

# JIPP

Journal of  
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Special Issue: November 2020

## Protests Around the World

2,750 Tons of Ammonium Nitrate: What Happened in Lebanon

*Emily Wang*

#EndSARS, #BlackLivesMatter, and the 21st Century Model of Protest

*Maanas Sharma*

And more...

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*Special Issue: November 2020*

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## ESSAYS

# 2,750 Tons of Ammonium Nitrate: What Happened in Lebanon?

**Emily Wang**

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*On August 4, 2020, an explosion rocked Beirut, Lebanon. A massive mushroom cloud blossomed in the sky. Shock waves rippled across the city, shattering windows, collapsing buildings, and sending people running for their lives. To many around the world, this explosion and news that it was the result of government mismanagement came as a devastating surprise. However, for the Lebanese people, the explosion instilled anger, not surprise. In fact, for many, government mismanagement was the least surprising part of the incident. Understanding the protests that erupted in the following weeks, then, requires an understanding of the events that set the stage for the August 4 disaster.*

For many, August 4th began as an ordinary day: Beirut, Lebanon's capital and largest city, was bustling with people. As the day progressed, at one point, people noticed something quite out of the ordinary: a massive plume of dark smoke near the sea billowing toward the sky. Moments later, a blast and a white cloud engulfed the city, sending people running for their lives. When the dust settled and the earth ceased to shudder, over 190 people were dead, over 6,500 injured, more than 300,000 without homes to return to, and at least \$3 billion in estimated damages (The Unprecedented Mass Protests in Lebanon Explained; Hubbard). The blast was noted as one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in history, with experts estimating its yield to be equivalent to that of between 500 tons and 1.1 kilotons of TNT, about one-twentieth the

size of the atomic bomb that the US dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 (Amos and Rincon). President Michel Aoun initially blamed Israel for the explosion, citing it as a foreign attack, but soon, reports emerged that the blast was caused by 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate that had resided in Beirut since 2013 (Vohra; Amos and Rincon). People's grief for lost loved ones and a devastated city soon morphed into anger.

## I. Background

To understand Lebanon's predicament leading up to the explosion and perhaps the cause of the explosion, we must look back to Lebanon about forty years ago. Lebanon was, and still is, religiously divided, with the largest three religious groups being Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims (Lalwani). In 1975, a war broke out between these religious sects, beginning the Lebanese Civil War (Lalwani). The war lasted for fifteen years, until 1990, ending with the Taif Agreement—an agreement that established a temporary government of a certain number of seats in Parliament to each religious sect (Lalwani). Many military leaders from the civil war found positions in Parliament, leading to political party formation along religious lines (Lalwani). As money flowed into the government for services such as providing clean water, consistent electricity, and waste management, politicians used the money to enrich themselves and their interests, neglecting the civilian services that the money was intended for (Lalwani). In addition to rampant political corruption, the government was in debt, so the government relied on using high-interest rates to lure in investors to its banks (Lalwani). However, the high-interest rates were an empty promise as there was neither a plan nor the money to pay investors the promised interest (Lalwani). Eventually, the system cracked when foreign investors began pulling their money out of the banks in response to regional strife (Lalwani). Debt skyrocketed, and soon, the banks froze civilian accounts, barring people from withdrawing their money (Lalwani).

As a result of a failing bank system, politicians' misuse of government funds, and political corruption, Lebanon now finds itself in a social and economic crisis, at the extreme frustration and anger of the Lebanese. Powerful politicians bicker behind closed doors while Lebanese civilians face blackouts, lack clean water, and watch the country's poverty and unemployment rates climb higher day by day, crises that the

Lebanese blame on their dysfunctional government (Page). What finally motivated masses of people to the streets, though, was a proposed tax announced last fall. In an attempt to absolve Lebanon's rising debt, which is currently 160% of the country's GDP, the Lebanese government announced a proposed tax of twenty cents a day on the use of messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (Hubbard; Madani and Tabet). Unsurprisingly, the tax was very unpopular. Many believed the collected tax dollars would face the same fate as all of the other money the government had collected—tucked into the pockets of the political elite. Thus, the poor were the first to take to the streets since the tax was not something they could afford (Aziza). October 17, 2019, marked the beginning of weeks of mass protests that saw hundreds of thousands of angry protesters take to the streets in protests that were later dubbed the "October Revolution" (Aziza).

The October Revolution was not merely a decry of the tax; protesters were indeed expressing their anger toward the broader economic crisis and government corruption, a long time coming. The protests transcended religious, socio-economic, political, and even class divides (Aziza). While in the past, people of these different groups may have stayed quiet and followed the politicians who represented their religious sect or political position, the October Revolution brought everyone together, united by the common demand for government accountability and complete elimination of the current corrupt sectarian governmental system (Aziza).

Admittedly, peaceful protests became violent at times, with protesters setting buildings on fire and holding mock executions of effigies of Lebanese politicians (Aziza). Law enforcement responded with beatings, tear gas, rubber bullets, and at times, even live ammunition (The Unprecedented Mass Protests in Lebanon Explained). In an incident on October 26, 2019, the army opened fire on dozens of protesters staging a sit-in, seriously wounding two protesters (Unprecedented Mass Protests). There was no transparent investigation into the altercation, again demonstrating the government's ineptitude at protecting the people it should serve (Unprecedented Mass Protests). Clashes with law enforcement like the one on October 26 further angered protesters and reinforced their belief that the government did not exist to serve and protect them; rather, it existed to retain power and money among a tight circle of political elites.

Nevertheless, the protesters eventually disbanded; inclement weather and the COVID-19 lockdown drove people back into their homes (Aziza). In some aspects, the protests were not successful. Protests did not cause top politicians to leave office or a new governmental system (Aziza). This failure may have even driven people away as some began to feel the movement was futile, and others were discouraged by the military and law enforcement's violent response, viewing the protests as too dangerous and not worth the risk (Aziza). Journalists, who played a key role in calling out politicians and fighting for accountability, were interrogated and intimidated, which may have further dissuaded journalists from pursuing accountability and suppressed free expression (The Unprecedented Mass Protests in Lebanon Explained). Nonetheless, by and large, the October Revolution succeeded in changing civilians' minds, decreasing people's fears of challenging the government, and revealing to the Lebanese people their resilience and unity (Aziza). This unity is most evident in a 170 kilometer-long human chain that protesters formed across Lebanon in 2019 (Lebanon Protests: People Form a Human Chain). Strangers proudly joined hands, with one participant saying, "for the first time I feel I'm Lebanese" (Lebanon Protests). The October Revolution turns out, had another key impact—laying the groundwork for the civilian reaction that followed the August 4 explosion.

## **II. Post-Explosion Lebanon**

The August 4 blast destroyed half of Beirut, leaving glass, rubble, and blood littering the streets (Hubbard). Immediately following the blast, the Lebanese took to the streets to clean up and help neighbors who were hurt or had lost their homes, for the Lebanese knew they could not rely on the government to help. Indeed, in the days that followed, there was no government clean up crew or government outreach to those whose homes and livelihoods were destroyed (Al Jazeera). However, as news emerged that the blast was the product of government mismanagement—neglect for a massive ammonium nitrate stock that arrived at the port in 2013—rather than a foreign attack, the Lebanese's grief turned into anger (Hubbard and El-Naggar). This blast was the culmination of the Lebanese government's failure: it represented neglect toward the Lebanese people as well as apathy toward the aftermath of failure. Lebanon's

circumstances were even worse leading up to and following the explosion than they were in 2019: the Lebanese currency had lost 80% of its value (massive inflation), COVID-19 lockdowns had further damaged the economy, COVID-19 cases were beginning to rise again just before the explosion, and now the country faced a devastated capital and port city (Lalwani; Hubbard). Thus, massive protests re-emerged on the streets on August 8. While the protesters were once again demanding a new government, this time their anger was even more palpable, for the protesters were marching amongst rubble, a conspicuous reminder of how their city had been scarred by government corruption and neglect.

Again, protesters were met with a violent response from the military and law enforcement, who launched tear gas and rubber bullets at peaceful protesters (Page). The Lebanese Red Cross and Islamic Relief Corps reported 728 injured, and the Internal Security Forces reported one of its personnel had died trying to help injured protesters and seventy other personnel were injured. Despite risks of injury and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the protesters continued to gather in large masses, for many felt that they had nothing to lose: unemployment, homelessness, and lost loved ones motivated many to join protests, even if they had not participated in 2019 (Aziza). The October Revolution is especially relevant here since this year's protests could springboard off experiences, networks, and organizations from the 2019 protests (Aziza).

Indeed, civilian organizations play a crucial role in Lebanon's protests. Because of their dysfunctional government, protesters are purposeful about self-reliance and channeling foreign aid directly to civilians, rather than allow the aid to pass through the government (Aziza). One example of such a civilian organization is Khaddit Beirut, a grassroots initiative predominantly led by activists and scholars, which launched the day after the explosion (The Roadmap to Recovery). Central to Khaddit Beirut's beliefs is the recognition that the Lebanese people must rebuild their communities themselves (The Roadmap to Recovery). Thus, Khaddit Beirut aims to have a community-led recovery through mobilizing international support and offering guidance and transparency in the rebuilding process (The Roadmap to Recovery). Khaddit Beirut is



only one of many civilian-led organizations that have emerged in response to the explosion and the Lebanese government's negligence.

Despite the size and support mechanisms for the 2020 protests, how successful these protests and civilian efforts will be remains in question. While the protesters have succeeded in pressuring multiple politicians to resign, many know that their goals will only be realized when the current sectarian government and power-sharing structure falls. Perhaps the government's aggressive efforts to intimidate protesters and suppress free expression will stymie the movement. Perhaps time will diminish attention and anger toward the explosion. At least in the United States, Beirut's devastating explosion was just another story that was swept up in a tumultuous news cycle. The event emerged as headlines and social media posts, but soon after, election details and COVID-19 charts overtook it. Moreover, little attention was paid to the situation of Lebanon outside of the immediate blast. While overturning a governmental system is indeed a tall order, massive protests and hundreds of emerging civilian organizations demonstrate the Lebanese's resilience. Perhaps, then, there is hope for a brighter future for Lebanon.

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# Black Lives Matter: A Foundational Debate in America

## Marinna Stopa

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**Content Warning:** This essay contains mentions of assault, racism, and murder.

*Black people in the United States of America are most likely to be killed by police 3 times the rate of white people and are 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed when killed. 8 of the 100 largest city police departments kill at higher rates than the median US murder rate; per every 100k people in Reno, Nevada, statistically, 12.1 black men will be killed by police, versus the US average of 5. 98.3% of these killings do not result in charges for the officers (Sinyangwe). While this statistic may include legitimately justified killings, a great percentage of unjustified murders occur without consequence. The lack of justice for the Black community has created a long-awaited uproar in the streets of America, and one that has gained international attention and support.*

Down to its roots, the United States of America has a huge race problem. Christopher Columbus, the well-known explorer credited with discovering the land, enslaved the indigenous people he came upon in the Caribbean Islands and along the Central and South American coasts, treating them with extreme violence and brutality. He forced these enslaved people to work for the sake of his own personal profit, sending thousands of Taíno people from their islands to Spain, where many were sold into slavery, or forced to work in gold mines and on plantations (Lee). Upon arriving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Columbus wrote in his journal that the Indigenous people “should be good servants” and “can be subjugated and made to do what is required of them,” despite reporting how “artless” and “generous” they were (Wright). He

cultivated a culture where white supremacy ruled the land: one that still is present over five hundred years later.

From 1954 to 1968, the Civil Rights Movement in America put a spotlight on the struggle to end institutionalized racial discrimination, codified disenfranchisement, and legal racial segregation. Led by activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, John Lewis, Malcolm X, and Jesse Jackson, the movement fought for federal policy reform that would ensure equal treatment of racial minorities in the eyes of the law and was—arguably—successful in doing so. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Fair Housing Act of 1968 were signed into legislation by the president at the time, Lyndon Johnson, with the goal of ending segregation, Black voter suppression, and discriminatory employment and housing practices (Janken). Unfortunately, these efforts only paved the way for different forms of systemic racism to emerge in American society.

Backstopped by notions such as the one made by Doctor Edward Huntington Williams, who stated that police “...needed higher caliber guns to kill Black men because cocaine made them impervious to normal-sized bullets” in 1914, drugs and the War on Drugs has provided a shield for law enforcement to use in order to disproportionately arrest, prosecute, and kill Black people (Cooper). Implemented largely by President Richard Nixon in 1971, over time the War on Drugs has since been exposed to be a scheme to imprison black people and hippies, as they were the “two enemies” of the time period (that included the Vietnam War and aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement). Former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman said that “We [the Nixon administration] couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin [,] and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities” (LoBianco). Ehrlichman continued to detail how the administration carried out this self-described disruption of these communities, saying “we could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news,” admitting that “of course” the administration knew their claims were lies (LoBianco).

These justifications have far from disappeared in the present day. The “high on drugs” and “drug fiend” defense in court has continued to allow police officers to go free after unlawfully killing someone, most notably seen in the case of Rodney King—who was beaten by up to fifteen police officers with batons after a high-speed car chase, sparking the 1992 Los Angeles riots. One of the key lines of defense in court was that officers were afraid that he had “superhuman strength” from being high on PCP, despite King testing negative for the drug (Daly). Time and time again, this same defense has been utilized. In 2014, police officer Jason Van Dyke was filmed shooting teenager Laquan McDonald sixteen times, claiming he thought the 17-year-old was a “violent drug user” and had “superhuman powers” due to his alleged PCP use. Officer Betty Shelby was acquitted of first-degree manslaughter after shooting unarmed Terence Crutcher, who had his hands in the air, motivated by the suspicion of PCP use, but was only later found in his system. Cannabis, which is now legally available in many states across the US, led to the death of Philando Castile, who was shot to death in front of his girlfriend and their daughter in their car after officer Jeronimo Yanez said the smell of marijuana made him “fear for his life” (Daly). The drug defense was even used in the case of George Floyd, where the attorney for one of the four officers charged for Floyd’s death argued that Floyd was an ex-convict whose cause of death was an overdose of Fentanyl, not asphyxiation inflicted by the Minneapolis police officers.

The ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement has been in existence officially since 2013, created following the acquittal of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman, who shot and killed the teen as a neighborhood watch on the grounds of self-defense, although Trayvon lived in the area and was walking home from the corner store (Channel 4 News). It was further advanced by the murder of Eric Garner in 2014, who died at the hands of New York City police officers using an illegal chokehold after being accused of illegally selling cigarettes on the street corner; eleven times he cried “I Can’t Breathe,” lines that were unheard by the officers but infamously rang around the world after his death (Lowery). The Black Lives Matter movement is self-described<sup>1</sup> as an “ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” and seeks to affirm Black people’s

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the Black Lives Matter movement does not associate with a singular central organization or leader, and cannot be accurately represented by only one mission statement or organization (Barrón-López; Ball). However, we include the most common and accepted definition here.

humanity, contributions to society, and resilience in the face of deadly oppression (Garza, Cullors & Tometi).

Recent events have revitalized the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man going on a run in his South Georgia neighborhood on one Sunday afternoon who was chased down by a white man and his son and shot twice, on February 23 shook the already unsteady American foundation to its core (Fausset). It has been continuously increased by numerous following deaths, most notably the murders of Breonna Taylor—shot five times in her own home by Louisville Police Officers carrying out a called-off house raid (Oppel, Taylor & Bogel-Burroughs)—and of George Floyd—suffocated to death by police officer Derek Chauvin as he knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds over a suspected counterfeit \$20 bill (Hill et al.). Protests erupted not only in the United States of America but around the world, demanding justice for Arbery, Taylor, and Floyd, as well as the countless other Black lives unlawfully ended at the hands of law enforcement.

Children are also falling victim to the unjustified actions of American police officers. Tamir Rice, only 12 years old, was shot within seconds of police arrival to the scene, on suspicion that he had a gun. After his death, it was found to be a toy. Seven-year-old Aiyana Jones was sleeping on the couch with her grandmother, when a flashbang (commonly used to disorient inhabitants in “wartime raids”) was thrown through the window, setting her blanket on fire (Leduff). The Detroit SWAT team then entered her home. firing immediately upon entry, one bullet going through her neck, killing her (Leduff). In reality, they had raided the wrong house.

The Black Lives Matter movement wants one thing. Justice. Unfortunately, that is not what they are receiving. Between 2013-2019, 98.3% of killings by the police did not result in a criminal charge for the officers (Sinyangwe). This lack of accountability stems from the strength of protections police officers receive, including ‘qualified immunity’, union contracts, and close district attorney relationships, which all come together to create a culture that makes it very difficult to convict law enforcement on any sort of crime. Therefore, the movement and its supporters have widely called for a mass restructuring of the police force as Americans know it. Specifically, they call for

'defunding the police,' a simplified term for the process of "reallocating or redirecting funding away from the police department or other government agencies funded by the local municipality" to health care, mental health services, addiction support, and education. Data shows that nine out of ten calls to emergency services are for nonviolent encounters, which put a spotlight on how out of touch law enforcement is to the training needed for these social interactions when they turn sour. In training, officers focus on use-of-force tactics and worst-case scenarios to reduce potential threats, even though a majority of interactions with civilians start with a simple conversation (Ray).

The most visible aspects of the Black Lives Matter movement have been nationwide, sustained mass protests. Chants of "No Justice, No Peace" are heard loud and clear at protests around the country, and truly encapsulates the purpose of the uprisings. However, rampant claims of the organization being full of "terrorists," "anarchists," and "thugs," popularized by American President Donald Trump, aim to downplay the protests as violent schemes to destroy small businesses and create unnecessary havoc (Ali). In late May, a 7:30 pm to 6 am curfew was imposed in Tampa by Mayor Jane Castor, following the damaging/burglary of more than 50 businesses and damage to more than 50 police cars after a peaceful protest grew violent after the sun went down. But those who participated in the violence were identified by Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister as those who "...were focused on chaos instead of change", and therefore were not associated with the Black Lives Matter protest itself (Shedden, Miller & Colombini). In fact, between May 26 and August 22, "more than 93 percent of all demonstrations connected to the movement, demonstrators did not engage in violence or destructive activity." Peaceful protests were held in over 2,400 distinct locations and violence occurred in less than 220 (Ali). It has been proven that the movement itself aims at enacting change through peaceful protests, and those who stray away from this goal are not associated with it.

All in all, the mass peaceful protests as part of the Black Lives Matter movement reveal the unhappiness and dissatisfaction among a large proportion of Americans in how they and their neighbors are treated by those who are supposed to keep them safe. Its media exposure opens the door to more educational opportunities and more voices to be heard, motivating citizens in every town to become educated on local and national

issues and fight to change the American foundation that is covered in long-lasting traces of white supremacy.

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# Human Rights Crisis in the Philippines

## Samantha McPhillips

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*The current president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, has launched a war on drugs (and dissent) since his inauguration in 2016. Among many others, Duterte has signed controversial anti-terror legislation that allows warrantless arrests, longer detention without charges and extrajudicial killings, attacked human rights, and implemented authoritarian policies. The people of the Philippines have rescinded with decisive protests.*

### I. Introduction

The election of the current president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, brought not only an international human rights crisis but also an estimated total of 27,000 unlawful killings by police, including the murders of political activists, community leaders, and human rights defenders (BBC News). Official figures place the number of deaths at 8,000 (BBC News)

Known in the Philippines as the “war on drugs,” the crisis started after Duterte’s withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC). This allowed Duterte to continue with his drug policy that is, according to the former Philippine National Police Chief Ronald de la Rosa, aimed at “the neutralization of illegal drug personalities nationwide” (Gavilan). Since the ICC investigates and tries criminals of the gravest crimes such as genocides, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, withdrawing gave Duterte the authority to give police permission to kill without consequences: a power that has been gravely abused (Amnesty International (b)).

In response to authorities (who are supposed to serve to protect) abusing their authorities with impunity, there has been significant backlash against Duterte, which he silences through restrictions, arrests, and extrajudicial punishment. The case of Senator Leila de Lima, a member of the Filipino Senate as well as a highly recognized human rights activist and critic of Duterte, is just one example of this. Her criticism was silenced in 2018, following the charge, arrest, and imprisonment on false, politically motivated accusations of drug use (Human Rights Watch (b)). To this day, de Lima is unlawfully detained (Human Rights Watch (b)). Duterte has silenced many more high-ranking officials and critics. Senator Antonio Trillanes IV was arrested due to his opposition to the drugs policy and Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno was stripped of her title due to her criticisms (Human Rights Watch (b)).

As international pressure for accountability mounted, the United Nations Human Rights Council requested a comprehensive written report on the state of human rights in the Philippines in 2019, a move that was quickly responded to by the immediate suspension of negotiations for financial assistance with all 18 countries involved with the request (Special Rapporteurs). The report, presented this June, concluded definitively against the Duterte administrations and highlighted a number of unlawful actions by the politically empowered in the Duterte regime, of which only the beginning is silencing dissent (Special Rapporteurs).

## **II. Extrajudicial Killings**

The Human Rights Watch (HRW), the leading international NGO researching and advocating for human rights, explains the rise of vigilante killings in the Philippines. Many are being killed by the police themselves, who know they will not be tried, as well as under the direct order of government authority. While the Philippine National Police claims that from the start of the hard-on-drugs policy regime, July 2016, to the time of the report, June 2019, only 5,526 suspects were killed, even the most conservative estimates using official records (not including the tens of thousands estimated to be killed with no reason to investigate or while unarmed) place the deaths above 8,000 (BBC News). When all is said and done, there are no trustworthy reports to

justify any of the figures given out by the Filipino government; all other reports place the number of arrests and killings much higher.

Unsurprisingly, this legacy of dishonesty pervades the police system. HRW has extensively documented the police failing to bring suspected drug users or distributors into custody, instead reporting them to have died while being restrained or due to self-defense by officers (c). HRW has also documented instances of planting weapons and altering the crime scene to portray that lethal force was justified (c). Indeed, justice was found only twice out of the thousands of cases of extrajudicial killings. First, in the case of 17-year old child Kian de los Santos. In August 2017, three police officers were found guilty by the Manila Court of the murder of de los Santos (Human Rights Watch (b)). Secondly, this September, a Bulacan court convicted former Major General Jovito Palparan and two other military men for the kidnapping and illegal detention of Karen Empeño and Sherlyn Cadapan (Human Rights Watch (b)). The two girls were abducted, raped, and tortured by the men for the sole crime of being vocal student activists. Tragically, they remain missing to this day. While both these cases sparked international outrage, thousands more like their stories go unreported.

Finally, it is important to note that the majority of the extrajudicial killings by police that continue today on a regular basis mostly affect impoverished urban areas such as the capital region, Metro Manila, and are also spreading outwards to other cities and provinces such as Cebu City and the Bulacan province (Human Rights Watch (c)). While the loss of life is indeed significant, Duterte's "war on drugs" has a hidden repercussion: the war on drugs contributes to the deprivation of the family members affected as well as damaging their psychological health. The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights writes that the police crackdown during COVID-19 has further destroyed the most vulnerable Filipino communities (Special Rapporteurs).

### **III. Violations of Human Rights**

However, the human rights crisis under Duterte's rule does not stop at the drugs war policy. Duterte exhibits a consistently shocking disregard for human life. Duterte reportedly told police forces to kill protesters calling for food aid during the pandemic

(Billing). Even prior to COVID-19, workers striking against unfair labor, low wages, and restriction to benefits faced police forces, killings, unidentified and lost victims, arrests, and violent dispersals. Additionally, he called for Congress to reinstate the death penalty during his annual State of the Nation Address in July this year for drug and general convictions (Jha). The Asian Director of the International Drug Policy Consortium says that the death penalty has not contributed to the solution of the drugs war in any country and many politicians suggest that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the penalty should not be a priority (Jha).

More worryingly, the reinstatement would violate obligations of the Philippines under the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which commits the country to never reinstating the death penalty (Iwasawa). Lastly, Duterte refused to certify the urgency of the SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression) Equality Bill despite national outcry when a transgender woman was prohibited from using a women's bathroom and arrested for documenting the incident on her phone (Amnesty International (a)).

Furthermore, in March 2019, Duterte declared a “permanent termination” of peace negotiations between the Filipino government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, the Communist Party of the Philippines, and the New People’s Army, claiming that talks were “useless” (Roque). While Duterte reversed this in December, deciding to resume peace talks, political dissent is still highly risky in the Philippines (Merez). In October, security forces arrested 50 leftist activists during a raid of three organizations in Bacolod City on the wrongful charges of explosive and firearms training; over 40 were released after bail or being cleared, but seven are still being held on charges without bail (Amnesty International (a)). In another case, the former Education Director of the human rights alliance Karapatan, Zara Alvarez, was murdered in Bacolod on 19th August 2020 (Regencia). She was shot six times while walking home by an unidentified attacker (Regencia). The government promises to investigate the case but focuses on the fact she was a member of a “leftist group” as the main lead (Regencia). Her death came only a few days after speaking out against Duterte’s new anti-terror legislation that allows warrantless arrests and longer detentions without charging detainees (Regencia). Flagrantly flaunting the presumption of innocence and limitations on the police force, this policy violates fundamental human

rights. Further, legal experts warn this policy will be directed at those who criticize Duterte under the guise of the war on drugs. Lastly, the Department of Education was forced to close down 50 schools serving Lumad children (Indigenous) by Duterte as he alleged they were teaching the children to rebel against him and stated he would bomb them. (Amnesty International (a))

Finally, children's rights are also at risk in the Philippines. The House of Representatives passed the final bill for the minimum age of criminal responsibility to be lowered from 15 to 12 years old, including drug-related offenses (Human Rights Watch (c)). Nevertheless, the bill remains pending in the Senate (Human Rights Watch (c)). As the law would endanger children rather than reduce crime, human rights organizations and the international public is applying pressure to reject the bill. And, under the drugs policy, children would be particularly susceptible to being murdered unlawfully.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Duterte's presidential term is set to end in 2022, but there is no guarantee the crisis will go with him. Even then, justice may never be served to the thousands of victims affected by the human rights violations conducted under his authority, especially as he only expands his regime. In one speech, he said "if you go into drugs... I will kill you." He added: "Even with the United Nations listening, I will kill you, period" (Human Rights Watch (c)). And they are. We all are. But together, we can contribute by using our voices to highlight the crisis and request for pressure to be put on Duterte, to bring equality and justice to the Philippines. A president should be directly responsible for the protection of his citizens, not the deaths.

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## COMMENTARY

### **#EndSARS, #BlackLivesMatter, and the 21st Century Model of Protest**

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In 1992, facing rising rates of crime in the country, Nigeria established a specialized police force, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), to bring justice to the country. The squad was afforded special privileges: it would act independently of other police forces, be given almost unchecked policing powers, and be composed entirely of plainclothes officers. With this unprecedented power, the agency acted with impunity, quickly accumulating accusations of harassment, extortion, and even extrajudicial killings. Though many in the country had expressed discontent with SARS for years, large scale mobilization did not occur until early October 2020, when videos of violent harassment and killings by SARS agents went viral. The hashtag #EndSARS took over Nigeria, and soon, the world. In response to the criticism, the president disbanded SARS almost immediately. However, protestors noted that the agency had disbanded three times before, but was reinstated each time. So, intense criticism continued. Moreover, Nigerian protestors have moved past the single demand to end SARS and are instead fighting for a broader liberation from the underlying problems: police brutality, stifling corruption, and excessive state power. While this movement (noted as #EndSARS for this article) in Nigeria warrants in-depth discussions in and of itself, a



comparative analysis of the nature of the movement more broadly provides interesting contributions to understanding the state of protest in the 21st century as a whole.

More specifically, studying the similarities between #EndSARS and #BlackLivesMatter is invaluable. The first unifying factor between them is the common goals of the two demonstrations: addressing militarized policing and state-sponsored, discriminatory violence. The protests continue full-force in Nigeria even after the disbanding of SARS primarily because protestors view the oppressive system as encapsulating more than just one department or one policy. They argue that police in general in Nigeria have acted with impunity for far too long, and the government must be held accountable. Similarly, the Black Lives Matter movement was born out of frustrations of racially biased policing, brutality, and incarceration. In both movements, therefore, the goal is to challenge the discriminatory, violent actions of the state. Indeed, both #EndSARS and #BlackLivesMatter organizers have acknowledged the deep connections between the objectives of the movements, saying that one can not support one without supporting the other.

Because of the similar goals, the two movements also share commonalities in their organization, demands, and composition. Among the most striking similarities, and perhaps the most telling about protest in the 21st century, is the organization of the movements themselves. Black Lives Matter is noteworthy in that it is entirely decentralized. By this, I mean that there is no sole organization that speaks for the whole movement, no individual leaders, and no organizational hierarchy. The fight against police brutality and corruption in Nigeria follows a very similar structure. These organizational structures (or lack thereof) are very intentional; in contrast to the unified, centralized movements of the past, Black Lives Matter and #EndSARS fight localized battles and have wide-ranging agendas. These require flexibility and democracy in mobilization that would be hampered by an overly rigid organizational structure. For instance, the Black Lives Matter Global Network has the broad goal “to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities...” Thus, demonstrators are connected by a common goal, but tailor demands to best fit their community’s needs and situations. Different subsets of Black Lives Matter advocate for slightly different policies, including local reforms like banning chokeholds, national moves like demilitarizing the police, and still larger

actions like transformative education and urban policy. Similarly, in Nigeria, far from the targeted protests against SARS during early October, current demonstrations are calling for a variety of reforms ranging from progressive economic policy to radical challenges to the state. The wide range of demands in both movements and low barrier of entry (because of a lack of hierarchy) have united large numbers of supporters behind common demands, fostered intersectional activism, and created coalitions transcending traditional divisions. Black Lives Matter has gained support across demographic groups, including whites and other people of color, and has even had countless solidarity demonstrations in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Similarly, protests against SARS have transcended deep divisions in Nigerian society. Christians march alongside Muslims; LGBTQ+ individuals march alongside cisgendered heterosexual traditionalists; young people march alongside the generations past.

Finally, it would be disingenuous to explore either movement without highlighting the role of social media and the internet. In fact, social media was integral to the formation of both movements. Both movements were initially created as hashtags on social media and spread rapidly alongside troubling video accounts of violence: countless videos of police-killed Black people for #BlackLivesMatter and an unknown man shot and left for dead by SARS agents for #EndSARS. Moreover, the recent surge of support for Black Lives Matter was spurred by another harrowing video of a police killing, this time of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. Given that social media allows people to share ideas in outlets not controlled by the government and form agreement across boundary lines difficult to cross in real life, the internet has been indispensable to the momentum of both movements. The immense pressure put on governments by record-setting crowds of demonstrators is almost entirely due to the advent of social media. Especially for issues that primarily affect marginalized populations, due to pre-existing power relations, the government is less moved by their organization and easily, often violently, quells such demonstrations. In these cases, the ability to reach broader audiences on social media lends support to the mobilization efforts of marginalized organizers. Some in Nigeria have even noted that celebrities' support on social media successfully pressured their government. In brief, social media has been integral to these modern movements every step of the way.

All in all, both #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS appear to provide a blueprint for protest in the 21st century: decentralized, intersectional organization, broad demands, and the use of the internet. This new blueprint admittedly has its own problems—performative activists on the internet give the impression of support but do not show up to demonstrations, the presence of large numbers of protestors no longer pressure the government like they used to, and many other criticisms—but both #EndSARS and #BlackLivesMatter have already had some promising results. In the United States, Louisville, Kentucky lawmakers passed Breonna’s Law banning no-knock warrants following the death of Breonna Taylor; cities and states across the country are reallocating police funds to social services; and other reforms at the subnational and national level appear imminent. In Nigeria, youth voices have been increasingly powerful, being included in national panels on police brutality, and current president Buhari’s political support has decreased drastically. Although organizers, academics, and politicians alike continue to debate whether this new system of protest will be successful at addressing long-standing, systemic issues in the long term, it has proven effective at forcing the government’s hand in the short term.

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# **Authoritarianism, Crisis, and the Fight for Democracy in Belarus**

**Grace Baldwin**

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The world is on fire. Authoritarianism around the globe is on the rise and protests and demonstrations have taken place during the fateful year of 2020, a year one has probably cast off already. The political meltdown in the nation of Belarus is a microcosm of the larger political problems plaguing the world as voting rights and elections have come under greater scrutiny and pressure, destabilizing democracies.

## **Background**

The Presidential Election in Belarus occurred on August 9, 2020. Belarus is not known for having rigid political parties, so both the major candidates this year ran as Independents. Alexander Lukashenko, the incumbent, has essentially been president since the creation of Belarus back in 1994. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya was the opposition candidate, as well as a human rights activist, politician, and a former teacher. In Belarus, the president is elected to five-year terms, and much like its neighboring country, Russia; however, it has had a single president (Lukashenko) repeatedly win elections for decades.

The Human Rights Watch has repeatedly warned about the persecution and detentions that journalists and media face in Belarus. Additionally, the death penalty remains in Belarus and is often as quick and brutal as being shot in the head, often without informing families of the date or burial place. Three months before the election occurred, in May 2020, hundreds of protestors and activists were arrested “arbitrarily” for protesting peacefully human rights abuses, supporting opposition candidates,

supporting environmental causes, etc. as Human Rights Watch reported. The US and the EU have a long history of criticizing Belarus' attack on political rights by sanctions; before the previous months, the Belarus government had been slowly attempting to mend relations. Contrasting Lukashenko's regime, Tikhanovskaya's campaign focused on the simple promise to hold free and fair elections if she won. She chose to run after her husband was detained and jailed for trying to register his own candidacy.

### **The Election and its Aftermath**

The official reports from Belarus and the government showed a landslide victory for Lukashenko, the now six-term incumbent, and he was inaugurated on September 23, 2020. Belarus' Central Electoral Commission reported that he won with around 80% of the vote and Tikhanovskaya only receiving about 10% of the vote. She and her campaign immediately protested the results, citing polling data they collected showing her voting shares far exceeding those reported. Regardless, some foreign leaders such as Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly congratulated Lukashenko on the victory. They were soon followed by the governments of the former Soviet bloc countries.

Protests broke out across Belarus in defiance of the election results, which resulted in numerous recorded and photographed instances of police brutality in retaliation. Harrowing stories of police brutality, threats of sexual violence, and beating have arisen as the situation escalated. Only a few days after the election, as many as 7,000 protestors were reported to have been arrested. In October, months later, the protests persist despite continuing abuse and threats by police of using firearms. Reports of the Belarusian authority monitoring and cutting off access to the internet as a means to prevent protest, assembly, and information about police brutality from spreading have surfaced as well.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has fled the country and resides in Lithuania and has called on Lukashenko to resign, a demand echoed by the thousands of protestors taking to the streets. Multiple journalists covering the government crackdown have been jailed, and instances of police brutality and anti-democratic governance have continued to

inflare Belarus. Lukashenko's failure to end police brutality and instate more democratic processes resulted in recent national protests on Tsikhanouskaya's "ultimatum" date of October 25. Even nearly two months after the election, the protests continue, though some pro-Lukashenko marches have also manifested, many carrying flags and promoting traditional values and peace. Regardless of the outcome of these protests, they demonstrate the delegitimization of Lukashenko across many in Belarus and highlight a tense political situation in the country, ready to boil over at any moment.

Numerous international organizations have insisted on inquiries on election fraud. In September, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe launched an investigation into the accusations of police brutality, and the UN Human Rights Commission also commissioned an on-the-ground report on the situation. The United States Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, expressed concern about the election and called for an end to the violent crackdown in Belarus. Tsikhanouskaya has been charged with, according to Russian news agencies, public calls to harm its security and for calling to seize power in Belarus. Demonstrating Russia's close ties to Belarus and Lukashenko, she is also part of Russia's Wanted List. Early in October, the EU instituted sanctions against Belarusian officials charged with being part of election fraud, and Belarus has responded with sanctions and recalling its ambassadors from Poland and Lithuania. The EU said it would consider putting sanctions against Lukashenko if he does not enter into talks with Tsikhanouskaya, and Lukashenko has increasingly turned to Russia.

### **Looking to the Future**

In the year 2020, an authoritarian government being authoritarian seems like the least surprising thing to happen, as I am sure the rest of this issue makes clear. Besides Belarus' strategic place as a buffer state between the Baltics and democratic Western Europe and Russia and the rest of its Soviet bloc, Belarus' flaring crackdowns reflects the prevalence of (mostly) peaceful protest met by retaliatory police violence growing around the world, seen most prominently in the situations in Hong Kong, the United States, and Nigeria. Many believe that democracies are at a crossroads right now. Evident is the lingering influence of the cold war and imperialism/colonialism and its



effects on the current political situations in countries experiencing much protest. Corruption plagues Nigeria, and its Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) has been widely criticized. Hong Kong's British influence has come into hard collision with mainland communist China. Russia's influence over Belarus lingers, and the world waits with bated breath to see if, at this moment, authoritarianism will reign supreme or if protest and international intervention will manifest itself in concrete change.

A former US Ambassador to Georgia Ian Kelly, points out, this situation is highly reminiscent of the presidential election in 2010 in Belarus, where Lukashenko won despite many reports of election fraud. Protests quickly sprung up, but they quickly passed from domestic and international memory. Russia is standing by Belarus, paralleling patterns of former and communist states staunchly supporting their allies and former territories, as seen in China's support of North Korea and Russia's continued support of Cuba. The crisis in Belarus today is also reminiscent of the presidential crisis in Venezuela after the contested election in 2018 that remains disputed today. If we look to Venezuela, the international community responded, a humanitarian crisis broke out, but the world remained split on whom to recognize as the legitimate president. Maduro received support from Russia and China, while the US and its allies supported Guaido. The crisis continues in Venezuela as inflation remains high, the people lack food, and emigration out of the country has skyrocketed, but the problem has largely faded from 2020's perceptions. Will Belarus' too?

All in all, it seems that with the dichotomy remaining between authoritarianism in the Chinese and Russian governments and the democratized nations of Europe and North America, the nations sandwiched in between (whose people seek better governments) may ignite international sympathy and response but may result in very little real change.

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# The 2020 Egyptian Protests

## Nanami Haruyama

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A call for social change. A rally to protect fundamental human rights. A fight for a new political regime. The recent Egyptian protests sparked its flame on September 20, 2020. With a purpose to demand President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's resignation, the protest attracted the national spotlight. Over thousands of participants ranging in over ten cities demonstrated anti-Sisi rallies and united under one goal: challenging the current Egyptian government.

### Background

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi first came into power in 2013, following the removal of President Mohamed Morsi. The then-army chief General el-Sisi led a coup d'état that resulted in the arrest of Morsi and other Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Subsequently, el-Sisi continued his role as the defense minister and leader of the armed forces; it was not until June 2014 that he was elected into office, with 96% of the vote. He was re-elected later in April 2018, with around 97% of the vote. Currently, President el-Sisi leads an authoritative regime where, since former President Morsi's removal in 2013, he has banned any unauthorized demonstrations. Hence, protests have become increasingly rare in Egypt as they are intensely criminalized.

In 2019, Mohammed Ali—a former Egyptian building and military contractor who had worked with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's administration—indicated that the nation's government was heavily corrupt. Ali explained that the President was squandering public funds by using finances on sumptuous construction projects. He

evidenced several videos on social media to outline his point. Following Ali's expose, many more joined in on the criticism towards the government, triggering a nationwide debate. With the sparked political and social tensions and on September 20, 2019, anti-Sisi protests rolled out in the streets of Egypt. Many called out for President el-Sisi's resignation. More than 4,000 protestors were arrested. Thus, this first wave of protests did not achieve its goal of dismissing President el-Sisi from office and died down. But the fuel of the 2019 protests did not disappear.

### **The Protests**

This year, on August 29, using Arabic hashtags translated to #WeDon'tWantYou and #GoOutOn20September, Mohammed Ali once again called for protests against the President and called for the end of el-Sisi's regime. He also took to Facebook, recording a video message saying "This is our chance to liberate our country." The first day of the protests—September 20, 2020—was the anniversary of last year's protests. Continued grave concerns such as the unstable economy and cases of human rights violations, as well as new issues such as the mishandled coronavirus situation all came together to fuel the resurgence of protests in Egypt.

Another recent factor contributing to the growing protests is the threat of house demolitions. The government revealed a housing campaign (Reconciliation Law on Building Violations) last year that gave residents two choices: either pay a large fine to keep their house or have it destroyed. According to Reuters, the settlement fee is between 50 and 2,000 pounds per square meter. These high prices pose a significant threat to many who cannot afford to pay it. Citizens have until the end of October to make this crucial decision. This campaign was justified by government claims that homes were built on agricultural or governmental land without permission and are hence illegal. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has stated that more than a third of all buildings break the law and that 700,000 violations have already been recorded. The magnitude of this law and its impact added a surge of protestors from poor, rural communities to the backlash. If the administration continues with the demolitions,

hundreds of thousands will be left homeless as their houses are replaced by sleeping tents during a pandemic.

### **The Response**

The government has responded with force against protestors. Videos on social media show harrowing accounts of tear gas, batons, and live bullets being deployed to counter the demonstrations. Police forces shot 25-year-old Samy Basheer in Giza and 26-year-old Owais al-Rawy in Luxor while they were demonstrating. Police arrested more than 2000 people due to the protests. Among them, 110 were minors and children, with the youngest being 11-year-old Yahya Qader. According to The Arab Foundation for Civil Society Support, protestors are being charged for trumped-up charges, including the following: working with terrorist groups, broadcasting and disseminating fake news and statements, and funding and inciting people to protest. Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director Philip Luther comments that "The fact that these protestors took to the streets while knowing the very high risk to their lives and safety they were taking shows how desperate they were to demand their economic and social rights."

Since 2013, the government has had a strict no-tolerance-to-opposition policy. As mentioned earlier, President el-Sisi's administration outlawed protests. However, they have not yet commented on the arresting of protestors or this year's wave of protests in the country. Government-supported media outlets have taken it upon themselves to express their opposition towards the protests and continue signaling support for the government. Certain platforms have even broadcasted that the protests are a hoax and more have claimed that the protests are only taking place in small numbers.

The international response has generally been strong. The UN stated that Egyptians should be "allowed to express themselves, and for governments to listen to the people." Concerned with human rights violations and the arrest of thousands of protestors, 222 members of the European Parliament issued a letter to President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi expressing their concern for the detentions of political prisoners in Egypt. Congresspeople in the US also sent a similar letter calling for the release of detainees.

The US even threatened to pose sanctions if the Egyptian government fails to act upon the United State's request.

As tensions within the country continue to heighten with the pandemic and the eviction laws, the Egyptians' protest hold much at stake. What will become of the thousands risking their lives to protect their rights? Only time will tell.

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# Junta Government in Thailand

## Sofia Waldron

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For the past six long years, the Thai people have been forced to live under the control of the *junta* government. The junta government in Thailand is a military dictatorship utilizing extreme, inhumane, and unjustifiable power to silence and oppress the Thai people. Basic human rights have been violently stripped from the people of Thailand, public gatherings have been banned, and the media is heavily censored. The current constitution (put into practice in 2017) greenlights authoritarianism and abuse of power to be passed off as “normal.” Nonetheless, many fearless students and activists are mobilizing across Thailand despite the likely threat of being assaulted, taken captive, and being threatened each time they voice their (justified) protest against their government.

In the last decade, the Thai government has been in a constant state of chaos. On May 22, 2014, because of many street protests against a populist government headed by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai military overthrew the elected government for the second time in a decade to reimpose structure in Thai society. Not two years later, in 2016, King Maha Vajiralongkorn assumed the throne after his father Bhumibol Adulyadej died after a long 70-year reign. King Vajiralongkorn approved a new constitution, backed by the military, that increased his powers as king. Moreover, recently, Prayuth Chan-Ocha (former prime minister of a military government and stager the 2014 coup) led a pro-army party and won the election amidst allegations of vote-buying and cheating.

This election was a massively divisive event in Thai society; the election split the country into two groups: one in support of Prayuth, and the other against him. Despite restrictions stemming from the outbreak of the novel coronavirus and a government

that weaponizes laws against dissent and criticism, large numbers of protestors spoke out against the Prayuth military government and the military-backed king. The hashtag “#WhyDoWeNeedAKing?” was used more than 1 million times by protestors to direct criticism against King Vajiralongkorn and the government during quarantine. In early June of this year, mass protests were held for the investigation of a government critic that disappeared in Cambodia. About a month later, 2,500 protestors assembled at the Democracy Monument, demanding new elections and the termination of Parliament.

The protests have not been aimless. On the contrary, they have clear goals: the people of Thailand stipulate three changes to their government, and not one less. They demand the eradication of the current Parliament, a new constitution, and the government to guarantee the Thai people freedom and a voice in their country. The government, however, has not reacted sympathetically nor rationally to the people of Thailand. Instead, it has arrested and charged multiple citizens for attending protests and has accused many more of spreading false/misleading information and speaking out against the Thai government online. In addition to these accusations, 53 Thai citizens were held captive in military prisons in Nakhon Chai Si and Thung Song Hong, and 6 forced disappearances were reported.

There are many actions to take to help the Thai people no matter where you are or what language you speak. One way to help is to continue to speak up about what is occurring: sharing information, petitions, and links is beneficial for the Thai people. Donating to organizations dedicated to helping Thailand is the most impactful for the Thai people, though. Amnesty International Thailand currently has a petition on its website as well as a link to donate to them; they are focused primarily on the protection of human rights in Thailand. Similar organizations such as Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), The Mirror Foundation, and Prachatai provide trusted sources for current and reliable news. Since the Thai government has attacked opposing political organizations and arrested their leaders, international support has renewed effect on the voices of the Thai people.



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# Gender Equality and Protest in Turkey

## Nisan Başçiftçi

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Protests, particularly concerning gender equality issues and the right to speech, have become common over the years. In the last week of August, protests captured the attention of Turkey as protestors held a place on every street corner regarding rumors that the parliament was planning to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Social responsibility initiatives, gender equality platforms, private institutions, and numerous other organizations are constantly striving to maintain Turkey's commitment to the convention. Even municipalities took action against the decision, raising awareness of the significance of the convention and placed billboards in city centers to inform people about the content of it. So what is the Istanbul Convention, and why has its fate divided the country of Turkey so deeply?

The Istanbul Convention (officially the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence), is the world's first binding measure to combat violence against women. Signed by all Member States of the European Union along with the 47 members of the Council of Europe on May 11 of 2011, including Turkey, the agreement aims to protect human rights and ensure gender equality. If summarized, convention clauses include:

1. Establishing state responsibility to prevent all forms of violence.
2. Ensuring the punishment of criminals, as well as ensuring the prevention of violence, is the state's responsibility.
3. Assuring safety for those exposed to violence and removing their perpetrators from their houses for victims' safety.

4. Working in coordination with civil society platforms for the tackling of the issue.
5. Including materials that question gender stereotypes into national curriculums and school materials.

Given the strong language and goals of the document, convention clauses have appeared as controversial for some signatory states, including Turkey. In particular, some leading groups in Turkey have objected against the convention as they perceive it to be “antithetical to ‘Turkish family values’”. However, women and other supporters are arguing that the convention does not establish any risks for the conventional family structure of the Turkish family unless people support a structure with a hierarchical perception of the supremacy of men. Striving for economic equity among genders and the right to life for all individuals, women are continuing their fight in a multitude of forms: by organizing protests, distributing flyers, raising awareness through social media, and legal challenges. Their claim is not superficial; the number of women killed—which reached 299 women by October 2020—by their male lovers, relatives, or rapists is shocking. Inspired by these tragedies, protestors commemorate the victims of femicides by preventing future victimization.

Being aware of the critical nature of the convention for their rights, women solidarity associations and university communities planned protests in several cities in Turkey. Not only women but also men attended these protests and demonstrated their stance in the question of human rights-related conventions; nevertheless, women constituted the majority. Moreover, left-wing politicians were present during the protests, and gave speeches against the abolishment of the convention and criticized the approach of the current government concerning the policies that are related to human rights and violence. However, the debate on the issues of domestic violence, women’s, and LGBT rights are not wholly political. Rather, they are of human rights: President Erdogan’s own daughter is a staunch supporter of the convention. However, even though the protesters did not resort to violence, police interventions were brutal. The irony of violence toward women protestors fighting for women’s rights is painful. For instance, the number of women arrested by the police reached 14 in İzmir. Women

reacted to these arrests by stating “There is no withdrawal from our fight” on media channels and by starting hashtags on their social media accounts.

All in all, the question of women’s rights, and human rights more broadly, poses divides to the country and the government as never seen before.

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# ART + POETRY

## Streets of Struggle

### Indra Gupta

*Indra Gupta is a student at Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi. She is pursuing a degree in engineering, but is an avid activist and political researcher. Indra enjoys parliamentary style debate and protesting for pressing issues such as Climate Change.*

The world flares bright with dark red light,  
The bodies shuffle and rail.  
Black walls surround us, the screams abound,  
As people cry with faces pale.

Tools of oppression are brought out around us,  
To claim that there is no hope of cession, but  
Our voices cannot drown, cannot fail;  
To admit defeat is to surrender to despots,  
Demagoguery,  
And deceit.

Our opponents think they are invincible as if they cannot be held to principle  
We cannot lose our ground, cannot abandon this trail.

The brutality is stifling but we will prevail.  
The strength of our fight will pull back the night.  
The streets are deluged, we push against the scale.  
We have been silent too long, yet our demands are met with nothing but violence.

Voices clamour for freedom but how far will they sail?

But, we know  
the future rests on the escape from this plight,  
on the intrepidity with which we fight.

We know  
we must break our nation out of this bubble,  
never relent and drive forward the struggle.

The people on the streets hold nothing but signs,  
Defenceless, no coats of chainmail.  
But we stay strong.