

### Why People Protest

Throughout history, people all over the world have protested for different reasons. Why is it that people risk their own safety and status to protest? There is not simply one correct answer to that question. The different things that people protest can be very different from place to place. The circumstances and environment that exist determine what the protests are about, and why people are protesting. In fact, the different things that people protest about can be characterized into three different levels of protest. In a single nation however, there can be groups of citizens that participate at different levels of protest. Within each group of citizens, when a level of protest is met, then people in that group tend to focus on the next level of protest. Each level of protest has protests that are all directed toward the government. The reason is because in a nation, the government is the body that makes up and enforces laws in order to serve its people. Therefore, when the people have grievances, they report them to the government

Basic survival necessities constitute the first level of protest. Basic freedoms constitute the second level of protest. The basic freedoms level becomes a little more complicated however, because it can be broken down further into two groups. The third level of protest includes protests about social issues and ideology.

Although the levels of necessities do go in chronological order from the first to the third level, there can be overlapping. For example, if a group of citizens' main focus

IS THIS SO?

of protest is at level three, they can still protest issues, like hunger, which is from level one. Thus, people concerned with higher levels of protest can protest about things that are in the lower levels of protest. However, the opposite of this is not true. If there is a group of citizens whose main focus of protest is at level one, then they will not be concerned with protesting for anything in higher levels of protest. For example, citizens who are protesting because they have hunger will not be concerned about social issues. Their main problem is hunger. Until that problem is not corrected, they will not be worried about social issues, because their basic survival is at risk.

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The first level of protest is about basic survival needs. If a group of citizens in a country do not have basic survival things like food and shelter, then this becomes their main focus of protest. The reason that basic survival needs has its own level of protest is because survival is, above all, the main goal for citizens. For example, no group of people would be protesting about gay marriage rights if they were on the verge of starvation. Basic survival needs must be fulfilled before any other needs; therefore, that is always the first level of protest.

Once basic survival needs are met, then groups of citizens will move on to the next level of protest. The next level of protest is made up of basic freedoms. This level can be divided into two groups. The first group is when citizens are willing to work within the framework of the existing government system in order to better their situations. Their main goals are not to overturn the existing regime, they simply want to fix the existing regime. An example of this would be Mongolia. Citizens in Mongolia are trying to become a more democratic state. They do not want to overturn the regime

that currently exists, they do however want to reform it. They may protest with hunger strikes, or by forming political groups in which citizens can become involved.

HAS THIS OCCURRED?

The second subdivision in the basic freedoms group is different from the first subdivision, because in this group, the intent is not necessarily to work with the existing regime. The intent may be to spark a revolution or a counterinsurgency. These protests often leave the category of protests, and can become conflicts or wars. An example of this is the Zapatista movement in Mexico. After many years of protest, this counterinsurgency group has taken up arms, and would like to overthrow the existing regime in Mexico. A historic example of this includes the US revolution. The colonists in America protested against England, and eventually overthrew the English power in the colonies. This subdivision of protest is not always violent however. An example of this includes Mahatma Ghandi and his protests in India, which also eventually overthrew English power.

The second level of protest is a very important level of protest. The reason is because the people involved in this level of protest are willing to sacrifice various aspects of their lives for more freedoms. This level is when people experience relative deprivation. They are educated enough to know about freedom, and places that are more free than their countries (1). They become very involved in their cause, and can often risk their lives in order to gain more freedom. They protest because they believe that it is the only way that things may change. They themselves must stand up and show enough resistance toward their existing government in order to change the status quo. The people who protest in level two are protesting the very structure of their government, and often face dangerous responses from their governments. An example of this are the student

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movements in the country of Iran. Student movements in the 1970s all began as protests against the Shah. The government suppressed most of the protests. However, the students in the movements did not give up, and many even lost their lives. By 1979, the student movement had succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy in Iran. The same thing is now occurring in present day Iran. There are uprisings among student movements all over Iran. Many students lose their lives annually, but these protestors will not stop until their cause is resolved. <sup>awk.</sup> Gaining freedoms in a society are often the longest struggles that protestors have, yet they continue their cause in order to live better lives.

After time, when citizens have gained freedoms, there is one final level of protest. This third level of protest is made up of protests about social issues and ideology. These types of protests can be found in places including, but not limited to, the United States and Western European countries. In this level, people that protest do so because they want to stand up for what they believe. They want to feel as though they are making a difference. Examples of this include people who protest for or against abortions, or people who protest for or against gay marriages. The difference with this level of protest from the other levels is that this stage of protest is mostly psychological. The people who protest feel good about themselves for standing up for what they believe in. They exercise their rights to protest, but they also still respect the rights and restrictions of protesting. That is, they work within their current governmental system to better it; they have no intention of overthrowing it. In fact, they probably realize that their protests may not be making a big difference. The important thing to them is that they have the right to be heard, and they have the right to tell their legislative representatives what they want done. For example, if someone writes a letter to his or her Congressman in the United

States, or if someone holds a sign up at a rally, he or she is not actually changing anything. He or she is not fighting with anyone. He or she just wants to be heard, and trying to make a difference by changing legislation. This level of protest is psychological because it makes the protestor feel good about what he or she is doing, even though he or she might not be making an actual difference. This characterizes the final third level of protest.

All of these levels of protests are found at different frequencies and amplitudes. Methods of protesting also vary from place to place. While people in the United States might create a rally where everyone holds up signs, people in Mongolia might conduct a hunger strike. The differences in techniques can be attributed to what different citizens would be comfortable doing. Also, citizens want to protest in a manner that will be most <sup>e</sup>ffective; therefore in Mongolia, it might be more <sup>e</sup>ffective to have a hunger strike because the Mongolian culture sees that more as a sign of resistance than a group of people holding up signs. The opposite may be true of United States citizens. In the United States, a sit-in may be a more <sup>e</sup>ffective way of protesting; the citizens see that as more influential as opposed to another method of protesting.

Ultimately however, the different levels of protesting are universal. And within each distinct society, there can be distinct levels of protest. As history has shown, there will always be protests. Human beings rely on protests as a way to convey their grievances. Elie Wiesel once said, "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

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## Works Cited

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