

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW

## MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

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Volume 3 | Issue 1

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2020

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# Changes in the Dynamics of Protests in 21st Century

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## ABSTRACT

*'Protest' is something which is very inherent in human nature and is the true manifestation of one's disagreement with the current state of affairs. It is a tool used by the common man/woman to take what is rightly his/her. There are various forms of protest in the world with different means but each of them has the same intention i.e to show dissent and resist oppression. In this article I have analysed four major protests which were carried out in the history of mankind. Starting with the first documented protest in the world which took place in England in 1215, resulting into the granting of a charter of civil rights by the king to his citizens which came to be known as the 'Magna Carta'. Then I have written about the French Revolution which took place in 1787 and laid the foundation of people's rule and civil rights. The next protest which I have mentioned is popularly known as the 'Cedar Revolution' which took place in Lebanon in 2005 and sparked various protests in the 'Arab Springs' for the want of self-rule and democracy. And the last protest which I have written about is the #METOO revolution which gained momentum in 2018 and was a first of its kind 'Social Media' protest garnering support from all over the world. Hence, throughout this article I have compared the essential characteristics of all the four protests thereby analyzing the changes and differences in the protests taking place in the 21st Century.*

The origins of the word are from the Latin word 'pro' meaning 'public' and 'testis' meaning 'witness', thereby giving us the term 'protestari'. This term evolved with time and gave rise to a word which led to several revolutions, uprisings, revolts etc. in fact a synonym of it also became the 2019 word of the year. Hence the word which I am talking about is 'Protest'.

'Protest' is something which is very inherent in human nature and is the true manifestation of one's disagreement with the current state of affairs. It is a tool used by the common man/woman to take what is rightly his/her. There are various forms of protest in different parts of the world with different means but each one of them has the same intention i.e to show dissent and not resist oppression.

Therefore, through this document I will try to draw a framework of protests taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by comparing it with the protests which took place in earlier centuries so as to get

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a fair look of the current scenario. In my opinion by comparing two scenarios we can very distinctively analyse each of them.

To start with, I would like present the very first documented protest of this world.

It started in Runnymede, England in 1215. King John, the then King of England was a very ruthless ruler who did not believe in giving rights to his citizens. The society was victim to a lot of oppression and they could no more abide by the unpredictable ruling styling of the king. King John's military failure at the Battle of Bouvines triggered all of this dis- contentment and the baron (a member of the aristocracy) waged a revolt against the state. In January 1215, a baronage of forty barons met with King John to discuss terms of reform, but the meeting was inconclusive. Thus, In May 1215 the barons along with the representatives of the Church of England renounced their homage to King John, in response King ordered the seizure of the baron's castles. However, when the Baron's seized the whole of London the King had to come to terms<sup>2</sup>.

On June 15, 1215 this world for the very first time witnessed a charter of rights with the seal of the ruler on it. With time this came to be known as the Magna Carta. Hence, for the very first time in the history of this humanity people successfully revolted for something which was rightfully theirs. In my opinion, this incident laid a very concrete foundation of the protests which we come across in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Second protest was more of a revolution as it changed the dynamics of the whole world. This incident was the tipping point for many other protests in the world and laid the foundation of modern day demands for civil rights. Popularly known by three words, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' the next protest which I would like to cover is 'The French Revolution'.

This civil unrest took place in the time period of 1787-1799 in France. The major causes of the revolt were the political conflicts between the monarchy and the nobility over the tax reform system, social antagonisms between the Aristocracy and the Bourgeoisie, Louis XVI was known to be an inefficient ruler who had no contact with the people and lastly the reason which sparked this revolution was the economic hardship because of the agrarian crisis in 1778-79 which led to widespread discontentment among people.

In June 1789, the third estate took an oath in a tennis court and manifested its claim of representing the sovereignty of the nation and created a revolution in France. For the very first

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<sup>2</sup> Rebellion and the great Charter, The Library of Congress, <https://www.stu.ca/media/stu/site-content/documents/Bluebook.pdf>

time in history of this world people were successful in taking down a complete government. The impact of the French Revolution was in a way felt throughout the fabric of the society, few of them which were paramount were that the new civil rights were introduced which gave everyone the much valued equality before law, decline in the authority of the church as the society and thoughts became more individualistic etc<sup>3</sup>.

When we analyse these two protests, things in common are that the reason for the protest was oppression of the rulers, there was large scale participation but only of a particular section of the society. They did not have any legal backing and hence the protests used to be violent as for them those were the only means. Therefore, the protests which are taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, which I would further list, have their roots embedded in these historic uprisings.

With the roots of protests embedded deep in the soil I would now like to introduce the protests which took place in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

On 30<sup>TH</sup> April 2005 The Syrian Army, after 30 years of occupation, withdrew its troops from Lebanon and succumbed to the force of Lebanese people who led the ‘Cedar Revolution’. The presence of Cedar tree on the Lebanese flag inspired the name of the Revolution.

Syria occupied Lebanon in 1976. They occupied Lebanon on the pretext of saving them from an Israeli invasion. Former Premier of Lebanon, Rafik Hariri was assassinated in Beirut on 14<sup>th</sup> February. This assassination proved to be a catalyst for the Cedar Revolution as it led to several opposition meetings and eventually demanded a pullout of Syrian troops from Lebanon. On 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, the citizens of Lebanon launched a nation-wide struggle to uproot the pro-Lebanon government in order to free their occupied land. The most unique element of this protest was that it was largely no-violent but very efficient. On 5<sup>TH</sup> March, 2005, the Syrian President bowed down to the national and international pressure and announced the pull out of the Syrian army from Lebanon. The demonstrations continued and reached its peak on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2005, when the Lebanese people held the world’s largest demonstration in their entire history<sup>4</sup>.

Hence this is the story of ‘Cedar Revolution’ which was successful in uprooting an oppressive Syrian regime. This protest which took place in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was so sensational that it made the United Nations sent a fact finding mission to Lebanon. This was also among the first protests of the Arab Springs which gave rise to various protests in Libya, Yemen etc. and laid

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<sup>3</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., [French Revolution](https://www.britannica.com/event/French-Revolution), Encyclopædia Britannica, (Feb.3, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/event/French-Revolution>.

<sup>4</sup> [History of Lebanon, The Cedar Revolution](http://www.lgic.org/en/history_lebanon2005.php), Lebanese Global Information Center, [http://www.lgic.org/en/history\\_lebanon2005.php](http://www.lgic.org/en/history_lebanon2005.php)

the foundations of democracy, elections and Human Rights in the Arabs.

The next big protest/movement is a very unique and far reaching movement which was collectively taken up by a section of the society against the harassment faced by them in workplace. It created an Echo-chamber of voices which shook the world.

The protest which I am talking about is the #MeToo movement which took the world by storm when female voices from all over the world came out and spoke about the sexual harassment faced by them in their life. The seeds of this movement were sown by an American Civil Rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006. According to a research, by September 30, 2018 #METOO was already tweeted 19 million times with a per day rate of 55,319. It is also one of the most discussed topics on Instagram with more than 15,00,000 posts. Hence through these statistics I want to show the intensity and participation of this protest. For the very first time in the history of protests we witnessed a Social Media protest which was as efficient as the offline ones. Some instances which show the success of this movement are when a co-founder of Uber resigned after facing allegations from an employee, in India a Minister of State had to resign when he faced several charges of sexual harassment<sup>5</sup>.

The sole reason why I choose to utilize the first 700 words of this essay for the protests which took place before 21<sup>st</sup> Century was to draw a comparison and analyse the changes. Hence if we look at the evolution of protests through the lens of this essay we can see that we started with a protest which was much more violent and scattered but was successful in reaching its end goal that is to secure the Magna Carta. Then we see a revolution which for the very first time introduced the concept of civil liberties and their importance in the society. Next is a protest of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which was much more peaceful and systematic. It was led by large number of people and was successful in uprooting an oppressive regime. The last protest which we witnessed was a very unique protest, different from the rest as it was carried out virtually on social media as not many people came out on the streets and demonstrated. They used Social media as a tool to raise their voices against the sexual harassment faced by them and to collectively fight for a cause. Hence these protests of 21<sup>st</sup> Century tell us how have it has taken a turn for the better. Protests are now much more peaceful, diverse, collective and effective.

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<sup>5</sup> Elena Nicolaou, Courtney Smith, [#MeToo Timeline- How far we need to go](https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/10/212801/me-too-movement-history-timeline-year-weinstein), Refinery29, (Oct. 5, 2019, 10:25 PM), <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/10/212801/me-too-movement-history-timeline-year-weinstein>