



Food, energy & cost of living protests, 2022

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There was an unprecedented global wave of more than 12,500 protests about food, energy and the rising cost of living in 2022.

Most protests were triggered not by generalised price rises or shortages, but by specific governmental failures to act to protect citizens against their effects.

This analysis shows that cost of living protests unite people across societies on grievances that are deeply and widely shared.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Summary	4
Introduction	6
Key terms	8
➤ 'Food protest'	8
➤ 'Energy protest'	8
➤ 'Events' and 'episodes'	8
Methodology	8
➤ Research questions and approach	8
➤ Data	9
➤ Analysis	10
➤ Limitations	10
Food, energy and cost of living protests in 2022: numbers, locations, protesters and grievances	12
➤ An unprecedented wave of food and energy protests?	12
➤ Location and distribution of protests	14
➤ Protestors	15
➤ Grievances	16
➤ Food, energy and the rising cost of living	17
➤ Corruption, collusion and unaccountable elites	19
➤ Responses and interactions	21
Selected episodes of food, energy & cost of living protests	24
Ecuador	24
➤ Overview of the episode	24
➤ Protestors and grievances	24
Panama	26
➤ Overview of events	26
➤ Protestors and grievances	27
➤ Policy and political outcomes	27
Sierra Leone	28
➤ Overview of the events	28
➤ Protestors and grievances	28
➤ Political and policy response	30
Lebanon	31

➤ Overview of the events _____	31
➤ Who protested, and why _____	32
➤ Political and policy response _____	33
Sri Lanka _____	34
France & Germany _____	37
➤ Background _____	37
➤ Protestors and Grievances: France and Germany _____	37
➤ Policy responses _____	38
Discussion and conclusions _____	39
➤ Scope and limitations _____	39
➤ Global responses to a global crisis _____	39
➤ The political effects of cost of living protests _____	40
➤ Implications _____	41
Bibliography _____	43
About the Authors _____	52
About FES _____	52
Imprint _____	52

Figures

Figure 1 Global food and fuel price indices, 2017-2022; research period circled in red _____	7
Figure 2 Global distribution of food, energy, & cost of living protests November 2021-October 2022 _____	12
Figure 3 Protest events and food and fuel price indices in 2022 _____	13
Figure 4 Regional distribution of protest events _____	14
Figure 5 Top 25 countries by numbers of protest events _____	15
Figure 6 Frequency of protests by grievance _____	17
Figure 7 Ecuador events _____	24
Figure 8 Numbers of fuel protests in Ecuador, June 2022 _____	25
Figure 9 Panama Events _____	26
Figure 10 Share of food in household expenditure in Sierra Leone _____	29
Figure 11 Sierra Leone food prices, 2017-2022 _____	30
Figure 12 Lebanon Events _____	32
Figure 13 Sri Lanka Events _____	35
Figure 14 Total number of protests in Europe by month _____	37

Tables

Table 1 Interactions between protesters, the security forces, and counter-protesters	22
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All errors of fact or interpretation remain those of the authors and not of their organizations or employers.

Summary

There was an unprecedented global wave of more than 12,500 protests about food, energy and the rising cost of living in 2022.

2022 saw an unprecedented wave of protest about the affordability of and access to the basics needed for everyday life. People took to the streets in over 12,500 protest events between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022, aggrieved about the rising cost of living as well as shortages of fuel, gas and electricity. Protests erupted across world regions, in all political regime types, and in rich, middle and low income countries alike. A total of 148 countries experienced such protests in 4,630 unique locations (ACLEDD 2022).

In several countries, protests about food and energy price rises and shortages escalated into larger national political crises, featuring significant violence, casualties and demands for political change. Protest-related deaths were recorded in 12 different countries, with Kazakhstan's fuel riots escalating into a full security crisis resulting in more than 200 fatalities. Perceived fiscal mismanagement and concerns about the conditions of IMF loans featured prominently in several protest episodes. Notably, ten of the 30 countries with more than 100 protest events during the period studied have ongoing IMF programmes, and others in that group were seeking IMF support.

The wave of protests signals a globalised economic failure to deliver the basic goods people need at prices they can afford.

Prices of food, but in particular of energy (fuel, oil, gas, and electricity for transport, industrial and domestic purposes) saw steep rises as a result of pent-up demand and supply chain issues following the closures enforced during the COVID19 pandemic. Food and fuel prices also faced inflationary pressures and fears of dearth after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022.

Most protests were triggered not by generalised price rises or shortages, but by specific governmental failures to act to protect citizens against their effects. Major episodes of protests commonly followed cuts to energy subsidies, leading to steep price increases. In certain instances, an announcement of subsidy cuts was sufficient to mobilise citizens against the government.

A wide range of people and groups were involved in these protests. Organised labour groups and opposition political parties were active, but other groups and movements not specifically aligned with trade unions or political parties were also prominent. Fishers, farmers, truck and taxi drivers and construction workers, as well as teachers and health workers, featured prominently in protests across world regions. However, several major episodes lacked visible organisation or leadership and took the form of apparently spontaneous mass uprisings.

Although triggered by the cost of living crisis, protests articulated political grievances: complaints against unaccountable or corrupt governments, often in collusion with economic elites.

Mass protests tell us that people hold their governments accountable for ensuring access to affordable basic goods and services needed for a decent life. Governments that fail to take action or seem indifferent to price spikes are justifiably protested against for violating what people feel are fundamental rights: to eat, and to power their homes, transport and workplaces. Food and energy protesters in 2022 demanded economic policies that served ordinary citizens.

Political leaders who failed to respond with preventive or ameliorative action – by reversing subsidy cuts or announcing new support measures – were blamed for being unaccountable or corrupt. Those that sent in the police or army to suppress protesters appeared to have lost legitimacy with the protesting public. Many incumbents who failed to address protesters' claims lost support, while opposition parties capitalised on their failures. Protestors in Sri Lanka took matters into their own hands, as their popular uprising deposed the president and prime minister over a failure to manage the country's economic crisis.

Protests about the rising cost of living may be providing space for and fuelling a continuation of extremist and/or populist politics

More analysis is needed, but there are signs that both far right and left-wing political groups are capitalising on major protest episodes, attracting new supporters for their positions on these issues and support for action to tackle inflation and shortages. Rather than a consistent ideological critique, opposition parties appear to see denouncing their country's rising costs as a winning issue, regardless of their political identification.

Mass protests about energy access indicate the need for civic participation in energy policies.

Protests against fossil fuel use dominated news headlines, but far more people in far more places protested because they lacked the access to the energy they needed to live a decent life. The 2022 protests signal a need for broad and meaningful people's participation in energy transition policies, including fossil fuel subsidy reforms.

Introduction

There were over 12,500 protests about the rising cost of living in 150 countries in 2022.¹ These events ranged from tiny local gatherings of people aggrieved about the prices of or access to food or energy, to multi-day episodes, which spread nationwide, involving thousands of protesters. Numerous protests escalated from complaints about the cost of living to broader critiques of the political conditions believed to have enabled such crises to develop. No region was spared these protests, although there were notably fewer in East Asia than in any other world region.

This paper analyses this global wave of food and energy protests in the 12 months between November 2021 and October 2022. It provides an overview of the numbers, locations, protesters, grievances and outcomes of these events, and examines the dynamics of several significant or sustained episodes more closely. For the global analysis, our study relies on data derived from the Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset (<https://acleddata.com/>). The country case studies draw on additional international and national media sources and expert analysis.

The aim is to understand these protests about ‘bread and butter’ issues or everyday economic conditions in 2022. Rising commodity prices following the peak of the COVID19 crisis were widely expected to lead to waves of protest, as other global shocks have done in the past (Cohen 2022). Our research suggests that the wave of protests to some extent tracks rising food and fuel prices globally (see Figure 3) and was in part exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 and subsequent impacts on gas and wheat markets.

Food and energy protests merit attention for two reasons. The first is that food and energy protests may be treated as indicators of how people are being affected by global commodity markets, and of the onset of commodity price crises. Media reports of ‘food riots’ are widely interpreted as signs of a food crisis, and reports of protesters’ own accounts of their grievances often focus on their suffering as they struggle to afford or access basic food items.² Energy protests (or ‘fuel riots’) have not had such a long history of associations with commodity crisis as their food-focused counterparts, but they have been relatively common in the past few decades as modern sources of energy have become more necessary but less reliable for large populations, and as governments have sought to cut fossil fuel subsidies for fiscal or environmental reasons (McCulloch et al. 2022; Ortiz and Cummings 2022; Hossain et al. 2021; Natalini, Bravo, and Newman 2020). Such protests are imperfect indicators of food and energy crisis, as many people suffering from high prices and shortages may lack the organisational capacities or freedom of association to mount an effective protest. But that their grievances are sufficiently great to motivate collective action signals that food and energy protests are a fairly reliable indicator of mass hardship.

Such protests are always national because they call on governments to act. But when they come in global waves, as in 2008, 2010-11 and now in 2022, they signal a popular political response to the failures of the global economic system, which jeopardises its very stability. Commenting on the possibility of food riots in the 2008 crisis, the then head of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Straus-Kahn stated that:

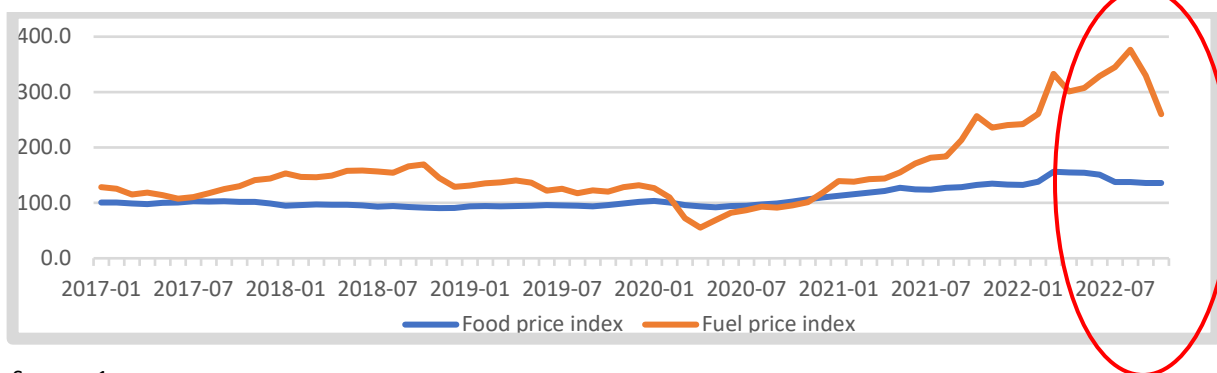
¹ The data actually cover the 12 months between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022, but we use ‘2022’ for brevity.

² After the 2008 and 2010-11 global food price crises, the World Bank set up a ‘food riot radar’ designed to alert policymakers to an unfolding food crisis <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/food-price-crisis-observatory#4>. Accessed 19th September 2022.

‘Hundreds of thousands of people will be starving ... Disruption may occur in the economic environment so that at the end of the day most governments, having done well for the last five or 10 years, will see what they have done totally destroyed and their legitimacy facing the population destroyed also.’ (Barlow 2008).

The second reason food and energy protests are important is that they are also harbingers of broader and more consequential social and political unrest. Mass protests about food and energy signal that a critical mass of people believe they have a right to access the basic goods needed for everyday life, and believe their governments are responsible for protecting those rights. These protests tend to be correlated with price movements,³ but high prices do not automatically lead to protests, nor do protests express discontent about high prices alone. Protests are not merely grumbles about high prices, but also a complaint against a political leadership that allows prices to rise unchecked. They occur when people are not only aggrieved, but also believe that they can stage an effective event, and that protesting can push political decisions in a more favourable direction. Food and energy protests are not merely spontaneous expressions of anger, but articulations of political belief (Hossain and Scott-Villiers 2017; Hossain et al. 2021).

Figure 1 Global food and fuel price indices, 2017-2022; research period circled in red



Source: 1

Food: <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>;

Fuel: <https://www.imf.org/en/Research/commodity-prices>

Note: 1 FAO food price index averages indices of meat, dairy, cereals, oils and sugar. 2014-16=100. Fuel (Energy) Index, 2016 = 100, includes Crude oil (petroleum), Natural Gas, Coal Price and Propane.

³ See, for instance, (Berazneva and Lee 2013; Arezki and Bruckner 2011; Hendrix and Brinkman 2013).

Key terms

‘Food protest’

A food protest here refers to any public gathering of people expressing discontent to the government about rising prices or shortages of food items. Food protests take place when the prices of staples spike because of poor harvests, supply chain disruption or cuts in food subsidies by governments trying to balance the books.

The media sometimes use the term ‘food riot’, and the food protests that make it into the headlines tend to be the ones that are violent and disruptive. But protests about food are often peaceful, within the law, and recognised by wider society as legitimate. Rather than being lawless and chaotic, many ‘food rioters’ seek to demonstrate what they see as fairer ways of managing food markets, by setting prices and preventing food exports from areas facing shortages (for a global and historical view, see Bohstedt 2016).

‘Energy protest’

Energy protests in this paper refer to public gatherings of people expressing discontent to government about rising prices or shortages of any kind of energy: fuel, gas (including cooking gas), petrol or electricity. Other kinds of protests about energy, such as those against fossil fuels or energy infrastructural development (which also occurred in large numbers in 2022), are not included here.

While food protesters are usually protesting about the problems posed by higher prices or shortages for domestic consumption, energy protesters may be protesting because of the higher costs incurred in their work lives or for domestic consumption. Protests often occur after governments have cut subsidies or raised taxes (McCulloch et al. 2022). Shortages may mean energy is unavailable or is rationed, as is the case with electricity ‘loadshedding’.

‘Events’ and ‘episodes’

The ACLED data used here treats an ‘event’ as a public gathering that occurs in a single location on a single day. That is, if protests were to continue for a week, they would constitute seven events. If protests spread from one area to three distinct locales on a single day, they would count as three events.

Here we use the term ‘episode’ to denote a series of events that are linked and sequential in time, and which spread across locations. Episodes of food or energy tend to occur when people are dissatisfied with the response to their initial protests; if the security forces repress or harm protesters; if the discontent spreads across locations as people learn about protests in other areas; or if the object of the protest escalates from food or energy prices or availability to encompass other issues, including corruption, political leadership, and accountability.

Methodology

Research questions and approach

The research aims to update recent analysis of global protests (Ortiz et al. 2022). As world food and energy prices increased after the pandemic and were also under pressure as a result of anticipated shortages as a result of

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the focus was on protests triggered by food and energy prices and shortages. The aims of the research are to:

- Estimate the magnitude of mass protests around the affordability of or access to basic goods
- Identify the locations and distribution of these events
- Provide insights into protesters and their grievances
- Provide insights into the political significance and responses to the protests.

A dataset of relevant events was compiled using the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data (<https://acleddata.com/>). ACLED compiles events-based data about conflict and violence worldwide. The data are collected by researchers from selected local, national and international sources, including media, vetted social media accounts, government and NGO reports, and partner organisations; these reports are triangulated where possible, and local partners may verify and collect first-hand information. ACLED has a range of cross-checks in place to ensure the data are high quality, and the data were obtained from sources which are widely considered to be among the best sources for data about violence and conflict, including protests.⁴

For the present study, relevant events were identified on the basis that they:

- Happened anywhere in the world;
- Occurred in the 12 months between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022;
- Were classified as either 'protests' or 'riots' and featured either 'excessive force against protesters'; 'peaceful protest'; 'mob violence'; 'protest with intervention'; or 'violent demonstration' according to ACLED criteria;
- Were coded as being protests about prices or shortages of food or energy (fuel, gas, oil, electricity, petroleum or diesel), or about the high cost of living or inflation specifically.

The ACLED data include a short paragraph or line that describes the nature of the protest, which was searched for a range of relevant key terms.⁵ These were adjusted and supplemented once different country and regional framings of the grievances had been identified through the search process and were based on our pre-existing knowledge of how food and fuel protests are framed (Hossain and Scott-Villiers 2017; Hossain et al. 2021; Hossain 2018).

Data

Using the parameters outlined above, our version of the ACLED dataset contained 12,514 protest events between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022. The dataset provides a detailed range of information for each protest event. For the purposes of our study, the relevant information for each event examined includes the region, country, event type (riot or protest), event date, and actors involved (primary, secondary, and possible group association). The dataset also provides geographic coordinates for each protest event, allowing for

⁴ For more information about ACLED data, see <https://acleddata.com/resources/quick-guide-to-acled-data/#s1>.

⁵ "Food"; "fuel," "energy", "gas", "electricity", "power outage", "cost of living", "living cost", "essentials", "commodity", "prices", "blackouts", "Food vouchers/subsidy/allowance/grant/assistance/benefit", petroleum", "diesel", "oil".

Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of the data. Finally, each protest event in the dataset contains a 'notes' cell, providing a succinct description of the event and the claims that the protesters advanced. We used the 'notes' to determine how to categorise each event by protest type. Our three protest category types include: food, energy (fuel, gas and electricity), or cost of living.

Analysis

We analysed the ACLED dataset using targeted keyword searches. The targeted keyword searches used the following terms: 'food'; 'food price'; 'essentials'; 'commodit*'; 'fuel'; 'fuel price'; 'gas price'; 'gas'; 'diesel'; 'petrol*'; 'energy'; 'electric*'; 'power outage'; 'blackout'; 'cost of living'; 'living cost'; 'inflation'.⁶

As noted, each protest event in the ACLED dataset contains a cell labelled 'notes,' which provides information about the event pulled from local news sources. When one of our keywords appeared in an event's notes cell, we read the description of the protest event to determine if the coding matched a food, energy or cost of living protest type. If we determined that a protest event was a positive match, we colour-coded the protest event entry to match the corresponding protest type.

Protest events that contained one of our keywords but were not related to claim making about food, energy or rising cost of living were coded as non-events. For example, an event about petroleum workers protesting delayed payment of wages by their employer might show as a match in our keyword search, but it is not a relevant event in our study. An event about climate activists protesting fuel extraction would also be a non-event. Another non-event would be when a region such as Venezuela's 'Vargas' produced a keyword match, but the protest event was entirely unrelated to energy, food or cost of living. Accordingly, our research required close examination of each protest event that proved an initial keyword match to filter relevant events from non-events.

Given the volume of relevant protests in our initial review, we employed a secondary audit of our initial protest type categorisations. The purpose of the audit was to catch events that had possibly been mis-coded as representing a specific protest type when they could more aptly fit into a different category. For the 'food' and 'energy' sub-datasets, we ran a full second keyword search. If any of the protest events initially coded specifically as a food or energy event produced a match on any of our other keywords, indicating that the protest included multiple claims, they were recoded as general protests over the rising cost of living and moved to the cost of living sub-dataset. For example, a protest note could read, 'On 20 July 2022, members of TRS along with a Minister held a protest in Mahabubnagar city (Mahabubnagar district, Telangana) against the imposition of GST on milk products as well as rising food and fuel prices' (ACLED ID 9421769). If this event was initially categorised as a food protest, it would be recategorised as a cost of living protest, given that the protester grievances had been over both food and fuel.

Limitations

The ACLED data and our search strategy provide us with a dataset of protests triggered by grievances about access to and prices of food, fuel and electricity, as well as broader discontent about inflation and the rise in the cost of living that we are confident includes the types of events in which we were interested. However, our relatively strict inclusion criteria mean that the dataset errs on the side of caution, and we have deliberately

⁶ The use of * denotes the search term captured permutations of the base word. For example, 'petrol' captured entries of 'petrol' and 'petroleum'.

excluded a number of types of events that may feature motivations that overlap with our main criteria, including the following:

- Protests or strikes led by trades unions or employees for higher wages or improved working conditions which did not explicitly mention inflation, the rising cost of living, or food and energy prices or access, or which targeted only employers, rather than government. This exclusion was necessary to ensure that the protests were specifically motivated by rising costs of living, and in particular by food and fuel prices, rather than occurring in the course of routine trade union wage bargaining. However, this should be regarded as a restrictive condition that could well exclude relevant trade union-sponsored protests.
- Protests *against* the use of fossil fuels because of their contribution to global warming; some countries and cities saw both anti-fossil fuel protests as well as protests against the high prices of energy, highlighting the complicated nature of people's relationships to energy. As 2022 wore on, there were a growing number of such protests, several of which (such as those involving tomato soup and Van Gogh's sunflowers) made world headlines. Again, this means that our analysis substantially *understates* the extent of energy-related contention in 2022. This was necessary in order to ensure that protests were only included if they were linked to people's grievances about access to energy (regardless of its sources or types).
- Protests by farmers about the prices of agricultural inputs, including water and fertiliser. Protests by food producers and retailers were included if the protesters explicitly mentioned price rises as a grievance. Protests were not included if the protesters were food producers who were protesting for price protections (price floors or minimum guarantees) from the state.
- In cases where protests about food, energy, or inflation escalated into larger and more substantial political complaints about the nature of governance, our search strategy stopped identifying these as relevant for inclusion. So, for instance, only events in the early period of the Sri Lankan uprising are included.

The data do not include complete information on the size of protests, or on the casualties, fatalities and arrests that may have occurred after the report was filed, and which may not always have been recorded. In the more detailed case studies, we have included more information about such issues, but we are unable to say much about the total casualties or arrests, or other human costs of protest events overall. Similarly, the data do not allow for analysis of the policy responses or 'outcomes' of protest movements, however defined. For these reasons, the analysis presented here is mostly confined to description and comparison.

In addition, some ACLED translations into English may have sacrificed local specificity and framings, such as the translation of Argentina's *comedores populares* into 'popular restaurants', when they are what English-speakers call 'soup kitchens'. However, in comparison with the data sources that existed before ACLED, and in particular when we consider the challenges of documenting and analysing earlier food and energy protests such as in 2008 and 2010-11, ACLED is a marked improvement in terms of data sources for global protests.

A significant limitation of the present analysis is that it is difficult or impossible to assess the 'success' or 'impact' of these struggles, for several reasons: many are current or ongoing in character; much of the ACLED data relied on here, by its very nature, offers merely a snapshot rather than a more detailed analysis; and analysis of the impacts and outcomes of contentious politics is inherently analytically challenging (Giugni 1998). However, to the extent possible, and drawing on more detailed case studies of specific episodes of contention around the

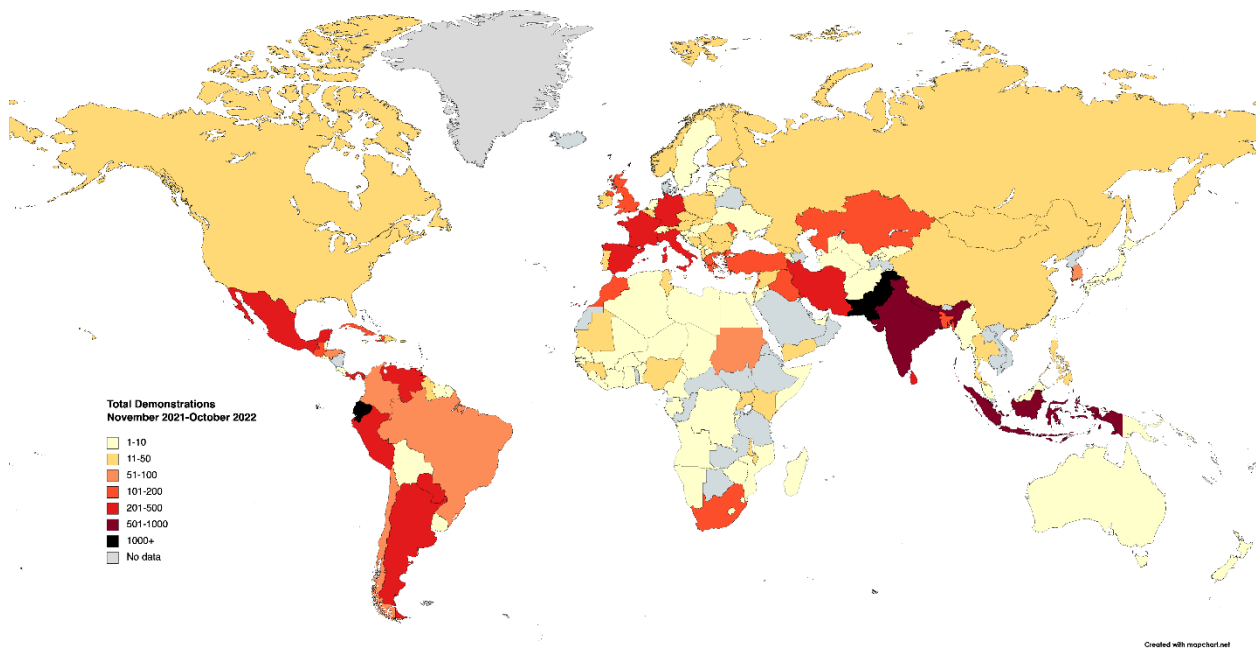
cost of living in 2022, some limited analysis of the responses and interactions between protesters and their state is provided.

Food, energy and cost of living protests in 2022: numbers, locations, protesters and grievances

An unprecedented wave of food and energy protests?

There were over 12,500 protests in the 12 months from November 2021, with numbers of events peaking in March 2022 (after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine) and June 2022, in which month there were over 2,000 protests around the world (see Figure 4). Many of these events are likely to have been small and localised; however, in 30 countries there were at least 100 such events during the year, spread across multiple locations.

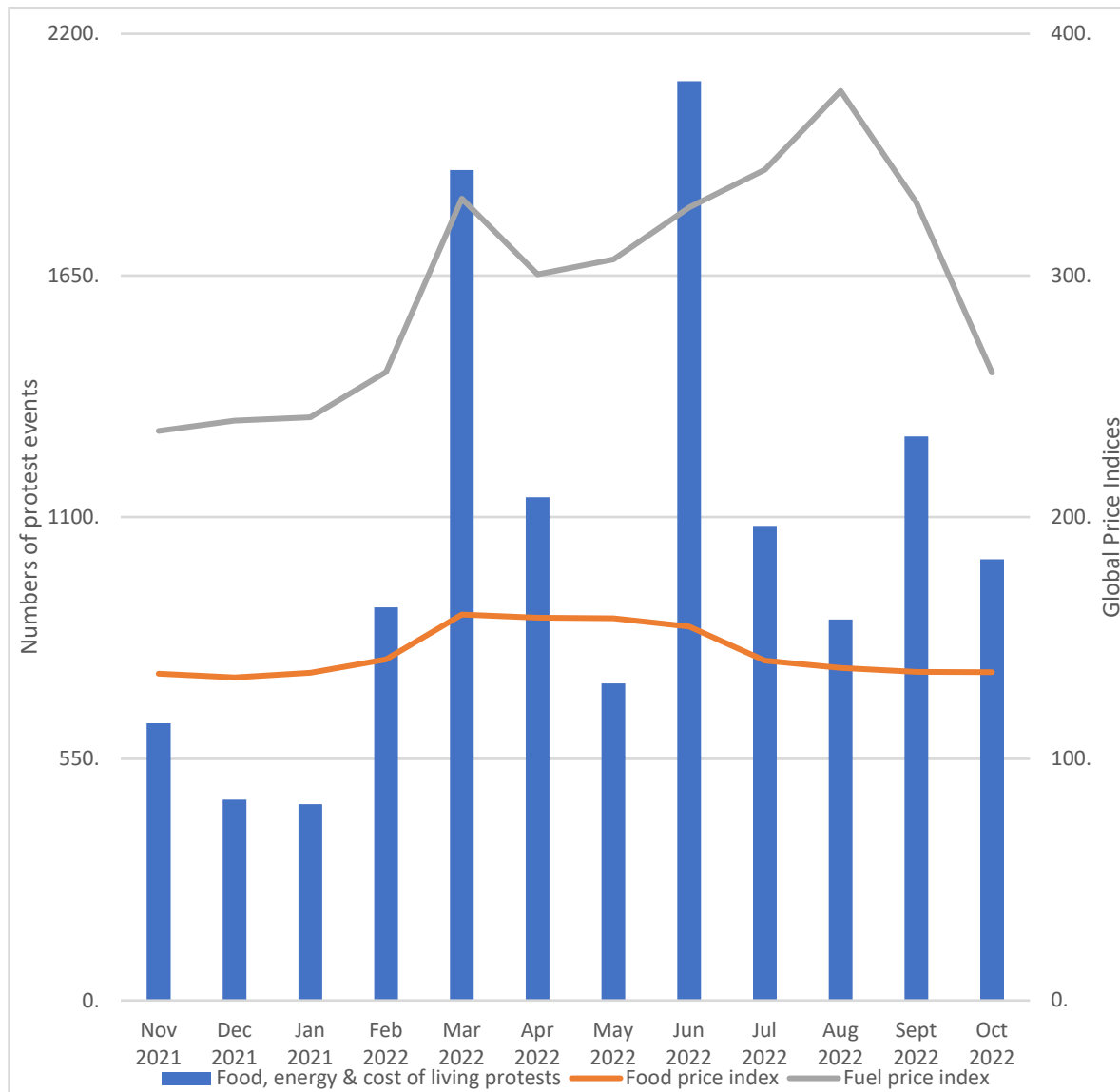
Figure 2 Global distribution of food, energy, & cost of living protests November 2021-October 2022



Source: 2 Authors' analysis of ACLED data; <https://acleddata.com/>

How does this figure of 12,500 compare to other periods of contention in recent history? In scale and spread, the wave can be compared to two waves of recent protests. The first was during the 2008 food and fuel price crisis, when food and energy commodity prices rose to their highest since the 1970s; the protests – or ‘food riots’ as they were generally termed – with which citizens responded to subsidy cuts by governments trying to pay their import bills were mostly concentrated in low-income countries, in particular sub-Saharan Africa (Bush 2010; Patel 2012). A second spike after drought pushed up global wheat prices in 2010-11 was associated with the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, just as anti-austerity/ Occupy protests were kicking off in the global North in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2009 (Berazneva and Lee 2013; Ansani and Daniele 2012; Barnett 2011).

Figure 3 Protest events and food and fuel price indices in 2022



Note: FAO food price index averages indices of meat, dairy, cereals, oils and sugar. 2014-16=100. Fuel (Energy) Index, 2016 = 100, includes Crude oil (petroleum), Natural Gas, Coal Price and Propane.

Source: Food price index: <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>; fuel price index: <https://www.imf.org/en/Research/commodity-prices>. Protest events from authors' analysis of ACLED data.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to make direct comparisons between the numbers and distribution of protests in 2022 and these earlier waves because of differences in data sources and methodologies. However, the best estimates available suggest that the number of events and their geographical spread in 2022 is likely to exceed those during and in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 and 2010-11 food price crises (Ortiz et al. 2022; World Bank 2014). The World Bank has constructed a database from media sources that identified 51 food riots in 37 countries between 2007 and 2014 (World Bank 2014). Ortiz et al have identified 492 protests about low living standards, fuel and energy prices and food prices between 2006 and 2020 (Ortiz et al. 2022). McCulloch et al. have identified 59 fuel price protests in 41 countries between 2007 and 2018 (McCulloch et al. 2022). Each of these sources for earlier periods counts major episodes rather than single events, and so may miss or undercount the smaller events which are included in this 2022 database. However, that at least 30 countries saw at least

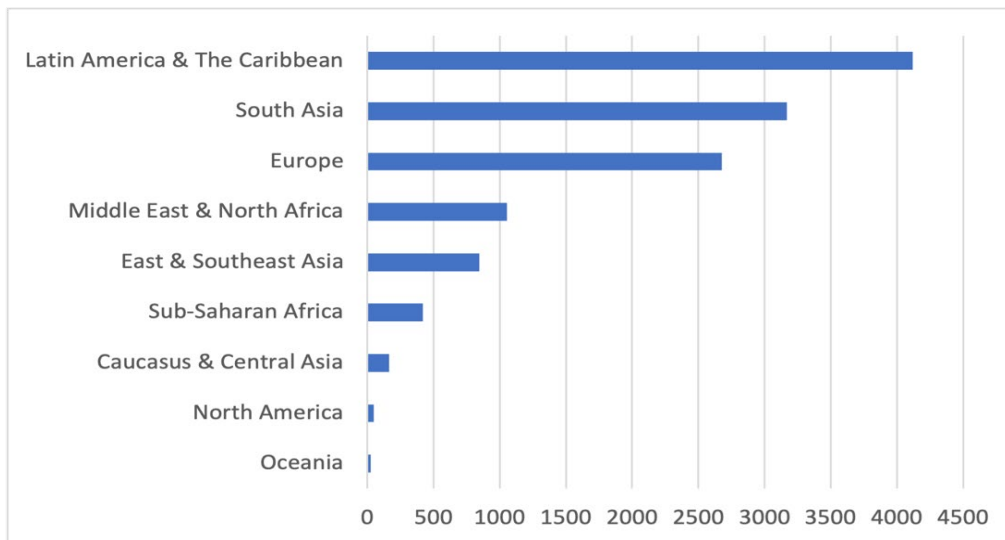
100 protest events during the 12-month period between November 2021 and October 2022 is enough to indicate that 2022 was indeed a highly contentious year for the world.

The 2022 wave also appears to be considerably more heavily focused on energy – fuel for transport, cooking, heating and electricity – than other global waves of food and energy contention. This may reflect the fact that compared to food price indices, energy prices have been climbing faster for much of the previous five years (see Figure 1). Figure 3 shows that protests about energy – fuel, gas, petrol, cooking gas and electricity – price rises and shortages dominated, although broader grievances about the cost of living and inflation also become more common during the year.

Location and distribution of protests

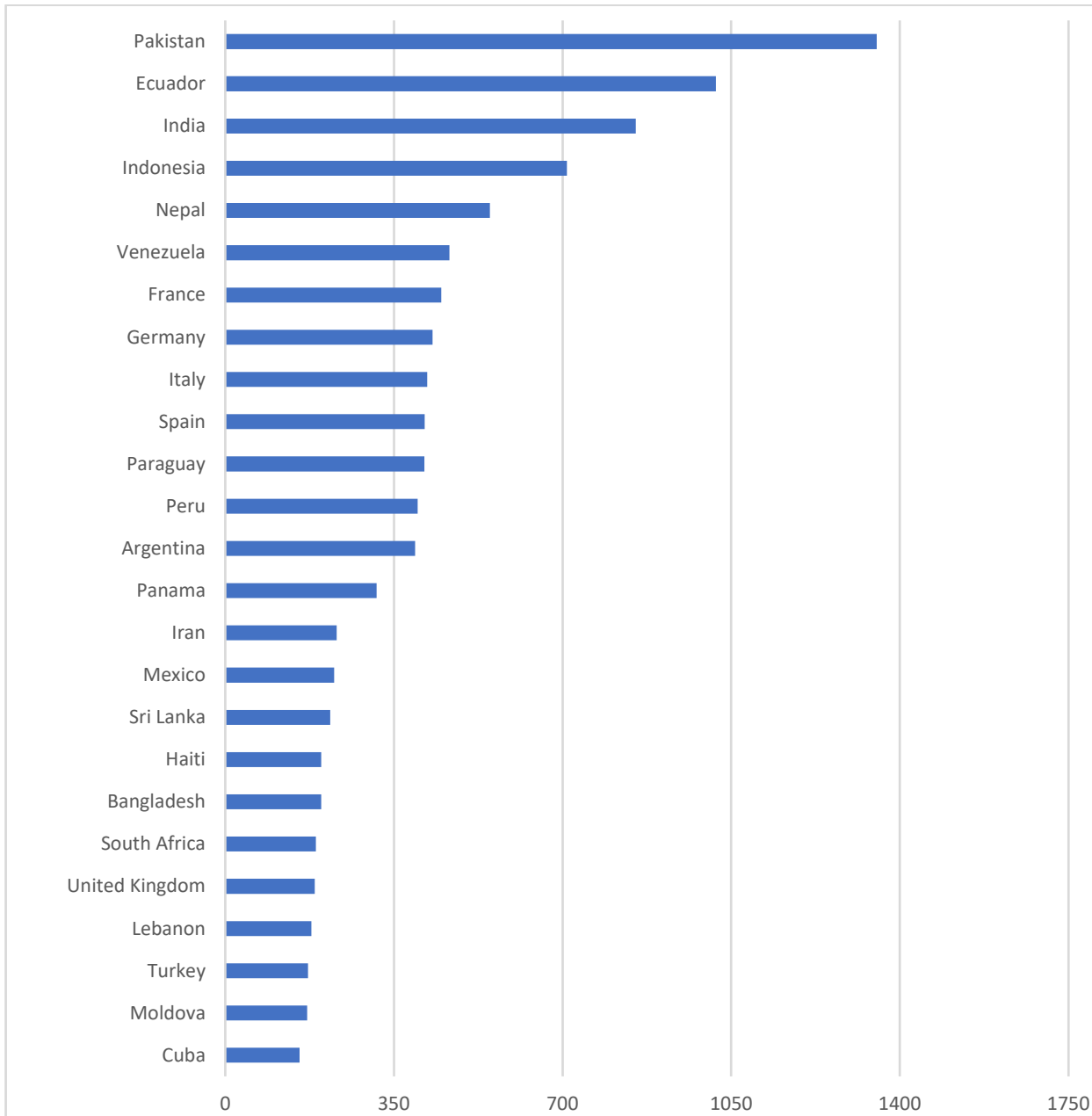
Protests were found across the globe but were concentrated in some regions. Latin America and the Caribbean experienced the highest number of protests, followed by South Asia and Europe. However, the countries that were the location of at least 100 of these events were a diverse set, including rich democracies (France, Italy and Spain), countries tending to authoritarian rule (Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh), fragile, conflict-affected and recently post-conflict settings (Lebanon, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nepal), countries with a history of macroeconomic and debt crisis (Argentina, Pakistan) and countries to date viewed as economically and politically stable (Sri Lanka, in particular). No evident pattern has emerged: protests kicked off in all kinds of countries with all kinds of economies and polities, suggesting that grievances and fears about rising costs of living or shortages of basic goods were, in 2022, a global phenomenon.

Figure 4 Regional distribution of protest events



Source: Authors' analysis of ACLED data

Figure 5 Top 25 countries by numbers of protest events



Source: Authors' analysis of ACLED data

Protestors

Who was protesting? The evidence from the ACLED data and the more detailed case studies suggests that protesters came from across a broad swathe of the population in many countries, and that participation was diverse. ACLED data provides a basic profile of acknowledged or named protest leaders and participants. This indicates that protesters came from across social classes, geographies and age groups; featured political parties and movements from organised labour and the left, as well from the populist and nationalist right and from unaffiliated citizen groups; and brought together a wide range of occupation and social groups.

Across the world, organised labour was the single most important actor in the protests, often in coalition with other groups. At least 4,000 events featured labour groups, while indigenous groups also featured in the

leadership of over 1,000 events. Farmer, fisher and peasant groups were identified in almost 1,000 events, youth and student groups in over 1,200, and taxi drivers, bus drivers, teachers and health workers together featured in over 500 protests. 'Women' were specifically named as leading protests in 241 events, including in some of the world's most patriarchal societies: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sudan, Mauritania and Yemen, and women's wings of political parties and labour organisations allied with other groups in multiple events. Protests often featured multiple different groups in varying combinations. In Pakistan, the country with the single most protests, for instance, some 40 different actors – labour groups, political parties, social movements, women's, farmers' and lawyers' groups among others – protested in more than 50 different combinations over the year.

It is common to hear governments criticising cost of living protests on the grounds that they have been instigated by opposition parties for purely partisan political reasons (see the Sierra Leone case study for an example). However, the ACLED data do not provide strong support for such a view: formal political parties were at the forefront of protests in a minority of countries, and these were concentrated in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, with fewer protests led by political parties in Sri Lanka), as well as Moldova, Spain, Trinidad, Russia and the UK. Even where political parties were not at the front of the contention, many protests included political parties from the left (Communist, workers' parties and progressive fronts of various kinds), while others featured nationalist and right-wing parties. Broad social and democratic movements also took part: Morocco's 'February 20' movement, set up during the Arab uprisings of 2011, featured in 19 of Morocco's 109 protests. Argentina's *Barrios de Pie* social movement, which dates back to the 2001 economic crisis, was prominent in at least 70 of that country's 394 protests.

Grievances

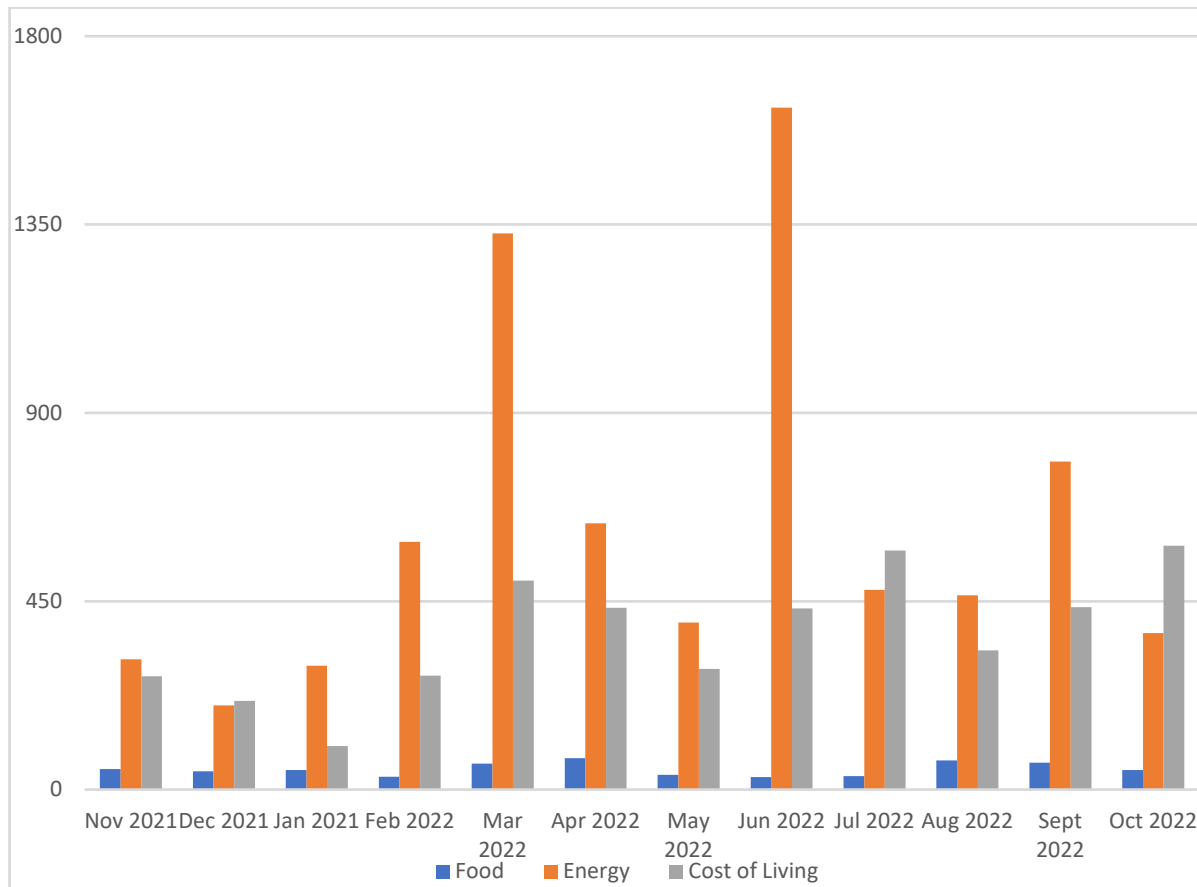
What specifically were people protesting about? Protests were included if they specifically referenced high prices or shortages of food or any type of energy, or 'inflation' or the high cost of living. Within these, there were considerable variations, depending on the nature of domestic food and energy markets, including how and the extent to which global prices were passed through to consumers; on how successfully government policies protected citizens against shocks in those markets; and on citizens' capacities to mobilise collectively to articulate their grievances on these issues.

Government was often explicitly the target or object of protests. Events that clearly took the form of labour strikes or demonstrations by private-sector employees were excluded from the set, although public-sector worker protests were included if they specified grievances about food, energy or the cost of living/inflation. In addition, the set also excluded producer protests about price caps on their products, although farmer and transport worker protests about the costs of energy were included. We also excluded protests about fertiliser, although these were closely linked to both food and fuel prices and shortages. However, 'fertilizer' was also one of the issues being protested in 440 of the events included in the dataset.

This means that grievances in the selected protest events were about a relatively narrow range of issues focused on government failures to ensure provision of basic goods needed for everyday life: to feed families, to get to work or school, to power machinery, transport, light and temperature control. By their nature, these issues affect most people in most countries, and in particular people on low, fixed or precarious incomes (Scott-Villiers et al. 2016). High inflation may also mean loss of spending power in real time, the immediate need to earn higher incomes, a strain on people's ability to plan, save or invest for their futures, and rising social and family stress (Hossain, King, and Kelbert 2013; Hossain and Green 2011). Wages may rise in the medium term (Shiller 1997),

but people are justifiably aggrieved when their purchasing power to meet their basic needs faces a shock, and their governments are not inclined to act to protect them.

Figure 6 Frequency of protests by grievance



Source: Authors' analysis of ACLED data

Food, energy and the rising cost of living

In 2022, complaints about food varied in their specifics, but mostly cohered around the problem of higher prices and their knock-on effects. Steep rises in the prices of staple foods were the most common concerns, but this grievance was articulated in different ways across different settings. South Koreans protested around their 'right to food', while in China the small number of food-related protests (which included some violent riots) related to access to foodstuffs during the strict lockdown regimes of the pandemic. Students protested about the declining quality and inadequacy of food and food vouchers in their educational institutions in India (in several states), Ghana, Colombia, South Africa, Chile, the US (Pennsylvania), Bangladesh, Greece, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Iran, Bolivia, Zimbabwe and in Sudan, where primary school students joined high school students in their protests. In Chile, 'hundreds' of students demonstrated for food subsidies for students in the national budget, calling for action by the new president Gabriel Boric, himself a former student activist and veteran of anti-inequality protests (Euronews 2022).

Public-sector workers campaigning for food allowances featured in several countries, while supplies for soup kitchens were a major theme in Argentina. Of the 20 food-related protests in Pakistan, 16 took place on the same day in January 2022 across Gilgit-Baltistan, part of the Kashmir region administered by Pakistan. Protestors

complained about ‘food shortages and black marketing’. One of the few available reports came from an Indian news source (and thus should be read in the context of the conflict over Kashmir between Pakistan and India)⁷ which reported ‘a massive protest’

... against black marketing and shortage of food supply amid sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfall during winters ... The people of Gilgit-Baltistan are outraged with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in the occupied region as they blame the government for corruption and black-marketing.

Protesters recently blocked the roads in Gilgit city as they are facing a severe shortage of wheat flour. The quota locals said they will continue their agitation all over Gilgit-Baltistan until the wheat is restored and standard wheat and flour is not provided.

The people here have anger against Islamabad for keeping Gilgit-Baltistan backward and underdeveloped. The unavailability of sufficient food and rampant corruption makes the people angry with Islamabad ... Speakers, during the protest, said that the Pakistani state has failed to deliver; even to provide the basic necessities of life to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (ANI 2022).

In Iraq, 18 of the 28 food-related protests included specific demands by teachers, health workers, graduates, oil company employees and unspecified ‘rioters’ to be included under the Emergency Law for Food Security and Development. This provided for an emergency budget to meet urgent food security needs and was passed in June 2022 (Reuters 2022a).

In Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, dozens of women in Kabul protested against rising poverty, demanding women’s political participation and for the international community to release Afghanistan’s frozen assets. They made it very clear that the economic crisis was mainly hurting the most vulnerable:

‘We are witnessing the gradual death of Afghanistan. Poverty forced us to gather here. The price of materials is spiking and the government is unable to control the prices,’ said Marjana Amiri, a protester.

Women protesters also released a statement about the world’s silence toward Afghan women’s rights and called on the international community to not abandon Afghans, particularly women.

‘Our children are dying from starvation. Our families are struggling to find bread for their children. International community: Please hear our voice—don’t abandon Afghanistan and its people,’ said Atifa, a protester (Feminist Newswire 2021).

As with food, the (far larger number of) energy protests predominantly referenced rising costs, with over 5,400 of the 6,900 energy protests specifically mentioning either price, costs, bills, tariffs or fares. Shortages of various kinds were also common with respect to electricity, with outages, blackouts, ‘loadshedding’, and power cuts were specifically mentioned in 655 events, and fuel shortages a grievance in another 270 events. ‘Fuel’ and petrol/petroleum together comprised the single greatest category of energy about which people protested, counting for more than 4,200 events. Gas (more than 1600 protests), electricity (more than 1400), oil (650) and diesel (160) and cooking gas more than 100 events) were also important categories of grievance. A particularly

⁷ It is common to find that ‘food riots’ are reported in neighbouring – rival or enemy – countries, but not in their own. In this instance, the Indian news agency ANI was one of few to report this large episode. This coverage should be read in the context of the conflict over Kashmir between Pakistan and India, but in this instance was reposted by a Pakistani news website.

striking set of energy protests related to the installation or upgrading of electricity meters, which protesters actively resisted in locations in India, South Africa, Ghana, Turkey, and Nigeria on grounds that it would lead to unaffordable bills.

Protests categorised as ‘cost of living protests’ included broader complaints that also included new taxes or tax rises at a time when people were already struggling. These protests featured demands for taxes to be cut or new taxes withdrawn in over 340 events in countries as varied as Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, India and Malawi. Peru experienced the longest and most significant episode of tax-related cost of living protests, when heavy goods transporters struck across the country over several days. India’s opposition party the Indian National Congress also protested against the goods and services tax in multiple events.

Corruption, collusion and unaccountable elites

The short description of the event in the ACLED database provided only basic details about protesters’ grievances, but when examined more closely, many protests about food, energy or the cost of living revealed underlying political concerns that were linked to the cost of living crisis. More analysis is needed to understand the scope of these concerns, but two clusters of concerns emerged from instances around the world. The first had to do with complaints about corruption, lack of accountability and the detachment of political elites from the concerns of the people. Some of these were very broad complaints linking higher prices and shortages to collusion between economic and political elites to obtain unlawful excess profits. For over 455 of the protest events, ‘corruption’ was mentioned as a headline grievance in the short event description (which was usually no more than a single sentence) provided in ACLED. Newspaper articles provided more detail about what ‘corruption’ meant in this context. For instance, in Albania, protesters were against ‘high taxes [on energy], corruption, and the capture of the state by “oligarchs”’:

Those protesting in Tirana on [13 March 2022] were clear that they believe the government is stealing from them and allowing ‘oligarchs’ to manipulate prices. They pointed to many corruption scandals involving public-private partnerships and hundreds of millions of taxpayers’ euros that have disappeared.

Citizens have also been clear that they support Ukraine, but that as a poor nation, they should not have to shoulder the economic burden. They pointed to increasing energy costs, high fuel prices, and increases in the price of basic food items such as wheat, meat, and fruit and vegetables.

Sunday’s crowd marched from Tirana’s central square to the prime minister’s office, chanting ‘criminal government’, ‘down with the dictator’, and accusing them of being in cahoots with an elite of wealthy business owners.

Others shouted, ‘if prices do not fall, the government will fall’ and accused the government of being ‘millionaires with villas and cars’ (Taylor 2022).

In the ACLED data, 33 event descriptions specifically mentioned ‘speculation’, ‘profiteering’ or undue profits being earned by energy companies as motivations for protests. Corruption, collusion, speculation and profiteering are common criticisms levelled at governments during periods of rapid price rises, reflecting perceptions that the causes of a cost of living crisis, or of a government’s inability to tackle it, owe to the fact that powerful elites are benefiting from the crisis (Hossain and Kalita 2014; Hossain and Green 2011). Often this perceived corruption includes protection or impunity of business interests engaged in speculation, hoarding or excess profit-making, understood to be either unlawful or immoral at a time when the majority of the population

are struggling to meet their basic needs. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in the wake of the post-pandemic supply chain crunch meant that the causes of price rises in 2022 are widely understood to be exogenous. Yet in several countries, companies have been criticised or otherwise held responsible for the crisis by politicians on the grounds that they have obtained excess profits; this was presumably intended to reassign blame for the crisis, or to restrain further price rises. In June 2022, under intense pressure over the price of fuel, the US president demanded that oil companies explain why they were ‘padding profits’ rather than processing more fuel to bring prices down (Hunnicuttt and Renshaw 2022). In the UK, calls for action to protect citizens against high prices took the form of demands for windfall taxes on unusually high profits by energy companies (*ITV News* 2022). In Bangladesh, the government charged seven corporations with ‘destabilising the market by abnormally raising prices of essential commodities with the intention to profiteer’ as food and other essential prices continued to rise (bdnews24.com 2022).

Governments that failed to act were accused of being unaccountable or detached from the concerns of ordinary people, or as the Albanian protests viewed it, as ‘in cahoots with a wealthy elite’. In Indonesia, when the government raised fuel prices for the first time in eight years, protesters saw their protests as a means of making the government listen to them:

‘In a week if there is no response, if the government still doesn’t care and is still deaf and blind toward the people’s suffering, the students all over Indonesia are ready to protest in much bigger numbers,’ Muhammad Yuza Augusti, a student at Bogor Agriculture Institute, yelled into a microphone on a rainy Thursday...

...

‘The fuel price hike proves that the government doesn’t care about the people, it only cares about the national strategic projects,’ said Supriadi, a protester from State Polytechnic of Jakarta (Muhtadi and Lau 2022).

The idea that protests are a way of forcing governments to listen to citizens’ concerns about the cost of living is echoed in more in-depth research into food and energy protests (Hossain and Scott-Villiers 2017; Hossain et al. 2021). As one Kenyan government official put it when explaining the motivations to act on high food prices, ‘we would quickly come up with something if Kibera was burning’ (Musembi and Scott-Villiers 2017, 149).

While domestic politics and the failures of governing elites to address the cost of living crisis dominated the political grievances underlying protests, geopolitics also featured in several episodes. In Argentina, the repudiation of the country’s debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was a specific target of the protests. As the case study of Ecuador’s protest episode in 2022 (below) shows, threatened fuel subsidy cuts in line with the proposed IMF package were also key grievances there.

Rising costs of living have been linked to the upsurge in popularity of populist parties across Europe; for some observers, energy had become a geopolitical tool of great power. Across Europe, governments were struggling to address the impact of rising gas prices, the result of the gas supply crisis since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on their citizens. One European Union official told Politico that

‘The current energy crisis is making all political leaders nervous because they fear the political consequences.’

In the same article, a Baltic diplomat predicted:

‘This might be the third wave of populism in recent times,’ he said, citing the financial crisis of 2008 and the migration crisis around 2014 as the two prior waves. ‘This time could be the worst and have unpredictable consequences. We also believe that this is what Putin is pushing for.’ (Lynch and Barigazzi 2022).

Since that prediction, both Sweden and Italy have elected far-right governments. Some political parties on the right opportunistically folded their partisan agendas into broader public concerns about inflation. For instance, the monarchist, Hindu-nationalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party in Nepal reportedly staged protests that combined demands to curb inflation with control of corruption, abolishing federalism, restoring the monarchy and establishing Hinduism as the religion of Nepal.

However, the predominance of labour and other progressive social movements among protest organisers and participants suggests that the political effects of the cost of living crisis do not necessarily trend rightward. There are also signs that the cost of living crisis has been pushing voters towards leftist governments: Colombia’s recent election of a leftist leader has been described as the advent of a ‘new pink tide’ for Latin America (Woodford, Vargas, and Araujo 2022). The leftwing Irish nationalist party Sinn Féin won a ‘historic’ victory in the 2022 elections in Northern Ireland, while the Australian centre-left Labor Party defeated the centre-right Liberals. In both races, the cost of living crisis was a key concern for voters (Corcoran 2022; Mercer 2022).

Responses and interactions

The methodology for selecting events means that some types of events, including when contention has escalated beyond grievances about the cost of living and into complaints about corruption and political failure, are excluded from the present analysis. This selection criterion is necessary to ensure that similar types of events are included and compared, and to avoid including broader insurrections and revolutionary episodes in a sample of food, energy and cost of living protests. The events analysed here are in some instances the precursors to these broader insurrections and revolutionary episodes; Sri Lanka is probably the best instance of this in 2022. This means that some of the larger episodes of protest in which the cost of living was at least one grievance, are not included here. The analysis here gives a snapshot of the responses by public authorities to events which were focused specifically on the cost of living, mostly energy prices and shortages, and not to the often repressive response to broader uprisings.

ACLED data provides us with some data about the nature of the responses by the state and by counter-protesters or allies of the state, which enables us to assess the overall nature of these protests. The vast majority of the protests were classified by ACLED as protests rather than riots, signalling that they are:

a public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. Events include individuals and groups who peacefully demonstrate against a political entity, government institution, policy, group, tradition, businesses or other private institutions.⁸

From Table 1, only 8 per cent of all of these events were classified by ACLED as ‘riots’ or:

⁸ From the ACLED Codebook 2022, pp. 13; <https://acleddata.com/resources/>

violent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts, including but not limited to rock throwing, property destruction, etc. They may target other individuals, property, businesses, other rioting groups or armed actors⁹

Table 1 Interactions between protesters, the security forces, and counter-protesters

Type of interaction	Number of events	% of events
'Riots'	1030	8
'Protests'	11,491	92
Peaceful protests (without violent suppression by police or military)	11,146	89
Demonstration suppressed by police or military	630	5
Demonstration in which protesters or counter-protesters (or both) act with violence	602	5
Violent demonstration in which civilians are injured/killed	135	1

Note: a small number of unclassifiable interactions were excluded. Source: Authors' analysis of ACLED data

While a majority of the events analysed did not feature contestation by competing sides, roughly 7 per cent involved some sort of interaction. As noted in the table above, the police or military were deployed in 5 per cent of events, a substantial number at 630. Typically, state force was used during sustained protest episodes, especially when protests turned into riots. The evidence suggests that peaceful protests sometimes turned into riots when they faced either counter-protests aligned with the government in power (602 events) or violence from the state.

Police or military were deployed during 309 of the 1,030 riot events analysed. Many of these deployments occurred in clusters, when sustained protests challenged the state. For example, during Indonesia's sustained fuel protests over President Joko Widodo's decision to cut energy subsidies, police forces engaged with rioters 20 times in a three-week period. Haitian police forces engaged with rioters 40 times between late August and mid-October. Rioters, decrying persistent insecurity, denouncing rising costs, and demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, threw stones at police while also vandalising and looting stores. In response, the police frequently used tear gas to disperse crowds and, in one instance, reportedly shot and injured several civilians (ACLED ID 9559905).

In other cases, police were deemed inadequate, resulting in military deployment. While used less frequently than the police, military forces interacted with rioters in Ecuador, Iran, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mauritania and France. The Ecuadorian military was deployed the most frequently of all the cases analysed, engaging with rioters 13 times in June 2022. In one instance, a military convoy carrying fuel was attacked by rioters, resulting in the death of a soldier.

Tear gas use was the most common tactic used by police and military to disperse crowds, with the term appearing frequently in the ACLED data. However, state forces also used lethal force, as in the aforementioned Haitian case. One of the deadliest episodes occurred when Sierra Leonian state police opening fire on protesters

⁹ From the ACLED Codebook 2022, pp. 14; <https://acleddata.com/resources/>

and rioters, resulting in a reported 21 deaths (the final figures vary). Protesting the cost of living was dangerous in 2022: in 135 events, civilians were injured or killed, with the ACLED data recording 105 fatalities as a result of these protests.

It is beyond the scope of the present report to analyse the impacts of these protests overall, and the ACLED data provide snapshots which, alone, do not support such analysis. Of the 12,500 protests overall, as Table 1 shows, the vast majority were peaceful events, which may have achieved little more than alerting the authorities to the extent and causes of broad public discontent. As will be discussed in the concluding section, this broader expression of public discontent is likely to have had a range of different political consequences, which evidently merit closer analysis.

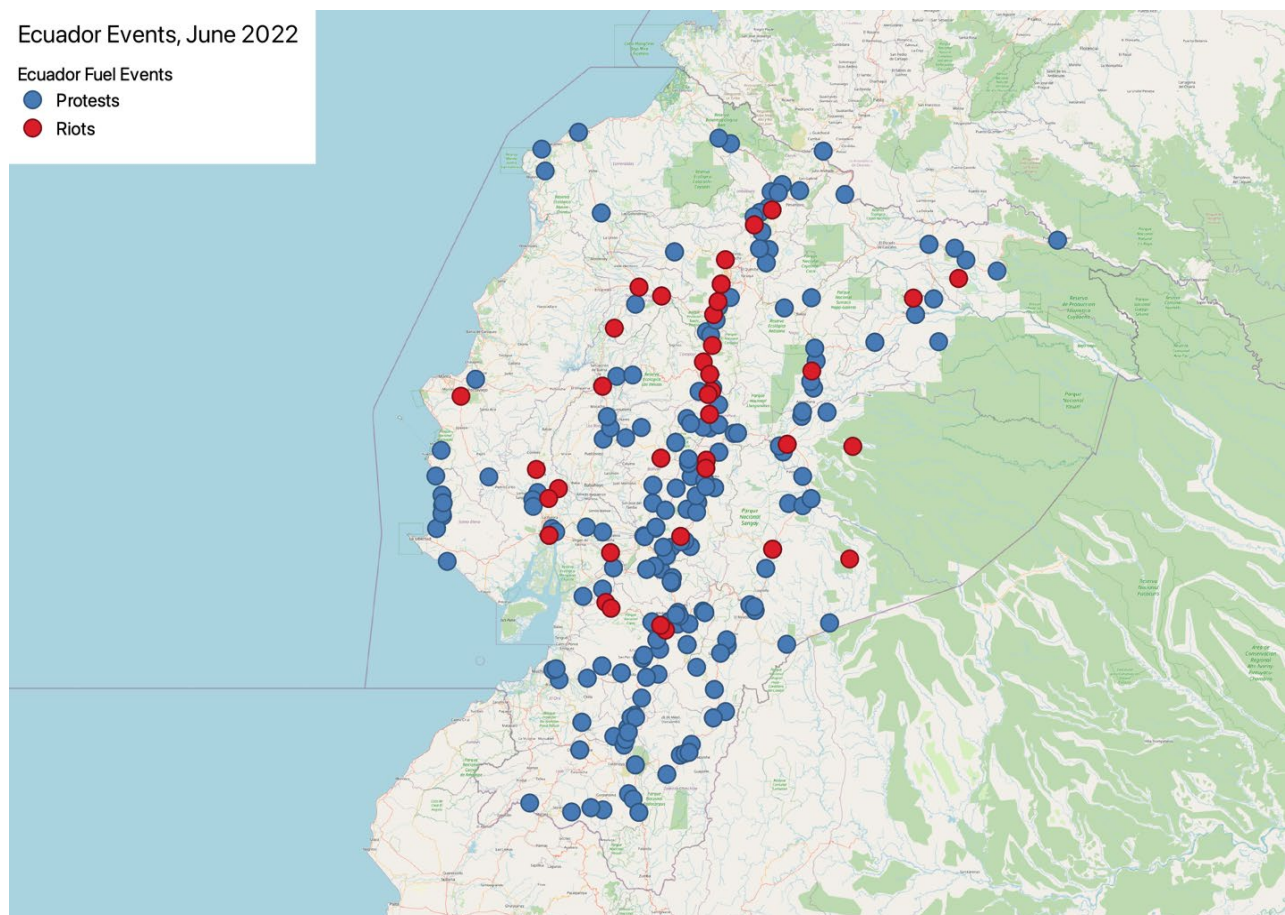
Selected episodes of food, energy & cost of living protests

Ecuador

Overview of the episode

Nationwide fuel protests engulfed Ecuador in June 2022. Over 18 days, there were more than 1,000 protests across the country, with roughly 10 per cent of the protests and riots occurring in the Pichincha Province where the capital city of Quito is located (ACLED). For the second time in three years, following a similar episode in 2019 (Kimberley Brown 2019), citizen discontent with the cost of fuel turned violent; the June 2022 protests and riots resulted in six deaths, hundreds of arrests, and an estimated USD 1 billion in lost revenue (AFP 2022). While the total number of participants is difficult to discern, reports indicate that thousands of people came out to denounce the government's economic management amid inflation and increasing costs of living.

Figure 7 Ecuador events



Protestors and grievances

Protestors principally denounced high fuel costs, inequality and the disproportionate social and economic hardships faced by indigenous and rural populations (Kimberly Brown and Schmidt 2022). The powerful political group Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (*Integrantes de la Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*, CONAIE) listed ten demands for conservative president Guillermo Lasso's administration

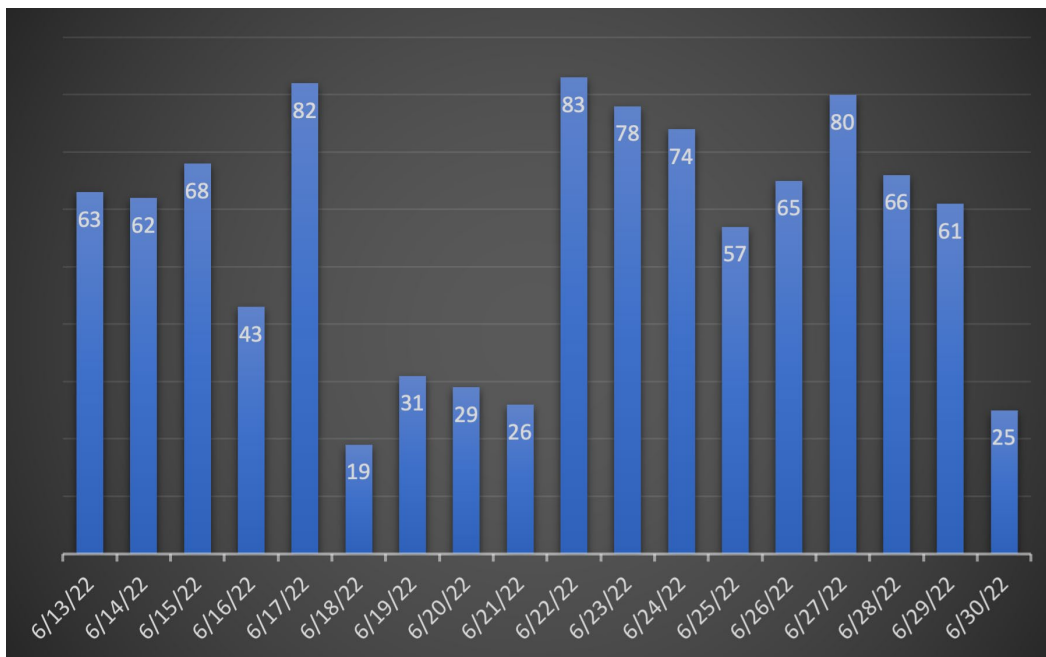
to meet to stop the protests, including freezing diesel prices at \$1.50 per gallon and gasoline at \$2.10 per gallon¹⁰, a moratorium on debt repayment, fair prices on agricultural products and state cessation of extractive mining developments in certain locations (CONAIE 2022).

Fuel subsidy cuts have been a core point of contestation between protesters and Ecuador's past two administrations. Fuel subsidies amount to more than \$1 billion in annual government spending (Long 2019) and IMF loan conditionality has required cost-cutting measures to balance the state's budget to unlock additional funding (Martinez and Brown 2021). Violent protests in October 2019 followed former president Lenín Moreno's announcement that he would end fuel subsidies to comply with the terms of an IMF loan (Long 2019). Moreno eventually decided not to immediately repeal the subsidy, instead signing a decree initiating gradual price hikes starting in May 2020.

After renegotiating certain aspects of the IMF loan in October 2021, President Lasso immediately faced public pressure to again freeze fuel prices and stop Moreno's gradual price rises. Lasso capitulated and set the diesel price at \$1.90 per gallon and gasoline at \$2.55 per gallon (Valencia 2021a). Even as Lasso froze prices, some protests persisted into late October 2021 (Valencia 2021b). After seven months with only two fuel-related protests, people again took to the streets across the country to demand an even lower price freeze on fuel in June 2022.

CONAIE initiated a coordinated national shutdown on 13 June 2022, blocking 20 highways in 11 of the country's 24 provinces (El Comercio 2022). Along with disrupting trade and transport routes across the country, protesters occupied portions of Quito and eventually took over the small city of Puyo by force (Cabrera and Janetsky 2022). Security forces arrested CONAIE leader Leonidas Iza on 14 June but released him less than 24 hours later. Before Iza's release, on 15 June, police and protesters fought outside the military base where the leader was detained (Al Jazeera 2022). The clash was a harbinger of further violent struggles.

Figure 8 Numbers of fuel protests in Ecuador, June 2022



¹⁰ Ecuador is dollarised, meaning that it uses the United States dollar as its official currency.

Of the more than 1,000 individual fuel protest events during June 2022, 83 were classified as riots. A total of 37 of the riots included the involvement of at least one of Ecuador's police or military forces (ACLED). Aside from 24 June, there was at least one riot per day between 13 June and when the protests ended on 30 June. During the 18 days of unrest, six people died as a consequence of the protests. CONAIE stated five civilians died during the protests, while one Ecuadorian soldier was killed during a convoy attack while delivering fuel (Valencia 2022; Brito 2022). According to police data from 28 June 2022, 238 police officers and 106 soldiers were injured during the protests. The Alliance of Organizations for Human Rights (*Alianza de Organizaciones por los Derechos Humanos*) reported 335 protesters were injured during that same period (Rosero 2022).

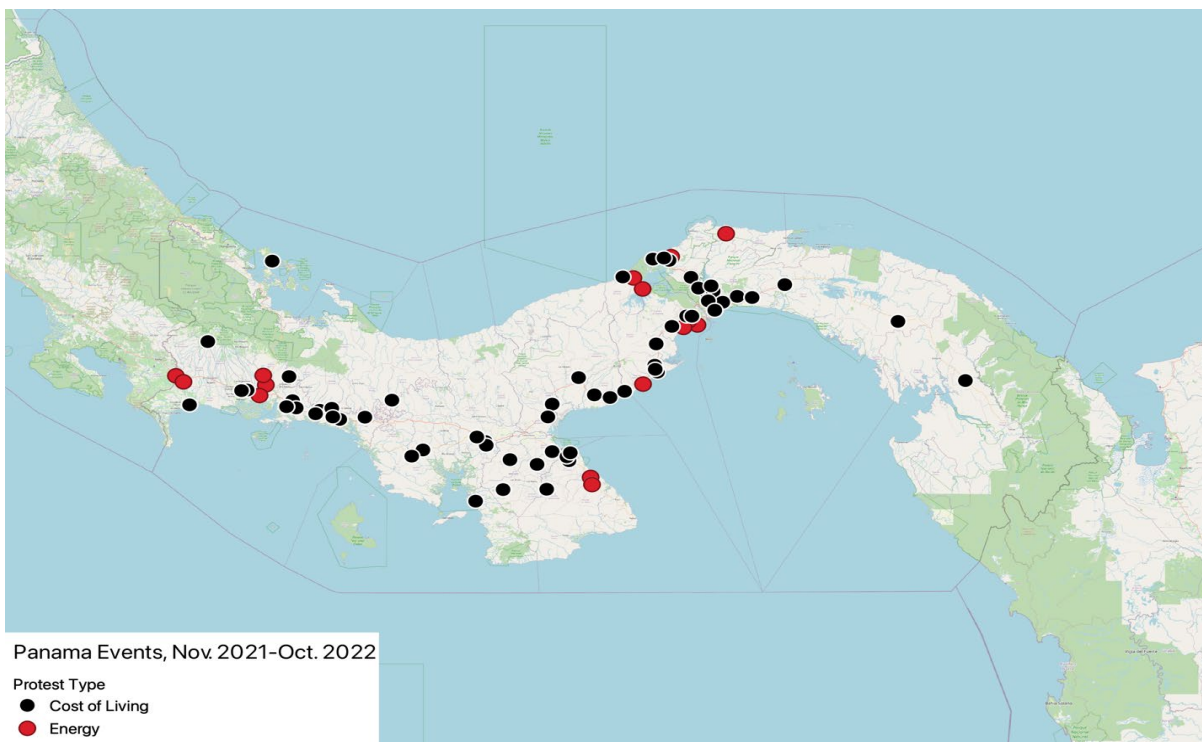
President Lasso and CONAIE struck a deal on 30 June. After an initial 10-cent per gallon price reduction did not stop the protests, the two sides agreed on a 15-cent per gallon total reduction on both the price of diesel and gasoline. The two sides also came to an agreement on other demands, including the prohibition of extractive mining projects in specific areas deemed important to indigenous and rural communities (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador 2022). On 26 September 2022, an Ecuadorian judge declared the case against Iza null as CONIAE claimed the decision was due to their leader's illegal detention during the protests (Ortíz 2022; Deutsche Welle 2022).

Panama

Overview of events

During the summer of 2022, Panamanians took to the streets in what amounted to the biggest act of civic dissent since the fall of dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega in 1989 (Guevara 2022). The countrywide, coalitional protests led by a collection of teachers unions starting in July grabbed international headlines, but simmering discontent with rising fuel costs began in early April.

Figure 9 Panama Events



Protestors and grievances

Gas prices increased 47 per cent between January and June in Panama, hitting \$5.17 per gallon. Between April and June 2022, Panama experienced a combined 69 protests denouncing the rising cost of fuel as well as inflation. Among the fuel-specific protests in this period, ACLED coded 30 as organized and led by taxi and bus drivers who often used their vehicles to block roads, ‘demanding a freeze in fuel prices or a revision of transport rates’ (ACLED ID 9103885). During this period there were also six protests organized by fishermen denouncing rising fuel prices, similarly using their vehicles to block highways. The remaining protests were led by a mix of labor unions, including the influential National Union of Workers of Construction and Similar Industries (SUNTRACS) and the National Panamanian Association of Teachers (UNEP).

Panama’s summer of protest matured into full force in July. A collection of teachers unions organised their members to lead a national suspension of classes, primarily demanding a freeze on the price of gas and improvements to the national education system. Reporting indicates the collection of unions represented 6,000 teachers halting their classes across the country (Paz 2022). Teachers were soon joined by other unions, including SUNTRACS, forming a broad coalition that attracted ordinary citizens to help denounce the rising cost of living. Luis Arturo Sánchez, Secretary General of a teachers union from Panama’s Veraguas province, said, ‘People are in the streets because they are tired of all the blows to their wallets’ (García Armuelles 2022).

Policy and political outcomes

The government took a series of steps to combat price spikes, notably freezing petrol prices at \$3.95 per gallon on July 12 and further down to \$3.25 per gallon on July 18 (Buschschlüter 2022; Ministerio de La Presidencia 2022; Guevara 2022). Along with fuel price freezes, the government tried to address concerns related to food costs by regulating the price of 72 food items (Reuters 2022c). Disputing these measures implemented by President Laurentino Cortizo, protesters demanded a further petrol price freeze down to \$3 per gallon.

The Cortizo government attempted to use the dual crises of COVID19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine to explain increasing commodity costs. Panamanians largely rejected these appeals, instead claiming the country’s economic woes were tied to elite indifference and corruption. Citizens point to a structurally unequal system, where the government wastes on resources on unique quirks such as ‘botellas’, which are ‘public employees who collect checks without official roles’ (Guevara 2022). The gap between elite comfort and citizens’ struggles was put on full display in early July when a video of members of Cortizo’s Partido Revolucionario Democrático drinking \$340 bottles of whisky went viral (Bustamante 2022). As one protestor said, ‘Our government is very corrupt and shamelessly mocks the people’ (Harkins 2022).

SUNTRACS and other labour groups protested several times in August demanding that the government compel petrol stations to comply with the fuel price reduction. However, anti-government demonstrations largely abated with the end of summer. The Cortizo government remained in power and the full impact of the protests on Panama’s political landscape remains to be seen until the 2024 general elections.

Sierra Leone

Overview of the events

A small number of cost of living protests was recorded for Sierra Leone, and it is likely that some events went unreported at the time they occurred. Two brief episodes in 2022 that were triggered by the rising cost of living were significant, chiefly because of the heavy-handed and extremely violent state response. The first was a protest by hundreds of women in the capital, Freetown, who marched through the streets on 'Black Monday', 4 July, dressed in black, carrying signs and decrying government failure to act on the rising cost of living. Shops and businesses closed in support of the protest. Two political leaders (including the only woman political leader in Sierra Leone, Femi Claudius Cole of the Unity Party) had been arrested earlier for having called for protests on social media. Dozens of women protesters were arrested during the protests and were reported to have been beaten and sexually assaulted by the police.¹¹

Just over a month later, following a two-day national strike, larger protests reportedly of 'hundreds' of people erupted in Freetown as well as in Kamakwie and Makeni in the north, areas where the current opposition party has its support base. The security forces used live ammunition to fire into the crowds, while protesters threw rocks, burned tyres and beat police. As many as 21 protesters were reported to have been killed, as well as six police officers, in the violence, while hundreds were arrested. The government set a curfew and shut down the internet. President Julius Maada Bio, whose resignation protesters were demanding, declared protesters to be 'terrorists' and stated that they were from the political opposition, while other government ministers declared it an attempted coup against the government.¹²

Protestors and grievances

Women, notably women of middle age and older, apparently market stallholders, spearheaded the protests in July, and were again prominent in the protests that followed in August. There were reportedly hundreds of protesters in July, and while the cost of living and of food and energy and transport prices were the core grievances, these were closely linked to failures of governance. One woman protesting in August explained to Al Jazeera reporters:

'One, we do not have freedom of speech, and two, there's no respect for us, the women¹³, and our economy is down, down, down, and the cost of living are very high. Because of it we're suffering, we're suffering.' (Al Jazeera English 2022a, sc. 1:26 onwards).

The August protests saw a broader range of citizens involved, and videos of the protests showed younger people, both men and women, mostly apparently groups facing poverty and precarity, take to the streets. The reasons for their anger and frustration were clear and pressing, centred on the high and rising costs of food and energy, particularly transport fuel.

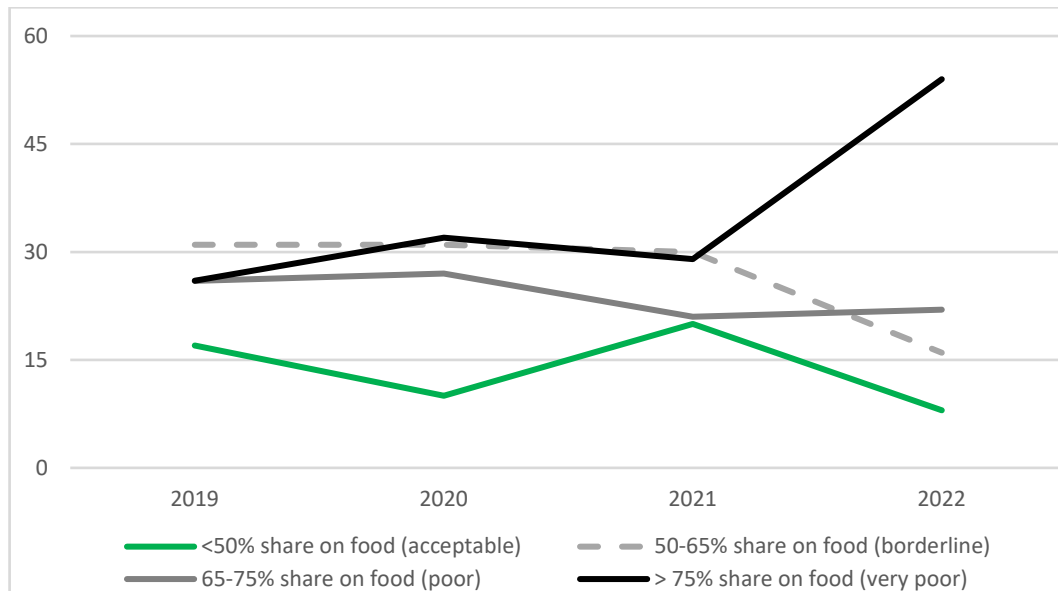
¹¹ See (Thomas 2022; CIVICUS 2022; Kanu 2022). For video of the protests, see (Wi Yard 2022).

¹² See (Fofana and Inveen 2022; Douglas 2022; Akinwotu 2022; Peltier and Barry 2022; BBC News Africa 2022). For video of these events, see (The Associated Press 2022; CNN 2022; Al Jazeera English 2022b)sxs0078

¹³ This may be a reference to police beatings and sexual assault reported by women protesters in response to the July protests (CIVICUS 2022).

Hunger is a major and rising concern in Sierra Leone. The 2022 Global Food Crisis Report found that almost a quarter of its 8.4 million people were in food crisis,¹⁴ 90,000 needed emergency attention, and a further 35 per cent of the population, almost three million people, were ‘stressed’ (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2022). Sierra Leone is highly dependent on imports, and therefore also highly vulnerable to volatile global food and energy prices (IMF 2022). Food consumed half of the expenditure for a majority of the population in 2022 (see (Government of Sierra Leone 2022) and Figure 12).

Figure 10 Share of food in household expenditure in Sierra Leone



Source: 3 Data from Government of Sierra Leone/ WFP Food Security Monitoring System Report; pp. 13-14

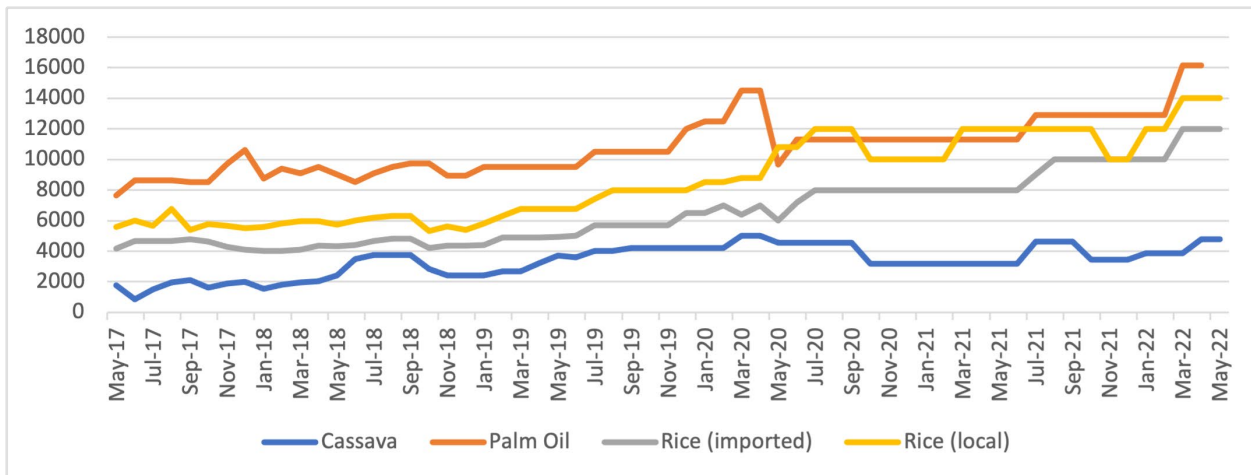
Higher prices of food are leading to people cutting back on already meagre meals and other adverse forms of coping. As a second woman protestor told Al Jazeera cameras:

‘The profit we’re supposed to have is just not there anymore. Our husbands are not working, we are the ones paying the rent and taking care of home. We have three to four children to feed, and even that is something we cannot afford. 36 cents used to be enough to buy lunch for our children, even if we have double that now, it is no longer enough. That’s exactly why we are asking government to reduce the prices on all commodities. Because the high cost of living here is making us suffer too much’ (Al Jazeera English 2022a, sec. 1:39).

Figure 11 shows the steep rise in the price of basic foods in Freetown in the months before the protests occurred.

¹⁴ Defined as either having food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or being marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies, either of which imply: ‘URGENT ACTION required to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps (FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises 2022).

Figure 11 Sierra Leone food prices, 2017-2022



Source: 4 Food Price Monitoring and Analysis, FAO; <https://fpma.fao.org/qIEWS/fpmat4/#/dashboard/tool/domestic>; accessed 5th September 2022

Note: 4 Prices are per kg in Sierra Leonean Leone (old denomination), and from Freetown.

Fuel prices had reportedly doubled in the past year, and people also expected that food prices would increase further with rising energy costs.

Political and policy response

There was limited coverage of the 4 July protests, and the beatings and sexual assaults by police reported by protesters were not widely reported internationally. Police had not granted permission for either the July or the August protests, which were thus deemed 'illegal'. The 10 August protests were met with a large-scale response from the government, which had prepared for military back-up for the police in anticipation of large-scale protests. The police were filmed using apparently live ammunition on protesters, who in turn threw stones and beat police. No final or authoritative figures have been provided, but reports estimated that at least 27 people, including six or eight police officers, were killed and dozens were injured. The government imposed a nationwide curfew, arrested over a hundred protesters, and shut down the internet.¹⁵ In the week after the August 10 riots,

'police and army convoys patrolled the busy commercial streets in the districts of Rokupa, Makeni and Kamakwie where Freetown's protests took place. A tense calm settled, with ordinary life gradually returning' (Akinwotu 2022).

The government claimed the protests were orchestrated by diaspora Sierra Leoneans to unseat the democratically elected government. Protestors chanted and held up signs declaring 'Bio [Sierra Leonean president Julius Maada Bio] must go', and protests combined grievances about the cost of living with criticism of the government in power. National security coordinator Abdulai Caulker reportedly said the military deployment against the protesters was in response to

¹⁵ (Al Jazeera 2022a; Deutsche Welle 2022; Fofana and Inveen 2022; Douglas 2022; CNN 2022).

‘the potentially volatile situation in the country caused by repeated social media incitements of the gullible population to embark on countrywide violent demonstrations with the aim of subverting the peace and stability of the state’ (Douglas 2022).

The foreign minister David Francis described the protests as a ‘premeditated, well-financed, organized, violent terrorist insurrection’ (Douglas 2022). However, there were clear signs that the protests were leaderless, and that they reflected widespread public sentiment. Headline inflation had risen to 28 per cent by mid-2022, and doctors and teachers had also been striking for better pay and conditions, including fuel allowances, earlier in the year. A civil society leader, Marcella Samba-Sesay of the Campaign for Good Governance, explained the protests as a failure of the government to communicate its message to the people:

‘There is an information gap in the country where the government’s message doesn’t reach many people. They have not effectively communicated to people why things are getting bad and that is making people angrier ... People are really suffering, and feel the government is not responding or allowing them to have a voice. We need people to be able to channel grievances through legitimate means’ (Akinwotu 2022).

The Sierra Leone protests of July and August were not repeated, presumably because aggrieved citizens were aware that they could be gunned down in large numbers by their state, apparently without consequence. It is notable that civil society groups and the media were not notably sympathetic to or supportive of the protests, citing the relatively recent and bloody civil conflict as a reason for citizens to avoid violent contention. Yet the statistics clearly indicate that a great many Sierra Leoneans had very strong motivations for demonstrating their discontent. Also remarkable is the limited interest paid by the international community to the state-sponsored killings of protesters; there has been barely a mention of them by the international press, civil society or human rights groups since the events of July and August 2022.

Lebanon

Overview of the events

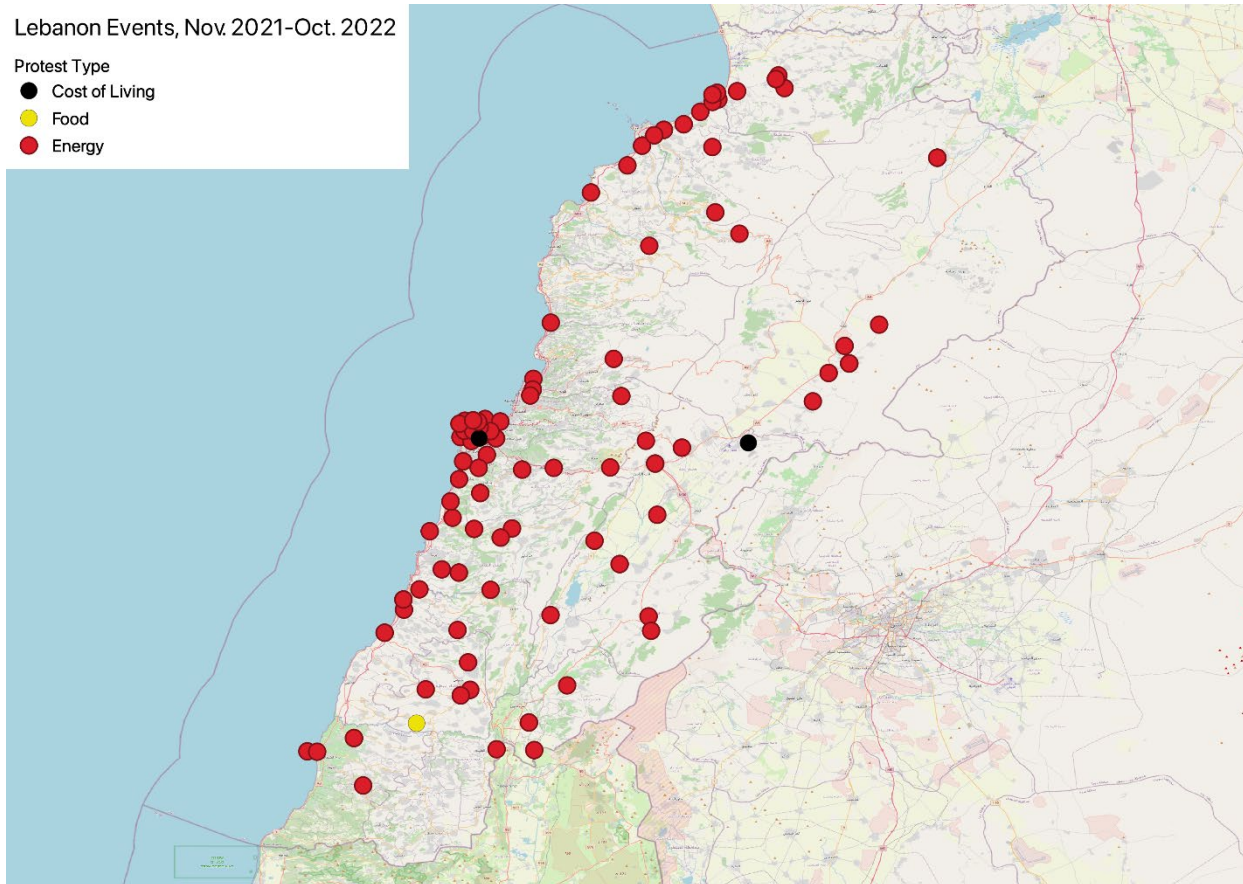
According to ACLED data, Lebanon experienced 179 protests against the high cost of living in the 12 months from November 2021. The protests were spread across 82 locations around the country, as well as in multiple neighbourhoods in the capital, Beirut. These events occurred in waves or episodes, with some 49 around the country on 13 January 2022, another 26 on 2 February 2022, and protests through much of March, late April, late May and again in July.

The Lebanon protests highlighted a number of features that appear to be common to many of the major episodes during 2022, including that:

- The 2021-2022 protests followed on from previous recent episodes featuring similar grievances to do with the cost of living and in particular energy prices, notably in October 2019;
- The grievances combined anger about rapidly rising costs of living with fury at perceived corruption, collusion between political and economic elites, and unaccountable governance;
- Government policies to cut food and fuel subsidies were specific triggers for many protests; these were part of official efforts to meet IMF reform requirements in advance of a bail-out package;

- Protests united broad groups of the public in a common cause; in Lebanon, this meant solidarities across communities that were historically divided by religion and sect (Yee 2019; Lehane 2020; Tschunkert and Bourhous 2022; Al-Masri, Abla, and Hassan 2020).

Figure 12 Lebanon Events



Who protested, and why

Lebanon's economic crisis predated both the COVID19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, but was exacerbated by both. By mid-2022, the currency had collapsed, and the Lebanese pound had lost over 90% of its value against the dollar compared to 2019 (Reuters 2022b). Four out of five Lebanese people were living in poverty by 2022 according to UN estimates (Al-Monitor 2022). With Lebanon heavily dependent on wheat imports for basic food security, 80 per cent of which came from Ukraine, the Russian invasion was a key factor in the sharp rise in food insecurity. Much of the country's grain reserve capacity had also been destroyed in the 2020 explosion in Beirut port, an incident itself linked to corruption and political mismanagement. The World Food Program (WFP) noted that by December 2021 53 per cent of people living in Lebanon, around 600,000 people, were in need of social assistance, and that figure had risen by a further 400,000 between early 2021 and September 2022 (WFP 2022b). By early 2022, the cost of the average food basket had already risen by over 350 per cent in the previous year (WFP 2022a). Dependence on fuel imports was exacerbated by the collapse of the currency. Protestors stormed the ministry of energy and other electricity providers, aggrieved by power outages and the unaffordability of private generators (Houssari 2022a). Energy prices rose throughout 2021, with all fuel subsidies removed by September 2022 (Abdallah 2021; Chehayeb 2022). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) criticised the government for the slow pace of reforms on its financial sector, fiscal reforms (including costly subsidies),

restructuring external public debt, and the establishment of anti-corruption and anti-money laundering procedures (Mroue 2022).

In this context, the food and fuel crisis was reported by a seasoned UN official as affecting ‘everyone, everywhere’ (UN 2022). Labour unions, taxi and bus drivers, local town residents, youth, women, as well as ‘protesters’, ‘demonstrators’ and ‘activists’ were listed as having participating in the protests by ACLED data sources. Other sources noted the participation in protests of public service workers, retired army and other pensioners (Chehayeb and Mroue 2022). There appeared to be broad popular support for protests, and a generalised discontent with the economic and political governance that had allowed the collapse of the Lebanese economy and failed to protect people from the fallout. Banks that had frozen accounts in the midst of the crisis were held up at gunpoint by people desperate to pay for basic goods and health services (Safi 2022).

A notable feature of the protests since 2019 has been that they cut across Lebanon’s historically salient divisions of religion and sect (Yee 2019), and fundamentally altered state-society relations:

‘Since October 2019, nationwide popular protests have been calling for increased accountability from the country’s political elite, which has shared executive power along sectarian lines since the end of Lebanon’s civil war in 1990. Unlike previous civic movements since the end of the civil war, the October protests were triggered by a severe economic downturn that continues to unfold amid a stalemate among the major political parties, which are yet to offer recovery plans to the Lebanese’ (Al-Masri et al., 2020, p. 5).

Political and policy response

There is little room for doubt that protests against the economic crisis in Lebanon emerged directly in response to extensive corruption among the ruling elites, and to a political system in which power is distributed by religion and community (itself a legacy of the long civil war) (Gallagher 2022). The government announced a crisis committee to address the cost of living crisis, and measures to protect public sector workers from price rises (Houssari 2022b). But in the absence of a functioning government, the 2022 budget was not passed. The World Bank, which is not known for its explicit criticism of political matters, noted that:

The management of the crises exemplifies the extent to which governance capacities have eroded as well as the political paralysis elite capture has brought. Political and sectarian divisions caused a near halt of high-level decision-making processes. Between October 2016 and October 2021, four governments were formed, while more than two years have been managed by caretaker governments. In May 2018, the Lebanese voted for a new Parliament for the first time in nine years after three extensions of the Parliament’s term. The mass protests of October 2019 then exposed long-festered governance deficits and economic decline. A government was formed in January 2020, which proposed frameworks for resolving the crises and started negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the aftermath of the [Port of Beirut] explosion in August 2020, however, the government resigned, leaving a 13-month hiatus until a new government in September 2021 was formed. Discord among major political factions, nonetheless, continues to paralyze the government’s work (World Bank 2022, 2).

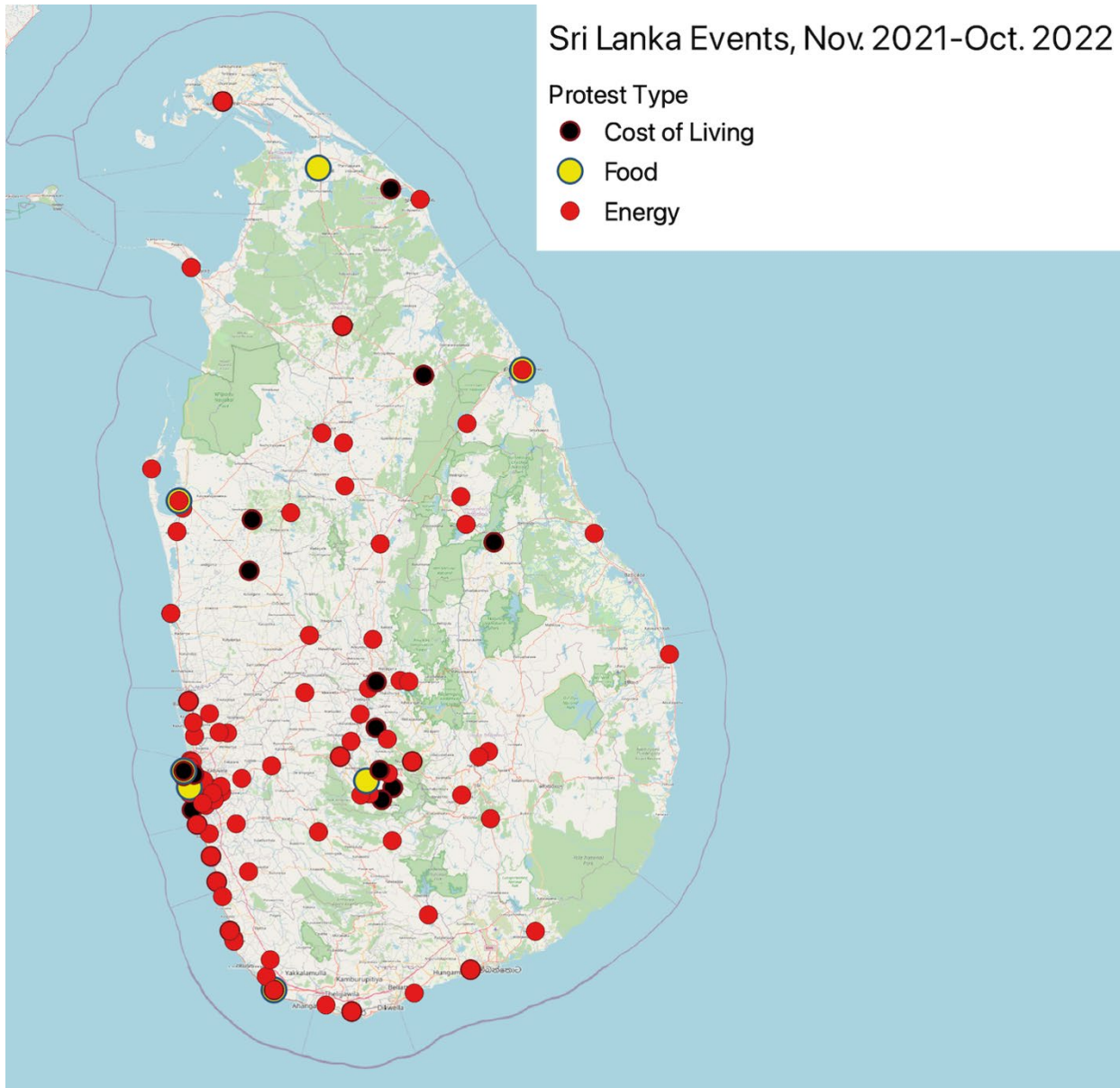
Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's 2022 protests were catalysed by the scarcity and rising costs of essential goods. In early March, protesters took to the streets following persistent multi-hour power outages and fuel shortages. Protestors also expressed a broader range of grievances beyond energy access, citing food and medicine shortages (Perera 2022).

Shortages forced Sri Lankans across the country to ration portions and wait for hours to obtain fuel (Lopez 2022). On March 20, two elderly gentlemen died while standing in fuel lines (Jayasinghe 2022). Sri Lankan analyst Bhavani Fonseka said, 'The crisis has really shocked the middle class -- it has forced them into hardships they were never exposed to before, like getting basic items . . . They have really been jolted like no other time in the last three decades' (Pathi and Mallawarachi 2022).

Sri Lanka's economic crisis was years in the making. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brothers and longtime political stalwarts in the country, oversaw years of economic mismanagement. Among President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's most damaging policies were a large value added tax (VAT) cut in 2019 and a fertiliser ban in 2021, which diminished the year's crop yields (Jayasinghe and Ghoshal 2022b). The VAT cut in particular was considered rash and made with an eye toward upcoming parliamentary elections, rather than being a well-considered fiscal policy (Jayasinghe and Ghoshal 2022a). Economic woes were compounded by over-leveraged development projects plagued by allegations of corruption and a tourism industry ravaged by the pandemic (DeVotta 2022; Cansler 2022). In early 2022, Sri Lankan foreign currency reserves began to dry up, and with them the country's ability to pay for imported goods (Francis and Kurtenbach 2022). People took to the streets to denounce the scarcity of essential goods and a government that 'had reduced [them] to being beggars' (Kempf 2022).

Figure 13 Sri Lanka Events



Between the beginning of March and the end of October 2022, Sri Lanka had 195 protests and riots centred on access to food and fuel, though the total number of anti-government protests was much higher. Protesters forced the mass resignation of the government's cabinet ministers on 4 April, but the President and Prime Minister remained in office. With the end goal of deposing the country's top two officials, protesters established a tent city on the Galle Face Green, a seaside park in Colombo across from the Presidential Secretariat building.

The Galle Face encampment began as a decentralised, grassroots movement of students and other young people denouncing the perceived corruption of the Rajapaksas (Srinivasan 2022). Galle Face soon attracted Sri Lankans of all different classes, ethnicities and religions, growing into an organised civic space defined by its diverse coalition (Mashal, Schmall, and Loke 2022). Citizens remained unified by the goal of crafting a better future with many claiming that would start with an end to dynastic, family rule in favor of 'a democracy representative of the people' (Wijedasa and Weerasinghe 2022).

On 9 May, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa tendered his resignation (Rajapaksa 2022). Protesters cheered 'One down, one to go' and 'Gota Go Home!' as they set their sights on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (Frayer 2022). In response, pro-Rajapaksa factions attacked protesters and security forces were later deployed to Galle Face (Radhakrishnan 2022). Undeterred, anti-government protests persisted into July. On the morning of 9 July, thousands marched to the presidential residence. Turnout exceeded expectations and protesters easily overran and occupied the mansion, declaring it open to the public (Farisz and Masih 2022). President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fled the country and submitted his resignation on 14 July (Masih 2022).

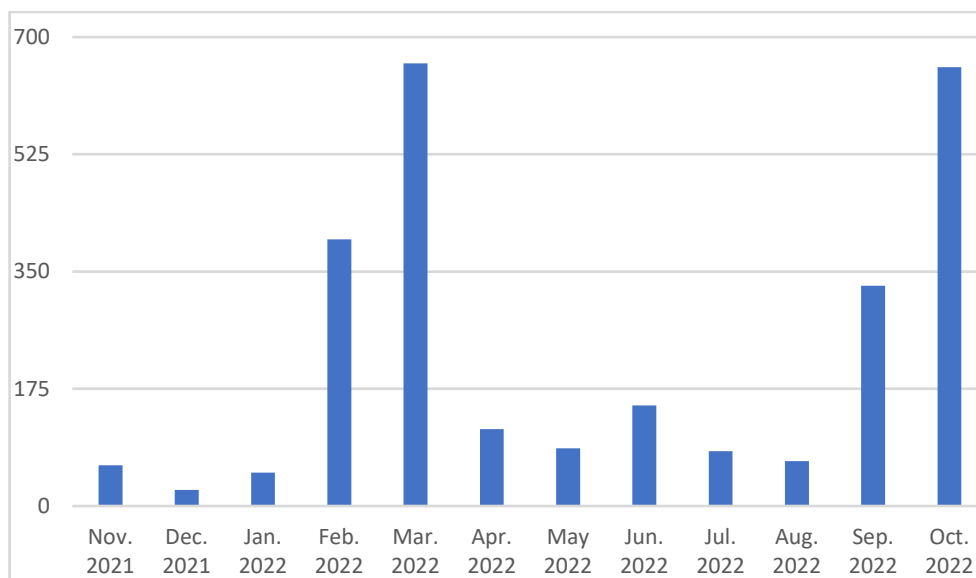
France & Germany

Background

Europe had the third most protest events of any world region in 2022. Across the continent, people protested the rising costs of living, notably denouncing high energy costs. Protesters included both left-wing activists and far-right political groups, with the latter often calling attention to government inaction on the rising cost of living while also claiming overreach on issues like coronavirus restrictions.

Many protesters were affiliated with labour groups who linked rising costs to the viability of their industry. For instance, the Italian commerce group CONFCOMMERCIO organised some of its members to publicly burn electricity bills in September. Similarly, people in Moldova and Bulgaria publicly burned bills as part of their demonstration. Tradesmen, framers, fishers and truck drivers also organised protests throughout the year concerning the rising price of fuel and gas. Protests spiked in Europe in February and March in the wake of price increases caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Protests increased again in September and October as inflation and high energy prices persisted heading into the winter.

Figure 14 Total number of protests in Europe by month



Source: 5 Authors' analysis of ACLED data

Protestors and Grievances: France and Germany

Cost of living and energy protests occurred in nearly every European country in 2022. In particular, French and German citizens took to the streets as summer waned to criticise their governments' economic policies and perceived inaction on high inflation rates. Between September and October 2022, France had 265 total energy and cost of living protests while Germany had 395 such protests.

In France, protests raged in October after refinery workers went on strike demanding higher salaries to combat inflation and to criticise the exorbitant corporate profits made by oil and gas firms. French unions rallied behind the striking workers, demonstrating their support for the right to strike while also highlighting the cost of living challenges faced by French citizens across the country. The refinery strikes ultimately caused fuel shortages across France (Francis 2022).

The protests were among the biggest demonstrations in France in 2022. The General Confederation of Labour (*Confédération Générale du Travail*, CGT) and other union groups called for a national, cross-sector strike on 18 October to demand higher pay in the face of rising inflation. According to ACLED data, there were 106 unique protest events organised by the CGT and other unions on the 18th alone. Tens of thousands of people joined these protests across the country, with the CGT estimating 70,000 protesters in Paris, though the numbers are disputed by the government (Francis 2022; Garriga and Benzabat 2022).

Germans made similar claims about unaffordable costs of living in October, citing inflation and rising energy costs. Protests were initiated by a range of actors, representing diverse partisan stances. While there was considerable variation in the size of the protests, some drew hundreds, and even thousands of people to the streets (ACLED). German left-wing union workers and far-right political parties sometimes protested simultaneously but separately, mostly expressing similar grievances over the high cost of living (Freiheit 2022). For instance, on 15 October while thousands of protesters organised by left-wing activists demonstrated in Leipzig and Potsdam against inflation, right-wing groups expressed the same grievances in a protest on the other side of the country, in Dortmund (ACELD). Similar examples can be found in Germany in October, when only days or cities apart partisan protesters would advance the same core concerns over rising prices, despite the ideological gulf between the organisers.

Policy responses

As in many European countries, the French and German governments faced high energy demand going into winter amid rising prices exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In September, Germany announced it would keep two nuclear power plants open that had been previously planned for decommissioning to cope with demand (Reuters 2022). France announced energy conservation efforts, while also offering subsidies for low-income households and implementing energy price caps (Fleming and Abboud 2022; Alderman 2022). Despite these efforts, European governments continued to struggle with rising inflation heading into November and with these challenges the prospect of sustained protests.

Discussion and conclusions

Scope and limitations

The present report provides rapid descriptive analysis of protests about the cost of living, mainly high energy prices, in the 12 months between 1 November 2021 and 31 October 2022. In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the global energy price index rose more than three times higher than its 2016 base price. Food prices also rose rapidly, and particularly sharply in countries that are dependent on foodgrain imports, such as Sierra Leone and Lebanon, suffering from both wheat shortages and rising costs of transport. Analysis of the ACLED data found over 12,500 protests in 148 countries in all regions of the world about the cost of living in the period November 2021 to October 2022. Protestors specified the cost or availability of food in (fewer than 600), energy (7,500) and the cost of living (more than 4,000), with protest slogans and protestor testimonies stating clearly that their basic needs were under threat, and demanding governments act to protect them against the crisis.

It should be noted that these are conservative estimates of the extent of contention about these issues: to maintain consistency, the analysis excluded a range of closely-related protests which did not fit the specification, including protests by organised labour around wages, farmers around fertiliser, political protests in which the cost of living was one of many grievances, and a range of other relevant contentions. In particular, the analysis excludes most of the later periods of broader uprisings such as in Sri Lanka, Haiti and Iran, which were to differing degrees triggered by protests about food or energy prices.

Protest data can offer insights into broad patterns, but not into the dynamics at work in specific contexts. The selected case studies presented here provide initial insights into the specific social and political contexts in which the protests occurred, and into their political and policy effects. However, this report is unable to provide a conclusive analysis of the social and political impacts of these protests, some of which are still unfolding, and all of which are highly complex interactions that warrant expert analysis by country specialists and actors on the ground.

Global responses to a global crisis

The cost of living protests of 2022 were distributed across the world, across all types of political systems and levels of economic development. They occurred in countries that are energy producers and exporters, as well as those that rely on energy imports. Similar waves of global or multi-regional protests about the cost of living in 2008 and 2010-11 had been seen as threats to global economic and political stability. Although the data for 2022 are not strictly comparable with those documenting these earlier waves, in 2022 there appear to have been a larger number of protests, focused more on crises of energy (fuel, petrol, gas, cooking gas and electricity in particular). Comparable waves of global protest earlier this century were fragmented by geography and time, featuring food and fuel riots in the global South, particularly Africa, in 2007-08; the Arab Uprisings of 2010-11; and the various Occupy and anti-austerity protests mainly in the global North, throughout much of the 2007-12 period. By comparison the 2022 wave was relatively unified: people all around the world protested about similar grievances, articulated in broadly shared terms and demanding in common that their governments act to protect them.

One implication of this unusually unified wave of global protests is that it signals broad discontent with the state of the global economy. This broad discontent was sufficiently deeply and widely felt to trigger collective action by unknown numbers of protests across at least 12,500 separate events in thousands of locations in 148

countries. It seems clear enough that regular mechanisms of governmental accountability have not brought citizens' perspectives to bear on the policy responses to the cost of living crisis. For many, the answer has been to take space on the policy agenda through mass protests. It is a strategy that many have thought worthwhile despite the real risks and costs to protesters.

The accountability of institutions of global economic governance must also be considered here: to what extent do IMF prescriptions take into account civic perspectives on the economic reforms necessary to qualify for IMF packages? Should multilateral development banks pay more systematic attention to the risk that citizens may be driven to dangerous protests when faced with commodity price shocks? If food and energy protests are an expected risk of policies or projects, what risk mitigation and grievance redress mechanisms are being put in place to protect people? The role of multilateral agencies in strengthening or undermining accountability to citizens is an area that merits further attention.

The political effects of cost of living protests

While these protests are an important indicator of the health of the global economy, they are also an indicator of the health of national politics worldwide. They mark the most visible point at which global economic governance shapes national political governance, or the relations between citizens and their states. It should be noted that protests are not the automatic response of angry people triggered by hardship. They require organisational capacity, a way of communicating shared grievances, and the courage and knowhow to have an impact without attracting deadly violence or sanctions by the state. And they require an aim and target. During 2022, it was mainly global forces – the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the post-pandemic supply crunch – that drove price rises, yet protests overwhelmingly demanded action by *national* governments. There was considerable variation across the world in how people were affected by these shocks, including how existing market and social protection mechanisms were working to protect people, but protests in general demanded their governments control price rises, cut taxes, reintroduce subsidies, raise wages or provide assistance to people struggling with the cost of living.

Why did people protest against national governments when the immediate causes were to be found in the Russian invasion and the aftermath of the pandemic? The short answer appears to be that the crisis hit a great many people very hard and showed few signs of abating or being mitigated by government action. A common sense right to the basics of life, however defined, and of government action to protect that right, informs perspectives on why people protested in 2022. Most protests articulated broad grievances about the rising cost of living, in particular energy and, to a lesser extent, food. Where protesters' voices have been recorded, they reported that rising costs were causing great suffering, an inability to provide for their families, and growing frustration with governments. In several cases, protesters were responding specifically to subsidy cuts, tax rises or other policies that stood to worsen the situation.

Without affordable food and energy, the very substance and security of daily life are affected for the worse, with potentially profound social and wellbeing implications. These protests were broad aggregations of people from across many walks of life and regions. While political opposition and labour groups featured in a large number of events, farmers and fisherfolk, women and children, students, teachers, health workers, transport workers and indigenous people were among their numbers. The extremes to which people were being driven by the crisis were illustrated by the fact that women came out to protest in some of the world's most patriarchal and violent countries. One message to emerge from the case studies that echoes with previous research is that governments earn their legitimacy through their efforts to protect citizens in these moments of crisis. For people from across

society to turn out suggests that a state that fails to respond successfully to protests risks a generalised loss of popular legitimacy. Several of the case studies briefly sketched the pathway from lost legitimacy to deeper political crisis. The present report scratches the surface of complex political dynamics, but points to the role of a cost of living crisis in accelerating and exacerbating underlying conditions.

Protestors' grievances about economic issues were often causally linked to perceived failures of political governance. Accusations of corruption and collusion between political and economic elites, and the detachment and unaccountability of the ruling class were heard across multiple contexts. More analysis is needed about the political effects of these crises, but there are signs that parties on the far-right and on the left or centre-left are reaping electoral gains from the cost of living crisis, as ruling centrist parties are seen to have failed to discipline energy markets or support citizens. For instance, in Spain, the far right party Vox called for nationwide protests in March over the rising costs of living, with thousands of protesters gathering in Madrid (France 24 2022). In Ecuador and India, protesters denounced their conservative heads of state for failing to protect against rising costs, with protesters in Ecuador specifically rejecting proposed fuel-subsidy cuts and the purported neo-liberal agenda of President Lasso. In Panama, former President Ricardo Martinelli claimed he would run for president in 2024 to represent 'all independent Panamanians,' seemingly attempting to capitalise on the unrest sweeping the country in the summer 2022. In October 2022, German left-wing union workers and far-right political parties protested simultaneously but separately, mostly expressing similar grievances over the high cost of living (Freiheit 2022). The spectrum of claims from different ideological positions indicates political entrepreneurs regard denouncing rising costs as a politically useful position that allows for solidarity with the struggles of the common citizen.

The more detailed country case studies found that faced with broad and sustained protest about the cost of living, some governments caved in and paused or even reversed subsidy cuts, as occurred in Ecuador. In general, however, few governments appeared to have had the room for manoeuvre, and even in the face of protracted unrest, persisted in price adjustments that were deemed necessary either because of the rising cost of commodity imports, or to meet IMF conditions (Panama, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone).

Several countries that faced significant energy-related unrest also saw significant political turmoil at the very top of government. This indicates that political instability may be linked – albeit not always directly or in any simple causal way – to popular discontent around the cost of living. Among the countries with at least 100 protests, Pakistan, the UK, Lebanon and Sri Lanka all experienced unexpected leadership turnovers as leaders failed to persuade the public or other political elites that they were capable of governing. In other countries that had hundreds of protests such as Haiti and Iran, discontent has escalated into far broader uprisings that continue to hit the news headlines as of December 2022. In functioning democracies, incumbent governments in the US, Sweden, France and Italy faced serious electoral competition from far-right politics.

Implications

The food, energy and cost of living protests of 2022 were so widespread as to have become almost unnoticeable, even as several mutated into broader political turmoil. This global wave raises important questions about the capacity of the global system to protect citizens against mass economic crisis, but even more directly about the mechanisms of accountability through which people can hold governments to account when those governments are themselves dependent on the volatilities of the global economy. One possibility entry point is for multilateral agencies to become more accountable to people, strengthening their engagement with citizens over projects and economic reform agendas likely to expose them to such shocks. And, if the risk of food, energy and cost of

living protests is high, they must properly document and account for those risks, while also demonstrating appropriate and proactive measures of mitigation and grievance redress for people adversely affected by their actions.

The political effects of this global wave of cost of living protests continue to unfold, even as new protests take place, and new grievances – women’s rights in Iran, extreme lockdown in China – add to the picture of people power emerging across a highly contentious year. The analysis presented here suggests that these protests unite people across societies on grievances that are deeply and widely shared. However, what happens to those shared political energies may be polarising: in Europe, India and North America, it seems to be the right and the far right which are most successfully absorbing and making use of people’s grievances. Latin America has seen a partial ‘pink tide’, by contrast. Whether or not cost of living protests prove to be a pathway to political extremes warrants close attention. At the same time, it is also worth considering the weakness of the response from centrist and centre-right parties, such as the UK’s Conservatives and the US Democrats, both of which have featured an unwillingness or ability to impose windfall taxes on energy or to establish more universal systems of social protection.

A final implication is that while the world paid much attention to soup being thrown at a painting of sunflowers, the more significant protests about energy in 2022 were arguing *en masse* for affordable access. While people in so many places are willing to protest to protect their rights to travel and power their homes and workplaces, ending fossil fuel use (in the absence of alternatives) may not be a popular policy. How people can be brought into energy policy dialogue in a meaningful way is an important likely strategy for moving towards those goals (McCulloch 2023).

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