

Ripe for rebellion?

Laza Kekic

Where protest is likeliest to break out

From anti-austerity movements to middle-class revolts, in rich countries and in poor, social unrest has been on the rise around the world. The reasons for the protests vary. Some are direct responses to economic distress (in Greece and Spain, for example). Others are revolts against dictatorship (especially in the Middle East). A number also express the aspirations of new middle classes in fast-growing emerging markets (whether in Turkey or Brazil). But they share some underlying features.

The common backdrop is the 2008-09 financial crisis and its aftermath. Economic distress is almost a necessary condition for serious social or political instability, but it is not a sufficient one. Declines in income and high unemployment are not always followed by unrest. Only when economic trouble is accompanied by other elements of vulnerability is there a high risk of instability. Such factors include wide income-inequality, poor government, low levels of social provision, ethnic tensions and a history of unrest. Of particular importance in sparking unrest in recent times appears to have been an erosion of trust in governments and institutions: a crisis of democracy.

Trust has been in secular decline throughout the rich world since the 1970s. This trend accelerated and spread after the collapse of communism in 1989. And as opinion polls have documented, it has sped up again since the 2008-09 financial crisis.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a sister company of *The Economist*, measures the risk of social unrest in 150 countries around the world. It places a heavy emphasis on institu-

tional and political weaknesses. And recent developments have indeed revealed a deep sense of popular dissatisfaction with political elites and institutions in many emerging markets.

The protesters in Turkey in 2013, for example, were dissatisfied with some abrupt decisions by Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. In Bulgaria, what started off as protests against higher electricity bills turned into generalised anti-government demonstrations complaining of corruption—and led to the fall of the government. Protests have continued.

What to expect in 2014? The recession is now over or has eased in much of the world. Yet political reactions to economic distress have historically come with a lag. Austerity is still on the agenda in 2014 in many countries and this will fuel social unrest.

Restlessness on the rise

According to the EIU's ratings, 65 countries (43% of the 150) will be at a high or very high risk of social unrest in 2014. For 54 countries the risk of instability is medium and for the remaining 31 countries it is low or very low. Compared with five years ago, 19 more countries are now in the high-risk categories.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA), southern Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are well represented in the high-risk categories: 12 out of 18 MENA states, six of the seven Balkan countries, eight out of the 12 CIS states, five out of six southern European ones. More than 40% of the countries in eastern Europe are in the high-risk categories. This region was hit hard by the financial crisis and also has many of the underlying characteristics associated with unrest. Unsurprisingly, many high-risk countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. But there are also some in Latin America and Asia—including the world's largest and most successful emerging market, China, where the authorities are perennially nervous about the risk of mass protests. ■

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Risk of social unrest* in 2014

Very low risk	Low risk	Medium risk	High risk	Very high risk		
Austria	Australia	Angola	Ivory Coast	Albania	Macedonia	Argentina
Denmark	Botswana	Armenia	Jamaica	Algeria	Madagascar	Bahrain
Japan	Canada	Azerbaijan	Kenya	Belarus	Mexico	Bangladesh
Luxembourg	Chile	Belgium	Kuwait	Brazil	Moldova	Bolivia
Norway	Costa Rica	Belize	Latvia	Bulgaria	Morocco	Bosnia
Switzerland	Czech Republic	Benin	Lithuania	Burkina Faso	Myanmar	Egypt
	Finland	Britain	Malawi	Burundi	Nicaragua	Greece
	Germany	Cape Verde	Malta	Cambodia	Pakistan	Guinea
	Hong Kong	Colombia	Mozambique	Cameroon	Panama	Iraq
	Iceland	Congo-Brazzaville	Netherlands	Chad	Papua New Guinea	Lebanon
	Lesotho	Cuba	Oman	China	Peru	Libya
	Malaysia	Dominican Republic	Paraguay	Croatia	Philippines	Nigeria
	Mauritius	Ecuador	Qatar	Cyprus	Portugal	Sudan
	Namibia	El Salvador	Russia	Ethiopia	Romania	Swaziland
	New Zealand	Equatorial Guinea	Rwanda	Guatemala	South Africa	Syria
	Poland	Eritrea	São Tomé & Príncipe	Guyana	Spain	Uzbekistan
	Senegal	Estonia	Saudi Arabia	Haiti	Sri Lanka	Venezuela
	Singapore	France	Serbia	Honduras	Tajikistan	Yemen
	Slovakia	Gabon	Seychelles	Iran	Togo	Zimbabwe
	Sweden	Georgia	Slovenia	Jordan	Tunisia	
	Taiwan	Ghana	South Korea	Kazakhstan	Turkmenistan	
	The Gambia	Hungary	Tanzania	Kyrgyzstan	Turkey	
	United Arab Emirates	India	Thailand	Laos	Ukraine	
	United States	Indonesia	Trinidad & Tobago			
	Uruguay	Ireland	Uganda			
		Israel	Vietnam			
		Italy	Zambia			

* 150 countries. Social or political unrest is defined as developments that pose a serious threat to governments or the existing political order

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

Scores: Based on forward-looking assessments of the risk of social unrest by the Economist Intelligence Unit's country analysts on a scale of 0 (very low) to 4 (very high)