We are delighted to introduce this inaugural issue of *Protest*. No time could be better than the present to launch an entire journal committed to examining, contextualizing, historicizing, and critically interrogating cases, trends, comparisons, and accounts of what we consider the ‘protest turn’ taking shape in today’s world. To re-work Foucault’s well-known truism about the ubiquity of power, protest is everywhere. It has reached nearly every country around the globe, north and south, rich and poor—and it is on the rise. Indeed, protest is on the radar of global observers and analysts. Some have dubbed our current epoch as the “age of mass protest” (Brannen et al. 2020). Against the backdrop of the new “civic activism” of the past two decades (Youngs 2019), even the COVID-19 pandemic did not slow protest momentum for too long, from Colombia to Iran (Pinckney and Hidalgo 2021). Columbia, Cuba and South Africa are other locales where protests have erupted, in what some tentatively chart as a pandemic “protest wave” whereby (often) youth decry inequality and demand social justice (Gillan 2021). The pandemic’s economic repercussions have prompted protestors, especially among the marginalized, to take to the street including in developing countries (Strohecker 2021). Such protests can carry extensive political significance. In Tunisia, anti-government riots and protests gripped the country just hours before (elected) President Kais Saied announced “exceptional measures” on July 25, 2021. He single-handedly consolidated power and “froze” Parliament (McKernan and Cordall 2021), throwing the country’s new democracy into disarray. Of course, protest is not a novel phenomenon to the Arab region, having punctuated authoritarian (non)equilibria for decades (Sadiki 2000). The explosive popular uprisings of the 2011 “Arab Spring” revitalized debates about local-international dynamics, from discursive constructions
to material interventions (Saleh 2016). Mass protests-turned-revolutions in some cases descended into violence and state “fragility/failure” in countries such as Libya, Yemen, and Syria (Korany 2020, 76-79). That even the tiny Gulf state Qatar has seen recent protests over citizenship rights (Reuters 2021) is an indication of how much the region has changed.

Attempting to understand this “protest turn”, from emancipatory to populist activations, calls for marshaling the full gamut of social science and humanities creativity. To muster a synergy between theory and practice, it further necessitates serious consideration of activist/practitioner perspectives. It is with this spirit in mind that we have assembled this journal as a platform for scholarly/activist discussion and debate. Protest’s various sections are thus designed as spaces for traditional scholarship (research articles), book reviews, teaching insights (Pedagogical Corner), on-the-ground activist accounts (Protest Voices), as well as views by noteworthy practitioners or researchers (Interviews and Special Essays). As we attempt to keep abreast of the flurry of worldwide protest activity, “Global Protest Spotter” features samples and snippets from recent protest events.

Protest thus boasts a focused research interest while allowing for wide-ranging heuristic tools and orientations. Multi-disciplinarity is our forte. The journal’s scope trans-historical, as well as cross-cultural, cross-national, and cross-regional, befitting the “globality” of the present phenomenon unfolding around us. Thus, the geographic and temporal scope is expansive. Protest activity from Western industrialized democracies whose social movements have long drawn scholarly attention (Tarrow 2011), to new democracies and developing countries across Central and Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, all falls under its purview. Inter-and intra-regional comparisons of social movements (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995) and contentious politics more broadly (McAdam et al. 2009) can also generate valuable insights. Hence, the journal aspires to cover a rich panoply and offer knowledge to comparativists, regional specialists, media, social media activists, and others across territories and borders of language and culture. Protest seeks not only to compare present patterns and phenomena but also anchors analyses in historical background: it works across time and space. The journal aims to become a resource available to a dispersed, global readership, as its heterogeneous structure indicates. All types of readers should find something of interest to spur new investigative directions or intellectual curiosity about some angle of protest, somewhere around the globe. In so doing, the journal commits to pluralism qua diversity of disciplines, methodologies, theories, regions, and problems.

Our goal is for Protest to become a forum to probe the actors, processes, behaviors, ideas, contexts, histories, and normative claims of protest and the “protest turn.” What are its triggers, as well as its consequences? Are they even?
How does their diversity manifest across contexts? How do cities, people, and ideas feature in the mobilization, organization, and practices of protest, as well as responses to them? How does protest ‘travel’ spatially and temporally? How do power differentials shape the contours of protest activity? Such lines of inquiry can jump-start investigations of this multi-faceted phenomena.

We are quite pleased with the diverse line-up for this first issue. Professor Laurence Whitehead (2021, this issue) opens it up by setting the theoretical and conceptual scene in “The Politics of Protest Processes: A Portrayal.” Ali Akbar (2021, this issue) tackles the Green Movement in Iran, situating it within ongoing debates about reformism and revolution. Janjira Sambatpoonsiri and Thammachat Kri-aksorn (2021, this issue) delve into adamant protest activity in Thailand, amidst authoritarian crackdowns and repression. Presenting a historical analysis, Öner Buçukcu (2021, this issue) takes up the Turkish left and its relationship to militant movements in the country and elsewhere in newly independent “Third World” contexts.

First-hand activist accounts from Thailand and Singapore kick off our “Protest Voices” section. South Africa’s Dikgang Mosenke’s Special Essay (2021, this issue) offers us a window through which to experience a transformative turning-point from his own life story as a young anti-apartheid activist jailed for his activities. Also reflecting on the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, Na’eem Jeenah (2021, this issue) converses with Ronnie Kasrils who reflects on the interplays between non-violent and armed struggle. The US Capitol Riots of January 2021 garner special attention, in a Special Essay by Jorge Heine (2021, this issue) as well as an interview with Raven Hodges from the advocacy group Southern Poverty Law Center in the US. This issue also zooms in on Latin America. Santiago Cahuasquí Cevallos and Manuel Tamayo present two different perspectives on Cuba’s summer 2021 protests. Social Media Section Editor Dayana Leon interviews Ecuadorian activist Leonidas Izas, also providing a regional recap of recent Latin American protests as “told” through social media. Three sharp book reviews close up our first issue with a “bang”. Our reviewers deserve special thanks for their tremendous efforts in providing anonymous feedback to our contributors.

We hope this first issue of Protest piques the interest of global readers hailing from a range of disciplinary specialties and with a cumulatively rich repository of life experiences.

References


