ÉPREUVES ÉCRITES D’ADMISSIBILITÉ

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ANGLAIS
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Texte au verso
From Hong Kong to Chile, 2019 is the year of the street protester. But why?


By last week it was undeniable: 2019 has become the year of the street protester. As hundreds of thousands marched in Hong Kong and Santiago, Lebanon and London, what has become a global explosion of people power was prompting panic among a host of governments — and raising some interesting questions about how and why it was all happening.

Of course, the phenomenon is not new, even in modern times. Since the late 1980s, when people took to the streets in the Philippines and South Korea, and then in the captive nations of Eastern Europe, mass movements of people have been overthrowing governments or, at least, creating political turmoil.

But this year is exceptional for the sheer breadth and diversity of the unrest. Hong Kong, which has now had 20 consecutive weeks of mass protests, has had perhaps the most noted uprising. But the Middle East has seen demonstrations in Algeria, Sudan, Egypt and Iraq in addition to Lebanon.

In Latin America, Chile’s riots followed mass protests in Ecuador, Argentina and Honduras. In Eastern Europe, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Georgia have been rocked. Vladimir Putin has had to contend with the largest street demonstrations in Russia since 2012. And the list goes on.

Why now? After all, the global economy is still growing, as it has for the past decade. In most of the world, poverty is declining. Governments in many countries where people are marching are corrupt, repressive or simply dysfunctional — but arguably no more so than they have been for decades.

Facile explanations have flourished. In Chile, where at least 18 people have died in demonstrations, foreign correspondents who rushed to seek explanations from Santiago’s left-leaning intelligentsia came away with a suspiciously ideological story: The “neo-liberalism” that Chile has practiced over the past 30 years, it was said, had failed. But wait. The poverty rate has fallen from nearly 50 percent to 6 percent during that time, living standards have risen dramatically, and inequality is less severe than in all but two other Latin American countries.

Some Middle East analysts jumped to the conclusion that the unrest in Iraq and Lebanon showed that people were finally fed up with sectarianism, especially that promoted by Shiite Iran. Maybe — but that doesn’t account for the uprisings in Sunni Algeria, Sudan or Egypt. A New York Times survey posited “a louder-than-usual howl against elites in countries where democracy is a source of disappointment.” But that doesn’t explain Algeria or Hong Kong.

A simple conclusion could be that the global unrest has no shared characteristics other than the tactic of taking to the streets. But I think there is more to it than that. Hong Kong and Egypt, Chile and Lebanon have two things in common: pervasive social media and a rising generation of discontented youth who are masters of it. The combination of the two has changed the balance of power between government and society in both democratic and authoritarian states.