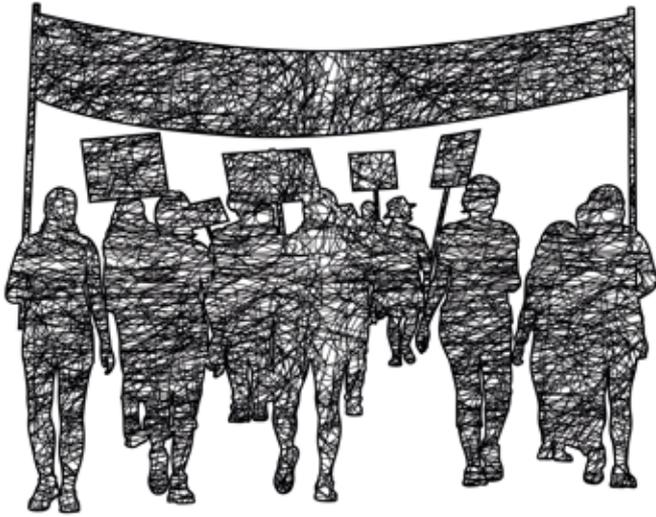


Photo: Via Getty Images

Thinking piece: A Reflection on Social Media and the Availability of Information

Defining and understanding a social movement is no easy task. The little consensus there is, revolves around their loose organizational framework. Spontaneous and fiery, social movements have always existed, only our perception of them has changed. It is very easy to look at their increased numbers during the last years and conclude there must be a common underlying cause. Whilst there are similarities, such as rising inequality, economic instability and corrupt governments, it is hard to account for them in a truly empirical manner. Underlying all these causes, however, is the thing that framed how people organize themselves in the last couple of years. Social media has drastically changed the exchange of information and the availability of knowledge. People can find like-minded individuals just one forum away. The rapidity of the exchange in ideas is almost impossible to account for and it is giving a voice to previously ignored societal groups.

Ideas of cyber feudalism and decentralized local societies, in which the true meaning of community can be found, spurred since the start of the information revolution. Ever since the Arab Spring, researchers have been puzzled by the impact social media has in empowering non-state actors. The loose control authoritarian regimes had on the spreading of information scared many. Now, we already see a desire to manipulate it from many governments. Something that was the liberating force for many is now transformed into a cautious tip-toe around what is acceptable to like on Facebook and write on Twitter. This is the reality for many internet users living under less democratic regimes. As all the information mediums before it, social media can be used as a platform for propaganda and mass control. This sounds grim and drastic. However, it appears that almost 27% of all internet users live in countries where arrests have been done for simple likes and comments.

Lately, there has been an increased number of media accounts regarding Chinese oppression of domestic minorities. The Uyghur people, the second largest Muslim minority in China, appear to be the central target of what the Chinese Government calls "reeducation camps". In 2009, in the Ürümqi riots, the Uyghur people organized themselves through Facebook. The precipitating cause of the protest was the allegedly false rape accusations made by two Han women against six Uyghur men. Han people are the largest ethnic group in China, making up to 18% of the total global population. The region has long been a focal point of ethnic discrimination between the two groups. The immediate response of the Chinese authorities, after the protest turned violent, was to block all mobile communication networks in the region. A few days after, Facebook was permanently banned in China.

The immediate reaction of the Chinese government further underlines that social networks are changing the rules of the game. If Facebook were not a threat to the centralization of information, no ban would have been instituted. Fortunately, data harvesting and government firewalls are still far from able to contain what has become the rapid organization of people through such platforms. However, it is hard to predict how they will evolve in the future. More governments are starting to invest heavily in entire cybersecurity departments. The US spent approximately \$66billion in 2018. Looking into data harvesting, the recent Cambridge Analytica Scandal showed us that the information we willingly put online is much more valuable than we previously thought. Social media is a powerful tool from both sides. It is the perspective you take that shapes how it is going to be used in the future.

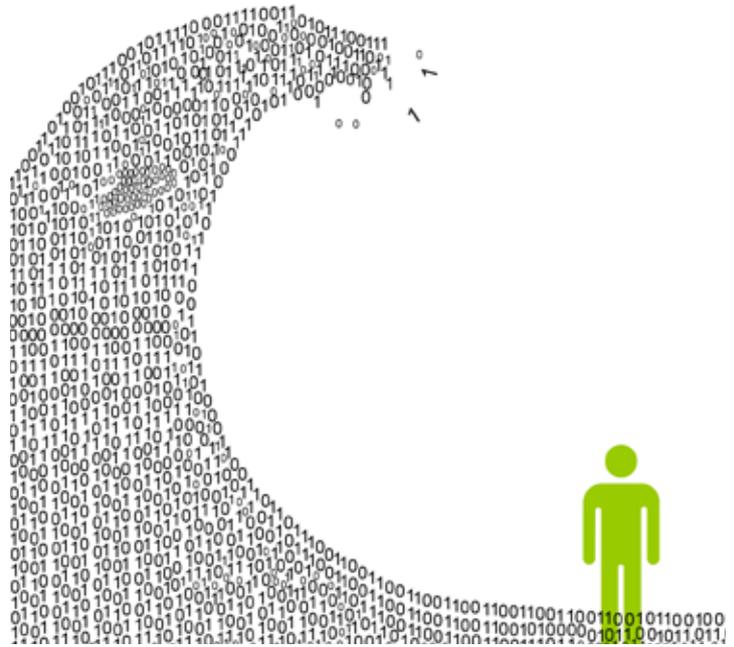


Photo: Mark Smiciklas via Flickr

Ana Popovici (Romania)

Rostra veteran and guilty of making things overcomplicated. Always up to discuss anything related to political economy. Scared of anything that involves using computers beyond Word.





Photo: Via expressandstar.com

No More Carbon Dioxide for the People

Climate change, a possible catastrophe that is facing us all if no action is taken. This harsh reality seems to have moved many people and brought them to the streets. While climate change demonstrations have been taken place from the 1990s it is only in recent years that they have started to gain massive attention and participation on a global level. Some of the most notable movements that try to address climate change are The School Strike For Climate, Extinction Rebellion, 350.org, Earth Strike and many other grassroots movements. Even though there certainly are lots of other movements, The School Strike For Climate has received overwhelming attention and gained much support recently. The School Strike For Climate movement sparked by Greta Thunberg has gained much participation by young people who have been skipping school on Fridays to protest against climate change. They question the idea of studying for a future that might not be there. For instance, in 2018 the United Nations released a report where they stated that the humankind will have 12 years to cut down on fossil fuel consumption before we hit a tipping point. Feeling that the time is running out and due to the increased fires, floods and other extreme weather phenomena, these movements have come together in order to organize global climate strikes.

During 2019, multiple individual climate protests were held, for instance, by Extinction Rebellion who held global climate hunger strikes and global climate rebellions. The latter one has resulted in more than a hundred people being arrested. The demonstrations that have gained the most attention are the three global climate strikes. The first one was organized on 15th of March, the second on 24th of May and the third on 20th and 27th of September. Out of these three, the last one was the biggest climate mobilization in history. The third global climate strike was not organized by one climate movement but multiple

different ones who collaborated together. It took place in more than 185 countries and about 7.6 million people participated. Out of these countries, Germany alone had 1.4 million people participating in the protests. In most countries, the youth was allowed to skip school to go out and protest. However, it was not only the youth that was demonstrating but people of all ages, nationalities and occupations. As the strikes took places in different countries the demands differed slightly but climate change was still the common denominator in all of them. The demonstrations were tactically held just before the UN climate summit in order to magnify its effect on global leaders. More than 250,000 people were demonstrating in New York where Greta Thunberg gave her speech in the headquarters of the United Nations. She has become an important figure in the action against climate change due to her massive influence. The next demonstration has already been talked about and might be held on the 29th of November 2019.

As the scientific facts about climate change have been laid out into the open, demonstrators have felt that politicians have hardly taken any notice or measurable action to tackle the problems. But, due to inaction by global leaders to address the problem people have started to demonstrate in order to affect people in positions of authority. Some of the main demands of these demonstrations are to help climate refugees and to declare a climate emergency through which the transition into 100% clean energy will be made.

In order to achieve these goals, more regulation on carbon emissions is needed, which hopefully would affect countries, companies and individuals in a way which would lead to a carbon-free world. One of the best ways to achieve this is by increasing awareness.



Photo: Sarah Silbiger

The reaction of these demonstrations has mostly been positive. Even though, there are some people claiming that skipping school is not necessarily the best way to act but rather to stay in school in order to learn and then to tackle the problems. Also, Vladimir Putin claimed that the youth is trying to address a complex problem of which they have no comprehensive understanding and adding that the youth have been manipulated and thus acting only as puppets. Besides, these criticisms and several other accusations the overall reception has been good.

These demonstrations have clearly had an effect on politicians and legislators. For instance the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker has been speaking about spending a quarter of the EU budget to mitigate the effects of climate change and Angela Merkel announced to give 50 billion Euros to new projects which reduce carbon emissions. Also, smaller changes such as banning plastic straws and putting air travel under taxation have been made. This combined with the rising support of green parties in the European parliament election shows that the demonstrations have had an impact in politics.

Besides politicians, citizens have also become more aware of the future problems we are facing. Movements such as zero waste, minimalism and vegetarianism which are partly inspired by the desire to mitigate climate change have been growing. Due to the demonstrations, philanthropists have donated nearly a million US dollars for Extinction Rebellion and The School Strike For Climate in order to support their movement. In addition, according to a poll held by YouGov in 2019, the public concern for the environment had increased drastically due to the awareness brought by the demonstrations.

Corporations have been influenced by the increasing demonstrations and also sensed the changing demands from consumers. As people have become more conscious about the impact of consumption on the environment, they have started to demand more environmentally friendly products. The change is apparent as consumption has switched into e.g. reused fabrics, reusable materials and to produc-

tion methods which are using only renewable energy sources. After the demonstrations the CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos has promised to implement new ways to make his business more environmentally sustainable.

Lastly, entrepreneurs have for some time now been coming up with creative ideas to make a sustainable future. For example, Elon Musk who created Tesla with the intention to transition from petroleum consuming cars into electric cars. Dickson Despommier who in cooperation with his students came up with the idea of vertical farming to reduce the negative effects on the environment of traditional farming. Bill Gates who is funding the company called Carbon Engineering and Beyond Meat. Carbon Engineering produces machines that use the direct air capturing technology to remove industrial volumes of atmospheric carbon dioxide from our atmosphere. However, as always with new technologies they are expensive. Luckily, we do have genius-level entrepreneurs and billionaires who are willing to work on these projects.

The youth of our generation is demanding action to be taken now. As their future is at stake and having heard the empty promises by politicians before it is no wonder that they are taking it to the streets. Through the demonstrations, the awareness of the problems of climate change is spreading to every corner of our societies and action will be taken. Hopefully, with the cooperation of people from all walks of life, a better future of the world will reveal itself.



Photo: Li-An-Lim via Unsplash

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Motives Pumping Protests: *Why Did You Join the Movement?*

You join the protest. You are in Hong Kong demanding freedom, in Lebanon aspiring for political change, or in Catalonia fighting for independence. You are making a petition, demonstrating, rioting, looting, or burning. You decided to act on your contention by joining the protest, whereas the person that sat next to you in the bus- who is subject to the same contention- did not. But, what is the difference between you and him? What are your motives to participate in the social movement? This question has been a source of fascination in political psychology, where two decades of scientific inquiry have started to consolidate a part of the answer. People that have devoted their careers to study the question collect this partial answer in four themes: grievance, efficacy, identity, and emotion.

Grievance is to protests what fuel is to fire- without it, there is just no substance for it to happen. Grievances are created from the way people in power treat a social problem. Sometimes they are sudden impositions or violated principles, as it is the case in the Dutch farmers' shared indignation towards the government clampdown on nitrogen emission, or in the Hongkongese feeling of outrage towards the new law that tries Hong Kong residents in mainland China.

Other times, the roots of the grievance are to be found in a perceived injustice. It can be that certain political or economic outcomes should have been better, as it is the case with the global protests that demand regulation to act on the rapid climate change. Other times they are caused by a perception that a person or a group have been treated unjustly- this was the type of grievances that gave rise to protests such as the Stonewall riot, one of the most pivotal moments in LGBT history, or the legendary Civil Rights Movement march in Washington.

However, grievance alone is not a motive. Grievances have repeatedly demonstrated to be weak predictors for protest participation. Most citizens have felt political grievance at some point in their lives, but just a few percent have ever protested. What are, then, the psychological differences between a protester and a non protester? One of the most important ones is a feeling of efficacy.

Do you think that you can make a difference in the political situation if you join the protest? Do you think that the protest collective action will be able to achieve the goal of change? If your answer is yes, you have a high sense of efficacy with respect to the protest. People that feel self-efficacious are more motivated to act when they believe that they can reduce their grievances through protesting at an affordable cost.

There are two types of efficacy: the perceived efficacy of the group and self-efficacy. Perceived efficacy is the individual belief that the collective actor that forms the protest has the capacity to start the desired societal change. This type of efficacy is stronger when there is more social media coverage, there is more politicians participation, and there is a perceived civic competence.

Self-efficacy is the belief that one can make it if one tries, and when one is confident about the control exerted over his or her actions and environment. It is shaped by past experiences, observations, and available information. It is also shaped by our formed identity- one of the most significant factors determining our motivation to protest.

Who are you? Who are other people? Your answer to these questions builds your sense of identity. Identity is who you think you are and who you think other people are. You can have many identities, as many as places you occupy in society, and some are more relevant for you than others. They are based on characteristics like sex, race, age, organizational affiliation, nationality, or political stand. The more others are like you in the identities that you find important, the more they become part of your collective identity.

If you identify with the group of people that are protesting, your motivation to participate in the protest increases. This is actually the case for most of human action- a characteristic that raises the question of to what extent our actions are truly ours, and for which right now there is no clear answer.

Identity and protest are also linked in the opposite direction: once you protest, you are more likely to share a sense of identity with the people that you are protesting with. This creates a connection between protesters. It brings a sense of powerful unity, almost as powerful as the last factor affecting protest motivation: emotions.

What is your emotional approach to a problem? Would you get angry at a perceived injustice, or would you have fear for what's to come in future policies? If you are more likely to experience anger, you are the protester type, whereas if you are more likely to experience fear, possibly you have not considered joining the protest.

Anger is considered an approach-oriented emotional response: when present, it takes charge of actions. Differently, fear is an avoidance-oriented emotional response that refrains people from taking action. Interestingly, anger is more common when a person feels self-efficacious, whereas fear is more prominent in people with a low feeling of efficacy.

Anger is often provoked by observing angry people around us. Lately, social media has allowed emotions such as anger to expand more quickly. For instance, before the advent of social media, a person might have shared his grievance and emotion with at most fifteen people in one day. Now, the same opinion is able to reach the hundreds of people that make the social networks of the person in a matter of seconds. Because social networks are often formed by people that share some aspects of their collective identity, the opinions and emotions communicated through social media have a drastic impact to build or support the protest.

The days of protest without social media are actually coming to an end. Social media participation affects the grievances that are formed, the emotions of the process, the collective identity, and the feeling of self-efficacy and group-efficacy. Advances in understanding the motivation to protest thus require that the protester motivation process are re-evaluated to account for such a powerful force. This might be the most important step to make in trying to answer why a person protests.

“Do you think that you can make a difference in the political situation if you join the protest?”



Photo: Vincent M.A. Janssen via Pexels

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Photo: AP via scmp.com

Looking Forward

All the interesting topics discussed in this magazine are not just meant to take a snapshot of the world right now. We as Rostra editors would also like to make an analysis that may be used as starting points of discussion, with an eye to the future. Therefore, what can we expect to happen in the time to come, as a consequence of the latest developments we discussed in this magazine?

For sure, the foundation of democracy itself will be put to challenge and its current deep crisis underlined. A global distrust in the political status quo led protesters to challenge their government position on many topics that are of broad social importance: the ripple effect also makes it easier to find supporters all over the world, and it makes people realize that they should not be frightened to show their opinion for what they believe is right. People can get inspired by the behaviors of others, and hope is a powerful tool when fighting important battles. If other people managed to do it, why shouldn't we? This should motivate us to keep fighting together for what we believe in, and not just let things go away. This starts from our daily life when we receive a tax report which we believe is not truthful, when at university we do not feel like we are treated equally, or when we read on the news that our local municipality introduced new policies with which we disagree.

The right to protest can be considered as one of the core aspects of democracy, representing freedom in defending our opinion. However, if people do not exercise it, the very foundation of democracy becomes unstable. In this case, the people to blame are those who know what is happening and decide to stay still: the latter behavior may occur when people do not feel directly affected by something, or they

think that fighting the current status quo is not worth it. The focus this year shifted from protests of workers to the ones of consumers, according to the economist Tyler Cowen, and this trend may continue soon.

Going back to our main questions, we might state with fair certainty that protests will leave their mark and probably will be just the start, or at least an incentive, of a massive process of right claiming all over the world. But also a great deal of attention must be put, as there will be people willing to exploit these unstable situations to establish themselves into power, leading countries into risky situations.

What we might also expect is for the political class to accommodate the protesters' requests to cool down the situation, to slowly come back to their powers over time, beyond suspicion. This is one of the main reasons why information and good education is key to having an inclusive and deciding role in society: namely to be able to form our own opinion without the need to rely on someone else's information, with the risk of being influenced and indoctrinated.

But above all, hope is the main outcome of this 2019. Hope that things may and actually can get better if we truly believe in a world which can be improved, and do not just accept what we are given right now.

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