

# Responding to protest movements: Latin America and Eastern Europe

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## Question

*How have governments in Latin America and Eastern Europe responded to popular protest movements, and what support have international actors offered? What were the outcomes of the governments' responses?*

*This report is one of a pair of research reports looking at how governments respond to protest movements. This report reviews broad trends internationally, drawing on illustrative examples from Latin America and Eastern Europe; the second report examines protests movements in the Middle East and North Africa in more depth.*

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# 1. Summary

The dynamics of protest movements can vary greatly, and especially since the mid-2000s they tend to be driven by specific local economic or political grievances rather than by broad global issues (Carothers & Youngs, 2015). Government responses to protests are also highly diverse, covering 'a wide spectrum from complete tolerance to the harshest possible repression', (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 23).

In general, the most common government responses to protests are to tolerate them without directly engaging with the protesters, or to repress the protests through either violent or non-violent means. Governments accommodate protesters' demands in a minority of cases, ranging between 8% and about 25% of protests according to studies looking at various types of protests, geographic scopes, and time periods (Brancati, 2016; Clark & Regan, 2018; Franklin, 2009).

The responses that governments do make to protests are influenced by many factors. In general, as protests cause increasing levels of disruption to the economy and society, the probability of a government accommodating protesters' demands and making concessions increases. However, as the political cost of making concessions increases (for example, when demands are farther-reaching or more directly affect those in power), the probability of making concessions decreases and the probability of repressing protests, either violently or non-violently, increases (Klein & Regan, 2018). Protests are more likely to win concessions if they are larger, seek limited demands, cause significant disruption, take place in more democratic countries, maintain long-term pressure, and use non-violent tactics (Brancati, 2016; Carothers & Youngs, 2015; Franklin, 2009). Protests are less likely to meet with repression if they are larger and seek limited demands, if they take place in countries that are more democratic and have a better human rights record, if their country has higher foreign capital dependency and is party to preferential trade agreements with hard standards for human rights protection, and if they use non-violent tactics (Brancati, 2016; Franklin, 2008, 2009; Hafner-Burton, 2005).

International actors tend not to directly and actively respond to protests in other countries. In cases where protests are repressed violently, international actors denounce excessive use of force, but such statements do not appear to have much effect and there is even some evidence that governments receiving criticism are incentivised to increase repression further to cover up abuses (DeMeritt, Conrad, & Fariss, 2016). Economic ties have a moderating effect on a government's response to protests, increasing the likelihood of concessions and decreasing the likelihood of repression. Governments are more receptive to criticism from international partners where there are strong economic links and higher foreign capital dependency, and trade agreements containing hard standards on human rights incentivise protection for human rights more strongly than subscribing to more general human rights agreements does (Brancati, 2016; DeMeritt et al., 2016; Franklin, 2008, 2009).

Most protests do not achieve their desired outcomes; they either generate no response or they are repressed, either violently or non-violently. Many protests, however, do achieve results which can include high officials resigning, legislation being repealed and initiatives halted or changed, constitutional reform, or other changes to political, economic, or social policy. The protests most likely to achieve results are those with political, legal or social aims, rather than those aimed at economic reform (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada, & Saenz, 2013). It is rare for governments or high officials to be removed from power, and such drastic outcomes are more likely when protests have been violent (Brancati, 2016), but there are also many examples of officials being removed after peaceful protests.

It is difficult for protest movements to sustain sufficient momentum to achieve deep institutional reform. Some observers even argue that protest movements can ‘tear down old structures but not foster sustained political institution building or effective participation in formal political processes’ (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 18). There are multiple examples (such as Ukraine in 2013-14, Guatemala in 2015, and Romania in 2012-2018) where protests led to governments reversing plans and even to the removal of high officials, but where the political establishment resisted deeper institutional reforms and patterns of behaviour persisted even though the individuals holding office changed.

## 2. Types of responses to protests

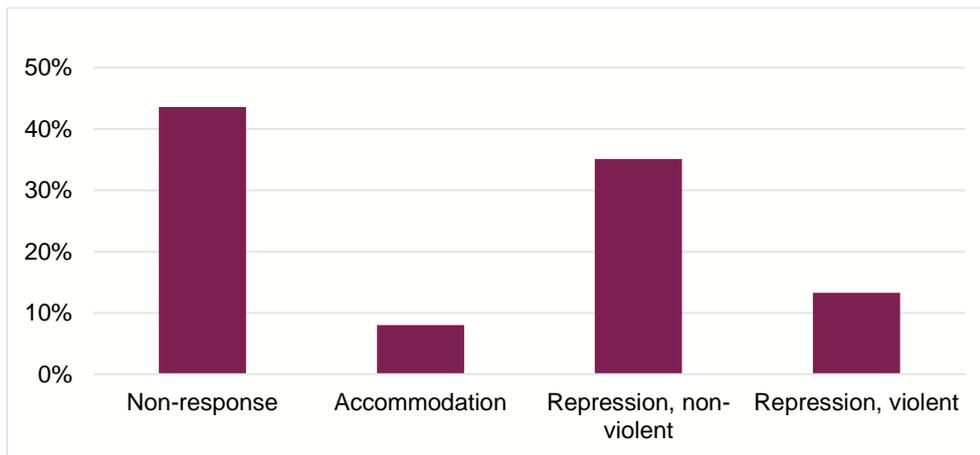
Government responses to protests are highly diverse, covering ‘a wide spectrum from complete tolerance to the harshest possible repression’, but with a high frequency of violence and a common pattern of ‘blaming foreign actors for protests and reducing space for domestic civil society actors to operate and seek support from abroad’ (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 23). Comparing protests and responses over time, across countries, and across different research studies is difficult because there is no common standard for precisely what kind of activities should be counted and how they should be classified. For example, by one measure, in China in the year 2010 alone there were 180,000 protest events – mostly small-scale protests about local issues (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 5). Governments also often respond in more than one way to a protest event or series of events – for example, they may attempt to repress protests initially, and then later make concessions (Brancati, 2016, pp. 107–126).

Governments’ responses to protest movements are often described as following one of four general patterns (Brancati, 2016, pp. 107–126):

- **Non-response or toleration** of protests, in which governments allow protests to proceed but do not engage with them in any significant way.
- **Accommodation or concession** to protesters’ demands, which could range from tokenistic offers such as agreeing to discuss issues without making specific reform commitments, or making political, economic, or other policy concessions that respond to protesters’ demands in whole or in part.
- **Non-violent repression** through measures such as restricting demonstrations, controlling print and broadcast media, restricting communications media such as cell phones and the internet, and organising counter-protests.
- **Violent repression**, through deploying police, paramilitary, or military forces to use varying degrees of force against protesters, such as hand-to-hand weapons, tear gas, water cannons, or firearms using conventional or non-lethal ammunition.

The Mass Mobilization Project at Binghamton University monitors protest events worldwide and provides data that currently cover 15,570 events across 162 countries from 1990 to 2018. The dataset identifies 17,410 responses to protest events, as some events receiving more than one response. The most common response is no response, or toleration, making up 44% of instances (Figure 1) (Clark & Regan, 2018).

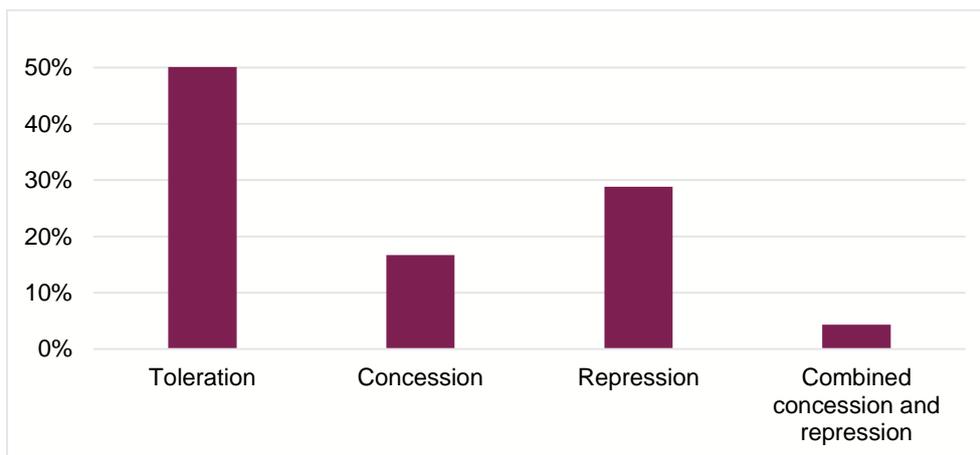
**Figure 1: Government responses to protests, global, 1990-2018**



Source: Author's own, data taken from Clark & Regan, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HTTWYL>

A study of government responses to protests<sup>1</sup> focusing on Latin America, covering 832 cases in seven countries between 1981 and 1995, found similar a pattern, although with somewhat higher rates of accommodation/concession and lower rates of repression (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Government responses to contentious challenges, Latin America, 1981-1995**



Source: Author's own, data take from Franklin, 2009, p. 703, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1065912908322405>

There is some indication that *pro-democracy* protests<sup>2</sup> may provoke stronger repressive responses from governments. These protests, since they directly challenge politicians and the governing regime, may pose a more direct existential threat to politicians and regimes than protests about social or economic issues. A study looking at these types of protests from 1989 to 2011 finds that violent repression was the most common response of governments, used in two-

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<sup>1</sup> The study defined its scope as 'contentious political challenges', defined as 'collective, unconventional acts taken by inhabitants of a country directed against or expressing opposition to their government, its policies or personnel, or the political regime itself... outside of the officially accepted, institutionalized methods of conflict resolution' (Franklin, 2009, p. 701).

<sup>2</sup> Mass public demonstrations in which participants demand that a country adopts or upholds democratic elections (Brancati, 2016, p. 5).

thirds of cases. Even in cases where concessions were made, two-thirds of the time concessions were only made after first trying to repress the protests through either violent or non-violent means (*figures not included here due to copyright restrictions*) (Brancati, 2016, p. 107).

### 3. Factors influencing government responses to protests

One approach to analysing responses to protests is to consider the likelihood of different responses as being dependent on the *costs of disruption* caused by the protests, in the form of economic losses and public disorder, and the political *costs of concession* to protesters' demands. Klein & Regan (2018), using global data on protests from 1990-2014, find that where disruption costs are high, such as when protests interfere with trade and commerce or greatly affect daily activities of the population, governments are less likely to tolerate protests and more likely to accommodate protesters' demands, all else being equal. Where the cost of granting concessions is high, such as when protesters demand extensive changes that directly affect political leaders or pose an existential threat to the regime, or where they use violence, which increases the likelihood of future violence and undermines the state's ability to maintain order, governments are less likely to tolerate or accommodate protesters' demands, and more likely to respond with repression (either violent or non-violent) (*figures not included here due to copyright restrictions*).

The table below summarises characteristics of protest events that have been found to have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of governments responding with accommodation or repression. The studies summarised here cover varying geographical scopes, types of protests, and time periods, and present their results in different ways, so the information available is not necessarily comparable across all characteristics. Further discussion of some of these characteristics follows the table.

**Table 1: Characteristics that influence government responses to protests**

<b>Characteristics of protests or countries</b>	<b>Likelihood of accommodation / concessions</b>	<b>Likelihood of repression</b>	<b>Scope and source of study (see notes below table for further details)</b>
Size of protests	Larger protests are more likely to win concessions		Global (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 5)
	Larger protests (in terms of the number of participants or the number of participants per capita) are more likely to win concessions		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, pp. 128–132)
	Larger protests more likely to win concessions, but the effect is small (2.5% increase in probability of concession for the largest protests compared with the smallest)	The largest protests were 37% less likely to be repressed than the smallest ones, and 34% percent more likely to be tolerated	
Limited, specific demands	6.5% more likely to win concessions	10.9% less likely to be repressed	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 708-709)
Presence of elite supporters	8.2% more likely to win concessions	3.5% less likely to be repressed	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, p. 711)
Economic crisis underway	There is an indirect positive association, as economic crises are associated with larger protests, which are in turn associated with a higher likelihood of concessions		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 143)
Economic inequality	No significant effect		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 143)
Economic development (higher GDP per capita)	Higher GDP per capita is less likely to be associated with democratic reforms or transitions		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, pp. 164-175)

<b>Characteristics of protests or countries</b>	<b>Likelihood of accommodation / concessions</b>	<b>Likelihood of repression</b>	<b>Scope and source of study (see notes below table for further details)</b>
Agricultural employment	The greater the percentage of people employed in agriculture, the higher the likelihood of democracy protests to be associated with democratic transitions		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 173)
Foreign capital dependency	Positive but weak association. However, in countries with a poor human rights record, high foreign capital dependency increases the probability of concessions by 60.2%	Positive but weak association. However, in countries with a poor human rights record, high foreign capital dependency decreases the probability of repression by 29.8%	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 711)
Previous human rights violations in country		Countries that have been criticised on human rights are 27.3% more likely to use repression	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 711)
Subscribing to human rights agreements		No significant effect	Latin America (Franklin, 2008, p. 189)
Subscribing to trade agreements with human rights provisions		Trade agreements with 'hard' standards for human rights protection reduce the probability of repression from one year to the next by up to 7% for the worst offenders	Global (Hafner-Burton, 2005)
International actors 'naming and		Increased likelihood of repression (see discussion below)	Global (DeMeritt et al., 2016, p. 24)

<b>Characteristics of protests or countries</b>	<b>Likelihood of accommodation / concessions</b>	<b>Likelihood of repression</b>	<b>Scope and source of study (see notes below table for further details)</b>
shaming' repressive behaviour		Increased likelihood of future repression (but see discussion below)  Where a country has strong economic ties internationally, criticism on human rights can make the government up to 33% less likely to use repression against future protests, but this effect is short-lived (see discussion below)	Latin America (Franklin, 2008, p. 187)
Democracy status in the country	Countries with the highest democracy scores are 6.0% more likely to grant concessions	Countries with the highest democracy scores are 29.1% less likely to use repression	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 711)
		Democracy does not significantly lessen repression, controlling for other factors	Latin America (Franklin, 2008, p. 205)
		Presidents with broader popular support utilise significantly lower magnitudes of repression, while presidents who were never popularly elected or who have lost popular support tend to be more repressive	Latin America (Franklin, 2008, p. 205)
	Democracy (as indicated by a higher score on the polity index) is significantly related to a lower likelihood of democratic transitions and reforms (possibly because countries that are already democratic are unlikely to make further transitions)		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, pp. 164, 174-175)
Previous repressive behaviour	Reduced likelihood of concessions		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 174-175)
		Increased likelihood of further repression	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 711)

<b>Characteristics of protests or countries</b>	<b>Likelihood of accommodation / concessions</b>	<b>Likelihood of repression</b>	<b>Scope and source of study (see notes below table for further details)</b>
Long-duration protests	The probability of concessions increases by 23.2% for the longest protests (120 days) compared with the shortest ones (1 day), but the size of the effect increases slowly and with great variation.	Increased probability of combined concession and repression by 45.5% for the longest protests	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 710-711)
Location of protests (urban or rural areas)	No significant effect		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 143)
Violent protest tactics	Increased likelihood of removing chief executives, but not other reforms		Democracy protests, global (Brancati, 2016, p. 143)
		Increased probability of repression by 57.2% (and of combined concessions and repression by 2.4%)	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, pp. 710)
		Increased probability of repression by nearly 100% for the highest levels of violence	Latin America (Franklin, 2008, p. 205)
Non-violent protest tactics (e.g. strikes, occupations, hunger strikes)	Nonviolent occupation increases the probability of concession by 7.3%	Decreased likelihood of repression, especially for hunger strikes	Latin America (Franklin, 2009, p. 709)
	Hunger strikes increase the probability of concession by 11.9%		

Source: Author's own, data taken from:

Carothers & Youngs, 2015: worldwide scope, focusing primarily on the period 2010-2015

DeMeritt et al., 2016: worldwide scope, considering only human rights violations identified by UNHCR from 1995 to 2010

Brancati, 2016: worldwide scope, considering only protests seeking democratic reforms, from 1989 to 2011

Franklin, 2009: Latin American protests, covering 827 or 832 challenges (depending on availability of data) in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, 1981-1995.

Franklin, 2008: Latin American protests, covering 873 challenges in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, 1981-1995.

Hafner-Burton, 2005: Global datasets on government repression or political terror, 1972-2002

The **size of protests** is particularly significant. In general, the larger a protest movement is, the more likely it is to obtain concessions from the government, although there is considerable variation in governments' responses (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 5). A global study of 310 democracy protests across 92 countries from 1989-2011 found that the size of protests – both in terms of the absolute number of protesters and the proportion of the population participating in the protests – was the most significant factor in predicting whether governments were likely to make significant political concessions (Brancati, 2016, pp. 128–132).

A similar statistical study of protests in Latin America also found that larger protests tend to be more successful in extracting concessions, but the effect was much less pronounced: protests with more than 100,000 participants were only 2.5% more likely to receive concessions than protests with fewer than 20 participants, all else being equal (Franklin, 2009, p. 710). However, this study showed that larger protests were much less likely to provoke a violent response from government: the largest protest events were 37% less likely to be repressed, and 34% percent more likely to be tolerated, than the smallest ones (Franklin, 2009, p. 710).

Countries with a **poor record on human rights** are, according to a statistical study of protests in Latin America, increasingly likely to attempt to repress protests. However, when such countries also have high foreign capital dependency, the probability of repression decreases by 29.8% and the probability of concessions increases by 60.2%. 'Challenges that occur in countries that receive much foreign aid or investment and that have recently been criticized for human rights violations tend to be safer and much more effective' (Franklin, 2009, p. 711). Signing up to international human rights agreements does not appear to have a mitigating effect, likely due to the lack of enforcement mechanisms within most such treaties (Franklin, 2008, p. 189). However, preferential trade agreements containing 'hard' (specific, legally binding, and enforceable) standards for human rights do tend to improve countries' human rights practices, although the effect is fairly small: the probability of repressing human rights from one year to the next is reduced by up to a maximum of 7% for the worst offenders if they are parties to one or more such agreements (Hafner-Burton, 2005).

**Violent protests** strongly attract violent responses, increasing the probability of violent repression in Latin America by 57% in one study and by nearly 100% for the highest levels of violence in another (Franklin, 2008, p. 205, 2009, p. 710). **Non-violent protest** tactics increase the likelihood of concessions and discourage repression. A statistical analysis of protests in Latin America finds that nonviolent occupations increase the probability of concessions by 7.3% and hunger strikes increase the probability of concessions by 11.9% (Franklin, 2009, p. 709).

## 4. International actors' responses to protests

International actors appear to rarely respond actively and directly to protests in other countries.<sup>3</sup> International actors sometimes make statements indicating support for the principle that populations should have the right to determine their futures (for example in Ukraine in 2013), or comment on the issues driving protests (for example, international actors urged the Romanian government to rethink and reverse its weakening of the justice system in 2017 and 2018) but it is not clear how much influence such statements have. It is rare for international actors to take

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<sup>3</sup> Authoritarian leaders often blame protests on foreign influence (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 21), but this report focuses on governments' and international actors' *responses* to protests, rather than on how protest movements arise and develop.

stronger actions such as imposing sanctions on countries based on a government's response to protests (Brancati, 2016, p. 125).

International actors do often respond to protests when a government represses protests violently by issuing **statements condemning excessive use of force**, but there does not appear to be strong evidence that such statements have much direct influence. Indeed, one study of human rights violations worldwide from 1995-2010 finds the reverse: when states are 'named and shamed' for repressive tactics, they 'continue using the shamed tactic and simultaneously increase other rights violations that help hide it' (DeMeritt et al., 2016, p. 1). This study found that 'when a country is shamed for torture by the United Nations in a given year, the level of disappearances increases in the following year' (DeMeritt et al., 2016, p. 21). Another study, focusing on protests in Latin America between 1981 and 1995, similarly found that 'all sources of human rights criticism are positively and statistically significantly related to the subsequent repression against contentious political challenges' (Franklin, 2008, p. 201). The author suggests that this does not mean that criticism *encourages* future abuses, but that criticism targets long-term abusers who are unlikely to change their practices regardless of what critics say.

The existence of **economic ties between countries appears to have a moderating effect** on a government's response to protests. The study of human rights violations in Latin America mentioned above finds that where there are strong economic ties to other countries, criticism incentivises governments to reduce repression of subsequent protests, but that this effect lasts no more than six months. This is most effective when the criticism comes from NGOs, religious groups, and foreign governments, where the probability of repression is reduced by 31% to 33%; intergovernmental organisations such as the UN have relatively little influence and reduce the probability of future repression by only 10%. (Franklin, 2008, pp. 187–204). Another study of protest movements in Latin America found that **high foreign capital dependency** increases the probability that a government will make concessions to protesters by 60.2%, and decreases the probability of repression of protests by 29.8% in countries with poor human rights records (Franklin, 2009, p. 711). Countries that are party to preferential trade agreements that contain 'hard' (specific, legally binding, enforceable) standards for human rights protection are up to 7% less likely to use repression from year to year for the worst offenders (Hafner-Burton, 2005). Finally, Brancati (2016, p. 181) argues that a strong economy enhances the likelihood of democracy protests achieving successful outcomes (although protests are less likely to occur when economic conditions are good).

**Strong international involvement on the issues driving protest** may be able to support protesters in achieving positive outcomes. In Guatemala in 2015, for example, an internationally-supported commission exposed a high-level corruption scandal, triggering mass protests and enabling a dual-pronged attack on corruption which led to the removal of the president and vice-president from office. However, a subsequent Guatemalan government undermined international support for the commission by lobbying the USA, and the commission has since been disbanded (see case study below).

In unusual cases, international actors have responded to protests by taking advantage of the disorder caused by protest movements to advance their own purposes, an extreme example being Russia's annexation of Crimea during the Ukrainian *Euromaidan* protests of 2014.

## 5. Outcomes of protests

**Most protests do not achieve their desired outcomes.** 'Many non-democratic governments hit by protests are proving able to survive them' (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 20). Many 'semi-

authoritarian' governments 'allow a limited amount of opposition political activity and independent civil society, both to release some political pressure in the system and to keep a degree of international legitimacy', but will react to restrict political space or undermine the opposition's legitimacy when protests emerge (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 17). A review of 843 protests in 84 countries between 2006 and 2013 (including protests aimed at corporations and employers as well as governments, so this includes a greater diversity of events than those discussed elsewhere in this report) found that 63% of the protests 'achieved neither their intended demands (when demands are stated) nor results toward alleviating the expressed grievances' (Ortiz et al., 2013, p. 36).

However, **many protests do manage to achieve at least some of their goals**. As Carothers & Youngs write (2015, p. 23):

Political outcomes of major protests in recent years run a full gamut of results: no perceptible impact; no change in the formal political system but long-term shifts in public mentality that may presage future political changes; the ousting of a regime and at least an attempted process of democratic change; something akin to a democratic revolution; an antidemocratic coup; prolonged civil war; and generalized political chaos. While some protest movements have indeed foundered at the task of translating protest energy into sustained political engagement, others have made progress in this regard.

The case studies summarised later in this report illustrate several examples of successful outcomes achieved by protest movements, including:

- reforms to education and social policy in Chile, including eliminating profit at all levels of the education system, returning control of education to the national government, increasing funding for social programmes including expansion of free higher education, and creating new public universities and colleges;
- constitutional reform, strengthening civil society, reforms to the police, breaking up monopolies, deregulating the economy, and reforming state-owned enterprises in Ukraine;
- reversing government initiatives and repealing legislation, blocking the development of a mining project, and exposing corruption in Romania; and
- removing high officials from office in Guatemala, Ukraine, and Romania.

**The protests most likely to achieve results are those related to political, legal, or social rights.** A review of 843 protests in 84 countries between 2006 and 2013 found that in the cases where governments responded to grievances, almost half were related to political, legal and social rights. These responses included a change of government, adoption of a new constitution, changes to law or policy, resignation of high officials, new elections, creation of a new political party or movement, legal recognition of political or social rights, or exposure of government or corporate secrets (Ortiz et al., 2013, p. 37). Economic achievements made up less than a third of achievements, and most of these were about labour issues such as pay and working conditions, and only to a lesser degree about broader economic issues such as subsidies, taxes, pension reform, labour market reform, social investment, and changes to controversial economic measures. Less than 10% of achievements were related to urban development and infrastructure projects, and another 10% were less tangible outcomes such as raising the prominence of issues in public discourse or opening a dialogue or negotiation (Ortiz et al., 2013, p. 37).

A review of democracy protests worldwide notes that one third of all democracy protests between 1989 and 2011 led to either full democratic transitions or smaller-scale democratic reforms within

one year (Brancati, 2016, p. 158). The most common types of reforms that governments made in response to these protests were (in descending order of frequency): increasing the openness and competitiveness of national elections; rectifying electoral malfeasance; restoring elections where they had been suspended due to a war or coup; holding elections for new or previously unelected offices; or upholding the results of elections that had already occurred (Brancati, 2016, pp. 109–115).

**It is rare for governments or high officials to be removed from power as a direct response to protests.** Such drastic outcomes may require violent action: a study of democracy protests suggests that ‘chief executives are more much likely to be removed from power when protesters act violently than when they do not’ (Brancati, 2016, p. 143). In Ukraine, for example, violent protests in 2013-2014 led to the fall of the president after a backlash against excessive use of force by the government. In Guatemala, peaceful protests were able to remove the president and vice-president, but the protesters in this case had the benefit of sharing an agenda with a high-profile anti-corruption panel with strong public support in the country and international support from the UN and thirteen donor countries (see case study below). In Romania, recent (2012-2017) protests led to the fall of two governments with very little violence (see case study below).

**It is difficult for protests to sustain sufficient momentum to achieve deep institutional reform.** Some observers argue that protest movements can ‘tear down old structures but not foster sustained political institution building or effective participation in formal political processes’ (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 18). In Ukraine in 2004, for example, demonstrators forced an election to be held democratically but struggled to achieve deeper institutional reform (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 19). A decade later, further protests led to the fall of another government but despite new people being brought to power, political institutions remain closed, power remains centralised, the electoral system has not been reformed, and wealthy and powerful interests remain entrenched and resistant to change (see case study below). A similar inability to follow through with reforms can be seen in Guatemala, where a corruption scandal led to high officials being forced out of office in 2015, but entrenched interests were able to push back and close down the anti-corruption commission a few years later (see case study below). In Romania, mass protests from 2012 through 2018 led to the repeal of legislation, the resignation of high officials, and the fall of two governments, but despite these gains the establishment’s control of political institutions remains unbroken and attacks on anticorruption efforts have slowed at best (see case study below).

**Some protest movements have attempted to sustain momentum for reform** by entering politics by joining existing political parties or forming new ones, or by connecting with existing institutions like labour movements which have had an ongoing role in political life during and after the protests (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 19). Some protest movements ‘have had impacts on socioeconomic policies, aiming at the level of specific policy reform rather than systemic change’ (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 20).

## 6. Case studies

### Chile, 2011-2013

In 2011, university and secondary school students in Chile embarked on a protest campaign nominally aimed at reforms to the education system, but also challenging fundamental elements of the neoliberal socio-economic model enshrined in the constitution (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015; Pousadela, 2013). Since the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), basic education had been the

responsibility of local governments and the higher education system had essentially been privatised. This led to large inequalities in education provision across regions and socio-economic groups, large variability in quality of education, high tuition costs, and high levels of student debt (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 253; Pousadela, 2013). The protesters sought to change the role of government in education from being a regulator of private markets to being a guarantor and provider of education, demanded significant tax reforms, sought to increase equality of opportunity, and sought to increase the accountability of politicians (Pousadela, 2013).

Although unrest can be traced back to 2006, the protests began in earnest in April 2011 with a student strike at the Central University of Chile, protesting against a plan to sell the university to a for-profit company. The students initially demanded enforcement of a ban on profit in higher education and strengthening of government regulation of private universities, although later demands included tax reform, measures to increase government accountability and renationalising the copper industry to pay for free education. Between April and October, protests spread nationwide with support from social organisations and labour unions, and the movement gained strong support from the population at large. Many protest events occurred across the country, growing in size from tens of thousands of participants initially to hundreds of thousands and one event of nearly a million participants in August. Protesters occupied university and secondary school buildings, organised labour strikes that spread nationally, marched in the streets, organised people to bang pots and pans from balconies and windows when street protests were banned, organised hunger strikes, and used creative events including music, dance, flash mobs, and a mass kissing marathon (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 259; Pousadela, 2013). Many protests were peaceful, but there was also a contingent of masked violent protesters, and vandalism and violence took place at protests and increased over time. (Pousadela, 2013). The movement had positive international media coverage, and one of the leaders of the movement, Camila Vallejo, was named 'person of the year' by *The Guardian* newspaper (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 256).

The government of president Sebastián Piñera engaged in discussions with protesters, but negotiations were strained and proposals from each side were rejected by the other as being vague, ineffective, not in good faith, or not responding to demands. The government offered to establish special negotiation forums but this was rejected by protesters as an attempt to move negotiations out of public view and not offering equality in the negotiation process. Police responded harshly to violence at protests, and there was some evidence of police *agents provocateurs* instigating violence in some instances. More than a thousand protesters were arrested and one was killed. In October, the government introduced a bill to impose jail sentences on those responsible for school occupations, stepped up arrests of protesters, and disrupted a major march with barricades, water cannon, and tear gas. (Pousadela, 2013)

Public opinion was generally supportive of the protesters, with opinion polls showing 89% support for their demands at the height of the movement, while the government's rate of support dropped to as low as 22%. However, most universities returned to teaching by November 2011, and secondary schools resumed normal operation by January 2012, although protest activities continued with less intensity (Pousadela, 2013).

The student movement did, however, weaken the government, put education and social inequality on the political agenda, and generate a broad public consensus for reform (Guzmán-Concha, 2017, p. 40; Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 262). In the 2013 national elections, candidates on both the left and the right promised substantial education reforms. The former government was defeated and the new president, Michelle Bachelet, won on a platform which included education reform, constitutional change, tax reform, and social inequality (Guzmán-

Concha, 2017, p. 1; Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 262). In addition, some members of the student protest movement, including the most prominent leader of the movement, Camila Vallejo, were elected to Congress (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, p. 262). The government's policy commitments responded to some of the student protesters' demands, including eliminating profit at all levels of the education system, returning control of education to the national government, increasing funding for social programmes including expansion of free higher education, and creating new public universities and colleges (Guzmán-Concha, 2017, pp. 37–40; Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, pp. 264–265). Some of the protesters' more radical demands on constitutional reform and nationalising the copper industry to pay for free education were not adopted (Larrabure & Torchia, 2015, pp. 264–265). However, opposition from private schools and universities, some parents' associations, and right-wing political groups blocked implementation of some reforms (Guzmán-Concha, 2017, p. 41) and in 2018, Bachelet lost the presidential election to Sebastián Piñera, who was the former president during the height of the student protest movement. As of late 2019, Piñera's government was once again battling large-scale violent street protests, this time sparked by rising living costs and high inequality (BBC, 2019).

## Ukraine, 2013-2014

The *Euromaidan* ('European Square') protest movement in Ukraine was triggered in November 2013 when President Viktor Yanukovich suddenly suspended plans to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 85; Zelinska, 2017, p. 1). The protests were a sudden and unexpected release of long-standing public frustration with the government, and although harshly repressed, they led to the downfall of the government after three months of violence (Zelinska, 2017, p. 1).

The grievances behind the protests 'were deeply embedded within the Ukrainian political system and economy' (Zelinska, 2017, p. 5). At the time of the protest, Ukraine ranked lowest in Europe in terms of the population's confidence in their government, and 'was at all-time low since the establishment of independent Ukraine' (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 85). Governmental efficiency ranked low by international standards and corruption was rampant. Although the country had gained its independence in 1991, it had not successfully reformed all elements of the old Soviet-style management and leadership, and remained 'an inefficient hybrid' of old and new (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 86). Power was highly concentrated in the hands of President Yanukovich and his inner circle, and the political system offered insufficient space for civil society or political participation other than through elections. (Zelinska, 2017, p. 6). Protests on tax policy and education policy had already taken place (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 86) and activists also complained of unemployment, high taxes, social injustice, and income inequality (Zelinska, 2017, p. 6). Many Ukrainians hoped that the process of European integration would lead to reforming and modernising economic and political institutions (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 86).

The protests were ignited in reaction to the suspension of the Association Agreement process on 21 November 2013, when Mustafa Nayem, a journalist and activist, posted a message on Facebook urging people to protest in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in central Kyiv (Metzger & Tucker, 2017). Protesters set up a tent camp to occupy the square, and occupied similar central squares in other cities (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 87). The authorities attempted to remove the tent camp the next day, but were not successful (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 87). Students were the initial driving force of the movement, but were joined within a few days by more than a hundred thousand people from diverse backgrounds, most unaffiliated with political parties or civic organisations (Shapovalova, 2019, p. 25; Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 87). Protest tactics initially included tent camps, blocking squares and streets, holding marches and rallies, holding popular assemblies, lying down in front of the prosecutor general's office, silent

protests, and consumer boycotts of companies owned by members of the governing political party (Zelinska, 2017, p. 4). The protesters made extensive demands including the resignation of the cabinet, the adoption of laws necessary for European integration, and the signing of the Association Agreement, but these were rejected.

The number of protesters dwindled to less than 500, and on 31 November the authorities used force to disperse the protesters in Independence Square. However, the use of force was widely perceived to be excessive and 'the abuses of the police forces... provoked the transformation of the student movement into the nationwide movement against the regime' as well as attracting criticism from the EU, NATO, UN, and international NGOs (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 87). Half a million protesters took to the streets, occupied government offices in Kyiv and other cities, and established fortified barricades on Independence Square, demanding the resignation of the president and his government (Shveda & Park, 2016, pp. 87–88). The government passed legislation banning demonstrations, but protests increased in intensity and violence became more common. Protesters used catapults and threw bricks, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails at police, burned buses and tires, and occupied government buildings (Zelinska, 2017, p. 5). Several protesters were killed in violent clashes (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 88). International organisations and foreign governments made statements in support of Ukrainians' rights to freedom of speech and assembly, and criticised the government and police for excessive use of force (see for example European Commission, 2013; United Nations Ukraine, 2013)

In January and February 2014, talks were held, brokered by politicians from Poland, France, Germany, and Russia, but the government and the protesters could not agree on timing for new elections (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 88). The bloodiest clashes of the protests took place in February, with 113 protesters being killed (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 88). On 21 February, protesters stormed the Presidential Palace and President Yanukovich fled the city. He was officially removed from office by Parliament the following day (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 88).

It must also be noted that the Euromaidan protests did not achieve the same degree of popular support in areas of eastern Ukraine which were more Russian-leaning than Europe-leaning, and in some areas 'antimaidan' counterprotests were held, although observers question whether they were true grassroots movements (Zelinska, 2017, p. 5). Russia took advantage of the opportunity offered by the fall of Yanukovich to annex Crimea, leading to an ongoing crisis in the region.

New presidential elections were held in May 2014, followed by parliamentary elections in October (Shveda & Park, 2016, p. 90). The country restored the 2004 constitution, which limited presidential powers, provincial administrators were removed from office, the Association Agreement with the EU was signed, which obliged the country to go through further reforms, and civil society has strengthened (Zelinska, 2017, p. 6). Political accountability and transparency have increased, public access to information has increased, corruption has decreased (although it is still extensive), and reforms have taken place in the police, although not the judiciary. Steps have been taken towards breaking up monopolies, deregulating the economy, and reforming state-owned enterprises (Shapovalova, 2019, p. 26; Solonenko, 2016, pp. 4–5). Some observers, however, argue that reforms have not yet been deep enough, and that despite new people being brought to power, political institutions remain closed, power remains centralised, the electoral system has not been reformed, and wealthy and powerful interests remain entrenched and resistant to change (Shapovalova, 2019, p. 26; Solonenko, 2016, p. 6; Zelinska, 2017, p. 7). 'The old system and its structures are fighting for their survival, as new actors – from both within the system and outside it – push for a new social contract' (Solonenko, 2016, pp. 1, 9). The process of reform initiated by the Euromaidan protests is still ongoing.

## Guatemala, 2015

Following the signing of peace accords in Guatemala in 1996 that marked the end of 36 years of intensely violent civil war, many former military and paramilitary groups transformed into criminal networks that operated with impunity due to continuing links with the state. After lobbying by civil society organisations and international partners, and after an international incident in which Guatemalan police officers were involved in the murder of Salvadoran members of the Central American Parliament, the Guatemalan government invited the UN to establish an international panel, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala*, CICIG), funded by international donors, to investigate organised crime and strengthen the prosecution service and the police. The CICIG was successful and popular, and has been credited with reducing the country's homicide rate by 5% per year since it was formed and increasing the proportion of homicides solved by a factor of four (International Crisis Group, 2018, pp. 5–13).

Beginning in 2013 and 2014, the CICIG increased its attention to corruption networks within government, including investigations of administrative corruption, illegal election financing, and bribery (Flores, 2019, p. 41; International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 7). In 2015, the Attorney General and the CICIG exposed a network of corrupt customs officials taking bribes in exchange for reducing import tariffs that involved 64 people including President Otto Pérez Molina, Vice-President Roxana Baldetti, and other high officials (Mitchell & Cameron, 2015, p. 1).

Reacting to this announcement, Gabriel Wer, 'a 33-year-old business administrator with no history of social activism' (Rogers, 2015) posted a message on Facebook inviting people to protest in Central Plaza, and more than 35,000 people turned up to demand the resignation of the vice-president (and later the president) under the slogan '#RenunciaYa' (Resign Now) (Flores, 2019, pp. 42–43). The protests were short, non-violent, and persistent, continuing over twenty Saturday afternoons in plazas across the country. They were primarily youth-led, urban, and middle-class, but over time also began to attract support from indigenous groups and peasants' groups (Flores, 2019, pp. 43–44).

After ten such protests, the vice-president resigned, but the president remained in power. Protesters called for a national strike on 27 August to increase pressure. More than 250,000 people gathered in Guatemala City's Central Plaza, with tens of thousands in plazas across the country. (Flores, 2019, pp. 44–45) A few days later, Parliament voted to remove the president's immunity. He resigned and was arrested. 'His resignation was widely celebrated and the Saturday mobilisations came to an immediate halt' (Flores, 2019, p. 45).

Following the resignations, some protesters continued to campaign against corruption and for greater government accountability, but for the most part the protests have not produced a coherent movement for long-term reform (Flores, 2019, pp. 45–46). Indeed, powerful elites remained entrenched and began to push back. 'The anti-corruption crusade led by the public prosecutor together with CICIG had almost complete support from Guatemalan society during 2015 and 2016' (Flores, 2019, p. 46), but CICIG met increasing resistance as later indictments included not only corrupt politicians but also bankers, corporations, and family members of the powerful traditional economic elite (Flores, 2019, p. 46).

Following President Molina's resignation and arrest, Jimmy Morales, a political novice and television personality, was elected 'on a wave of public outrage at the political establishment' (Breda, 2019, p. 1). Morales became an opponent of CICIG, and lobbied the United States, the principal funder of CICIG, to undermine international support for it. He and some of his family

members were investigated in 2017 by CICIG for fraud, embezzlement and campaign finance violations. Later that year, he announced that the commission's mandate to operate would not be renewed, and the commission was closed in September 2019. (Breda, 2019, pp. 2–3) The current President, Alejandro Giammattei, has proposed replacing CICIG with a new national body, but doubts have been raised about its effectiveness and independence (Breda, 2019, p. 2).

## Romania, 2012-2018

Since 2012, Romania has experienced a series of large and mostly peaceful protest events focusing primarily on government corruption. The country has long-standing problems with corruption, currently ranking second-worst in Europe (Transparency International, 2020, p. 22). Some of the protest events of 2012-2018 have been successful in achieving aims including the repeal of proposed legislation, the resignation of high officials, and the fall of two governments. Despite these gains, however, the protests have not been successful in achieving long-term structural change. Some of the most significant events in this period are briefly summarised below.

In 2012, protests against plans to privatise an emergency medical service known as SMURD were sparked when the president dismissed the state secretary for health and founder of the service, an act which was viewed as unjust and discretionary (Buzasu, 2019, p. 31). Violent street protests ensued and led directly to the resignation of prime minister Emil Boc (Buzasu, 2019, p. 31).

In 2013, protests lasting a month were triggered by the government's approval of a draft law to enable the construction of a gold mine in the town of Roşia Montană. Opponents raised environmental concerns and alleged corruption of public officials, and held weekly protests, although opinions were divided and there were also counter-protests by miners and other supporters of the project citing its economic benefits (Buzasu, 2019, pp. 31–32; Marinas, 2013; Pojoranu, 2017, p. 43). Parliament rejected the bill and ancient Roman ruins in the area are now protected as a national historic site (Pojoranu, 2017, p. 43).

In 2015, a fire at the Bucharest nightclub Colectiv killed 65 people and exposed corruption of public officials who had failed to undertake safety checks (Buzasu, 2019, p. 32). Prime Minister Victor Ponta, who had been clinging to power despite challenges over the previous two years, resigned after a protest which attracted 25,000 participants (Buzasu, 2019, p. 32; Pojoranu, 2017, p. 45).

In 2017, the government passed an ordinance decriminalising government corruption and abuse of office below a certain threshold (Buzasu, 2019, p. 32). A crowd of 10,000 gathered spontaneously to protest, and the protests quickly grew and spread nationwide (Pojoranu, 2017, pp. 45–46). There was also international criticism of the Romanian government's actions: Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States issued a joint statement urging the government to 'reverse this unhelpful course' (United States Embassy in Romania, 2017). Daily demonstrations peaked on 5 February when almost 600,000 people participated in protests across the country. The government repealed the ordinance a few days later (Buzasu, 2019, p. 32).

In 2018, nearly 100,000 people gathered in January to protest against government measures that would weaken the judiciary and help corrupt politicians avoid conviction (Buzasu, 2019, pp. 34–35; Stan & Zaharia, 2019, p. 233). The EU issued a statement urging the Romanian government to rethink the proposals (Deletant, 2018; European Commission, 2018). Smaller demonstrations continued almost daily, all of which were peaceful, until another large-scale event

was organized in August which again drew nearly 100,000 people protesting against the justice bills and the dismissal of the head of the national anticorruption agency. The police responded more aggressively this time, beating protesters and using tear gas and water cannon, with between 247 and 452 people injured (reports vary) (Buzasu, 2019, pp. 34–35; Deletant, 2018, p. 2; Ilie & Dragin, 2019; Stan & Zaharia, 2019, p. 239).

Many of the protest events of 2012-2018 were successful in achieving their immediate aims, including the repeal of proposed legislation, the resignation of high officials, and the fall of two governments. Despite these gains, however, the protests have not been successful in achieving long-term structural change, and some argue that the events of this period illustrate ‘a kind of trench war... between the government and the protesters over several years and that the protests to date have ‘only delayed the governing coalition’s stronghold on public institutions and its attacks on anticorruption legislation’ (Buzasu, 2019, p. 35). Some activists continue to challenge the government through civic networks and online campaigns which have had some successes, such as the Corruption Kills (*Coruptia Ucide*) network, formed after the *Colectiv* nightclub fire, which has helped uncover cases of corruption, fraud, and embezzlement. Others have begun to become involved in politics by setting up new political parties, such as the center-right *USR* and *PLUS* and the left-wing *Democracy and Solidarity Party* (Buzasu, 2019, pp. 34–38). However, thus far these efforts have not yet led to deep institutional reform, and in August 2019, 20,000 people held yet another protest against entrenched corruption, weak public administration, and government attempts to weaken the judiciary (Ilie & Dragin, 2019).

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