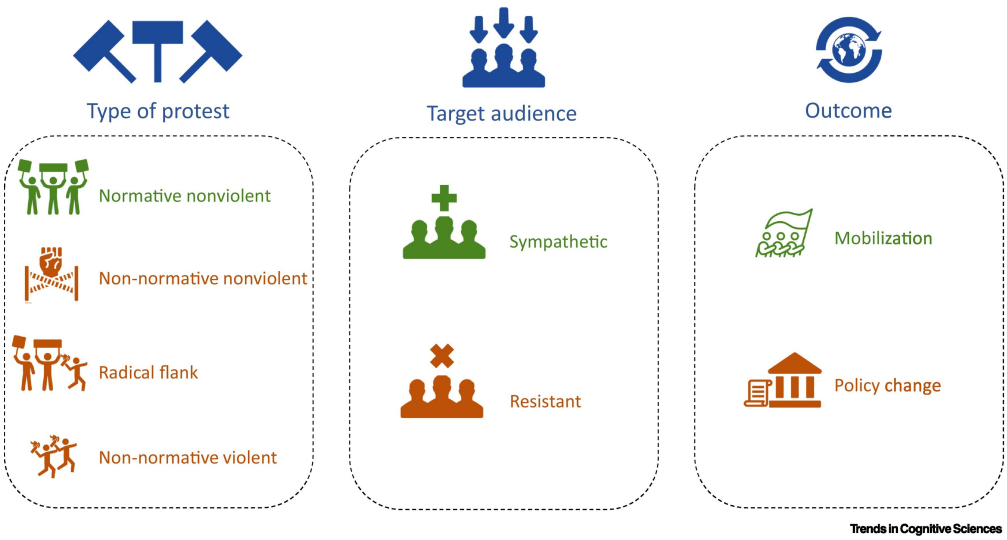
Science of Protest

Why in News?

A global study stated that protests are increasingly seen as a way to express disagreement or a lack of faith in institutions.

What is a protest?

- **Protests** – A protest is an action which involves the *occupation of space over a long period of time* by camping, usually in public places, to express *strong disagreement with something*.
- **Objectives** – To publicly express views on unfair policies and laws, to dissent from them, to shape minds & form public opinion against them, to speak to and against the government, to challenge it.
- **Causes** – It may be due to the political decisions, social injustices to people, climate change impacts among others.
- **Short term impacts** – It can influence media coverage, public opinion, policy, and politics.
- **Long term impacts** – Protests can also help to spur longer-term changes in public opinion yet such influences are harder to trace.
    - **For example:** C*ivil-rights protests in the 1960s* and the *Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020* changed voting behaviour and even flipped elections.



- **Success factors –** The study by Pearson suggest some factors that are responsible for success of protests.
- *Large protests* seem more effective than small ones
- *Non-violent protests* appear to be more potent than violent ones
    - **For instance**, Non-violent protests such as the *Philippines' People Power*

Revolution, were successful in ousting Dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986.

- *Unified goals* might achieve more than diffused demands do
- *Repression by police*, for instance can win more support for protesters.
    - **Example:** The *repression by Columbia University in New York City* to arrest student protesters for Gaza peace reportedly sparked an escalation in media coverage, resulting in a wave of student protests across parts of the US and abroad.
- Conversely, violent protests are often labelled as riots and disorder by the media.

What is the status of protests across the world?

- **Increase of protests** – The study reveals that global tally of ***protests tripled since 2006***.
- **Higher political protests** – *300 protests* and revolutionary campaigns between 1900 and 2006 aimed to dethrone national leaders.
- **Success of mass movements** – Every movement that mobilised *at least 3.5% of a population* was successful as mass participation enables political leverage.
    - **For instance:** The *Take Back Parliament campaign in 2010 in UK* saw success that influenced the UK referendum in 2011 for electoral reforms.
- **3.5% Rule** – Any protests require this level of participation to ensure change but the figure can be misleading.
- A much larger number of people are probably supporting a successful revolution even if they aren't visibly protesting.
- **Non-violent disruptive protests** – Little is known about this methods.
    - **For example:** *Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion*, which include throwing soup on paintings, glueing themselves to government or oil company offices, and blocking traffic.
- Multiple surveys suggests that *disruptive methods can stimulate negative opinions* on an issue.
- **Major protests** – It include the *Arab Spring* and Occupy movements of the 2010s and the global *Black Lives Matter protests in 2020*.
- *Farmer protests* have erupted in countries such as *Germany, Belgium, and India* over new regulations.

What is status of protest in India?

- **Historical protests** – The background of the Indian Constitution is formed by its anti-colonial struggle.
    - **For instance:** Gandhi's satyagraha movements including *civil disobedience movement in 1930* (salt satyagraha).

*The **International Day of Non-Violence** is observed on 2 October, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Indian independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence.*

- Protests have also offered points of inclusion and participation to the voices that are

not part of the mainstream as seen in the protests for *creation of Andhra* or the *Chipko movement*.

- **Constitutional recognition** – The Right to protest peacefully is enshrined in the Indian Constitution
- **Article 19(1)(a)** – It guarantees the freedom of speech and expression.
- **Article 19(1)(b)** – It assures citizens the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
- **Article 19(2)** – It imposes reasonable restrictions on the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
- **Article 51A** – It makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen "to safeguard public property and to abjure violence".
- **Reasonable restrictions on protests** – They are imposed in the interests of
  - The sovereignty and integrity of India
  - The security of the State
  - Friendly relations with foreign States
  - Public order, decency or morality or
  - In relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.
- **Supreme Court** – In ***Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India & Ors. Case (2012)***, it had stated, 'Citizens have a fundamental right to assembly and peaceful protest which cannot be taken away by an arbitrary executive or legislative action.'
- **Recent protests** – The *farmers' protest in India during 2020* was the largest among those studied between 2006 and 2020, with an estimated 250 million participants.
- *2020 strike against the CAA-NRC citizenship* matrix in India involved 250 million.

What lies ahead?

- The Right to protest is one of the core principles on which democracy survives and thrives.
- However, when a protest turns violent, as seen in some places in recent protests, it defeats the very purpose of the protest.
- While enjoying the rights, one must adhere to one's duties and responsibilities in a democratic society.

References

1. Down To Earth| Increase in Protests across the World
2. Telegraph India| Protests in India

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering