



YEAR IN REVIEW:
PROTEST AND
ACTIVISM

CITIZENS MOBILISING: PROTEST, ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

1. INTRODUCTION

Each year the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report looks at the major events that have affected civil society around the world. We seek to celebrate the major achievements of civil society, identify the key challenges it has faced, and assess how recent events have impacted on civil society, and how civil society has responded to them. In particular, we explore how civil society has reacted to and been affected by conflict and disaster; how citizens have mobilised to seek change; how the space for civil society has changed; and how civil society was worked internationally to address the pressing issues of the day. This section of the year in review considers recent mobilisations of protest, activism and participation.

Our report is of and from civil society. Alongside the four sections of our year in review, our report consists of 33 guest contributions from civil society activists, leaders and experts, on this year's special theme, of civil society and exclusion, and a thematic essay that draws from those contributions. Our report is also informed by 27 responses to our annual survey of national and regional civil society coordination bodies that are members of our Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), and a series of interviews with members of the CIVICUS alliance who were close to the year's major stories. We are very grateful to all our contributors for their efforts in developing this report.

2. PEOPLE ON THE MARCH: CONTINUING WAVES OF PROTEST AND ACTIVISM

Every year, in different locales around the world, people take to the streets to demand change. It remains hard to predict where public anger will next spill out in the form of large scale protests, but it is possible to say something about the common drivers of protests in different parts of the world. What mass protests have in common is that they signify anger and frustration. People are angry at not having their voices heard, and they feel excluded and humiliated. They are demanding their right to a voice, and seeking accountability. People are also frustrated about highly visible economic inequality and lack of economic

opportunity. They are seeking to change political systems that fail to uphold rights and meet needs, and that are characterised by systematic elite privilege and corruption.

Mass protest is never the first resort, so when it breaks out it signals that something is going wrong with governance. While a level of public dissent should be seen as an indicator of a healthy society and engaged citizenry, incidents of sustained mass protest suggest that other methods of participation, including voting in elections, lobbying politicians, being active online and taking part in civil society organisations (CSOs) are blocked, failing or insufficient. These deficits may arise because civil society rights are restricted, and political participation processes are more formal than real, as highlighted in our section on civic space. They may also indicate that existing, organised civil society is not sufficiently serving a public need.

As the case studies below suggest, the trajectories mass protests take, once sparked, tend to be remarkably similar. Protests generally start small, addressing specific, often local issues, but then grow to ask more profound questions of governance, democracy and human rights. For example, what started as a protest about rubbish collection in **Lebanon** in July and August 2015, under the banner of 'You Stink', quickly took on larger questions of corruption and government failure, in a politically deadlocked country where politicians cannot agree on a president or a new electoral law.¹



People are angry
at not having
their voices
heard.



Photographer: Joelle Hatem

Often with protests, the initial response by security forces is heavy handed, as in Lebanon and examples such as **Armenia, Bolivia, Ethiopia** and **South Korea**, discussed below.² In March 2016, the management of assemblies was the focus of new recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) by Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and Christof Heyns, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The recommendations came as a recognition of the violence that increasingly comes in response to protests. Importantly, the recommendations observed that all forms of protest, including demonstrations and occupations, are covered by the right to the freedom of peaceful assembly, and that assemblies form an essential part of democracy and people's participation, and of challenging exclusion and realising rights. The recommendations called for states to develop, update and implement policies that are permissive of assembly and that are based on the presumption that assemblies will be peaceful, rather than see them as threats. Policies should have light-touch notification procedures, recognise the right to plan, organise, promote and communicate assemblies, and have strong limitations on the use of force. Guidelines should also apply to the private sector, given the increasing privatisation of the public spaces in which protests may occur, and the role of private security contractors in responding to protests.³ The recommendations should provide a focus for civil society advocacy to ensure that protests are able to take place peacefully and legally.

As we have observed over our series of State of Civil Society Reports, heavy state and security force response can also have the unintended consequence of helping to recruit protestors by feeding public anger and promoting the cause as just. Protests also often share similar strategies: they make a point of visibly occupying central, public spaces in major cities, and use social and mobile media in multiple ways, including to organise and promote protests, resist state interference and recruit support. This can be seen in almost all the examples discussed below. The ability of new media to enable diffuse and horizontal ownership of protest movements, rather than the narrow and hierarchical leadership of classical organisational forms, is a phenomenon that has been discussed in our past reports, and can be observed in many of the examples offered here.

Something else that modern mass protests have in common is that, as with the You Stink protests, they are often criticised for failing to achieve breakthrough.⁴ In the long-term, protest fatigue can set in, security forces may gain the upper hand and governments can split high profile protestors away from the ranks. This happened with some of the mass protests covered in last year's report, such as those in **Hong Kong**, and was arguably the case in the student protests in **South Africa**, discussed below. At the same time, some startling examples of immediate achievements can be observed in the examples below. It is also important to acknowledge the long-term impacts that may be experienced by those who participate in protests. These may not be immediately visible, but are nevertheless real: at least some of those who take part in protests grow their participation skills and confidence, and develop national and international networks, such that they are likely to remain committed to advancing change in the future, and continue to take civic action in a variety of ways. Some protests can be seen to have built on the footprints of earlier mobilisations, suggesting that smaller protests can act as rehearsals for larger ones to come. This is an area where more research over time would be helpful, to identify and demonstrate the long-term benefits of participation in protests.

2 'Many injured in Beirut 'You Stink' protest over rubbish', Al Jazeera, 23 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/23181Cu>.

3 'Practical Recommendations For The Management Of Assemblies', United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Rq4Pu2>.

4 'You Stink Lost Momentum Months Ago', Beirut Syndrome, 9 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/23189lx>.

The examples below indicate that many people who become involved in protests are young people, experiencing their first taste of participation. Young people are often assumed to be apathetic, as measured, for example, by their levels of participation in elections or membership of political parties, but the heavy participation of young people in protests defies this lazy label. What it suggests, rather, is that people, and particularly young people, are rejecting the conventional politics and participation routes on offer, and are looking for causes to believe in and processes they can create and own. They are forging their own politics and their own ways of working. Part of the significance of the Lebanon protests, for example, lay in being the first mass protest in the country that took place outside party structures, and the religious and sectarian identities that existing parties represent. People used the protests to model new ways of taking action.⁵

The potential for protest energy to be sustained suggests that attempts to dismiss protests as inconsequential are short-sighted: if protest does not achieve immediate breakthrough, then the problems around which protest formed are unlikely to go away, and anger is likely to be sustained. A protest ended is not a problem solved; it is only a solution delayed.

“
A protest ended
is not a problem
solved.”

3. PEOPLE DEMAND CHANGE ACROSS LATIN AMERICA

A wave of protest swept across Latin America in the past year. The common thread that united different protests was public anger with state failure, epitomised by entrenched corruption at the very top of politics, and the vast economic disparity between the very wealthy and everyone else. In multiple contexts in Latin America, people are challenging the notion that corruption must be accepted as a fact of life, and highlighting the drain corruption makes on a government's ability to serve its citizens.

When citizens can dismiss or punish corrupt and failing governments through elections, they do so: this happened in 2015 in **Argentina**, where the opposition candidate won presidential elections, and in **Venezuela**, where the opposition won parliamentary elections, putting them into a power struggle with the presidency that continues at the time of writing, and sparking ongoing protests for and against the president's party.⁶ But when elections are not imminent, or are seen as offering inadequate potential for real change, people take to the streets.

What is happening in Latin America should not be seen in narrow political terms: what is being rejected is not necessarily leftist governments in favour of market-friendly governments, but poor governance, failure to deliver public services and redress economic inequality, and attempts to use populist or nationalistic rhetoric to conceal failures.

5 'Why Lebanon's 'You Stink' movement lost momentum', Al-Monitor, 23 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1pyoh0v>; The Huffington Post, 29 August 2015, op. cit.; Al Jazeera, 21 September 2015, op. cit.

6 'Conservative wins Argentina's presidential election', Al Jazeera, 23 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NLshAa>; 'Venezuela: The Light at the End of the Tunnel?', International Crisis Group, 8 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1OEF77C>; 'Venezuela opposition launches protests, Maduro counters', Reuters, 12 March 2016, <http://reut.rs/1qOB3cm>.

Guatemala saw a breakthrough in 2015, when protests sustained over months about high level corruption led to the resignation, stripping of immunity and arrest of the president, on charges of fraud and bribery. Elite corruption has long been a problem in Guatemala, but public anger was fuelled by allegations that public officials, including the president, were responsible for the loss of millions of dollars of customs revenues, by accepting bribes for low custom taxes and fees, at a time when public services are in decline. Among the revealed impacts of corruption was the loss of vital dialysis treatment for kidney patients, meaning that, starkly, corruption could be seen directly to have cost lives.⁷ A research group estimated that some 30 per cent of the state budget is lost to corruption.⁸ Subsequent revelations highlighted connections between organised drug crime and the funding of political campaigns.

Economic growth in the 20 years since Guatemala's long-running civil war ended has seen urbanisation, the rise of a middle class and an increase in university education, all often important factors in developing protest, as people start to see the government as a force that is holding them back. Amidst these changes there also remain persistent poverty and inequality. A political system captured by the elite could be seen as out of step with the changing aspirations of people. A new generation that had grown up after the civil war was able to overcome the fear of repercussions that has hindered protest potential in the past.⁹

Importantly and unusually, Guatemala's citizens had an international ally: the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which exposed the 'La Línea' (telephone line) corruption scandal, had become increasingly challenging towards organised corruption and criminality at the highest levels, even in the face of state resistance.¹⁰ It had the support of the US government in this, which threatened to withdraw aid if the CICIG was not allowed to do its work, in a reversal of its previous position of blanket support for the president. Guatemala, along with El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, are supported by the USA as part of its attempts to stop drug trafficking, but as discussed in the 2015 State of Civil Society Report in relation to Mexico, US financial support has in the past tended to be untroubled by issues of impunity.

As the evidence piled up against President Otto Pérez Molina, protests grew, under the banner of #JusticiaYa (Justice Now). Protest measures included marches, blockades and a general strike. An estimated 15,000 people occupied the central square of Guatemala City in April 2015 following a call on social media, and thousands more protested again in May 2015.¹¹ Importantly, what started as a largely urban, left of centre movement grew, to attract broad support, including from people from different wealth brackets, students and members of peasant and indigenous communities. The resignation and arrest of the president, in September 2015, was greeted by large celebrations.¹²

The subsequent election, held in October 2015, was overwhelmingly won by an outsider candidate, comic actor Jimmy Morales, who campaigned on an anti-corruption ticket, making a virtue of his outsider status. But levels of public cynicism and suspicion remain high. There has, for example, been concern about the links between the new president's party and the military, which

7 'New Corruption Scandal Plunges Guatemala's Government Further Into Crisis', International Justice Monitor, 26 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1rergN5>.

8 'Thousands of protestors demand resignation of president in Guatemala', The Guardian, 12 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LPJuMe>.

9 'How a peaceful political uprising happened in war-scarred Guatemala', The Washington Post, 5 September 2015, <http://wapo.st/1hMXV7t>.

10 Ibid.

11 'Thousands protest graft in Guatemala, raising pressure on president', Reuters, 30 May 2015, <http://reut.rs/26qxSs7>; 'How 9 strangers used Facebook to launch Guatemala's biggest protest movement in 50 years', Fusion, 14 June 2015, <http://fus.in/1ld5tqf>.

12 'Guatemala's president spends night in jail after resignation', The Guardian, 4 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Sp8gG3>.

carried out massacres in the past. The new president's cabinet is filled with establishment figures, and his government's apparent intent is to continue the economic policies of the past. Both candidates in the run-off vote were accused of being too closely connected to corrupt elites. Turnout at the election was also low, indicating continued disaffection.¹³

The election of Morales should not necessarily be seen as a solution, but rather as an expression of frustration with a broken system. Corrupt formal politics have failed Guatemalans, and public demands on the new president will rightly be high. Early action to clean up the country's governance must be demonstrated. The election should not be seen as the conclusion of a process of political change, but rather as a stepping stone. Public anger has not gone away, as evidenced by a further protest in April 2016, when over 2,000 people, largely indigenous people and students, undertook an 11-day March for Water, marching to the capital to protest about water scarcity and water pollution caused by large businesses.¹⁴ Protest momentum now needs to be sustained, so that new decision-makers can be held to account, and a decisive break made with a failed political system.

“
The government
moved to silence
the whistle-
blower.”

The progress of Guatemala will be watched with particular interest by citizens of neighbouring **Honduras**, which saw its own mass protests in 2015. In June 2015, thousands assembled in the capital, Tegucigalpa, to demand the president's resignation, after he admitted that his 2013 presidential campaign had taken money from businesses linked to a major fraud. Investigative journalism revealed that the ruling party enjoyed kickbacks from allowing health suppliers to overcharge, sucking money out of health provision, as in Guatemala. But, characteristic of corrupt governments that fear exposure, rather than open up to greater transparency, the government moved to silence the whistle-blower. Investigative journalist David Romero Ellner, who revealed the ruling party's role in the fraud, was put on trial for criminal defamation, alleged to have been committed against the wife of the Deputy Prosecutor, one of the officials accused of involvement in the fraud. This move provided a further spark for public anger. Thousands took part in torchlight marches, with an estimated 60,000 people taking to the streets in July 2015, and protests continued each Friday for over three months.¹⁵

Unlike in Guatemala, the president remains in power. In April 2015, the supreme court, which has been heavily influenced by the ruling party, also cancelled the constitution's one-term limit, which means the president could even run again.¹⁶ David Romero Ellner, meanwhile, was found guilty in November 2015, after a trial held in conditions of heavy security.¹⁷ And as our section on civic space sadly confirms, Honduras' dreadful record for the killing of activists, and impunity in this, has continued.¹⁸

The president has resisted a Guatemala-style external commission, in a back-handed acknowledgement of the success of this in challenging corruption. Unlike in Guatemala, the position of the USA is to support the status quo.¹⁹ Although by August 2015 there were some signs of movement, with acceptance of the idea of a national dialogue, progress on this was minimal; the

13 'With Military Backing, TV Comedian Wins in Guatemala in First Vote Since Jailing of Ex-President', Democracy Now!, 27 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/26qyaid>; 'Jimmy Morales Can't Fix Guatemala', Foreign Policy, 16 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Sp8gG3>.

14 'Guatemalan Indigenous Peoples Close 11-Day March For Water', teleSUR, 21 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/26nr5PK>.

15 'Thousands rally to call for Honduras president to quit', Al Jazeera, 6 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/21dWLDn>; 'Honduras stages biggest march yet to demand president step down', Reuters, 4 July 2015, <http://reut.rs/1T1lg0h>; 'Our Central American Spring': protestors demand an end to decades of corruption', The Guardian, 14 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1IQM67e>.

16 'Honduran Court Changes Constitution, OKs President Re-election', teleSUR, 24 April 2015, <http://bit.ly/24h3WMU>.

17 'Declaran culpable al periodista David Romero', La Prensa, 13 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TaFDIT>.

18 'The human rights crisis in Honduras', Independent, 18 December 2015, <http://ind.pn/1TUaHhB>.

19 '730 Scholars Decry Impunity in Honduras and Urge the U.S. State Department to Demand Human Rights Accountability', Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 16 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1rwllOy>.

dialogue process was controlled by the ruling party, and many opposed to the president refused to participate. An Organisation of American States process, which began in January 2016, was also criticised for lacking independence and power: it will only provide support to the politically compromised national judiciary, and the government is free to ignore its recommendations.²⁰ Protest pressure needs to be maintained, and Hondurans may continue to look to their neighbours for learning and inspiration.

Guatemala and Honduras are not alone: **Bolivia** too has seen recent protest. In July 2015, a general strike and blockade that lasted a month was held in the city of Potosí, and miners from the city marched on the capital, La Paz.²¹ Protests were coordinated by the Potosí Civic Committee (Comcipo), a coalition of 23 civil society groups. The Potosí region is one of Bolivia's poorest, even though it is home to one of the world's richest silver mines. Promises to invest in the social and economic development of the region have frequently been broken, working conditions in the mines are very harsh, and the region has also been hit by a fall in the world silver price.²² The march and protests therefore signalled that frustration at lack of progress runs deep, and established means of dialogue have failed. But the protest was met with police tear gas, and marked by violent confrontations, while the president refused to enter into dialogue.²³ Ramiro Oras, of Foundation CONSTRUIR, a Bolivian CSO, relates what happened to the protest:²⁴



Photographer: Keith Bacongco

In what is known as the Pacific March, over 2,000 miners walked for over 530km from Potosí to La Paz. When they got to La Paz they organised massive protests, blocking the streets in an effort to get their demands heard. The protests went on for weeks and dialogue remained elusive.

The police responded with violence, using excessive force to disperse protesters. Thirty-three protesters were arrested and four of their leaders were detained for a week and faced legal charges. The absence of any valid government response towards the demands of the protests, the heavy-handed manner in which the police responded to the demonstrations and the judicial persecution of some of the protesters forced the group from Potosí to return to their region.

After the return of the protesters, President Morales sarcastically noted that he “laughed at Potosí’s demands.” This demonstrates how insensitive the government is towards the issues of the region that continues to bear the brunt of poverty and distress.

Despite the government’s current intransigence, the protest enjoyed support from Bolivian citizens, suggesting a wider connection was being made with people’s concerns about governance:

Despite the fact that the protests had caused disruptions in traffic, the people of La Paz showed solidarity towards the protesters from Potosí. The Assembly for Human Rights issued a statement calling for dialogue, peace and respect for freedom of assembly and the protection of the right of citizens to engage in social protests.

Public support suggests that the government’s strategy of denying the protestors dialogue and restricting fundamental civil society rights can only fail in the long term. The anger will not go away, and protests are likely to return.

Neither has public anger faded in **Brazil**, where large-scale demonstrations against President Dilma Rousseff were seen on several occasions in 2015 and 2016. Protest has been triggered by an ever-unfolding and wide-ranging corruption scandal in the state oil company, known as the car wash (‘Lava Jato’) scandal, from which the ruling party is alleged to have benefited. Economic downturn and corresponding experience of cutbacks in public services can also be seen as drivers of protest. In August 2015, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in rolling demonstrations that moved from city to city, encompassing 200 different cities.²⁵ Web-based groups were instrumental in calling for protests, while independent activist journalist groups, such as Congresso em Foco, have been essential in exposing corruption.²⁶

A further wave of protests came in March 2016, as the widening investigation into the corruption scandal implicated President Rousseff’s predecessor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Protestors called for his arrest, and protested further following President

25 ‘Panelaço / 2015 Protests in Brazil’, Know Your Meme, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Ue8wIV>; ‘Rousseff’s message deafened by pot-banging, horn-blowing and messages calling for her resignation’, Merco Press, 9 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SwEFqH>; ‘Brazilian president under fire as tens of thousands protest in 200 cities’, The Guardian, 17 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VmAGSw>.

26 ‘Thousands join anti-government protests across Brazil’, Al Jazeera, 16 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1qOJpRb>; ‘Quem somos’, Congresso em Foco, <http://bit.ly/1SLtyiU>.

Rousseff's appointment of Lula da Silva as her chief of staff, a ministerial appointment that would make prosecution much harder, and the release of a recording of a call between the two that seemed to confirm that the avoidance of prosecution was the motivation behind the appointment. The appointment was subsequently blocked by Brazil's supreme court.²⁷ Protests were estimated to have taken place in over 150 cities and have involved more than three million people, in what some assessed were the largest ever demonstrations in Brazil.²⁸ As is customary, there were also smaller counter-demonstrations, both in support of the government, and by those who are more sceptical, but who see attempts to remove the president as tantamount to a coup.²⁹

As noted in the 2015 State of Civil Society Report, the participation base of much of the recent protests is different from that of the widespread protests seen in 2013, initially triggered by bus fare increases and anger over the heavy cost of hosting the 2014 World Cup. The current protest demographic tends to be wealthier, older and less politically radical compared to the earlier protests. However, the strand in protest that calls for a return to military rule, a view that remains strongly held by a Brazilian minority, should be understood as small and unrepresentative of the views of the whole, despite receiving much media attention.³⁰ Crucially, there is also evidence that President Rousseff's support base has eroded amongst the poorer groups that normally support her party.³¹

“
What unites
protestors
is anger at
seemingly
entrenched
corruption.”

There has been considerable support among protestors for the impeachment of the president, something that was a political football from late 2015 onwards: the president was impeached in November, only for the supreme court to reverse the decision in December; impeachment proceedings were then resumed in April 2016, and were ongoing at time of writing. Interestingly, the impeachment motion brought by the lower house speaker specifically referenced the 2015 popular protests. This could suggest that the protests had achieved an impact, but also that they were in danger of being co-opted as part of political manoeuvrings, given that those pursuing impeachment are themselves accused of involvement in corruption. The impeachment process thereby demonstrates how murky and self-interested Brazil's politics have become, and how deep corruption may be.

The positions of those involved in the protests are diverse and should be recognised as such. They are not, in the main, narrowly political. Protests tend to be more against the corruption that characterises the elite as a whole, than seeking to advance a particular political position. What unites protestors is anger at seemingly entrenched corruption, the inadequacy of existing politics, and the president's failure to do enough to change poor governance.³² If Brazil's corruption problem seemingly remains endemic then so, fortunately, does Brazil's strong tradition of active, public protest to challenge it.

27 'Protests in Brazil after Lula appointed chief of staff', Al Jazeera, 17 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NvKdVD>; 'Release of tapped phone calls between Lula and Rousseff sparks mass protests in Brazil', The Guardian, 17 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/22nIR2v>; 'Brazilian judge blocks Lula appointment – but fight far from over', CNN, 19 March 2016, <http://cnn.it/1R457cM>.

28 'Record Brazil protests put Rousseff's future in doubt' Reuters, 14 March 2016, <http://reut.rs/1TY0c0Q>; 'Millions of people in cities around Brazil protest against President Dilma Rousseff and Lula da Silva', International Business Times, 14 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NvKO9I>.

29 'We won't accept a coup': groups unite to save beleaguered Dilma Rousseff', The Guardian, 3 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1M8soLJ>.

30 'What Brazil's protests mean', CNN, 18 August 2015, <http://cnn.it/1VUqSA4>.

31 Reuters, 14 March 2016, op. cit.

32 'Brazil's silent majority has not been swept up by the anti-Rousseff protests', The Guardian, 7 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1MVJRHo>.

Chile also has robust protest traditions to draw upon. In 2011, millions of Chilean students protested to demand education reform, in a country that has vast disparities between private and public education. The protests led to many students becoming active in politics, and education reform was a prominent theme in the following presidential election. While some reforms were introduced, they clearly did not sufficiently address the underlying issues, because student protests returned in 2013 and 2014, and again in May and June 2015, when an estimated 200,000 students and others took to the streets of the capital, Santiago. The June protests, which were met with police tear gas and water cannon, were timed to coincide with Chile's hosting of the regional international football tournament, the Copa America, mimicking tactics seen in other contexts in recent years, of using major sporting competitions as an opportunity to throw the spotlight on governance problems.³³ Despite reforms, the costs of education have only increased, making university education largely the preserve of the wealthy. Students demanded a greater say in education policy, but also raised broader questions of constitutional change. Protestors also distanced themselves from those former student leaders who went into established politics.³⁴

As elsewhere in Latin America, beyond the immediate issue, public anger with corruption scandals served as a wider tipping point. The president's son was forced to stand down from running a government body in February 2015 after it was revealed that his wife had exploited political connections to benefit from a property deal, while executives of a finance company were arrested in March 2015 on charges of money laundering and tax fraud, linked to financial support of a number of political parties.³⁵ It was for these reasons that the student protests enjoyed broader public support.

The parallels between Chile and South Africa, another student protest hotspot discussed below, seem clear. But as with other recent protest events, the demands in Chile should be understood as going further than immediate headlines might suggest: in seeking a greater say in education policy, students have essentially called for greater democratisation of decision-making, and resisted top-down and paternalistic governance. In making connections to issues of corruption, protestors challenged the divide between the government and its citizens. The recurrence of protests, in 2013, 2014 and 2015, suggests that slow reform is not enough, and protests will come again.

4. A SUCCESS STORY, SO FAR: CIVIL SOCIETY BUILDING TUNISIAN DEMOCRACY

But what happens when protests achieve breakthrough to the extent that they topple the government? As our section on conflict and disaster indicates, the recent experience of citizens of Middle East and North African (MENA) countries who rose up against their governments in 2010 and 2011 has not been a happy one. Repressive governments have largely reasserted themselves, or bloody conflicts have taken hold. But the story has more than one side. Civil society achieved landmark recognition in October 2015, when Tunisia's civil society quartet was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work in building

³³ 'Chile: Riot police deploy tear gas and water cannons as student protest in Santiago turns violent', International Business Times, 11 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1WnqRDI>.

³⁴ 'Chile's emboldened students back on streets to defy government', Reuters, 25 June 2015, <http://reut.rs/1Uebc9F>.

³⁵ 'Student protests rock Chile ahead of soccer tournament', Al Jazeera, 10 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1M8tZkd>.

democracy and peace following the 2011 revolution.³⁶ Tunisia has special significance, as the country that provided the first inspiration of uprising, in December 2010, that travelled across MENA.

However, by July 2013, the prospects for peace and democracy were not promising. The transitional government was being led by Ennahda, part of the region's Muslim Brotherhood network, and there were intense and hardening disagreements between radical Islamists and secular forces, including on the development of a new constitution. Key areas of disagreement were the proposed constitution's regressive attitude to the status of women, and the apparent filling of government posts with Ennahda supporters. Following the assassination of some major public critics of the government, there were real fears of a narrow, pro-Islamist constitution being pushed through, or even of a coup. Informed by the salutary experience of Egypt, which experienced a military coup in July 2013, the quartet came together to challenge the trajectory of polarisation.

The quartet brought together four different, established civil society networks. Crucially, it involved long-standing civil society groups, which had been allowed to exist under the previous government. Tunisia's large, national trade union group, the Tunisia General Labour Union (UGTT), led the convening of the quartet, drawing on the deep networks, reputation and negotiation skills it had developed before the revolution. This is not to say that the process was easy. It involved different groups putting aside substantial histories of disagreement, particularly between the UGTT and the employers' association, the Confederation of Industry, Trades and Handicraft (Utica). The Tunisia Human Rights League (LTDH) and the Tunisia Order of Lawyers completed the quartet.

The quartet developed a road map for agreeing a constitution and holding elections, and forged a new, alternate process of dialogue. Through intensive bouts of negotiation, the process led to the prime minister agreeing to step down, the appointment of a caretaker prime minister agreeable to all sides, the holding of peaceful elections in late 2014 under the new constitution, and the formation of a coalition government, which involves Ennahda alongside the largest party, the secularist Nidaa Tounes, under an independent prime minister. Importantly, at key points of the negotiation, the quartet's ability to mobilise supporters to hold large-scale demonstrations helped demonstrate their legitimacy, and emphasise the need to involve all sides in a political settlement.³⁷

We asked Amine Ghali of the Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center (KADEM) what impact the Nobel award could have in the wider MENA region:

CSOs in the Arab region, some politicians and the general public are more aware that civil society can play a major role in the transformation process, especially at the level of national political momentum. They are also more aware of the importance of dialogue in a political transition process. Also, the chances of success are bigger when they are carried by a national, powerful and neutral player. They are aware that other countries may not have such structures as the UGTT or the LTDH, but they all think that each country has its own reality and may rely on its own existing structures.

³⁶ 'Nobel Peace Prize 2015: Tunisian choice for dialogue rewarded', Worldwide Movement for Human Rights, 9 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NOoQts>; 'UGTT in Tunisia wins Nobel Peace Prize', IndustriALL, 9 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Tubihj>.

³⁷ 'Trade unions and the construction of a specifically Tunisian protest configuration', Open Democracy, 24 September 2013, <http://bit.ly/21e4i55l>; 'How a Leftist Labour Union Helped Force Tunisia's Political Settlement', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 March 2014, <http://ceip.org/1PkIv7Z>; 'The Tunisia quartet: how an impossible alliance saved the country from collapse', The Guardian, 8 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RCvIPg>; 'UGTT and the culture of dialogue in Tunisia', Open Democracy, 18 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1T6Y9mW>.

This is not to say that all is now settled in Tunisia. Its democratic future remains very much in play. Its economy is struggling, and the economic inequality, urban-rural divide and high youth unemployment that were such powerful driving forces of the revolution are still experienced by many. January 2016 saw a spread of protest across several parts of Tunisia by young, unemployed people, who were angry that five years on from the revolution in which they played such an active part, nothing appears to have changed in their material conditions. A curfew was imposed after clashes between protestors and the police, and there were reports of the police using unlawful force to suppress protests. There is some evident government suspicion of youth culture, even when young people mobilise to challenge extremism and seek human rights.³⁸ As a case study prepared for our section on exclusion by Olfa Lamloom of International Alert suggests, one pre-condition of making Tunisia more peaceful and inclusive will be to improve the income opportunities of the young. Now democracy has been won, economic reform must follow.

“
Now democracy
has been won,
economic reform
must follow.”

Nidaa Tounes, as the big tent secularist party, is accused of lacking coherence, and of offering a safe haven to people associated with the old regime. Terrorism continues to present a major threat, not least because of militants who cross the border from conflict-ridden Libya. For example, 22 people were killed in a terrorist attack on the Bardo National Museum in March 2015, and 38 died in an attack against tourists on a beach in June 2015. In November 2015, a state of emergency was declared after 12 people were killed in a bus bomb attack, and another bombing was carried out close to Tunisia’s border with Libya in March 2016.³⁹ Attacks have tended to target Tunisia’s fragile tourist economy.

In addition, more work is still needed to bring disparate Tunisian civil society groups together, as Amine Ghali observes:

CSOs in Tunisia are divided into two groups: those providing services, and sometimes charity, and those acting to stimulate and support change at the policy level. While the latter is rather centralised in the capital and large cities, the former is trying to go out of the large cities and reach into marginalised groups and regions. Further actions are needed to seek complementarity from the two groups in order to optimise impact.

What can be said, however, is that Tunisia’s prospects are much brighter than if the quartet had not worked so hard to bring about change. The Tunisian experience tells us that existing civil society structures can be a crucial part of peacebuilding: the quartet members had networks and legitimacy that they were able to bring into play. The process also entailed developing a recognition, on the part of the ruling party, that elections are not the end point of democracy, and the winning of an election does not give a winning party carte blanche; that inclusive, participatory democracy and consensual peace can only be built with the participation of a wide range of voices, including civil society, some of which, as in the case of unions, have wide support bases. This is a salutary lesson, not least for those many countries, discussed in our section on civic space, in which current office holders are rewriting constitutions in a bid to make their hold on power permanent.

38 ‘Tunisia: Crackdown on Peaceful Protests’, Human Rights Watch, 10 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1EYcqzS>; ‘‘We’ll be the first they kill’: the Tunisian rappers taking on Isis’, The Guardian, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1N70GvC>; ‘Tunisia unemployment protests spread to capital’, Al Jazeera, 22 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1ZG5l6a>; ‘Tunisia imposes curfew as unrest grows over lack of jobs’, The Guardian, 22 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Qpdn8l>; ‘Tunisia’s Protests Are Different This Time’, Bloomberg View, 31 January 2016, <http://bv.ms/1nlvWte>.

39 ‘Tunisia massacres: Sousse beach and Bardo Museum attacks ‘linked’ say UK police’, International Business Times, 5 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1XU9N70>; ‘Deadly explosion hits presidential guard bus in Tunis’, Al Jazeera, 25 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1kROPsk>; ‘No terrorist attack can reverse Tunisia’s democracy’, UN Security Council says’, UN News Centre, 9 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1UenQV9>.

Finally, it is significant that the award was given specifically to the quartet, as a joint effort of different organisations, rather than to individual organisations. Civil society is most effective when different groups are able to claim their own space and recognise their disagreements honestly, but choose to put differences aside to work towards a joint goal. In doing so, civil society models and demonstrates how inclusive practices and processes can be developed. An investment in supporting and strengthening civil society, particularly in supporting its convening, brokering and negotiation capacities, and joint working between different groups, should therefore be seen as an essential aspect of the promotion of democracy, human rights and peace.

5. SUSTAINED DEFIANCE DRIVES DEMOCRACY IN BURKINA FASO

The question of whether protest momentum can be sustained also finds an answer in West Africa. Burkina Faso offers one of the most extraordinary recent examples of how the impetus of mass protests can be carried through to achieve change. As the 2015 State of Civil Society Report described, persistent protests drove former strong-arm President Blaise Compaoré out of office after 27 years of rule in October 2014, and then resisted subsequent attempts to impose military rule. The story has continued, and while the future of Burkina Faso remains in the balance, thus far citizens have won critical battles in the fight for democracy and human rights.

An ongoing challenge to democracy in Burkina Faso has come in the form of the Presidential Security Regiment (Régiment de la Sécurité Présidentielle, RSP), an elite section of the military that was close to the former president, distinct from the rest of the army and accustomed to operating with impunity. There is also an established history in Burkina Faso of the army rebelling in order to extract concessions from political leaders. In September 2015, the RSP staged a coup, and for a moment it seemed that a dismal history of governance was about to be resumed. However, the coup failed, lasting only a week before its leaders were forced to back down. Crucial in the failure of the coup was the holding of large-scale protests, similar to those of 2014, which publicly demonstrated the lack of public support for the coup. The broader army's lack of willingness to clamp down on protest was also important, as was the fact that protestors continued to offer a unified front, resisting attempts to fragment them along ethnic or geographical lines.⁴⁰

The African Union (AU) offered a robust response to the coup, immediately condemning it in strong terms, offering evidence that it is capable of moving on from the days when state sovereignty was regarded as inviolate, although our section on global governance also outlines some civil society criticisms of the AU. In contrast, many saw the response of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as weaker. ECOWAS mediators were seen as offering too many concessions to coup leaders, and civil society groups resisted the mediators' attempts to offer coup leaders immunity.⁴¹

40 'Why Burkina Faso's coup failed', The Economist, 2 October 2015, <http://econ.st/1SwTTMs>; 'Why Burkina Faso has so many coups', The Economist, 12 October 2015, <http://econ.st/1SwUJKq>.

41 'Seven lessons from Burkina Faso's seven-day coup', BBC, 24 September 2015, <http://bbc.in/1OVezPo>; 'Analysis: How Burkina Faso foiled the coup', Daily Maverick, 28 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MVqVJI>.

The issue of immunity remains controversial in Burkina Faso. The offering of immunity is often a key element of transitional justice, as part of a wider peacebuilding process, but there is anger, both about the role of the RSP in resisting change, and more specifically because 14 people were killed during the coup attempt. Civil society groups have called for no amnesties to be offered to those who carried out the killings, which saw protestors shot in the back, while running away and with hands raised. Concern is fuelled because immunity was granted for past crimes.⁴² Another controversial issue ahead of the presidential election, and part of the stimulus for the attempted coup, was the exclusion of the president's former allies and political party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès, CDP) from standing, as an attempt to make a clear break with the past. The interim government has, so far, shown that it is prepared to address past crimes: in December 2015, it issued an international arrest warrant that implicated ex-president Compaoré for the murder of the country's former leader, Thomas Sankara, from whom he seized power in 1987.⁴³

“
The issue
of immunity
remains
controversial
in Burkina
Faso.
”



Photographer: Day Donaldson

Elections took place in November 2015, peacefully, with a level of transparency unprecedented in Burkina Faso, including the first ever provision of real-time results, and parallel vote counting by a coalition of CSOs.⁴⁴ Ahead of the election, donors provided grants to each presidential candidate to try to level the electoral playing field, and a new biometric registration system was introduced, which received broad public trust. A sharp increase in voter registration - up by 27 per cent - and long queues to vote suggested a newly engaged and mobilised citizenry.⁴⁵ The polls resulted in the election of Roch Marc Kabore, who had separated from the ruling party ahead of the 2014 protests.⁴⁶

CSOs played an important role in electoral oversight, and should have an important part to play in ensuring accountability over the new government. We asked civil society leader Bintou Tall-Diallo to describe the importance of the election, the current state of civil society freedom, and civil society's work in Burkina Faso:

Burkina Faso is living a historical moment in its political history. For the first time in decades, Burkina Faso had fair, just and transparent elections, with results endorsed by all political parties, and without any contestation registered.

Civil society seems to not want to miss the take-off of democracy. Even though many are in a wait and see mood, they are organising, getting together, and making sure they are empowered for the next possible actions within this consensual political collaboration. For the first time the National Anti-Corruption Network (Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption, REN-LAC) released the results of a study on the elections, where they revealed some corrupt acts during the elections, including by the elected party, and yet the president allowed further investigations that may expose them and condemn them to pay heavy fines if they are found guilty of those allegations.

Civil society groups are being more vigilant and more vocal, compared to under the Compaoré regime. Diakonia, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and others such as Amnesty Burkina are training and giving them tools, which has diversified the intervention tools and forums to create more dialogue among them. They work more with media, including social media, for more visibility of their actions, and they don't miss any occasion to denounce misbehaviour, even by other CSOs. Their activities are more oriented on marches, meetings, press conferences, studies and reporting to state institutions, open letters of protest and information, campaigns, training, and conversations in remote rural areas. They have awareness of state matters and confidence in their power of moving things forward, regardless of their weaknesses.

There is at the moment a total freedom of expression, since the end of the coup d'état. We are also experiencing for the first time a real national union government with many technocrats and non-political related members. Within the parliament we have the sense there will be for the first time a real debate around the country's issues, including all political boards. The former presidential party, CDP, that was excluded from the presidential election, got 18 seats in parliament, with a member elected third vice president.

44 'Why data was crucial to Burkina Faso's first election since uprising', The Guardian, 4 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NTrQd8>.

45 'From the street to the ballot box: Elections in Burkina Faso', Africa Research Institute, 27 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/26qPJit>.

46 'Burkina Faso election: millions vote in first ever poll since coup', The Guardian, 30 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TaR2lw>; 'Kabore wins Burkina Faso presidential election', Reuters, 30 November 2015, <http://reut.rs/1Nw2qIG>.

Overall, civil society is stronger than ever and believes in its power, even though they recognise they need more training in accomplishing their mission of defending populations and their causes adequately, assuring a consolidated democracy and establishing the rule of law.

As Bintou Tall-Diallo indicates, expectations will be high for the new president, and the challenge will be to deliver on and manage those expectations, at a time when the economy is distressed; citizens have proved their continued willingness to engage, and failure can be expected to bring them back onto the streets again.⁴⁷ A president not connected with the military, and a potentially functioning parliament expressing a variety of dissenting viewpoints, will be novel. The president will have to continue to promote transparency and accountability, and ensure that resources reach citizens rather than stick to elites. The new government needs to demonstrate that it has broken with the past, is addressing the grievances behind the protests, and is also capable of building democracy for all citizens, including those who supported the discredited former regime. For this to happen, the new government must accept and nurture civil society, and enable it to carry out a multiplicity of roles. Increased support to help strengthen civil society will be critical as part of this, as Bintou Tall-Diallo makes clear:

“
Failure can be
expected to
bring them back
onto the streets
again.”

If some are standing strong in the civil society arena, many others that accepted to take a portfolio in the transition are facing credibility challenges.

Diakonia, the Swedish cooperation agency and NDI are doing a lot in strengthening and better organising civil society, but they alone cannot do it all. In my view there is a paradigm shift and mentality change to be made with regard to the real mission and commitment of civil society itself. During the transition, a coalition of CSOs has been put in place, but there is still a question of trust among them.

Knowledge and experience sharing are needed. Even if civil society recently gained much credit in political change and has accomplished a lot in Burkina Faso, there is still much more to do. The main weaknesses of civil society are leadership, planning, responsibility, professionalism, lack of discipline and lack of solidarity.

I see here mainly four needs. The first is capacity building in strategic planning, leadership and funding mobilisation techniques and tools; the second will be organising activities that build trust and solidarity among CSOs; third is creating space for dialogue between institutions and civil society; last but not least, there is a need to put in place a platform that will allow sharing of knowledge and best practices.

Even though the social mobilisation against the Compaoré regime worked, only a few big names in civil resistance are familiar with global non-violent civil resistance techniques and achievements. But overall, Burkina civil resistance remains one of the most successful cases in Africa, and this is something we need to capitalise on and encourage within the region.

As Bintou Tall-Diallo suggests, there is scope to share the lessons of Burkina Faso to inspire wider action around the West and Central Africa region, where many states continue to deny citizens democracy and human rights. At the same time, a fresh warning has come against complacency: a new threat to civil society emerged, to deadly effect, in January 2016, when terrorist

47 'Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II', International Crisis Group, 7 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NOAT9Y>.

network al-Qaeda in the Arab Maghreb (AQIM) killed 30 people in an attack in the capital Ouagadougou. The act of violence offered a direct challenge to citizens' right to build democracy, and the work of outside forces to support democracy and rebuild the economy.⁴⁸ While the attack demonstrates the extent to which the country's future remains uncertain, what can be said is that the Burkinabe people have continued to prove their power and agency, and can be expected to do so when called upon again. Their new government, and those of other countries in the region, must take note.

6. A NEW GENERATION RISES IN SOUTH AFRICA

More than 20 years on from the long-anticipated birth of democracy, South Africa's young people might have been assumed to be apathetic. It has been a long time since queues snaked outside polling stations. The political landscape has been dominated since the end of apartheid by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. The ANC has, however, experienced a number of recent political storms, including allegations of corruption, such as over the construction of President Jacob Zuma's sprawling and lavish residence at Nkandla; human rights abuses, notably the killing of 34 striking miners at Marikana in August 2014; and incompetence, as evidenced by the sacking of two finance ministers in a week in December 2015. Given this, recent protests should come as no surprise.

In October 2015, student protests over proposed tuition fee increases, which would particularly have affected poorer, mostly black students, started at Witwatersrand University (Wits) in Johannesburg, and then spread to universities elsewhere around South Africa. The protests caused a slew of universities to close down.

The protests showed many of the hallmarks that have characterised mass protest events around the world in recent years. Heavy handed security force response, including the use of pepper spray, stun grenades and tear gas against protestors, helped to grow support for the protest. Protestors also sought to occupy iconic public sites, including space around parliament in Cape Town, the government's Union Buildings in Pretoria, and ANC headquarters in Johannesburg. Social media was important in the protests, which mobilised under the hashtag #FeesMustFall.⁴⁹

The #FeesMustFall hashtag consciously echoed an earlier, successful campaign, in April 2015, that led to the symbolic removal of the statue of colonial politician Cecil Rhodes from the University of Cape Town, under the #RhodesMustFall banner.⁵⁰ The hashtag form continued to prove its adaptability over the rest of the year, morphing into #ZumaMustFall, directed against the president following the sacking of finance ministers and as corruption controversies raged, while October 2015 also saw

48 'Analysis: Why is Burkina Faso in Al Qaeda's crosshairs?', Daily Maverick, 17 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1QyhNVz>.

49 'Student protests hit zenith at parliament', Mail and Guardian, 21 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VPVkm8>; 'Police clash with student protestors outside Parliament', Mail and Guardian, 21 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MEcgeF>; '#FeesMustFall: In Johannesburg, students fight their way through another historic day', Daily Maverick, 23 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1pBeiaU>; 'Parliamentary diary: Stun grenades whizz again, Riah Phiyega hung out to dry', Daily Maverick, 11 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MVH3u7>.

50 'The Rhodes statue must fall': UCT's radical rebirth', Daily Maverick, 13 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TuqiFN>; 'Rhodes statue removed in Cape Town as crowd celebrates', BBC, 9 April 2015, <http://bbc.in/1CZ8muX>.

#ThePriceofBreadMustFall, addressing the fundamental issue of high basic food prices.⁵¹ The adaptability of the #MustFall protest banner was further demonstrated when Oxford University students in the UK adopted it in their own campaign to have a Rhodes statue removed.⁵² The brand of the Occupy Movement also featured, for example, in a student march on the treasury, reserve bank and revenue service in Pretoria in October 2015.⁵³ South African protestors showed themselves to be adept at harnessing social media's viral and memetic power, and of building on earlier successes.



Photographer: Tony Carr

- 51 'Ground Up: Why #ThePriceOfBreadMustFall Matters', Daily Maverick, 22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NwhQXh>; '#ZumaMustFall: South Africans react to the new finance minister', Daily Maverick, 10 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1reWns3>.
- 52 'Will 'Rhodes Must Fall' fail?', BBC, 18 January 2016, <http://bbc.in/1nxXotr>.
- 53 'Students march on Sars, Reserve Bank and treasury', Mail and Guardian, 28 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NwiWIP>.

What was seen in South Africa, however, was not only an internet campaign: the street and social media interacted and supported each other. Parallels could be drawn with the organising methods of the recurrent student protests of Chile, not least in the ways that social media was used to organise donations of time, money and supplies, to counter police claims of violence and demonstrate that protestors had acted peacefully, and to mobilise international solidarity.⁵⁴

The focus of protest also grew, from its initial concern with tuition fees to encompass the poor work conditions of university support staff, and particularly to call for an end to the practice of outsourcing, which led onto broader critiques of South Africa's enduring divides and policies of economic neo-liberalism.⁵⁵ Others took up the protest mantle independently: for example, parliamentary support staff in Cape Town protested about their pay and conditions alongside a student protest in November 2015.⁵⁶

We asked Mpho Ndaba, a student activist, blogger and executive member of 350Wits to describe the origins, trajectory and purpose of the protests:⁵⁷

The fall of apartheid saw many promises being made to South Africans, especially to black people who were most affected by the system of oppression and segregation. Although there was a sense of hope for a new path which would ultimately lead to complete emancipation, nothing appears to have changed.

Access to education has been one of the major challenges the poor have been faced with in the new democratic South Africa. 2015 saw the rise of students who are willing to lay their lives down in an attempt to ensure that the system does not put them in a position of disadvantage. Students from various institutions of higher learning embarked on a national protest action. This gave birth to what is today known as the Fees Must Fall movement.

The fact that a large number of qualifying students are academically excluded each year is problematic because that means our rights to free and quality education are not being met. Our call for free education is not a new demand; we are merely holding the state to account for its promises. Of course there are questions as to whether what we are calling for is feasible, and in that regard we are saying that the state should be able to find money to fund higher education. They should be able to reduce unnecessary expenditures.

In October, we embarked on protest action calling on the University of the Witwatersrand to do away with a proposed fee increase for the 2016 academic year. During the planning of the protest, we consulted different structures within the university, including outsourced workers, academics and general staff. After the consultation we then decided that among our demands, the issue of outsourced workers would be put forward, as we are advocating for an inclusive system which does not exclude anyone, whether on basis of income, sex or the colour of their skin.

54 '#FeesMustFall: A movement of shares, likes, tweets and posts', Mail and Guardian, 29 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1T1MYdf>.

55 'UJ students and staff march to end outsourcing', Mail and Guardian, 3 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1rwNgTW>; 'Current heat is forging a new university', Mail and Guardian, 26 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1QyoORj>.

56 '#FeesMustFall protestors march to Parliament', Mail and Guardian, 9 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NwjmZu>.

57 This is an edited extract. For the full interview see 'Inequality and exclusion lie at the heart of the South African student protests', CIVICUS, 8 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1XYDWkv>.

The fee increase issue became a short-term goal. As time progressed we realised that all the problems we are dealing with have to do with the lack of transformation. Free education and end to outsourcing became our long-term goals.

The movement also advocates for a complete decolonisation of the institutions of higher learning and for change regarding patriarchy and the oppression of the women in our society.

We asked Mpho Ndaba why the protests took the form they did, and how the police and security forces responded:

We have been having intellectual discussions from as early as 1994, after South Africa's independence. Even those who came before us have been advocating for and calling for fair representation of black women professors and lecturers at our universities. Our brothers and sisters have been calling for an end to outsourcing from as early as 2000 by engaging with the government's Department of Higher Education as well as our universities, but nothing substantial came out of it. Protesting and occupying the university's central and administrative blocks seemed to be the only option.

During the protest, we saw the level at which the South Africa Police Services responded to us. In Cape Town, students were beaten up and some were arrested and were almost charged with treason, although this charge was withdrawn. We saw students being manhandled and physically attacked for demanding their rights in a democratic South Africa. I was also detained at a police station during the University of Johannesburg protests together with 141 other students and workers. The universities went as far as bringing untrained private security onto our campuses under the guise of protecting us.

After the infamous Marikana massacre, the Ian Farlam Commission made a number of recommendations with regard to policing and crowd control methods. Marikana was a clear example of inadequate training of the public order policing in South Africa. The application of force against protesting students made us feel that the state failed us, because there could have been other legitimate ways of responding to our demands instead of calling for our arrest and silencing.

Instead of responding to the legitimate demands made by students, the South African government asserted that there was a 'third force' in the nationwide protests. Well, that third force in this regard is poverty, inequality, exclusion of the black working class from the system and the increasing commodification of education in South Africa. We cannot sweep these issues under the carpet anymore. We cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that South Africa has the capacity to implement a system whereby free education is possible, but rather, corruption and lack of accountability have become the order of the day, if not the key defining features of our government.

The student protests were, in the short term, successful: university leaders expressed solidarity with protestors and opened negotiations, and President Zuma, while refusing to meet protestors, intervened to suspend the increase. This was followed by the announcement of a commission of enquiry into the funding of higher education in January 2016.⁵⁸

If assessed against broader aims, then the success of the movement is more debatable. Fees are yet to fall; they were frozen.

58 '#FeesMustFall: Cue the commission of inquiry', Daily Maverick, 14 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NwjGaH>.

“
Free education
and end to
outsourcing
became our long-
term goals.”

Little progress could be seen on the movement's demand for free education, or its more radical aims. Further, as the protests developed, inevitably complications, contradictions and fragmentation set in. Many in the movement attempted to reject conventional forms of negotiation, which would entail the holding of behind closed doors meetings, and when deals were struck, such as that between the Student Representative Council and Wits University, some accused the student leadership of selling out, and even of being bought by the ANC. There were also accusations that agents provocateur were fostering violence in an attempt to discredit the movement.⁵⁹ Some protestors stopped action following the fees freeze, seeing their objective as essentially having been achieved, and expressing concern about the need to sit exams, while inevitably some protest fatigue set in. At the same time, even as protests wound down so that exams could take place, many vowed the fight would continue.⁶⁰ As Mpho Ndaba comments:

The protest has been successful in terms of showing students and the general members of our society how powerful being united is. We have now seen that, when we speak with one voice despite our political differences, we can actually shake those in power and show that it is the people who are the governors.

At Wits University, the management has agreed to put an end to outsourcing in principle. There also now exists a task team comprising of students, workers, academics, independent experts and other relevant stakeholders. The aim is to look at all issues relating to how the process of insourcing of workers can be fully implemented as soon as possible. At the same time, the university is still negotiating with the student movements on issues such as scrapping registration fees, doing away with student debt and ensuring the fair representation of black women in management positions and lecturing posts.

We have a long way to go, as not all our demands have been met. The ultimate goal is to see a complete dismantling of a system that perpetuates the exclusion of black people. We want to see free education being realised, we want to see our mothers and fathers being able to earn fair wages, and we want to see them being able to better their lives not only through fair wages but also by being able to study at the very same universities they clean. We want to see a complete end to a patriarchal and misogynistic system that excludes and mistreats women. We want to see our LGBTQIA+ citizens being fairly represented in different spheres of our society.

There are those who came before us. Now it's our duty that we ultimately see the changes which were advocated for in the past being made into reality in this lifetime.

Not everyone saw the protests in such radical terms. Some labelled the protests as an elite phenomenon, mobilising urban young people at a relatively advanced stage of education, and some saw protestors as essentially selfish and materialistic in

59 '#FeesMustFall: South Africa recreated, history redefined, Zuma's moment of reckoning', Daily Maverick, 23 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NOVg7b>; 'We'll always have Paris: South Africa's May '68 moment', Daily Maverick, 25 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1WR9qvD>; '#FeesMustFall: Wits splits – the beginning, not the end, of a chapter', Daily Maverick, 27 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Tb13pm>; '#FeesMustFall: No end in sight', Daily Maverick, 28 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1YRJ8lm>; '#FeesMustFall: Cracks start showing in student unity', Mail and Guardian, 15 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1VzKb1z>; 'Will political tension get the better of #FeesMustFall?', Mail and Guardian, 22 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/233iAFc>.

60 'South Africa: Govt Bows to Student Pressure', AllAfrica, 23 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1UeBKYk>; '#FeesMustFall: Varsities still closed amid confusion over the next move', Daily Maverick, 26 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/21eIGH2>.

nature, apparently being concerned with their living costs.⁶¹ However, such criticisms miss part of the picture: the conscious extension of the focus of protest to cleaning staff took it beyond elitism, and the debate about wider questions of South Africa's power inequalities, embedded in its history, and the economics it has pursued since democracy, went beyond short-term materialist calculation. As in Chile, students could be seen to be recognising the transformative potential of education for societies, and demanding rights for all. Protesting students also cited workers' protests as an inspiration, and saw a clear connection.⁶²

The special focus of the 2016 State of Civil Society Report is exclusion, and inevitably, in a country where issues of race are ever present, debate focused on the racial backgrounds of protestors: some saw the protests as being events where white young people challenged notions that they are privileged and apathetic, while many black students saw a clear dimension of challenging histories and practices of racial inequality, and reclaiming racial politics as valid, these having been played down in attempts to construct a post-apartheid identity as a 'rainbow nation'.⁶³ It should be acknowledged that protests only attracted wide visibility when students in the top universities, which are disproportionately attended by white students, participated, but it would be misguided to assume that many white student protestors were unaware of the racial politics: for example, one protest tactic acknowledged and subverted the police's unequal treatment of white and black people, by having white protestors form human shields around black protestors; other protests explicitly focused on campus racism.⁶⁴ Others saw generational and class divides emerging as, for once, more important than racial divides, with black and white students working together, to challenge older, establishment figures, such as elite leaders of universities, many of whom are black people who fought apartheid.⁶⁵

The subsequent #ZumaMustFall movement, which saw protests held on South Africa's national Day of Reconciliation in December 2015 and into 2016, was challenged for being opportunistic, and accused of involving mostly white, middle class people with little connection to earlier protests and long-running antipathy to the ANC.⁶⁶ Many involved in the protests however rejected this characterisation, emphasising its connection to #FeesMustFall and the broad range of grievances under the banner.⁶⁷ Certainly there is a need, in the always complex and polarised atmosphere of South Africa, for protest movements to demonstrate that they are bridging across racial, class and political divides.

In 2016, there was further evidence that protest momentum could be sustained: in January 2016, student registration at several universities was suspended following protests; in an extreme case, a university was shut down in February 2016 after

61 '#FeesMustFall and its inherent elitism', Mail and Guardian, 21 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Tb1Mqn>.

62 'Student protests: Another day of uncertainty and simmering tensions', Daily Maverick, 17 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Qypdlr>; 'It ain't over till varsity fees really fall', Mail and Guardian, 8 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1reZekL>.

63 'Faces of #WitsFeesMustFall', Daily Maverick, 22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VzLdKY>.

64 'So #FeesHaveFallen but let's not celebrate too quickly', Mail and Guardian, 27 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/26r5WEX>; 'Protest, politics and prayers at South Africa's universities', Mail and Guardian, 26 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Sxg4lr>.

65 'Why South African students have turned on their parents' generation', The Guardian, 18 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1pBkobj>; '#FeesMustFall: SA's universities are in the grip of a class struggle', Mail and Guardian, 14 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1UeD5yi>.

66 'The Twitter world of #ZumaMustFall', Daily Maverick, 19 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1qPnUQd>.

67 '#ZumaMustFall: Whose hashtag is it anyway?', Mail and Guardian, 17 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1WRaoYM>; '#ZumaMustFall dominates social media', Mail and Guardian, 18 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/21enJe1>; 'What #ZumaMustFall and #FeesMustFall have in common', Mail and Guardian, 18 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/21enOyu>.

being set on fire in reaction to security force violence. Further protests were seen in Johannesburg in April 2016.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, President Zuma continued to face a barrage of questions about corrupt links, and a haemorrhaging of his support; in March 2016, he was judged by South Africa's highest court to have breached the country's constitution in ignoring earlier rulings to pay back some costs of the development of Nkandla.⁶⁹

What can be said for certain is that, for the first time in post-apartheid South Africa, young people organised themselves in large numbers outside the structures of the ANC or other political parties, and while there was the inevitable tawdry spectacle of politicians of all persuasions attempting to associate themselves with the movement, protestors were largely successful in resisting co-option. Protestors challenged the notion that party politics is the only arena where alternatives can be offered. They expressed dissatisfaction with the notion that the ANC, as a ruling party of over two decades, can position itself as a vehicle for radical change, and they expressed doubt that change can be advanced within existing neo-liberal constraints, given unaddressed issues of poverty and inequality.⁷⁰ Protestors have tapped into and helped crystallise a sense that it is time for a period of national reckoning and soul-searching about South Africa's post-apartheid experience.⁷¹

“
It is unlikely to
keep quiet from
now on.
”

Protestors have shown that for the 'born free', post-apartheid generation, there is little apathy; rather there is much frustration, and determination to ask the big questions about South Africa's future. A new generation, with no experience of anti-apartheid activism, has reinvented and rediscovered South Africa's activist spirit. It is unlikely to keep quiet from now on.

7. ETHIOPIA: PROTEST MET WITH BRUTAL RESPONSE

Burkina Faso and South Africa were, of course, not the only contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa that experienced large-scale public mobilisations in the last year. Our section on civic space sets out how protests have formed in response to attempts by ruling figures to consolidate their power, often by seeking to rework constitutions to remove presidential term limits, and how state violence has been exerted to suppress protestors, including in Burundi, Congo (Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Protests also came in the heavily restrictive conditions of **Ethiopia** in 2015 and 2016, and were met with brutal reaction.

Protests first sparked in April and May 2014, and flared again in November 2015, involving people from the Oromia region, which borders the capital, Addis Ababa, opposing development plans to expand the capital into the surrounding region. The protests had both economic and identity dimensions: while Oromos make up Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the ruling elite are

68 #FeesMustFall back: Wits registration suspended', Mail and Guardian, 11 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Sxh2hy>; 'Fees Must Fall: Reloaded', Daily Maverick, 12 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/23YMTTj>; 'Three reasons why #FeesMustFall protests will continue', Mail and Guardian, 13 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NOZmvV>; 'NWU students advised to leave campus immediately', Daily Maverick, 25 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/23YN2pj>; 'Wits protest about free education', News 24, 4 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1MVPt4J>.

69 "Guptagate" claims surrounding Jacob Zuma spark corruption inquiry by police', The Guardian, 24 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1MmXZsX>; 'Nkandla ConCourt ruling: President Zuma and National Assembly in breach of Constitution', Daily Maverick, 31 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1pBmach>; 'ANC Rebellion Gains Momentum, Raising Odds of Zuma's Ouster', Bloomberg, 8 April 2016, <http://bloom.bg/1MVQ7iT>.

70 'Why South Africa should undo Mandela's economic deals', Mail and Guardian, 12 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1SxiwbG>.

71 #FeesMustFall: South Africa recreated, history redefined, Zuma's moment of reckoning', Daily Maverick, 23 October 2015, op. cit.

predominantly drawn from Amhara people, and Oromo people complain of increasing exclusion under hard-line rule. At the same time, the development of the capital would claim farmland, and remove people's means of earning a living. Protestors did not believe that they stood to benefit from Ethiopia's model of heavily state-centric economic development, which enriches the elite but provides little opportunity for citizens to participate.⁷² Yared Hailemariam, of the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, outlined the origins of the protests:⁷³

The Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan, otherwise known as the Master Plan, was announced by the government in April 2014. That announcement was followed by bloody protests in April and May 2014 after government forces used excessive force to stop peaceful Oromo protesters who opposed the plan. As a result, dozens were killed, hundreds of students were arrested, many were charged under the anti-terrorism law, and many others left the country. After the bloody events of 2014, the government promised to settle the disputes concerning the Master Plan by holding inclusive and transparent dialogue with all stakeholders, particularly local residents, opposition parties, civil society representatives and local officials. However, the promises were not adhered to; the current protest is due to those unfulfilled promises.

The first and main cause of the protests was the controversial government proposal of a Master Plan, which aims to expand the city by taking over several Oromia towns surrounding the capital. Protestors say the implementation of the plan will result in the displacement of thousands of local farmers who settled in the area many years back. The protest was started by students in Oromia region, and then farmers and other members of the Oromo ethnic group joined the demonstrations.

Such is the state of restrictions in Ethiopia on fundamental civil society rights, and repression of the media, that it was hard to obtain accurate information on how many people were killed and detained in the state's response to the protests. There was, however, ample evidence that unarmed protestors were killed and maimed, detained people were tortured and subjected to other forms of denial of rights, and that the scale of the killings reached several hundred at the time of writing.⁷⁴ As Yared Hailemariam explains:

Ethiopia has for a long time severely restricted media freedom and the work of civil society. It is one of the top countries when it comes to jailing journalists, many of whom it charges under the 2009 anti-terrorism law. The space for civil society to carry out its work has also narrowed since the adoption of the 2009 Charity and Societies Proclamation. This law has crippled the ability of many local CSOs, particularly those who work in the area of human rights. The restrictions imposed on media and civil society have a significant impact on the monitoring, documentation and reporting of the situation of human rights in Ethiopia.

72 'Ethiopian forces in bloody crackdown on Oromia protests; daily killings and arrests reported: HRW', Mail and Guardian, 22 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1TdmrKD>; 'Ethiopia's Oromo people demand equal rights in protests', Al Jazeera, 26 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/24jtEk1>.

73 This is an edited extract. For the full interview see 'More action needed to stop human rights violations in Ethiopia', CIVICUS, 4 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1TJmamC>.

74 'Ethiopia: civil society groups urge international community to address killing of Oromo protestors', CIVICUS, 14 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Q23DPs>; 'Ethiopia: No Let Up in Crackdown on Protests', Human Rights Watch, 21 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1XH5wEi>;

The protest in the Oromia region has not been well documented or investigated by independent media or human rights organisations. Only a few foreign journalists tried to report the protest. Local journalists were not allowed to carry out investigations on the protest. The only local human rights organisation, the Human Rights Council, expressed its concern on the protest and asked the government to stop the killings and targeting of peaceful protestors. However, it was unable to conduct its investigation or report because of restrictions and budget constraints that hinder it from covering the whole country. The rest of the information was gathered by local social media activists, who reported most of the incidents from the scene.

Since the protest started in mid-November 2015 a large number of casualties and mass arrests have been reported. These are unlawful, brutal and irresponsible acts of the government aiming to dismantle the protests. The intensity of the response of the armed forces in the Oromia region exacerbated the situation.

“
The response
of the army
and police was
disproportionate
to the protests.”
”



Photographer: Gadaa

In most places the protests were peaceful, including at universities, high schools and elementary schools. But the response of the army and police was disproportionate to the protests as they attacked protestors, killing more than 160 people and wounding many others. Some of those killed included young students and children as young as seven. In two of the main universities in the Oromia Region, there were explosions in which a number of students sustained serious injuries.

Thousands of protestors, including opposition leaders, journalists and activists were also arrested. In December 2015, prominent opposition leader Bekele Gerba, two journalists, Getachew Shiferaw and Fikadu Mirkana, online activist Yonatan Teressa and four other opposition party members were arrested. The Ethiopian authority labelled them as terrorists.

Protests continued even after the government stated that it was dropping its expansion plans, in January 2016, suggesting that distrust of the state and demands for human rights run deeper. People were not convinced that the state would curtail its acquisitive approach to Oromia land, and also demanded redress for those killed, injured and detained during protests, and the release of people in detention.⁷⁵ Yared Hailemariam outlines how protests continued:

Even after the government announced its decision to halt the implementation of the Master Plan, a number of casualties were still being recorded. In the last few weeks the protestors were also raising other serious issues, such as lack of the rule of law, accountability of the state, corruption, justice problems, inequality, lack of democracy, and non-respect of basic rights of citizens.

Ethiopia's government is a strong ally of western states, which give it substantial amounts of aid, because they see Ethiopia as a bulwark against terrorism in the region, and an economic development success story. They do so even though many citizens benefit little from the high levels of economic growth, and the state uses anti-terrorist laws to suppress dissent, which has included the labelling of Oromia protestors as terrorists. Because of this, and because of the restrictions on reporting from Ethiopia and the blocking of social media, little is heard from Ethiopia's dissenting voices on the international stage.⁷⁶ We asked Yared Hailemariam what civil society could do internationally to help challenge this:

Activists in the country have faced numerous challenges and many restrictions as they perform their day to day activities. They are also subject to direct attack by government authorities. The Ethiopian government is labelling activists who criticise its policies as terrorists. As a result, the participation and visibility of Ethiopian activists in international and regional human rights mechanisms is very low and limited. This gap can be closed with a strong commitment and efforts of international and regional civil society, who have better access to advocate on the situation of Ethiopia at all levels. They could also support the work of local activists through capacity building, financing their work, consulting, supporting their research work and providing technical and security support.

Ethiopia has demonstrated the potential for people who are denied rights to rise up in protest in even the most constrained circumstances, but also the ability of an unaccountable state to respond with lethal force. Only greater democratisation and the realisation of rights can help Ethiopia's restricted civil society and brave protest movement. They need international support in their struggle.

75 'Ethiopia Boundary Dispute Puts Human Rights Violations in Spotlight', Voice of America, 25 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1K5XTEU>; 'Ethiopia: Oromo protests continue amid harsh crackdown', Al Jazeera, 24 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Rnzpar>.

76 'Deafening Silence from Ethiopia', Human Rights Watch, 12 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/22stbJv>.

8. BLACK LIVES MATTER: IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Mass protests are sometimes accused of achieving little impact beyond a feel good effect amongst those involved. Examples in this report push back against this criticism because, in the main, they demonstrate a correlation between protest actions and tangible political shifts. The feel good factor is also not something that should be dismissed out of hand; it at least suggests that social capital is being developed as people experience the joy of participation and solidarity. But the question of how mass protests can contribute to achieving breakthroughs in challenging established relations of power remains contested.

In the US, as covered in the 2015 State of Civil Society Report, 2014 saw the start of an eruption of mass protests against the deaths of black people at the hands of the police. Yet even as protests grew, police shootings continued: by November 2015, a thousand people had been recorded as having died as a result of law enforcement in the US, and statistics demonstrated a clear racial dimension: unarmed black men are seven times as likely as unarmed white men to be killed by the police.⁷⁷ If judged narrowly, movements such as Black Lives Matter, the most prominent voice on this issue, could be accused of failing to make headway on key issues of challenging police impunity and racism.

“
Black Lives
Matter has used
social media to
make clear that
police shootings
are not one off
events.”

However, protest momentum was sustained during 2015 and into 2016. While the direct action tactics often used by the movement, which include blockading public spaces and disrupting political meetings, are controversial, they have kept the debate about racism and impunity alive and vital. For example, the movement disrupted a meeting of Democratic Party presidential candidates in July 2015, and interrupted the US Conference on Mayors in San Francisco in January 2016; these actions reveal a specific strategy to confront and question political leaders, including those that may be seen as sympathetic but accused of taking black voters for granted.⁷⁸

New police abuses have been met with corresponding protests, and as a result of pressure, authorities have been forced to release police video footage that often contradicts official accounts of shootings. For example, protests sparked in Chicago in November 2015 when video footage of a killing from 2014 was released, showing an officer firing 16 shots at a 17 year-old black man. The footage flatly contradicted police reports, and the officer was subsequently charged with murder. Further releases of police videos followed, showing more examples of abuse, and impact could be seen when the mayors of Baltimore and Chicago dismissed their police chiefs.⁷⁹

77 ‘Black and Unarmed’, The Washington Post, 8 August 2015, <http://wapo.st/1rfaopB>; ‘Number of people killed by US police in 2015 at 1,000 after Oakland shooting’, The Guardian, 16 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MN8Wlz>.

78 ‘Democrats lose control of presidential event’, CNN, 19 July 2015, <http://cnn.it/1WRfVid>; ‘A Year of Black Lives Matter’, The Atlantic, 31 December 2015, <http://theatlntc/233viDZ>; ‘Black Lives Matter protest shuts down San Francisco’s Bay Bridge, leads to 25 arrests’, Daily News, 19 January 2016, <http://nydn.us/1PnBYFe>; ‘Black Lives Matter Protestors Call For Justice At U.S. Mayors Conference’, The Huffington Post, 20 January 2016, <http://huff.to/1PFFxXY>.

79 ‘Obama backs protestors over ‘deeply disturbing Laquan McDonald shooting’’, The Guardian, 26 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SX6mu1>; ‘Chicago police report contradicts video footage of Laquan McDonald death’, The Guardian, 5 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1XJG5Wk>; ‘Video shows Chicago police officers using Taser repeatedly on man in jail’, The Guardian, 8 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RGIsvS>.

The movement can therefore be seen to be combining protest with disruptive direct action and the use of a range of media to expose malpractice. Black Lives Matter has used social media to make clear that police shootings are not one off events, but arise out of a structure of ingrained racism; they have created a brand that communicates the epidemic nature of the killings. Police abuses have been going on for years, but now they are being documented and disseminated, and they reach an audience. Investigative journalism is also playing an important, complementary role in exposing the realities of policing practice, and indeed it can be argued that there is increasingly an overlap between activist civil society making use of the media and investigative journalism exposing corruption, poor governance and human rights abuses. Examples here include the investigation that alleged in October 2015 that a secret police detention centre is operating in Chicago.⁸⁰ The media is also playing a key role in redressing one of the most basic accountability deficits: the lack of accurate data on police killings. Two different media groups are generating open data on the numbers of people killed by the police, to the extent that the US government has been left playing catch-up: in October 2015, the federal government announced a trial of an open source system to count police killings, admitting that it was “ridiculous and embarrassing” that the media had better information on police killings than the state.⁸¹

Naturally the movement has experienced pushback and been accused of racism itself, often framed around the phrase ‘All Lives Matter’, a slogan that wilfully misses the point that black lives evidently currently matter less, with black Americans statistically living shorter lives and earning less than white Americans.⁸² Significantly, in October 2015, President Obama defended the movement for shedding light on difficult and entrenched problems.⁸³ Protestors have also faced violence. In November 2015, protestors commemorating the killing of an unarmed black man in Minneapolis were fired on by racist attackers, although this did not deter them from continuing their protest.⁸⁴ Protestors have also been met with violence when trying to disrupt the rallies of presidential candidates. The policing of protests often further exposes the challenges: in June 2015, the US Justice Department found that the policing of the August 2014 Ferguson protests violated the right to freedom of expression and assembly, fuelled tensions and prevented police officers from being held accountable.⁸⁵

There have been attempts to appropriate the movement, and conflicts about focus and tactics among supporters. Others have anointed the movement as the true and radical heir of Occupy, not least in its organising and tactics, noting that it has grown from addressing state power to asking questions about the economics of persistent poverty, that it makes strong connections that have previously been lacking between issues of black exclusion and exclusion on the basis of sexual or gender identity, and also that it appears to have strong roots: Black Lives Matter may have started as a hashtag, but it has persisted because it has embedded itself in communities.⁸⁶ It has maintained practices of democracy and diffuse leadership, positioning both as a movement and an organisation, marking a point of departure from previous civil rights movements that were heavily oriented around charismatic, and always male, leaders. It has nurtured a web of connections to like-minded movements, some new and some that already existed, enabling nimbleness and spontaneity in response and mobilisation.⁸⁷

80 ‘Homan Square revealed: how Chicago police ‘disappeared’ 7,000 people’, The Guardian, 19 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NkbtCB>.

81 ‘Justice Department trials system to count killings by US law enforcement’, The Guardian, 6 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VATbUO>.

82 ‘Black lives tend to be five years shorter. That’s why we interrupt you’, The Guardian, 14 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/23Z01rj>.

83 ‘Obama Explains The Problem With ‘All Lives Matter’’, Think Progress, 22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/26rjFuV>; ‘Obama explains the difference between Black Lives Matter and ‘all lives matter’’, Mashable, 23 October 2015, <http://on.mash.to/1WRgKHS>.

84 ‘Minneapolis police arrest three in shooting of Black Lives Matter protestors’, Reuters, 25 November 2015, <http://reut.rs/1rx1bta>.

85 ‘Justice Department faults Ferguson protest response’, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 30 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1R18UdE>.

86 ‘From Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter: where does radical protest go from here?’, 13 November 2015, Occupy.com, <http://bit.ly/1SxvbLO>.

87 ‘#BlackLivesMatter: the birth of a new civil rights movement’, The Guardian, 19 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1OfXg8N>.

There is a need to continue to understand the killing of black citizens by the police as a governance issue, as well as a human rights issue, as impunity results from poor accountability and the exclusion of minorities in decision-making. The release of videos that contradict official stories, something that would not have happened without civil society campaigning, exposes the lies in official versions of events, and collusion in cover-up between local politicians and police forces. This is something that can only be tackled by increasing accountability and scrutiny.

CIVIL SOCIETY USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Black Lives Matter, and the many protest movements covered here, are using social media in a multiplicity of ways: to expose corruption, encourage accountability, communicate messages, shape debate, recruit support and organise activity. Participants in the AGNA survey also offered some further examples of how civil society is working with social media.

In Macedonia, the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) notes that civil society groups are using social media to mount a response to urgent issues of the day:

Many CSOs, and especially informal citizens' initiatives, increasingly use social media to inform, generate support and call for action on particular issues, such as stopping police brutality, and helping the refugees in Macedonia.

While in the very different context of the Solomon Islands, Development Services Exchange describes the new activism and accountability opportunities that social media has brought to its country:

The birth and rise of social media groups in the country adds a new dimension to civil society activism and advocacy against chronic corruption. A classic example is the exposure of the corrupt or improper dealing of the Board and CEO of the country's national airline, which is now the subject of defamation proceedings in the High Court.



9. NORTHEAST ASIA: CITIZENS DENY PRESUMPTIONS OF PASSIVITY

Japan's citizens may be customarily stereotyped as politically disengaged, but a wave of protest against militarisation defied such notions. August and September 2015 saw protests in Japan against the government's decision to expand Japan's military capacities, which could see Japanese forces being deployed abroad for the first time since the Second World War. Opinion polls showed that most Japanese citizens oppose this move, and it remains a deeply controversial issue in a nation that has founded its post-War identity on peace.⁸⁸ At its peak, up to 120,000 people were reported to have demonstrated outside parliament, forcing a vote on militarisation to be delayed. The vote was, however, subsequently passed.⁸⁹

“
Japan can
be viewed to
have increased
potential to
protest to seek
change.”

Many of the protestors were young and not politically connected, but had some past experience of dissent to draw from: one key group was Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy, which formed to oppose a state secrecy law in 2013 that penalises whistle-blowers and investigative journalists who report sensitive information.⁹⁰ Young protestors will have gained experience from this most recent engagement, and Japan can be viewed to have increased potential to protest to seek change.

Meanwhile, **South Korea** saw its largest protest in years in November 2015, as up to 130,000 people marched through the capital, Seoul. Labour unions, civic groups and farmers' groups were among the protestors. The concerns that brought different groups together were diverse, but they could be seen as reflecting an overall concern that the state has simultaneously become excessively pro-business while denying political and civil rights. Grievances included widening economic inequality, worsening employment conditions, and free market trade deals that have led to farmers struggling as the price of crops falls. Opposition also focused on government plans to change labour laws to make it easier for businesses to lay off workers, and a decision that the government would centralise the publication of school history textbooks, which sparked concern about the potential whitewashing of the history of the current president's military ruler father, amid broader concerns about the erosion of the freedom of expression. Young people in particular are shown by opinion polls to be disenchanted with the president and her government's policies, and with conventional politics as a whole.⁹¹

Protestors were met by heavy response, including the use of tear gas and water cannons, and over 50 people were detained. One protestor, 69 year old Nam-Ki Baek, of the Korean Catholic Farmers Association, was knocked unconscious by a water cannon and remains in a coma at the time of writing.⁹² Protestors were also subsequently demonised by the president,

88 'Japanese pacifists unnerved by lifting of ban on military intervention', The Guardian, 1 July 2014, <http://bit.ly/1rTPLtV>.

89 'Thousands protest Abe, security bills at Diet rally', The Japan Times, 30 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/26rkQdl>; 'Tens of thousands of Japanese protest against 'war law'', Al Jazeera, 30 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Q34MWg>.

90 'New generation of Japanese anti-war protestors challenge Abe', The Guardian, 16 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1KRBPhy>.

91 'Dozens injured at South Korea anti-government protest', Al Jazeera, 14 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LfQ3SR>; 'Civil Rights At Issue In Korea, But Not The Korea You'd Expect', NPR, 4 January 2016, <http://n.pr/1kH6OR8>; 'South Korean conservatives seen regaining hold of assembly in election', Reuters, 7 April 2016, <http://reut.rs/22foHFY>; 'South Korea Youth in Crisis: Implications for Political Leadership', Jiyon Kim, Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs, Vo. 2, No. 2, Winter 2016, <http://bit.ly/1SMA20Y>.

92 'South Korea police detain over 50 in Seoul as protest for president's ouster turns violent', The Globe and Mail, 14 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/23Z6FOg>; 'S. Korea should stop sacrificing agriculture says Namki baek's daughter at ISS conference, The Hague', La Via Campesina, 8 February 2016,

who drew parallels between protestors and Islamist fundamentalists, and called for a ban on the wearing of masks in demonstrations.

Further heavy handed pressure was seen with the opening of a prosecution on sedition charges for one of the organisers of the November demonstration, Sang-gyun Han, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.⁹³ Sang-gyun Han was also harassed for his role in earlier protests, held in April and May 2015, on the first anniversary of the sinking of the Sewol ferry, a disaster in which over 300 people died. The Sewol disaster sparked considerable public anger against the government, not least because of the poor regulatory standards it exposed, which enabled safety violations; the ferry had been highly overloaded with cargo. Rather than deal with the issues exposed by the disaster, the government chose to suppress dissent and jail activists; seven protestors were detained for leading calls for a fully independent investigation into the disaster, and in January 2016, two of the leaders of this protest were given two and three year jail sentences.⁹⁴

The crackdown has, however, not deterred protestors. Another demonstration of up to 30,000 people was held in December 2015, after a government banning order was overturned by the court.⁹⁵ And in February 2016, Amnesty International Korea found a novel way to bypass bans and get its message about the restriction of the freedom of expression across, when it staged a 'ghost protest' by projecting holographic images of protestors onto a screen in central Seoul.⁹⁶

Citizens will, it seems, keep finding ways to express dissent, and with evidence that conventional politics are being rejected, will forge their own arenas to make their voices heard. The government, an ally of the west, and so long used to escaping scrutiny because of its favourable comparison to North Korea, needs to demonstrate that it is capable of listening. Its cold war mind set is being challenged by many of its young people and trade unionists, who want real democracy, and an economy that works for everyone.

10. PROTEST HOTSPOTS ACROSS EUROPE

Europe was the site of multiple protests in 2011 against cut-backs in public services, particularly in **Greece, Spain** and the **UK**. In Greece and Spain, that protest momentum was sustained into the development of new political forms that challenge

<http://bit.ly/23Z71Vj>; 'Farmer's family seeks gov't compensation', The Korea Times, 22 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/21ezMs2>.

93 'South Korea: Arbitrary detention of Mr. Sang-gyun Han, president of the Korean Federation of Trade Unions (KCTU)', Worldwide Movement for Human Rights, 16 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NyxiMM>; 'S Korea labour activist charged after temple standoff', Zee News, 5 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1NwGeb8>.

94 'Tragic ferry Sewol repeatedly overloaded: report', Daily News, 4 May 2014, <http://nydn.us/23Z87jH>; 'South Korea: Detention of Mr. Lae-Goon Park, a standing steering committee member of the Coalition 4.16 on the Sewol Ferry Disaster', Worldwide Movement for Human Rights, 22 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1T2drcc>; 'Release activists imprisoned for supporting Sewol ferry demonstrations', CIVICUS, 31 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MzFZsV>; 'Jailing protest leaders undermines South Korean democracy', CIVICUS, 27 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1KFazO4>; 'Sang-gyun Han', Front Line Defenders, <http://bit.ly/1WnWSvh>.

95 'South Korea protests: Seoul rally against Park Geun-hye', BBC, 5 December 2015, <http://bbc.in/1VQfzt7>.

96 'South Koreans stage rights 'ghost protest' in Seoul', BBC, 24 February 2016, <http://bbc.in/1rfi2Aq>.

established political parties, and recent times have seen these forms moving into the party political arena and grappling with the challenges this can bring. In Greece, although the Syriza party was already in existence, it was moribund until receiving fresh momentum and support following the 2011 protests, to the extent that it took power in January 2015, although it has since lost support and faced splits for accepting conditions on international loan measures.⁹⁷ The Greek experience serves as a reminder that there are limits to what can be achieved through party politics and the pursuit of political power; a strong civil society is always needed to foster debate and scrutiny. In Spain, although barely two years old, Podemos (We Can), the radical party formed out of 2011's 15-M and Indignados movements, brought community mobilising methods into the political arena. Podemos came third in the December 2015 elections, commanding 21 per cent of the vote; at the time of writing, as a result of this, neither of the main established parties had been able to negotiate a coalition government.⁹⁸

Mass protest spread to other European contexts in 2015, and with major political impacts. In **Iceland** in April 2015, major protests in the capital, Reykjavík, were sparked by revelations that the prime minister and other senior political figures have connections to offshore companies, including those pursuing repayments from Iceland's banks, which collapsed in 2008. These connections were unearthed in the Panama Papers, a huge leak of information from a major offshore legal firm. The largest protest was joined by 10,000 people, a huge number given Iceland's 330,000 population, and the protests, fuelled by anger about elite power and hypocrisy, led to the immediate resignation of the prime minister.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, a burgeoning new protest movement, *Nuit debout* (rise up at night), was seen to spread across cities in **France** and to **Belgium** and other European countries in March and April 2016, using tactics of occupation, in which protest camps were set up in public spaces. In the largest protest, the Place de la Republique in Paris was occupied for over a week in April 2016, before the protest camp was cleared. As with the South Korea protests, the movement began in anger about proposed new laws to restrict employment rights, but it could be seen to be working outside conventional political structures to formulate calls for radical change, taking on issues such as feminism and solidarity with refugees. Striking features included the way the movement created its own media channels, including internet radio, and the high levels of public support it attracted, with one poll assessing public support to stand as high as 60 per cent.¹⁰⁰

Our section on civic space details the attacks on human rights being made by the governments of Hungary and Poland. Protests greeted the attempt by the government of **Hungary** to introduce new anti-terrorism measures in March 2016, recognising these as a further threat to democracy and human rights.¹⁰¹ In **Poland** meanwhile, large-scale protests were mounted against the repressive actions of the Law and Justice party government elected in October 2015. Tens of thousands of protestors

97 'Greece's Syriza party splits, rebels form anti-bailout front', Reuters, 22 August 2015, <http://reut.rs/1Wo4dLm>.

98 'Pablo Iglesias: How the leader of the leftist Podemos party upset Spain's elites to reach the brink of power', Independent, 25 December 2015, <http://ind.pn/1MWoTbE>; 'Disillusioned Spain still has no government months after general election' Independent, 10 March 2016, <http://ind.pn/1Wo4u0W>.

99 'Panama Papers leak sparks massive protests in Iceland over PM's link to tax havens', Independent, 5 April 2016, <http://ind.pn/1TEhKxX>; 'Opposition, Protestors Press On as Iceland Gets New Premier', <http://bloom.bg/1SpZ2Jv>; 'The Unraveling Of A Government: The Panama Papers And Iceland', The Reykjavík Grapevine, 8 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1TuPIZ8>.

100 'Paris' Occupy-style protestors carry warning for French left', Associated Press, 7 April 2016, <http://apne.ws/1qQ5q1X>; 'Nuit debout protestors occupy French cities in revolutionary call for change', The Guardian, 8 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/25PAIXi>; '60% des Français soutiennent le mouvement "Nuit Debout"', iTELE, 9 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1TuQiRn>; 'The French protest that wants to redefine politics', EU Observer, 11 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Wo5VMO>; 'I've never felt so involved in democracy': Nuit debout protestors on their cause', The Guardian, 12 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/23rTZ29>.

101 'Hungarians rally against government push for sweeping anti-terror powers', The Guardian, 25 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/24hRnkB>.



Photographer: Althingi

mobilised in cities across Poland in December 2015 to defend democracy, and again in February and March 2016 after the Constitutional Court rejected the government's proposed changes to it as unconstitutional.¹⁰²

Protests have been organised by the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (KOD), formed in November 2015.¹⁰³ Hanna Szulczewska of KOD talked to us about KOD's spontaneous origins, and its motivations:¹⁰⁴

Our civic movement emerged spontaneously in reaction to these developments. KOD was inspired by an article published on 18 November 2015 on studioopinii.pl, an independent journalist web portal, by Krzysztof Łoziński, an active member of the anti-communist opposition and a journalist. In his text Łoziński said there was now a need to create a Committee for the Defence of Democracy, in view of "...deliberate attempts made by the Law and Justice party to dismantle democracy." The Committee should follow the tradition and ideals of the Committee for the Defence of Workers founded in communist Poland in 1976.

102 'Poland protests: Tens of thousands march again', BBC, 19 December 2015, <http://bbc.in/1qQ7C9T>; 'Poland protests: Anti-government demonstrators march in Warsaw to express anger at constitutional crisis', Independent, 28 February 2016, <http://ind.pn/1oQsvRY>; 'Polish protests as government rejects court ruling', BBC, 12 March 2016, <http://bbc.in/1SHMGez>.

103 'Thousands protest Polis government, defend former president', DW, 28 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1Th4G2f>.

104 This is an edited extract. For the full interview see 'Poland: government should listen to the people and stop curbing civil liberties', CIVICUS, 19 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1WvIjdp>.

Łoziński's article was posted on Facebook by Mateusz Kijowski, now the leader of KOD. As the text was getting considerable interest, being shared by many people on Facebook, Kijowski decided to open a KOD group on Facebook, and so it started. The group reported a rapid growth in membership, reaching over 30,000 in just a few days.

The main goal of the movement is to defend democracy in Poland and to prevent the authoritarian vision of the state promoted by the present government from coming true. KOD is monitoring and documenting all the movements of the Law and Justice government. The organisation also responds to the open acts of violation of the democratic order by organising mass demonstrations in the streets of Polish cities. Moreover, KOD is now developing its structures all over the country and preparing for a long-term activity, which involves, among others, civic education and building social networks.

In January 2016, people protested against a new surveillance law, and in April 2016, protests mobilised against the government's intention to ban abortion, which is already heavily restricted; this caused the government to downplay its intention, although the debate remains ongoing.¹⁰⁵ The campaign to resist further restrictions on abortions shows that resistance can be mounted. Still, many more struggles can be expected ahead. Hanna Szulczewska calls attention to what international support is needed, and what the state should do:

The role of European Institutions is vital for Poland, where 80 per cent of the population support our presence in the European Union (EU), 10 years after accession. It is very important that the EU monitors the situation in our country and makes this government aware that Poland, as an EU member state, is obliged to comply with the European 'rules of the game'. It is also important for us to build and maintain relations with other European bodies and CSOs at different levels.

We should remember that the ruling Law and Justice party won the election with less than six million votes, which means that only 18 per cent of all the people eligible to vote supported this party. Therefore, the ruling Law and Justice party should not ignore the voice of many Poles who have openly and repeatedly expressed their protest in mass demonstrations. The government should finally start listening to the people and deliver on the social promises from their electoral campaign, rather than curbing civil liberties.

ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA

In **Romania**, protest brought down a government in 2015. A nightclub fire in the capital, Bucharest, caused 62 deaths in October 2015 and led to over 30,000 people protesting in Bucharest's Constitution Square, and demonstrations across Romania.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ 'Poles rally against new surveillance law amid 'Orbanisation' fears', Reuters, 23 January 2016, <http://reut.rs/1ONthor>; 'Street protests over abortion law are latest skirmish in battle for Poland's soul', The Guardian, 10 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/25RNp3Z>; 'Abortion in Europe: 'Coat Hanger Rebellion' Grips Poland', NBC News, 26 April 2016, <http://nbcnews.to/1NOiev8>.

¹⁰⁶ 'Romania: Protests despite Victor Ponta's resignation', BBC, 5 November 2015, <http://bbc.in/1MiRO71>; '63 people lose their lives after the tragic fire at Bucharest Collectiv club. Who are they?', Romania Insider, 12 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1WX943o>.

Protestors blamed corruption for the disaster: the nightclub was operating in breach of safety guidelines, but had been granted permits and had not been inspected. People queued long to donate blood for the injured, but alongside this humanitarian reaction, many saw the disaster as a wake-up call to challenge and change the political system. The disaster quickly came to symbolise a broader, systematic culture of corruption and dysfunctional governance in Romania.

Interestingly, many of those who mobilised most quickly had earlier become engaged in 2013, in a successful campaign to stop a village being demolished to construct a goldmine: the village was eventually declared a site of historic interest in January 2016. Activist skills and networks that had been developed in this earlier engagement proved valuable, ready to be deployed as this new crisis of governance arose.¹⁰⁷

In the wake of the protests, Prime Minister Victor Ponta and his government resigned. He had already, in July 2015, been indicted on various charges relating to corruption. The local mayor also stepped down.¹⁰⁸ A largely technocratic new cabinet was appointed by the president in the wake of the resignations, ahead of elections scheduled for late 2016, and the President also met with civil society representatives. Protests however continued after these resignations, involving an estimated 70,000 people, many of them young people newly involved in action. This demonstrated that anger went beyond the fury directed at immediate office holders: it concerned itself with questions of fundamental change, and how citizens can change their relations with power.¹⁰⁹ The 2016 election, and the process leading up to it, will have to deliver something different for these newly active citizens.

“
Protestors
blamed
corruption for
the disaster.”

Protest also flared through much of 2015 in Romania’s neighbour, **Moldova**. A large scale corruption scandal saw around US\$1 billion siphoned off from three Moldovan banks during 2014 and spirited out of the country through opaque processes. The scandal was exposed only by a leaked report in April 2015.¹¹⁰ As this money, amounting to one eighth of Moldova’s gross domestic product (GDP), had to be covered from state coffers, it directly impacted on the government’s ability to provide services in what was already one of Europe’s poorest countries, an impact that was heightened because it came at a time when the price of basic goods was rising.¹¹¹ As in the examples given above, from Guatemala and Honduras, the scandal therefore drew renewed attention to the direct impacts on the public of a seemingly institutionalised process of corruption, and the associated power of oligarchs.

In response, a new civil society body, Civic Platform for Dignity and Truth, formed in February 2015, and convened protests in April and May 2015.¹¹² These were followed by the largest protests since Moldova declared independence from the Soviet

107 ‘Romania’s organisation of righteous anger signals a fragile hope’, The Guardian, 5 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/23TZzqo>; ‘Romanian village blocks Canadian firm from mining for gold’, The Guardian, 14 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/234oYPn>.

108 ‘Romanian PM Ponta resigns over nightclub fire’, Al Jazeera, 4 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Nx55vs>; ‘The Latest: Mayor of Bucharest district resigns after fire’, Business Insider, 4 November 2015, <http://read.bi/1pCakij>.

109 ‘Romanian protests continue, despite Ponta resignation’, EurActiv, 5 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Sy4p5X>; ‘Romania: Street protests over ‘a whole chain of incompetence and corruption’’, Euronews, 5 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Sy4x5D>.

110 ‘Moldova: Banking Scandal Threatens Support for EU-Friendly Government’, EurasiaNet, 14 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Sq85KC>; ‘Waiting for a New Moldova’, Carnegie Europe, 10 September 2015, <http://ceip.org/1NkLZWI>.

111 ‘The great Moldovan bank robbery’, BBC, 18 June 2015, <http://bbc.in/1MWEFU2>.

112 ‘Civic Platform “Dignity and Truth”: On May, 3 we have one more chance to stop the lust planned by those three criminals’, Jurnal TV, 22 April 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VQyyUu>; ‘Spring again in the Republic of Moldova – mass protest against corruption’, DW, 4 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VAIpyj>; ‘Moldova anger grows over banking scandal’, BBC, 14 September 2015, <http://bbc.in/24hYWYq>.

Union in 1991: tens of thousands, perhaps 100,000 people, occupied the Great National Assembly Square in the capital Chişinău in September 2015. Protestors demanded the resignation of the president, early elections and the return of the stolen money. They formed a tent city and settled in for an occupation. The protests were however met with heavy-handed security force response, with several protestors detained and intimidated.¹¹³ At the end of the occupation, protestors resolved to call for a general strike until a unity government replaced the incumbents. Parallels were drawn with Ukraine's Maidan movement, which brought down the Ukrainian government in 2014.¹¹⁴ The protests suggested that Dignity and Truth had tapped into widespread public outrage that was seeking a new protest vehicle.

As in Romania, the Moldova protests could be seen to have decisive impact: in October 2015, the government was dismissed through a parliamentary motion of censure, leaving the country unable to form a government until January 2016, while a former prime minister was arrested for bribery and corruption.¹¹⁵ But as in Romania, the dismissal of political leaders did not bring an end to the protests, suggesting that issues, and the actions required, ran deeper, and that few people were placated by the dismissal of the government, which may have been motivated by narrow party political calculations. In November 2015, the Dignity and Truth platform announced that it was forming an associated political party to try to win reform by contesting the next election, and in January 2016, over 15,000 took to the streets of Chişinău to protest against the new government, rejecting the freshly appointed prime minister as a member of a discredited political elite closely connected to corrupt business, and calling for early elections. Protests flared again in April 2016, and were met by violence, suggesting that the anger is enduring.¹¹⁶

In a country that, like neighbouring Ukraine, sits on the hinge between the EU to the west and Russia to the east, elements of protests have pushed in either direction. Successive Moldovan governments that have earned public distrust have been associated with the project of wider integration with the EU, and so some of those involved in protest view the EU with suspicion, as a source of easy money for corrupt politicians, and have called for stronger links with Russia as an alternative. Others have questioned the gap between the reality and rhetoric of EU compliance, and have demanded that EU integration processes be applied more strongly in order to prevent corruption. Others still have argued for closer connections with and even unification with Romania, something thousands marched in support of in July 2015.¹¹⁷

However, it is important, in viewing Moldova, not to see the situation only through a lens of EU/Russian relations. To do this is to deny citizens their agency to seek change. Both pro-EU and pro-Russian politicians have been exposed as corrupt and, as in other contexts, protestors have largely resisted narrow political co-option. What brought together protestors who look east

113 'Moldova protestors take to streets criticising 'mafia' government', The Guardian, 6 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SHXObs>.

114 'Moldova banking scandal fuels biggest protest ever', EurActiv, 7 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/26rOeki>; 'The 'billion dollar protests' in Moldova are threatening the survival of the country's political elite', London School of Economics and Political Science, 21 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1rxrCin>; 'Moldova's Maidan', Politico, 1 October 2015, <http://politi.co/1pCdMt5>.

115 'Moldova detains former PM in parliament over \$1 billion fraud', Reuters, 15 October 2015, <http://reut.rs/1SHYBJw>; 'Moldova's parliament dismisses pro-EU government amid corruption scandal', DW, 29 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1qQu4Q5>.

116 'Civic Platform "Dignity and Truth" to become a political party', Moldova.org, 12 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/2400UzW>; 'Platform "Dignity and Truth" announces creation of political party', Teleradio Moldova, 12 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1VAngDf>; 'Thousands of protestors decry Moldovan government corruption', DW, 24 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1rxuNXh>; 'Moldova: anti-government protests continue', Euronews, 25 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/1WRxLS7>.

117 'Moldova: Pondering Unification with Romania?' EurasiaNet, 10 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1guiGo9>; 'Moldova's Maidan: Echoes of Ukraine crisis amid anti-corruption protest movement', International Business Times, 8 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1PdZ2LH>.

and those who face west was a shared belief that existing governance has failed, corruption is entrenched and only systemic change will do. Even with Dignity and Truth contesting them, fresh elections cannot be enough, alone, to solve this crisis. There is a need for the government to signal a decisive break with the past, and quickly demonstrate progress on accountability and transparency. It will have to do this while also tackling a financial crisis, in part caused by the unwillingness of international lenders to give loans to a corrupt state.¹¹⁸ The prospects do not seem promising. If politicians fail to deliver the change Moldova's citizens demand, they should expect people to take to the streets again.

FAILURE OR SUCCESS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA?

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (BiH) the Centre for Civil Society Promotion sets out how protests that can be seen as having failed in the short term can have longer-term positive implications, in the development of new civic networks. A wave of outrage swept BiH in February 2014, sparked by high unemployment and political stagnation, but the movement had petered out by April 2014. However, those who mobilised have not sunk into apathy:

Civic activists that emerged during the February 2014 protests remained active in 2015 at the local level, and attempted to establish networks across the country to address pressing socio-economic issues. Some CSOs strived to increase their capacity to monitor the EU integration process and enter into dialogue on the Reform Agenda with the EU and BiH authorities.

One of the most successful examples of civic activism in 2015 was the Akcija građana (Civil Initiative) by the Association of Citizens, which successfully campaigned to open the National Museum of BiH, after it had been shut for three years.

ARMENIA: MORE THAN THE PRICE OF ELECTRICITY

A rise in the price of electricity was the ostensible spark for protest in Armenia in June 2015. This was to be the third price increase in two years, in a country where many live below the poverty line.¹¹⁹ Yet as might be expected, the protests, known as Electric Yerevan, were about much more than the price of fuel. Protests are nothing new in Armenia, and Electric Yerevan could be seen as building on informal networks developed during earlier campaigns. What was new was the international attention the 2015 protests commanded.

It was significant that Armenia's electricity supplier is entirely owned by Russia: as with Moldova, Ukraine and indeed all former Soviet and Warsaw Pact states that are not members of the EU, the country faces pressure from both sides to pivot east or west. Armenia's government has long been seen as a strong ally of Russia, relying on it for security and its economy, which is heavily dependent on remittances from Armenians in Russia. There has been some public resentment about the government's supine attitude towards Russia, and apparent impunity for the actions of Russian military based in Armenia.¹²⁰ But aside from

118 'Another government expected to fall, in Moldova's political breakdown', New Europe, 4 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1SN6YXI>.

119 'Armenians are protesting over price hikes – and Russia's not pleased', Business Insider, 25 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SjJJPm>.

120 'Armenia can't count on Russia any more', Al Jazeera, 20 January 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Wp9q5C>; 'Electric Yerevan vows comeback, as 'Moscow's soft power has been lost'', Al Jazeera, 9 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MYgrJ6>.

questions of national identity, corruption was again a key driver of public anger: another popular banner of the movement was ‘No Plunder’. The electricity company was accused of being mismanaged and run for the benefit of its senior officials.¹²¹

As elsewhere, protest was met with heavy response: the police used water cannons and batons on protestors, injuring a reported 25 people, and detained 230 activists and journalists, drawing condemnation for their actions.¹²² Despite this, protests grew and continued from June into July 2015, claiming 20,000 participants per evening at peak, before eventually being cleared.¹²³ By this stage, the protests had achieved a clear, short-term success: the president intervened and agreed to subsidise the price increases.¹²⁴ But as with other examples, protests continued even after this point, suggesting that dissatisfaction was more profound, and confidence and momentum in expressing dissent had grown. The protests mostly involved people with no previous political affiliation, including many young people who were acting in the public sphere for the first time. Protests adopted horizontal forms of organising and open debate, with heavy complementary use of social media.¹²⁵

Apart from the prize freeze, the government did little else to show it understood the protestors’ message, suggesting that more significant change is needed. Protests flared again in September 2015, and in December 2015, when the government called a short-notice referendum to change the political system from a presidential to a parliamentary one. There was suspicion here that, as with the several Sub-Saharan African countries discussed in our section on civic space, the constitution was being reworked for short-term political convenience: the expectation is that Armenia’s strong-arm president, who will soon reach the end of his term limit, will switch into the role of prime minister, as Vladimir Putin pioneered in Russia, and with enhanced powers.

“
The government
did little else
to show it
understood
the protestors’
message.”

Referendums should exemplify democracy at its finest, with citizens given the direct opportunity to determine an issue of importance, but Armenia’s was rushed and flawed. Pleas by civil society groups for the referendum to be delayed were ignored, and the referendum was dogged by allegations of vote rigging and the inclusion on the electoral register of large numbers of dead people and people who have left Armenia.¹²⁶ Civil society groups observed malpractice: the Citizen Observer initiative and the European Platform for Democratic Elections, a coalition of Eurasian and European observer CSOs, reported a high number of violations of electoral law, threats and violence, and apparently systematic abuse of the media, while Transparency International used citizen-compiled data to build a map of electoral violations.¹²⁷

Large protests were held in Yerevan, both before the referendum, and after it. The referendum approved the constitutional changes, but on a turn-out of barely 50 per cent, suggesting that there was no groundswell of interest in or popular support

121 ‘The power of Electric Yerevan’, Open Democracy, 6 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1PxS27m>; ‘Small Electric Yerevan Spark – A Big Challenge for the Armenian Government’, The Huffington Post, 13 July 2015, <http://huff.to/1TvR9RC>.

122 ‘Armenia: Police Violence Against Protestors, Journalists’, Human Rights Watch, 24 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1XVYhbj>; Al Jazeera, 9 August 2015, op. cit.

123 Open Democracy, 6 July 2015, op. cit.

124 ‘Armenian Voices Sound Off at ‘Electric Yerevan’’, Global Voices, 24 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1ryLCKA>.

125 Open Democracy, 6 July 2015, op. cit.

126 ‘‘Asa Ayo’? No thanks. Armenian Opposition Gets Creative Ahead of Crunch Referendum’, Global Voices, 4 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/241WXuB>; ‘Armenia: Who Benefits from Constitutional Reform?’, EurasiaNet, 4 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NyQwHX>.

127 ‘Armenia: Widespread Reports of Irregularities Mar Constitutional Referendum’, EurasiaNet, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SrieGW>; ‘Armenia votes to curb presidential powers in disputed referendum’, The Guardian, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MYiDQT>.

for constitutional change: this further indicates that the referendum did not speak to a public demand, but rather arose from political expediency.¹²⁸

The referendum experience serves as a reminder that protest successes may only be temporary, and that venal political elites are always looking for ways to move the political goalposts. Even if they failed to challenge this in the short-term, the



Photographer: PAN Photo

greater impact of the protests may have been in helping people discover that they can challenge impunity.¹²⁹ A surge of public patriotism, which saw people take to the streets to support their country after Azerbaijan launched attacks on the disputed

128 'Thousands Rally In Armenia Against Plan To Change Constitution', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1qSsRHx>; 'Protestors Gather in Yerevan, Claim Fraud In Armenian Referendum', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/241XuN6>; 'Constitutional Amendments Approved in Armenia's Referendum', The Armenian Weekly, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1YT7eT0>.

129 'Armenia: Can the Protests Bring Change?', EurasiaNet, 29 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1JkLOCN>; 'Armenia: Evaluating Electric Yerevan's Impact', EurasiaNet, 7 July 2015, <http://bit.ly/1G9vB3z>.

territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016, may have dampened down the potential for further protest in the short term, but it also served to demonstrate citizens' continued willingness to mobilise in public space.¹³⁰ Looking further ahead, bigger breakthroughs still are needed in changing the relationship between the government and the people. The deep, informal dissent networks that exist in Armenia need further to be nurtured.

MACEDONIA: A SCANDAL TOO FAR

Protests erupted in Macedonia in May 2015, after the opposition leader released recordings of tapped conversations implicating leading political figures in corruption and interference in the judiciary, and revealing widespread state eavesdropping. A wider political dispute had simmered since controversial April 2014 elections.

In an interview conducted at the time of the protests, Emina Nuredinoska of MCIC and Tanja Hafner Ademi of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network gave the history and background:¹³¹

The protest movement in Macedonia was catalysed both by persistent state malfeasance and the disclosure of wiretapped conversations implicating the government in a number of unlawful practices, including a systematic campaign to suppress and persecute critical voices. Since the autumn of 2014, there has been broad public discontent, with wide-scale protests led by students, cultural workers and journalists emerging in response to ill-conceived, long-term reforms initiated by the state.

At the political level, the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), boycotted parliament after national elections on 27 April 2014. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe declared that the elections, while effectively administered, lacked separation of state institutions from party, and suffered from credible reports of voter intimidation and vague campaigning rules. On 9 February 2015, the SDSM's leader, Zoran Zaev, released wiretapped phone conversations of high-ranking officials discussing persecution of government critics, control of the media, dubious business deals and voter fraud. The wiretapping, which allegedly began in 2011, affected over 20,000 people, including state officials, members of the opposition, media and civil society activists. In reaction to the leaks, Zoran Zaev was charged with organising a coup. While the opposition responded by filing charges alleging abuse of power by state intelligence services, the State Prosecutor reported that he was initiating several investigative processes, but has yet to charge any of the government officials implicated in the leaks.

On 5 May 2015, a recorded conversation detailing the political cover-up of the murder of 22 year-old Martin Neskovski by police officers in June 2011 was released, sparking spontaneous and peaceful protests by citizens and civil society activists in front of the main government building, under the slogan #протестирам (I protest).

In an atmosphere thick with tension - protestors breached barriers erected by police officers, yet remained peaceful - provocateurs began throwing objects towards the police, an act the police interpreted as an invitation to crack down violently

130 'Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict: patriotism prevails on both sides', The Guardian, 7 April 2016, <http://bit.ly/23dldZk>.

131 This is an edited extract. For the full interview see 'Insights on the current protests in Macedonia: an interview with two leading civil society activists', CIVICUS, 27 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SrjdXy>.

on the protests. The police used disproportionate force, including violently pursuing protestors, harassing students in Brakja Miladinovci library and indiscriminately detaining protestors. Some protestors were released on the condition that they refrain from attending all further protests. On 22 May, the first group of nine protestors detained were given parole, and one received a 10 month prison sentence.

Protests were held every day, with police forces preventing protestors from coming within 100 meters of all public buildings, excluding the parliament. As a result of these restrictions, some protests evolved into mobile marches around the city.

The ruling party staged its own large-scale gathering, while opposition-led protestors established a fixed camp in front of the main government building and civic activists protested in front of the Basic Court in Skopje calling for the release of detained peaceful protestors.

While the trigger of protests could be characterised as political, as with other examples, there were wider social and economic currents involved. Many people have been feeling poorer, and see that economic inequality is increasing, a regular indicator of protest potential. There had also been rising concern ahead of protests about the government appearing increasingly grandiose, distant and self-interested, and its use of nationalistic and religious rhetoric.

In addition, non-formal movements already existed, which provided crucial assets that protests could draw upon. These included protests, led by students in the Student Plenum movement, to resist negative changes in education policy, as in Chile and South Africa, protests against utility price rises, as in Armenia, and to defend green spaces, one of the triggers of protests in recent years in Turkey.¹³² MCIC, which further contributed to this report as a member of the AGNA network, relates the important experience of the student protests to the wider movement:

Civic activism, expressed most of all in the Student Plenum movement and the massive protests that lasted for several months, resulted in a withdrawal of the Law on Higher Education in February 2015 and an agreement to establish a new working group where representatives of the Student Plenum and other relevant student associations will also participate. The successful and inspiring story of the Student Plenum resulted in the establishment of strong High School Plenum as well as Professors Plenum, which throughout the year contributed to increasing debate about better quality education for every student.

The student movements have influenced extensively the atmosphere where civil society operates. As well as all the events that followed after, they made change and improvement towards a more democratic society seem possible.

A remarkable feature of the 2015 protests was the coming together of different ethnicities, in a country where opinion can divide and tensions flare along ethnic lines. Both Macedonian and Albanian flags, with which the minority population identifies,

¹³² 'Macedonian Student's Plenum – A Cry for Respect', Balkan Insight, 15 December 2014, <http://bit.ly/1SrijrOI>; 'Youth Rules and Student protests in Macedonia', The AEGEEan, 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1XVYpYj>; 'Lipstick Protestor' Jasmina Golubovska: Macedonians Want to 'Start from Scratch', Global Voices, 18 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/241YbpC>.

were flown at demonstrations, and CSOs played a constructive role in bridging across divides.¹³³ As Emina Nuredinoska and Tanja Hafner Ademi describe:

In response to violent clashes in the ethnically diverse city of Kumanovo, which saw the death of eight police officers and 10 predominantly Albanian militants, opposition and citizen protests arose on 17 May. These protests, some of the largest in the country's history, brought together citizens from diverse ethnic, religious and socio-political backgrounds.

While the protests were mostly peaceful, there were some civil society concerns about restrictions. MCIC notes that one issue of contention for civil society was the failure to investigate police abuses against protestors, such as those committed at the Brakja Miladinovci library, while alarming developments concerning the freedom of assembly also preceded the protests:

In March 2015, troubling amendments to the Law on Police were made. Under the amendments, new means of coercion were added, including electric paralyzers, rubber bullets, pyrotechnical and explosive means, and special vehicles for maintaining public order and peace. Additionally, another section was added allowing the police to use technical means for video recording to provide video material of police actions, including arrests. As the EU progress report notes, "There appears to be an increasing reliance on the criminal offence of 'participating in a crowd which commits a crime', which is too broad to be stated as criminal offence."

Enduring challenges are also noted against the freedom of expression:

Self-censorship and caution on the side of civil society has continued to be practised. The wiretapping scandal, revealing that people working in civil society were allegedly the targets of wiretapping by the government, influenced increased self-restriction in communication and usage of communication channels. The media environment continues to be restricted and polarised, leaving little space for CSOs to be able to present their work.

As with several protests covered in this report, the May 2015 events could be seen as contributing to change. Some government ministers resigned, and EU mediation was introduced, leading to the Przino Agreement. The agreement gave the main opposition party some involvement in government, introduced an enquiry into the tapping, and stipulated that the prime minister, Nikola Gruevski, would resign in January 2016 and a caretaker government be brought in ahead of early elections in April 2016. Nikola Gruevski did indeed stand down in January 2016, and insisted that the election would take place in April 2016 as agreed. However, the opposition called for more time and threatened to boycott the election, on the grounds that not enough had been done to ensure it would be free and fair, particularly on media freedom and the updating of the electoral roll. International observers agreed, and the elections were postponed until June 2016.¹³⁴

133 'Anti-government protestors take to streets of Skopje', DW, 17 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1ryNEBu>.

134 'Macedonia Prime Minister Gruevski agrees to step down', DW, 15 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1qSuzsT>; 'Macedonia opposition threatens to boycott election called to end crisis', Reuters, 16 January 2016, <http://reut.rs/1YT7PnK>; 'Macedonian parliament accepts PM Gruevski's resignation, parties disagree over elections date', Focus Information Agency, 19 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1SJmyzX>; 'Macedonia elections postponed to 5 June', EurActiv, 24 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/24j94jQ>.

“
Self-censorship
and caution
on the side of
civil society has
continued to be
practised.”

The political deadlock that Macedonia has seen, and the associated poor state of dialogue between civil society and government, has challenged CSOs, while protest events called on CSOs to play a number of roles, as MCIC relates:

Civil society faced significant challenges in supporting the resolution of the political crises in Macedonia, while still having to deal with the lingering constraints of its development, such as sustainability issues and lack of civil dialogue and cooperation with institutions.

Civil society continued to face the challenge of operating in a difficult environment, in a country in political crisis with limited dialogue. Essential civic dialogue on issues of importance to the development of civil society in Macedonia is still absent in practice. Civil society is insufficiently involved in policy-making and law drafting by state administration bodies.

All the events presented challenges for CSOs to participate and fulfil their roles by engaging in different watchdog and advocacy activities and holding peaceful assemblies and events for raising awareness, thus supporting the process of finding solutions and paving the way to the improvement of democracy. Professional and expert CSOs were trying to fulfil their role as constructive partners, by monitoring, pressuring and challenging the government and its institutions to be more transparent and accountable, as well as to involve civil society as an equal partner in the negotiations to find a way out of the crisis.

The Platform of CSOs Against Corruption brings together 15 predominantly national organisations which work in the area of good governance and anti-corruption. In 2015, the Platform held several noticeable press conferences and issued calls to institutions to undertake the necessary measures to investigate the opposition's allegations. Additionally, the Platform, together with Network 23, asked for complete transparency of the process of negotiations between political parties in order to resolve the political crisis in Macedonia.¹³⁵

Recent political changes in Macedonia can be seen as significant shifts that are unlikely to have arisen without protests. But, as in the other contexts covered above, the protests should be seen as less about seeking to replace the government party with the opposition party, than about demanding democracy, transparency and a renegotiation of the relationship between the state and citizens. The political manoeuvrings that have characterised the run up to the election suggest a need for civil society to continue to exercise vigilance and pressure where necessary, and for support for Macedonian civil society to be part of the long-term solution to move on from political deadlock.

135 Network 23 was a civil society initiative from the Institute for European Policy Center, Change Management and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia to monitor public policies relating to fundamental rights and the judiciary, in the context of negotiations for Macedonia's accession to the EU.

10. PROTEST AND ACTIVISM: CONCLUSION AND FIVE POINTS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The above examples have demonstrated a remarkable similarity, not only in the tactics and trajectories of protests but, in most cases, in the short-term impacts protests have achieved. While some, such as those in Bolivia, Honduras and South Korea, have found themselves frustrated and blocked by a blank refusal of political elites to enter into dialogue, in most of the cases above, mass protests can be seen to have contributed to some form of political shift: policies being reversed, senior politicians stepping aside, governments collapsing.

What is striking is how often protests continue even after short-term success, suggesting that, beyond the economic or political issue that usually acts as a tipping point to bring people to the street, lie deep-rooted concerns about lack of voice, corruption and shortfalls in accountability by the state towards its citizens. The example of Armenia, however, offers a salutary lesson of how reversal can come even after apparent short-term success. The challenges of lack of voice and accountability in the examples are profound, and often the changes needed are fundamental. This, as the case of Tunisia also indicates, suggests a need for continued engagement, even beyond the immediate flashpoint and after protest momentum has faded.

“
There is a need
for constant
dialogue
between CSOs
and the street to
enable renewal.”

In not all cases, but in many, attempts to sustain momentum can be seen. While it is still too early to celebrate in Burkina Faso, the continued willingness of people to protest and engage has been a major factor in the country's refusal to slide back into dictatorial rule. In some contexts, such as Spain and now Moldova, protest movements have morphed into more overtly political structures to take the campaign directly into the sphere of electoral politics. In others, such as with Black Lives Matter in the USA, movements that started informally and via social media have formalised into networks that work by challenging dominant discourse and campaigning to shape the debate. In Macedonia, established CSOs have drawn inspiration from protest movements and taken on renewed responsibility for seeking accountability. Different developments are appropriate for diverse contexts, but in all cases, people taking part in protests can be seen to be challenging notions that they are disengaged and apathetic.

Looking forward, these experiences suggest that there can be no substitute for civil society structures that remain engaged over time to hold the powerful to account and challenge them continually, and that are able to develop the capacities to do so. The challenge is that formal civil society structures can ossify. Energies may go into chasing resources, the original vision can be lost and the leadership of civil society can become isolated from citizens. As CIVICUS has observed in the past, established CSOs largely did not anticipate or play a significant role in many of the waves of protests that swept MENA and many other parts of the world in 2010 and 2011.¹³⁶ The answer would seem to be that there is a need for constant dialogue between CSOs and the street to enable renewal, and continual questioning about whether the civil society structures that exist are the most relevant and appropriate forms; at the same time there is a need to grow appropriate structures out of protests that can keep up momentum while maintaining nimbleness and flexibility.

136 'Bridging the Gaps', CIVICUS, 2011, <http://bit.ly/241ZzbV>.

Our analysis suggests five practical steps that can be taken in protest contexts to help sustain protest momentum, and enable citizen action to lead to change:

- Mass protest movements already tend to be adept at learning from the tactics and methods of previous protests, including in using social media to shape, express and promote protest. But still more could be done to identify and share relevant learning, particularly when regional clusters of protest can be identified, as in some of the cases above. Peer-learning could be supported, between leaders of successful movements in neighbouring or similar countries, and people who have been schooled in past protests and those protesting for the first time, to enable flows of practical inspiration and solidarity.
- There is a relationship between protest and civic space. In many contexts CIVICUS has researched over the years, mass protests have broken out in conditions where the three fundamental civil society rights, of freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, have been restricted. Sometimes restrictions come shortly before protests spark and grow, suggesting that increasing civic space restriction may, perhaps counter intuitively, offer an indicator of potential mass protest: ruling elites may be assumed to become more nervous about exposure and seek to tighten restrictions as the governance and political environment deteriorates. When mass protests break out in such contexts, this also suggests that other participation channels have blocked. A heartening conclusion to draw from this is that citizens can always find new ways to articulate their frustrations and demands, once a tipping point is reached, even in repressive contexts such as Ethiopia, albeit with a heavy associated risk of violence. But in the long run, participation channels must be developed and sustained to enable momentum to continue. This suggests that mass protests should include among their demands improvements in the three fundamental civil society rights, in order to enhance the prospects of continued engagement.
- Many of the protests have been met with violence and other forms of heavy-handed state response, including detention and criminalisation. The March 2016 recommendations to the UNHRC offer a new framework around which international level civil society advocacy efforts should be focused to uphold and realise the rights of freedom of assembly. At the national levels, more efforts need to be made by a broad range of civil society to expose and challenge the restriction of protests, and impunity over abuses against protestors. At the same time, there is a need to develop, propagate and encourage the application of high standards for peaceful behaviour among protestors, in order to enable them to access and sustain strong levels of public support, rebut attempts by the state to characterise them as violent insurgents, and identify and deter extremist infiltrators or agents provocateurs that may try to join their ranks.
- Political co-option of mass protests is always a danger, and must be resisted at all costs, because it compromises the autonomy of civil society and enables ruling parties to characterise protestors as supporters of the opposition. Protestors and protest organisers need to be able to find ways to articulate clearly that, while they may be pushing for change in political leaders, this does not mean they are supporting opposition parties. It is relevant to note here that, when former protest leaders move into conventional politics, the next waves of protestors often reject them, as was seen in Chile. High levels of public protest often come in broken political systems, in which none of the mainstream parties offers a plausible prospect of real change. It is understandable in such contexts that mass protest movements sometimes form political parties to take their demands to elections, but in such cases, the separation between civil

society and political party should be managed carefully and strongly communicated. Even when new political parties are formed, a strong and independent civil society is needed alongside them.

- While it is hard to predict where mass protests will break out next, it is possible to suggest some indicators that suggest increasing protest potential. These may include economic indicators, such as rising prices of basic goods, including food and fuel, and high levels of youth unemployment; political indicators, such as pushback on civil society rights; and social indicators, such as the existence of networks formed from previous protests. More research is needed to develop and test indicators that can help to predict where protests are likely to occur, which would enable support to be mobilised in advance.