

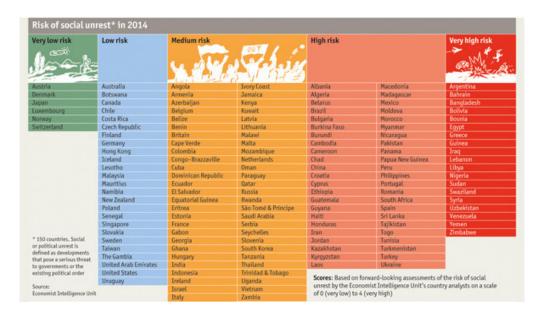
Cassandra

## The World in 2014

## Social unrest in 2014

## **Protesting predictions**

Dec 23rd 2013



UKRAINE, Bulgaria, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey are all countries in which protests have erupted in the past twelve months. Even places traditionally more muted, such as Japan and Singapore, have seen demonstrators in the streets. Social inequalities and political discontent have spurred citizens to gather. Resistance can be coordinated with greater ease than ever in the age of the smartphone.

According to Laza Kekic from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), economic distress is almost a prerequisite for protest, but does not explain outbursts entirely:

"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."

The fates of Muhammad Morsi, Egypt's president until July, and Ali Laraayedh, soon to step down as Tunisia's prime minister, seem to be cases in point. But next year, which leaders will pay for their politics with their positions? Where will protests erupt next?

The EIU measures the risk of social unrest in 150 countries around the world (see table). It places a heavy emphasis on institutional and political weaknesses. According to its ratings, 65 countries (43% of the 150) will be at a high or very high risk of social unrest in 2014. Compared with five years ago, 19 more countries are now in the high-risk categories. The Middle East and North Africa, southern Europe and the Balkans will be particularly vulnerable.

These predictions are not infallible, however, Cassandra notes. Thailand was identified as only being at "medium risk" but in recent days protesters have surrounded the house of the beleaguered prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Demonstrations started in November, after a controversial amnesty bill passed Thailand's lower house.