

UDC 323.27:330.34

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2413-9971/2026-61-5>

Kazakova Lyudmila

*Candidate of Legal Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor of the Department of International Politics,
State University "Uzhhorod National University"
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7529-9543>*

Melnykova Nataliia

*Master Student,
State University "Uzhhorod National University"
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4845-6986>*

Казакова Л.О.

*кандидат юридичних наук, доцент,
доцент кафедри міжнародної політики,
Державний вищий навчальний заклад
«Ужгородський національний університет»*

Мельникова Н.

*магістрант,
Державний вищий навчальний заклад
«Ужгородський національний університет»*

GLOBAL PROTEST ACTIVITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND TRENDS

Summary. This article examines contemporary trends in the development of protest activity worldwide within the context of the socio-economic and political transformations of the twenty-first century. The research identifies and analyzes the principal drivers of the growing protest movements, including social inequality, political polarization, economic crises, societal digitalization, and network-based forms of collective mobilization. Particular attention is devoted to the analysis of the economic determinants of protest activity. The paper systematizes the major waves of global protests that occurred between 2000 and 2026 and explores their relationship with macroeconomic processes. Based on an examination of protest movements during 2025–2026, the study characterizes their key causes, distinctive features, and socio-political consequences across different countries. The findings indicate that contemporary protest activity is increasingly shaped by the prominent role of youth participation, the expansion of digital coordination mechanisms, and the growing influence of socio-economic factors on protest mobilization. The study concludes that modern protest activity constitutes a systemic form of societal response to global crises and structural development imbalances.

Keywords: protest activity, social movements, mass protests, social inequality, economic crises, digital mobilization, youth movements, global transformations.

Introduction and problem statement. In the twenty-first century, protest activity has become an integral component of the political and social life of most countries worldwide. Mass protests increasingly emerge not only as reactions to specific political events but also as manifestations of deeper structural imbalances, including social inequality, economic instability, political polarization, and declining public trust in governmental institutions. The digitalization of society and the development of network-based forms of communication have significantly transformed mechanisms of mobilization, making protest movements faster, larger in scale, and increasingly transnational in nature.

The relevance of this study is determined by the need for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary protest

movements, their economic determinants, and emerging forms of organization. Particular importance is attached to the examination of protest dynamics in 2025–2026, a period during which large-scale demonstrations occurred in both countries with unstable political regimes and established democracies, highlighting the universal nature of protest as a form of citizens' political participation.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The issue of protest activity has become the subject of interdisciplinary research in political science, sociology, economics, and international relations. Classical approaches to the study of social movements and collective mobilization were developed in the works of C. Tilly [11], S. Tarrow [13], and D. McAdam [14], who conceptualized protest as a



© Kazakova Lyudmila, Melnykova Nataliia, 2026

Стаття поширюється на умовах ліцензії відкритого доступу (CC BY 4.0)

form of collective action and an important mechanism of citizens' political participation. In contemporary academic literature, these approaches have been significantly expanded through the analysis of the impact of macroeconomic processes and socio-political transformations on the dynamics of protest activity. Considerable attention is devoted to the examination of social inequality, political polarization, and declining trust in public institutions as key determinants of mass protests [4; 7].

Empirical studies conducted in recent years confirm that economic crises, inflationary pressures, and the rising cost of living constitute some of the most significant triggers of protest mobilization among the population [4; 5]. In this context, mass protests are increasingly viewed as a societal response to macroeconomic instability and structural development imbalances. At the same time, a distinct strand of research has emerged focusing on the impact of digital technologies on the transformation of protest movements. In particular, studies have demonstrated that social media and digital platforms substantially alter the mechanisms of protest organization and coordination, facilitating the development of networked and horizontal forms of mobilization while enabling the rapid diffusion of protest activity at both national and global levels [10; 12].

At the same time, most contemporary studies focus primarily on the analysis of specific waves of protest or regional case studies, thereby limiting the possibilities for a comprehensive generalization of global trends in the development of protest activity. Insufficient attention has been paid to examining the relationship between protest mobilization and long-term socio-economic processes on a global scale, particularly in the context of the ongoing transformations of 2025–2026. Further scholarly attention is required to address the role of youth as a key actor in protest mobilization, the influence of digital technologies on the formation and evolution of protest movements, and the transformation of collective action models under conditions of globalization and societal digitalization.

The purpose of the article is to examine contemporary trends in the development of protest activity worldwide, to identify the principal socio-economic, political, and technological factors driving its expansion, and to analyze the distinctive features of mass protest movements during the period of 2025–2026.

To achieve the stated objective, the following research tasks were formulated: to analyze the principal theoretical approaches to understanding protest activity; to characterize the key factors contributing to the growth of protest movements in the twenty-first century; to examine the relationship between global economic processes and protest mobilization; to summarize the major waves of protest activity worldwide during the period 2000–2026; and to conduct a comparative analysis of the most significant protest movements of 2025–2026 in order to identify their common characteristics and distinctive features.

The object of the article is contemporary protest activity worldwide.

The subject of the article comprises the socio-economic, political, and technological factors shaping the formation and development of protest movements during the period 2000–2026, as well as the specific features of protest mobilization in 2025–2026.

Results of the study. In the twenty-first century, protest activity has evolved from an episodic phenomenon into a structural component of the political and social life of most countries worldwide. Whereas mass demonstrations previously emerged primarily as responses to specific political crises or revolutionary events, contemporary protests have acquired a systemic character, reflecting the deep-seated imbalances of modern societies. They increasingly function as a regular mechanism for expressing public discontent and as an instrument for influencing public policy. Among the key factors driving this transformation, the following should be highlighted:

- Social inequality. The widening gap between socio-economic groups, the concentration of capital, limited social mobility, and unequal access to education, healthcare, and political influence contribute to a growing perception of injustice and stimulate protest behavior.

- Political polarization. The intensification of ideological divisions, the rise of radical movements, declining trust in public institutions, and increasing confrontation among political elites encourage citizens to engage in protest activities.

- Economic crises and instability. Financial crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, energy disruptions, and inflationary shocks have significantly affected living standards. Declining incomes, rising unemployment, and social insecurity have become major drivers of mass protests.

- Digital technologies. Social media platforms and messaging applications facilitate rapid mobilization, coordination, and international visibility of protest movements. They reduce organizational costs while increasing the scale, speed, and effectiveness of protest activity.

- The networked nature of contemporary protests. The absence of clear hierarchical structures and centralized leadership makes protest movements more adaptable and more difficult for governments to control. At the same time, the digital environment promotes rapid emotional mobilization and facilitates the transformation of online activism into large-scale street demonstrations [10; 12].

It should be noted that the growing intensity of protest activity has brought to the forefront the issue of its legal regulation and protection. In contemporary international law, the key instrument in this area is the freedom of peaceful assembly, which constitutes a fundamental human right and one of the core elements of a democratic society. It is enshrined in Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, both of which guarantee everyone the

right to peaceful assembly, including demonstrations and protest actions. The implementation of this right in international legal practice is based on the core principles of legality, proportionality, and non-discrimination. This means that any interference by the state in the conduct of assemblies must be clearly prescribed by law, necessary in a democratic society, and free from selective or discriminatory application. At the same time, the freedom of peaceful assembly is not absolute. It may be restricted only in exceptional circumstances, in particular for reasons of national security, public order, public health, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Such restrictions must be applied strictly within the limits of necessity and must not serve as an instrument for suppressing legitimate protest activity [2; 3].

An important dimension in the analysis of protest activity is its economic determinism, as a significant share of mass protests in the contemporary world is rooted in socio-economic factors. Economic conditions often act as immediate triggers of public mobilization, intensifying already existing social and political tensions. Among the economic drivers of rising protest activity, the scholarly literature typically identifies inflation, unemployment, declining living standards, social inequality, and economic crises. In order to empirically demonstrate the link between economic processes and global protest activity, Table 1 summarizes the major waves of global protests worldwide from 2000 to 2026, indicating the countries and regions where protests occurred, their periods of peak activity, the main economic causes, and the macroeconomic context that served as a trigger for protest mobilization.

Analysis of the aggregated data presented in Table 1 indicates a stable relationship between global macroeconomic processes and the intensity of protest

activity in the period 2000–2026. Economic factors most often act as key triggers of mass mobilisation or significantly amplify existing socio-political tensions. The largest waves of protests coincide with periods of global economic crises, including the 2008 global financial crisis, the 2020–2021 pandemic recession, and the 2022–2023 inflationary crisis, indicating a direct link between macroeconomic instability and social unrest. At the same time, a transformation of economic drivers of protests can be observed: from the general consequences of globalisation and unemployment in the early 2000s to issues of cost of living, inflation, and structural inequality in the contemporary period. The growing importance of long-term structural factors, such as inequality and labour market transformation, should also be noted. The obtained results support the conclusion regarding the cyclical and structurally determined nature of protest activity, reflecting societies' responses to global economic imbalances and crisis phenomena [4; 5].

It should be noted that there has been a sharp increase in the number of protests worldwide. According to global estimates, in the past year alone there were over 128 major anti-government protests globally, while the total number of protest events exceeded 148,000 across different countries. Protests in 2025–2026 span both politically unstable regimes and developed states, reflecting the universality of protest as a form of civic participation. At the same time, common features can be observed, including the predominance of socio-economic causes, active youth participation, and the widespread use of digital technologies for mobilisation and coordination of actions [1].

Table 2 systematises the main manifestations of protest activity from the beginning of 2025 to mid-2026, including their causes, patterns of development, and consequences in different countries around the world.

Table 1

Global waves of protest activity from 2000 to 2026 and their economic determinants

Period, Wave	Regions and Countries	Main economic causes	Macroeconomic context
2000–2003 (post-crisis anti-globalization protests)	United States, European Union (EU), Latin America	inequality, globalization imbalances, unemployment	consequences of the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, economic slowdown, labor market restructuring
2008–2012 (Global Financial Crisis and Occupy Movement)	United States, Spain, Greece, United Kingdom, France	unemployment, declining incomes, inequality, anti-austerity policies	global financial crisis of 2008, sovereign debt crisis in the EU, fiscal austerity policies
2013–2016 (Socio-economic protests and regional crises)	Brazil, Turkey, Ukraine, Middle East	inflation, corruption, declining living standards	slowdown of the global economy, decline in commodity prices, currency crises
2017–2019 (cost of living protest wave)	France (Yellow Vests), Chile, Iraq, Hong Kong	fuel prices, tariffs, inequality, taxation	rising cost of living, uneven post-2008 recovery, structural inequality
2020–2021 (COVID-19 pandemic and economic shock)	global (United States, European Union, India, Latin America)	unemployment, declining incomes, social vulnerability	pandemic recession, lockdowns, supply chain disruptions
2024–2026 (wave of youth and socio-economic political protests)	Nepal, Serbia, Kenya, Morocco, Indonesia	inequality, youth unemployment, corruption, social injustice	weak economic growth, AI-driven labor market disruption, debt constraints, global instability

Source: compiled by the authors [1; 4; 5; 6; 7]

Table 2

Characteristics of mass protests worldwide in the 2025–2026 period

Country	Period	Cause of protests	Characteristics, consequences
Iran	2025–2026	Economic crisis, inflation, political dissatisfaction	Large-scale anti-government protests, harsh repression, arrests, internet restrictions
Indonesia	2025	Social inequality, actions of law enforcement agencies	Protests over human rights violations, detentions, significant public resonance
Madagascar	2025–2026	Political instability, consequences of the coup	Youth-led (Gen Z) protests, arrests of activists, escalation of the crisis
Bulgaria	2025–2026	Anti-corruption demands, budgetary policy	Mass demonstrations, government resignation, political changes
United States	2025–2026	Socio-economic and political demands	Institutionally organized protest actions, large-scale civic mobilization
Japan	2026	Constitutional changes in the field of security	Protests against the revision of pacifist constitutional provisions
Global level (Gen Z movements)	2025	Corruption, authoritarian tendencies, inequality	Youth protests across multiple countries, extensive digital mobilization

Source: compiled by the authors [1; 9]

The analysis of the data presented in Table 2 indicates that protest activity in 2025–2026 has become increasingly multidimensional, combining both traditional socio-economic determinants and emerging political, institutional, and technological factors. Despite regional differences, a common pattern can be observed: in most cases, protests emerge as a response to the accumulation of social tensions associated with inequality, deteriorating economic conditions, and declining trust in state institutions.

An important characteristic of the current stage is the growing role of youth as a key actor in protest mobilization. In a number of countries, particularly Madagascar, as well as within global Gen Z movements, young people constitute the primary driving force behind protests, reflecting the intensification of intergenerational inequality and limited opportunities for social mobility. This trend indicates a structural transformation of protest participation, whereby traditional political actors are increasingly giving way to networked and horizontal movements [10; 12].

It should also be emphasized that contemporary protests are increasingly organized and coordinated through digital technologies. Social media platforms and messaging applications perform not only communicative but also mobilizational functions, facilitating the rapid dissemination of information, synchronization of collective actions, and international support for protest movements. This strengthens the effect of the “network diffusion” of protests, whereby local events quickly gain global visibility and resonance [10; 12].

At the same time, the response of states to protest activity is heterogeneous, ranging from institutional resolution of demands, as in the case of political changes in Bulgaria, to coercive suppression and restrictions on civil liberties, as in the case of Iran. This demonstrates the existence of different models of state-society interaction under conditions of increasing social tension [9].

Conclusions. The conducted article demonstrates that protest activity in the 21st century has acquired a systemic character, reflecting deep socio-economic and political transformations in contemporary societies. It is gradually shifting from episodic responses to crises toward a stable mechanism of expressing public discontent and influencing state policy. The key determinants of modern protests include social inequality, political polarization, economic crises, and structural development imbalances. Digital technologies and network-based forms of organization play a crucial role by ensuring the speed, scale, and transnational nature of protest mobilization.

It has been established that a significant share of protest activity has an economic foundation, and the largest waves of protests coincide with periods of global macroeconomic instability. At the same time, an evolution in the causes of protests can be observed, shifting from unemployment and the consequences of globalization to inflation, cost of living, and inequality. Contemporary protests, particularly in 2025–2026, are characterized by increased structural complexity, a growing role of youth, and intensified digital mobilization. Overall, they function as a societal response to global crises and structural development imbalances.

References:

1. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) (2025) Global Protest Trends Report 2025. Washington. Available at: <https://acleddata.com> (accessed May 10, 2026).
2. United Nations (1966) Mizhnarodnyi pakt pro hromadianski i politychni prava [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]. New York. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (accessed May 10, 2026).
3. Council of Europe (1950) Yevropeiska konventsiiia z prav liudyny [European Convention on Human Rights]. Rome. Available at: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG (accessed May 10, 2026).

4. World Bank (2024) Global Economic Prospects 2024. Washington. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects> (accessed May 10, 2026).
5. International Monetary Fund (2023) World Economic Outlook 2023. Washington. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO> (accessed May 10, 2026).
6. United Nations Development Programme (2023) Human Development Report 2023/2024. New York. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org> (accessed May 10, 2026).
7. OECD (2023) Society at a Glance 2023. Paris. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/social/society-at-a-glance/> (accessed May 10, 2026).
8. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2026) Global Protest Tracker. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/features/global-protest-tracker> (accessed June 10, 2026).
9. Amnesty International (2026) Global Report 2025/26: The State of the World's Human Rights. London. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2026/> (accessed June 10, 2026).
10. Yaqoub M., Al-Kassimi K., Wang H. (2024) The evolution of research on digital communication and social protests. Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development, no. 8(7). Available at: <https://systems.enpress-publisher.com/index.php/jipd>
11. Tilly C. (2004) Social Movements 1768–2004. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
12. Castells M. (2015) Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. Cambridge: Polity Press.
13. Tarrow S. (2011) Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. McAdam D., Tarrow S., Tilly C. (2001) Dynamics of Contention. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Список використаних джерел:

1. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) (2025) Global Protest Trends Report 2025. Washington. URL: <https://acleddata.com> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
2. Організація Об'єднаних Націй (1966) Міжнародний пакт про громадянські і політичні права. Нью-Йорк. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
3. Рада Європи (1950) Конвенція про захист прав людини і основоположних свобод. Рим. URL: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
4. Світовий банк (2024) Global Economic Prospects 2024. Вашингтон. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
5. Міжнародний валютний фонд (2023) World Economic Outlook 2023. Вашингтон. URL: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
6. Програма розвитку Організації Об'єднаних Націй (2023) Human Development Report 2023/2024. Нью-Йорк. URL: <https://hdr.undp.org> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
7. Організація економічного співробітництва та розвитку (OECD) (2023) Society at a Glance 2023. Париж. URL: <https://www.oecd.org/social/society-at-a-glance/> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
8. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2026) Global Protest Tracker. URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/features/global-protest-tracker> (дата звернення: 10.06.2026).
9. Amnesty International (2026) Global Report 2025/26: The State of the World's Human Rights. Лондон. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2026/> (дата звернення: 10.06.2026).
10. Yaqoub M., Al-Kassimi K., Wang H. (2024) The evolution of research on digital communication and social protests. Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development, 8(7). URL: <https://systems.enpress-publisher.com/index.php/jipd> (дата звернення: 10.05.2026).
11. Tilly C. (2004) Social Movements 1768–2004. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
12. Castells M. (2015) Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age. Cambridge: Polity Press.
13. Tarrow S. (2011) Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
14. McAdam D., Tarrow S., Tilly C. (2001) Dynamics of Contention. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ГЛОБАЛЬНА ПРОТЕСТНА АКТИВНІСТЬ: СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНІ ЧИННИКИ ТА ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ

Анотація. Стаття досліджує сучасні тенденції розвитку протестної активності у світі в умовах соціально-економічних, політичних та технологічних трансформацій XXI століття. Визначено ключові чинники масових протестних рухів, серед яких зростання соціальної нерівності, політична поляризація, економічні кризи, інфляційні та енергетичні шоки, а також прискорена цифровізація. Сучасна протестна мобілізація дедалі частіше набуває мережевого характеру, що суттєво трансформує традиційні моделі колективної дії та підвищує швидкість і масштаб поширення протестів як на національному, так і на глобальному рівнях. Особливу увагу приділено економічним детермінантам протестної активності як одному з головних факторів масової мобілізації. У дослідженні узагальнено основні хвилі глобальних протестів у період 2000–2026 рр. та підкреслено їх тісний зв'язок із макроекономічними процесами, зокрема світовою фінансовою кризою 2008 року, пандемічною рецесією 2020–2021 років та інфляційною кризою 2022–2023 років. Виявлено чітку трансформацію причин протестів: від проблем глобалізаційного безробіття та нестабільності на початку

2000-х років до сучасних питань вартості життя, нерівності та структурних дисбалансів на ринку праці. На основі аналізу протестів 2025–2026 років визначено їх основні причини, особливості та наслідки в різних регіонах. Сучасна протестна активність має багатовимірний характер, поєднуючи соціально-економічні, політичні та інституційні фактори. Ключовою тенденцією є зростання ролі молоді як центрального актора протестної мобілізації, що відображає посилення міжгенераційної нерівності та обмежену соціальну мобільність у багатьох країнах. Також підкреслено критичну роль цифрових технологій і соціальних мереж в організації протестів, що забезпечують швидку координацію, масову участь і глобальну видимість протестних рухів. Отримані результати свідчать, що сучасна протестна активність має системний характер і функціонує як реакція на глобальні кризи та структурні дисбаланси. Загалом хвилі протестів демонструють циклічний характер, тісно пов'язаний із макроекономічною динамікою, тоді як мережеві та цифрові форми політичної участі продовжують розширюватися у XXI столітті.

Ключові слова: протестна активність, соціальні рухи, масові протести, соціальна нерівність, економічні кризи, цифрова мобілізація, молодіжні рухи, глобальні трансформації.

Дата надходження статті: 21.06.2026

Дата прийняття статті до публікації: 14.07.2026

Дата публікації статті: 07.09.2026