

The Economist

Cassandra

The World in 2014

Social unrest in 2014

Protesting predictions

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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
Denmark	Botswana	Armenia	Jamaica	Algeria
Japan	Canada	Azerbaijan	Kenya	Belarus
Luxembourg	Chile	Belgium	Kuwait	Brazil
Norway	Costa Rica	Belize	Latvia	Bulgaria
Switzerland	Czech Republic	Benin	Lithuania	Burkina Faso
	Finland	Britain	Malawi	Burundi
	Germany	Cape Verde	Malta	Cambodia
	Hong Kong	Colombia	Mozambique	Cameroon
	Iceland	Congo-Brazzaville	Netherlands	Chad
	Lesotho	Cuba	Oman	China
	Malaysia	Dominican Republic	Paraguay	Croatia
	Mauritius	Ecuador	Qatar	Cyprus
	Namibia	El Salvador	Russia	Ethiopia
	New Zealand	Equatorial Guinea	Rwanda	Guatemala
	Poland	Eritrea	São Tomé & Príncipe	Guyana
	Senegal	Estonia	Saudi Arabia	Haiti
	Singapore	France	Serbia	Honduras
	Slovakia	Gabon	Seychelles	Iran
	Sweden	Georgia	Slovenia	Jordan
	Taiwan	Ghana	South Korea	Kazakhstan
	The Gambia	Hungary	Tanzania	Kyrgyzstan
	United Arab Emirates	India	Thailand	Laos
	United States	Indonesia	Trinidad & Tobago	
	Uruguay	Ireland	Uganda	
		Italy	Vietnam	
			Zambia	
				Argentina
				Bahrain
				Bangladesh
				Bolivia
				Bosnia
				Egypt
				Greece
				Guinea
				Iraq
				Lebanon
				Libya
				Nigeria
				Sudan
				Swaziland
				Syria
				Uzbekistan
				Venezuela
				Yemen
				Zimbabwe

* 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)

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.