Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**

Countries with socio-political crises

2. Socio-political crises

- There were 83 socio-political crises around the world in 2018. These crises took place mainly in Africa (33) and Asia (18), while the rest of the crises were in Europe (12), the Middle East (11) and the Americas (nine).
- In the western part of the DRC, armed clashes between the Bnugu and Batende communities left around 890 people dead and displaced 16,000.
- The economic and political crisis in Sudan triggered major civic protests that were harshly repressed by the government, leaving a death toll of at least 37 people.
- The increase in insecurity and violence in the central, northeastern and northwestern parts of Nigeria aggravated the instability in the country.
- Nicaragua experienced the most serious crisis in recent decades, with somewhere between 200 and over 560 fatalities by the end of the year.
- In Venezuela, the number of protests increased and tensions between the government and the opposition intensified following the presidential election, the results of which neither the opposition nor part of the international community recognise.
- The tension between India and Pakistan remained at very high levels with dozens of people killed as a result of exchanges of fire on the border.
- Reports of the human rights situation in the Chinese province of Xinjiang increased, especially regarding the existence of re-education camps for the Uyghur population.
- The murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul had a great media impact and exposed the repressive policies of Saudi Arabia to international scrutiny.
- The tension between Israel, Syria and Lebanon intensified during 2018, partly as a result of the dynamics of the conflict in Syria and misgivings about Iranian influence there.

The present chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2018. It is organised into three sections. The socio-political crises and their characteristics are defined in the first section. In the second section an analysis is made of the global and regional trends of socio-political crises in 2018. The third section is devoted to describing the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. A map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the socio-political crises registered in 2018.

2.1. Socio-political crises: definition

A socio-political crisis is defined as that in which the pursuit of certain objectives or the failure to satisfy certain demands made by different actors leads to high levels of political, social or military mobilisation and/or the use of violence with a level of intensity that does not reach that of an armed conflict and that may include clashes, repression, coups d'état and bombings or attacks of other kinds, and whose escalation may degenerate into an armed conflict under certain circumstances. Socio-political crises are normally related to: a) demands for self-determination and self-government, or identity issues; b) opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state, or the internal or international policies of a government, which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or c) control of resources or territory.

Table 2.1. Summary of socio-political crises in 2018

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties	Intensity[3] / Trend[4]
Africa[5]			
Angola (Cabinda)	Internal	Government, armed group FLEC-FAC, Cabinda Forum for Dialogue	2
	Self-government, Resources		↓
Central Africa (LRA)	International	AU regional force (RTF, composed of the Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese Armed Forces), Operation Observant Compass (USA), self-defence militias from DRC and South Sudan, the LRA, the former Central African armed coalition Séléka	1
	Resources		↓
Chad	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
Congo, Rep. of	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Côte d'Ivoire	Internationalised internal	Government, militias loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo, mercenaries, UNOCI	2
	Government, Identity, Resources		=
Djibouti	Internal	Government, armed group FRUD, political and social opposition (UAD/USN coalition)	1
	Government		=
DRC	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
DRC – Rwanda[6]	International	DRC, Rwanda, armed groups FDLR and M23 (former CNDP)	1
	Identity, Government, Resources		=
DRC – Uganda[7]	International	DRC, Uganda, ADF, M23 (former CNDP), LRA, armed groups operating in Ituri	1
	Identity, Government, Resources, Territory		↑
Equatorial Guinea	Internal	Government, political opposition in exile	1
	Government		=
Eritrea	Internationalised internal	Government, internal political and social opposition, political-military opposition coalition EDA (EPDF, EFDM, EIPJD, ELF, EPC, DMLEK, RSADO, ENSF, EIC, Nahda), other groups	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↓
Eritrea – Ethiopia	International	Eritrea, Ethiopia	1
	Territory		↓
Ethiopia	Internal	Government (EPRDF coalition, led by the party TPLF), political and social opposition, various armed groups	3
	Government		↓

---

1. This column includes the states in which socio-political crises are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict. This last option is used in cases involving more than one socio-political crisis in the same state or in the same territory within a state, for the purpose of distinguishing them.
2. This report classifies and analyses socio-political crises using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). Regarding the second type, the socio-political crises may be of an internal, internationalised internal or international nature. As such, an internal socio-political crisis involves actors from the state itself who operate exclusively within its territory. Secondly, internationalised internal socio-political crises are defined as those in which at least one of the main actors is foreign and/or the crisis spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Thirdly, international socio-political crises are defined as those that involve conflict between state or non-state actors of two or more countries.
3. The intensity of a socio-political crisis (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation, decrease, no changes) is mainly evaluated on the basis of the level of violence reported and the degree of socio-political mobilisation.
4. This column compares the trend of the events of 2018 with 2017, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2017 is more serious than in the previous one, the ↓ symbol to indicate an improvement in the situation and the = symbol to indicate that no significant changes have taken place.
5. The socio-political crises regarding Cameroon, Chad and Niger that were present in 2016 due to the instability generated by the armed conflict of Boko Haram are analyzed in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts) in the case of the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram).
6. This title refers to international tensions between DRC–Rwanda–Uganda that appeared in previous editions of this report. Even though they share certain characteristics, DRC–Rwanda and DRC–Uganda are analysed separately in *Alert 2019!*
7. Ibid.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
Africa			
Ethiopia (Oromia)	Internal	Central government, regional government, political opposition (OFDM, OPC parties) and social opposition, armed opposition (OLF, IFLO)	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Gambia	Internal	Government, factions of the Armed Forces, political opposition	1
	Government		↓
Guinea	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, political parties in the opposition, trade unions	1
	Government		↑
Guinea-Bissau	Internalised internal	Transitional government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, international drug trafficking networks	1
	Government		=
Kenya	Internationalised internal	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties and civil society organisations), armed group SLDF, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and groups that support al-Shabaab in Kenya, ISIS	3
	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-government		=
Lesotho	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties	2
	Government		=
Madagascar	Internal	High Transitional Authority, opposition leaders, state security forces, dahalos (cattle rustlers), self-defence militias, private security companies	1
	Government, Resources		↓
Morocco – Western Sahara	International[8]	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front	1
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		=
Mozambique	Internal	Government, former armed group RENAMO, RENAMO militias, islamist armed group al-Shabaab	2
	Government, System		↓
Nigeria	Internal	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, farmers and livestock raisers, community militias, IMN, IPOB, MASSOB	3
	Identity, Resources, Government		=
Nigeria (Niger Delta)	Internal	Government, armed groups MEND, MOSOP, NDPVF, NDV, NDA, NDGJM, IWF, REWL, PANDEF, Joint Revolutionary Council, militias from the Ijaw, Itsereki, Urhobo and Ogoni communities, private security groups	2
	Identity, Resources		=
Rwanda	Internationalised internal	Government, Rwandan armed group FDLR, political opposition, dissident factions of the governing party (RPF), Rwandan diaspora in other African countries and in the West	1
	Government, Identity		=
Senegal (Casamance)	Internal	Government, armed group MFDC and its various factions	1
	Self-government		↑
Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland)	Internal	Republic of Somaliland, autonomous region of Puntland, Khatumo State	2
	Territory		↑
Sudan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Sudan – South Sudan	International	Sudan, South Sudan	1
	Resources, Identity		=
Togo	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Tunisia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including the Uqba bin Nafi Battalion and the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigades (branch of AQIM), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS	2
	Government, System		=

---

8. Although Western Sahara is not an internationally recognised state, the socio-political crisis between Morocco and Western Sahara is considered "international" and not "internal" since it is a territory that has yet to be decolonised and Morocco's claims to the territory are not recognised by international law or by any United Nations resolution.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
Africa			
Uganda	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
Zimbabwe	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
America			
Bolivia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition (political parties, authorities and civil society organisations from the eastern regions)	1
	Government, Self-government, Resources		=
El Salvador	Internal	Government, state security force groups, gangs (Mara Salvatrucha-13, Mara/Barrio/Calle 18, 18 Revolucionarios, 18 Sureños)	2
	Government		↓
Guatemala	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, gangs	1
	Government		=
Haiti	Internalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, MINUSTAH, former military officers	1
	Government		↓
Honduras	Internal	Government, political opposition, social movements, organised crime structures (drug trafficking, gangs)	2
	Government		↓
Mexico	Internal	Government, political and social opposition (peasant and indigenous organisations, unions, students), armed opposition groups (EZLN, EPR, ERPI, FAR-LP), cartels.	3
	System, Government		↑
Nicaragua	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
Peru	Internal	Government, armed opposition (remnants of Shining Path), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)	1
	Government, Resources		=
Venezuela	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
Asia			
Bangladesh	Internal	Government (Awami League, AL), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami political parties), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islami, JMB)	2
	Government		↑
China (Xinjiang)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition	2
	Self-government, Identity, System		↑
China (Tibet)	Internationalised internal	Chinese government, Dalai Lama and Tibetan government-in-exile, political and social opposition in Tibet and in neighbouring provinces and countries	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China – Japan	International	China, Japan	1
	Territory, Resources		=
India (Assam)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
India (Manipur)	Internal	Government, armed groups PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA	2
	Self-government, Identity		↓
India (Nagaland)	Internal	Government, armed groups NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN (K-K), NSCN-R, NNC, ZUF	1
	Identity, Self-government		↓
India – Pakistan	International	India, Pakistan	3
	Identity, Territory		↑

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
Asia			
Indonesia (West Papua)	Internal	Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition (autonomist or secessionist organisations, indigenous and human rights organisations), indigenous Papuan groups, Freeport mining company	2
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↑
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	1
	System		↓
Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[7]	International	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia	1
	Government		↓
Kyrgyzstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1
	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↓
Lao, PDR	Internationalised internal	Government, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin	1
	System, Identity		↑
Pakistan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed opposition (Taliban militias, political party militias), Armed Forces, secret services	2
	Government, System		↓
Sri Lanka	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, Tamil political and social organizations	1
	Self-government, Identity		=
Tajikistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	2
	Government, System, Resources, Territory		=
Thailand	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
Uzbekistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	1
	Government, System		↓
Europe			
Armenia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	International	Armenia, Azerbaijan, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh	2
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↓
Belarus	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Internationalised internal	Central government, government of the Republika Srpska, government of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation, high representative of the international community	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑
Cyprus	Internationalised internal	Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Greece, Turkey	1
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Georgia (Abkhazia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity, Government		=
Georgia (South Ossetia)	Internationalised internal	Georgia, self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity		=
Moldova, Rep. of (Transdniestria)	Internationalised internal	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓

9.   This international socio-political crisis affects other countries that have not been mentioned, which are involved to varying degrees.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
Europe			
Russia (Dagestan)	Internal	Federal Russian government, government of the Republic of Dagestan, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS)	2
	System		↓
Russia (Chechnya)	Internal	Federal Russian government, government of the Chechen Republic, armed opposition groups	2
	System, Government, Identity		=
Serbia – Kosovo	International[10]	Serbia, Kosovo, Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX	2
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑
Turkey	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ISIS, Fetullah Gülen organization	2
	Government, System		=
Middle East[11]			
Bahrain	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, Identity		↓
Egypt	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		=
Iran	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
Iran (northwest)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed group PJAK and PDKI, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Iran (Sistan and Balochistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups Jundullah (Soldiers of God / People's Resistance Movement), Harakat Ansar Iran and Jaish al-Adl, Pakistan	2
	Self-government, Identity		=
Iran – USA, Israel[12]	International	Iran, USA, Israel	2
	System, Government		↑
Iraq (Kurdistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkey, Iran, PKK	1
	Self-government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↓
Israel – Syria – Lebanon	International	Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah (party and militia)	3
	System, Resources, Territory		↑
Lebanon	Internationalised internal	Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition, armed groups ISIS and Jabhat al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Saraya Ahl al-Sham	2
	Government, System		↓
Palestine	Internal	PNA, Fatah, armed group al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Hamas and its armed wing Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Salafist groups	1
	Government		=
Saudi Arabia	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including AQAP and branches of ISIS (al-Hijaz Province, Najd Province)	2
	Government, Identity		=

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity.
↑: escalation of tension; ↓: decrease of tension; =: no changes.

2.2. Socio-political crises: report on trends in 2018

This section analyses the general trends observed in the socio-political crises throughout 2018, whether globally or regionally.

2.2.1. Global trends

In 2018, (83) socio-political crises were identified around the world. As in previous years, the largest number of socio-political crises was found in Africa, with 33 cases, followed by Asia (18), Europe (12), the Middle East (11) and Latin America (nine). There

10. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status remains unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by over 100 countries.
11. With regard to Yemen (south), the events related to this dispute have ceased to be analyzed as tension - as in past editions of the report - and the analysis has been integrated in the case of armed conflict Yemen (al-Houthists).
12. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear program.

were four new crisis scenarios: in Nicaragua, which has experienced its most serious political and social crisis in recent decades after the wave of demonstrations in April to protest against the government and condemn human rights violations committed by the state security forces and armed groups sympathetic to the government; in Armenia, which suffered an escalation of anti-government protests that led to the departure of President Serzh Sargsyan and early elections; in Russia (Dagestan), which until 2017 had been considered an armed conflict, but which was no longer viewed as such due to the drop in violence that was experienced during the previous years, but in which dynamics of tension were still present; and in the Lao PDR, which was once again considered a socio-political crisis due to the rise in violence in recent years linked to the security forces' increasing repression against the Hmong community. Furthermore, three cases considered crises in previous years were reclassified as armed conflicts in 2018 due to the rising violence: Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), Burkina Faso and Niger.[13]

Although crises can be attributed to multiple factors, our analysis of the crises in 2018 makes it possible to identify trends in terms of their main causes or motivations.

In line with the data observed in previous years, **practically 70% of the crises in the world were mainly caused by opposition to internal or international policies implemented by the respective governments** (Government),[14] which led to conflicts to access or erode power, or opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective states (System). In Latin America, for example, all identified crises were linked to one of these two variables. In turn, **the main causes of nearly half the crises (45%) included demands for self-government and/or identity, but this percentage was clearly higher in regions such as Europe (more than 66%, or two out of every three crises in Europe) and Asia (more than 55%).** Disputes over the control of territory and/or resources were particularly relevant in around one third of the crises (31%), although this is a factor that fuels many situations of tension to varying degrees.

In line with previous years, **slightly more than half of the crises in the world were internal in nature (45 crises, or 54%)**, with Latin America being particularly paradigmatic, as practically all crises there (except Haiti) were of this type. Moreover, **almost one third of the crises around the world were internalised (24 crises, or almost 29%)**, but this percentage was clearly higher in regions such as Europe (half the crises) and the Middle East (45%), and significantly lower in Africa (15%) and Latin America (11%). Finally, **one sixth of the crises**

Eighty-three (83) socio-political crises were identified in 2018: 33 in Africa, 18 in Asia, 12 in Europe, 11 in the Middle East and nine in Latin America

were international (14, or almost 17%), following the downward trend in recent decades, although no such context was identified in Latin America. Many (40%) of the crises did not experience significant changes, 30% saw some improvement and the remaining 30% deteriorated compared to 2017. Except in Asia, where there were more cases of improvement than of deterioration (seven and five, respectively), in aggregate terms, the number of crises whose situation worsened equalled those in which there was improvement. Regarding the intensity of socio-political crises, during 2018 half of them were of low intensity (50%, a percentage higher than the 47% reported in 2017), one third were of average intensity (similar to the figure in the previous year) and only 15% had high levels of tension (13), six of them in Africa.

Compared with previous years, the number of serious tensions followed the downward trend in recent years (representing 15% in 2018, 20% in 2017 and 24% in 2016) as several crises that had experienced high levels of tension in 2017 de-escalated during 2018 and became medium- or low-intensity crises. This was the case in Angola (Cabinda); the different crises in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea and Eritrea-Ethiopia); Mozambique; Korea, DPR-USA, Japan, the Republic of Korea; India (Manipur); and Lebanon. However, there were also four crises that reported medium or low levels of conflict increased substantially and were considered high-intensity in 2018: Iran (northwest), Israel-Syria-Lebanon, Mexico and Nicaragua. There were three other cases where the intensity of the violence also increased, causing them to be viewed as armed conflicts: in Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), due to the escalation of violence by the separatist armed groups as well as by the disproportionate use of force and repression by the security forces in western regions of the country and in the northern region of Niger and Burkina Faso, which together with northern

Graph 2.1. Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2018

---
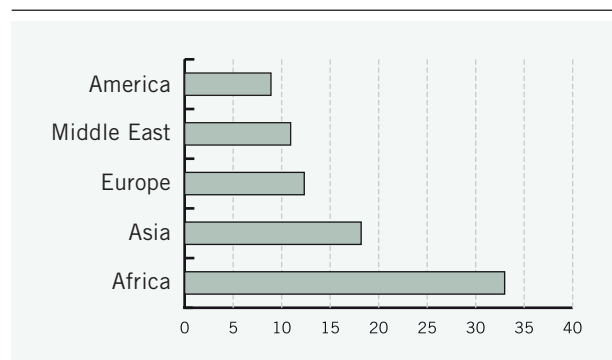
13. See the summaries on Cameroon and on the Western Sahel region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
14. See note 2.

Mali were affected by a climate of instability and violence generated by the growing presence of armed groups and jihadist militias in the Western Sahel (a conflict that was renamed the Western Sahel region).

The most serious crises in Africa in 2018 were in **Chad**, which is affected by a climate of political and social instability and by the escalation of violence in the northern part of the country, linked, among other issues, to illegal mining; **Ethiopia and Ethiopia (Oromia)**, where despite the significant positive changes that occurred with the rise to power of new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a strained and violent atmosphere persisted; **Kenya**, where there was an increase in inter-community violence during the year, alongside the ongoing actions of the Islamist armed group al-Shabaab, the counterinsurgency operations of the Kenyan Armed Forces and security forces and the growing presence of ISIS since 2016; **Nigeria**, where the military campaign against Boko Haram in the northeast continued,[15] alongside acts of violence between livestock and agricultural communities in the country's Middle Belt, actions carried out by various groups in the northwestern region (Kaduna and Zamfara), tensions in the southern region of Biafra and recurring violence in the Niger Delta[16]); and the **DRC**, where, in addition to the armed conflicts affecting various regions of the country, sources of tension included the elections in December 2018, the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu province (east) and the outbreak of violence in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west).

Maximum-intensity tension in the rest of the regions took place in **Mexico**, where the number of homicides increased significantly, reaching the highest figure in the last 20 years, as did political violence, which was linked to the presidential election and other factors; **Nicaragua**, which underwent the most serious political and social crisis in recent decades after the harsh government crackdown on the wave of protests throughout the country that began in April when the government attempted to reform the social security system; **Venezuela**, where the number of demonstrations and social protests increased significantly compared to the previous year and the institutional crisis and international concern about the situation worsened after President Nicolás Maduro won the presidential election in May, which was boycotted by the opposition (and considered fraudulent by some actors); **India-Pakistan**, where high levels of intensity persisted, with mutual armed attacks at different points along the Line of Control that separates the two countries; **Egypt**, where the climate

Seventy per cent (70%) of the crises were mainly caused by opposition to the internal or international policies implemented by the respective governments or opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective states

Half the crises throughout the world were of low intensity, more than in recent years

of internal tension continued, characterised by the repression of dissent, violations of human rights, abuse by the security forces and the application of emergency measures; Iran (northwest), where hostilities between the Iranian government and Kurdish armed groups intensified and killed at least 60 people during 2018; and **Israel-Syria-Lebanon**, where the crisis worsened during 2018, partly as result of dynamics linked to the Syrian armed conflict.

2.2.2. Regional trends

As in previous years, in 2018 **Africa** remained the main scenario for global socio-political crises, accounting for 39% of them (33 of 83, a figure relatively similar to the 37 in 2017 and the 34 in 2016). There were no new cases compared to the previous year. As mentioned above, **almost half the high-intensity crises worldwide (six out of a total of 13) were concentrated in Africa in 2018: Chad, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia) Kenya, Nigeria and the DRC**. However, there was a notable reduction in the number of high-intensity cases in Africa due to the decrease in violence in Angola (Cabinda) and Mozambique. Meanwhile, violence increased in Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West) and the Western Sahel region (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), reclassifying them as armed conflicts.[17] Less than one third of the socio-political crises in Africa (10) deteriorated, fewer than in 2017 (16). **Moreover, there was improvement in nine crises**: Central Africa (LRA), Angola (Cabinda), the Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Madagascar and Mozambique. **Domestic political changes in Ethiopia had a positive impact on the crises in the Horn of Africa**.[18] In almost half the cases (42%), there were no significant changes.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the crises in Africa were internal (67%), similarly to previous years. More than one sixth of the crises presented signs of internationalisation (15%, a figure that fell compared to 2017, when they accounted for 19%), including the influence of foreign actors, including armed non-state actors of various kinds, like the armed organisation al-Shabaab, which is originally from Somalia, in Kenya; the actions of regional or global jihadist groups, such as the branches of ISIS and AQIM in Tunisia; the presence of international troops, such as UNOCI in Côte d'Ivoire and MONUSCO in the DRC; and the influence of parts of the diaspora and local armed groups present in neighbouring areas, such as in Eritrea or Rwanda, for example. Only six of the 33 crises in Africa were international in nature,

---

15. See the summary on the Lake Chad region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
16. The situation in the Niger Delta region, in Nigeria, is another socio-political crisis. See Table 2.1. Summary of the crises in 2018.
17. See chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
18. See "Window of opportunity for peace in the Horn of Africa" in chapter 4 (Opportunities for peace in 2018).

Graph 2.2. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**
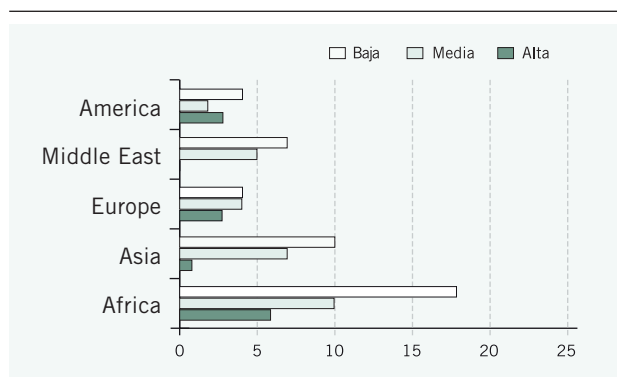
most of them in the Great Lakes region, Central Africa and the Horn of Africa: Central Africa (LRA), Eritrea-Ethiopia, Morocco-Western Sahara, DRC-Rwanda, DRC-Uganda and Sudan-South Sudan. Among these, tensions only rose in one crisis during 2018: between the DRC and Uganda. In July, the tension escalated due to the permanent dispute on the common border at Lake Edward, which led to an exchange of fire between ships of both countries and the death of a Ugandan soldier. The DRC later accused Uganda of having killed 11 Congolese fishermen and arresting 100, while the crises in Central Africa (LRA) and Eritrea-Ethiopia saw improvement.

The crises had multiple underlying causes, in line with the global trend. **Two thirds of the socio-political crises in Africa (22 of the 33, or 66.7%) were linked to opposition to the government** and three (Kenya, Mozambique and Tunisia) included opposition to the system at the same time. Furthermore, 39% of the crises in Africa had demands for identity and/or self-government as one of their main causes and four (Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia (Oromia) and Morocco-Western Sahara) had both variables. In addition, the struggle to control resources and/or territory was also an important factor in more than one third (specifically 39%) of the crises in Africa.

In line with previous years, **the Americas** had the lowest number of crises in the world, with a total of nine in 2018 (10%). Four of them were of low intensity, while three of them **(Venezuela, Mexico and Nicaragua)** were of high intensity, as it was the region with the highest percentage of high-intensity crises (33%). However, as in previous years, although Latin America continued to be the region in the world with the least number of crises and armed conflicts, the same situations are affected by some of the highest homicide rates in the world. The leader of the pack is Venezuela, which has the highest homicide rate in Latin America and one of the highest worldwide with 81.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by El Salvador, with a rate of 51, Honduras, with 40, Mexico,

The most serious crises in Africa were located in Chad, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Nigeria and the DRC

In proportional terms, Latin America had the highest percentage of serious crises worldwide

with 25.8, Colombia, with 25, and Guatemala, with 22.4. Moreover, all the crises in Latin America were internal, with the exception of Haiti, due to the role that MINUSTAH has played in the country in recent years. Regarding the trends of the crises in the Americas, the situation deteriorated in three cases (Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela). In three other cases (El Salvador, Haiti and Honduras), the tension observably subsided, while in another three cases (Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru), there were no changes compared to the previous year. The **main causes of the nine crises identified in Latin America included opposition to government policies**, which materialised in protests of varying intensity and character, such as those mentioned in Venezuela and in Nicaragua, and in the severe repression of these protests. In some cases, this factor occurred in combination with other causes, such as demands for self-government (Bolivia) or disputes over access to or use of resources (Bolivia, Mexico, Peru).

Eighteen (18) crises were reported in **Asia**, the same number as in 2017. The conflict in the Lao PDR was reclassified as a socio-political crisis due to the rise in violence in recent years because of the security forces' increasing crackdown on Hmong political organisations and civilians. **Only one high-intensity crisis was observed in Asia during 2018 (the crisis between India and Pakistan) due to the improvement of the situation in the other three high-intensity contexts of 2017 (India (Manipur), Pakistan and the crisis between several countries and North Korea). In this sense, Asia was the region with the highest percentage of crises where the situation improved (in seven, corresponding to 39%)**, while there were no significant changes in six and the situation deteriorated in five: Bangladesh, China (Xinjiang), India-Pakistan, Indonesia (West Papua) and the Lao PDR.

As in 2017, Asia continued to be the region with the highest percentage of international crises, three of which were located in northeastern Asia, specifically in the area between the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea: the dispute between China and Japan (mainly regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands) and the tension between North Korea and its southern neighbour, as well as with several other countries, regarding its weapons programme. The other international crisis was the historical dispute between India and Pakistan. Nearly 39% of the crises that were internal also had a clear international dimension due to regional armed groups and border tensions, as in three of the Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and either transnational links to local armed organisations (as in the Chinese province of Xinjiang and the Indian state of Assam) or armed organisations in neighbouring countries,

as in the Lao PDR. In the Chinese province of Tibet, the dispute has an international dimension due to the presence of the Tibetan government-in-exile in northern India and the demonstrations of the Tibetan diaspora.

As for the root causes, 11 of the 18 crises in the region were linked to opposition to the system or the government. Both variables coincided in four of them (Pakistan and the three former Soviet republics of Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), while opposition to the system was identified as one of the fundamental sources of tension in four others (the provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang, in China, the dispute between North Korea and South Korea and the situation of the Hmong community in the Lao PDR). Furthermore, 10 other crises (55%) were related to identity aspirations and/or demands for self-government. Finally, the control of resources and territory was also a factor in a third of the crises in Asia.

Following the trend of previous years, all the crises in **Europe** were of low intensity (58%) or medium intensity (42% of cases), as no high-intensity crisis was found. Tensions rose between **Serbia and Kosovo** during the year as a result of several factors, including Serbia's accusation that Kosovo had breached the agreement to establish the association of Kosovo Serb municipalities, Kosovo's legislative approval to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an army and, finally, Kosovo's application of tariffs on imports from Serbia and Bosnia in protest of their lack of recognition of its independence of Serbia, which was considered the most difficult challenge since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. There was improvement in three of the 12 crises, no changes occurred in five and the situation deteriorated in four, in contrast with the trend in 2017, when the political and social situation worsened in nine of the 13 crises. The crises in which there was deterioration included **Armenia**, as a result of the climate of anti-government protests that led to the resignation of President Serzh Sargsyan and early elections, which ended the hegemony of the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). However, prominent crises in which the tension subsided included those between **Armenia and Azerbaijan** and in the Russian region of **Dagestan**. The security situation had already improved between Armenia and Azerbaijan due to a process that had begun in 2017 and continued in 2018 after an agreement to establish a mechanism of direct communication between the parties to the conflict, which meant less ceasefire violations. The atmosphere of violence in Dagestan continued to subside to the point that it was reclassified and was no longer considered a situation of armed conflict, although incidents that caused dozens of fatalities and persistent human rights violations continued.

Asia was the region with the highest percentage of crises that observably improved

In Europe, the crisis deteriorated between Serbia and Kosovo, leading to the breakdown of the negotiating process in December

Regarding the root causes, Europe continued to be the region where disputes related to identity demands and/or self-government had the highest incidence worldwide, with 67% of the crises linked to these factors, similarly to previous years. One of the main causes in 67% of the crises that took place in Europe was certain groups' opposition to government policies or to the system as a whole. In line with previous years, the control of territory was a factor present in two of the most prolonged crises in the region: the dispute between the government of Cyprus and the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Finally, in relation to the geographical scope of action and the influence of the actors involved, half of the socio-political crises that took place in Europe were **internalised internal in nature, emphasising the role that foreign governments play in certain contexts and especially the role that Russia plays** in some self-proclaimed independent regions in countries that were once part of the USSR, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Transdniestria in the Republic of Moldova. One third of the crises were internal, while two were considered international: Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Serbia-Kosovo.

Finally, 11 crises were reported in the **Middle East**, a similar figure to 2017. The Middle East remained the region of the world with the lowest number and percentage of low-intensity crises (four, representing 36%, a figure higher than the previous year). This was the same number as the medium-intensity crises (four). There were three high-intensity socio-political crises, one more than in 2017: Egypt, Iran (northwest) and the crisis affecting Israel in relation to Syria and Lebanon. Three crises saw relative improvement compared to 2017: Bahrain, Iraqi Kurdistan and Lebanon. In five, the situation did not experience significant changes compared to the previous year, while in three the tension worsened, including in **Iran (northwest)**, where hostilities between the Iranian government and Kurdish armed groups intensified, causing at least 60 deaths during 2018, and in **Israel-Syria-Lebanon**, where incidents that may have caused more than 100 deaths were reported amidst a volatile and menacing environment.

Regarding the causes of the disputes, the **Middle East was the region with the greatest number of crises whose main causes were related to opposition to the internal or international policies of the government or the system (in almost 73% of the crises, or eight)**. In almost half the crises (five) the factor of identity aspirations and/or demands for self-government was also an outstanding motivation. Four of the crises in the region were internal and two were of an international nature: the dispute between Iran and the

US and Israel over the Iranian nuclear programme and the case of Israel-Syria-Lebanon, linked to the regional dynamics and consequences of the conflicts in Syria and in Israel-Palestine. Five other internal crises showed an outstanding degree of internationalisation: Saudi Arabia, Iran (northwest), Lebanon and Iraq (Kurdistan).

2.3. Socio-political rises: annual evolution

2.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Central Africa (LRA)	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Resources International
Main parties:	AU regional force (RTF, composed of the Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese Armed Forces), Operation Observant Compass (USA), self-defence militias from DRC and South Sudan, the LRA, the former Central African armed coalition Séléka

Summary:
The opposition armed group LRA, moved by the religious messianism of its leader, Joseph Kony, was created in 1986 with the aim of overthrowing the government of Uganda, introducing a regime based on the Ten Commandments of the Bible and releasing the northern region of the country from its marginalisation. The violence and insecurity caused by the attacks of the LRA against the civil population, the kidnapping of minors to add to its ranks (about 25,000 since the beginning of the conflict) and the confrontations between the armed group and the armed forces (together with the pro-governmental militia) have led to the death of some 200,000 people and the forced displacement of some two million people at the most acute moment of the conflict. The growing military pressure carried out by the Ugandan armed forces obliged the group to take refuge first in South Sudan, later in DR Congo and finally in the Central African Republic. Thus, the LRA increased its activities in the neighbouring countries where it set up its bases, due to the inability to stop it in DR Congo, Central African Republic and the complicity of Sudan. Between 2006 in 2008, a peace process was held that managed to establish an end to hostilities, although it was a failure and in December 2008, the Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese armies carried out an offensive against the LRA, which caused the breaking up of the group towards the north of DR Congo, the southeast of the Central African Republic and the southwest of South Sudan, where the offensive continued. In November 2011, the AU authorised the creation of a cross-regional force composed of military contingents from these three countries, which deployed in September 2012 and has US logistical support. The sustained reduction of violence in recent years meant that the situation was no longer considered an armed conflict in early 2015, although less intense violence persists.

The armed activities of the insurgent group of Ugandan origin LRA continued during the year in the triangle formed between the CAR, the DRC and South Sudan, though at a lower intensity than previous years. Again, the most affected areas were concentrated in the eastern CAR (Haut Kotto, Mbomou and Haut Mbomou) and the northeastern DRC (the provinces of Haut Uelé and Bas Uelé and Garamba National Park), and no acts of violence were reported on the South Sudanese side of the border area between the DRC and South Sudan. According to the project LRA Crisis Tracker, a total of 90 violent incidents were recorded during the year (less than in the previous year, when 103 were reported) in which eight people lost their lives (10 in 2017) and 362 people were temporarily or permanently abducted. Though this is an increase over the 293 reported in 2017, it is far below the 729 that occurred in 2016. In general, in 2018 there was a decrease in the impact of the actions committed by the LRA in the region.[19] Again, most of the activities of the active subgroups that currently make up the LRA consisted of looting, ambushes, temporary kidnappings and sexual violence.

Chad	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources, Territory Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The foiled coup d'état of 2004 and the constitutional reform of 2005, boycotted by the opposition, sowed the seeds of an insurgency that intensified over the course of 2006, with the goal of overthrowing the authoritarian government of Idriss Déby. This opposition movement is composed of various groups and soldiers who are disaffected with the regime. Added to this is the antagonism between Arab tribes and the black population in the border area between Sudan and Chad, related to local grievances, competition for resources and the overspill of the war taking place in the neighbouring Sudanese region of Darfur, as a consequence of the cross-border operations of Sudanese armed groups and the janjaweed (Sudanese pro-government Arab militias). They attacked the refugee camps and towns in Darfur, located in the east of Chad, and this contributed to an escalation of tension between Sudan and Chad, accusing each other of supporting the insurgence from the opposite country, respectively. The signature of an agreement between both countries in January 2010 led to a gradual withdrawal and demobilisation of the Chadian armed groups, although there are still some resistance hotspots. In parallel, Idriss Déby continued controlling the country in an authoritarian way. After the 2016 election, which was won with no surprises by Idriss Déby, the climate of social instability persisted. Finally, the military intervened in the north against groups based in Libya, illegal miners and Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, as well as periodic inter-community clashes over property and land use.

---

19. See Invisible Children – Resolve, *LRA Crisis Tracker*. [Viewed on 21 February 2019]

Chad remained affected by an atmosphere of political and social instability, ongoing attacks by the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region[19] and escalating violence in the northern part of the country linked to illegal mining and other issues. Regionally, Chad continued to participate in the G5 Sahel Joint Force. In the political and social arena, the national forum on institutional reform was held in March. Though it was boycotted by the opposition, around 1,000 representatives of pro-government parties participated. Different measures were proposed in the forum that were introduced into the constitutional reform. Approved by Parliament and ratified by President Idriss Déby in May, the new Constitution abolishes the office of prime minister and reinstates the presidential term limits that Déby eliminated in 2005. However, the political opposition mobilised against the new Constitution. At the end of October, the government and the unions reached an agreement putting an end to five months of strikes in the public sector. Furthermore, violence escalated in the northern part of the country: periodic clashes between groups of miners who illegally mine for gold and local communities in the Tibesti region were joined by the regular and growing intervention of the Chadian Army in pursuit of Chadian armed groups based in Libya and official government action to expel the illegal miners, groups of arms dealers and slaver groups. In November, clashes escalated between the Chadian Army and militias of the Tebu community, which tried to retain control and mining resources in the area of Miski, in Tibesti, causing dozens of fatalities. The real death toll is unknown. The actions involved combat aircraft that bombed areas inhabited by civilians. Opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo condemned the government's silence on the resurgence of armed groups in the north and the parliamentary political opposition later called for a ceasefire and for dialogue in the northern part of the country.

DRC	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Between 1998 and 2003, what has been called "Africa's First World War" took place in DRC.[20] The signing of a series of peace agreements between 2002 and 2003 involved the withdrawal of foreign troops and the creation of a National Transitional Government (NTG), incorporating the former government, the political opposition, the RCD-Goma, RCD-K-ML, RCD-N and MLC armed groups, and the Mai Mai militias. From June 2003, the NTG was led by President Joseph Kabila and four vice presidents, two of whom belonged to the former insurgency: Azarias Ruberwa of the RCD-Goma and Jean-Pierre Bemba of the MLC. The NTG drew up the constitution, on which a referendum was held

in December 2005. Legislative and presidential elections were held between July and October 2006, in which Kabila was elected president and Jean-Pierre Bemba came second, amid a climate of high tension and accusations of electoral fraud. The formation of the new government in 2007 failed to bring a halt to the instability and disputes taking place in the political sphere. The elections of November 2011, in which a series of irregularities were committed, fuelled the instability. The extension of President Kabila's term of office, which was due to expire in the 2016 election (which in turn was postponed until the end of 2018), exacerbated the instability and political and social protests against him remaining in power, which were harshly repressed.

The country remained affected by the serious nationwide political and social crisis resulting from the expiration of President Joseph Kabila's term of office in December 2016 and preparations to hold the election in December 2018, amidst a climate of political violence and insurgent activity in the provinces of Ituri, North and South Kivu (east) and in the Kasai region (centre). There was also tension related to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu province (east) and the outbreak of violence in Mai-Ndombe province (west).

The fragility of the opposition, divided by a leadership vacuum following the death in early 2017 of historical opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi, the head of the opposition party UDPS, affected the implementation of the peace agreement. Moreover, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) declared that holding the elections in 2017 would be impossible and published a new election schedule in November 2017. Though rejected by the opposition and triggering large demonstrations, in the end the UN Security Council validated this new schedule, which provided for holding national presidential and legislative and provincial elections on 23 December 2018 and for appointing the president in January 2019, more than a year after what was stipulated in the agreement of 31 December 2016. The government justified the delay in the elections due to the security situation and the logistical and technical difficulties. The entire year passed amidst disputes between the presidential majority and the opposition over the electoral preparations and the repression of the political and social protests in the street. In August, the deadline for submitting candidacies, Kabila finally announced that he would not run for a new term and that Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, his protégé, would run on behalf of the presidential majority.

In early April, a new Ebola outbreak was detected in the province of Équateur, leaving around 33 people dead at the end of July. On 1 August, the government declared another outbreak in Beni, in the province of Ituri (North Kivu), which reportedly claimed 75 lives by the end of that month. The escalation of violence in the Ituri region complicated the work of health care professionals and was joined by popular protests in the Beni region in late October. This led the Electoral Commission in charge

---

20. See the summary on DRC (east) in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

of organising the presidential election in the country in December to cancel it in Beni and Butembo (North Kivu), postponing it until March 2019. The election was also suspended in Yumbi, in the western province of Mai-Ndombe, due to the deterioration of the security situation. Also in Mai-Ndombe, clashes between the Bnugu and Batende communities, reported between 16 and 18 December, left a death toll of around 890 and displaced 16,000, who took refuge in the Republic of the Congo, according to the United Nations human rights office in the country.

Finally the presidential, legislative and regional elections were held on 30 December, a week later than planned (23 December) because a fire destroyed around 8,000 electronic counting machines stored in a local electoral commission. After several days in which some governments and international organisations pressured the CENI to publish the results of the elections, finally on 10 February it declared Felix Tshisekedi (38.57%) the winner, followed by Martin Fayulu (34.83%) and the ruling party candidate Emanual Ramazani Shadary (23.84%), with a turnout of 47.5%. The CENI also announced the results of the legislative and local elections, in which the parties supporting former President Kabila won an overwhelming majority. Both Tshisekedi and Kabila accepted the results, but Martin Faluyu filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court alleging electoral fraud and claiming that he would have received 62% of the votes and Tshisekedi 18%, according to his estimates and those of the Catholic Church. The Church, which deployed 40,000 electoral observers, publicly stated that the official results did not coincide with their own conclusions or with the results indicated by most international observers, including those of the African Union and the SADC, which would have handed victory to Faluyu.

The political and economic crisis in Sudan unleashed major popular demonstrations across the country that were harshly repressed by the government

Sudan	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Sudan has been immersed in a long-standing conflict stemming from the concentration of power and resources in the centre of the country. Besides the conflicts in the marginalised regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the rest of the country is also undergoing governability problems stemming from the authoritarian regime of President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power after a coup in 1989 and who uses strict control and repression against dissidents through the State's security forces. Tensions worsened in the country with the secession of South Sudan

in 2011, since this severely affected the country's economy, 70% of which depended on revenues from oil, mainly located in the south. The Sudanese State coffers saw revenue plummet with the loss of control over oil exports and, later on, due to the lack of agreement with South Sudan over how to transport oil through the oil pipelines crossing Sudan. A financial situation with a high inflation and the devaluation of its currency contributed to the outbreak of significant protests in the Summer of 2012 in several cities around the cities that were put out by the security forces.

The tension in the country increased throughout the year, reaching its peak during December, when major demonstrations against the government were harshly repressed by the security forces. The national budgets submitted for the year 2018 included cuts to the flour subsidy that caused the price of bread to triple, triggering major protests throughout the country during January. The protests were suppressed by the security forces, resulting in the arrest of hundreds of people, including the opposition leader of the Sudanese Congress Party, Omar al-Digar. During February the protests continued to be concentrated mainly in the capital. After the violence was condemned by EU embassies and the United States, the government of Sudan released 80 of the people arrested in January. Later, on 10 April, President Omar al-Bashir ordered the release of the dozens of political prisoners who remained in prison. During May, the economic situation worsened due to the shortage of fuel that began in late April. In response to the crisis, on 7 May the government announced an agreement with Saudi Arabia to provide oil at preferential rates for five years. In the midst of the political and economic crisis, on 14 May President al-Bashir announced that he was reshuffling the government cabinet, appointing new ministers of foreign affairs, oil and the interior. Amidst political reforms enacted by the new cabinet, on 10 June the Council of Ministers announced it had approved a draft electoral law reducing the number of seats in Parliament from 450 to 300 and increasing subnational state representation from two MPs to three. In order to alleviate the political and economic crisis in the country, President al-Bashir dissolved the government in September and appointed a new prime minister, Motazz Moussa, who had been the minister of irrigation and electricity, thereby reducing the number of ministries from 31 to 21. In the same month, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) again selected Omar al-Bashir as its candidate to run in the presidential election scheduled for 2020. The announcement prompted significant criticism from the opposition, because the Constitution allows a maximum of two presidential terms, and if al-Bashir runs in the next election it will be his third term. On 4 December, Parliament approved the constitutional amendment to extend presidential term limits, thereby allowing al-Bashir to run in future elections. In the midst of the economic and political crisis, demonstrations against the government began in the northeastern city of Atbara on 19 December and quickly

spread throughout the country. Their many demands included the resignation of the president and resulted in the burning of ruling party headquarters buildings in various parts of the country. The regime's security forces responded by cracking down hard on the protests, leaving a death toll of at least 37 in the first few days. The Internet was ordered closed, as well as several newspapers and educational centres, including universities. The United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, the UN and other international actors condemned the repression and asked the government to investigate the deaths of the demonstrators. The year closed with the protests continuing and spreading across a large part of the country.

Meanwhile, the Sudanese and US governments worked to normalise their diplomatic relations during the year and remove Sudan from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. The US State Department informed Khartoum of its willingness to stop designating it a "state sponsor of terrorism" if the Sudanese government makes progress in six different areas, including expanding anti-terrorism efforts, peacefully resolving the armed conflicts in the country, downgrading relations with North Korea and improving the human rights situation in the country. These negotiations remained active at the end of the year.

Horn of Africa

Eritrea	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government, Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, internal political and social opposition, political-military opposition coalition EDA (EPDF, EFDM, EIPJD, ELF, EPC, DMLEK, RSADO, ENSF, EIC, Nahda), other groups

Summary:
The single-party regime that has remained in place in Eritrea since 1993 (the former insurgency that contributed to the collapse of Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in Ethiopia in 1991), is highly authoritarian in nature, silencing and suppressing the political opposition. The government, led by the old guard from the time of independence, has a series of opposition movements to contend with that are calling for progress in democracy and the governability of the country, respect for ethnic minorities and a greater degree of self-government. They also demand official language status for Arabic, an end to the marginalisation of Islam in the country and a halt to the cultural imposition of the Tigray community, or Tygranisation, carried out by the PFDJ, which controls all the mechanisms of power. This situation, added to Eritrea's policy in the region of the Horn of Africa, has led the country towards increasing isolationism. In December 2009 the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo, air travel ban and asset freeze on the country's highest-ranking officials due to their support of the Somalian armed group al-Shabaab.

The positive development of the situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia had a positive influence on Eritrea's regional policy, but not its domestic policy. On 14 November, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions against Eritrea that had been in place since 2009 through UN Resolution 2444, which was approved unanimously. **The historic peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia[21] that was reached during 2018 resulted in overcoming the deadlock in other regional disputes, including the situation between Eritrea and Djibouti over the Ras Doumeira border dispute.** Although the conflict is still pending resolution, on 7 September 2018 both countries announced the normalisation of their relations after Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh's visit to Djibouti. Djibouti Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf announced the start of a new era of relations between the two countries. Following the meeting, Ethiopia publicly celebrated the change in attitude. Osman Saleh appeared in Djibouti accompanied by his Somali counterpart, Ahmed Isse Awad, and his Ethiopian counterpart, Workneh Gebeyehu, who travelled to Djibouti to facilitate the dialogue. Internally, however, the situation remained serious, as evidenced by the fact that since the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia reopened in September, more than 27,500 Eritreans applied for refugee status in Ethiopia, according to ECHO, the humanitarian agency of the EU, as it reported on 21 December. As of 31 August, there were 174,000 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, according to ECHO. Several analysts indicated that the resumption of diplomatic ties with Ethiopia and the regional dynamics had not been accompanied by changes in the domestic arena such as the release of the thousands of political prisoners held in the country as a consequence of the repression, the absence of freedom of expression, the closure of prisons where serious human rights violations have been committed and indefinite conscription for people between 18 and 50 years of age, which are the main reasons why the country's population is fleeing. In October, UNHCR highlighted that the flow of Eritreans seeking refugee status in Ethiopia had risen from 53 to 390 a day.

Eritrea - Ethiopia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Territory International
Main parties:	Eritrea, Ethiopia

Summary:
Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1993, although the border between both countries was not clearly defined, causing them to face off between 1998 and 2000 in a war that cost over 100,000 lives. In June 2000 they signed a cessation of hostilities agreement, the UN Security Council established the UNMEE mission to monitor it and they signed

---

21. See the summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia.

the Algiers peace agreement in December. This agreement established that both would submit to the ruling issued by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), which is in charge of delimiting and demarcating the border based on the relevant colonial treaties (1900, 1902 and 1908) and on international law. The EEBC announced its opinion in April 2002, assigning the disputed border village of Badme (the epicentre of the war, currently administered by Ethiopia) to Eritrea, though Ethiopia rejected the decision. Frustrated by the lack of progress in implementing the EEBC's ruling due to insufficient pressure on Ethiopia to comply, Eritrea decided to restrict UNMEE operations in late 2005, forcing its withdrawal in 2008. A year earlier, the EEBC had ended its work without being able to implement its mandate due to obstructions in Ethiopia, so the situation has remained at an impasse ever since. Both countries maintained a situation characterised by a pre-war climate, with hundreds of thousands of soldiers deployed on their shared border, sporadic clashes and belligerent rhetoric.

In 2018, a historic agreement was reached between Eritrea and Ethiopia that put an end to 20 years of conflict between both countries. The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as the new prime minister of Ethiopia was decisive, although according to some sources, the process began to take shape during the government of Hailemariam Desalegn. Eritrea and Ethiopia had been exchanging messages since 2017 with the support of the United States and particularly the United Arab Emirates, a country that has been the greatest backer of this process. On 15 February, former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced that he would resign from office and from the leadership of the ruling coalition to facilitate the implementation of reforms due to the serious crisis affecting the country. On 16 February the Ethiopian government reinstated the state of emergency, which had been in force between October 2016 and October 2017. However, in January the government had announced that it would pardon hundreds of political prisoners, and in February the attorney general decreed the release of hundreds of prisoners, though the demonstrations and tension continued. On 27 March, Abiy Ahmed was appointed president of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forum (EPRDF). A member of the Oromo community, former military intelligence officer and MP, Abiy Ahmed was put forward as a candidate by the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), one of the four parties that make up the governing EPRDF coalition. He was appointed prime minister of the country on 2 April. His first acts were aimed at mitigating ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. In his inaugural address, Abiy Ahmed promised that he would achieve peace with Eritrea. However, Eritrea dismissed the statement and again urged Addis Ababa to withdraw its troops from the border area.

A historic agreement was reached between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2018 that put an end to 20 years of conflict between both sides

On 5 June, the governing EPRDF coalition announced that it would accept the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission's (EEBC) ruling, which includes the transfer of Badme, the epicentre of the conflict, to Eritrea. At the same time, it urged Asmara to accept its openness to dialogue without preconditions. The announcement did not establish any agenda for withdrawing troops, which was Eritrea's main concern and demand, but was unanimously welcomed by the international community nonetheless. The Eritrean opposition movement Forum for National Dialogue[22] urged the Ethiopian government to withdraw its troops from Eritrean soil without preconditions. However, peaceful civic demonstrations were staged days later in Badme and the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray in protest against the government's announcement. The TPLF party, a member of the ruling coalition representing the Tigray minority, also criticised the decision. On 20 June, Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki revealed plans to send a delegation to hold peace talks with Ethiopia, which became effective on 26 June with a meeting in Addis Ababa between the Eritrean foreign minister and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. After the meeting, Abiy said that his country was willing to end hostilities and make sacrifices to restore peace with Eritrea if necessary. The decisive moment came on 8 July, when Abiy set out on a two-day visit to Asmara. On the same day, telephone connectivity between both countries was re-established for the first time in 20 years. **On 9 July, the leaders of both countries signed the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship**, ending 20 years of war and including agreement on implementing the border decision and on restoring diplomatic, economic and communications agreements, among other issues. Abiy asked UN Secretary-General António Guterres to lift the sanctions on Eritrea. Between 14 and 16 July, Afewerki visited Ethiopia for the first time in 20 years and reopened the Eritrean Embassy. Ethiopian Airlines resumed flights with Eritrea on 18 July and its Eritrean counterpart did the same on 4 August. On 24 July, both leaders thanked Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates for his role in promoting peace between the two countries. Abiy Ahmed made his second visit to Eritrea on 5 September and the Ethiopian Embassy opened in Asmara the next day. On 11 September, both leaders agreed to withdraw their troops from the shared border. This decision gave way to the tripartite meeting between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) that culminated in the **signing of the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia on 16 September, known as the Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation**, with the leaders of both countries and King Salman of Saudi Arabia, the UN Secretary-General, the chair of the AU

---

22. Opposition movement created in London in 2014 that promotes democracy and political transition in the country that includes several former senior officials of the ruling party, the EPLF, who reject the authoritarian path that the country has taken since the 1990s.

Commission and the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates in attendance. This agreement added the creation of joint investment projects to the Joint Declaration of 9 July, including the establishment of Joint Special Economic Zones and collaboration in the fight against terrorism and human, drug and weapons trafficking, as well as a committee and subcommittees to monitor implementation of the agreement.

Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government (EPRDF coalition, led by the party TPLF), political and social opposition, various armed groups

Summary:
The Ethiopian administration that has governed since 1991 is facing a series of opposition movements that demand advances in the democracy and governability of the country, as well as a greater degree of self-government. The government coalition EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) is controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party, of the Tigrayan minority, that rules the country with growing authoritarianism with the consent of the Amhara elite. There is discontent in the country with the ethnic federal regime implemented by the EPRDF which has not resolved the national issue and has led to the consolidation of a strong political and social opposition. Along with the demands for the democratization of the institutions, there are political-military sectors that believe that ethnic federalism does not meet their nationalist demands and other sectors, from the ruling classes and present throughout the country, that consider ethnic federalism to be a deterrent to the consolidation of the Nation-State. In the 2005 elections this diverse opposition proved to be a challenge for the EPRDF, who was reluctant to accept genuine multi-party competition, and post-election protests were violently repressed. The following elections (2010, 2015) limited even more the democratic opening by increasing the verticality of the regime and the repression of the political opposition. The 2009 Counter-Terrorism Law contributed to decimate the opposition. The attempt since 2014 to carry out the Addis Ababa Master Plan, a plan that provided for the territorial expansion of the capital, Addis Ababa, at the expense of several cities in the Oromiya region, and the organization of the development of the city generated important protests and deadly repression in the Oromiya region, which contributed to increasing tension.

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as the new prime minister of Ethiopia in March 2018 was decisive, although according to some sources. In February, former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced that he would resign from office and on 27 March, Abiy Ahmed was appointed president of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forum (EPRDF). A member of the Oromo community, former military intelligence officer and MP, Abiy Ahmed was put forward as a candidate by the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), one of the four parties that make up the governing EPRDF coalition. He was appointed prime minister of the country on 2 April. His first acts were aimed at mitigating ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. On his first trip, in April, he visited Jijiga, the capital of the Somali region, to meet with representatives of the Oromo and Somali communities. On 30 June, the government presented a proposal to Parliament to remove three armed groups from the list of terrorist organisations (OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7), opened access to more than 200 forbidden websites, dismissed senior prison officials for failing to protect prisoners' rights and promoted the release of political prisoners, which ostensibly reduced the violence and the tense atmosphere in the country.

However, as stated by ACLED, the change in leadership and the opening to democracy promoted by Abiy Ahmed's government did not halt the political violence.[23] In this vein, ACLED observed greater tolerance of the protests and a reduction in the number of demonstrations in Oromia, but instability in other parts of Oromia and intercommunity violence in Ethiopia increased at the same time. In June 2018, a state of emergency was lifted that included a ban on holding public protests, which implied a rise social and political mobilisation and a drop in clashes between the demonstrators and the security forces of the country at the same time, due to the security forces' greater tolerance.

Ethiopia (Oromia)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Central government, regional government, political opposition (OFDM, OPC parties) and social opposition, armed opposition (OLF, IFLO)

Summary:
Ethiopia has experienced secessionist movements or rejection of central power since the 1970s. The Oromo OLF emerged between 1973 and 1974 and operates in the Ethiopian region of Oromia, in the centre and south of the country, against the Mengistu dictatorship and with the goal of establishing an independent State for the Oromo community. Despite differences, the political and armed nationalist movements of the Oromo participated together with other insurgent groups in the country to overthrow the Mengistu regime in 1991. However, the OLF split away in 1992 from the transitional Government led by Meles Zenawi's TPLF party, that controls the coalition in power, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and has initiated an armed struggle against the central Government and against other Oromo pro-government political movements, and demands independence for the Oromo community. Meanwhile, the region of Oromia has been hit by a series of protests against the Ethiopian regime. Initiated by the student movement

---

23. Matfess, Hilary and Watson, Daniel, *Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy's Ethiopia*, ACLED, 13 October 2018.

in 2014 over the the Oromo people's perception that it is marginalised, the protests were harshly repressed. Furthermore, violence broke out recurrently between Somali pastoralist communities and Oromo agricultural communities along the border between the Oromia and Somali regions due to competition for resources and the demarcation of the land of both communities. Violence also flared in remote areas of both regions. Finally, the crackdowns of the Liyu Police have exacerbated the situation and fuelled further violence.

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as the new prime minister of Ethiopia in March 2018 was decisive, although according to some sources. In February, former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced that he would resign from office and on 27 March, Abiy Ahmed was appointed president of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Forum (EPRDF). A member of the Oromo community, former military intelligence officer and MP, Abiy Ahmed was put forward as a candidate by the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), one of the four parties that make up the governing EPRDF coalition. He was appointed prime minister of the country on 2 April. His first acts were aimed at mitigating ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties. On his first trip, in April, he visited Jijiga, the capital of the Somali region, to meet with representatives of the Oromo and Somali communities. On 30 June, the government presented a proposal to Parliament to remove three armed groups from the list of terrorist organisations (OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7), opened access to more than 200 forbidden websites, dismissed senior prison officials for failing to protect prisoners' rights and promoted the release of political prisoners, which ostensibly reduced the violence and the tense atmosphere in the country.

After it was removed from the list of terrorist groups, where it had been listed since 2008, the OLF declared a unilateral ceasefire in July. On 20 July, Parliament passed an amnesty law for former political prisoners. After these historic decisions, the government and the OLF reached a reconciliation agreement to end the hostilities in Asmara on 7 August. Both parties agreed to establish a joint committee to monitor implementation of the agreement.

However, after these breakthroughs, there was an escalation of violence in the capital, Addis Ababa, and the surrounding area linked to the return of OLF members who had been in exile. On 15 September, a major demonstration was staged to commemorate their return, which ended with acts of violence committed by

On 7 August, the Ethiopian government and the armed group OLF signed a Reconciliation Agreement in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, laying the foundations for ending a conflict that is over 40 years old

sympathisers of the rebellion against other communities. Other acts of violence occurred in some neighbourhoods and districts of the capital in the days that followed, in which 28 people lost their lives. Later, the government asked the OLF fighters who had not yet disarmed as established by the reconciliation agreement reached in August to proceed to disarm. Around 1,300 OLF fighters had already disarmed in compliance with the agreement. However, clashes were reported between the OLF and Ethiopian security forces in the district of Qelem de Wolega between 28 and 29 October, which were repeated at the end of the year. The OLF accused the government of not having respected the August agreement.

In this vein, ACLED observed greater tolerance of the protests and a reduction in the number of demonstrations in Oromia, but instability in other parts of Oromia and intercommunity violence in Ethiopia increased at the same time.[24] In addition, the geography of political violence also shifted from the capital, Addis Ababa, and from western Oromia, to the Somali region and the border area between the Somali region and Oromia. There were outbreaks of violence between Somali livestock-raising communities and Oromo agricultural communities along the border between the Oromia and Somali regions. These communities compete for resources but above all for the demarcation of their respective lands, as no formal border has ever been drawn and the symbolic lack of a boundary is used to promote intercommunal violence. To this must be added the escalation of violence perpetrated by the Liyu Police, the governmental paramilitary group responsible for serious human rights violations against civilians in Oromia and the Somali region.[25]

Kenya	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Identity, Government, Recsources, Self-government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties and civil society organisations), SLDF, Mungiki sect, MRC, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and groups sympathetic to al-Shabaab in Kenya, ISIS

Summary:
Kenya's politics and economy have been dominated since its independence in 1963 by the KANU party, controlled by the largest community in the country, the Kikuyu, to the

---

24. Matfess, Hilary and Watson, Daniel, op. cit.
25. In 2008, the Liyu Police became a powerful counterinsurgency group led by the region's security chief, Abdi Mohammed Omar, also known as Abdi Illey, who became the president of the Somali region in 2010, although the Liyu Police remaned under his control. HRW, *Ethiopia: No Justice in Somali Region Killings*, HRW, April 2017.

detriment of the remaining ethnic groups. In 2002, the authoritarian and kleptocratic Daniel Arap Moi, who had held power for 24 years, was defeated by Mwai Kibaki on the back of promises to end corruption and redistribute wealth in a poor agricultural country whose growth is based on tourism. However, Kibaki's subsequent broken promises fostered a climate of frustration, which meant that the opposition leader Raila Odinga became a threat to Kibaki's hegemony of power. Odinga did not base his campaign on tribal affiliation but rather on change and on the building of a fairer society. The electoral fraud that took place in 2007 sparked an outbreak of violence in which 1,300 people died and some 300,000 were displaced. This situation led to an agreement between the two sectors through which a fragile government of national unity was created. A new presidential election in 2013 was won by Uhuru Kenyatta, who was tried by the ICC in connection with the events of 2007, though the court dropped the charges in 2015. In parallel, several areas of the country were affected by inter-community disputes over land ownership, also instigated politically during the electoral period. Furthermore, the illegal activities of the Mungiki sect, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia has triggered attacks by the Somalian armed group al-Shabaab in Kenya and the subsequent animosity towards the Somalian population in Kenya, presenting a challenge to the country's stability. Another factor in 2012 has been the growing government pressure on the secessionist movement Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), whose goal is the independence of the country's coastal region.

The country suffered an increase in intercommunal violence during the year alongside the continuous activity of the Somali Islamist armed group **al-Shabaab, the counterinsurgency operations of the Kenyan Armed Forces and the security forces and the growing presence of ISIS in the country since 2016**. The political demonstrations linked to the 2017 election cooled down and the post-electoral tension subsided. In December 2017, President Uhuru Kenyatta rejected dialogue with the opposition and the electoral reform and opposition leader Raila Odinga postponed his decision to proclaim himself president due to domestic and international pressure between 12 December to 30 January.[26] Kenyatta appointed his cabinet in January (without including members of the opposition) and Odinga proclaimed himself "president of the people" in a crowded ceremony despite threats of police intervention. The ceremony took place peacefully, although the government interrupted the broadcasts of some media outlets that intended to cover it. In February there were clashes between supporters of the opposition and the police following the arrest of opposition lawyer Miguna Miguna, who played a predominant role in Odinga's proclamation as president and was charged with treason. However, President Kenyatta and Odinga met unexpectedly on 9 March in their first meeting since the disputed election, creating a space to start talks in April that included the launch of a joint committee formed by 14 members on both sides

that was supposed to resolve the political conflict. This negotiating and reconciliation process was consolidated in April and both parties carried out confidence-building measures in May, including Kenyatta's announcement of the creation of new offices in his government to which he would appoint allies of Odinga.

Furthermore, al-Shabaab staged periodic insurgent attacks in the north and east of Kenya, specifically in the border area between Somalia and Kenya (the counties of Mandera, Wajir and Garissa) and in the coastal zone of Kenya (mainly in Lamu county), which caused dozens of fatalities throughout the year. Human Rights Watch reported in February 2018 that police and armed gangs had killed at least 37 people between September and November 2017 as part of the new election held in October. In this vein, fewer people died at the hands of the police in 2018 than in 2017, as revealed by Deadly Force.[27] In 2015, 143 people were killed by the police. This figure climbed to 205 people in 2016 and to 256 in 2017, but fell to 219 in 2018, a 14% drop in one year. This decrease may be directly linked to the electoral period, since in August 2017 there were 67 deaths while in August 2018 there were only 16. During the rest of the year, the number of fatalities per month was relatively similar. Finally, militias linked to different communities clashed on various occasions throughout the year in the northern part of the country due mainly to the theft of cattle, boundary disputes between territories of different communities, reprisals for previous attacks and land use and ownership, causing dozens of fatalities.

North Africa – Maghreb

Tunisia	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups including the Uqba ibn Nafi Battalion or the Oqba ibn Nafaa Brigades (branch of AQIM), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS

Summary:
From its independence in 1956 until early 2011, Tunisia was governed by only two presidents. For three decades Habib Bourghiba laid the foundations for the authoritarian regime in the country, which Zine Abidine Ben Ali then continued after a coup d'état in 1987. The concentration of power, the persecution of the secular and Islamist political opposition and the iron grip on society that characterised the country's internal situation stood in contrast to its international image

26. See Escola de Cultura de Pau. *Alert 2018! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2018.
27. Deadly Force is a database for murders committed by the police. This Nation Newsplex project, which in turn is a project of the Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation*, seeks to report all the deaths resulting from police operations in Kenya based on public reports and including information from individuals and organisations in the public and private sectors. The database is compiled from information from the media, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, other government agencies and accounts provided by human rights organisations.

of stability. Despite allegations of corruption, electoral fraud and human rights violations, Tunisia was a privileged ally of the West for years. In December 2010, the outbreak of a popular revolt exposed the contradictions of Ben Ali's government, led to its fall in early 2011 and inspired protests against authoritarian governments throughout the Arab world. Since then, Tunisia has been immersed in a bumpy transition that has laid bare the tensions between secular and Islamist groups in the country. At the same time, Tunisia has been the scene of increased activity from armed groups, including branches of AQIM and ISIS.

The situation in Tunisia continued to be characterised by **ongoing security challenges linked to the activity of armed groups, as well as a climate of political and social tension. Following the trend of the previous year, during 2018 different acts of violence caused the deaths of about 15 people**. The most prominent incidents included an ambush on a border patrol by suspected jihadist fighters in the Ain Sultan area, near the Algerian border, which killed six members of the security forces in July, and an attack conducted by a suicide bomber in October that injured 20 people, making it the first attack in the Tunisian capital since 2015. Meanwhile, the Tunisian authorities maintained their offensives against leaders and presumed fighters of armed jihadist groups, active mainly in areas bordering Algeria and Libya. The killing of Bilel Kobi, a senior AQIM official whose mission was to reorganise the group's branch in Tunisia, was announced in January 2018.[28] Other prominent figures who lost their lives during the year included Chawki Fakraoui, the leader of Jund al-Khilafa, a branch of ISIS, in the governorate of Kasserine, in March, and Aymen Ben Younes, the leader of the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade, an AQIM splinter group, in December. Some analysts pointed out that even though the actions of these groups were of low intensity, the security forces were unable to dismantle them. On the contrary, they have grown in size and are in a position to take advantage of the instability in Tunisia and Algeria.[29] The Tunisian authorities renewed the current state of emergency in force since 2015 on five occasions in 2018 and upheld measures such as controls and restrictions on movement in border areas. Amnesty International reported that these measures were being applied in a discriminatory manner and were leading to arbitrary arrests.

Meanwhile, the country remained mired in an atmosphere of social protest. The most serious incidents occurred at the beginning and end of the year. In January, three days of protest over the rising cost of living resulted in clashes with the police that left one dead in Teborurba (north) and more than 800 people arrested. **In December, the death of a journalist who had condemned the economic problems and unfulfilled promises of the 2011 revolution sparked new protests and clashes with the police** in Kasserine (centre). In this context, Amnesty International also denounced the arbitrary arrest of demonstrators and cases of excessive use of force by security forces. Tunisia

also continued to be affected by a political crisis stemming mainly from the power struggle between President Essebsi and Prime Minister Chahed, leaders of two factions of the ruling party, Nida Tounes, which led to the breakup of the coalition with the Islamist Ennahda party in September. Moreover, in March Parliament voted against extending the mandate of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) to end its investigative work on human rights abuses in the country since 1955. In the midst of controversies related to procedural issues, the IVD continued its work until December and submitted its report at the end of the year in the absence of government and parliamentary representatives. The chair of the IVD called on civil society to continue working towards reconciliation in the country. International human rights NGOs criticised the obstacles and lack of political support for the IVD and called for the proper development of transitional justice in the country.

Southern Africa

Mozambique	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, RENAMO political party, RENAMO militias, islamist armed group al-Shabaab

Summary:
The coup against the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974 and the guerrilla war between the Marxist-Leninist FRELIMO insurgence drove Mozambique to gain independence from Portugal in 1975. Then Mozambique entered a civil war between the FRELIMO Government and the armed group RENAMO, the latter supported by the white minorities governing in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the apartheid regime of South Africa, in the context of the Cold War. The country was also deeply affected by famine and horrendous financial management issues. In 1992 the parties reached a peace agreement that was seen as an example of reconciliation, mediated by the Sant'Egidio Community, ending 16 years of war with one million dead and five million displaced and marking the dawn of a period of political stability and economic development albeit the large inequalities in the country. The leader of RENAMO, Alfonso Dhlakama, has been unable to turn his party into an organised and structured platform that could reach power and since the first elections in 1994 it has gradually lost its share of political power to FRELIMO and other parties such as the MDM (a breakaway party of RENAMO). In parallel, a growing chorus of voices denouncing fraud and irregularities during the successive elections, some of which were verified by international observers, have gone hand in hand with a growing authoritarianism and repression against the opposition, as well as FRELIMO taking over the State (besides the media and the economy). In 2013 RENAMO conditioned its continuity as a political entity to a set of reforms, mainly the national electoral commission and a more equitable distribution of the country's wealth, and threatened to withdraw from the peace agreement signed in 1992.

---

28. See the summary on Algeria in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
29. Matt Herbert, "The insurgency in Tunisia's western borderlands", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 June 2018.

While the tensions between the Mozambican government and the main opposition group RENAMO subsided considerably during the year, the escalation of instability and violence in the northern region of Cabo Delgado continued due to the emergence in late 2017 of an armed Islamist-based group known locally as Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a or al-Shabaab. The tensions between the FRELIMO government and the main opposition group in the country, RENAMO, continued their trend of de-escalation that began in 2017, making headway in implementing the peace agreement.[30] In February, President Filipe Nyusi (FRELIMO) and Afonso Dhlakama (the head of RENAMO) held bilateral meetings to discuss the terms of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of RENAMO members into the country's security forces. The government then announced the implementation of measures to reach an agreement in Parliament to amend the Constitution to decentralise the state, which is one of the main sources of the tensions. One of the opposition's historical demands is that political parties that win provincial elections should choose the governors of those provinces instead of the president, and this change was included. On 23 May, Parliament approved the decentralisation project. Dhlakama, the historical leader of RENAMO since 1979, died on 3 May at 65 years of age, generating uncertainty about the future of the peace agreement. Ossufo Momade, a former RENAMO general, was elected its interim leader pending a party congress in which the successor would be chosen. Both RENAMO and the government expressed their commitment to the peace process and on 11 July President Nyusi and Momade issued a joint statement announcing the upcoming disarmament of RENAMO, which was signed on 6 August. Later, on 10 October, local elections were held in the country under the new decentralisation framework approved by Parliament. For the first time in 10 years, RENAMO ran in the elections. FRELIMO won in 44 of the 53 municipalities (out of the 49 that it had previously controlled) with 57% of the vote, while RENAMO won in eight municipalities with 36.5% of the vote, although it claimed victory in another five. The Constitutional Court validated the election results on 14 November, except in the municipality of Marromeu (Sofala province), where FRELIMO prevailed in the run-off held on 22 November.

Furthermore, **instability continued in the northern region of Cabo Delgado, bordering Tanzania, as a result of the armed activities of the jihadist group known locally as Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a or al-Shabaab,** which emerged in late 2017. Although there were different attacks in the region directed against government interests and local communities during the first half of the year, it was during June that there was a higher incidence of violence in Cabo Delgado. That month, suspected Islamist militants stepped up the number

The violence in the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique increased due to the activity of jihadist militants

of attacks against communities, carrying out at least seven, mainly in the districts of Macomia and Quissanga, which left an estimated 39 people dead, with dozens injured and hundreds of homes burned down. In response, the government established army command centres in the districts of Macomia and Quissanga and subsequently announced the arrests of various people. The increased presence of the Mozambican Army in the region reduced attacks by the Islamist militants, though they continued to take place. In a Mozambican Army attack in August on a suspected insurgency camp near the village of Pundanhar, in district of Palma, at least four people were killed, and one of the group's alleged leaders, Abdul Raim, was reportedly captured. In new attacks reported in the town of Paqueue in September, 12 people were killed, 14 were wounded and more than 50 houses were burned by suspected Islamist militants. In October, the Mozambican government announced that 132 people had been arrested, while the Tanzanian Police reported that it had arrested 104 people in the country. Later, between 26 and 28 November, the Mozambican authorities announced new arrests of more than 200 people suspected of belonging to the armed group. The violence, which lasted until the end of the year, forced thousands of people to seek refuge in Tanzania.

West Africa

Nigeria	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Identity, Resources, Internal Government
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, farmers and livestock raisers, community militias , IMN, IPOB, MASSOB

Summary:

Since 1999, when political power was returned to civilian hands after a succession of dictatorships and coups, the government has not managed to establish a stable democratic system in the country. Huge economic and social differences remain between the states that make up Nigeria, due to the lack of real decentralisation, and between the various social strata, which fosters instability and outbreaks of violence. Moreover, strong inter-religious, inter-ethnic and political differences continue to fuel violence throughout the country. Political corruption and the lack of transparency are the other main stumbling blocks to democracy in Nigeria. Mafia-like practices and the use of political assassination as an electoral strategy have prevented the free exercise of the population's right to vote, leading to increasing discontent and fraudulent practices.

---

30. See the summary on Mozambique in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace talks in focus, 2019: report on trends and scenarios.* Barcelona: Icaria, 2019.

The climate of violence in the country persisted during the year due to the instability in various regions, notably the military campaign against Boko Haram in the northeast,[31] the acts of violence between livestock-raising and agricultural communities in the middle belt of the country, armed attacks conducted by various groups in the northwest region (Kaduna and Zamfara) and tensions in the Biafra region, as well as the instability in the Niger Delta.[32] All these different fronts made the security situation in the whole country much worse in a year marked by the presidential election campaign scheduled for early 2019. In addition to the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, the other most significant sources of violence were concentrated in the central region and the northwest. In the former, intercommunity fighting between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and agricultural communities in the centre and south of the country continued throughout the year. In January, there were many attacks that affected mainly the states of Benue, Taraba, Kaduna and Plateau, with a death toll of at least 203 people, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG). In response, in mid-February the Nigerian Army launched the Ayem Akpatuma ("Cat Race") military operation, which was operational in six states (Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Niger) until 31 March. The violence continued however, spreading to the southern states of Ebonyi, Kogi, Delta, Abia and Ogun. In March, at least 194 people lost their lives in different armed episodes. The escalation continued in April, when 20 different incidents were reported that claimed 350 lives, mostly in the states of Benue and Nasarawa. The increasing instability led several MPs to demand that the government make changes in its military and intelligence operations. Benue State authorities declared that the violence had transformed from a conflict between pastoralists and farmers into an insurgency. Although the intensity of the violence subsided in May, claiming around 50 lives, it increased again in June, with around 200 fatalities in a single incident between 21 and 24 May in the area of Barkin Ladi (Plateau). Later, in the third quarter of the year, violence in the region fell again in intensity, widening again in the final months of the year. Thus, in mid-November the Plateau State government reported at least 1,801 people killed and 50,212 displaced as a result of the violence there in recent months.

In relation to the **violence reported in the northwestern part of the country, mainly concentrated in the states of Kaduna and Zamfara, the year was also characterised by an increase in clashes and armed attacks** as part of different crisis situations, including tensions linked to grazing and resource management, actions resulting from

The increase in violence and tensions in the central, northeastern and northwestern regions generated an atmosphere of insecurity throughout Nigeria

vandalism and crime, tensions related to inter-community disputes and tension between the government and the Shia community organised in the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). In the first half of the year, according to data collected by the ICG, at least 382 people were killed in different episodes of violence. In June, violence displaced 12,000 people in the states of Zamfara and Sokoto. In the middle of the year the government increased its military deployment in the area, including air force operations. In one of the different security operations, taking place on 30 November, the police reported that at least 104 people accused of vandalism had been killed in the area of Zurmi (Zamfara). Meanwhile, tensions between IMN supporters and the government remained active during the year. The former continued to demand the release of their leader, Ibrahim El Zakzaky, through various demonstrations that were suppressed by the state security forces, leading to the deaths of many people during the year.

In the southern region of **Biafra**, Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of Biafran secessionist movement Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which was declared a terrorist organisation by the Nigerian government in September 2017, reappeared in Israel in October after going missing since the government's declaration. Kanu demanded a boycott of the **presidential election** until Biafra agreed to a referendum on its political-territorial status in the year commemorating the 50th anniversary of the declaration of the Republic of Biafra. His reappearance coincided with the moment when the national political parties presented their candidacies for the presidency. The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) nominated the incumbent President Buhari, while the main opposition party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP), nominated Atiku Abubakar. In total, the Electoral Commission confirmed that 79 candidates will run in the election scheduled for February 2019. In December, as the election date approached, different incidents targeted representatives of political parties, increasing the tension in the country.

Nigeria (Niger Delta)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Resources, Identity Internal
Main parties:	Government, MEND, MOSOP, NDPVF, NDV , NDA, NDGJM, IWF, REWL, PANDEF, armed groups, Joint Revolutionary Council, militias of the Ijaw, Itsereki, Urhobo and Ogoni communities, private security groups

---

31. See the summary on the Lake Chad region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
32. See the summary on Nigeria (Niger Delta) in this chapter.

Summary:

Instability in the Niger Delta is the result of the loss of livelihoods of the population due to oil activity in the area. The lack of financial compensation, development and marginalization of communities led them to demand greater participation in the profits of oil exploitation. Armed groups arose in the 90s and carried out attacks on oil installations and military posts and the kidnapping of workers. The Government's response was military, with the permanent presence of the special forces in the Delta region, accused of committing numerous human rights violations. In 2009 the government decreed an amnesty for all armed groups that decided to stop violence. The offer of rehabilitation programs encouraged the leaders of many of these groups to disarm, which led to a significant pronounced reduction of armed violence in the area. However, the stagnation of reintegration and development projects promised by the government could lead to a return to armed struggle.

The situation of tension in the southern region of the Niger Delta persisted during 2018. Since 2016, instability in the region has remained constant due to local groups' demands for the government to comply with the measures stipulated in the peace agreements signed in 2009. Although there were some attacks on oil pipelines in 2017, in the closing months of the year the tension subsided, reactivating the talks between the government and the coalition of Delta organisations, the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF). In early 2018, the armed group Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) announced that it would renew its attacks against foreign oil companies due to the lack of progress. There were some incidents in the region while talks took place during the year. In September, after the police raided the house of the PANDEF leader in Abuja on the pretext of searching for weapons, the armed group NDA reacted by announcing the end of the ceasefire and the resumption of the attacks on oil installations. At the end of the year, on 30 December, the armed coalition announced the end of the ceasefire that had been maintained for two years, arguing that the Nigerian government had not complied with the region's demands for development. Five days before the announcement, a new armed group calling itself War Against Niger Delta Exploitation (WANDE) threatened to disrupt the presidential election scheduled for early 2019 if the government did not comply with the demands of the region.

2.3.2. America

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

El Salvador	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, state security force groups, gangs (Mara Salvatrucha-13, Mara/Barrio/Calle 18, 18 Revolucionarios, 18 Sureños)

Summary:

After the end of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992), which claimed around 75,000 lives, the situation in El Salvador has been characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality, the proliferation of gangs of youths and other organised crime structures and high homicide rates that have made the country one of the most violent in the region and the world. A truce with the gangs was achieved during the government of Mauricio Funes (2009-2014), which led to a significant drop in the homicide rate, but the inauguration of Sánchez Cerén in 2015 was followed by a tightening of security policies and a substantial rise in levels of violence, resulting in a crisis of defencelessness and the forced displacement of thousands of people.

In 2018, according to official data, 3,340 homicides were reported in El Salvador. Though this was 15% less than the year before, the homicide rate still ranked the country as one of the most violent in Latin America and the world. The government stated that **both this figure and the homicide rate have gradually fallen after reaching a record high in 2015** (103 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making El Salvador the country with the highest rates of violence on the planet). The homicide rate dropped to 81 in 2016, 60 in 2017 and 51 in 2018. According to the government, this decrease in violence is mainly due to programmes to fight crime, programmes to prevent crime in at-risk communities and rehabilitation programmes in Salvadoran prisons, which according to the government have managed to get thousands of gang members to dissociate from their gangs. The number of police officers killed (32) was also lower than in the previous year (46), but the number of disappearances increased to 3,514, which was 10% more than in the previous year. Until the middle of the year, the levels of violence were clearly higher than in the previous year. In fact, in January and February, the number of homicides in El Salvador was 25% higher than in 2017. In these circumstances, the government took several steps to try to address the rising insecurity. Notable actions included the mass arrests of gang members (357 in August, around 200 in September, 340 in November and 631 in December) during major operations against the main gangs in the country (Mara Salvatrucha and the two factions of Barrio 18), the arrest of important leaders of those gangs, an increase in sentencing (in August, for example, 61 Mara Salvatrucha members were sentenced to over 100 years in prison) and, especially, the extension of the package of extraordinary measures approved in March 2016 that regulates the confinement of *mara* members and raises ideas such as the extreme isolation of certain individuals. This package of extraordinary measures was debated for a good part of the year and provoked criticism from many human rights organisations and experts, considering that it is a violation of fundamental rights and makes it harder to resume the dialogue with gangs to reduce levels of violence in the country. Regarding the human rights situation, **the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions issued a report in February that condemned these types of executions, the excessive use**

of force against gang members, the deplorable state of certain prisons and the validity of the aforementioned exceptional measures in certain prisons. Later, in April, the United Nations Human Rights Council deplored the existence of death squads in the Salvadoran Armed Forces and the high incidence of abuse by state security forces and bodies that remains unpunished.

Honduras	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, social movements, organised crime structures (drug trafficking, gangs)

Summary:
The political and social situation in the country is mainly characterised by the high homicide rates in Honduras, which in recent years has often been considered among the most violent countries in the world, as well as by the social and political polarisation following Manuel Zelaya's rise to power in 2006. Criticism from broad swathes of the population for his intention to call a referendum to reform the Constitution and run for a new term of office and for his relationship with the governments that make up the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), especially in Venezuela, led to a coup in 2009 that was criticised by the international community, led to the loss of the country's membership in the OAS and forced Zelaya into exile, which prevented him from running in the presidential election of 2009. Although Zelaya was able to return to the country in 2011, there has been a certain degree of social polarisation in the country ever since, reflected in the political crisis stemming from the 2017 presidential election between the incumbent president and a candidate who is politically close to Zelaya.

The number of murders and homicide rate fell in 2018, in line with the trend observed since 2015, but **high levels of conflict related to the political and social crisis continued, leading to a lack of agreement about the results of the presidential election of November 2017, in which incumbent President Juan Orlando Hernández and opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla both claimed victory**. This disagreement triggered several weeks of protests and demonstrations (the National Human Rights Commission said that by the end of 2017, 31 people had died and more than 1,600 had been arrested) and the temporary imposition of a state of emergency and curfew in January 2018. Although the Supreme Electoral Tribunal ruled that Hernández won the election by a narrow margin in mid-December 2017, the Opposition Alliance against the Dictatorship, led by Nasralla and former President Manuel Zelaya, who was deposed in a coup d'état in 2009, refused to recognise the results and urged the people to protest permanently. Thus, the protests continued in 2018 and were especially intense in January, with various incidents of violence both in the days before Hernandez's inauguration for a second term of office and on the day

of the investiture ceremony that injured more than 200 people. In February, Zelaya called for the formation of 10,000 commandos to lead the continued protests against the government. Episodes of violence between demonstrators and policemen reappeared later, during protests in November to mark the first anniversary of the general election. In early January 2019, a new platform close to the opposition Liberal Party, Citizen Action against the Dictatorship (ACCD), staged major protests in most of the country's departments to demand Hernández's resignation.

Given the magnitude of the crisis, the United Nations promoted dialogue between the country's main political forces. Despite the reluctance and difficulties encountered during the exploratory phase, the talks officially began in late August, with four topics and working groups, each facilitated by foreign experts hired by the United Nations: the electoral crisis of 2017, human rights, constitutional reforms and electoral reforms. Previously, the parties had agreed to give legal validity to the agreements that may be reached at the negotiating table, in addition to agreeing on a protocol to prevent violence during political demonstrations and on the establishment of a commission to investigate human rights violations after the 2017 election. These talks ended in December, with 169 "agreements" reached between the parties but no substantive agreement on core or more controversial items of the negotiating agenda.

Furthermore, **the number of homicides in 2018 (3,310) fell by 6% compared to the previous year, although the homicide rate (40 per 100,000 inhabitants) remained among the highest in Latin America and the world**. Since 2014, when Honduras was the country with the highest homicide rate in the world (87), homicides have gradually subsided in the country. In 2017, for example, they fell by 26% compared to 2016. Although the data for 2018 seem to confirm and consolidate a downward trend in homicide rates (which the government attributes to its crime prevention policies and, especially, to its programmes to fight against the *maras*), the Observatory of the Violence at the National Autonomous University of Honduras reported that the number of massacres increased in 2018. According to the Observatory, a total of 108 people died in 33 massacres between January and September 2018. In the same vein, 30 people died in eight different massacres in the first half of January 2019.

Mexico	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition (peasant and indigenous organisations, unions, students), armed opposition groups (EZLN, EPR, ERPI, FAR-LP), cartels.

Summary:
Since 2006, when Felipe Calderón started the so-called "war on drug-trafficking", the level of violence and human rights' violations throughout the country increased substantially making the country one of the ones with most murders in the world. Since then, the number of organized crime structures with ties to drug trafficking have multiplied. In some parts of the country, these structures are disputing the State's monopoly on violence. According to some estimates, by the end of 2017, the "war against drug-trafficking" had caused more than 150,000 deaths and more than 30,000 disappearances. Also, Mexico has insurgency movements in States such as Guerrero and Oaxaca –including the EPR, the ERPI or the FAR-LP. In Chiapas, after a short-lived armed uprising of the EZLN in 1994, conflict is still present in Zapatista communities.

The number of homicides, which hit its highest point in the last 20 years, increased significantly in 2018, as did cases of political violence, linked, among other factors, to the presidential election of 1 July, which was won by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. In July, it was reported that **153 politically active people, 48 of them candidates, had been killed since the beginning of the election campaign in September 2017**. Approximately 80% of these incidents occurred at the municipal level and half took place in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Puebla. Thus, in April the National Association of Mayors reported that 121 mayors have been assassinated since 2000. According to statements made by the National Commission of Human Rights in May, 133 journalists had also been killed since 2000. In March, the NGO Artículo 19 reported that 1,986 journalists had been attacked during Enrique Peña Nieto's presidency alone. In June, after the murder of three LGTBI activists in Guerrero, it transpired that 381 people had been murdered because of their sexual orientation and gender identity during Peña Nieto's presidency. Furthermore, 2018 was the year with the highest number of reported femicides (861) in recent years (there were 422 in 2015). The states with the highest incidence of this phenomenon were Colima (3.37 per 100,000 inhabitants), Sinaloa (3.09) and Nuevo León (2.96).

According to official data, there were 33,341 homicides in Mexico in 2018, a figure 15% higher than the 28,866 homicides reported in 2017 and the highest since homicide records were first collected in 1997. These increased dramatically since the end of 2006 –date in which former President Felipe Calderón initiated the so-called "war against drug trafficking"– and increased by 74% since 2014. According to official data, 250,547 homicides were reported in Mexico between December 2006 and April 2018. In 2018, the states with the highest relative rates of violence were Colima (81.09 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants), Baja California (77.19) and Guerrero (61.35), while those that experienced the greatest increase in violence in 2018 compared to the previous year were Guanajuato (138%), Quintana Roo (106%) and Jalisco (45%). In April, the Igárape Institute published a report stating, among other things, that Mexico was the country with

the second-highest number of homicides in the world in 2017, that the murders that occurred in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela accounted for a quarter of the 437,000 that occurred around the world and that five Mexican cities were among the 50 with the highest homicide rates in the world. Finally, the Geneva Academy for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights published *The War Report,* which indicated that Mexico deserved to be considered a "non-international armed conflict" (classification according to international law) and sustained that the number of fatalities in Mexico surpasses that of several past wars and many current armed conflicts. The report also asserts that the country has gone from having the four drug cartels operational in 2000 to between 60 and 80 criminal groups, highlighting especially the Sinaloa Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, the Beltrán Leyva Cartel, La Familia Michoacana and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, an organisation that has gained prominence in recent years.

Nicaragua	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
As a result of the government's attempt to reform the social security system, a series of protests began throughout the country in 2018 that plunged it into the worst socio-political crisis in recent decades, with hundreds of people dying, thousands becoming injured and tens of thousands leaving the country. Faced with domestic and international concern regarding the protests, the crackdown by the state security forces and clashes between government supporters and opponents, the National Dialogue began in May. Involving the government and various opposition groups and facilitated by the Catholic Church, it was interrupted by the political dynamics and violence of the crisis and did not achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Nicaragua experienced the most serious political and social crisis in recent decades after the wave of protests that began in April throughout the country against the government's attempt to reform the social security system. Despite the fact that the government scrapped the reform immediately and that the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua (ECN) said it was willing to facilitate talks between the government and the opposition in April, between 25 and 60 people died in the first few days of the demonstrations, according to sources, and protestors continued to demand the resignation of President Daniel Ortega for the rest of the year alongside ongoing complaints about human rights violations, especially those committed by state security forces and agencies and armed groups sympathetic to the government. Although Ortega accused the opposition of provoking and leading the main episodes of violence on several occasions and defended the

performance of the state security forces, many national and international human rights organisations and bodies condemned the wave of repression and massive human rights violations in Nicaragua. In December, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) indicated that the government had established a police state and a regime of terror that suppressed all freedoms. At around the same time, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, a part of the IACHR, was expelled from the country one day before presenting a report that accused Managua of crimes against humanity. **According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), 325 people had died in the crisis at the end of the year, while another 2,000 had been injured and some 550 had been arrested**. However, the government cited a death toll of 199 and said that 340 persons were detained. The Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights stated that 561 people had died and that 4,578 others had been wounded between April and the end of December. According to the Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners, 767 people had been arrested in Nicaragua for participating in protests. In mid-December, the Jesuit Migrant Service declared that around 80,000 people had left the country since April and that 23,000 of them were seeking protection in Costa Rica. Moreover, according to the Independent Journalists and Communicators of Nicaragua movement, 55 journalists went into exile in 2018. In addition to the relatively frequent protests and demonstrations throughout the year, the opposition platform Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy (ACJD) called three major national strikes that enjoyed significant continuity. In October, a new opposition platform called Blue and White National Unity, made up of more than 40 student, political, academic, professional, women's, peasant and business organisations, called for a new general strike. According to the government's own data made public in early October, the crisis had caused the loss of 350,000 jobs and an economic impact of more than 1.1 billion dollars.

The crisis in Nicaragua also had repercussions on the international level. Given the lack of progress of the National Dialogue and its interruption in July after an attack on a church in the town of Diriamba by dozens of government supporters in which several religious figures were assaulted, including two of those with more important roles in mediation efforts between the parties (Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes and Monsignor Silvio Báez), **several governments and some international organisations stepped up pressure against the Nicaraguan government**. Both the United Nations, whose Secretary-General met with the Nicaraguan chancellor, and the Central American Integration System (SICA) offered to facilitate the dialogue, while organisations such as the European Union and MERCOSUR came out more explicitly in favour of releasing the people arrested or in their criticism of the human rights situation in Nicaragua. However, it was the OAS that had a more prominent role in managing the crisis and that was more critical of Managua. In mid-July, it passed a resolution calling for the elections to be held in March 2019, which

Ortega rejected outright. A little later, it created the Working Group on Nicaragua, made up of 12 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the United States, Guyana, Mexico, Panama and Peru) to monitor the political situation in the country, but this was considered interference by the Nicaraguan government, which refused to cooperate with the OAS in the following months, received no visitors from the organisation and even called for OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro to resign. The tension rose even more after the OAS Permanent Council raised the need to activate the Inter-American Democratic Charter to restore democracy in Nicaragua, which could lead to its expulsion from the OAS.

Some international organisations voiced concern about the repercussions that the crisis in Nicaragua was having on women during the year. In October, for example, UN Women deplored the situation in which some female human rights advocates found themselves and called on the Nicaraguan government to respect freedom of expression and the participation of women. Days before, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Monitoring Mechanism for Nicaragua said that it was worried about sexual violence against women and even rape by government agents and supporters in the repressive atmosphere. The IACHR also condemned the state authorities' harassment of the mothers of detainees, based on discriminatory gender stereotypes. In the same vein, in December, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a programme run jointly by the World Organisation against Torture and the International Federation of Human Rights, stated that it is receiving information from reliable sources about a campaign of attacks against female human rights advocates and feminist organisations. In addition, other Nicaraguan organisations, such as Catholics for the Right to Decide, blasted the killing of 15 women and five girls by pro-government paramilitary forces and the government's connivance with the murder of dozens of other women in the country. Many women's organisations and networks played an active role in protests against the Nicaraguan government during the year and some of them, like the Women against Violence Network, the Autonomous Women's Movement and the Feminist Articulation of Nicaragua, published manifestos with condemnation and criticism of the government, as well as the demand that it form a Truth Commission endorsed by the IACHR.

South America

Venezuela	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The current political and social crisis gripping the country goes back to the rise to power of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and his promotion of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, but it became more acute during the political transition that led to Chávez's death in March 2013 and his replacement by Vice President Nicolás Maduro, which was considered unconstitutional by the opposition. The tensions rose markedly after the presidential election of April 2013, which Maduro won by a narrow margin (50.6% of the votes), with the opposition denouncing numerous irregularities and demanding a recount and verification of the votes with the support of several governments and the OAS. Amidst a growing economic crisis and recurrent and sometimes massive demonstrations, the political crisis in Venezuela worsened after the opposition comfortably won the legislative elections in December 2015, winning its first election victory in two decades. This victory caused a certain degree of institutional paralysis between the National Assembly on the one hand and the government and many of the judicial authorities on the other.

The number of social demonstrations and protests in 2018 increased significantly compared to the previous year, though they were less virulent, as more than 120 people died and another 2,000 were injured in 2017, according to the state attorney general at the time. Furthermore, the institutional crisis and international concern about the situation in Venezuela worsened after President Nicolás Maduro won the presidential election handily in May, which was boycotted by most of the opposition and considered fraudulent by certain countries and international organisations. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict reported **12,715 protests between January and December, a 30% increase over the previous year and the highest number of protests since Maduro has been president**. The number of protests in 2018 clearly exceeds the two years with the highest rates of social conflict (2014 and 2017). The vast majority of these demonstrations, which caused the deaths of 14 people, were linked to economic, labour and health issues, as well as the quality of basic services in general. According to data from the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (the only source available, given the absence of official data), **there were 23,047 homicides in 2018, which places Venezuela as the country with the highest homicide rate in the Latin America** (81.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, far higher than the 51 reported in El Salvador). The total number and the homicide rate in 2018 were lower than in 2017 (26,616 and 89 per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively), but these estimates are based on the 2011 population, so they do not account for the enormous flow of people (around three million since 2015, according to data from the United Nations) that have fled the crisis affecting the country. In addition, the number of murders committed by state security forces has increased notably (from 5,535 in 2017 to 7,523 in 2018) and account for almost one third of the violent deaths in the country. According to some human rights organisations, some of the deaths reported under the category of "resistance

to authority" were actually extrajudicial killings. In this vein, the High Commissioner for Human Rights accused the state security forces of having committed 500 extrajudicial killings between July 2015 and March 2017 as part of operations to reduce crime. Almost 90% of the municipalities in Venezuela suffer from an epidemic of violence (a category attributed by the World Health Organisation when the homicide rate is over 10). The situation was especially serious in municipalities such as El Callao (620 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants) and in states like Aragua, where the homicide rate is double the national average. Some women's organisations and human rights groups warned of the repercussions that the Venezuelan crisis was having on women during the year, such as the increase in sexual exploitation. According to Global Voices, for example, the number of Venezuelan victims of human trafficking had quadrupled between 2014 and 2018, while the femicide rate in Venezuela was among the 15 highest in the world.

Regarding the country's political and institutional situation, the tension between the government and the opposition (and many countries and international organisations) increased markedly early in the year following the deadlock in the negotiations that the parties had begun in the Dominican Republic in the last quarter of 2017 and after Caracas unilaterally announced that it would hold the presidential election on 22 April (though it was finally postponed until 20 May). This announcement prompted criticism and in some cases even sanctions from many governments, such as the United States and the 14 Latin American countries that make up the Lima Group, which believe that the election would lack legitimacy and credibility. Finally, according to the Electoral Commission, Nicolás Maduro prevailed with 67% of the votes in an election that had 46% turnout and in which the opposition candidate Henri Falcón (who had previously broken the consensus among the opposition coalition Democratic Unity Roundtable to boycott the election) obtained 21% of the votes. **Both Falcón and the opposition as a whole and several countries did not recognise the results because they thought that the elections had been fraudulent and had not complied with international electoral standards**. The countries of the Lima Group called their ambassadors in Caracas, the US imposed new economic sanctions against Venezuela, the EU also announced new sanctions and the OAS proceeded in its intention to submit evidence to the International Criminal Court that Maduro's government had committed crimes against humanity. In addition, after the Supreme Court rejected Falcón's request to annul the election due to the commission of many irregularities (such as vote buying), the OAS passed a resolution that did not recognise the results and urged the government and opposition to initiate talks that would lead to a new election. Diplomatic pressure on Venezuela increased during the second half of the year. Some OAS member countries urged

the activation of the Democratic Charter (which could mean suspending Venezuela's membership in the organisation), while others threatened to break diplomatic relations with Venezuela and US President Donald Trump did not rule out coercive steps to solve the crisis in the country. The tension was also exacerbated by an alleged assassination attempt against President Maduro in August, by the growing militarisation of society (Maduro said in December that the popular militias aimed at defending the country against external aggression had grown to include 1.6 million people) and by the opposition's calls on the international community to stage some kind of intervention to end the country's humanitarian crisis.

2.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

Central Asia

Tajikistan	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, System, Resources, Territory Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan

Summary:
The tension in Tajikistan is largely related to the armed conflict that took place from 1992 to 1997 between two main groups marked by strong regional divisions: on the one side, the opposition alliance of Islamist forces and anti-communist liberal sectors (centre and east of the country) and, on the other side, the government forces, which were the heirs of the Soviet regime (north and south). The 1997 peace agreement involved a power-sharing deal, which incorporated the opposition to the government. In its post-war rehabilitation phase, the problems facing the country include regional tensions (including the growing hostility of the Leninabadi population in the north of the country towards its former allies in the south, the Kulyabi, the dominant population group in power since war ended), the presence of some non-demobilised warlords and former opposition combatants in parts of the country, the increasing authoritarianism of the regime, corruption, high levels of poverty and unemployment, tensions with neighbouring Uzbekistan, instability related to the border shared with Afghanistan and the potential threat of armed jihadist groups.

Tension remained in the country around various lines, including the repression of political Islam and violent border incidents, while attacks in the country for which ISIS claimed responsibility increased. The authorities continued to restrict civil and political liberties under the umbrella of security policies, following the trend in recent years to persecute the political opposition, human rights defenders, independent journalists and parts of the population practicing Islam. In 2018 the government introduced legislative changes with new restrictions on religious freedom, including the power of the executive branch to restrict religious expression in many areas. In February, authorities closed 45 mosques in the city of Isfara, alleging that they were illegal. In 2017, the state closed 1,938 mosques. This persecution has been accompanied by pressure against the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), a participant in the armed conflict of the 1990s, a signatory of the 1997 peace agreement and a subject of institutional repression since 2015, as it was banned in 2015 and designated a terrorist organisation in 2016. ISIS also made its presence in the country known in 2018. The group claimed responsibility for an attack in July against a group of foreign cyclists in the Khatlon region (south), killing four of them. The authorities accused the IRP of being behind the attack, while the party denied any such connection. In November, a court sentenced 15 defendants to various prison sentences. Also in November, ISIS claimed responsibility for riots in a high security prison in the northern town of Khujand, which houses prisoners convicted of terrorism and extremism. The resulting attacks on prison guards claimed the lives of two prison agents and 25 prisoners (though some sources put the figure at 50). Several other people were injured. According to government sources, 12 of the assailants had fought in Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, the Tajik authorities admitted detaining 12 people suspected of planning an attack on the Russian military base in the Tajik capital after initially denying the information. There were also new outbreaks of border tension in 2018, with intercommunity clashes between the population of the Tajik district of Isfara and Batken province, in Kyrgyzstan, in April, injuring several people. The tension ended up involving the security forces of both countries, with altercations and the temporary detention of several Tajik border guards by Kyrgyzstan in June, though they were later released. There were also violent incidents on the border with Afghanistan in August, resulting in the death of two Tajik border guards in clashes with armed actors that some sources defined as Taliban fighters and others as smugglers. These incidents were followed by an air strike that the Afghan authorities blamed on either Tajikistan or Russia, while both countries denied being behind it. Meanwhile, the relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan improved and they began demining their border in October. The mines have caused 374 deaths and 485 injuries in the last 20 years, according to records kept by Tajikistan.

East Asia

China (Xinjiang)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, System, Identity Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition

Summary:
Xinjiang, also known as East Turkestan or Uyghuristan, is China's westernmost region. It contains significant hydrocarbon deposits and has historically been inhabited by the Uyghur population, which is mainly Muslim and boasts important cultural ties with Central Asian countries. Following several decades of acculturation policies, the exploitation of natural resources and intense demographic colonisation, which has substantially altered the population structure and caused community tensions since the 1950s, several armed secessionist groups began armed operations against the Chinese government, especially in the 1990s. Beijing classifies such groups, including the ETIM or the ETLO, as terrorist organisations and has attempted to link its counter-insurgency strategy to the so-called global war on terrorism. In 2008, when the Olympic Games were being held in Beijing, there was an increase in armed attacks by insurgent groups, while 2009 saw the most fierce community clashes in recent decades. Over the following years the violence became more intense, frequent and complex, until it peaked in 2014. Afterwards, the growing militarisation in the region and the implementation of counter-insurgency measures led to a drastic reduction in violent episodes, although there was also an increased number of reported cases of human rights' violations.

As in previous years, there were no reports of significant episodes of violence committed by insurgent groups (Uyghur organisations claim that both the government and the government-controlled media systematically silence any such incident), but allegations about the human rights situation in Xinjiang increased dramatically. In August, **the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reported that it had received credible reports that one million Uyghurs would be held in re-education and political indoctrination camps**. One of the experts on the committee claimed to have information according to which two million Uyghurs and other national minorities (especially Kazakhs) have been forcibly transferred to internment camps, although this figure surely includes people who are obliged to attend political and social training sessions (but not internal ones). According to some reports, up to 10% of the Uyghur and Kazakh adult population could be in this situation. Subsequently, many human rights organisations and media outlets expanded on and deepened these complaints. In October, the AFP agency reported that there were at least 182 facilities in Xinjiang aimed at re-educating and confining people, while the BBC warned that the number of new detention centres had multiplied by 10 since 2016 and 2017. Radio Free Asia reported that Beijing had initiated a massive transfer of inmates from Xinjiang to other centres outside the region due to overcrowding. According to the organisation Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 21% of the arrests that occurred all over China in 2017 were in Xinjiang. **Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemned the existence of systematic campaigns against the Uyghur population that included cases of torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, restrictions on movement, the control of religious practices, etc.** In July, the government-affiliated media reported that over 460,000 people had been relocated to work in other parts of the province in the first quarter of 2018 alone and that it planned to relocate 100,000

more people by 2019. According to some analysts, this policy is not only intended to alleviate the levels of poverty in the region, but also to contain the levels of conflict. Faced with this situation, during the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of China, several countries voiced concern about Beijing's treatment of several Chinese national minorities and demanded that it close the aforementioned camps and release the arbitrarily detained people. In addition, some expressed concern about the possibility that the anti-terrorist cooperation agreement signed between the authorities of Xinjiang and those of Ningxia province at the end of the year may involve the transfer of the Xinjiang counter-insurgency strategy to other parts of the country and lead to the violation of rights of the Muslim Hui minority.

South Asia

Bangladesh	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	Government (Awami League, AL), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami political parties), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islami, JMB)

Summary:
Since the creation of Bangladesh as an independent State in 1971, after breaking away from Pakistan in an armed conflict that caused three million deaths, the country has experienced a complex political situation. The 1991 elections led to democracy after a series of authoritarian military governments dominating the country since its independence. The two main parties, BNP and AL have since then succeeded one another in power after several elections, always contested by the loosing party, leading to governments that have never met the country's main challenges such as poverty, corruption or the low quality of democracy, and have always given it to one-sided interests. In 2008, the AL came to power after a two-year period dominated by a military interim Government was unsuccessful in its attempt to end the political crisis that had led the country into a spiral of violence during the previous months and that even led to the imprisonment of the leaders of both parties. The call for elections in 2014 in a very fragile political context and with a strong opposition from the BNP to the reforms undertaken by the AL such as eliminating the interim Government to supervise electoral processes led to a serious and violent political crisis in 2013. Alongside this, the establishment of a tribunal to judge crimes committed during the 1971 war, used by the Government to end with the Islamist opposition, especially with the party Jamaat-e-Islami, worsened the situation in the country.

Political tension persisted in Bangladesh throughout the year, with a major escalation of violence near the end, before parliamentary elections were held on 30 December. At least 30 people were killed and hundreds were wounded as a result of clashes between supporters of the country's two main political forces, the ruling

AL party and the opposition BNP, whose leader is in prison on corruption charges. The BNP complained that thousands of its members had been arrested prior to the elections and although it initially indicated that it would not run if the elections were not held under the auspices of an interim government, it finally joined the platform Jatiya Oikya Front (United National Front). The electoral commission did not allow Khaleda Zia, the leader of the BNP and former prime minister, to run in the elections. Zia had been sentenced to five years in prison for corruption in February and her imprisonment was a source of tension and social protest throughout the year, some of which led to riots and clashes between police and demonstrators. Several political activists and human rights defenders were arrested during the year. There were also massive student protests that resulted in riots with injuries and many arrests. Members of the BNP were also convicted during the year and some of them were given death sentences, such as the former minister of the BNP, Lutfozzaman Babar. Moreover, over 200 people died in a large-scale anti-narcotics operation in which human rights organisations condemned extrajudicial killings, corruption and impunity for the country's main drug traffickers, including political leaders.

Violence prior to the parliamentary elections in December claimed the lives of at least 30 people

insurgent activity of the armed groups active in the state and security force operations in response to the rebels. Sporadic armed clashes were reported and the armed groups also carried out attacks against state infrastructure and engaged in extortion to finance their armed activity. One of the most prominent sources of tension during the year was the publication of the National Register of Citizens, which initially excluded four million people who were not recognised as having Indian nationality. The nationality issue has been a source of conflict in the state due to the sharp tension between the indigenous population and the Bangladeshi population, which arrived in the state in different waves of immigration in recent decades. There have been inter-community clashes on several occasions in recent years.

India (Assam)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT

Summary:
The armed opposition group the ULFA emerged in 1979 with the aim of liberating the state of Assam from Indian colonisation and establishing a sovereign State. The demographic transformations the state underwent after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, with the arrival of two million people from Bangladesh, are the source of the demand from the population of ethnic Assamese origin for recognition of their cultural and civil rights and the establishment of an independent State. During the 1980s and 1990s there were various escalations of violence and failed attempts at negotiation. A peace process began in 2005, leading to a reduction in violence, but this process was interrupted in 2006, giving rise to a new escalation of the conflict. Meanwhile, during the eighties, armed groups of Bodo origin, such as the NDFB, emerged demanding recognition of their identity against the majority Assamese population. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in violence and numerous armed groups have laid down their arms or began talks with the government.

Tensions remained active in Assam, with levels of intensity similar to those in the previous year. According to the body count kept by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 20 people died in 2018 as a result of the

India (Manipur)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA

Summary:
The tension that confronts the government against the various armed groups that operate in the state, and several of them against each other, has its origin in the demands for the independence of various of these groups, as well as the existing tensions between the various ethnic groups that live in the state. In the 1960s and 70s several armed groups were created, some with a Communist inspiration and others with ethnic origins, groups which were to remain active throughout the forthcoming decades. On the other hand, the regional context, in a state that borders with Nagaland, Assam and Myanmar, also marked the development of the conflict in Manipur and the tension between the ethnic Manipur groups and the Nagaland population which would be constant. The economic impoverishment of the state and its isolation with regard to the rest of the country contributed decisively to consolidate a grievance feeling in the Manipur population. Recent years saw a reduction of armed violence.

Manipur continued to be the scene of tension and sporadic clashes between the security forces and the insurgent groups operating in the state. Around 30 armed groups would be active in the state, though their operational and recruitment capacity would be very unequal. According to figures compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 23 people lost their lives during the year as a result of armed violence in the state (seven civilians, seven members of the security forces and nine insurgents). This was a lower death toll than in the previous year, when 55 people lost their lives as a result of armed violence. Security force operations resulted in many arrests of alleged members of insurgent groups. These groups' activities included attacks on infrastructure and extortion, as well as attempts to attack different public representatives. The conflict in

Nagaland and the possibility of agreement between the Naga insurgents and the Indian government was also a source of tension because of all the possible implications it could have for the territorial configuration of Manipur and the Naga population residing in the state.

India – Pakistan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	India, Pakistan

Summary:

The tension between India and Pakistan dates back to the independence and partition of the two states and the dispute over the region of Kashmir. On three occasions (1947-1948, 1965, 1971, 1999) armed conflict has broken out between the two countries, both claiming sovereignty over the region, which is split between India, Pakistan and China. The armed conflict in 1947 led to the present-day division and the *de facto* border between the two countries. In 1989, the armed conflict shifted to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1999, one year after the two countries carried out nuclear tests, tension escalated into a new armed conflict until the USA mediated to calm the situation. In 2004 a peace process got under way. Although no real progress was made in resolving the dispute over Kashmir, there was a significant rapprochement above all in the economic sphere. However, India has continued to level accusations at Pakistan concerning the latter's support of the insurgency that operates in Jammu and Kashmir and sporadic outbreaks of violence have occurred on the de facto border that divides the two states. In 2008 serious attacks took place in the Indian city of Mumbai that led to the formal rupture of the peace process after India claimed that the attack had been orchestrated from Pakistan. Since then, relations between the two countries have remained deadlocked although some diplomatic contacts have taken place.

The tension remained at very high levels of intensity, with mutual armed attacks at different points along the Line of Control (the de facto border between both countries) repeating throughout the year, especially between January and May. Both sides traded blame for having initiated the different episodes of violence, which caused the deaths of security force personnel and civilians living in towns on both sides of the border. In January, four Pakistani soldiers were killed in a mortar attack launched by the Indian Armed Forces. The Pakistani response led to the death of three Indian soldiers. Days later, six civilians and two Indian soldiers were killed by exchanges of fire that went on for several days in a row. In February, India responded to an attack on one of its military bases in Kashmir that killed six soldiers and the resulting escalation of violence forced hundreds of people to flee. Finally, in May, after several days of shelling on the border that killed at least six civilians and a member of the security forces and left 30 people injured, both countries pledged to fully implement the 2003 ceasefire agreement. The number of people killed since the situation worsened in 2016

Tensions between India and Pakistan worsened throughout the year with armed clashes on the border

had topped 150 in May. The countries' diplomatic relations deteriorated markedly in March when the Pakistan foreign ministry reported that its diplomatic staff in India and their families were suffering intense harassment and monitoring that led it to call Pakistan's ambassador in the country. India responded by noting that its diplomatic staff also suffered the same treatment routinely. However, it also emerged that senior Pakistani military commanders had approached India offering the possibility of opening peace negotiations, but did not receive a positive response from India. Finally, after agreeing to hold a meeting alongside the session of the UN General Assembly, which would have been the first high-level meeting since 2015, India cancelled it, referring to an attack on its security forces in Kashmir that was allegedly conducted by armed groups based in Pakistan and also to Pakistan's issuance of postage stamps bearing the image of Burhan Wani, an insurgent whose death in 2016 led to an escalation in the conflict in Kashmir.

Southeast Asia and Oceania

Indonesia (West Papua)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, OPM armed group, political and social opposition (secessionist, pro-autonomy, indigenous and human rights organisations), Papuan indigenous groups, Freeport mining company

Summary:

Although Indonesia became independent from Holland in 1949, West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) was administered for several years by the United Nations and did not formally become part of Indonesia until 1969, following a referendum considered fraudulent by many. Since then, a deep-rooted secessionist movement has existed in the region and an armed opposition group (OPM) has been involved in a low-intensity armed struggle. In addition to constant demands for self-determination, there are other sources of conflict in the region, such as community clashes between several indigenous groups, tension between the local population (Papuan and mostly animist or Christian) and so-called transmigrants (mostly Muslim Javanese), protests against the Freeport transnational extractive corporation, the largest in the world, or accusations of human rights violations and unjust enrichment levelled at the armed forces.

Administratively divided in the provinces of Papua and West Papua, the Papua region experienced the worst episode of violence in recent years after at least 17 people (some sources claim 31) were kidnapped and killed by the armed opposition group OPM in early December in the Nduga district. This led to the start of one of the most intense counterinsurgency campaigns in recent times by the Indonesian Armed

Forces and the police, which were accused of using chemical weapons (specifically, white phosphorus) and of attacking several communities with aerial bombings, troops and heavy artillery. According to the International Coalition for Papua (which groups together 15 NGOs), around 20 civilians and an undetermined number of combatants and soldiers also died two weeks after the counterinsurgency operation began. In addition, thousands of people who were forced to leave their homes were in a precarious humanitarian situation, living in the jungle without access to water, food or medicine. The OPM admitted that it had carried out the attack, but maintained that the people killed were not civilians who were building a road, but military personnel belonging to corps of engineers who had been photographing demonstrators in the days leading up to the massacre. On 1 December, almost 600 people had been arrested in Indonesia during the demonstrations that often take place in various parts of the country to commemorate the day when the flag symbolising the independence of Papua was raised for the first time in 1961. The OPM also justified its armed action by claiming that the construction of the aforementioned Trans-Papua Highway (measuring about 4,600 kilometres) would be used by state security forces to enhance its counterinsurgency operations and to control areas that are more remote and difficult to access. The OPM took advantage of the media coverage of its action to publicly assert its refusal to surrender and its determination to continue fighting until the region achieves independence. Faced with unanimous condemnation following the accusations made by Australian journalists that they had used chemical weapons against the population, the Indonesian Armed Forces not only denied having done so, but also denied that it possessed them. The government also announced its intention to double its military presence in the region and announced that the Indonesian Armed Forces would be responsible for completing the Trans-Papua Highway. In the face of international pressure arising from the accusations that they had used chemical weapons, in late January 2019, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet announced that Jakarta had authorised personnel from her office to visit West Papua to investigate the situation first-hand. The episodes of violence experienced in late 2018 and early 2019 are part of an upward trend in the dynamics of confrontation between the Indonesian Armed Forces and the OPM, whose armed wing declared war on the Indonesian government in January 2018. The declaration was acknowledged by the OPM in January 2019 at the same press conference in Port Moresby (the capital of the neighbouring country of Papua New Guinea) in which it invited the Indonesian government to begin peace negotiations. This development came after several years in which, according to some analysts, the OPM lowered the intensity of its armed actions to give an opportunity to the new conflict management strategy announced by current President Joko Widodo at the beginning of his term in 2014.

Thailand	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
Since Thaksin Shinawatra's began his term in office in 2001, he had been criticised by several sectors for his authoritarian style, his campaign against drug trafficking (which claimed over 2,000 lives) and his militaristic approach to the conflict in the south. However, the socio-political crisis affecting Thailand over the last few years escalated in 2006. That year, after a case of corruption was made public, mass demonstrations took place demanding Shinawatra's resignation and in September a military junta staged a coup that forced him into exile. Although a new Constitution was voted in August 2017, the new Government was unable to bring down the political and social polarisation and there continued to be regular mass demonstrations encouraged by the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (a movement also receiving the name of "red shirts", supporting the return of former prime-minister Thaksin Shinawatra) and by the People's Alliance for Democracy –also known as the "yellow shirts". This instability gave place to many violent acts, the resignation of several governments, and the overthrowing of the Government led by Yingluck Shinawatra –Thaksin Shinawatra's sister– with a military coup in May 2014. Since then the country is governed by a military government called the National Council for Peace and Order, which has been repeatedly accused of prohibiting the action of parties, retraining fundamental rights and freedoms and wanting to institutionalize and perpetuate a constitutional and democratic exceptionality situation.

As in previous years, there were no mass social protests or notable episodes of violence, but there was an **increase in demonstrations and national and international pressure for the Thai government (officially the National Council for Peace and Order, NCPO) to lift its ban on the political parties' activity and to announce the final date of the election that should allow the country to restore democracy and put an end to the military junta that has ruled it since May 2014**. Despite the drastic restrictions on the right of association and demonstration, several demonstrations were staged in Bangkok and other cities in the first quarter of the year after the government postponed the election again (for the fifth time) and did not specify a new date. A march undertaken by about 200 people making various social, environmental and political demands, such as the democratisation of the country and respect for human rights, produced great social and media interest. The march covered more than 450 kilometres (from Bangkok to the north-eastern town of Khon Kaen) and lasted almost a month. It was organised by the People Go Network, a platform created by civil society organisations in 2016. The demonstrations increased again in May, coinciding with the fourth anniversary of the coup against former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. In fact, the NCPO took several forms of legal action during the year against the Pheu Thai party, which is linked to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (another former

prime minister who was also deposed in a coup d'état in 2006), on the grounds that it broke the electoral law and the regime's ban on political party activity. Finally, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha announced that the general election would take place in February 2019, although he added two conditions that created uncertainty and discomfort: that the coronation of the new King Rama X must have already taken place by then and that the conditions for upholding peace and order must be guaranteed. Moreover, some analysts believe that several statements by General Prayuth during the year and the support he has received from various political groups suggest that he will run in the election himself. In addition to the protests linked to the election date, local and international human rights organisations criticised the regime repeatedly during the year. Notable in this regard was the UN Secretary-General's report, published in September, which includes Thailand on the list of 38 countries that carries out acts of reprisal and intimidation against people who cooperate with the United Nations to promote or protect human rights.

Peaceful anti-government protests in Armenia resulted in a change of government, which was ratified in early elections in December

2.3.4. Europe

Russia and Caucasus

Armenia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:
The former Soviet republic of Armenia became independent in 1991, within the framework of the dissolution of the USSR, and began a process of convulsive transition, characterised by political instability and the war with Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (1992-1994). Armenia's participation in this war led to international sanctions, with serious impact in its economy, although it experienced a certain recovery in later years. Internally, the country has faced various political crises since its independence, including the resignation in 1998 of President Levon Ter-Petrosian, accused of concessions to Azerbaijan in the peace process; or the violent episodes of 1999 in Parliament, in which several armed men killed the prime minister, the president of the chamber and six parliamentarians. Recurrent themes of tension in the post-Soviet era have included disputes between the incumbent government and the opposition over electoral irregularities, complaints about the violation of human rights, especially freedom of expression and the press, criticism of the use of force in repression of demonstrations or corruption. The climate of discontent and polarization worsened after the electoral crisis of 2008, with protests against the result, various fatalities and the declaration of a state of emergency. In 2018 peaceful mass protests against former President and Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan's prolonged grip on power led to his departure from the government, followed by new elections and a new government.

Tensions increased between April and May, in the wake of anti-government protests that led to the resignation of former President and Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and early elections, which put an end to the long-lived hegemony of the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). After a 14-day march through the country by opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan, a member of the minority opposition party Civil Contract, protests broke out in the capital, Yerevan. These protests against Serzh Sargsyan's prolonged grip on power spread and amplified on 13 April. Specifically, the protests rejected the government's plans to appoint Sargsyan, who had completed his second presidential term in 2018, to be the new prime minister, relying on the constitutional amendments approved in a referendum in 2015, which turned Armenia into a parliamentary republic and came into force with the legislative elections of 2017, in which the HHK won. Tens of thousands of people gathered in the capital on 17 April, the same day that Parliament voted to make Sargsyan prime minister (76 votes in favour and 17 abstaining). The day before, 46 people were injured, including six policemen, in clashes between police and demonstrators in which the police used concussion grenades. The protests were prolonged, mostly peaceful and employed strategies of non-violent civil disobedience. Pashinyan called for a "peaceful revolution". Negotiations began between Pashinyan and Sargsyan, which failed, and Pashinyan was arrested on 22 April. Thousands of women urged Sargsyan to resign by beating on cooking pots. Amidst mass protests, Sargsyan resigned on 23 April. Pashinyan was released that same day. Acting Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan ruled out negotiations with Pashinyan. According to media reports, a day earlier President Putin had urged Karapetyan to find a quick solution that would reflect the results of the 2017 elections, which the HHK won. Subsequently, the Russian government stated that it considered the events in Armenia to be an internal affair. Pashinyan was finally elected acting prime minister by the Armenian Parliament on 8 May, with 59 votes in favour, including several from the HHK, and 42 against. Hundreds of protesters were arrested during the weeks of protests, accusing them of participating in mass unrest, though they were released hours or days later, according to Human Rights Watch. In any case, analysts highlighted the containment in the use of force by the security forces during the weeks of protest, in contrast to escalating tension in previous years, including the post-election crisis of 2008, which resulted in a dozen fatalities and several hundred people injured. Members of the security forces even joined the 2019 protests. The new government programme focused on the fight against corruption, the strengthening of education and the economy. The new government upheld a public position in line with previous governments on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including defending Armenian forces' control of the districts around

Nagorno-Karabakh. Early parliamentary elections were held in December, as part of Pashinyan's aspirations to ratify his electoral support. His party obtained 70% of the votes (88 of the 132 seats), while the HHK did not achieve any parliamentary representation. Turnout was lower than in previous elections, at 48.6%.

Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh,

Summary:
The tension between the two countries regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh region, an enclave with an Armenian majority which is formally part of Azerbaijan but which enjoys de facto independence, lies in the failure to resolve the underlying issues of the armed conflict that took place between December 1991 and 1994. This began as an internal conflict between the region's self-defence militias and the Azerbaijan security forces over the sovereignty and control of Nagorno-Karabakh and gradually escalated into an inter-state war between Azerbaijan and neighbouring Armenia. The armed conflict, which claimed 20,000 lives and forced the displacement of 200,000 people, as well as enforcing the ethnic homogenisation of the population on either side of the ceasefire line, gave way to a situation of unresolved conflict in which the central issues are the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of the population, and which involves sporadic violations of the ceasefire.

The security situation improved in the final months of the year, following an agreement on a mechanism of direct communication between the parties to the conflict, which led to a significant reduction in violence. Questions were raised during the year about the impact that the change of government in Armenia, resulting from massive anti-government protests, could have on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In what came to be called the Velvet Revolution, massive peaceful protests were staged between April and early May against outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan's prolonged grip on power and attempt to become the new prime minister after the constitutional amendments of 2015 and after completing two presidential terms. The protests eventually led to his resignation and the appointment of Nikol Pashinyan, a member of the opposition Civil Contract party and one of the main leaders of the protests, to be acting prime minister in May. The early elections in December were won by Pashinyan's My Step alliance, with more than 70% of the votes, while Sargsyan's Republican Party did not get enough votes to enter Parliament. However, turnout for the elections was low, at 48.6%, in contrast to the high levels of mobilisation during the protests. The change in leadership raised questions about its impact on the dispute. After being appointed acting prime minister, Pashinyan upheld a

public position on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue similar to that of previous Armenian leaders, affirming that various districts around Nagorno-Karabakh that were seized militarily by Armenian forces during the war in the 1990s belong to Nagorno-Karabakh. Pashinyan also called for the direct participation of representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh in the peace process. However, under his leadership progress was made in the final months of the year. Thus, during a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States in September, Armenia and Azerbaijan reached an agreement to **create a mechanism of direct communication between the ministries of defence aimed at preventing incidents. Its entry into force in October was accompanied by a drop in the number of violent incidents**, as announced by both governments. The co-mediators of the OSCE Minsk Group welcomed the move. At the end of the year, in a new meeting with the Minsk Group, the foreign ministers agreed on the need to take concrete steps to prepare their respective populations for peace. There had been **new breaches of the ceasefire in previous months, leaving several dozen people dead**. Both countries also carried out large-scale military exercises. Moreover, there were protests in Nagorno-Karabakh at various times of the year. Unprecedented protests were staged in June following violent incidents between security agents and two civilians. The demonstrations led to the resignation of the chief of police, the head of the national security service and another senior official. In addition, the top leader of Nagorno-Karabakh announced that he would not run in the 2020 election. Some analysts established links between social protests in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. At the end of the year, tensions arose between representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh and the new Armenian government.

Russia (Chechnya)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	System, Identity, Government Internal
Main parties:	Federal Russian Government, Government of Chechnya, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS)

Summary:
After the so-called first Chechen War (1994-1996), which confronted the Russian Federation with the Chechen Republic mainly with regard to the independence of Chechnya (self proclaimed in 1991 within the framework of the decomposition of the USSR) and which ended in a peace treaty that did not resolve the status of Chechnya, the conflict re-appeared in 1999, in the so-called second Chechen War, triggered off by some incursions into Dagestan by Chechen rebels and attacks in Russian cities. In a pre-election context and with an anti-terrorist discourse, the Russian army entered Chechnya again to fight against the moderate pro-independent regime which arose after the first war and which was, at the same time, devastated by internal disputes and growing criminality. In 2001 Russia

considered the war as being finished, without an agreement or a definitive victory, and in 2003 favoured a state of autonomy and a Chechen pro-Russian administration. However the confrontations continued in following years, although in the form of low-level violence. In parallel, there was a Islamisation of the Chechen rebel ranks while the insurgency was increasingly of a regional nature, especially affecting neighbouring Dagestan. Furthermore, the civilian population faces serious human rights violations, largely committed by local security forces.

Tensions remained high along several lines and included violent incidents, with several dozen fatalities, and harsh internal repression by the Chechen authorities. **ISIS claimed responsibility for several attacks**, including one against an Orthodox church in the capital, Grozny, in May, that killed two policemen, one worshipper and the four assailants and wounded two other policemen and one worshipper. ISIS also claimed responsibility for several attacks in August, including a suicide attack on a police station in the town of Merker-Yurt, an attack with a vehicle against police officers in Grozny and an assault with a knife against a police station in the town of Shali. According to the Chechen authorities, the assailants were minors. These events were followed by mass arrests and interrogations of young people in Shali. The Chechen authorities rejected allegations that ISIS was behind these attacks, claiming that the group did not exist in Chechnya, despite the fact that a large part of the Islamist fighters of the North Caucasus have pledged allegiance to ISIS in recent years, which in 2015 declared the Vilayat Kavkaz (Caucasian Province) in various parts of the region, including Chechnya. It is also estimated that several thousand Russian nationals have joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq, an unknown number of which came from Chechnya. As in previous years, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov threatened collective punishment against the suspects' relatives. In November there was another suicide attack on a police station in Grozny, which caused no injuries.

The climate of repression and violence against human rights defenders and activists continued. The director of the Chechen branch of the human rights group Memorial, Oyub Titiev, was arrested in January and kept in pre-trial detention for the rest of the year on charges of drug possession. Human rights organisations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the World Organisation Against Torture, FIDH and others issued a joint statement that month, defending the work of Titiev and Memorial and demanding his release. International actors such as the European Parliament also demanded his release. Fifteen OSCE member states expressed concern about the situation of the human rights defenders, as well as journalists and people who have been arrested, detained, tortured and murdered because

For the first time since 2011, a group of OSCE member states invoked an organisational mechanism to establish a mission to investigate human rights violations in Chechnya

of their sexual orientation and gender identity, invoking the OSCE Vienna Mechanism in August. Through this tool, they demanded that Russia clarify the measures taken by the federal authorities to ensure that the Chechen regime complies with Russia's commitments to the OSCE. They also requested information on the steps taken in the federal investigation of human rights violations in Chechnya, including of LGTBI people and the extrajudicial killing of 27 people in January 2017. Furthermore, they demanded that Russia move to guarantee the work of media and human rights organisations, including Memory. In November, 16 states invoked another OSCE tool, the Moscow Mechanism, to establish a mission of experts to investigate reported human rights violations. The Moscow Mechanism had been used for the last time in 2011. Finally, a border demarcation agreement reached between the authorities of Chechnya and Ingushetia and involving an exchange of territory sparked protests in Ingushetia.

Russia (Dagestan)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	System Internal
Main parties:	Federal Russian government, government of the Republic of Dagestan, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS)

Summary:
Dagestan –which is the largest, most highly populated republic in the north of the Caucasus, and with the greatest ethnic diversity–, has faced different levels of conflict since the end of the 1990s. The armed rebel forces of Salafist Islamist ideology, which defend the creation of an Islamic state in the north of the Caucasus, confront the local and federal authorities, in the context of periodical attacks and counterinsurgency operations. The armed opposition has been articulated around various structures, such as the network of armed units of an Islamist nature known as Sharia Jamaat, and later through Vilayat Dagestan, both integrated into the insurgency of the North Caucasus (Caucasus Emirate). From the end of 2014 various commanders from Dagestan and the North Caucasus declared their loyalty to ISIS, splitting from the Caucasus Emirate and establishing a Caucasian branch linked to ISIS (Vilayat Kavkaz). In addition, part of the insurgency has moved to Syria and Iraq, joining various armed groups. Armed violence in Dagestan is the result of different factors, including the regionalization of the Islamist insurgency from Chechnya as well as human rights violations in Dagestan, often under the "fight against terrorism". All of this takes place in a fragile social and political context, of social ill due to the abuses of power and corruption and the high levels of unemployment and poverty, despite the wealth of natural resources. This is made even more complicated by interethnic tensions, rivalry for political power and violence of a criminal nature. The armed violence has subsided in recent years.

Tensions in Dagestan continued to decline, following the trend of recent years, to the point that it was no longer considered an armed conflict. Even so, violent incidents continued, **causing several dozen deaths amidst an atmosphere of human rights violations**. ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack on an Orthodox church in the town of Kizlar in February that killed six people, including the assailant, and wounded five, three of them police officers. ISIS also claimed responsibility for an attack with firearms on a police vehicle in July that killed two police officers and wounded one. The authorities conducted counterterrorist operations during the year that claimed several lives. People were also arrested and given prison sentences on charges of terrorism. The human rights situation continued to be serious. The Dagestani branch of the Russian human rights organisation Memorial suffered attacks, including against its director, Sirazhutdin Datsiev, in May. It also suffered material damage to one of its vehicles in January, in addition to attacks and persecution against Memorial in Chechnya and Ingushetia in the first few months of the year. As in previous years, the authorities conducted raids on mosques considered sympathetic to Salafism and arrested worshippers. The regime persecutes the Salafist branch of Islam and has been accused in recent years of yielding "false positives" (killing young civilian men that it presents as insurgents or terrorists).

South-east Europe

Serbia – Kosovo	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Government International[21]
Main parties:	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX

Summary:
The socio-political crisis between Serbia and Kosovo is related to the process of determining the political status of the region after the armed conflict of 1998-1999, which pitted both the KLA (Albanian armed group) and NATO against the Serbian government following years of repression inflicted by Slobodan Milosevic's regime on the Albanian population in what was then a province of Serbia within the Yugoslav federation. The NATO offensive, unauthorised by the UN, paved the way for the establishment of an international protectorate. In practice, Kosovo was divided along ethnic lines, with an increase in hostilities against the Serb community, whose isolationism was in turn fostered by Serbia. The territory's final status and the rights of minorities have remained a constant source of tension, in addition to Kosovo's internal problems, such as

unemployment, corruption and criminality. The process of determining this final status, which began in 2006, failed to achieve an agreement between the parties or backing from the UN Security Council for the proposal put forward by the UN special envoy. In 2008, Kosovo's parliament proclaimed the independence of the territory, which was rejected by the Serbian population of Kosovo and by Serbia.

Tensions rose between Serbia and Kosovo during the year. First, the **Serbian government accused Kosovo of failing to keep its promise to establish the Association of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo** that resulted from the 2013 agreements. Several security incidents also highlighted the strained relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The Kosovar police arrested and deported the head of the Serbia's Office for Kosovo, Marko Duric, during a visit to Mitrovica, setting off protests by Kosovo Serbs in which several people were injured in clashes with the police. In September, Serbia ordered its army to prepare for battle during a surprise visit by Kosovo President Hashim Thaci to northern Kosovo, including the Serb-majority town of Zubin Potok and Lake Gazivode. Thaci was accompanied by special police forces during his visit. Lake Gazivode is disputed between Kosovo and Serbia and its hydroelectric power plant is controlled by Serbia. At the same time, the Kosovo Albanian opposition movement Vetevendosje ("self-determination") organised protests in the capital, Pristina, against the possibility that a final agreement between Serbia and Kosovo might include any exchange of territory. In that vein, in August Thaci had announced that he would bring to the bargaining table the idea of a "correction of the border" to integrate the Albanian areas of Serbia's Presevo Valley into Kosovo, while rejecting the possibility of any territorial partition of Kosovo, which would affect the Serb-majority areas of northern Kosovo. The possibility of territorial modification provoked many different reactions. The president of Serbia supported demarcating the border and defended integrating the Serb areas of northern Kosovo into Serbia. US National Security Advisor John Bolton said the United States would not impede a change to the border if it were the result of an agreement between both sides. The tension around this issue was palpable in the EU-facilitated negotiating process. Another factor that caused relations between both governments to deteriorate was **the Assembly of Kosovo's approval in December of legislation to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an army**. NATO regretted the decision. The plans and progress made during the year in that direction prompted criticism and warnings from Serbia. In November, the government of Kosovo applied a 10% tariff on imports from Serbia and Bosnia in protest of their refusal to recognise Kosovo's independence, among other factors, and increased it

> *Relations between Serbia and Kosovo deteriorated due to factors such as the approval of the Kosovar law to transform its security forces into an army and Kosovo's application of tariffs on imports from Serbia*

33. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" since although its international legal status remains unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a State by more than a hundred of countries.

to 100% at the end of that month. Serbia called it the most difficult challenge since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Mayors from four northern Serb-majority townships resigned and cut off communication with Kosovo in protest, while the Serbian president cancelled the negotiating process in December.

2.3.5. Middle East

Mashreq

Egypt	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition

Summary:

Within the framework of the so-called "Arab revolts", popular mobilisations in Egypt led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak at the beginning of 2011. During three decades, Mubarak had headed an authoritarian government characterised by the accumulation of powers around the Government National Democratic Party, the Armed Forces and the corporate elites; as well as by an artificial political plurality, with constant allegations of fraud in the elections, harassment policies towards the opposition and the illegalisation of the main dissident movement, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The fall of Mubarak's regime gave way to an unstable political landscape, where the struggle between the sectors demanding for pushing towards the goals of the revolt, Islamist groups aspiring to a new position of power and the military class seeking guarantees to keep their influence and privileges in the new institutional scheme became evident. In this context, and after an interim government led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the electoral triumph of the MB in the parliamentarian and presidential elections seemed to open a new stage in the country in 2012. However, the ousting of the Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, when he had just been in power for one year, opened new questions on the future of the country in a context of persistent violence, polarisation, political repression and increasing control by military sectors.

Egypt continued to be the scene of an atmosphere of internal tension characterised by the repression of dissent, human rights violations, abuse by the security forces and the application of emergency measures. The state of emergency, which is renewed every three months by the authorities, remained in force throughout the year. It was initially imposed in response to armed insurgent activity in the Sinai Peninsula[34]. **The key political issue during the year was the presidential election that consolidated Abdel Fatah al-Sisi's hold on power**. The president announced his intention to run early in the year. In line with the results obtained by Hosni Mubarak and his predecessors before the revolts in the region,

Egypt continued to suffer from a climate of persecution of dissent and many human rights violations

he won 97% of all valid votes. This was after several of his opponents either dropped out of the race, were arrested or were banned from running. The election took place in March amid allegations of vote buying and a lack of guarantees on free and fair elections. The authorities intensified their persecution of opponents in the pre-election period and the judiciary announced investigations against opposition leaders who called for a boycott on the vote. After the elections, the arrest of various critics continued, including bloggers, political activists, journalists, representatives of local human rights organisations, diplomats, academics and lawyers for political prisoners. After al-Sisi was sworn into office in June, he pushed for reform of the military high command and approved controversial and restrictive new measures, including a rule giving the government greater control over the Internet. Parliament also passed a law allowing the president to grant immunity to senior military officers for crimes committed between July 2013 and January 2016, covering the period of the military coup against the government of Mohamed Mursi and the crackdown on demonstrations in support of the Islamists, which led to the deaths of 1,000 people. Trials continued against members of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the year and people were arrested on the suspicion of having links to the group, which has been banned and declared a terrorist organisation. Many people were sentenced to death in 2018 for crimes related to political violence and terrorism.

In this context, international human rights organisations condemned many cases of abuse, reporting that many of the arrests of dissidents occurred without arrest warrants and that in some cases could constitute enforced disappearance, as their whereabouts were unknown. **The independent Stop Enforced Disappearance campaign had documented 230 cases of disappearance between August 2017 and August 2018. Human Rights Watch warned of the use of allegations of terrorism to silence individuals and organisations close to the opposition**. Amnesty International also drew attention to the use of mistreatment, torture and prolonged periods of pre-trial detention for government opponents, the lack of investigation into cases of extrajudicial killings and other issues.

Iraq (Kurdistan)	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Territory, Resources, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkey, Iran, PKK

---

34. See the summary on (Sinai) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Summary:
Concentrated in the northern part of Iraq, the Kurds represent between 15 and 20% of the country's entire population. Since the creation of the state of Iraq and after the unfulfilled promises of an independent Kurdish state in the region, the Kurdish population has experienced a difficult fit within Iraq and suffered severe repression. In 1992, after the end of the Gulf War, the establishment of a no-fly zone in northern Iraq laid the foundations for creating the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The Kurds' experience with self-government was strengthened when Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled in 2003 and won recognition in the federal scheme embodied in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. Since then, different interpretations of the rights and responsibilities of each party have stoked tension between Erbil and Baghdad. The strain has mainly been over the status of the so-called "disputed territories" and control of energy resources. More recently, the Syrian Civil War and the development of the armed conflict in Iraq have affected the dynamics of this tension, rekindling discussion about the prospects of a possible independent Kurdish state.

After the intensification of the conflict in 2017 due to the independence referendum promoted by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which did not obtain international support and led to retaliatory measures by Baghdad, including the expulsion of Kurdish forces from disputed areas, **tensions slackened in 2018. Starting early in the year, Erbil and Baghdad maintained regular contact to address several issues**, including the management of airports and land borders, oil resources and the budget for the Kurdish region. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani met for the first time after the crisis in late January and the federal leader insisted on Baghdad's conditions to lift the restrictions imposed on the region. After the referendum, the federal government closed the airports in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and they were not reopened until the parties reached an agreement in March. The agreement also required Baghdad to send funds to pay the salaries of public employees in the Kurdish region for the first time since 2014. However, the budgets approved by the federal Parliament in March provoked controversy and encouraged protests by the Kurdish leaders, which boycotted the vote, because of the decrease in resources allocated to the KRG. **Throughout 2018, the situation in the Kurdish area was also determined by two elections**. The federal elections took place in May and were won by the coalition led by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.[35] The elections were marred by protests and some episodes of violence in Iraqi Kurdistan and allegations of fraud. Following the vote, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, the nephew of historical KDP leader Massoud Barzani, who resigned as KRG president after the 2017 crisis, met in Baghdad with the outgoing Iraqi prime minister and with his successor, Adel Abdul Mahdi, to address outstanding issues between the Iraqi federal government and the KRG. Thus, during the last quarter,

Erbil and Baghdad reached an agreement to resume exports from Kirkuk, which had been suspended since the referendum was held in 2017.

The Kurdish legislative elections were held in September, after Parliament was dissolved in 2017 amidst the crisis between Baghdad and Erbil. The elections (the first since 2013) were won by the KDP (45 seats), followed by the PUK (21). The electoral commission also had to process allegations of fraud, which led to the annulment of results in 96 polling stations (120,000 votes). The Barzani family's influence in the KRG was confirmed after the elections, with the appointment of two cousins to the highest positions. **The KDP appointed Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to be the new president of the KRG and Masrour Barzani, the son of Massoud Barzani and the chief security officer of the region, was promoted to be the new prime minister**. The sole KRG president until 2017, Massoud Barzani has remained at the head of the KDP. Various analysts indicated that tensions between the Kurdish political groups intensified due to the failure of the referendum and to the electoral context. These tensions were also projected onto the politics of Baghdad, where by convention the president is a Kurd. This position has traditionally been occupied by a representative of the PUK, but the KDP also promoted its own candidate. The vote in the federal Parliament gave the victory to the PUK candidate, Barham Salih, who became the new president of Iraq in October. Finally, Turkey launched many attacks against PKK positions in territories controlled by the group throughout the year, resulting in dozens of deaths.[36] Iran also conducted at least one attack on a base belonging to the Iranian Kurdish group KDPI, killing 12.[37] Turkish attacks caused civilian casualties in Iraqi Kurdistan and the deaths of at least two KRG peshmergas, according to media reports.

Israel – Syria, Lebanon	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Resources, Territory International
Main parties:	Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah (party and militia), Iran

Summary:
The backdrop to this situation of tension is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its consequences in the region. On the one hand, the presence of thousands of Palestinian refugees who settled in Lebanon from 1948, together with the leadership of the PLO in 1979, led Israel to carry out constant attacks in southern Lebanon until it occupied the country in 1982. The founding of Hezbollah, the armed Shiite group, in the early 1980s in Lebanon, with an agenda consisting of challenging Israel and achieving the liberation

---

35. See the summary on Iraq in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
36. See the summary on Turkey (southeast) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
37. See the summary on Iran (northwest) in this chapter.

of Palestine, led to a series of clashes that culminated in a major Israeli offensive in July 2006. Meanwhile, the 1967 war led to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights, which together with Syria's support of Hezbollah explains the tension between Israel and Syria. Since 2011, the outbreak of the armed conflict in Syria has had a direct impact on the dynamics of this tension and on the positions adopted by the actors involved in this conflict.

The historical tension between Israel, Syria and Lebanon intensified during 2018, partly as a result of dynamics linked to the armed conflict in Syria. **There were many armed incidents that may have caused more than 100 deaths during the year, although the body count is difficult to determine. The acts of violence took place in a volatile environment and in an atmosphere scarred by aggressive rhetoric and mutual threats**. Many of the incidents were related to Israel's growing misgivings about Iran's presence and influence in Syria. Early in the year, in the midst of cross-accusations, Israel's downing of an Iranian drone that allegedly entered Israeli airspace (though Tehran denied it) led to an escalation with Israeli attacks against Iranian targets in Syria and missiles fired by Syrians that may have reached Israeli territory. In April, a new Israeli attack on an air base in central Syria caused the deaths of seven Iranian troops. Weeks later, another set of attacks against military bases in northern Syria led to the deaths of 38 Syrian soldiers and 18 Iranian troops. The perpetrator of these attacks was vague, though some sources blamed them on Israel. The escalation worsened in May when Israel launched attacks after accusing Iran of firing rockets in the area of the Golan Heights. Some of the Israeli missiles hit Damascus. These Israeli attacks killed 23 people and were considered the most intense since the conflict in Syria began in 2011. Damascus said the attack had struck Syrian targets, not Iranian ones. Israel also attacked targets near the border area with Iraq, allegedly against forces of Iraqi origin aligned with Tehran. In this context, Syria's anti-aircraft system mistakenly shot down an allied Russian aircraft, killing 15 people, when trying to hit four Israeli planes that had launched an attack in the Latakia area allegedly against Iranian interests. **A senior Israeli official acknowledged that at least 200 attacks had been launched on suspected Iranian targets in Syria since early 2017**. The Israeli government insisted that Iran must withdraw completely from Syria, rejected Russia's offers for Iranian forces to remain more than 100 or 85 kilometres from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and stressed that it would not cease its operations in Syria as long as Iranian arms transfers to Hezbollah through Syria continued. The Lebanese Shia militia-party confirmed that it would continue to support the Damascus regime for as long as was necessary.

There were also another series of incidents in the border area between Israel and Lebanon in 2018. One of the most

Tensions between Israel, Syria and Lebanon intensified during 2018, partly as a result of the dynamics of the Syrian conflict and misgivings about Iranian influence on the country

prominent took place at the end of the year, when Israel launched an operation that it called "Northern Shield" to destroy tunnels allegedly built by Hezbollah for entering Israeli territory. The UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) confirmed that at least two of the tunnels crossed the "Blue Line" in contravention of UN Security Council. Other attacks against Hezbollah and Hamas targets on Lebanese soil were also attributed to Israel throughout the year. As such, the dispute over the land and, above all, maritime borders between Lebanon and Israel remained on the agenda, influenced by the discovery of gas reserves in the Mediterranean, and no headway was made in establishing a permanent ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. The UNIFIL periodic reports also found that Israel continued to violate Lebanese airspace on a recurring basis, more than 1,000 times in 2018.

The Gulf

Iran (north-west)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups PJAK and KDPI, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

Summary:
Despite the heterogeneous and multi ethnic nature of Iran, the minorities that live in the country, including the Kurds, have been subjected to centralist, homogenisation policies for decades and have condemned discrimination by the authorities of the Islamic Republic. In this context, since 1946, different political and armed groups of Kurd origin have confronted Tehran government in an attempt to obtain greater autonomy for the Kurd population, which is concentrated in the north-western provinces of the country. Groups such as the KDPI –Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran– and Komala headed this fight for decades. Since 2004, the Free Life of Kurdistan Party (PJAK) has gained a protagonist role in the conflict with Tehran. Its armed wing, the East Kurdistan Defence Forces, periodically confronts the Iranian forces, in particular members of the Revolutionary Guard.

Hostilities between the Iranian government and Kurdish armed groups intensified and killed at least 60 people during 2018. The incidents were concentrated in the second half of the year, in the northwestern part of the country and in border territories controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq. The acts of violence included an attack by Iranian forces against alleged militants that left nine dead on the border with Iraq in June, an assault by Kurdish fighters on a checkpoint in Marivan that killed a dozen members of the Revolutionary Guard and an undetermined number of militiamen in July, clashes in August between members of the KDPI and Iranian security forces in

Oshnavieh that left over 20 fatalities (12 guards and 11 Kurdish fighters, according to various sources) and a missile attack against a KDPI base in Iraqi Kurdistan that killed 12 people in September. After some of these incidents, Iran protested to the KRG, complaining that Kurdish fighters had entered its territory from Iraq, while the KRG accused Tehran of violating its territorial integrity. Kurdish organisations reported the killing of Kurdish people, including at least one woman and one minor. International human rights NGOs continued to condemn violations of the rights of minorities in Iran, including Kurds, citing cases of arbitrary arrest, torture, ill-treatment and unfair trials against activists. The instability in the northwestern part of the country exacerbated insecurity in other Iranian border areas with significant minority populations. During 2018 more than a dozen people were killed in several incidents in the Balochistan area (bordering Pakistan), linked to the activity of the Jaish al-Adl group. Another 25 people were killed in Ahvaz, in the southern province of Khuzestan (bordering Iraq), in attacks for which the armed opposition group Ahvaz National Resistance and ISIS claimed responsibility.

Saudi Arabia	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including AQAP and branches of ISIS (al-Hijaz Province, Najd Province)

Summary:
Governed since the 18th century by the al-Saud family and established as a state in 1932, Saudi Arabia is characterised by its religious conservatism and wealth, based on its oil reserves, and its regional power. Internally, the Sunni monarchy holds the political power and is in charge of government institutions, leaving little room for dissidence. Political parties are not allowed, freedom of expression is curtailed and many basic rights are restricted. The Shiite minority, concentrated in the eastern part of the country, has denounced its marginalisation and exclusion from the state's structures. The authorities have been accused of implementing repressive measures on the pretext of ensuring security in the country and in the context of anti-terrorism campaigns, the targets of which include militants of al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). As part of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, protests calling for reform and democracy received a repressive response from the government, especially in the Shia-majority areas of the country, and the authorities have denounced attempts at destabilisation from abroad, pointing to Iran. The country is the scene of sporadic armed actions by AQAP, and most recently by cells presumably linked to ISIS.

As in previous years, the tension in Saudi Arabia was fuelled by domestic policy issues and by the consequences of its foreign policy, given its growing involvement in regional issues, such as the war in Yemen and its power struggle with Iran. In 2018, there were fewer episodes of violence associated with armed groups and with unrest in the Shia part of the country than in 2017. However, **the regime's repressive policies received wide international exposure as a consequence of the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October**. The brutal crime provoked criticism of the kingdom and particularly of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, who was believed to have instigated the murder. An investigation by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency concluded that the prince had ordered the journalist killed. The Saudi government dismissed senior officials, announced that it would restructure the intelligence services and arrested nearly 20 people for their alleged responsibility for the crime. However, by the end of the year no independent investigation had yet been launched, as demanded by the UN. The murder was just one of the many forms of abuse and human rights violations of which the regime was accused during the year. International organisations stressed that Riyadh continued with its severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association and with the persecution of dissenting voices, including human rights defenders and women activists. For example, a royal decree in June ended the ban on driving for women. However, a month earlier, authorities had detained prominent activists who had defended women's right to drive. In the following months, two other advocates of women's right to drive and of an end of the male guardianship system were arrested. In addition, the UN special rapporteur on counterterrorism warned in June about the abusive use of the anti-terrorist law in Saudi Arabia to criminalise criticism of the authorities. Amnesty International also called attention to the death sentences in the country and, in particular, its application after confessions under torture or against dissidents. These include some Shia activists charged with participating in demonstrations to demand reforms and greater rights for their community, which is affected by several discriminatory policies. Throughout the year, Saudi Arabia faced the consequences of its involvement in the war in Yemen. Houthi forces launched many missiles in 2018, mainly towards the areas of Najran, Jizan, Khamis Mushait and also against the capital, Riyadh. Saudi forces intercepted many of these missiles, but one of them killed an Egyptian citizen in Riyadh in March, the first victim of the Yemeni conflict in the Saudi capital. Saudi Arabia maintained its regional rivalry with Iran and continued to persecute people with suspected links to the Islamic Republic and Hezbollah. No progress was made during the year in resolving the regional crisis that led Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region to break off relations with Qatar in 2017, such as Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia accuses Qatar of financing terrorism and of seeking to undermine its position, charges that Qatar denies and blames on Riyadh's intention to punish the country for pursuing an independent foreign policy.