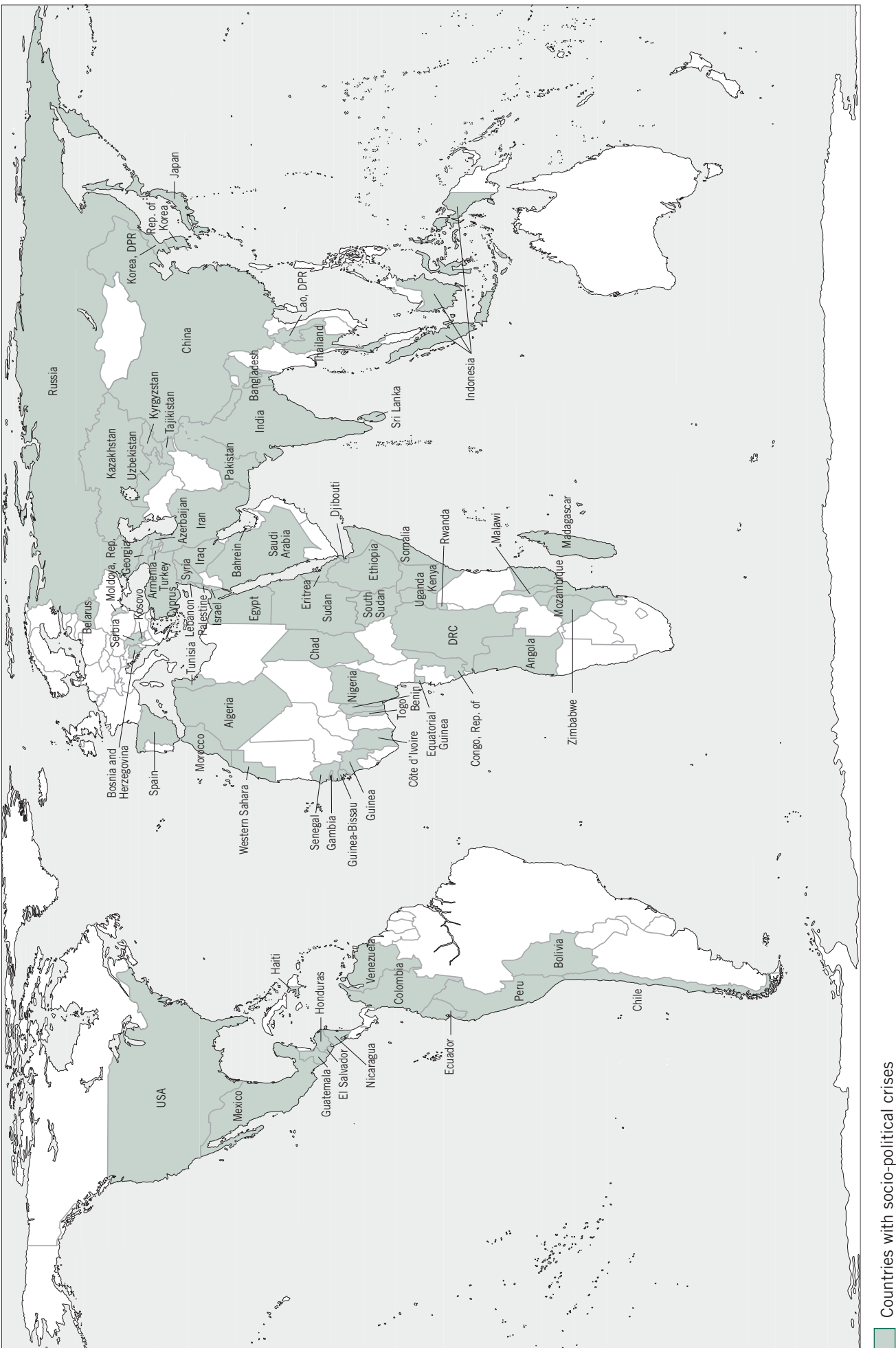Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**



Countries with socio-political crises

# 2. Socio-political crises

- There were 94 socio-political crises around the world in 2019. The largest number of them were concentrated in Africa (36 cases), followed by Asia (23), the Middle East and Latin America (12 cases in each region) and Europe (11).
- In addition to the conflict in the Lake Chad region, Nigeria saw an increase in violence from criminal groups in the northwest, coupled with the climate of intercommunity violence in the central belt and instability resulting from the electoral process.
- Chad was affected by a serious economic and political crisis, instability in the north and east of the country, attacks linked to intercommunity violence, as well as actions by Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region.
- The serious national socio-political crisis that has shaken the DRC in recent years ended with the holding of elections which handed victory to Felix Tshisekedi in what was the first peaceful transition of power in the country's history.
- During the year there was a serious deterioration in relations between Rwanda and Uganda, as well as between Rwanda and Burundi, and there were actions by the Rwandan-born insurgency FDLR, from its stronghold in the DRC.
- After three decades in power, President Omar al-Bashir was overthrown due to strong mass protests in the country, setting the stage for a new transition in Sudan.
- In Latin America protests broke out or increased in several countries, such as Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Haiti, Ecuador or Venezuela.
- The Indonesian region of West Papua experienced the most significant increase in protests and episodes of violence in recent decades.
- Several simultaneous attacks on Christian churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka killed more than 320 people on Easter Sunday.
- The situation in India was worsened by the adoption of new citizenship legislation that discriminated against the Muslim population, leading to intense social protests in which more than 20 people died.
- The situation around the Line of Contact in Nagorno-Karabakh improved, with a decrease in ceasefire violations and the number of victims in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- Mass protests in Iran from November onwards led to a harsh crackdown by the security forces, leaving more than 300 people dead.
- Iraq was the scene of a severe crackdown on mass protests against corruption and nepotism among the ruling class, resulting in the deaths of over 400 people.

The present chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2019. 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 2019. 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 2019.

## 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 2019**

| Conflict[1] -beginning- | Type[2] | Main parties | Intensity[3] / Trend[4] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Africa[5]** | | | |
| **Algeria** | Internal | Government, military, social and political opposition, Hirak movement | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| Angola (Cabinda) | Internal | Government, armed group FLEC-FAC, Cabinda Forum for Dialogue | 1 |
| | Self-government, Resources | | ↑ |
| Benin | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 1 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| 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, armed groups (UFR, UFDD), political and social opposition, communitary militias | 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 | 1 |
| | Government, Identity, Resources | | = |
| **DRC** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| | Government | | ↓ |
| DRC – Rwanda[6] | International | Governments of DRC, Rwanda, armed groups FDLR and M23 (former CNDP) | 1 |
| | Identity, Government, Resources | | = |
| DRC – Uganda[7] | International | Governments of DRC and Rwanda, 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[8]** | International | Government of Eritrea, Government of Ethiopia | 1 |
| | Territory | | ↓ |

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 2019 with 2018, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2019 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). In turn, the socio-political crises regarding Niger and Burkina Faso that were present in 2017 due to the instability generated by the self-called jihadist insurgency are analyzed in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts) in the case of the Western Sahel Region.
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 since *Alert 2016!*
7. Ibid.
8. See summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia in chapter 1 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace negotiations 2020. Analysis of trends and scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2020.

| Socio-political crisis | Type | Main parties | Intensity / Trend |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Africa** | | | |
| **Ethiopia** | Internal | Government (EPRDF coalition, led by the party TPLF), political and social opposition, various armed groups | 3 |
| | Government | | = |
| **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 | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| Guinea-Bissau | Internationalised 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 | | ↓ |
| Malawi | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 1 |
| | 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[9] | Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front | 1 |
| | Self-government, Identity, Territory | | = |
| Mozambique | Internal | Government, RENAMO | 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 | 2 |
| | Government, Identity | | ↑ |
| **Rwanda - Burundi** | International | Government of Rwanda, Government of Burundi, armed groups | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| **Rwanda - Uganda** | International | Government of Rwanda, Government of Uganda | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| Senegal (Casamance) | Internal | Government, factions of the armed group MFDC | 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 | 3 |
| | Government | | ↑ |

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9. 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** | | | |
| Sudan – South Sudan | International | Sudan, South Sudan | 1 |
| | Resources, Identity | | ↓ |
| Togo | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 1 |
| | 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 | 1 |
| | Government, System | | ↓ |
| 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 | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| **Chile** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| **Colombia** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| **Ecuador** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| | Government | | ↑ |
| **El Salvador** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs | 2 |
| | Government | | ↓ |
| Guatemala | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, gangs | 1 |
| | Government | | = |
| **Haiti** | Internationalised internal | Government, political and social opposition, BINUH, gangs | 1 |
| | Government | | ↓ |
| **Honduras** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs | 2 |
| | Government | | ↓ |
| **Mexico** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, cartels, armed opposition groups | 3 |
| | Government, Resources | | ↑ |
| **Nicaragua** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| | 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), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islami, JMB) | 2 |
| | Government | | ↓ |
| China (Xinjiang) | Internationalised internal | Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition | 1 |
| | Self-government, Identity, System | | = |

| Socio-political crisis | Type | Main parties | Intensity / Trend |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Asia** | | | |
| 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 |
| China (Tibet) | Self-government, Identity, System | | = |
| **China (Hong Kong)** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| **China (Hong Kong)** | Self-government, Identity, System | | ↑ |
| China – Japan | International | China, Japan | 1 |
| China – Japan | Territory, Resources | | = |
| China – Taiwan | International | China, Taiwan | 1 |
| China – Taiwan | Territory, Resources | | ↑ |
| **India** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition | 2 |
| **India** | System, Government | | ↑ |
| **India (Assam)** | Internationalised internal | Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT | 2 |
| **India (Assam)** | Self-government, Identity | | = |
| India (Manipur) | Internal | Government, armed groups PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA | 1 |
| India (Manipur) | Self-government, Identity | | ↓ |
| India (Nagaland) | Internal | Government, armed groups NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN (K-K), NSCN-R, NNC, ZUF | 1 |
| India (Nagaland) | Identity, Self-government | | ↓ |
| **India – Pakistan** | International | India, Pakistan | 3 |
| **India – Pakistan** | Identity, Territory | | ↑ |
| **Indonesia (West Papua)** | Internal | Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition, indigenous Papuan groups, Freeport mining company | 3 |
| **Indonesia (West Papua)** | Self-government, Identity, Resources | | ↑ |
| Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea | International | DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea | 1 |
| Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea | System | | ↓ |
| Kazakhstan | Internationalised internal | Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups | 1 |
| Kazakhstan | System, Government | | ↑ |
| Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea | International | DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea | 1 |
| Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea | System | | = |
| **Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[10]** | International | DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia | 2 |
| **Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[10]** | Government | | ↑ |
| Kyrgyzstan | Internationalised internal | Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan | 1 |
| Kyrgyzstan | System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory | | ↓ |
| Lao, PDR | Internationalised internal | Government, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin | 1 |
| Lao, PDR | System, Identity | | ↑ |
| Pakistan | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, armed opposition (Taliban militias, political party militias), Armed Forces, secret services | 2 |
| Pakistan | Government, System | | = |
| South China Sea | International | China Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam | 1 |
| South China Sea | Territory, Resources | | ↑ |
| **Sri Lanka** | Internal | Government, political and social opposition, Tamil political and social organizations | 3 |
| **Sri Lanka** | Self-government, Identity | | ↑ |

10. 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 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Asia** | | | |
| **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 – 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 | | = |
| **Russia (North Caucasus)**[11] | Internal | Russian federal government, governments of the republic of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasian Emirate and ISIS) | 1 |
| | System, Identity, Government | | ↓ |
| **Serbia – Kosovo** | International[12] | Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX | 2 |
| | Self-government, Identity, Government | | = |
| **Spain (Catalonia)** | Internationalised internal | Government of Spain, Government of Catalonia, political, social and judicial actors of Catalonia and Spain, Head of State | 1 |
| | Self-government, Identity | | ↑ |
| Turkey | Internationalised internal | Government, political and social opposition, ISIS, Fetullah Gülen organization | 2 |
| | Government, System | | = |
| **Middle East**[13] | | | |
| 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 | 3 |
| | Government | | ↑ |

11. In previous editions of this report, the socio-political crises between Russia (Dagestan) and Russia (Chechnya) were analysed separately.
12. 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.
13. 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).

| Socio-political crisis | Type | Main parties | Intensity |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **Trend** |
| **Middle East** | | | |
| **Iran (northwest)** | Internationalised internal | Government, armed group PJAK and PDKI, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) | 2 |
| | 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**[14] | International | Iran, USA, Israel | 3 |
| | System, Government | | ↑ |
| **Iraq** | Internationalised internal | Government, social and political opposition, Iran, USA | 3 |
| | 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 (Hijaz Province, Najd Province) | 1 |
| | Government, Identity | | = |

1: low intensity; 2: medium intensity; 3: high intensity.
↑: escalation of tension; ↓: decrease of tension; =: no changes.
The socio-political crises in bold are described in this chapter.

## 2.2. Socio-political crises: analysis of trends in 2019

This section examines the general trends observed in areas experiencing socio-political crises throughout 2019, at both the global and regional levels.

### 2.2.1. Global trends

**During 2019, 94 socio-political crisis flashpoints were identified worldwide, representing an increase of 12 per cent compared to 2018, when 83 flashpoints were identified. As in previous years, the largest number of socio-political crises were concentrated in Africa, which accounted for 36 cases, followed by Asia (23), the Middle East and Latin America (12 cases in each region) and Europe (11)**. It is worth noting that 16 new socio-political crisis flashpoints have been identified. Five of them were recorded in Africa: in Benin and Malawi, due to the increase in citizen protests and mobilisations against the respective governments

*During 2019, 94 socio-political crises were identified: 36 in Africa, 23 in Asia, 12 in the Middle East, 12 in Latin America and 11 in Europe*

in the context of the elections; in Algeria, due to the tensions that arose during the year following mass protests against the regime; and two other cases of inter-State crisis as a result of the deterioration of relations between the governments of Rwanda and Burundi and between Rwanda and Uganda. In the Americas, three new cases were identified (Chile, Colombia and Ecuador), where the most significant popular protests of the last decade against the various governments have been recorded, as well as allegations of serious human rights violations stemming from the actions of the state security forces. Five new cases of socio-political crises emerged in Asia and affected China-Taiwan, Kazakhstan, the South China Sea, China (Hong Kong) and India (the latter two linked to strong popular protests against the respective governments). In Europe, there was a notable increase in tensions in Catalonia (Spain) due to the repercussions of the judicial ruling against pro-independence politicians and civil society leaders; while in the Middle East, Iraq was a notable case due to the deterioration of the political situation in the country. In turn, during 2019, the cases of Russia

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14. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear program.
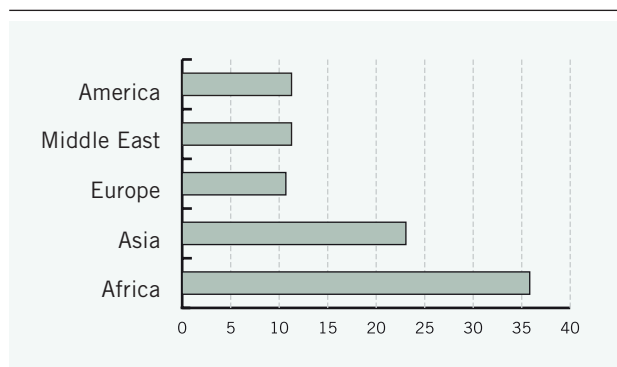
(Dagestan) and Russia (Chechnya), examined separately in previous editions of this report, were merged into a single socio-political crisis under the name of Russia (North Caucasus). On the other hand, three cases considered to be socio-political crises in previous years ceased to be classified as such in 2019, due to the improvement of the political situation in Djibouti, Lesotho and Armenia.

While socio-political crises may be caused by many factors, analysing the scope of the crises in 2019 allows us to identify trends as regards their causes or motivations. In keeping with data observed in previous years, **at global level 71 per cent of the crises were mainly linked to opposition to domestic or international policies implemented by a given government** (Government) (which led to a struggle to seize or erode power), or to opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective state system (System). In Latin America, for example, all the socio-political crises identified were linked to one of these two variables. At the same time, **40 per cent of the socio-political crises worldwide had as one of their main causes demands for self-government and/ or identity**, **with this percentage being clearly higher in Europe (more than 82 per cent, 9 of the 11 cases recorded) and much lower in America (8 per cent, only 1 of the 12 cases**). Note that around a third of the socio-political crises (31 per cent) involved disputes over control of territory and/or resources as a particularly important element, although this is a factor that fuels many crises to varying degrees.

In line with previous years, **slightly more than half of the socio-political crises in the world were internal (51 cases or 54 per cent)**, with the case of Latin America being particularly paradigmatic, where once again almost all the cases (except Haiti) were of this type. On the other hand, **almost a third of the global socio-political crises were internationalised internal (25 situations or almost 27 per cent)**, with this percentage clearly higher in regions such as the Middle East (half of the crises) or Europe (55 per cent), and significantly lower in Africa

*71 per cent of the socio-political crises had among their main causes opposition to the domestic or international policies implemented by their respective governments or opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective States*

(14 per cent) and Latin America (with Haiti the only case). Finally, **one fifth of the socio-political crises were international (18 cases or almost 19 per cent)**, concentrated in Asia (26 per cent) and Africa (22 per cent). With regard to the **evolution of the socio-political crises**, in 37 per cent of the conflicts (35 cases) there was no significant change, while **in 41 cases (44 per cent) there was a deterioration with respect to 2018**, and **in only 19 per cent of the settings was there some improvement in the crisis** (18 cases). In the Americas, 58 per cent of cases showed a worsening situation (7 out of 12), while Africa accounted for almost half of the improvement globally (8 out of 18). With regard to the **intensity of the socio-political crises**, during 2019 half of them were of low intensity (49 per cent, a percentage similar to the 51 per cent recorded in 2018), one third were of medium intensity (34 per cent, equivalent to last year's figure) and only 18 per cent of the cases had high levels of intensity (17 cases), 11 of which occurred in Africa (6) and the Middle East (5).

In comparison with previous years, **the number of severe socio-political crises followed the downward trend** seen in recent years (albeit with a small deviation in 2018) representing 18 per cent in 2019, 15 per cent in 2018, 20 per cent in 2017 and 24 per cent in 2016. Several settings that had experienced high levels of socio-political crisis in 2018, de-escalated during 2019 to a medium or low intensity. This was the case in the DRC, Nicaragua and Iran (north-west). However, there were also six settings that had recorded medium or low levels of intensity in 2018 and previous years, whose levels of conflict increased substantially and were considered to be of high intensity in 2019: Sudan, Haiti, Indonesia (West Papua), Sri Lanka, Iran and Iran-USA, Israel. It should be noted that, as opposed to 2018 when three cases of socio-political crisis escalated into armed conflict –Cameroon (Ambazonia/North West and South West), northern Niger and Burkina Faso–, during 2019 **only the socio-political crisis in northern Mozambique had evolved negatively to the point of being classified as an armed conflict**, caused in part by the actions of insurgent groups with jihadist agendas.

The Middle East accounted for the largest number of high-intensity socio-political crises by region, with 5 cases out of the 12 recorded (42 per cent of the socio-political crises in the area), and a notable crisis in **Egypt** –where the climate of internal socio-political tensions characterised by a shift towards authoritarianism by the government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, the persistent persecution and crackdown on dissidents, human rights violations, abuses by the security forces and the application of emergency measures continued for another year–; **Iraq** –as a result of mass popular protests against the political system, corruption and nepotism, which were harshly repressed, as well as the escalation of hostilities

between Washington and Tehran at the end of the year which materialised in a series of violent incidents in Iraq–; **Iran** –where mass popular protests against the government were recorded and harshly repressed by the security forces with a toll of more than 300 deaths–; **Iran-US, Israel** –the socio-political crisis linked to the Iranian nuclear programme was influenced by a series of incidents in the Middle East that led to a volatile situation that was dangerously conducive to military escalation–; and **Israel-Syria-Lebanon** –where the socio-political crisis continued for another year, partly as a consequence of dynamics linked to the Syrian armed conflict.

In Africa, the six most serious socio-political crises in 2019 were **Chad** –which continued to be affected by the climate of social and political instability and the escalation of violence during the year due to various crisis flashpoints present in the north of the country (Tibesti region, linked, among other issues, to illegal mining) and the east (Ouaddai and Sila provinces, due to outbreaks of intercommunity violence)–; **Ethiopia and Ethiopia (Oromia)** –where, despite changes in the country under the Government of Abiy Ahmed, a high level of violence persisted, mainly in the north-west (Amhara region), the north-east and the south-central (Oromia), due to numerous intercommunity points of contention and historical grievances that surfaced in the context of the political reforms undertaken by the Government–; **Kenya** –where intercommunity violence persisted for another year, as well as the actions of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in the north and east, although these were less intense than in 2018–; **Nigeria** –where, in addition to the armed conflict present in the north-east region (Boko Haram),[15] various socio-political crises remain ongoing in the country, which have had repercussions in terms of an increase in violence and instability–; activities of criminal groups in the north-west of the country (Kaduna and Zamfara); intercommunity violence in the central belt (Middle Belt); instability linked to the national electoral process; and tensions in the southern region of Biafra and the Niger Delta[16]–; and **Sudan** – which continued with a climate of high tension throughout the year as a result of the significant mass protests that were subject to a harsh crackdown and led to the fall of President Omar al-Bashir and the opening of a transition of power that was initially hijacked by a military junta.

As for the remaining regions, the most intense crises took place in **Haiti** –where a worsening of the political, institutional, social, economic and humanitarian crisis was noted during the year–; **Mexico** –where the homicide rate once again broke a new record, becoming the most violent year since public

*Half of the socio-political crises worldwide were of low intensity*

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

Graph 2.2. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**
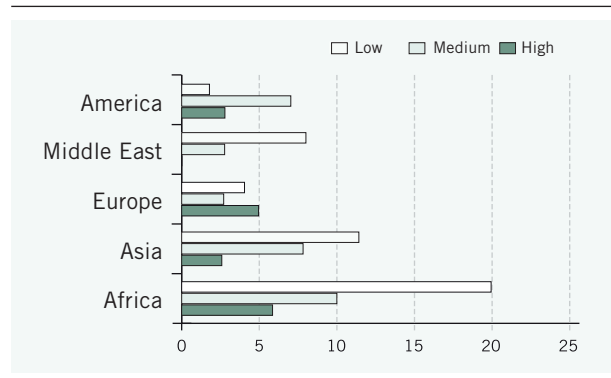


records began; femicides; kidnappings; extortion; people trafficking–; **Venezuela** –a country where the climate of instability, social protests and mobilisations continued, exacerbated by the institutional crisis and Juan Guaidó's self-proclamation as President-elect, which led to moments where the risk of military conflict was high–; **India-Pakistan** –where relations between the governments seriously deteriorated as a result of various episodes of violence in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir–; **Indonesia (West Papua)** –where clashes between the armed opposition group the OPM and the Armed Forces increased, as well as protests and disturbances in the Papua region–; and **Sri Lanka** –whose security situation deteriorated seriously due to several simultaneous attacks that killed more than 320 people and injured another 500.

## 2.2.2. Regional trends

As in previous years, in 2019 **Africa** remained the main flashpoint of socio-political crises at global level, accounting for 38 per cent of the cases –36 out of 94, a relatively similar figure compared to previous years (33 in 2018, 37 in 2017, 34 in 2016). Five new cases were included with respect to the previous year (Algeria, Benin, Malawi, Rwanda-Burundi and Rwanda-Uganda) while two of them were no longer considered socio-political crises due to lower levels of intensity (Djibouti and Lesotho). As mentioned above, **35 per cent of the high-intensity crises worldwide –6 out of 17– were located in the African continent in 2019**: **Chad**, **Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya**, **Nigeria** and **Sudan** This figure is similar to that recorded the previous year for the African continent, with the only exception being the reduction in the intensity of the crisis in the DRC and the increase in intensity in Sudan. At the same time, there was an **increase in violence in the north of Mozambique**, in Cabo Delgado province, which was

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15. See summary on the Lake Chad Region in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).
16. The situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria relates to another socio-political crisis. See Table 2.1. Summary of socio-political crises in 2019.
17. See summary on Mozambique (north) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

now considered an armed conflict,[17] with the tensions between the FRELIMO government and the opposition group RENAMO continuing in the country. It should also be noted that 56 per cent of the crises recorded in Africa (20 out of 36 cases) were **low intensity**. On the other hand, 39 per cent of the cases of socio-political crisis in the continent (14 cases) noted deterioration, representing an increase with respect to 2018 (10 cases). In contrast, **a relative improvement in the situation was observed in eight cases**: Rep. of Congo, Eritrea, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, DRC, Sudan-South Sudan and Tunisia. Of these, the cases of Ethiopia (Oromia) and Kenya are noteworthy, since although there was a decrease in tensions compared to the previous year, they are still considered high intensity cases. It should be noted that in 39 per cent of the cases (14) **no significant changes was recorded**.

On the other hand, the vast majority of tensions in Africa (23 cases) **were internal (64 per cent)**, similar to the previous year (67 per cent in 2018). Slightly less than a sixth of the crises displayed **elements of internationalisation** (14 per cent, a figure similar to 2018), including the influence of foreign actors, whether non-State armed actors of various kinds –such as the armed organisation al-Shabaab (originating from Somalia) in Kenya–, acts committed by regional or global jihadist groups –such as branches of ISIS and AQIM in Tunisia and Algeria–, the presence of international troops –such as UNOCI in the Ivory Coast or MONUSCO in the DRC–, or the influence of sectors of the diaspora and local armed groups present in neighbouring territories –as in the cases of Eritrea or Rwanda. Only **8 of the 36 socio-political crises in Africa were international in nature, most of them in the Great Lakes region**: Central Africa (LRA), Eritrea-Ethiopia, Morocco-Western Sahara, DRC-Rwanda, DRC-Uganda, Rwanda-Burundi, Rwanda-Uganda and Sudan-South Sudan. Among these, an increase in tension was noted during 2019 in the cases of Rwanda-Burundi and Rwanda-Uganda –which came to be considered new flashpoints on the continent due to the deterioration of relations between the various governments and the climate of accusations and threats–, while the cases of Eritrea-Ethiopia and Sudan-South Sudan evolved positively due to changes in the government in some of the states involved.

As for the root causes of the crises, all them had multiple causes, in line with the global trend. **Two thirds of the socio-political crises that occurred in Africa (26 of the 36 cases, 72 per cent) were linked to opposition to the government** and in three cases –Kenya, Mozambique and Tunisia– **opposition to the system** was also observed. On the other hand,

*In Latin America, 58 per cent of the socio-political crises recorded in 2019 experienced a deterioration in their situation*

*Asia recorded five new flashpoints during 2019: China (Hong Kong), China-Taiwan, India, Kazakhstan and the South China Sea*

33 per cent of the socio-political crises in Africa had as one of their main causes **identity and/or self-government demands**, with both variables converging in four conflicts –Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia (Oromia) and Morocco-Western Sahara. In addition, it should be noted that the struggle for **control of resources and/or territory** was also a relevant element in Africa in more than a third (specifically 39 per cent, 14 cases) of the socio-political crises in the continent.

The **Americas** experienced an increase in the number of socio-political crises, from 9 in 2018 to 12 in 2019, representing 13 per cent of the global total. The **three new flashpoints** are located in **Chile, Colombia and Ecuador**, and relate to the increase in mass protests and the serious crackdown on demonstrators. For example, **Chile experienced the most intense and widespread protests in recent decades, with a final toll of 26 deaths, 12,600 people injured and thousands of arrests, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).** As regards the intensity of the crises in the continent, in two cases the intensity was low –**Guatemala and Peru**–, while in three of them –**Haiti, Mexico and Venezuela**– the intensity was high. In the remaining cases (57 per cent), the intensity recorded was medium. However, as in previous years, although Latin America and the Caribbean continued to be one of the regions in the world with the least number of socio-political crises and armed conflicts, they also have the **highest homicide rates in the world, accounting for 11 of the 12 top countries in the ranking** (except South Africa).

On the other hand, all the socio-political crises in Latin America were of an internal nature, with the exception of Haiti, due to the role that the United Nations missions have played in the country in recent years. As for **the evolution of the socio-political crises** in the Americas, **the situation worsened in 58 per cent of cases** (7) – Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico and Venezuela–, compared to the three cases recorded in 2018. **The 12 socio-political crises identified in Latin America had among their main causes opposition to government policies**, which materialised in protests of differing intensities and in the serious crackdowns on protests in countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Haiti or Venezuela. 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 and Peru.

In **Asia**, 23 socio-political crises were recorded (24 per cent of the total), **five more than those observed in 2018** (18): China (Hong Kong), China-Taiwan, India,

Kazakhstan and the South China Sea. Among them, **13 per cent of cases (three) were classified as high intensity during 2019 –India and Pakistan, Indonesia (West Papua) and Sri Lanka– while in 52 per cent of cases (12) the intensity was low** –China (Xinjiang), China-Japan, DPR Korea-Rep. of Korea, India (Manipur and Nagaland), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, South China Sea, Thailand and Uzbekistan. In relation to the evolution of the socio-political crises in the Asian continent, in **43 per cent of cases (10) a worsening of the situation was observed**, which was particularly serious in those settings with a greater intensity of violence, represented in particular by the tensions between India and Pakistan, Indonesia (West Papua) and Sri Lanka. **In turn, only four cases (17 per cent) saw an improvement in the situation –Bangladesh, India (Manipur and Nagaland) and Uzbekistan– compared to seven cases (37 per cent) observed during the previous year**, while in nine cases (39 per cent) there was no significant change.

As in 2018, Asia continued to be the continent with the highest percentage of **international socio-political crises**, **six of which were in North-East Asia**, specifically in the area between the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea: the dispute between China and Japan (mainly over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands), North Korea's tensions with its southern neighbour and also with several other countries regarding its weapons programme, the tensions between China and Taiwan, and the crisis in the South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. The other main international socio-political crisis was the historic dispute between India and Pakistan. Some **43 per cent of the socio-political crises (10 cases) were internal, and 30 per cent (7 cases)** had a clear international dimension, either due to the presence of regional armed groups and border tensions, as in three of the Central Asian countries –Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan– or because of the transnational links of local armed organisations –as in China's Xinjiang province or the Indian state of Assam–, or due to the presence of armed organisations in neighbouring countries –as in the case of Lao PDR.

As for the root causes, **14 of the 23 socio-political crises in the region (61 per cent) were linked to opposition to the system or to the government**. In six of them –India, Pakistan and the four former Soviet republics of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan– both variables were present; while in another five –the provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang in China, as well as Hong Kong, the dispute between North and South Korea and the situation of the Hmong community in Lao PDR– opposition to the system was identified as one of the fundamental points of contention, alongside other

*In Europe, it should be noted that all the recorded cases of socio-political crisis were classified as low intensity (73 per cent), with no high-intensity cases*

issues. On the other hand, **identity aspirations and/or demands for self-government** were observed in 11 conflicts (48 per cent), while issues relating to the **control of resources and territory** was were a factor present in a third (35 per cent) of the socio-political crises in Asia.

**In Europe, 11 cases of socio-political crisis were recorded**, with the notable inclusion of a new case in 2019 relating to the deterioration of the political conflict between Catalonia and Spain, as well as the end of the crisis in Armenia, which ceased to be classified as a socio-political crisis. Following the trend of previous years, **all the cases of socio-political crisis recorded in Europe were classified as low intensity (73 per cent), with no high-intensity cases**. On the other hand, with regard to the **evolution of the socio-political crises**, it is worth noting the increase in tensions in four cases –Cyprus, Spain (Catalonia) and the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia–, the improvement of the situation in 2 of the 11 cases –Russia (North Caucasus) and Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)–, while in the remaining cases (45 per cent) no significant changes were noted. Among the cases where tensions were reduced, the **situation surrounding the Line of Contact in Nagorno-Karabakh improved**, with a decrease in ceasefire violations and in victims of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, as regards situations that have deteriorated, there has been an **increase in the tensions surrounding the conflict over Catalonia's status within Spain, mainly as a result of the sentence handed down to pro-independence civil society and political leaders, among other issues.**

With regard to the root causes, it should be noted that Europe continued to be the region at the global level where disputes related to **identity and/or self-government demands** had the strongest presence, **with 82 per cent of cases** being linked to these factors (9 cases out of 12), a similar percentage to previous years. It should also be noted that 55 per cent of the socio-political crises that took place in Europe were also related to causes linked to the **opposition** of certain groups to government policies or to the **system** as a whole. At the same time, following trends of previous years, **control of territory** was a factor in two of the most prolonged socio-political crises in the region: the dispute between the Government of Cyprus and the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Finally, in relation to the geographical scope of action and influence of the actors involved in the socio-political crisis, the trend observed in previous years continued. Half of the socio-political crises that occurred in Europe (55 per cent) were **internalised internal, highlighting the role that foreign governments play in certain contexts,**

especially the role played by Russia in certain self-proclaimed independent regions within the framework of countries that had formed part of the USSR: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transdniestria in the Republic of Moldova. Almost a third of the cases (27 per cent) were **internal** socio-political crises, while two cases were considered **international** socio-political crises: Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Serbia-Kosovo.

Finally, 12 socio-political crises were recorded in the **Middle East**, one more than in 2018. The new socio-political crisis is located in **Iraq**, which was the scene of mass protests against the corruption and nepotism of the ruling class, which were subject to a harsh crackdown, resulting in the deaths of more than 400 people. It should be noted that the **Middle East was the region of the world with the highest percentage of high-intensity socio-political crises** (5 cases, accounting for 42 per cent, up from three cases a year earlier, when they accounted for 27 per cent). The most severe socio-political crises were recorded in Egypt, Iran, Iran-US, Israel, Iraq, as well as the crisis affecting Israel's relations with Syria and Lebanon. On the other hand, four low-intensity (33 per cent) and three (25 per cent) medium-intensity socio-political crises were observed. In relation to the **evolution** of the crises, **only one case was identified where a relative improvement in the situation was detected with respect to 2018**: **Iran (north-west)**. In five cases the situation did not change significantly with respect to the previous year, while **in half of the cases (6 cases) there was a deterioration in the socio-political crisis**, including the situation in **Iraq**, the mass protests recorded in **Iran** at the end of the year that led to a very harsh crackdown by the security forces with a toll of more than 300 deaths, and the escalation of tensions between **Iran and the USA** linked to the Iranian nuclear programme, in a volatile context that was dangerously close to a military escalation in the Middle East.

As regards the causes of the disputes, **75 per cent of the socio-political crises** recorded in the region (9 out of 12 cases) **had opposition to the internal or international policies of the government or opposition to the system among their main causes**. In almost half of the crises (5 cases representing 42 per cent) identity demands and/or demands for self-government were also one of the most notable motivations. In parallel, four of the socio-political crises in the region were **internal**, five were **internationalised internal** and two were **international**: 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 Arab-Israeli conflict and, more recently, also influenced by the war in Syria.

# 2.3. Socio-political crises: annual evolution

## 2.3.1. Africa

### Great Lakes and Central Africa

| Chad | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government, Resources, Territory Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, armed groups (UFR, UFDD), political and social opposition, community militias |

**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 elections, won without surprises by Idriss Déby, the climate of social instability persisted. Finally, it is worth noting the military interventions in the north against groups based in Libya and against illegal mining, and against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, as well as periodic inter-community clashes over land ownership and uses.

**Instability in northern and eastern Chad, attacks and reprisals in other parts of the country linked to intercommunity violence, as well as the actions of the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region, persisted.**[18] On the military side, there was a notable French military air intervention from 3 to 6 February against a rebel column of the Union des Forces de la Résistance (UFR) coalition of armed groups, consisting of 50 vehicles from the north-east, originating in southern Libya, which was heading for N'Djamena. At the request of President Idriss Déby, French fighters intervened in support of the Chadian army and destroyed around 20 vehicles. The UFR is a group led

*The Chadian Government restricted public space by prohibiting acts of protest against cuts in the supply of butane gas and the use of the CFA franc*

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18. See summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

by Timan Erdimi, a nephew of President Idriss Déby and the former chief of staff, currently based in Qatar. On 9 February, the army announced that they had destroyed about 40 vehicles and arrested 250 rebels. The opposition and sectors of civil society criticised the French intervention as further proof of its unconditional support for Déby. In addition, in March hundreds of militants deserted or left the rebel coalition Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement (UFDD).

As a result of the **outbreaks of violence in the eastern provinces (Ouaddai and Sila), the Government established a state of emergency in August** and extended it for the rest of the year following the escalation of clashes between local farmers and nomadic livestock breeders of Arab origin. The state of emergency was accompanied by a curfew, with the aim of forcibly disarming the civilian population. In addition, **the outbreak of violence in the mining areas of the Tibesti region in the far north of the country over the past year has resulted in dozens of deaths and various attempts to promote talks between the parties**. The Government extended the state of emergency, established in August in the east of the country, to Tibesti. In August, it also announced the deployment of 5,000 troops in the three provinces to tackle the situation of instability, and the closure of the borders with Sudan, CAR and Libya. Finally, on 2 November, the Government and the self-defence militia responsible for the situation reached a pre-agreement establishing a ceasefire. The Government was required to lift the blockade on Miski village and release the militia group, while the militia was required to surrender its weapons. On 5 November the President reinstated the canton chiefs who had been expelled for opposing the Government's decision in August 2018 to change the internal borders which led to Miski ceasing to form part of the Tibesti region and being integrated into Borkou. The final agreement was reached on 11 November, when the militia agreed to a definitive cessation of hostilities and the Government agreed to establish a mechanism to manage gold mining that will lead to profits from gold mining returning to the local population.

In the political and social sphere, the Government restricted public spaces by banning acts of protest against cuts in the supply of butane gas and the use of the CFA franc. In addition, on 23 April the Government rejected the request of the opposition movement Les Transformateurs to become a political party (an organisation created in 2018 that aims to break onto the political scene through the leadership of Succès Masra, a young former economist at the African Development Bank). Different actions organised by this movement were repressed during the year. However, in view of the situation in neighbouring Sudan, where protests over the high cost of living led to the fall of its President, Omar al-Bashir, the Government on 10 May withdrew import taxes on basic commodities such as rice, flour, cooking oil and dates in order to reduce the price and

defuse the protests in the country to avoid a situation of tension such as the one being experienced in its neighbouring country. The renewal of the members of the Cadre National de Dialogue Politique (CNDP) (a forum for coordination between the presidential majority, the political opposition and civil society) remained pending throughout the year due to discrepancies within the political opposition to decide on their representatives, with the members finally being renewed in August. This forum, chaired by Mahamat Zene Bada, secretary-general of the ruling party, Idriss Déby's MPS, held talks throughout the year to agree on the electoral calendar. In May, the CNDP decided to postpone the legislative elections scheduled for that month until the end of the year, on a date yet to be determined. Déby held meetings between 10 and 16 July with the political parties to discuss the elections. Countries from the international community put pressure on the Government to speed up the timetable, grant authorisation to political parties to enable them to carry out their activities and freely organise rallies. The President, Idriss Déby, pressured the electoral bodies to speed up the holding of elections in January 2020, rejecting the proposal of the electoral commission to hold elections in April or November 2020, due to the need to revise the electoral law and to organise a new census, as proposed by the opposition, which denounced the interference by the Government and threatened to boycott the electoral process if it did not accept its demands. The death of a taxi driver on 4 November at the hands of the bodyguards of the President of the National Assembly while they were clearing the roads in N'Djamena provoked strong rejection by society and the mobilisation of thousands of people on 23 November to attend his funeral, an action in which the security forces intervened causing the death of one person.

| DRC | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>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.[19] 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

19. See the summary on DRC (East) in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

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 mandate, which was due to expire in the 2016 elections that were postponed until the end of 2018, contributed to exacerbating instability and political and social mobilization against his stay in power, which was harshly repressed.

**The serious political and social crisis at national level that has affected** the country as a result of the conclusion of President Joseph Kabila's mandate in December 2016 and its extension until the holding of elections in December 2018, as agreed in the December 2016 Saint Sylvester agreement, **culminated in the holding of elections in a generally peaceful climate in most of the country, which resulted in the victory of Felix Tshisekedi, in what was the first peaceful transition of power in the country's history**. However, it should be noted that between 16 and 17 December 2018, on the eve of the elections, there was a massacre in four towns in Yumbi, in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west of the country) that went unnoticed as it coincided with the electoral process, and in which, according to the UN, up to 535 civilians from the Banunu community were killed by militias from the Batende community. Local security forces and political actors were allegedly involved in this massacre, encouraged by political actors, security forces and the local state administration in the area. Other sources put this figure at over 900 fatalities. The massacre was reportedly preceded by a dispute over the burial of a Banunu community leader. The UN conducted an investigation in which it determined that crimes against humanity may have been committed. The new Government opened an investigation, collaborated with the UN, initiated legal proceedings and replaced many positions in the security forces and local administration.

On 24 January 2019, Felix Tshisekedi took office as the country's new President after his victory in the controversial national and provincial presidential and legislative elections on 30 December, subject to suspicions of irregularities and alleged electoral fraud. In addition, during the year greater freedom was seen in the political arena as well as an improvement in the security situation, contrasting with the increase in political violence and insurgent actions in the east of the country. The implementation of the December 2016 peace agreement was marked by the splintering of the opposition due to an absence of leadership following the death of historic opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of the UDPS opposition party, in early 2017.

*The serious national political and social crisis that has affected the DRC in recent years culminated in the holding of elections at the end of 2018, which conferred victory to Felix Tshisekedi, marking the first peaceful transition of power in the country's history*

The presidential, national legislative and provincial elections were held on 30 December 2018, one week later than planned (23 December) due to a fire that destroyed around 8,000 electronic counting machines stored at an electoral commission building. Amidst accusations of electoral fraud on the part of Martin Fayulu and his Lamuka coalition, on 19 January the **Constitutional Court confirmed Felix Tshisekedi's victory by a narrow margin** over the second candidate, Martin Fayulu, with the candidate Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary coming in third. The SACD and various African countries such as Egypt (the country that assumed the AU presidency in February) endorsed the announcement, celebrating the transfer of power. Both Tshisekedi and Kabila welcomed the results (with some sources speculating on a possible agreement between them), but Martin Faluyu filed a petition with the Constitutional Court alleging electoral fraud and claiming that he allegedly received 62% of the votes and Tshisekedi 18%, according to his estimates and those of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO). The latter, which deployed 40,000 election observers, publicly stated that the official results did not match its own conclusions. Some Governments and diplomatic sources questioned the official results.

The **Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) also announced the results of the legislative elections on the basis of which the ruling coalition Common Front for the Congo (FCC) maintained a large majority in the National Assembly**, as well as in the provincial assemblies, amidst strong accusations of fraud and protests in several cities, especially in Kikwit (Kwilu province, a stronghold of Martin Fayulu), and to a lesser extent in Kisangani, Mbandaka, Goma and Kinshasa. The CENI postponed the vote until March 2019 in four constituencies, the territory of Beni, the city of Beni, Butembo and Yumbi, due to the Ebola outbreak and security concerns. Finally, the ruling party of President Kabila, the FCC, won 361 of the 485 seats in Parliament, while the coalition that included Felix Tshisekedy's UDPS, the Cap pour le Changement (CACH), won only 49 seats, compared to 90 for the Lamuka coalition. As a result, Tshisekedi did not obtain enough support to choose a prime minister because Kabila's FCC blocked his proposals, which led to new negotiations between the two blocks that ended with the announcement on 6 March of an agreement to form a coalition Government with a prime minister from the FCC. Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba was appointed Prime Minister on May 20. The new Prime Minister had held various positions of responsibility during the Mobutu Sese Seko Governments. He is a member of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy, one of the main parties that make

up the FCC. The new Government will be formed of 67 members: the prime minister, 5 deputy prime ministers, 10 state ministers, 31 ministers, 3 deputy ministers and 17 vice-ministers. On the Council of Ministers, the CACH obtained 23 seats, while the FCC obtained 42. More than 70% of the Government is made up of ministers who are serving as ministers for the first time. Women's representativeness is 17 per cent, but they hold key ministerial positions, such as Foreign Affairs and Planning. Taken together, the seats held by the FCC in the National Assembly and the Senate represent a majority of more than three-fifths and give the coalition broad legislative powers, and as various sources have pointed out, the transition of power in the country has remained in the hands of Kabila and his acolytes. In the provinces, the FCC had a majority in 25 of the 26 assemblies, while in North Kivu the majority of the seats were held by Lamuka. In addition, the FCC presides over 24 assemblies, and 23 governors have been appointed from among its ranks. Lamuka chairs two provincial assemblies and the CACH chairs one. On 24 April, the National Assembly elected its Parliamentary Committee, headed for the first time by a woman, Jeanine Mabunda, who belongs to the FCC coalition. On 3 September, Ilunkamba presented the Government's programme to the National Assembly and the coalition Government was inaugurated.

Following a meeting of its founding members in Brussels at the end of March, the Lamuka electoral coalition was transformed into a political platform within which Moïse Katumbi was appointed as first coordinator, a position that rotates every three months. Amid accusations of internal dissent, Lamuka's presidential election candidate, Martin Fayulu, continued to demand respect for "the truth of the ballot box" and organised mass public events in Kisangani and Kinshasa. One of the first steps taken by President Felix Tshisekedi, as part of his so-called "100-day emergency programme", and in accordance with the political agreement of 31 December 2016, was to grant a pardon in March to some 700 political prisoners, including lawyer Firmin Yangambi and opposition leader Franck Diongo. The improved political climate facilitated the return of opposition leaders to the DRC, which contributed positively to the emerging balance of power between the country's political forces. The months of May and June, saw the return of three historic political leaders belonging to Lamuka: Moïse Katumbi (two years in exile), Antipas Mbusa Nyamwisi (seven years in exile) and Jean-Pierre Bemba. Katumbi's return was made possible by the annulment of a three-year prison sentence for property-related fraud and the suspension of all legal proceedings pending against him. Katumbi welcomed President Tshisekedi's achievements, particularly with regard to granting greater political freedom, and promised to take a pragmatic approach, promote national cohesion and work constructively as a member of the "republican opposition".

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20. See the summary on Rwanda – Uganda in this chapter.
21. See the summary on Rwanda – Burundi in this chapter.

| Rwanda | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government, Identity Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, Rwandan armed group FDLR, political opposition, dissident sectors of the Government party RPF, Rwandan diaspora in other African countries and in the West |

**Summary:**
The arrival of Belgian colonialism in 1916 exacerbated the ethnic differences between the majority Hutu community and the Tutsi minority. The latter was considered superior and held political, economic and social power in the country with the blessing of Belgium to the detriment of the majority of the population. This situation stirred up great resentment and by 1959 the first outbreaks of ethnic-political violence against the Tutsi community had taken place. Following independence in 1962, the Hutu community took power. 1990 marked the start of an armed conflict between the RPF armed group, led by the Tutsi community in Uganda, having fled in 1959, and the Hutu government, although an agreement was reached in 1993. This agreement was not respected. Between April and June 1994, extremist Hutu groups carried out the genocide of around one million people, mostly Tutsi but also moderate Hutu, abandoned by the international community, which withdrew the UN mission that was supposed to supervise the agreement. The RPF managed to overthrow and expel the genocidal government, committing serious violations of human rights. Some sectors of the population refer to this as a second internal genocide, in addition to the crimes committed by the RPF in Congolese territory as it persecuted those responsible for the 1994 genocide (the former Rwandan armed forces and the Interahamwe militias, rechristened as the FDLR) and the two million Rwandan refugees who had fled to DR Congo. Since then, the president, Paul Kagame, has ruled in an authoritarian manner, repressing political dissidence.

**During the year, the relationship between Rwanda and Uganda,[20] as well as between Rwanda and Burundi,[21] seriously deteriorated and there were actions by the Rwandan-born insurgency FDLR, from its stronghold in the DRC**. There was an outbreak of violence in early October in the north of the country, near the border with the DRC, in which 33 people died. A group belonging to the FDLR insurgency entered from DRC and attacked the town of Kinigi, in Musanze district, killing 14 people. Rwandan security forces pursued the assailants, executing 19 and capturing 5. Police arrested the leader of the unregistered opposition party FDU-Inkingi, Victoire Ingabire, on charges of involvement in the Kinigi attacks.

In addition, the Government of Rwanda continued to restrict political freedom and freedom of expression in the country. In September, two unidentified assailants stabbed and killed a senior official of the FDU-Inkingi party, and authorities arrested two people in connection with the crime, although the party leader noted that

the murder was a further attempt by the Government to intimidate the opposition. Subsequently, opposition leader Victoire Ingabire announced on November 9 the creation of a new opposition party, the Development and Liberty for All party (DALFA-Umurinzi). In January, a judicial investigation was launched in South Africa into the murder of former Rwandan intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya, who was found dead in his hotel room in Johannesburg in December 2013. Karegeya, who was a colleague of President Paul Kagame during the RPF rebellion that overthrew the genocidal Government in 1994 and who in turn committed serious atrocities in the country and in neighbouring DRC in pursuit of those responsible for the genocide, had fallen from grace with the regime, he was imprisoned in 2005 and 2006, and in 2007 he went into exile with the former chief of staff, Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, with whom he founded the opposition movement Rwandan National Congress (RNC), and in 2011 a Rwandan court convicted them *in absentia* for offences against the State. In South Africa both suffered numerous assassination attempts, which resulted in the expulsion of Rwandan diplomats, even though Rwanda always denied its involvement. Four Rwandan suspects were implicated in Karegeya's murder, but they left South Africa and were not extradited. In parallel, Rwanda's chief prosecutor in December 2018 had announced that he would appeal the sentence in which dissident Diane Rwigara was acquitted along with her mother, Adeline, and four others, by the Rwandan Supreme Court, of charges of forgery and incitement to rebellion on 6 December. Rwigara is the sister of Assinapol Rwigara, an industrialist who was a major donor to the ruling RPF in the 1990s. She later became a critical voice of the regime and tried to run for election in August 2017, but her candidacy was rejected due to alleged irregularities. In September 2017 she was arrested and imprisoned awaiting trial. Finally, it should be noted that in December 2018 the French justice system abandoned the investigation into the death of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyariamana due to a lack of evidence, a situation that had deteriorated relations between the two countries since the investigation also examined the participation of President Kagame, then leader of the insurgent group RPF, in the launch of the missile that shot down the plane in which he was travelling and triggered the subsequent genocide. Ballistic investigations in 2012 pointed to the possibility that the missile belonged to Habyarimana's presidential guard, and a Rwandan investigation in 2009 ruled that it may have been extremist Hutu sectors that killed Habyarimana because of his willingness to reach an agreement with the Tutsi minority.

| Rwanda – Burundi | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | Government of Rwanda, Government of Burundi, armed groups |

**Summary:**
The end of the respective armed conflicts in Rwanda in 1994 and Burundi in 2004 reversed the political and ethnic dominance that had emerged following independence. In Rwanda, the 1959 revolution overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and brought the Hutu elites to power, who were driven out after the 1994 genocide by Tutsi refugees from Uganda, and who installed the RPF, led by Tutsi General Paul Kagame, at the top levels of the country's Government. In Burundi, 40 years of Tutsi military rule ended with an armed conflict and the victory of the largest pro-Hutu faction in the armed rebellion, the CNDD-FDD. Their leader, Pierre Nkurunziza, managed to find a balance within the group allowing him to rise to power. Both have become "strong men" of the region, promoting the development of their countries and an end to conflicts in the area. Rwanda, with the RPF in power, financed Nkurunziza's electoral campaign, which is seen as moderate because it marginalised other sectors of the Burundian Hutu rebellion (Agathon Rwasa's FNL) with connections to his Rwandan Hutu enemy FDLR. Nkurunziza and Kagame have supported one another in the prosecution of their respective insurgencies. However, in 2013 this relationship was severed when the pro-Rwandan M23 rebellion was defeated in DRC (the enemy of the FDLR). Rwanda accused its Burundian neighbour of being the safe haven for combatants whose presence in DRC had until then justified Rwanda's intervention.

**The deterioration of the relationship between Rwanda and Burundi persisted, a relation that has worsened in recent years in the wake of the serious crisis in Burundi, because Rwanda has put pressure on its neighbour to grant greater political freedom to reduce the climate of violence in the country.** In turn, Burundi has accused the Rwandan regime of being authoritarian, of repressing political opposition and of supporting the Burundian insurgency.[22] Reports leaked in December 2018 regarding allegations by Refugees International that Burundian armed groups, such as FNL and Imbogoraburundi, were forcibly recruiting fighters in Rwandan refugee camps and that the Rwandan authorities might not only be acquiescing but also actively collaborating, thereby contributing to the worsening of relations between the two countries. Subsequently, in late February 2019, a dozen lifeless bodies were found in the Burundian part of Lake Rweru that separates Burundi from Rwanda, with the Burundian authorities claiming that these bodies came from the Rwandan

*During the year, the relationship between Rwanda and Uganda, as well as between Rwanda and Burundi, seriously deteriorated and there were actions by the Rwandan-born insurgency FDLR, from its stronghold in the DRC*

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22. Then, in July 2018, cross-border attacks were reported of an unidentified armed group from Burundi having attacked the Rwandan town of Cyamuzi, which had already taken place in June. At that time, Rwandan President Paul Kagame warned that his army was prepared to defend the integrity of the country. The East African, *No end to Rwanda-Burundi spat,* 25 August 2018.

side, an allegation that was denied by Rwanda. Tensions persisted throughout the year. In this regard, it should be noted that in November 2019, unidentified armed groups from Burundi attacked military positions in the district of Bweyeye, Rwanda. Subsequently, following a deadly attack in Burundi by an unidentified group, on 28 November the Burundian Government accused the Rwandan Army of having carried out attacks and threatened to retaliate in the event of continued hostilities on the part of Rwanda. Kagame hinted to the Rwandan Parliament that neighbouring countries had been implicated in sponsoring cross-border attacks against Rwanda. Weeks earlier, the chiefs of staff of Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania met in DRC on 24 and 25 October to discuss the possibility of carrying out joint military operations against armed groups in eastern DRC.

| Rwanda – Uganda | |
|---|---|
| Intensity: | 2 |
| Trend: | ↑ |
| Type: | Government<br>International |
| Main parties: | Government of Rwanda, Government of Uganda |

**Summary:**
Both Governments have historically been allies and have played a very important role in the political evolution of the other. The Ugandan Government, led by Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement, came to power in 1986 with the military support of the Tutsi refugee community, including Paul Kagame. In turn, Museveni's Uganda facilitated the creation in the late 1980s of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the group that from Uganda launched the failed offensive in 1990 to defeat the Hutu Government and eventually overthrew it after the 1994 genocide. Since then, both regimes have fought on the same side on several occasions during the wars in the DRC. Since the end of the second war in the DRC, when both countries withdrew from Congolese territory, their relationship has been unequal, although they have been able and willing to negotiate around various conflicts. However, over the past year the relationship has seriously deteriorated due to various factors, mainly Uganda's alleged support for Rwandan dissidents.

The relationship between Rwanda and Uganda seriously deteriorated. Throughout the year, there was an escalation of incidents and retaliations between the two countries that led to the worst case scenario becoming a reality, according to various analyses. On 5 March 2019, the Rwandan Foreign Minister announced that he would close the border with Uganda and advised Rwandans living in Uganda to leave the country, accusing Uganda of arbitrarily arresting Rwandans, hindering and obstructing regional trade and, above all, providing support and shelter to Rwandan armed opposition groups, accusations which were denied by Uganda. Specifically, Rwanda accused Uganda of supporting the Rwanda

National Congress (RNC) movement, and specifically the Rwandan armed groupForces Démocratiques pour la Libération de Rwanda (FDLR).[23] Both organisations are allegedly seeking to overthrow the current Rwandan Government and are being singled out for reviving the ethnic socio-political crises that led to the 1994 genocide. Between April and August both countries took punitive measures against citizens of the other country residing in their own country, such as deportations or executions of persons crossing the border accused of smuggling or spying, and the temporary closure of border crossings.

In July, a summit was held in the Angolan capital, Luanda, between the Presidents of Rwanda, Uganda, DRC and Angola, at which they decided to appoint Angola as a mediator between the two countries with Congolese support. **Finally, Presidents Kagame and Museveni signed an agreement on 21 August in Luanda to normalise relations between the two countries in which they committed to respecting each other's sovereignty, to refrain from destabilising actions, to respect the rights and freedoms of their citizens and to resume cross-border activities.** In September, a high-level Ugandan delegation visited Kigali to discuss the implementation of the agreement. On the other hand, although indirectly related to the above, the Chiefs of Staff of Rwanda, DRC, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania met from 24 to 25 October in DRC to discuss the possibility of carrying out joint military operations against armed groups in eastern DRC. However, security incidents continued to be recorded between Rwanda and Uganda, in particular the shooting of nationals of both countries in the border area, including the death of two Ugandans accused of smuggling tobacco into Rwanda (which led to condemnations by Uganda), the arrest of 35 Rwandans for illegal entry into Uganda and the deportation of 32 others.

| Sudan | |
|---|---|
| Intensity: | 3 |
| Trend: | ↑ |
| Type: | Government<br>Internal |
| Main parties: | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
Sudan is immersed in a chronic conflict stemming from the concentration of power and resources in the centre of the country. Apart from the conflicts in the marginalised regions of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, the rest of the country also suffers from governance problems stemming from the authoritarian regime of President Omar al-Bashir who came to power in a coup d'état in 1989 and who exercises tight control and repression of dissidents through state security apparatuses. The tense situation in the country was exacerbated by the separation of Southern Sudan in 2011, as it severely affected the economy of the

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23. Clement Uwiringiyimana, "Rwanda accuses Uganda of supporting rebels", Reuters, 5 March 2019.

country which was 70% dependent on oil sales, mostly from the south. The Sudanese state's coffers saw their income drastically reduced by the loss of control over the export of oil and, later, by the failure to reach an agreement with South Sudan for its transportation through the pipelines that pass through Sudan. An economic situation with high inflation and the devaluation of the currency contributed to the start of significant protests in the summer of 2012 in several cities in the country that, in early 2019, led to the fall of the al-Bashir regime.

**After 30 years in power, Omar al-Bashir was overthrown on April 11 as a result of popular mobilisations and protests, the last wave of which emerged in December 2018.** The fall of al-Bashir (which did not necessarily imply the removal of the regime), posed important challenges and opportunities for the construction of a new political scenario in the country, which was marked by uncertainties surrounding the new transitional Government's capacity to confront and resolve the important challenges facing the Sudanese state. These include the ravages of the economic crisis on the most vulnerable population and the socio-political crises and historical grievances between the centre and the periphery, which manifested through various violent scenarios in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The citizen protests that had emerged in late 2018 calling for the resignation of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir due to the economic crisis intensified in early 2019, spreading to several parts of the country. These were harshly repressed by the Sudanese security forces, and were denounced by human rights groups, which recorded the deaths of at least 40 people and around two thousand arrests. The intensification of the protests led Omar al-Bashir's Government to publish several decrees to attempt to quell popular discontent, including: the dissolution of the federal Government and the country's 18 state governments, placing members of the security forces in charge of the latter; the delay of the constitutional reform to allow him to run for President again; and the decree of a nationwide state of emergency for one year, a measure not taken since 1999. He also subsequently announced new decrees concerning the state of emergency: the powers and authority of regular forces were increased; unauthorised meetings, demonstrations and strikes were prohibited; control over the outflow of foreign capital from the country was extended; the distribution, sale and transport of fuel outside official channels were prohibited; and the Attorney General was authorised to establish emergency courts throughout the country. In mid-March, the National Assembly ratified the state of emergency decreed by the Government, although it reduced its duration to six months. In parallel, al-Bashir handed over the chairmanship of the National Congress Party (NCP) to Ahmed Harun (who was the subject of an ICC arrest warrant for crimes committed in Darfur) in an attempt to run again and be elected President at the party conference scheduled for April. However, despite

*After three decades in power, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir was overthrown due to strong popular protests in the country, triggering a new transition in Sudan*

the measures decreed by the Government, protests in the country continued and intensified.

Popular pressure finally led to the announcement on 11 April by the Minister of Defence, Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Ouf, of the overthrow and arrest of al-Bashir by the army, informing citizens of the creation of a Transitional Military Council (TMC) that would remain in power for two years. At the same time, the Constitution was suspended and a state of emergency was declared for three months. Abdel Fattah Burhan was appointed President of the TMC. Sudanese civil society rejected the creation of the military junta and demanded that power be handed over to citizens. The African Union (AU) reacted by giving the TMC 15 days to hand power back to the country's citizens under the threat of expulsion from the body, which was later extended to three months. At that time, talks were initiated between the TMC and the opposition coalition led by the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) movement to agree on a shared, civilian-led transitional Government. Tensions escalated as a result of increased crackdowns and attacks on protesters by state security forces, particularly the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). On 3 June, the worst attacks by the security forces in a crackdown on demonstrators were recorded, leaving an estimated total of at least 108 people dead and more than 500 injured, according to the Sudanese Central Medical Committee. The crackdown was condemned by the United Nations and many countries, although a veto by China and Russia prevented a resolution by the UN Security Council to condemn it on 4 June. The United States condemned the crackdown and made Sudan's removal from the list of "terrorist sponsors" conditional on the implementation of a power-sharing agreement with civilians. For its part, the AU reacted on 6 June by suspending Sudan from the body and demanding the creation of a transitional Government led by civilians.

After months of negotiations mediated by the AU and Ethiopia, plagued by socio-political crises, protests, acts of repression, pressure and incidents, on 17 July the Military Council (TMC) and the opposition coalition (FFC) reached a political agreement for the **creation of a transitional Government**. This political agreement was enshrined as a constitutional agreement on 4 August, and a formal signing ceremony was held on 17 August in Khartoum. The main points of the deal were as follows: the transition period will last 39 months before elections are held; the Sovereign Governing Council will be composed of 11 members (six civilians and five military) and will be headed by a general for the first 21 months and by a civilian for the last 18 months; the Prime Minister will be nominated by the FFC and confirmed by the Sovereign Council; the Government Cabinet will be composed of no more than 20 ministers elected by the Prime Minister, except for the Internal Affairs and Defence portfolios, which will be chosen by the military members of the Sovereign

Council; the legislative body will be formed within the first 90 days of the signing of the agreement, and will not exceed 300 persons, of whom at least 40 per cent of the seats should be allocated to women; the FFC alliance will have 67 per cent of the seats and the remaining 33 per cent will go to other political parties not linked to al-Bashir; the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF paramilitary corps will form part of the military institution under the command of the chief of the Armed Forces; the **Government's priority during the first six months of the transition period will be to bring peace to the war-torn regions: Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile**; the transitional Government will work on legal and economic reforms, as well as outlining a balanced foreign policy.

On August 21, economist Abdalla Hamdok took office as prime minister of the FFC-nominated transitional Government, and the TMC chief general Abdel-Fattah Burhan assumed the position of chairman of the Sovereign Council. In a joint statement on 21 August, the Troika (the United Kingdom, the United States and Norway) welcomed Hamdok's appointment. At the same time, on 19 August, the Sudanese Court of Justice commenced a trial against former President al-Bashir, charging him with corruption and illegal possession of foreign funds, and sentencing him to two years in prison. Bashir also faces charges related to the 1989 coup that brought him to power and for organising violence against protesters in early 2019. The Government cabinet was formed to include representatives from all regions of the country in order to obtain greater legitimacy. As a result of progress in the formation of the civilian transitional Government, the AU –through its Peace and Security Council– lifted the agency's suspension of Sudan on 6 September. On 22 June, Hamdok announced the establishment of an independent committee of inquiry into the June deaths of pro-democracy protesters, with this report being due for submission in three months' time. The Sudanese Human Rights Commission estimated, from police records, that a total of 85 people were killed in the 3-12 June crackdown in Khartoum, while the FFC maintained that at least 127 protesters were killed and hundreds more injured. At the same time, thousands of Sudanese demonstrated in several cities on 21 October, urging the country's new authorities to dissolve the former ruling party of the overthrown leader Omar al-Bashir (NCP). In late November, the Government arrested and imprisoned Ali al-Haj, the party's secretary-general, and passed a bill to dismantle the former regime, including the dissolution of the NCP. In turn, the new authorities approved legal reforms to increase the protection of civil liberties.

On the other hand, during the year, and particularly since the commencement of negotiations between the TMC and the civilian groups opposing the regime regarding the formation of the transitional Government in the country, various steps were taken to de-escalate the violence in the regions at war and to ensure the reopening of peace talks.[24]

Other highlights include, in late October, the head of the RSF paramilitary forces, Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti", announcing the withdrawal and return to Sudan of some 10,000 RSF soldiers from the Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen, with the Government reporting that only 5,000 units remained deployed. Prime Minister Hamdok was appointed by the regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to serve as President for one year beginning in February 2020, assuming the position Ethiopia has held since 2010. Finally, it should be noted that the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Sudan warned at the end of the year that 9.3 million people in the country (almost one in four) will need assistance by 2020, of which five million will require humanitarian assistance, including 2.4 million children suffering from acute malnutrition.[25]

## Horn of Africa

| Ethiopia | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | = |
| **Type:** | Government Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, 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) further limited democratic openness by increasing the verticality of the regime and the repression of the political opposition. The 2009 Counter-Terrorism Act helped decimate the opposition. The attempt since 2014 to

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24. See summary on Sudan in Chapter 1 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Icaria: Barcelona, 2020
25. OCHA, SUDAN. Situation Report. *Last updated: 12 Dec 2019.* Available at: https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/

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 significant protests and deadly repression in the Oromiya region, which contributed to increased tension. Social protests contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in early 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, who undertook a series of reforms aimed at easing ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties.

The year 2019 was marked by the process of reforms initiated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the rejection by political actors and sectors of civil society of the changes undertaken by the Government that culminated in outbreaks of intercommunity violence. This climate of violence claimed hundreds of lives throughout the year. Numerous intercommunity tensions and grievances ignored by previous Governments surfaced in the context of the political reforms undertaken by Abiy Ahmed's Government. **In May, the federal attorney general charged,** *in absentia*, **former NISS intelligence chief Getachew Assefa and 25 other NISS officials with serious human rights violations committed during their tenure**. The Government of the Tigray region continued to hide Getachew, who was also a presidential advisor and senior official of the TPLF party. The commander of the prison in Jijiga (capital of the Ogaden region) was also arrested and deported to Ethiopia in May on charges of serious human rights violations in the prison.

**The areas of the country most affected by intercommunity violence were the north-west (Amhara region), north-east and south-central areas (Oromia).** Among the most significant occurrences was the killing of 200 people from the Gumuz community in the Agi Agew area (Amhara) in early May in retaliation for attacks in the Benishangul-Gumuz region in which 18 people were killed between 26 and 28 April. In June, assassinations of senior Government officials took place in the Amhara region, which was described as an attempted coup d'état against this region, with the federal Government intervening to control the situation and carrying out acts of repression against the Amhara political opposition. On 22 June, the President of the region, Ambachew Mekonnen, and two of his advisors were assassinated in the capital, Bahir Dar. Hours later, the chief of staff, General Seare Mekonnen, and a retired officer were killed in Addis Ababa. The Government claimed that these killings were connected and were part of a plot orchestrated by Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, who was apprehended and executed in a firefight near Bahir Dar on 24 June. On that same day, 50 people were killed by a group of assailants, which could be linked to the attempted coup d'état. Following the attack, police arrested nearly 250 people suspected of taking part in the plot, including members of the security forces, opposition leaders and supporters of the Amhara ethno-nationalist party National Movement of Amhara. Finally, 86 people were killed during protests in Addis

Ababa and other parts of Oromia state in October in protest against the indictment of an activist, Jawar Mohammed, who had been one of the architects of the protests that helped to bring Abiy to power in 2018, and who subsequently accused him of acting authoritatively like his predecessors. The influential Orthodox Church criticised the Prime Minister's response to the clashes on 27 October, saying he had failed to protect members of the congregation because the Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which is linked to the Amhara community, had suffered attacks at some of its locations. Finally, the campaign of forced disarmament undertaken by the Government in the Lower Omo Valley (in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's State, SNNPS) caused dozens of deaths due to its rejection by the local population. In November, the UN warned of two million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the climate of intercommunity violence that was shaking the country.

On the political front, a new party was formed in May, the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ), which brings together seven opposition groups and will be led by veteran opposition leader Berhanu Nega. On 30 July, Parliament decided to postpone local and district elections to be held in conjunction with the 2020 legislative and regional elections. Two important issues took place in November. Firstly, the ruling coalition formed of four ethnic-based parties, the EPRDF, created in the late 1980s to overthrow the Mengistu dictatorship and which has governed the country since 1991, decided to merge into a single party in order to compete with better guarantees of success in the elections scheduled for 16 August 2020, at the behest of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The creation of the party was also an attempt to reduce ethnic tension and the ethnic divisions that have defined the country, seeking to promote national unity and the integration of ethnic groups under a common project. Three of the four parties (the Amhara ADP, the Oromo ODP and the multi-ethnic SEPDM) agreed on 21 November to merge and create the new party, which will be called the Prosperity Party (PP), whilst the party that had dominated the coalition until Abiy Ahmed came to power, the Tigre minority's TPLF, refused to join the new project, fearing that its influence would be restricted. Under the Abiy Government, the TPLF has seen its power reduced, and various analysts have pointed out that the enmity between the TPLF and the Abiy Government has led to the coalition existing only on paper.

Secondly, **the population of the Sidama community in the south of the country voted in a referendum on November 20 to decide whether the region should become a semi-autonomous federal state**. The date of the referendum was postponed during the year, leading to an escalation of protests in July to demand greater autonomy for the Sidama community which caused dozens of deaths as a result of the delay in the referendum. The electoral commission ruled that 98.5% of the people who participated in the referendum voted in favour of the

creation of the new state, in a process that took place in a climate of freedom and democratic normalcy. The Sidama community represents 4 per cent of the country's population, being the fifth largest national community, and the largest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's State (SNNPS) from which it will be split off. Historically, sectors of the Sidama community have demanded to have their own state, which has led to socio-political crises in the SNNPS region, home to 56 ethnic groups. Various analysts have pointed out that this step, which will make the Sidama region the tenth state, may be an incentive for other communities (Wolayta, Hadiya, Gurage, Keffa, among others) to seek to have their own ethnic state. After the referendum, a complex process was to be launched to create a new state administration that will have the power to levy taxes and control schools, police, health and other services. A climate of concern grew among the non-Sidama population of the new state, especially in the town of Hawassa.

| Ethiopia (Oromia) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity, Resources<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government of Ethiopia, regional government, political (OFDM, OPC) 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. In parallel, the Oromiya region has experienced a cycle of protests initiated by the student movement in 2014 against the Ethiopian regime due to demands linked to the perception of marginalization of the Oromo people, which were strongly repressed. It is also worth noting the recurrence of outbreaks of violence between Somali livestock communities and Oromo farming communities along the border between the Oromiya and Somali regions due to resource competition and the demarcation between the territories of both communities and in remote areas from both regions and the repressive intervention of the Liyu Police, which contributes to exacerbating the situation and increasing violence. Social protests contributed to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in early 2018 and the appointment of Abiy Ahmed, who undertook a series of reforms aimed at easing ethnic tensions in the country, promoting national unity and relaxing restrictions on civil liberties.

**In the Oromia region, violent intercommunity clashes and severe socio-political crises between Oromo sectors competing for power** took place at the same time as the demobilisation of the OLF began**.** Between 12 and 13 January, the army carried out air strikes in western Oromia against members of the OLF who had rejected the peace agreement, killing seven civilians. The federal Government denied having carried out air strikes, but claimed that it had conducted a stabilisation operation following a request from the regional Government. **On 24 January, the regional Government and the armed group OLF signed a ceasefire agreement,** under which the OLF combatants promised to enter cantonments for their disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). However, subsequently there was an attack by the OLF on 28 January which resulted in the death of two farmers in the Amaro district. This was followed by further clashes between the OLF and federal law enforcement agencies. The Government announced that 1,000 OLF rebels surrendered their weapons and were cantoned in DDR camps. According to reports by some media, certain sectors of the OLF committed sporadic acts of violence which could not be confirmed, but in general the level of violence decreased.

At the end of May, the OLF led by Dawud Ibsa agreed to work together with the main ruling Oromo party, the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the Government of the region. The OLF committed to supporting initiatives to enable the regional Government to regain control of the situation. In a joint statement by the President of the Oromia region, Shimeles Abdissa, Dawud Ibsa, and the Deputy Chief of Staff, Berhanu Jula, the OLF announced that it would never again have an armed wing. In addition, a reconciliation committee composed of senior leaders was formed to mediate between the OLF and the ODP. This committee submitted a report highlighting the work done to canton the OLF militia with the aim of rehabilitating and training its members and encouraging their reintegration into society. In parallel, in May there were also developments in the merger between the OLF and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), led by Professor Merera Gudina.

| Kenya | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-government<br>Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties, civil society organisations), SLDF armed group, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and al-Shabaab sympathizers 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 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.

**Intercommunity violence continued during the year, as did the actions of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in the north and east, although a reduction was noted in the number of incidents and their savagery**. June was the most active period of the year for al-Shabaab, when it attacked military and police posts and border checkpoints. The highlight of the year was the attack on a hotel in the Westlands area of Nairobi on 15 January, which after a 17-hour siege led to the deaths of 21 civilians, all 6 members of al-Shabaab and the injuring of at least 30. Secondly, according to sources, between eight and ten policemen were killed on 15 June, when an explosive was detonated as they drove through the border area with Somalia in Wajir County. On 19 June, a Nairobi court convicted three people for collaborating with the armed group in the attack on Garissa University in 2015, which killed 148 people.

ACLED brought the number of deaths linked to al-Shabaab actions and intercommunity violence to more than 200, significantly lower than the 406 deaths recorded in 2018 and the 730 deaths in 2017. In this regard, it is worth noting the reduction in the number of deaths at the hands of the police in 2019 compared to previous years, as revealed by Deadly Force.[26] In 2015, 143 people died at the hands of the police, rising to 205 people in 2016, 256 in 2017, 219 in 2018, while the figure fell to 105 people in 2019 (as of 30 September), a reduction of 47% in one year. The escalation of police violence in 2017 coincided with the country's electoral cycle. Finally, it is worth noting the clashes between militias linked to different communities throughout the year in the northern part of the country, among other issues mainly as a result of cattle theft, border demarcations between the territories of different communities and reprisals for previous attacks linked to land ownership disputes.

On the other hand, there was a notable increase in tensions between Kenya and Somalia following the discovery of hydrocarbon deposits in a disputed maritime area between the two countries. The International Court of Justice in The Hague postponed the hearing on this issue, initially set for September, to November and then to June 2020. In November, the Presidents of both countries met and decided to normalise relations, after an escalation of tensions between the two for much of the year, during which direct flights between the two countries were interrupted and ambassadors were called back for consultation, among various measures of pressure.

| Somalia (Somaliland – Puntland) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | = |
| **Type:** | Territory<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Republic of Somaliland, autonomous region of Puntland, state of Khatumo |

**Summary:**

Both regions are in a conflict over the control of the border regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn since 1998. These three regions, which make up the SSC administration, are geographically within the borders of Somaliland, but most of the clans in the region have ties to those in Puntland. Since then there have been sporadic clashes and attempts at mediation. In 2012 these regions created the Khatumo state (Dervish State of Somalia), adding further complexity to the situation. In 2016, the Khatumo and Somaliland Governments began peace talks, but the Khatumo President and Vice-President clashed and created two separate administrations claiming to be the legitimate Government. One of these ended up negotiating its inclusion within Somaliland.

The tense relationship between the two Governments, which were at odds over the control of the Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) region, continued during the year, with sporadic clashes between the respective militias and security forces. Attempts at negotiations between Somaliland and Somalia, with the aim of integrating the former into a federal Somalia, were the backdrop for the tensions. In the Sanaag region, rival clan militias clashed in Duud Arraale and El Afweyn between 7 and 8 July, killing 25 people. Also in Sanaag, Somaliland

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26. Deadly Force is a database of killings committed by the police. The Nation Newsplex project of the Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper, seeks to record all the deaths resulting from police operations in Kenya, based on public reports, including information from individuals and organisations in the public and private sectors. The database is populated with information collected from the media, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, other government agencies and counts performed by human rights organisations.

forces clashed with the troops of Colonel Arre on 10 July –who had defected from Somaliland to Puntland in 2018– leaving three Somaliland soldiers and one Arre soldier dead. After Karin's troops took over the town of Arre on 26 July, fighting broke out the next day, resulting in the deaths of two Somaliland soldiers. In August, senior leaders from the area met to mediate between the Somaliland Government and Colonel Arre, a Puntland ally, and agreed to a cessation of hostilities and the start of negotiations. On 6 October, the President of Somaliland agreed to put an end to hostilities in Sanaag against the Arre militia. However, in November, in the disputed border regions of Sool and Sanaag, between Puntland and Somaliland, tensions continued and a number of armed clashes were recorded between groups with ties to one or the other group. In August and October, two Warsangeli clan militia leaders and their troops defected from the Somaliland Army to Puntland. This was the third major military defection from Somaliland's security forces to Puntland in 2019. On 18 September, in Ceel Afwayn, Sanaag region, violence between the Habar Yoonis and Habar Jeclo sub-clans of the Isaaq clan erupted again, resulting in a number of deaths.

## North Africa - Maghreb

| Algeria | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, military power, political and social opposition, Hirak movement |

**Summary:**
Having held the presidency of Algeria since 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika has remained in office despite suffering from a serious illness that has kept him out of the public eye since 2013. A shadowy coalition of political and military figures has held on to the reins of power behind the scenes, popularly identified among the Algerian population as "le pouvoir". In 2019, the announcement that Bouteflika (82) would run for a fifth term triggered mass popular protests of an intensity not seen since the country's independence in 1962. Popular pressure forced his resignation and, since then, the military establishment has tried to control the transition and has taken measures such as the persecution and arrest of certain figures associated with the old regime. The peaceful protest movement Hirak has continued to mobilise against corruption, the influence of military power on politics and the ruling class in general, insisting on its demands for a transition to a genuinely democratic system capable of promoting political, social and economic reforms.

During 2019, Algeria was the scene of a profound upheaval and of mass and persistent popular protests against the Government and the leadership at levels not seen since the country's independence in 1962. **The protests were triggered in February when, despite his fragile health and few public appearances in recent years, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (82) announced that he would run for a fifth term** in the elections scheduled for April. In early March, protests brought together some 800,000 people in the capital, Algiers, and two million more in various parts of the country. In the following months, mass demonstrations continued, mainly on Fridays, in the framework of a peaceful movement (Hirak) mobilised under the banner of rejecting a fifth mandate. Bouteflika tried to quell the popular outcry against his re-election by promising that, if he won, he would push through a series of measures, including an independent inclusive national conference to adopt constitutional, political and economic reforms; a constitutional referendum; and an independent mechanism to organise new early presidential elections. However, these announcements did not dissuade protestors. Thus, in mid-March the President decided to withdraw his candidacy and postpone the elections. Shortly afterwards, on 2 April, he was forced to resign (after two decades in office) after the army led by the powerful chief of staff, Gaïd Salah, and the ruling FLN party triggered a constitutional clause declaring him unfit for the job. Despite Bouteflika's resignation and increasing crackdowns, protests continued to bring together tens of thousands of people who demanded the dismantling of the old regime and denounced the attempts of the military power to control the transition. The former leader of the Upper House of Parliament, Abdelbaker Bensalah, was appointed interim President until elections were held in July, but various social and political sectors of the opposition (from Islamists to centre-left groups) announced a boycott of the elections and demanded the formation of an independent electoral commission, among other issues. Broad sectors expressed their rejection of any initiative promoted by Bensalah and other actors linked to the former regime, including a proposal for a national dialogue that was received with scepticism and interpreted as an attempt to co-opt critical parties and associations. Some analysts highlighted that the Algerian authorities were trying to take advantage of the absence of clear leadership in the protests and the failure to articulate a common set of demands. At the same time, however, notable were the peaceful nature of the protests and the unity in calling for regime change. **Against this backdrop, and reflecting the internal struggles within the former regime, the army and the interim Government instigated the arrest of many people from Bouteflika's** entourage, including his brother, Said Bouteflika (considered to be one of the main figures in power behind the scenes in recent years), the former head of intelligence Mohamed Mediene, two former prime ministers and several parliamentarians, among others.

In the following months, the Algerian authorities also intensified the crackdown by dispersing peaceful protests, placing obstacles to the arrival of demonstrators at the regular protests being held in the capital, the blocking of meetings of political and human rights groups and the arrest of critical voices, including a Berber activist who died in prison in May while on hunger strike. Two other

people were reported to have died in connection with the protests, although the circumstances were unclear, as well as nearly 200 injuries. According to the NGO Human Rights Watch, **hundreds of people were detained in 2019 from the beginning of the protests, some of them released without charges, but others were charged with offences or conspiracy against state institutions, weakening the authority or morale of the army, among other crimes**. Other forms of repression and intimidation included website closures and the arrest of journalists and human rights activists. Faced with the impossibility of holding elections in July, the interim government in Bensalah attempted to offer certain concessions and insisted on opening a national dialogue between the Government and civil society. This took place in a context in which various initiatives by sectors of civil society and organisations linked to political parties had been set up to attempt to make proposals and outline roadmaps for a transition. Opposition sectors, including secularists and Islamists and the student movement, maintained their distrust and refusal to participate in the preparatory meetings for the talks. The demands of the protests continued to focus on the march on Bensalah, the end of Gaïd Salah's *de facto* military power and the establishment of a constituent assembly to radically reform the Algerian political system. In September, the final report of the Government-led national dialogue committee recommended presidential elections, which were scheduled for later in the year. However, calls for a boycott were made by various political forces and social sectors, which intensified after it became known that all the candidates were figures linked to the former regime. Elections were held on 12 December, and former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected with 58 per cent of the vote. Officially, 39% of the electorate was reported to have participated, but observers said it was 15%. The elections took place in a climate of protests and further arrests of hundreds of demonstrators. At the end of the year, General Gaïd Salah's death from a heart attack was announced, which added uncertainty to the future political scene in Algeria.

*The announcement that Abdelaziz Bouteflika would run for a fifth term of office prompted mass peaceful protests in Algeria against the Government and the behind-the-scenes leadership in the North African country, prompting the President's resignation*

## Western Africa

| Nigeria | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Identity, Resources, Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, livestock and farming communities, 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.

**In Nigeria, there has been an increase in violence and instability in addition to the conflict surrounding the actions of Boko Haram, which affects the country's north-eastern provinces and the Lake Chad Basin.**[27] **This increase was felt in the north-west of the country, based on the activities of criminal groups, which has compounded the permanent climate of intercommunity violence in the central belt and instability linked to the electoral process.** Firstly, there was an increase in political violence linked to the electoral cycle in the country that took place during the first quarter of the year. On 23 February, the federal presidential and legislative elections were held, and on 9 March, the governor and state legislative elections. In most states there was an increase in political violence between supporters of the different parties contesting the seats of government in these states and mainly between supporters of the ruling party, President Muhammadu Buhari's All Progressive Congress (APC), and supporters of the main rival party, Atiku Abubakar's People's Democratic Party (PDP). On 27 February the electoral commission conferred victory to the candidate and incumbent President Buhari, who won 56% of the votes, while Atiku rejected the results. Political violence claimed at least 40 lives and injured dozens of people in February, half of them on election day in the states of Rivers and Akwa Ibom. There were around ten serious incidents in which groups of mercenaries and hired saboteurs attacked party offices and vehicles, rallies and gatherings. At the same time, certain states held their state elections at different times, prolonging the climate of political violence throughout the year in different parts of the country and leading to criticism by international observers of the intimidating and violent conditions in which the elections took place.

Secondly, there has been an **increase in the actions of criminal groups in the north-west of the country since 2018** that continued throughout the year, mainly in

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27. See summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna states, which executed hundreds of civilians, committed kidnappings for ransom, looted and burned dozens of localities, all of which led to the deployment of military operations to deal with the looting. **The annual toll in these four states alone was more than 2,000 fatalities as a result of the actions of criminal groups**, security forces and also civilian self-defence militias. In recent years, civilian self-defence groups have been organised to attempt to deal with this increase in crime. The actions of the self-defence militias led to an increase in violence through the commission of extrajudicial executions of suspected members of criminal groups, which in turn provoked new spirals of retaliation from one group to another in response to the attacks. **The UNHCR warned in late September that the escalation of violence had led to the displacement of 40,000 people who were forced to flee to neighbouring Niger** in the last 10 months. Amnesty International had already published a report on the state of Zamfara in July 2018 (the state most affected by gang violence) stating that the state was at the mercy of criminal groups who had killed hundreds of people in the last two years in remote locations that were difficult for law enforcement to access. However, it should be noted that in July, the Zamfara state authorities reached a peace agreement with the criminal groups to end the violence, which included the surrender of their weapons in exchange for an amnesty. The agreement was to be replicated in the neighbouring state of Katsina where the Government began peace talks with criminal groups to stop their attacks. These talks reduced the violence in October, although a climate of low-intensity violence persisted.

This crime wave compounded the historic intercommunity conflict **between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and the agricultural communities of central and southern Nigeria** which has been taking place in the country's central states known as the "middle belt". Community clashes were observed in spirals of action-reaction that exacerbated the climate of violence, including the looting and burning of fields and the theft and slaughter of livestock. The most affected states were Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Taraba and Adamawa, with hundreds of deaths as a result of intercommunity fighting. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions of the OHCHR, Agnès Callamard, submitted a report accusing the Nigerian Government of passivity and failure to stop the violence between farmers and cattle breeders that has been affecting the centre of the country for several years, as well as the kidnappings and criminality in the north-west that have claimed thousands of lives in the last year. The Government rejected the report, which also noted the extrajudicial executions committed by the security forces in the country. Local and international organisations such as HRW and Amnesty International also held state security forces responsible for numerous abuses and extrajudicial killings of suspects in police custody. It should be added that in

*Criminal violence in Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna states in Nigeria claimed 2,000 lives in 2019*

the oil-rich Niger Delta states, kidnapping for ransom of expatriate workers linked to oil corporations and wealthy Nigerians has become widespread, a situation that has also increased in northern Nigeria in recent years, where entire villages have been displaced to avoid kidnappings and attacks by criminal gangs. Finally, with regard to the situation in Biafra, 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of the war and the humanitarian disaster it caused, with estimates of between one and five million people killed by the humanitarian blockade to which the region was subjected in order to suffocate the self-determination movement. Various local and international human rights organisations noted that during 2019, violent persecution of social actors and civilians suspected of being sympathizers of the independence movement (considered a terrorist movement by the Nigerian state) continued.

## 2.3.2. Americas

### North America, Central America and the Caribbean

| El Salvador | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs |

**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 line with the trend observed in recent years, the homicide rate in 2019 was substantially reduced from that of the previous year. After reaching an all-time high in 2015 (103 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making El Salvador the most violent country in the world), the homicide rate has been steadily declining (81 in 2016, 60 in 2017, 51 in 2018 and 35 in 2019). **According to official data, in 2019 there were 2,383 homicides, 29% less than the previous year.** The drop in this rate was especially notable from June onwards, following the inauguration of the new President, Nayib Bukele, former mayor of San Salvador who won the February presidential elections in the first round, being the first in the country's recent history not to run under the

banners of the parties ARENA or the FMLN. According to some studies, the number of homicides per day after he assumed office was reduced from nine to four. In this regard, the Government noted that August was the least violent month of the twenty-first century, while October had been the least violent month since the end of the civil war in 1992. While some security experts argue that the time period is too short to establish any correlation between the decline in homicides and the policies of the new Government, and that the number of homicides had already declined substantially in the first half of the year (by 13 per cent, according to some data), the Bukele Government maintains that its strategy against crime and insecurity, called the Territorial Control Plan, was clearly bearing fruit. **After taking office, Bukele publicly ruled out any kind of agreement or truce with the maras and also announced the tightening of measures against them**. Shortly thereafter, he was widely criticised for appointing as chief of police a person who had previously been accused of ordering extrajudicial executions. According to the Government itself, the Territorial Control Plan aims to have a special impact on the control of imprisoned mara leaders (minimising their communications with the outside world), cutting funding to the maras, and strengthening the State's security forces. One month after beginning his mandate, Bukele announced the recruitment of 3,000 new soldiers, as well as improving and upgrading the technological equipment of the Armed Forces and the Police. In an attempt to counteract the criticism that some of its actions generated among human rights organisations, the Government announced in the second half of the year the acceptance of a visit by a delegation from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, as well as the launching of the International Commission Against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES), which will receive support from the OAS and United Nations and will be headed by the Guatemalan Ronalth Ochaeta.

| Haiti | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, BINUH, gangs |

**Summary:**
The current crisis affecting the country, with mass protests and numerous episodes of violence recorded in 2019, is linked to the accusations of corruption, electoral fraud and negligence in the action of the Government of President Jovenel Moïse. However, the situation of institutional paralysis, economic fragility and socio-political crisis began to worsen after the forced departure from the country of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide in February 2004, who avoided an armed conflict with the rebel group that had taken over much of the country. Since then, the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force and later of a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSTAH, replaced by MINUJUSTH in 2017 and by BINUH in 2019) and the

greater involvement and coordination of the international community in normalising the situation in the country have led to progress in certain areas of its governance, but have not succeeded in achieving political, social and economic stability, nor have they reduced the high levels of corruption, poverty, social exclusion and crime rates, or completely eliminated the control held by armed gangs in certain urban areas of the country.

While significant anti-government protests had already taken place by the end of 2018, the political, institutional, social and economic crisis that the country is experiencing reached its peak during 2019. As a result of the virtually continuous protests throughout the year, with frequent clashes between demonstrators and police, more than 70 people had been killed and over a hundred injured by early November. At the same time, the violence linked to armed groups operating in certain neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince and other cities increased significantly. In addition, the worsening economic situation exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country. In November, **the United Nations warned that more than 3.7 million people were in urgent need of food aid**. For its part, the National Human Rights Defense Network warned of the risk of death from starvation for the more than 11,000 prisoners in the country. In late November, an IMF delegation that visited the country noted that Haiti was facing an unprecedented economic crisis with devastating consequences and noted that if the social crisis continues, there is a risk of an economic recession greater than 1.9% of GDP in 2019. Faced with this situation, in mid-November the Government was forced to request help from the international community to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the country.

While major protests had already taken place between October and November 2018, in which 12 people were killed and more than 50 injured, the protests became mass and continuous protests from early February 2019, after a report emerged that the Government and the President himself, Jovenel Moïse, might be involved in the misappropriation and embezzlement of significant amounts of money (more than 2 billion dollars) from the PetroCaribe fund, which provided access to Venezuelan oil at low interest rates to several countries in the region. According to several media outlets, the worsening economic crisis and the growing shortage of fuel and other goods, or the perception that the Government was failing to keep its election promises, also contributed decisively to the fact that thousands of people, rallied by the opposition, took to the streets to demand the President's resignation. In February, 26 people were killed in the course of the fighting and looting. Despite the fact that (i) Moïse announced the creation of a national dialogue committee at the end of February, (ii) the Government submitted a package of measures to tackle the economic crisis as early as mid-February and (iii) Moïse dismissed Prime Minister Jean-Henry Céant in May, protests and calls for his resignation continued throughout the year, with continued blockades, acts of vandalism, and clashes between demonstrators and

police. In a context of increasing commodity shortages as the year progressed, the protests increased in intensity, especially in mid-September. **On 1 November, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that since 15 September alone at least 42 people had died and 86 others had been injured.** In November and December the protests were somewhat less well attended, and schools and shops resumed their activity after almost two months of paralysis, but there were still abuses by the police (according to the opposition) and significant episodes of violence and acts of vandalism and looting in which several people were injured and many items of street furniture were damaged.

The social, economic and humanitarian crisis was also affected by the tension between the Government and the opposition and by the institutional paralysis that occurred throughout the year. **In 2019 alone, Moïse appointed three prime ministers** (the third of whom, Fritz-Willian Michel, had not yet been ratified in office at the end of the year after it transpired that he had attempted to bribe congressmen to vote in his favour) and had to hold a vote of confidence that he ultimately lost by a small margin of votes. Finally, it should be noted that during the year there was also a notable increase in the violence associated with criminal gangs operating in several cities in the country. According to some analysts, such groups are used both by the Government and by certain sectors of the opposition to intimidate dissent or to encourage unrest and instability. In fact, during the year it became known that some Government officials and police had been involved in a massacre that took place in November 2018 in the La Saline neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince, in which at least 26 people were killed. Although the number of deaths associated with these types of agents has not emerged, conflicts between rival gangs were constant and frequent throughout the year. The National Human Rights Defense Network reported that in 2019 more than 40 police officers had been killed, while in 2018 the number was 17.

*The United Nations stated in early November that since 15 September alone at least 42 people had died and a further 86 had been injured in Haiti*

| Honduras | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, gangs cartels |

**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 an important degree of social and political polarisation in the country. The current phase of the crisis, which has led to mass anti-government protests and serious episodes of violence, was exacerbated after the 2017 presidential election between outgoing President Juan Orlando Hernández and Salvador Nasralla (a candidate who is politically very close to Zelaya) in which Hernández, finally re-elected by a narrow margin of votes, was accused of electoral fraud.

Anti-government protests continued throughout the year, albeit at a lower intensity than the previous year, but according to data available in early 2020 the homicide rate increased slightly, following several years of gradual decline. According to official data, which is quite similar to that provided by the Observatory of Violence of the National Autonomous University of Honduras, 3,996 homicides were recorded in 2019, 7.1% more than the previous year. These data break with the downward trend observed since 2014, when Honduras was the country with the highest homicide rate in the world (87 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants). In 2017, for example, these fell by 26% with respect to 2016, while in 2018 they fell by another 6% with respect to the previous year. However, Honduras still has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. According to the 2019 Global Study on Homicide published by the United Nations (which uses 2017 data) Honduras had the third highest rate in the world behind El Salvador and Jamaica. In 2019, the departments with the highest homicide rates were Cortés, Francisco Morazán, Olancho and Atlántida. 55% of the people killed were under 30 years old. According to the Observatory of Violence, 2019 also saw an increase in the number of massacres (62 throughout the year, significantly more than the 33 recorded in 2018) and femicides (319 women murdered between January and October, leaving a total of 5,555 since 2006). The human rights commissioner complained that 90% of femicides go unpunished.

Protests against President Hernández took place almost continuously throughout the year. Although no figures were released on the number of people killed, injured or arrested in the course of the protests, it is estimated that they were less intense than those last year, when, according to the National Human Rights Commission, 31 people died, more than 1,600 were arrested and a state of emergency was temporarily imposed. In January, coinciding with the anniversary of Hernández's inauguration, thousands of people demonstrated throughout the country demanding his resignation. However, protests increased sharply from

April onwards, after the Government approved two decrees to reform the health and education system, which, according to the opposition, opened the door to the privatisation of services and the mass dismissal of staff. Despite the Government's revocation of these decrees on 2 June, protests, clashes and riots (several buildings in the capital were burned) continued. **At the end of June, the Government deployed the Armed Forces throughout the country indefinitely to assist the Police in the maintenance of public order**. The protests escalated again in October, shortly after a United States federal court convicted the President's brother of drug trafficking and other charges. In August, this same court had accused Hernández of having received 1.5 million dollars from drug trafficking for his election campaign in the 2013 presidential elections. Faced with such a scenario, tens of thousands of people demonstrated throughout the country and the main opposition leaders, including former President Manuel Zelaya (defeated in a coup d'état) and Salvador Nasralla (Hernández's rival in the 2017 presidential elections that triggered the political crisis currently gripping the country) formed a coalition to force the President's resignation. Another factor that caused tension between the Government and the opposition during the year was the attempt to reform the criminal code, which the opposition believes could lead to harsher penalties for opponents of the Government. Despite these facts, it is also worth noting that during the year numerous negotiations were held to implement the agreements reached during the so-called National Dialogue held under the auspices of the United Nations, which ended in December 2018. Particularly noteworthy is the progress made in electoral reform (the composition of the Electoral Supreme Court, the establishment of a second round of elections, among other issues), which received technical support from the OAS.

| Mexico | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | System, Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, cartels, armed opposition groups |

**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.

According to data released by the Ministry of Public Security in early 2020, the **number of homicides in 2019 was 35,588 –slightly higher than the previous year (34,655)–, making it the most violent year since the public records on homicides began to be kept**. These data confirm an upward trend in the number of homicides in recent years, having increased dramatically since former President Felipe Calderón launched the so-called "war on drugs" at the end of 2006. According to official data, from December 2006 to April 2018, 250,547 homicides had been recorded in Mexico, so that by the end of 2019 the total number of homicides probably exceeded 300,000. The homicide rate in 2019 (27 murders per 100,000 inhabitants) also exceeded that included in the United Nations 2019 Global Study on Homicide (24.8, with data from 2017). According to this report, Mexico has the 12th highest homicide rate in the world (24.8, homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, while during Calderon's tenure it was less than 10), higher than countries such as the Philippines or Afghanistan. It should be noted that 10 of the 11 homicide rates higher than the Mexican homicide rate (all except South Africa) were from Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The data published by the Government, which generally coincide with those published by centres such as the organisation Causa en Común, also identified an increase in **other forms of violence, such as femicides (1,006 in 2019, 912 the previous year), kidnappings (from 1,559 in 2018 to 1,614 in 2019), acts of extortion (8,523, up by 29%) or people trafficking (up by 12% on the previous year)**. In absolute numbers, the states with the highest number of homicides were Guanajuato, Mexico, Michoacán, Jalisco and Baja California; while in relative terms it was Colima (107 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants), Baja California, Chihuahua, Morelos and Guanajuato. In some states, the increase in homicides on the previous year was very notable, such as in Sonora (57%), Hidalgo or Aguascalientes (32%). At national level, the homicide rate increased significantly in the first six months of the year and stabilised (though without decreasing) in the second half of the year.

In January 2020, the Government also issued a report that 61,637 people had disappeared in Mexico in the so-called "war on drugs" since 2006, a figure significantly higher than the approximately 40,000 cases acknowledged by the Government in 2018. According to the Government, some 9,000 people disappeared in that year alone. The report, based on data collected by the Attorney-General's Office, states that most disappearances were concentrated in 10 states, particularly Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Durango. During the first year of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's mandate, some 800 hidden graves were discovered containing more than 1,120 bodies, bringing the figure to 3,631 since 2006.

López Obrador began the year by stating that his National Peace and Security Plan would focus on tackling the causes of violence, emphasizing education, health and

employment issues, and distancing himself from the strictly security-led approach of his predecessors in office. As the year progressed, however, **debate centred on the creation and deployment of the National Guard, a corps of some 70,000 troops made up mainly of Army and Navy officers** led by a former general. This fact led to numerous criticisms of the Government by civil society organisations that consider that the creation of the National Guard entails the militarisation of public security in Mexico. After several debates and parliamentary procedures to ensure that the Armed Forces are able to serve in public security matters, the National Guard began its operations in May and was gradually deployed throughout the territory over the year. In spite of this, during 2019 there was an increase in conflicts both between drug cartels and between the latter and the state security forces. As proof of this, up to November, 382 police officers had died in the course of these clashes. The year also saw numerous massacres and episodes of high-intensity violence, mostly linked to rivalry between groups for the control of drug-trafficking markets and routes, fuel theft (one of the priorities of the Government during the year, which deployed thousands of military personnel to protect oil pipelines) extortion, kidnapping and even the avocado industry. Dozens of groups took part in the clashes, including the New Generation Jalisco Cartel (CJNG) and the Sinaloa Cartel. Among the episodes that generated the most media attention during the year were the killing of 19 people in August by the CJNG in Uruapán in response to the deployment of the National Guard in the region; the killing of 23 people in Guanajuato between 7 and 9 June for control of the crude oil market; the killing of 28 people at the end of August in the state of Veracruz as a settling of scores between organised crime groups; the killing of 13 policemen by the CJNG on 14 October in Michoacán; the killing of 14 cartel members on 16 October in Guerrero State; or the killing of 26 people in Ciudad Juárez in early November by the Mexicles group, in an episode of violence in which 35 vehicles were burned and several bomb threats were recorded. However, one of the episodes that had the greatest political impact during the year was the arrest by the National Guard of Ovidio Guzmán (the son of "Chapo" Guzmán, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel) in mid-October in Culiacán, the capital of Sinaloa. After the Sinaloa Cartel deployed dozens of foot soldiers in the city and eight people died in clashes between them and the state security forces, the Government decided to release Ovidio Guzmán in order to prevent a further escalation of the violence. It should also be noted that selective attacks against social leaders or journalists continued to occur throughout the year.

| Nicaragua | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>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.

Despite a significant decrease in the intensity of violence associated with the political and social crisis that began in April 2018, anti-government protests, clashes between demonstrators and security forces or armed pro-government groups, and constant reports of mass human rights violations, took place throughout the year. Figures on the impact and magnitude of the crisis differ significantly depending on the sources. Thus, in early October, the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights declared that between **April 2018 and the end of September 2019, 651 people had been killed, 4,922 had been injured, 516 had been kidnapped and 853 remained missing**. If these data are compared with those supplied at the end of 2018, it can be inferred that according to this association in the first nine months of 2019 some 90 people died and another 344 were injured. These figures are somewhat higher than those offered by other organisations, such as Articulación de Movimientos Sociales (belonging to the opposition platform Unidad Nacional Azul y Blanco), according to which 24 opposition members were killed between January and July, particularly in the department of Jinotega. However, these figures differ significantly from those provided by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which states that between April 2018 and September 2019, 328 people died, 3 were declared missing, 130 remained in prison and more than 88,000 had left the country. According to the IACHR, the vast majority of these figures were recorded in 2018. However, the Government only acknowledged the deaths of 199 people. On the other hand, human rights organisations and bodies (such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Amnesty International and several Nicaraguan organisations) **reported continuous and mass human rights violations at various times during the year, such as excessive use of force by the police, arbitrary arrests, harassment and attacks on opposition groups, disappearances, disproportionate sentences, lack of due process in trials, attacks on specific groups such as students, journalists or religious followers, etc.** At the end of the year, for example, the Permanent Commission on Human Rights stated that it had received more than 3,000 complaints of alleged human rights violations committed or encouraged by the State. In December, 70 civil society organisations denounced the systematic

violation of human rights in Nicaragua. However, on most occasions the Government considered that such information and accusations were biased or politically motivated. The Government rejected the Human Rights Council's resolution of condemnation issued in April and the report submitted by the same organisation in which they made 250 recommendations to the Government, just as it denied the entry to OAS personnel wishing to examine the situation in the country first-hand. For its part, the Government denied many of these allegations and in turn claimed to be gathering evidence on the crimes committed by certain demonstrators during the protests that it could bring to the International Court of Justice.

*Bolivia experienced the most intense political and social crisis in recent times, which resulted in the deaths of 35 people, hundreds of people being injured and political asylum being sought by Evo Morales*

## South America

| Bolivia | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
Although President Evo Morales' resignation and departure from the country at the end of 2019 were precipitated by accusations of fraud in the presidential elections held that same year, the country has been immersed in a process of political and social polarisation practically ever since former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada went into exile in the United States in 2003 following the crackdown on anti-government protests in which more than 100 people died. After a period of uncertainty during which two Presidents took power on an interim basis, Evo Morales won the elections in December 2005, becoming the country's first indigenous leader. However, his actions while in Government, especially the agrarian reform, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the approval of a new Constitution, were hampered by the strong opposition of several political parties and the eastern regions of the country which, led by the department of Santa Cruz, demanded greater autonomy. Alongside the political struggle between the Government and the opposition, in recent years Bolivia has faced one of the highest rates of social conflict in the continent, with protests of different kinds linked to sectoral labour demands, the activity of mining companies or the rights of indigenous peoples. The political crisis became especially acute in 2016 after the ruling party lost –by a narrow margin of votes, marking Evo Morales' first electoral defeat– a referendum on constitutional reform on whether or not to allow Evo Morales a further re-election and thus to compete in the 2019 presidential elections.

**Bolivia went through the most intense political and social crisis in recent times, which resulted in the deaths of 35 people, hundreds of people injured and President Evo Morales and Vice-President Alvaro García Linera seeking political asylum in Mexico**. The crisis began

shortly after the preliminary results of the presidential elections were made public, in which Morales was ahead of his opponent, Carlos Mesa, by a margin that forced a second round of voting. However, after the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) halted the scrutiny of votes for 24 hours, the distance separating the two contenders had widened significantly and exceeded the margin needed to proclaim Evo Morales the winner of the first round by a few tenths. The OAS declared that the Supreme Electoral Court's explanations for halting the scrutiny of votes were confusing and insufficient, while both Carlos Mesa and the opposition as a whole, in addition to the governments of certain countries, complained of electoral fraud. The OAS and the EU called for a repeat of the elections. Mass protests and clashes between Government supporters and opponents began in several provinces of the country the day after the elections, even before the Supreme Electoral Court officially declared Evo Morales the winner of the elections on 24 October. The protests, clashes, riots, burning of public buildings, roadblocks and blockades of cities continued and intensified in the following weeks, especially in departments such as Santa Cruz, La Paz, Oruro, Potosi, Tarija and Sucre, with a final toll of a number of deaths and many people injured. The OAS began an audit of the electoral process and its results on 31 October and submitted its preliminary report on 10 November, identifying serious irregularities and urging the Government to repeat the elections. Morales accepted the recommendation, but a few hours later, following pressure from the head of the Armed Forces, he went into exile in Mexico along with his Vice-President. Two days later, in the absence of the politicians of the ruling MAS party, the Legislative Assembly appointed the former second Vice-President of the Senate, Jeanine Áñez, as interim President of the country. It declared its intention to call new elections and to pacify the country. Following this decision, and Evo Morales' statements from Mexico describing his departure from power as a coup d'état, mass protests were held by followers of the former President in various parts of the country. The day after Áñez approved a decree exempting the Armed Forces from criminal liability in the containment of the protests, 9 protesters died in Cochabamba and another 10 in El Alto, all from gunshot wounds. Finally, in view of the criticism of the decree and the magnitude of the protests, the decree was repealed at the end of November. **The Ombudsman's Office noted that since the beginning of the crisis, but especially since the new Government took office, 35 people had died and several hundred others had been injured**. On the political front, at the end of November Parliament passed a law (supported by the party of the previous Government, MAS) which annulled the October elections, stipulated a 120-day period for the calling of new elections and established a new electoral authority for this purpose. At the same time, the new interim Government filed a criminal complaint with the Prosecutor's Office against

Morales for sedition and terrorism due to his alleged messages inciting violence. In addition, it was also revealed that the new Government intended to arraign Evo Morales before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity due to his inciting union groups to lay siege to certain cities and impede the food supply. Morales also accused the interim Government of inciting the armed forces to violently suppress the protests. In early December, the OAS submitted a more detailed report on what it considered serious irregularities and manipulations of the vote-counting process in the October elections, concluding that a detailed analysis of the evolution of the count made it statistically unlikely that Morales would win in the first round.

| Chile | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
Although the trigger for the mass protests and numerous episodes of violence that were recorded in 2019 was the increase in the price of the metro, both analysts and the organisations that called for the protests maintain that the real causes of the social discontent that exists in the country are the political and economic model that has governed the country in recent decades. Some of the aspects of the country's political and economic governance that were criticised during the protests were the precariousness of the health and education systems, the growing privatisation of the pension system, water system or other sectors of the economy, the increase in the price of housing, medicines and public transport, the growing perception of corruption and the increase in inequality and poverty rates.

**Chile experienced the most intense and widespread protests in recent decades, with a final toll of 26 deaths, 12,600 people injured and thousands of arrests, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).** These figures differ slightly from those provided by the National Institute of Human Rights (INDH), which reported the same number of deaths, the hospitalisation of some 3,400 civilians, more than 220 people receiving severe eye trauma and more than 8,800 arrests. All the reports published by human rights bodies and organisations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) identified serious human rights violations committed by State security agents. By way of example, the IACHR denounced sexual violence, torture and other degrading and humiliating treatment committed during arrests of demonstrators. Similarly, in mid-November, the National Institute of Human Rights declared that it had recorded 346 lawsuits, of which 246 were linked to allegations of torture and 58 to allegations of sexual violence. At the end of October,

the Prosecutor's Office announced the commencement of 840 investigations into alleged human rights violations. Of these, 597 were filed against the National Police Force (*Carabineros*), 45 against the Army, 16 against the Investigative Police and 8 against the Navy.

The protests began after the Government announced, on 6 October, an increase in public transportation system fares, which prompted hundreds of people, mainly students, to organise to evade paying their metro fare in the capital, Santiago. Support for this measure gradually grew and, over the following days, led to the complete paralysis of the metro system and conflicts between police and protesters took place. On 18 October, the protests and unrest spread to several parts of the country and the Government imposed a state of emergency, initially in Santiago and later in 15 of the 16 regional capitals, and arranged for the deployment of military personnel to control the protests. In cities such as Santiago, Valparaiso and Coquimbo, a curfew was also decreed. **Although initially the protests were motivated by the increase in the price of public transport, as time passed the scope of the demands grew and the number of supporters increased, with the focus of the protests broadening to include the high cost of goods and services, low pensions, the economic and social policy of Sebastián Piñera's Government and criticism of the political class and democratic institutions**. At the end of October, more than a million people gathered in the capital to protest against all of these issues and also against the state crackdown, since by that time 20 people had already been killed and several hundred injured in the course of the protests and riots that took place in various parts of the country. In spite of the lifting of the state of emergency on 27 October, the dismissal of the entire Government and the submission of a package of economic reforms (pensions, health and salaries) major protests continued in November. In the middle of the month, the legislative and executive powers announced an agreement to hold a plebiscite, in April 2020, on whether or not a new Constitution should be drafted. Despite the fact that the levels of protests and violence have dropped significantly since the announcement of these measures, significant protests, roadblocks and disturbances of varying intensity continued to occur in various parts of the country until the end of the year, causing the death of at least three people.

| Colombia | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
The mass protests that took place in 2019 are closely linked to the rejection by part of the population of the Government action of President Iván Duque, but also to

issues of a more structural nature relating to the political system and the economic model that has governed the country in recent decades, such as criticism of judicial corruption or impunity, or the growing perception that the high levels of economic growth that the country has experienced have not led to a reduction in inequality. Although without reaching the same size as the 2019 protests, significant sectoral protests have been recorded in recent years, such as the mass demonstrations against a higher education reform project in 2011 or the so-called National Agrarian Strike in 2013. Under Iván Duque's mandate, signs of social unrest increased, as evidenced by the holding of a popular consultation against corruption in August 2018; the so-called National University Strike between October and December 2018, which also saw clashes; the so-called "Lantern March" in January 2019, which demanded the resignation of the attorney general due to several cases of corruption and the perception of a sense of impunity regarding the murder of civil society leaders; and the recurring criticism of Duque for slowing down the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement between the Government and the FARC.

**The country experienced the most important anti-government protests in recent decades, with a toll at the end of the year of 6 deaths, around 800 people injured (half of them police and half civilians) and more than 250 arrests**. The protests, which took place in several parts of the country, began in late November and were very active by the end of the year. The main reasons for the protests were the rejection of the Government's economic policy and, more particularly, of several laws on tax, labour and pension reform. As the demonstrations progressed, the opposition's agenda expanded, as exemplified by the document containing thirteen demands that the so-called National Strike Committee delivered to the President, Ivan Duque, in view of the talks he had entered into with various political and social actors to contain the scope of the protests. Some of these demands include full compliance with the peace agreement between the Government and the FARC, the passing of anti-corruption laws, the implementation of commitments made by the current and previous Governments to various groups (students, indigenous people, agricultural workers, etc.) or the purging of the police force and the dissolution of the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad. The protests began on November 21 in several Colombian cities, and included roadblocks, damage to street furniture and numerous clashes between police and protesters. In the early days of the protests, the Government ordered the closure of border crossings with Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela, while the mayor of Cali decreed a curfew to prevent what he considered acts of vandalism by the protesters. In addition, Iván Duque accused certain opposition leaders of orchestrating and capitalising on the protests and criticised the fact that the protesters were using violence to achieve political aims. However, as the protests took hold and grew, the Government offered to hold talks with the country's leading social and trade union organisations. For their part, both the UN and human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch criticised the excessive use of force during the protests and demanded an investigation to determine who was responsible.

| Ecuador | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
Although the crisis that broke out at the end of 2019 is linked to the agreement between Lenin Moreno's Government and the IMF to reduce the public deficit through a decree that drastically cut public spending and increased tax collection, in previous decades the country had already seen numerous protests and episodes of political and social polarisation. In fact, since the late 1990s, there have been three Presidents (Abdalá Bucaram, Jamil Mahuad and Lucio Guitérrez) who have not completed their terms for political reasons. During the mandates of former President Rafael Correa (2007-2017) there were also important protests linked to the Government's management, the approval of the new Constitution in 2008 and his decision to run for a third term (the second under the new Constitution). In addition, both during Correa's tenure and those of previous Presidents, there were recurring protests and sporadic outbreaks of violence linked to the impact of certain mining and oil exploration projects on the Amazon and other parts of the country.

**Ecuador experienced one of the most intense protests in recent years after tens of thousands of people throughout the country staged demonstrations of various kinds in the first half of October, following the approval of a decree which, among other issues, intended to eliminate a fuel subsidy**. According to a report issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, **9 people were killed, more than 1,500 were injured and 1,382 others were arrested**. For its part, the Ombudsman's Office estimated that 11 people were killed, 1,340 were injured and 1,192 were arrested. On 1 October, President Lenin Moreno announced a decree that would introduce several tax and labour measures, including the elimination of a fuel subsidy that had been in place for more than 40 years and led to increases in gasoline prices of more than 120%. This decree was part of an agreement with the IMF reached in March which intended to reduce the fiscal deficit (through cuts in public spending and tax increases) so as to be given access to lines of credit worth more than 4.2 billion dollars. According to some analysts, the agreement with the IMF provided for the modification or elimination of programmes and policies that had led to very significant reductions in poverty and extreme poverty in recent years. Moreno's announcement provoked a strike by hauliers and protests and roadblocks throughout the country, led mainly by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and its related political movement, Pachakutik. On 3 October, in response to the outbreak in Quito of numerous riots and episodes of violence, including looting and clashes between protesters and police, the Government decreed a state of emergency, and days later ordered what the opposition labelled a curfew (the Government, however, noted that it had only restricted night-time movements around strategic

Government buildings and military and police bases). The demonstrations increased in the following days and, **faced with the mobilisation of thousands of people in the vicinity of the National Assembly and the presidential Palace, the Government moved the capital from Quito to Guayaquil**. The Government accused former President Rafael Correa and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of orchestrating the protests with the aim of perpetrating a coup d'état, but both parties denied the accusations.

In the face of intensified protests and widespread roadblocks (affecting the Pan-American Highway and 17 of the 24 provinces), Moreno returned to Quito on 9 October and offered to hold talks with the opposition under the auspices of the United Nations and Ecuador's Episcopal Conference. Although the content of the talks was not released, on 14 October the Government withdrew decree 883 (popularly known as the "Paquetazo"), which substantially reduced the intensity of the protests. On 23 October, the CONAIE announced that it was abandoning talks with the Government because it considered that the Government was continuing its strategy of repression and harassment against indigenous leaders. It is worth noting the commencement of an investigation by the Attorney General's Office against the President of the CONAIE for mentioning the creation of his own army of indigenous movements during a public appearance. Faced with numerous complaints of repression and attacks on the press (more than 100 attacks on journalists were recorded in the first two weeks of October), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights visited the country between 21 October and 8 November. At the end of the month, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report accusing the State security forces of unnecessarily and disproportionately using the crackdown.

In early December, however, the Government criticised such a report as reflecting the opinion of the opposition only and ignoring the intensity, quantity and degree of coordination and premeditation of the episodes of violence by protesters. The Government accused the CONAIE of using urban guerrilla tactics, stating that during the protests 435 police officers were injured, 108 vehicles affected, or 45 ambulances attacked. Finally, it should be noted that at the end of November the Ombudsman's Office announced the creation of the Special Commission for Truth and Justice with the aim of assessing the complaints submitted and following up on cases of human rights violations.

| 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 political, social and humanitarian crisis gripping Venezuela worsened considerably during the year and at certain times there was even a risk of a military conflict after the recently appointed President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, proclaimed himself President-elect of the country at the beginning of the year and dozens of countries (56 at the end of the year, mainly in the Americas and Europe) recognised his office. Guaidó's self-proclamation came a few days after Nicolás Maduro took office for a second six-year term, which was not recognised by many Governments because it was considered to stem from a presidential election –in May 2018– that did not meet international standards. Guaidó, who had been appointed President of the National Assembly five days before Maduro's swearing-in, cited Article 233 of the Constitution. **The United States and most Latin American countries recognised Guaidó, and the European Parliament also voted to recognise him as interim President. In contrast, countries such as China, Turkey and Russia did not.** In the days following Guaidó's self-proclamation, some 40 people were killed in the course of demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country. Subsequently, in February, several people were killed and several hundred injured in the clashes that took place as a result of attempts by the United States and the opposition to bring humanitarian aid convoys into the country, with the Government closing all border crossings with Colombia and Brazil, claiming that it was a provocation and denouncing a possible invasion of the country by the United States. As the Government itself acknowledged, some 400 members of the state security forces, mainly from the National Guard, defected and crossed the border into Colombia. However, most of the Armed Forces remained loyal to the Government. According to human rights organisations, summary executions and numerous attacks on protesters by pro-

*The crisis gripping Venezuela worsened and at certain times there was even a risk of a military conflict after Juan Guaidó proclaimed himself acting-President of the country and dozens of countries recognised his office*

government paramilitary groups were reported in the riots in late February. **At the end of April, Guaidó urged the Armed Forces to rebel against the Government and overthrow Maduro**. Although further defections were recorded, the Government maintained control of the situation and described the opposition's action as a coup d'état. In the days following Guaidó's appeal, the clashes between Maduro's supporters and detractors increased. For its part, the Government stepped up its crackdown on certain sectors of the opposition. During the month of May, 15 opposition parliamentarians were arrested, left the country or took refuge in the embassies of various countries. During the rest of the year, the opposition continued to report police and military repression, human rights violations and harassment of opposition politicians. According to several media outlets, both the latter situation and the attempt to bribe opposition politicians escalated at the end of the year in view of the National Assembly session in early January 2020 where a vote was to be held (as eventually took place) to extend Guaidó's presidential term for another year. The second quarter also saw continued tensions and war-like rhetoric between the Maduro Government and the United States. However, in late 2019 the United States Congress passed a law ruling out any military action in the country and instead strongly advocated political negotiations between Maduro and the opposition. Political tensions between Venezuela and the neighbouring countries of Brazil, Colombia and Peru also increased at the end of the year after Maduro accused those countries of supporting an assault on a military barracks in the state of Bolívar in which more than 100 rifles and a large amount of ammunition were stolen and in which several hostages were taken and one person was even killed. According to the Government, this military action was politically motivated and intended to attack military units in Táchira, Zulia, Barinas, Aragua, the Capital District and Sucre, although some media outlets denied this version.

The political and social crisis occurred alongside a clear deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the country. In October, the United Nations declared that **more than 4.5 million people had left the country since 2015, although the actual number was much higher because this figure did not include people who had fled the country through illegal border crossings**. In April, the United Nations warned that seven million people were in need of assistance, although some local organisations say the figure could be much higher. Some sources warned of chronic product shortages, the risk of collapse of the health system and power cuts, which were very frequent throughout the year. In mid-April, the Government reached an agreement with the International Federation of the Red Cross for the mass distribution of emergency aid. With regard to the human rights situation, there were reports of mass human rights violations throughout the year. In September, the United Nations Human Rights Council approved sending a mission to the country to investigate extrajudicial killings

and forced disappearances. Finally, it should be noted that, according to the United Nations Global Study on Homicide 2019, published in the middle of the year, which collects and analyses data from 2017, Venezuela had a rate of 57 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (the second highest in Latin America, behind El Salvador, with 62) and is clearly the Latin American country where this rate has experienced the greatest increase in recent decades, climbing from 13 in 1991 to 57 in 2017. The situation in the capital, Caracas, is particularly alarming, with a homicide rate of 122. According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV), more than 333,000 homicides were recorded between 1999 and 2018, and the rate of impunity is 92%. According to this observatory (the only source available in the absence of official data on the matter), 23,047 homicides were recorded in 2018, making Venezuela the country with the highest homicide rate in Latin America (81.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, far above the 51 recorded in El Salvador). As for the number of protests, the Venezuelan Social Conflict Observatory (OVCS) said that in the first six months of 2019, 10,477 street protests (with mainly political and social demands) had been recorded, 97% more than in the same period of the previous year.

## 2.3.3. Asia Pacific

### Central Asia

| Tajikistan | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | = |
| **Type:** | Government, System, Resources, Territory<br>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.

The socio-political crisis in the country continued along several lines, with ISIS claiming responsibility for new incidents of violence, as well as an increase in tension which triggered violent clashes in areas along the border with Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley. On the one hand, Tajikistan was affected in 2019 by several episodes of violence that the authorities attributed to ISIS and for which the group claimed responsibility, although some analysts highlighted a lack of information, in a context of restrictions on freedom of the press, which made it difficult to verify the perpetrators of the acts. Among the incidents, a **riot in a maximum security prison in the Vahdat district (near the capital) in May resulted in the deaths of 29 prisoners and three security guards**. **ISIS claimed responsibility for the acts in June**, stating that the attackers were members of its group. According to the Ministry of the Interior of Tajikistan, 17 of the 29 dead were members of ISIS and three others were members of the Islamic Renaissance Party (PRI), a party involved in the armed conflict of the 1990s and the 1997 peace agreement, and a political party subject to institutional repression since 2015, when it was outlawed, and then designated as a terrorist organisation in 2016. The Ministry of Justice said the instigators of the riots included Gulmurod Halimov, son of Behruz Gulmurod, a former special operations colonel and police commander in Tajikistan who defected in 2015 and joined ISIS, becoming the organisation's military chief in 2016. According to the Government, other prisoners involved belonged to outlawed groups such as Jamaat Ansarullah and the Islamic Movement of Turkistan. The deadly riots were preceded by further riots in November 2018 in another high security prison in Khujand (north), also claimed by ISIS, with 25 prisoners and two security guards dead (some sources put the figure at around 50). The May riots once again led some activists to question the prison situation in the country, which is subject to serious overcrowding and allegations of torture, rulings handed down against people with no links to the violence, as well as the need for rehabilitation programmes for people convicted on charges related to terrorism and extremism.

Tensions rose again in November, when an attack was led on a border post near the Uzbekistan border. According to the authorities, some 20 ISIS fighters carried out the attack, resulting in the deaths of 15 attackers, one policeman and one border guard, with five other fighters being arrested. The authorities also claimed that the group had crossed over from Afghanistan. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack and put the number of border guards killed at ten. The area was blocked to press access. Some analysts drew attention to the doubts surrounding what happened. In addition, the Government announced in April the return of more than 80 children and adolescents from Iraq, children of mothers imprisoned by the Iraqi authorities on charges of belonging to ISIS. According to the Tajik Government, some 1,900 people of Tajik nationality had joined ISIS

in Syria and Iraq, and some sources put the number of Tajik fighters currently in Afghanistan in various armed groups at around 100. On the other hand, tensions increased in the Ferghana Valley (an area between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, with numerous enclaves and disputed border sections). During the year, violent intercommunity clashes between the populations of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, involving border guards from both countries,[27] occurred around Vorukh (Tajikistan's enclave in Kyrgyzstan) the Kyrgyz region of Batken that surrounds it, and around the districts of Bobojon Ghafurov (Tajikistan) and Leylek (Kyrgyzstan). Ten violent clashes during the year resulted in several deaths and several dozen people injured. Following the July clashes, which led to Kyrgyzstan evacuating some 600 residents from the Batken region, the Presidents of both countries met in the disputed area. In the September clashes, Tajikistan denounced the deployment of some 300 Kyrgyz troops. Some analysts warned that the use of weapons by the civilian population in the clashes represented a qualitative leap compared to intercommunity border clashes in previous years.

## East Asia

| China (Hong Kong) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity, System Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
In 1997, after more than 150 years of British rule and several years of negotiations culminating in the Sino-British Agreement in 1984, China regained sovereignty over Hong Kong under the principle of "one country, two systems". Under this principle, Beijing committed to respect (for 50 years) the institutional idiosyncrasies and self-government of the enclave, guaranteeing its status as a special administrative region and a "fundamental law" that provides for a relatively autonomous regional government with executive, legislative and judicial powers. Since then, the citizens' movement and the political parties which advocate greater democratisation and autonomy for Hong Kong and reject the interference of the Central Government in the enclave's domestic affairs have significantly increased their institutional strength, popular support and capacity for protests. Although both the central and regional authorities claim to be sensitive to the demands of the majority of citizens and have sometimes put forward proposals for political reform, the scale of the protests increased significantly in the two decades following Hong Kong's handover by the United Kingdom. In the second half of 2014, hundreds of thousands of people participated in mass protests (popularly known as the Umbrella Revolution or "Occupy Central") against a series of electoral reforms proposed by Beijing. From then until the outbreak of mass protests in 2019, there were also numerous anti-government demonstrations and recurrent episodes of tension between Hong Kong citizens with different views on the political status of the region and its relationship with the rest of China.

27. See summary on Kyrgyzstan in this chapter.

In 2019, the country experienced the most widespread and intense protests in recent decades, to the extent that some analysts maintain that the political situation in Hong Kong represents China's greatest challenge since Xi Jinping came to power. According to some accounts made public at the end of the year, two people died, some 2,600 were injured and more than 7,000 had been arrested during the protests, which began at the end of March and continued throughout the year. Indeed, at the end of March, thousands of people protested against attempts by the Hong Kong regional parliament to pass a bill amending the extradition laws and allowing, among other matters, the surrender of fugitives to Chinese jurisdiction. According to some analysts, this bill led to fears among many citizens that Hong Kong's regional autonomy could be undermined and that Beijing could use the legal coverage of the new legislation to extradite political leaders who oppose the current status quo in the region. While initially the protests revolved primarily around the withdrawal of the bill, as the protests progressed new demands were included (such as the investigation of alleged police abuse during the demonstrations and the resignation of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam) as well as demands that had been raised by citizens in the past, such as the introduction of universal suffrage in the election of the Legislative Council or the Regional Government. Despite the protests at the end of March, Carrie Lam declared her intention to continue with the aforementioned bill, triggering renewed and more widespread protests at the end of April, when over 100,000 people gathered in the vicinity of the regional parliament.

The protests reached a turning point in June, when the Hong Kong regional Government announced the suspension of controversial amendments to extradition legislation after hundreds of thousands of people (one million according to organisers) began to hold protests which triggered the most severe violence in decades during clashes between the police and protesters and led to the closure of public buildings for several days. After Lam's announcement, hundreds of thousands of people (up to two million according to some sources) continued to protest for the complete withdrawal of the bill. On 1 July, to mark the 22nd anniversary of the United Kingdom's handover of sovereignty to China, dozens of protesters stormed the Legislative Council headquarters, while at the end of the month there were further clashes with police after several people, including passengers, were attacked at a train station. In early August a general strike forced the cancellation of some 200 flights, while days later, between 12 and 14 August, thousands of people occupied the international airport, causing more flights to be cancelled and serious clashes between protesters and the police. On 1 September, the protesters gathered at the airport again. During the month of August, public transportation was affected by the protests, and thousands of high school

and college students decided not to attend classes in order to participate in the demonstrations. Although Carrie Lam announced the definitive withdrawal of her bill, protests continued during September and even increased at the beginning of October on the occasion of the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the ban issued by the regional Government on wearing masks during mass gatherings in public places. November saw some of the most intense conflicts of the year, especially after thousands of protesters occupied several universities. The two-week police siege of the Polytechnic University, in which some 1,100 people were arrested, had a particularly strong media impact. On 24 November, district council elections were held, with a record 71% turnout, and were described by some analysts as a referendum on the protests taking place. The pro-democracy parties achieved the best result in their history, gaining control of 17 of the 18 districts in the election and tripling the number of seats (from 124 to 388), while the parties close to Beijing suffered a severe defeat and lost more than 242 seats. Protests resumed in early December, with demands that went further than the mere withdrawal of the amendments to the extradition law, and remained very active at the end of the year.

| DPR Korea - USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[28] | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia |

**Summary:**
International concern about North Korea's nuclear programme dates back to the early 1990s, when the North Korean government restricted the presence in the country of observers from the International Atomic Energy Agency and carried out a series of missile tests. Nevertheless international tension escalated notably after the US Administration of George W. Bush included the North Koreannregime within the so-called "axis of evil". A few months after Pyongyang reactivated an important nuclear reactor and withdrew from the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2003, multilateral talks began on the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula in which the governments of North Korea, South Korea, the USA, Japan, China and Russia participated. In April 2009, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the said talks after the United Nations imposed new sanctions after the country launched a long range missile.

After a year in which good progress in the inter-Korean and North Korean-United States negotiations on the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula led to a reduction of military tensions to a minimum, tensions increased again substantially after the failure of the summit between the United States and North Korean leaders held in February. Beyond the accusations regarding blame for the

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28. This international socio-political crisis relates mainly to the dispute over the North Korean nuclear programme.

stalling of the aforementioned negotiations, the military conflict and the warmongering rhetoric became evident from April onwards, coinciding with the joint military exercises historically carried out by the United States and South Korea. According to Pyongyang, these contravene the *de facto* commitment that both countries supposedly made in 2018 within the framework of the détente that took place during that year. A few days after the end of such exercises, North Korea launched short-range ballistic missiles, the first since December 2017. The United States Government tried to minimise such launches by assuring that they did not imply a violation of the commitments adopted by Pyongyang in 2018 (which according to Washington only affected nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests), but at the same time it criticised such launches because it considered that they did imply a clear violation of several resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. The North Korean Government continued to carry out short-range missile launches in July, August, October and November. At the end of the year, several media outlets even speculated on the possibility that North Korea had tested a new type of missile capable of being fired from submarines. Tensions were especially high in August, coinciding with the new joint military exercises that the United States and South Korea carried out during practically the entire month and in the month of November, with the presentation of South Korea's new defence strategy, which foresees a substantial increase in South Korean military expenditure. In November, despite the fact that the United States and South Korea agreed to postpone the military exercises scheduled for the beginning of the month in order to resume talks between the United States and North Korea, which have been stalled since February, the North Korean armed forces fired several artillery shells near the disputed maritime border in the direction of South Korea. In parallel with these actions, at various times during the year the North Korean Government warned about the possibility of resuming the testing of its nuclear and ballistic missile programme if there was no significant change in the United States negotiating strategy by the end of 2019. Finally, it is also worth noting the military incident that took place in July, when the South Korean Air Force fired hundreds of warning shots at Russian planes patrolling the region along with Chinese planes, which, according to Seoul, had violated their airspace by flying over the Dokdo Islands (East Sea or Sea of Japan).

## South Asia

| Bangladesh | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | Government (Awami League), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islam, 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.

**Tensions in the country around various issues remained, although the levels of violence decreased compared to previous years**. The first flashpoint was the elections. Following the announcement of the results of the parliamentary elections held on 30 December 2018, which gave victory to the ruling Awami League party, which won 288 of the 300 seats, there followed accusations of electoral fraud by the opposition, particularly by the BNP party. In addition, international actors such as the EU, the United States and the United Kingdom expressed concern about possible electoral fraud. In March, local elections were held under a climate of violence. At least seven people died in episodes of violence linked to the electoral process. In addition, the elections were boycotted by the main opposition party, BNP, and there were clashes between members of this political force and the governing party. The various elections left the governing party with almost total control of the country's many institutions. At the same time, tensions between the Government and BNP continued over the imprisonment of opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who had to be transferred from prison to hospital and whose release continued to be demanded by BNP. The second source of tension was the Government's counter-insurgency strategy, which intensified after the attacks in Sri Lanka. The security forces carried out numerous arrests during the year of persons accused of belonging to different armed organisations of an Islamic nature and certain clashes and actions by armed groups were recorded. The Government noted that ISIS did not have a significant presence in the country, but the armed organisation disseminated messages and videos of support from Bangladeshi insurgents on several occasions. It should be noted that the regional political situation also had an impact on the Bangladeshi crisis. Firstly, the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya refugee population

in Bangladesh entering from Myanmar remained unresolved. Attempts to return the Rohingya population to Myanmar failed, and there was a worrying increase in rhetoric that sought to link the Rohingya community to the Islamist insurgency. On the other hand, the adoption in India of legislation that gave people from Bangladesh who professed religions other than Islam access to Indian nationality deteriorated relations between the two countries.[29]

| India | |
|---|---|
| Intensity: | 2 |
| Trend: | ↑ |
| Type: | System, Government<br>Internal |
| Main parties: | Government, political and social opposition |

**Summary:**
In May 2014, the Hindu nationalist party BJP won the elections and took over the country's Government, led by Narendra Modi as prime minister. In 2019, Modi repeated his election victory. Since then, the Government has promoted a Hindu nationalist governance programme accompanied by discriminatory rhetoric, measures and policies against the Muslim population. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India had increased in previous decades, especially following the serious violence in Gujarat in 2000, when a train carrying Hindu pilgrims caught fire and 58 people were killed, and violent riots broke out, killing nearly 800 Muslims and more than 250 Hindus (although civil society organisations claim the numbers were much higher). Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat and a member of the ultra-nationalist Hindu organisation RSS, was accused of collusion and even incitement to violence against the Muslim population. In 2019, the Modi Government adopted several measures considered to be highly detrimental to the Muslim community, including the withdrawal of the special autonomy and statehood status from Jammu and Kashmir; the National Register of Citizens in Assam, which excluded two million Muslims from Indian citizenship; and the adoption of the Citizenship Act, excluding Muslims from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh from being granted Indian citizenship.

**India was the scene of intense social protests in December after parliament approved the Citizenship Act, which caused an enormous social controversy by establishing that the population migrating to the country from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh who were Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains or Parsis could be granted Indian citizenship, but excluded the Muslim population**. The protests, involving hundreds of thousands of people, began in the north-eastern state of Assam and spread to other states.[30] The protests were led by sectors of civil society that pointed to the discriminatory nature of the legislation against the Muslim population, noting that it was a violation of the secular nature of the Indian Constitution. The Act was also met with rejection by large sections of the

population of Assam, who oppose the nationalisation of the immigrant population from Bangladesh, pointing out that it seriously jeopardises the fragile demographic balance of north-east India. The protests were particularly intense in the state of Uttar Pradesh (20% of the population of this state is Muslim) where **at least 19 people were killed in clashes with the police**. Five other people were killed in Assam after being shot by security forces in different demonstrations. In addition, there were thousands of arrests. The protests escalated after police carried out a violent operation against students demonstrating at Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi, arresting more than 100 people, and Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh, where dozens of arrests were also made. The Government imposed a state of emergency on large areas of the capital. In addition, it was announced that a National Register of Citizens would be implemented, similar to the one in Assam, which received enormous amounts of criticism from human rights organisations, who highlighted the serious discrimination it had provoked against the Muslim population.

| India (Assam) | |
|---|---|
| Intensity: | 2 |
| Trend: | = |
| Type: | Self-government, Identity<br>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.

**The armed activity of insurgent groups in Assam was significantly reduced, and by the end of the year there was speculation that an agreement would be signed between the Government and many of the insurgent organisations still active in the state**. According to figures provided by the South Asia Terrorism Portal

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29. See the summary on India and India (Assam) in this chapter.
30. See summary on India (Assam) in this chapter.

research centre, two insurgents were killed during 2019 as a result of the conflict. One of the most serious acts of violence occurred in May, when a grenade explosion –in an attack claimed by the armed group ULFA(I)– injured six people. Subsequently, the leadership of the armed group stated that they would not use bombs in public places, after several civilians were injured in the attack. In addition, during the year several insurgent leaders turned themselves in to the police and there was speculation that the commander in chief, Paresh Baruah, had lost contact with the group's members. The situation is said to have worsened for the armed group following an operation launched by the Myanmar Armed Forces against the Naga NSCN-K armed group in Taga, an area where other armed groups operating in India are also based, including the ULFA(I) and the NDFB-S. In this operation the leader of the ULFA-I Jyotirmoy Asom was allegedly killed. At the end of the year, the Indian Government extended the ban on the ULFA (including all its factions) for a period of five years.

At the same time, **the crisis was worsened by the adoption in December of the Citizenship Act** which established that Indian citizenship would be granted to immigrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who were Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains or Parsis, but excluded the Muslim population. **The approval of this legislation led to intense social protests that later spread to the rest of the country**.[31] Assam had already been the scene of numerous protests on the issue of citizenship, with significant social tensions between the indigenous population of Assam and people of Bangladeshi origin, due to the fragile demographic balance of the state and the fear of nationalisation of migrants from Bangladesh. This was compounded by protests from human rights organisations and the Muslim population who pointed out that the legislation was clearly discriminatory and Islamophobic. In fact, two million people were excluded from the National Register of Citizens, after 33 million people had to prove their nationality over the past four years in order to be included in the register. This left out many people who lacked the necessary documentation to complete the bureaucratic procedures under which the new legislation demanded their nationality. Assamese organisations noted that, faced with demands for a ban on illegal immigration by some sectors of Assamese society, the Indian Government is using the religious issue as a legal instrument regardless of the religion professed by the immigrant population. **At least five people were shot dead by police during protest demonstrations despite the Government's curfew, and hundreds were arrested.**

*At least five people were killed in the Indian state of Assam in the Citizenship Act protests, which spread to the rest of the country*

| 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.

**Relations between India and Pakistan seriously deteriorated during the year as a result of various episodes of violence in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir**, which has been the subject of a dispute between the two countries ever since independence and partition in 1947. Around one hundred people died as a result of various acts of violence in the dispute between the two countries. A serious attack in February that killed 45 Indian soldiers led to accusations of Pakistani complicity with the events by the Indian Government and led to an escalation of military and diplomatic tensions between the two countries. The Indian Air Force said it had carried out pre-emptive air strikes against a Jaish-e-Mohammad training camp on Pakistani territory, a claim denied by Pakistan. In turn, the Pakistani Government announced the capture of an Indian military pilot (who was later released in what Pakistan described as a "gesture of goodwill") and the shooting down of Indian planes on Pakistani territory, while the Indian Government alleged the shooting down of another Pakistani plane on Indian territory. In addition, the Indian Government threatened to cut the flow of rivers that run into the Indus, endangering the continuity of the Indus River Treaty between the two countries, which guarantees the distribution of water resources,

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31. See summary on India in this chapter.

indispensable for the survival of the population and the local economy, which is essentially agricultural. In March, the tension eased slightly with the return of the high commissioners of each country to their respective embassies. In addition, a joint technical meeting was held to facilitate the movement of Sikh pilgrims from India visiting holy sites in Pakistan, although the Indian Government noted that this was not a resumption of bilateral talks. **In August, tensions seriously escalated with the withdrawal of the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir.**[32] This situation led the UN Security Council, at the proposal of China (echoing a historic demand of Pakistan), to hold a closed-door meeting in August on the situation in Kashmir –the first in decades. Although no joint statement was agreed, several diplomats called on the parties to limit any unilateral actions in response to the crisis as much as possible. A further meeting was to be held in December, also at the request of China, but was postponed as the United Nations mission on the ground failed to submit its report. Armed clashes between the two armies on the Line of Control (the *de facto* border between India and Pakistan) resulted in the deaths of some 50 people throughout the year, mostly soldiers. Calls for talks throughout the year failed to materialise and in September, in a speech to the United Nations, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan warned India that its actions could lead to a new war.

*Violence in Jammu and Kashmir led to increased tensions between India and Pakistan, raising fears of a renewed armed conflict between the two countries*

| Sri Lanka | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, Tamil political parties and social organisations, armed group National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ) |

**Summary:**
In 1983, the armed Tamil opposition group known as the LTTE began an armed conflict that ravaged Sri Lanka for almost three decades. The increasing marginalisation of the Tamil population by the Government, which was mainly composed of Sinhalese elites, following the decolonisation of the island in 1948, led the armed group to call for the creation of an independent Tamil State using armed means. From 1983 on, every phase of the conflict ended with a failed peace process. In 2002, Norwegian-brokered peace negotiations were commenced after a ceasefire agreement was signed, the failure of which led to the resumption of the armed conflict with great intensity in 2006. In May 2009, the Armed Forces defeated the LTTE militarily and recovered all of the country's territory after killing the leader of the armed group, Velupillai Prabhakaran. In the years that followed, thousands of Tamils remained displaced and took no steps towards reconciliation. In addition, the Government refused to investigate war crimes during the armed conflict, denying that such crimes had been committed. However, in 2015 the presidential and parliamentary elections resulted in the formation of a new Government, which led to the implementation of a number of political reforms and tentative progress in the investigation of crimes during the armed conflict.

**The situation in Sri Lanka deteriorated dramatically and was the scene of a very severe episode of violence. More than 320 people were killed (mostly locals, but also at least 40 foreigners) and 500 were injured in several simultaneous attacks on Easter Sunday in churches around the capital city of Colombo and Batticaloa, as well as at three luxury hotels in Colombo.** The attacks were committed by a previously unknown Islamist group, the National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ), with ISIS claiming responsibility, and constitute the deadliest attacks abroad and the most severe episode of violence in Sri Lanka since the end of the armed conflict in 2009. More than 1,800 Muslims were arrested after the attack and at least 15 people, including 6 minors, were killed in one of the police raids as a result of clashes with the police and the detonation of explosives by suicide bombers. Subsequent parliamentary inquiries identified serious security breaches on the part of the Sri Lankan authorities, since the head of the intelligence services had allegedly received information about the high risk of attack prior to the events and did not provide an adequate response to these threats. In addition, the head of the attacks, extremist preacher Mohamed Zahran, had been investigated by the intelligence services prior to the attacks. The chief of police and the former secretary of defence were arrested for negligence and failure to prevent the attacks. The attacks were followed by several episodes of violence against the Muslim community in the country, including attacks on mosques and businesses owned by Muslims.

On the political front, presidential elections were held in November, with the SLPP candidate, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, winning by a large majority. Gotabaya served as Secretary of Defence from 2005 to 2015 and was the head of the Armed Forces during the final years of the armed conflict and during the military operations that brought the conflict and the armed group LTTE to an end in 2009, with accusations of serious human rights violations and war crimes (such as the intentional bombing of civilians, hospitals and humanitarian centres) against the Tamil civilian population being levelled at the army. Following his election, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe of the opposition UNP party resigned, leading to the inauguration of Mahinda Rajapaksa as Prime Minister. The return of the Rajapaksa clan to government control of the country increased concern among broad sectors of civil society and human rights organisations, as well as certain third-party countries.

32. See summary on India (Jammu and Kashmir) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

Gotabaya had announced during the election campaign that he would not continue the Sri Lankan Executive's commitments to the UN Human Rights Council on reconciliation and accountability for human rights violations during the armed conflict. On the other hand, prior to the configuration of the new Government, the appointment of General Shavendra Silva as commander of the armed forces had been condemned by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, due to his involvement in human rights violations during the armed conflict

*In Sri Lanka, the election victory of Gotabaya Rajapaksa increased the concern of human rights organisations regarding the lack of accountability for human rights violations during the armed conflict*

## Southeast Asia and Oceania

| Indonesia (West Papua) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity, Resources Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, OPM armed group, political and social opposition, 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.

**Clashes between the armed opposition group the OPM and the Armed Forces as well as protests and unrest in the Papua region (administratively divided into the provinces of Papua and West Papua) increased dramatically, with the final result of tens of people killed and tens of thousands forcibly displaced**. As regards the clashes between the OPM and the Armed Forces, violence in Nduga district (and surrounding regions such as Puncak, Puncak Jaya or Lanny Jaya) have increased exponentially since December 2018, after 17 people were killed by the OPM in a single attack. This action, the largest in the region in recent years in Papua, led to the start of a counter-insurgency campaign by the Armed Forces and the Police with air strikes and heavy artillery that resulted in the deaths of some 20 civilians and an undetermined number of combatants and soldiers. The mortality rate associated with the conflict in 2019 has not been established,

but according to information published in the press, around 30 soldiers and combatants could have died in the course of the aforementioned clashes. In addition, in October a network of local NGOs reported that 189 people who had left their homes due to the violence had died between early December 2018 and October 2019, mainly from disease and malnutrition. A report issued by local authorities in Nduga district in April noted that more than 20,000 people had left their homes due to the violence, although some NGOs put the figure at more than 32,000 and the Government reduced it to about 3,500. Although by the end of 2018 the Armed Forces had already been accused of numerous human rights violations, including the use of white phosphorus, such accusations continued throughout the year. In January, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, stated that she had requested permission to visit the region and conduct an investigation into these allegations. In March, a representative of the National Committee for West Papua stated before the UN Human Rights Council that the Armed Forces were committing numerous human rights violations in Papua, mainly directed against the Papuan population.

With regard to the protests linked to the political conflict in Papua, most notable were those that took place in August and September. In August, at least 10 people were killed in Jayapura and Deiyai district as a result of protests in more than 30 cities across Indonesia, after Papuan students were attacked and harassed in Surabaya and Malang on August 17, Indonesia's Independence Day. Dozens of people were arrested in connection with these incidents, which prompted the Government to deploy thousands of police and military personnel to the regions most affected by the protests, such as Manokwari, Sorong, Timika and Wamena. In some of these cities, several buildings were set on fire. **September saw the most intense spiral of violence of the year, when 43 people (33 according to Human Rights Watch) were killed in the city of Wamena and several others in cities such as Jayapura**. The incidents began after a group of Papuan university students were attacked in their residence (one died and two others were injured) and days later a school teacher made racist insults against a Papuan student in the same city of Wamena. By the end of September, dozens of people had been killed and more than 16,000 had left the city (according to Government figures) as a result of the spiral of violence that mainly affected people coming from other parts of Indonesia. Following these incidents, in which numerous public buildings, shops and vehicles were set on fire, some analysts warned that Islamist organisations in Indonesia had called for the defence of the non-Papuan Muslim population living in the Papuan region, thus exacerbating the risk of community or religious clashes. In Jayapura, where four people were killed, and in other cities, incidents

of violence were also reported. At the end of the year, on the occasion of Papua's Independence Day, dozens of people were arrested as part of the mobilisations to commemorate the event. **On the political front, it is worth noting that in October, following the above-mentioned spiral of violence, President Widodo visited the Papuan region and indicated his willingness to meet with the leaders of the Papuan secessionist movement**, mainly the United Liberation Movement of West Papua, which had previously called for such talks to be facilitated and observed internationally. In April, a group of lawyers asked the Supreme Court to review the legality of the 1969 referendum after which Indonesia annexed the Papua region and which several human rights organisations said did not meet the minimum standards of transparency, despite being organised and supervised by the United Nations.

## 2.3.4. Europe

### Russia and the Caucasus

| Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity, Territory<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed<br>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 around the ceasefire line improved significantly**, in keeping with developments at the end of 2018, and in contrast to previous years, with lower levels of tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to the ACLED database, in 2019 there were about 15 conflict-related deaths (down from about 50 the previous year) and several people injured. The victims, members of the security forces of both countries, were caused by violations of the ceasefire around the militarised Line of Contact. During the year, the Governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan committed to strengthening the ceasefire

and the direct communication mechanism adopted in 2018 to facilitate the prevention of incidents. However, there was no commitment yet to a practical arrangement for the expansion of the limited OSCE observer team monitoring the ceasefire. At some points during the year, there were increases in security incidents, such as in June, which led the co-mediators to urge the parties to refrain from provocative actions, including the use of snipers. In the midst of the arms race that still affects the region (military spending of 4.8% of GDP in 2018 in Armenia, 3.8% in 2017; 3.8% in Azerbaijan, the same as in 2017), both countries carried out military exercises, and levelled mutual criticism against one another. Within such exercises, in March Azerbaijan mobilised 10,000 troops, 500 tanks and 300 missile systems, among other military equipment, in large-scale exercises over five days, shortly before the March summit between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, which drew criticism from the Armenian Government.

On the other hand, political tension increased at times during visits to Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenian political officials, such as the trip in February by the Director of the National Security Service, who expressed support for new Armenian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh, a policy strongly criticised by Azerbaijan due to the difficulties that it creates for an eventual agreement on the status of the territory and for the return of the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh displaced by the war. The August visit of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian to Nagorno-Karabakh, in which Pashinian claimed that Nagorno-Karabakh was an Armenian region, also triggered criticism from Azerbaijan. For his part, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev stated in November that Nagorno-Karabakh had always been Azerbaijani territory and accused Armenia of genocide during the war. On the other hand, Nagorno-Karabakh held local elections in September, without international recognition. Relations between the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Government of Armenia also deteriorated.

| Russia (North Caucasus)[33] | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 1 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | System, Identity, Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Russian Federal Government,<br>Governments of the republics of<br>Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia,<br>Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition<br>groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS) |

**Summary:**
The North Caucasus is the scene of several hotbeds of tension, in the form of conflict between federal and local security forces, on the one hand, and jihadi insurgent actors, on the other. The violence is the result of a combination of factors, including the regionalisation and Islamisation

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33. In previous editions of this report, Russia (Dagestan) and Russia (Chechnya) socio-political crises were analysed separately.

of the insurgency in Chechnya (a republic that was the setting for two wars, between 1994-1996 and between 1999 and the beginning of the 21st century) as well as the impact of policies persecuting Salafist Islam adherents, serious human rights violations, deficits in governance and social unrest. Over the years, local armed structures were established in republics such as Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, connected regionally through the so-called Caucasus Emirate. From the end of 2014, several commanders in the North Caucasus proclaimed their loyalty to ISIS, breaking away from the Caucasus Emirate and establishing a Caucasian branch linked to ISIS (Vilayat Kavkaz). In addition, part of the insurgency moved to Syria and Iraq, joining various armed groups. The levels of violence have fluctuated in the various republics (being considered an armed conflict in the case of Dagestan between 2010 and 2017), while in the North Caucasus as a whole, armed violence has subsided in recent years. In addition to the armed violence, other flashpoints include serious human rights violations, especially against activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists, as well as disputes over borders, inter-ethnic tensions, rivalries for political power and criminal violence.

**The North Caucasus continued to be affected by multiple flashpoints, including armed conflict between the security forces and the ISIS-linked insurgency, with a decrease in fatalities compared to previous years**. Security forces carried out numerous counter-insurgency operations in the region and imposed counter-terrorism measures, while the insurgency perpetrated various attacks, including attacks against police posts. The death toll was around 30 between January and November, according to the independent website Caucasian Knot. Unlike in previous years, when Dagestan was the republic that recorded the highest number of deaths, in 2019 Kabardino-Balkaria was the most affected in terms of fatalities, with a dozen deaths, almost all of them members of the regional insurgency. It was followed by Dagestan, with a dozen insurgents killed; and Chechnya, with eight fatalities. Half were insurgents and half were members of the security forces. In other areas, such as Ingushetia and the Stavropol region, there were also deaths and people were injured. ISIS claimed responsibility for several attacks, including against several policemen in the Chechen capital in June and against a police post in July in the Achkhoi-Martan district of Chechnya, which resulted in several deaths and people injured. The Russian authorities arrested several people on charges of belonging to ISIS and planning attacks. In turn, a former Chechen commander from the second Chechen war, Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, was killed in Berlin in August. Sources close to the victim pointed to a connection between his death and the Russian security services. Furthermore, in November the head of Ingushetia's Centre for Combating Extremism was assassinated in Moscow, an attack that some media outlets attributed to a conflict between the victim and elements close to Sheikh Batal-Khadji, one of whose leaders was killed in 2018.

On the other hand, **the region continued to be affected by serious human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detentions and kidnappings, with new allegations of abuse emerging in 2019**. In March the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture condemned the widespread use of torture and ill-treatment against detainees in Chechnya. Similarly, the Russian organisation LGBT Network reported in January on arrests and torture by the Chechen authorities against gay men and lesbian women, with figures of 40 arrested and two people killed. In addition, the director of the Chechen branch of the human rights organisation Memorial, Oyub Titiyev, was released in June after 18 months in prison. He was sentenced in March to four years in prison on trumped-up charges denounced by human rights organisations. Furthermore, political and social tension increased around the 2018 agreement between Chechnya and Ingushetia to outline the border. Thousands of Ingush citizens protested in March, demanding a referendum on the agreement and the resignation of Ingush President Ynus-Bek Yevkurov, with several people injured in clashes with security forces, raids and arrests. Yevkurov resigned in June. Parallel negotiations between Chechnya and Dagestan for the demarcation of their border were also affected by tensions in Ingushetia and protests in Dagestan, and both authorities announced the suspension of the process in April. There were also social tensions in Dagestan over the protests in Meusisha against the construction of a new canal, with several people injured in clashes with the police and the federal security service. Moreover, the conflict situation in the North Caucasus took place against a general background of political and social tensions in Russia in 2019 surrounding the September local elections, with mass protests in July and August in Moscow and large-scale arrests.

## South-east Europe

| Serbia – Kosovo | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | = |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity, Government International[34] |
| **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

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

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.

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**Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo remained high, following the stalling of talks and with Serbia placing its army on combat alert along the border, while political instability increased in Kosovo**. In 2019, Kosovo maintained in force the application of 100% tariffs on the import of products from Serbia. This measure, taken in 2018 in protest against Serbia's campaign against the international recognition of Kosovo, triggered in late 2018 an increase in tensions between them, the suspension of negotiations, as well as the resignation of the Kosovo Serb mayors of the four Serb-majority towns in northern Kosovo, creating a power vacuum. The maintenance of tariffs in 2019 deepened the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia and between Kosovo and the Serbian areas of Kosovo. The Kosovar authorities called extraordinary municipal elections to be held in northern Kosovo on 19 May. The refusal of the Central Election Commission in April to validate the candidatures of the Kosovo Serb party "The Serb List" drew criticism from those affected and from the Government of Serbia, and the measure was eventually revoked. The Serb List obtained 90% of the votes in the four Kosovar municipalities with a Serbian majority. In July, Kosovo Serb businesses in the four municipalities went on a two-day strike to protest against the tariffs. In turn, Kosovar Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj dismissed Serbian Local Government Administration Minister Ivan Todosijevic in April after he described the Kosovar Albanian population as terrorists and accused them of filing false war crimes complaints.

*Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo remained high, against the backdrop of the cancelled bilateral talks and political instability in Kosovo*

Tensions between Kosovo and Serbia also increased following an operation in May by Kosovo police against smuggling and organised crime in several areas of northern Kosovo, which resulted in 29 arrests, including 19 local police and two officials from the UN mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, in which a dozen people, including ten civilians, were injured. In response, **the Government of Serbia claimed that the operation was designed to intimidate the Serbian population in northern Kosovo and that it constituted a threat to stability and peace**. **In addition, it ordered the Serbian Army troops along the border to place themselves on combat alert** to protect the Serbian population if tensions escalated. The Serbian

President warned that if there was an escalation of the conflict or an attack against the Serbian population, the Serbian state would be victorious. The Kosovar President urged the Kosovar Serb population to remain calm and support the police. For its part, the NATO mission in Kosovo, KFOR, called for calm and said it was closely monitoring the situation. The UN noted that the arrest of the two UNMIK officials (who were later released) did not respect their immunity and announced an investigation into the events. Tensions remained high in the following months. It was revealed that the Kosovo Police allegedly refused to allow entry into Kosovo by persons holding Serbian passports. Serbia's Defence Minister complained in July that the Kosovar authorities had prevented him from entering Kosovo. The Kosovar Government denied that there was ever any ban in place.

Political uncertainty also increased in Kosovo**. Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj resigned in July after being summoned by the Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office, bodies of the international judicial system of Kosovo, based in The Hague, which investigate crimes against humanity, war crimes** and other crimes committed in the period of the armed conflict, between 1998 and 2000, in relation to allegations contained in a Council of Europe report on crimes perpetrated by Kosovo Albanian KLA guerrillas. From 2018 until November 2019, the Specialist Prosecutor's Office had summoned around one hundred former combatants for interrogation, including Haradinaj. The coalition in Government rejected the appointment of a new prime minister, leading to the dissolution of Parliament and the calling of early elections in October. The Kosovo Albanian nationalist party Vetevendosje (Self-determination) won with 26% of the vote. Half of the polling stations in Kosovo were ordered to be recounted and more than 3,700 votes cast in Serbia were declared invalid. The results were a turning point in the political map of Kosovo, with the KDP being excluded from the Government for the first time since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.

## Western Europe

| Spain (Catalonia) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 1 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government of Spain, Government of Catalonia, political, social and judicial actors in Catalonia and Spain, Head of State |

**Summary:**
In its current phase the conflict over the status of Catalonia centres around the clash between, on the one hand, the

aspirations for Catalan independence held by a large section of population, including political and social actors, within Catalonia and, on the other hand, the defence by the Spanish State and another large section of population, including political and social actors, within both Spain and Catalonia of Spain's territorial integrity and –to varying degrees– their defence of national unity, Spanish national sovereignty and/ or the interpretation that the current regulatory framework prohibits Catalonia from exercising self-determination. Accordingly, the conflict is active at various levels, mainly between actors in Catalonia and Spain and within Catalonia, and also has international ramifications. There are different narratives and interpretations surrounding the origins and causes of the problem, as well as its evolution and possible solutions. Among other elements, the right to self-determination and the defence of Spain's territorial integrity have been invoked, appeals have been made to long-standing grievances in areas such as resources, competencies and recognition of the identity and nation, as well as the diverse range of aspirations within Catalonia and the limits of legality. The independence movement grew in political and social strength from 2012 onwards, two years after the Constitutional Court's ruling that restricted Catalonia's new Statute of Autonomy –which had been approved in 2005 by all the political forces of the Catalan Parliament (except the Popular Party), was restricted by the Spanish Congress and subsequently ratified in a Catalan referendum (2006) where it received 74% of the vote (49% voter turnout)– all against a backdrop of economic crisis, cuts in rights and public spending, and social upheaval. This was the beginning of what has been called the "sovereignty process", with political and social actions being undertaken by multiple actors with a view to exercising self-determination and achieving independence, who in turn were questioned and/or persecuted by other actors from political and judicial spheres in Catalonia and Spain. These actions included a popular consultation held on 9 October 2014, in which 2.3 million people participated and 80.76% of them voted in favour of Catalonia becoming an independent state. In the Catalan parliamentary elections of 2015, which was taken to be a plebiscite by the pro-independence parties, the latter obtained 47.74% of the votes and a parliamentary majority (72 of 135 seats). In 2017 tensions escalated following a succession of events, including the approval in the Catalan Parliament of the laws on the self-determination referendum and on the legal transition in an expedited procedure which the opposition denounced with claims that its rights and statutory and constitutional legality had been violated –leading to the majority of the opposition consequently abstaining from the vote; the holding of a referendum on 1 October (43% voter turnout, with 90% voting in favour of independence) which had previously been blocked by the Constitutional Court, and baton charges by police against peaceful participants, a thousand people injured and the closure of 14% of the polling stations, according to the Catalan government; the acceptance of the result in favour of independence and the suspension of independence by the Catalan President himself on 10 October, and a declaration of the creation of an independent republic on the same day by the pro-independence parties; the declaration of the creation of a Catalan republic and the start of a constitutional process approved by the Catalan Parliament on 27 October (70 votes in favour, 10 against, 2 abstentions and 53 absences); the application of article 155 of the Constitution, through which the State Government took control of the autonomous region of Catalonia; the preventive imprisonment and the commencement of a large-scale judicial process against Catalan social and political leaders, which culminated in October 2019 with heavy prison sentences. In recent years, there have also been other legal proceedings brought against

politicians, police officials and activists, in a trend that has seen the judicialisation of the political dispute in a context that has prompted some political leaders –including the then President of the Catalan government Carles Puigdemont– to leave Spain, many of whom have been living abroad ever since. Figures abroad, such as Puigdemont, have promoted the internationalisation of the conflict, including through the creation of the so-called Council for the Catalan Republic. The conflict has led to political tensions and the paralysis of the government, the polarisation of society and the media, as well as protests of various kinds. On the other hand, between 2018 and 2019 the Spanish and Catalan governments attempted to hold talks, which included the Pedralbes Declaration (2018), although they faced many obstacles.

**Tensions surrounding the dispute over the status of Catalonia increased, mainly due to the sentencing of pro-independence political and civil society leaders**, which widened the divide between State institutions, the Government and political parties at national level, on the one hand, and a large political and social section of the population in Catalonia, on the other. The crisis in 2019 was felt in various areas, including the judiciary, civil society, politics and the media in both Catalonia and Spain and, as in previous years, also had an international impact. In the legal sphere, the judicialisation of the dispute in previous years led to the handing down of a judgment in the so-called "trial of the sovereignty process", concerning the events that took place in Catalonia around the referendum date of 1 October, after the oral phase had been completed between February and June 2019. The Supreme Court handed down its judgment on 14 October, sentencing the two pro-independence civil society leaders Jordi Cuixart (President of Òmnium Cultural) and Jordi Sànchez (President of the Catalan National Assembly, ANC) as well as six members of the dismissed Catalan government who facilitated the consultation (Oriol Junqueras, Jordi Turull, Dolors Bassa, Raül Romeva, Joaquim Forn, Josep Rull) and the then President of the Parliament (Carme Forcadell) to between 9 and 13 years in prison and full disqualification from holding public office for the crimes of sedition –and in some cases also for embezzlement. Three former members of the Catalan government (Meritxell Borràs, Santi Vila and Carles Mundó) were issued fines for disobedience and were disqualified from holding public office for 1 year and 8 months. The ruling caused a shockwave within the independence movement and other sections of Catalan society who opposed the judicialisation of the dispute, which increased political and social tensions in the final quarter of the year. It triggered numerous protests in many Catalan towns, including a mass march to Barcelona airport on the same day of the ruling, organised by the Tsunami Democràtic platform – which caused the cancellation of 110 of the 780 flights scheduled that day, according to Aena– as well as mass marches lasting several days from various locations (Berga, Castelldefels, Girona, Tarragona, Tàrrega and Vic), all of which converged on Barcelona on 18 October in a mass protest on a day when some unions also called for a general strike in Catalonia. There were also several

nights of riots in the cities of Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona, with participants claiming various motives, according to press reports. Human rights organisations reported excessive use of force during police baton charges and other actions that contributed to increasing the tension, both by the National Police and the Mossos d'Esquadra (the regional police of Catalonia). The Ministry of the Interior put the number of people arrested in the first seven days of the protests at around 200, and the number of injured at 600, of whom –according to the same sources– 289 were police officers. Several people were seriously injured, including a young man who was run over by a Mossos d'Esquadra van and several civilians who lost the sight in one eye. 70 journalists were injured, 69% of them as a result of police actions, according to the media observatory Mèdia.cat. The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, expressed concern regarding numerous reports of attacks on journalists, by demonstrators and police officers, and regarding the insecurity faced by journalists covering the conflict, as well as the allegations of the disproportionate use of force and inappropriate use of riot gear. The Commissioner strongly condemned the violent attacks and acts of vandalism and at the same time urged the Spanish authorities to reconsider the use of rubber and foam bullets. In the final months of the year, new protests were held. Among them, in November, several thousand demonstrators who had been called to protest by Tsunami Democràtic cut off the AP-7 motorway in La Jonquera and blocked the border crossing with France for 24 hours, in rejection of the ruling and appealing to the international community to pressure the Spanish government to enter talks regarding the conflict in Catalonia. 20 people were arrested –19 of them by the French Gendarmerie– and subsequently released, with some being charged and handed cautions. Tsunami Democràtic also called for protests before and during the football match between the Barcelona and Real Madrid football clubs on 18 December in defence of "rights, freedom and self-determination" and urged the Spanish government to engage in talks.

In a public statement on 19 November, the international human rights NGO **Amnesty International expressed its concern regarding the definition of the crime of sedition in the Spanish Criminal Code, which it considered to be too general, as well as the loose interpretation of this crime by the Spanish Supreme Court, which according to Amnesty International entails a violation of the principle of legality** –contained in the European Convention on Human Rights– because it allows for the criminalisation of acts arising from the exercise of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. In the case of Sànchez and Cuixart, Amnesty International considered that the ruling excessively and disproportionately restricted their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and urged the Spanish authorities to release them and provide guarantees that would allow them to overturn their convictions. With regard to the former members of the Government and Parliament, it pointed out that

they may have committed a crime that is legitimately punishable due to the office they held, but that because of the vague definition of the crime with which they were charged and an overzealous interpretation, the ruling violated the principle of legality. It therefore urged the Spanish authorities to ensure that in the event that any legal appeals are filed by the convicted persons, the said authorities take due account of the breach of the principle of legality.

Other legal proceedings continued throughout the year. In this sense, the President of the Catalan government, Quim Torra, fought a trial against his disqualification from holding public office before the High Court of Justice of Catalonia, where he was accused of a crime of disobedience for not removing a banner bearing yellow ribbons –a symbol representing demands for the freedom of pro-independence prisoners– from the Palau de la Generalitat during the pre-election campaign, in defiance of an order of the Central Electoral Board. In November, Torra attended the first hearing of the trial. Furthermore, the Spanish National High Court set the date of January 2020 for the commencement of the trial of the Commissioner of the Mossos d'Esquadra, Josep Lluís Trapero; the ex-director of the Mossos d'Esquadra, Pere Soler; the ex-secretary general of Catalan Internal department, César Puig (who were all accused of the crime of rebellion); and autonomous police mayor Teresa Laplana (accused of sedition, due to her failure to prevent the referendum of 1 October and the protests before the Ministry of Economy on 20 and 21 September 2017). In turn, among other legal proceedings under way, the trial against the former members of the Parliament's Bureau and the former Member of Parliament Mireia Boya (which was scheduled to begin that month) was suspended in November. They face charges of disobedience for allowing the parliamentary processing of the laws, of 6 and 7 September 2017, on the referendum and on the legal transition. Joan Josep Nuet's diplomatic status after he was elected to Congress led the High Court of Justice of Catalonia to refer his case to the Supreme Court, while the Court of Justice of Catalonia retained its jurisdiction to rule on the rest of the defendants and ordered a new trial to be held in 2020.

As regards the international legal impact, the EU Court of Justice ruled in December that Oriol Junqueras, the pro-independence political leader and a candidate who was elected during the 2019 European Parliamentary elections in May (in pre-trial detention since November 2017) had immunity as an MEP from the date of the announcement of the results, therefore requiring his release. The Court noted, however, that it was the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to assess the effects of the immunity in other proceedings (in reference to the case against Junqueras for the 1 October referendum), with a ruling being issued from 14 October. The Supreme Court will decide how to implement the EU Court of Justice's ruling, which was expected by the beginning of 2020. In turn, hours after the European Court's ruling, in December the European Parliament

authorised the election of the former President of the Generalitat Carles Puigdemont and former regional Minister of Health Toni Comín, who were both elected as MEPs in the May elections (withdrawing the ban imposed on them since the reactivation of the Euro-order) and who will therefore take their seats in January 2020.

In the political sphere, in the framework of the negotiations concerning the investiture of a new government in Spain following the parliamentary elections of November 2019, the year ended with the expectation of an investiture agreement being signed between the ERC and PSOE parties, to be ratified during the first few days of January 2020, which would include the creation of a dialogue table between the governments and a popular consultation in Catalonia on the agreements reached at that dialogue table, according to reports at the end of December. As part of the agreement, through its abstention, ERC would facilitate the investiture of a coalition government between the PSOE and Podemos. For its part, JxCAT warned that this party did not feel that it was bound by the agreement between the PSOE and Podemos and accused the ERC of undermining the struggle for independence. As regards the talks between the Catalan and Spanish governments, both executives considered the talks to have stalled in February 2019 and levelled mutual accusations. On 20 December 2018, after a brief meeting between the Presidents of the Spanish and Catalan governments, Pedro Sánchez and Quim Torra, at the Palau de Pedralbes, both governments issued the so-called Pedralbes Declaration. According to the text, both governments agreed on the following: that there was a conflict over the future of Catalonia, that they both defended an effective dialogue that would convey a political proposal with broad support within Catalan society, that forums for dialogue should be promoted that would allow society's needs to be met and for progress to be made in providing a democratic answer to the demands of Catalonia's citizens (within the framework of legal certainty), and that the path of dialogue requires the effort of all institutions, political actors and citizens. The two governments differed in their assessment of the scope of the Declaration and its nuances.

The Declaration was preceded by months of rapprochements and disagreements between the two executives after the PSOE came to power in June 2018 following a vote of no-confidence against the Popular Party, supported by the pro-independence groups ERC and PDeCAT. In January 2019, several meetings took place at ministerial level, which were intended to move forward in the implementation of the Pedralbes Declaration, including the architecture of the talks themselves. The negotiations addressed the creation of a dialogue table involving political parties in order to tackle the most politicised issues, which would be complemented by the bilateral Generalitat-State Commission, enshrined in the Statute of Catalonia and reactivated on 1 August 2018 (having been suspended since July 2011). Disagreements arose between the two

governments over the make-up of the political parties' dialogue table that was to emerge from the Pedralbes Declaration. Even so, at the beginning of February the Spanish government accepted the inclusion of an intermediary to "faithfully report" the progress of the political parties' dialogue table, in reference to ERC and JxCAT's demand for a rapporteur. The discussions regarding this intermediary role and the talks between the governments as a whole, led to strong criticism from the Popular Party and the Citizens party, which described it as a betrayal of the unity of Spain and called for a demonstration against the talks to be held on Catalonia's future, which took place on 10 February and brought together 45,000 people, according to the police (200,000, according to the organisers).

In addition to pressure from political opposition parties, the talks were also influenced by the negotiations relating to the approval of the state budget (and the position of ERC and PDeCAT that the entire budget should be amended), as well as the situation surrounding the preventive detention of Catalan political and civil society leaders and the commencement of the oral hearing phase of the trial against them. Even before the demonstration was held, the Catalan and Spanish governments considered the negotiations to have failed. Spain's PSOE Government blamed the Catalan government for the suspension of the talks due to the latter's rejection of the framework proposed for them which, according to the Spanish government, had from the outset excluded the self-determination of Catalonia and the holding of a referendum outside the framework of the Constitution. The Government did not definitively end the talks, but insisted that the only possible framework for dialogue was to do so within the rule of law and according to the Spanish Constitution. For its part, the Catalan government accused the Spanish government of abandoning the talks and attributed it to pressure from right-leaning political parties. The Catalan government reiterated its position that the political parties' dialogue table should be held at the state level. It also accused the Spanish government of lacking the courage to put the mechanisms for talks into practice, and of rushing to close a deal that was not yet ready. It noted that they would continue to sit at the negotiating table. On the other hand, during the year there was only one meeting (in February) of the dialogue table of Catalan parties, which was called for the first time in November 2018 by the President of Catalonia as a parallel forum to the negotiations between the Spanish and Catalan governments –in which the PP, Ciutadans and the CUP refused to participate. At the February meeting of this forum for dialogue, the Catalan President made public the 21-point document that he had handed over to the Spanish President at the brief meeting between the two in December 2018. Among other points, the document called for the recognition of the right to self-determination of the people of Catalonia and its effective implementation, international mediation and an end to threats to apply Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, among other matters.

## 2.3.5. Middle East

### Mashreq

| Egypt | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | = |
| **Type:** | Government<br>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.

The situation in Egypt continued to be characterised by the **consolidation of the shift towards authoritarianism at the hands of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's Government and the persistent persecution and repression of dissident voices**, in a context also marked by the state of emergency that has been in force in the country since 2017 due to the conflict in the Sinai Peninsula.[35] During 2019, the Government promoted certain controversial constitutional changes that were ratified in April in a referendum denounced by various voices due to a lack of guarantees and accusations of fraud. **The legal changes introduced mean that al-Sisi can extend his current mandate from four to six years and opt for another two terms, allowing him to remain in power until 2034**. In addition, the constitutional reform allowed al-Sisi to appoint a number of authorities and senior members of the judiciary, thereby reducing the scope for independence of the judiciary and extending the power of the military in Egyptian political life. During the year, the Government also promoted changes in the controversial law governing the activity of NGOs in the country, but the amendments were considered cosmetic among sectors of civil society. International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the new regulations maintain most of the restrictions on civil society organizations. As an example, the law prohibits NGOs from conducting research or opinion polls without Government authorisation and from engaging in activities perceived as "political" or "harmful to national security", and it allows for strict monitoring of NGOs by security forces.

At the same time, the climate of harassment and persecution of critical and dissident voices, including academics, journalists, human rights defenders and activists, continued in 2019. In the first months of the year, there were arrests of demonstrators who mobilised to denounce the negligence of the authorities after a train accident in which about twenty people died. On the eve of the referendum on the reform of the Constitution, at least 160 activists who had questioned the amendments were also arrested, according to HRW. In a regional context marked by mass protests in countries such as Sudan or Algeria, al-Sisi publicly warned the Egyptian population about the risks of the protests. During the second half of the year, the mass arrests intensified after an Egyptian businessman based in Spain, Mohamed Ali, posted on social networks criticising al-Sisi for mismanagement and abuse of public resources. The accusations (denied by the President in a televised speech) encouraged mass anti-government protests in several cities in the country, including Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta and Suez, and a crackdown response by the security forces. According to various sources, **between September and December more than 4,000 people had been arrested**. Throughout the year, arrests were also made of people accused of supporting, financing or belonging to terrorist groups. An **extensive use of the death penalty during mass trials on charges allegedly linked to political violence** was also denounced. Hundreds of people have reportedly been sentenced to death in military and civilian trials, according to HRW. During the year, at least 15 people arrested on political charges were executed, according to the Egyptian Front for Human Rights. UN experts also warned of arbitrary executions in the country, with evidence of confessions being given under torture or unfair trials in at least nine cases. During 2019, **the alarm continued to sound regarding the situation of the detainees, including former President and Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Mursi, who died in prison in June**. UN experts indicated that the conditions of his detention may have led to the death of the Islamist leader. In addition, Egypt remained one of the most dangerous countries for journalists (some 30 reporters remained under arrest at the end of 2019, some accused of spreading fake news) and the authorities continued their policy of blocking news, political or human rights websites –more than 600 sites have reportedly been closed since 2017, according to HRW. It is also worth mentioning that harassment of women's rights activists (including travel bans outside the country) and the

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35. See summary on Egypt (Sinai) in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

LGTBI community continued (transgender people were arrested and charged with terrorism, among other cases).

| Iraq | |
|------|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Internationalised, Government Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, political and social opposition, Iran, USA |

**Summary:**

The United States-led international invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the shaping of a new political system. The new system set up at Washington's behest divided the Government along sectarian lines. Against this backdrop, in recent years there has been an increase in feelings of alienation and frustration with a ruling class perceived as corrupt and motivated by personal and group interests, at the expense of citizens' quality of life. Thus, since 2015, there has been a succession of mass demonstrations (mainly led by young people) denouncing the endemic corruption, governance deficits, serious problems in the provision of services, unemployment and lack of future prospects. In 2019, mass anti-government protests and a severe crackdown by the security forces exposed the serious political crisis gripping the country, the lack of legitimacy of its authorities, and misgivings concerning the influence of external actors (and in particular Iran's growing prominence in the region) in Iraqi affairs.

During 2019 **Iraq was the scene of serious tensions as a result of mass protests against the political system, corruption, nepotism and economic mismanagement by the ruling class. Protests were harshly repressed, resulting in the deaths of more than 400 people and more than 20,000 people injured**. Although the country has seen periodic popular protests since 2015, the events linked to last year's demonstrations were considered by some analysts to be the most serious since the United States invasion of the country in 2003. The protests (mostly peaceful and at times involving up to 200,000 people) were also more sustained and involved a diverse range of groups, including the unemployed, students, civil society activists and tribe members. The situation highlighted the fragility and lack of legitimacy of the system of Government established after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, discontent with a model of power based on sectarian divisions and irritation at Iran's growing influence in some sectors of the Iraqi population, including among Shiites. Although there were protests against corruption that led to clashes with the security forces in the south of the country in the first months of the year (Najaf in May and Basra in June) the most significant events were concentrated in the second half

*Iraq was the scene of serious tensions as a result of mass protests against the political system, corruption, nepotism and economic mismanagement by the ruling class that were harshly repressed, resulting in the deaths of more than 400 people*

of the year. Anti-government demonstrations intensified in early October and the trigger was reportedly the decision by Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi to demote a popular general, considered by some sectors to be a hero for his role in the fight against ISIS. The fact that the general belonged to the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) and the CTS' competitive relationship with the Hashd al-Shaabi militia conglomerate (the most powerful of which are linked to Iran) was interpreted by some sectors as a surrender to the Hashd paramilitary groups.

The protests quickly expanded their demands and focused their criticism on the corruption, lack of jobs and serious problems in public services. **Protests in Baghdad and in various cities in the south of the country (which later expanded to other areas in the north and centre of the country) were subject to a harsh crackdown by security forces, who used tear gas and firearms to disperse them**. Demonstrators also attacked Shiite Islamist party headquarters and paramilitary groups. In the first week of protests alone, 149 protesters and eight members of the security forces were killed. The harsh response by the authorities did not quash the movement, nor did the package of measures announced by the Mahdi Government (creation of jobs, punishment of corrupt officials, aid to the poorest population, changes in the cabinet), and the protests continued in the following weeks. Against this backdrop, the highest Shiite authority in the country, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (who usually speaks only in situations of serious crisis) denounced the crackdown and demanded an investigation into the events, while Shiite political leader and cleric Moqtada al-Sadr expressed his support for the protestors and demanded the resignation of the Government. Press reports said the top leader of Iran's al-Quds Revolutionary Guard unit, Qassem Soleimani, travelled to Baghdad in November to secure an agreement that would allow the Government to continue. In the middle of that month, meanwhile, the UN mission in Iraq (UNAMI) proposed a roadmap for resolving the crisis (publicly supported by al-Sistani) that included such issues as an immediate end to the violence, the release of detainees, an investigation into the disappearance and excessive use of force against demonstrators, and electoral reforms, among other measures.[36]

At the end of November, demonstrators set fire to the Iranian consulate in Najaf, highlighting Tehran's critical influence in Iraq among some of the sectors protesting, including in Shiite-majority areas. The security forces and militia responded strongly, killing 44 people in Najaf and Nassiriya. Following these events, al-Sistani asked Parliament to withdraw its support for Mahdi. The Prime Minister resigned and by the end of

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36. See the summary on the Middle East in Escola de Cutura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Analysis of Trends and Scenarios*, Icaria: Barcelona, 2020.

the year the political forces had not managed to agree on the formation of a new Government. In December, protests continued, alongside reports of attacks and deaths of demonstrators (some of them by stabbing) allegedly at the hands of pro-Iranian militia supporters or collaborators of state forces. The UNAMI warned of credible allegations of killings, abductions and arbitrary detentions by "militias", "third parties", "armed groups" or "saboteurs" and reported continuing and severe human rights abuses. According to the UNAMI's assessment, from 1 October to 9 December, violence during the protests had caused the deaths of 424 people and injured some 8,758, including members of the security forces, although the latter figure climbs to almost 20,000 if we include those affected by injuries caused by gas inhalation, for example. The UNAMI reported that, unlike in the past, the Iraqi authorities did not allow access to official hospital statistics on those affected by the demonstrations or visits to interview victims. Several analysts attempted to provide keys to understanding the dynamics of the protest movement in Iraq and the difficulties for a rapid solution to the crisis in the country. Among them, the widespread mistrust of the political class and democratic mechanisms (partly due to experiences of electoral fraud, nepotism, cronyism and the use of parties for personal projects, among other factors) was mentioned; the generational element (most of the protesters are under 30 years old, who represent 67% of the population and are experiencing growing frustration with the country's governance failures); the short term response of the authorities (linked to their inability to offer an attractive future project); and the difficulties for the protest movement to channel its demands for deep structural changes in a political system that they perceive as corrupt and incapable of improving the living conditions of the population despite the country's oil wealth. Against this backdrop, **the escalation of hostilities between Washington and Tehran at the end of the year, which materialised in a series of violent events in Iraq and the death of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a United States attack in Baghdad, threatened to further destabilise the internal scenario in Iraq.**[37]

| Israel – Syria, Lebanon | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | System, Resources, Territory<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah<br>(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 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.

In line with what was observed the previous year, the historical international socio-political crisis involving Israel, Syria and Lebanon –with Iran becoming progressively more directly implicated– led to various incidents that allegedly cost the lives of almost one hundred people (94 deaths according to non-official accounts). **Most of the acts of violence linked to this socio-political crisis occurred on Syrian territory and affected the Golan Heights area (occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war) but also other areas, such as Quneitra, Deir al-Zour, Aleppo, Hama and even Damascus**. Thus, in January, Israeli air strikes in the south of the Syrian capital on facilities that allegedly belonged to Iran and related militias were followed, in apparent retaliation, by attacks on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights area. Israeli forces responded with a new attack on the forces of al-Quds (the Iranian military unit in charge of overseas operations) which reportedly killed 12 people. Despite Russian warnings to Israel about its operations in Syria, Israeli forces again attacked a Hezbollah observation post in Quneitra (south) in February and launched an air operation against an alleged Iranian weapons depot in Aleppo in March, reportedly killing several Iraqi and Iranian fighters. In April, Israeli attacks affected the Syrian regime's infrastructure in Hama, while in May, Damascus reported the interception of Israeli missiles launched from the Golan Heights area that were intended to hit Iranian targets in the Syrian capital. The summer months saw the bloodiest incidents: Israeli air strikes against Syrian pro-Government forces, Iranian and Hezbollah assets in the Golan Heights area, Homs and Damascus between June and July reportedly killed 35 people, including at least seven civilians. In September, an alleged Israeli attack in the east near the Iraqi border reportedly killed a further 18 Iranian and Iraqi fighters. In November, after intercepting four rockets fired from the Golan Heights into Israel, Israeli forces launched an offensive against Syrian and Iranian targets that reportedly killed 23 more people. In December, two other incidents against pro-Iranian militias in Syria's Deir al-Zour province left 10 people dead, in acts that Hezbollah blamed on Israel. During the year, there were reports of further Israeli offensives aimed at preventing drone attacks from Syria on Israeli territory.

The incidents linked to this tension also affected Lebanese territory. **The action that caused the greatest alarm in 2019 was the Israeli offensive against Hezbollah**

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37. See the summary on Iraq in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

in Beirut in August. **Two Israeli drones launched an offensive against Hezbollah positions in the area of Dahiyah, a stronghold of the Shiite group to the south of the Lebanese capital**. A day later, another Israeli offensive was reported in eastern Lebanon against the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an organisation also supported by Iran. The strike on Beirut was declared by the Lebanese authorities to be a "declaration of war" (in the words of the Lebanese President) as well as the most serious operation since the war in 2006, and they called on the international community to denounce the flagrant violation of the country's sovereignty. The Hezbollah leader, meanwhile, noted that this hostile action called into question the terms that had been in force since 2006. Indeed, in September, the first artillery exchanges in years took place between Israel and Hezbollah, although no casualties were recorded. **During 2019 the parties also exchanged threatening statements. For example, the Hezbollah leader warned of the possession of numerous missiles with the capacity to strike Israel, while senior Israeli military officials stressed that in a future war no distinction should be made between the Lebanese Government and Hezbollah.** In this sense, it should be noted that after the formation of the new Lebanese Government at the beginning of the year, the Lebanese authorities issued a declaration claiming the right of the Lebanese to resist the Israeli occupation and aggression, in what was considered a cover for Hezbollah's military structures.

It should be added that successive UN reports on UNIFIL operations and the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) noted the systematic violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel and reported on Israeli actions to close tunnels across the so-called Blue Line, among other incidents. While no progress was made on the border demarcations, certain communications were held to resolve the maritime boundary disputes between Lebanon and Israel, at the behest of the United States. Finally, it should be noted that the dynamics of this tension during 2019 were also influenced by other stances taken by Washington, in particular the decree signed in March by the Trump Administration recognising Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Syria and Lebanon rejected the measure and United Nations stated that the United States declaration did not change the status of the Golan Heights.

| Lebanon | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government, System Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition, armed groups ISIS and Jabhat al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), Saraya Ahl al-Sham |

**Summary:**
The assassination of the Lebanese prime minister, Rafiq Hariri, in February 2005 sparked the so-called "Cedar Revolution" which, following mass demonstrations, forced the withdrawal of the Syrian Armed Forces (present in the country for three decades), meeting the demands of Security Council resolution 1559, promoted by the USA and France in September 2004. The stand-off between opponents of Syria's influence (led by Hariri's son, who blamed the Syrian regime for the assassination) and sectors more closely linked to Syria, such as Hezbollah, triggered a political, social and institutional crisis influenced by religious divisions. In a climate of persistent internal political division, the armed conflict that broke out in Syria in 2011 has led to an escalation of the tension between Lebanese political and social sectors and to an increase in violence in the country.

Unlike previous years when the tensions were mainly determined by the influence of the armed conflict in neighbouring Syria and in particular by acts of violence in border areas, **during 2019 the situation in Lebanon was particularly marked by mass anti-government protests which intensified in the second half of the year**. 2019 began with the announcement by Prime Minister Saad Hariri of the formation of a new Government of national unity after a nine-month suspension following the parliamentary elections. After the approval of the new Government by the Parliament in February, attention focused on economic reforms and the new Government's budget proposal, which triggered the first protests against the austerity measures in May. Since then, protests by military veterans and civil servants, among other groups, followed, and clashes between the demonstrators and the security forces occurred. **The protests intensified in late September and took on a mass dimension in October after Hariri announced a tax on the use of the WhatsApp social network as part of his Government's austerity package. The protests (considered the largest in the last decade) began in Beirut, but spread throughout the country**, with complaints of corruption and economic mismanagement by the ruling class and demanding the resignation of the Government. Demonstrators occupied public places to hold their debates and denounced the confessional political system prevailing in the country. Some analysts highlighted as characteristic elements of these protests their mass and decentralised nature, the support for the demonstrations throughout all regions and communities, the fact that the protests transcended religious divides, among other elements.[38] The role of women in the movement was also notable.[39]

During the protests, several incidents occurred that resulted in the deaths of five people. Among them were two Syrian refugees who died in a building that caught fire during the protests, two people who were shot by the bodyguards of a parliamentarian who tried to join the protests and was attacked by the demonstrators, and another who was shot by a soldier who was trying to disperse the protestors. At the same time, dozens of people were injured in various clashes between the police and demonstrators, between demonstrators

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38. Anis Chérif-Alami, "Twenty Days of Lebanese Protests: Between Continuity, Innovation and Uncertainty", *Arab Reform Initiative*, 6 November 2019.
39. See Chapter 3 (Gender, Peace and Security)

and supporters of President Michel Aoun, between demonstrators and supporters of Hezbollah and its allied group Amal, and between members of these two organisations and the Christian party Lebanese Forces. It should be noted that the Hezbollah leader initially supported the protests, but then rejected the Government's demands for his resignation and blamed the protests on outside interference. The same speech was made by the Iranian authorities after the outbreak of protests in that country and the convergence of intense protests in Lebanon and Iraq during the last quarter of 2019.[39] Anti-government protests forced Hariri to resign at the end of October. The political factions negotiated for weeks until they agreed on the appointment of former education minister Hassan Diab as the new prime minister. Diab took office in mid-December and promised to form a Government of technocrats within six weeks, but protests (including calls for the new prime minister's resignation) continued. Political uncertainty persisted at the close of 2019, in the midst of a severe economic crisis, the worst in the country since the civil war (1975-1990), according to analysts. A number of other significant events during the year should be highlighted. These include two incidents in June: an attack by an alleged "lone wolf" from the armed group ISIS, which left five people dead in Tripoli; and the attack on a minister's convoy outside Beirut by two rival Druze factions, which left two dead and led to several weeks of cabinet paralysis. In this regard, it should be mentioned that UN reports on the situation in Lebanon noted the arrests of dozens of people linked to ISIS and the former al-Nusra Front in 2019 and also stressed that no tangible progress has been observed in dismantling and disarming Lebanese militias, as provided for in the Taif Agreements (1989) and UN Security Council Resolution 1554 (2004).

## The Gulf

| Iran | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Government<br>Internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, social and political opposition |

**Summary:**
This tension is framed within a political context that is marked by the decades-long polarisation between the conservative and reformist sectors in the country, and by the key role of religious authorities and armed forces – especially the Republican Guard– in Iran's power politics. Internal tensions rose towards the middle of 2009 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in elections that

were reported to be fraudulent by the opposition and that fueled the largest popular protests in the country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The end of Ahmadinejad's two consecutive mandates and the election of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani in 2013 seem to have started a new stage in the country, giving rise to expectations regarding a possible decrease in the internal political tension and an eventual change in the relations between Iran and the outer world. However, internal tensions have persisted.

During 2019, **Iran experienced the greatest internal upheaval of the last decade, after mass protests led to a harsh crackdown by the security forces that resulted in more than 300 deaths**. Protests against a rise in fuel prices began in mid-November and by the end of the year there were 304 deaths, according to a report released by Amnesty International in mid-December. On 15 November, the Government announced a surprise 50% increase in the price of fuel, triggering mass demonstrations in various cities in Iran, at which some 200,000 people participated, according to official figures, and which involved road blocks and attacks on shops and banks, among other actions. The regime responded with an almost total blackout of the internet and with a harsh crackdown, which resulted in numerous deaths in a matter of days. The media reported that in one location alone, in Mahshahr (north-west), around 100 people were killed (including many of the area's Arab minority) after security forces fired directly at the demonstrators. **The United Nations denounced violations of human rights and international standards on the use of force, warned of the lack of transparency regarding the victims of the crackdown and expressed concern about the, at least, 7,000 people arrested** in 28 of Iran's 31 provinces since mid-November. Warnings were issued regarding possible physical abuse, violations of due process, forced confessions and the possibility that many of those detained may face charges and penalties punishable by death in Iran. Amnesty International also reported intimidation, threats and even extortion of the victims' families.

*Mass protests in Iran from November onwards led to a very harsh crackdown by security forces, with more than 300 people killed*

Various analysts highlighted the regime's harsh response to the protests, employing greater force than in other recent episodes: some 70 people died during the protests of the so-called Green Movement against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009 and some two dozen died in the protests against the country's economic situation between December 2017 and January 2018. **The Iranian authorities denounced the recent protests as a result of a conspiracy by foreign enemies**, highlighting the coordination of some of the attacks on key infrastructure (including ports, silos and refineries), considered unusual in the modus operandi of

39. See the summaries on Iraq and Iran in this chapter.
40. See the summaries on Iran – United States, Israel and Israel–Syria–Lebanon in this chapter and the summary on Yemen (Houthis) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).

protests in the country. The reaction of the Iranian regime therefore falls within the general climate of geostrategic struggles and international and regional socio-political crises led by Tehran, which have materialised in various indirect clashes.[41] In this sense, the Iranian authorities also underlined the fact that the protests and upheavals coincided with those in Iraq and Lebanon in 2019 (countries where Tehran is gaining increasing prominence), feeding suspicions that this was an orchestrated campaign to destabilise the Iranian area of influence.[42] Some analysts pointed out that while external intervention in the turmoil in Iran cannot be ruled out, there has for years been a sense of frustration over a political system that perceives dissent as treason and widespread social concern over the country's economic situation, which has high inflation and unemployment problems. Economic conditions have deteriorated in the last year, especially since the decision of the United States Government to intensify its policy of sanctions against the Iranian regime. In this context, some analysts have also warned of the consequences of the repressive policies in provinces that are home to minorities such as Arabs and Kurds. Others drew attention to the fact that Iran is in a pre-election phase, with legislative and presidential elections scheduled for February 2020 and 2021, respectively.

| Iran (north-west) | |
| --- | --- |
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↓ |
| **Type:** | Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, armed groups PJAK and KDPI, Komala, KDP, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) |

**Summary:**
Despite the heterogeneous and multiethnic 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. In 2011, the PJAK and the Iranian Government reportedly agreed on a ceasefire that would commit the armed group to cease its attacks and the authorities to suspend the execution of Kurdish prisoners, but hostilities and low-level clashes continued.

Reports of the conflict between Iran and Kurdish groups operating in the north-west of the country and in the border area with Iraq pointed to a relative decline in levels of violence compared to the previous year. **While some 60 people were killed in 2018, the figures for 2019 indicate that the various acts of violence have left around 10 to 15 people dead, according to different assessments based on press reports.** It should be noted that the incidents were mainly concentrated in the summer months and that the death tolls were sometimes ambiguous or contradictory. In July, official press reports indicated that Iranian forces had killed two militants in the Chaldoran area (Western Azerbaijan province). Although the group to which they belonged was not identified, incidents involving the Kurdish armed group the PJAK and Iranian forces are common in the area. A week later, an armed attack on a military vehicle had killed three members of the Revolutionary Guard in the town of Piranshahr (Western Azerbaijan province). Days later, in apparent retaliation for this latest ambush, an operation took place in the border area that included the use of rockets, drones and artillery fire. Official Iranian sources reported that a large number of militants had been executed or injured there. In August, the PJAK acknowledged that four of its fighters had died in skirmishes with Iranian forces between 8 and 11 July in Kermanshan province. One Iranian soldier was reportedly killed in these clashes and another was reportedly killed in further hostilities in the area at the end of July. Against this backdrop, the Iranian authorities issued warnings to the Kurdistan Regional Government about the use of its territory by armed groups as a base, training centre and space from which to launch attacks on Iran.

In parallel, according to press reports, during 2019 Kurdish opposition groups and representatives of the Iranian Government are said to have held a series of secret meetings in Oslo in what could be a first step towards identifying terms for negotiations. The liaisons allegedly involved representatives of two branches of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan (a third, communist, Komala faction did not take part in the initiative) and two rival factions of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). According to reports, the meetings in Oslo took place in May, June and August as part of an initiative being facilitated by the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF). Some analysts highlighted that Tehran would seek to dissuade Kurdish sectors from an escalation in Iran, within a geopolitical context of growing socio-political crises and in which it is suspected that the Kurdish insurgency is receiving aid from Saudi Arabia and the United States.

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41. See the summaries on Iran – USA, Israel and Israel–Syria–Lebanon in this chapter and the summary on Yemen (Houthis) in Chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts).
42. See summaries on Iraq and Lebanon in this chapter.

| Iran (Sistan Balochistan) | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 2 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | Identity, Self-government<br>Internationalised internal |
| **Main parties:** | Government, Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran), Jundallah (Soldiers of God / People's Resistance Movement), Harakat Ansar Iran, Jaish al-Adl, Pakistan |

**Summary:**

Sistan-Balochistan is an Iranian province bordering with Afghanistan and Pakistan –the Baloch population lives on both sides of the border– and is of Sunni majority, contrasting with the rest of the country, where the Shiite arm of Islam is predominant. The zone is characterised by high poverty levels and is the scene of smuggling routes and drug trafficking. Since 2005 the group Jundallah (Soldiers of God) has led an insurgence campaign in the region. The organisation, which also calls itself the People's Resistance Movement, was established in 2002 and denounces Tehran's sectarian persecution. Jundallah states that its aim is to defend the rights, culture and religion of the Baloch people and denies having any ties with abroad, as the Iranian Government accuses it of having with the US, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and with the al-Qaeda network. In view of the possibility of destabilization in the region, Tehran has strengthened its control mechanisms and has sentenced dozens of Jundallah militants to death. The actions of the armed group have dropped since 2010 after its leader was captured and executed, but new armed groups with a similar agenda to Jundallah's, including Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), have continued to operate in the area, with sporadic clashes with the security forces.

Tensions between Iranian security forces and insurgent groups in Sistan and Baluchestan Province continued to cause periodic violence in 2019, with more deaths than in the previous year. **The region was the scene of a particularly bloody episode in February earlier this year, when a suicide attack killed 27 members of the Revolutionary Guard and injured 13 others**. Responsibility for the offensive, the bloodiest in years, was claimed by the armed group Jaish al-Adl or Army of Justice. Previously, in January, another incident involving a bomb disposal squad in the provincial capital, Zahedan, left three military personnel injured (a second device exploded while they were trying to neutralise the first). After the events of February, the Iranian Government threatened revenge, accused the perpetrators of being mercenaries attack and insisted on linking the activities of insurgent groups in the country with support from foreign powers. Iranian officials pointed mainly to the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel and noted that the attack occurred on the same day that the United States Government was holding a conference on the Middle East in Poland involving 60 countries and focusing on discussing ways to intensify pressure on Iran. In the following months and after a period of tensions and mutual accusations

of successive armed attacks in the border area, **Iran and Pakistan announced in April the formation of a joint rapid reaction force to act against insurgent militias operating in the area**. In March, Tehran had called on Islamabad to act decisively to neutralise the activity of insurgent groups responsible for offensives in Iran. According to reports, the Iranian Government identified three Pakistani citizens, including the suicide bomber, among the perpetrators of the February attack. In April, following an attack on a bus that left 14 people dead in Pakistan's Balochistan province by a new armed Baloch group (Balochi Raji Aajori Saangar or BRAS), the Government of Islamabad claimed to have evidence that the organisation had training camps on Iranian territory. In the middle of the year, a new act of violence in the Saravan area left another two military personnel dead, one a member of the Revolutionary Guard and another a member of the Basij militia.

| Iran – USA, Israel[43] | |
|---|---|
| **Intensity:** | 3 |
| **Trend:** | ↑ |
| **Type:** | System, Government<br>International |
| **Main parties:** | Iran, USA, Israel |

**Summary:**

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979 that overthrew the regime of Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi (an ally of Washington) and proclaimed Ayatollah Khomeini as the country's Supreme leader, relations between the US, Israel and Iran have been tense. The international pressure on Iran became stronger in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the George W. Bush Administration declared Iran, together with Iraq and North Korea as the "axis of evil" and as an enemy State due to its alleged ties with terrorism. In this context, Iran's nuclear programme has been one of the issues that have generated most concern in the West, which is suspicious of its military purposes. Thus, Iran's nuclear programme has developed alongside the approval of international sanctions and threats of using force, especially by Israel. Iran's approach to the conflict during the two consecutive mandates of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) did not contribute to ease tensions. The rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani, in turn, has generated high hopes of a turn in Iran's foreign relations, especially after the signing of an agreement on nuclear issues at the end of 2013. However, the rise to power of moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani has raised expectations about a turning point in Iran's foreign relations, especially after negotiations began on the Iranian nuclear programme in late 2013 and after a related agreement was signed in mid-2015. In recent years, the withdrawal of the United States from the Iran deal in 2018 and the intensification of its sanctions policy, the progressive distancing of Iran from the commitments made in the deal and a chaotic regional backdrop have worsened tensions and made it difficult to find a way out of this dispute.

Following the escalation of tension in 2018 due to the United States' decision to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, signed in 2015), the situation worsened

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

significantly in 2019. **The year saw an extension of the policy of unilateral sanctions against Iran by the United States, a progressive distancing of Tehran from some of the commitments undertaken in the framework of the deal, and a series of incidents in the Middle East that led to a volatile scenario dangerously conducive to military escalation**. During the year the Iranian regime attempted to put pressure on the countries that remain loyal to the deal, known as the P4+1 (France, United Kingdom, China, Russia and Germany) to obtain measures that would allow them to alleviate the economic sanctions imposed by Washington. Tehran issued a 60-day ultimatum in May and threatened to increase uranium enrichment. In July it became known that Iran had exceeded the reserves of enriched uranium allowed by the JCPOA. Tehran issued a new ultimatum, warning of further violations of the deal. These threats became a reality in the following months with the lifting of the restrictions on nuclear research and development and activation of the centrifuges at the Fordow plant (south of Tehran). In this context, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised the alarm in November, reporting that the country had accumulated more heavy water than the limit foreseen in the deal. The EU and the European countries involved in the agreement rejected Iran's successive ultimatums and at the end of the year warned of the possibility of activating the dispute resolution mechanism provided for in the JCPOA, which could lead to new sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Iran warned that if this mechanism were to be put into action it would reconsider its commitments to the UN on nuclear issues.[44]

In parallel, throughout 2019 the United States extended sanctions against the Islamic Republic, including against its supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, and in April it designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation. The measure was countered by Tehran, which blacklisted the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) for the Middle East and Central Asia. Discussions and tensions surrounding the implementation of the deal on Iran's nuclear programme were affected by the turbulent regional backdrop and by numerous incidents, particularly in the Gulf sea. In May, four ships were attacked off the coast of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (two Saudi, one Norwegian and one UAE), for which nobody claimed responsibility, and a drone attack was carried out on Saudi territory against oil facilities for which the Yemeni armed group Houthis claimed responsibility, leading to accusations against Iran. In June, alarms were raised over the attack on two oil tankers (one Japanese and one Norwegian)

*During 2019, tensions linked to the Iranian nuclear programme escalated due to the United States sanctions policy against Iran, the progressive distancing of Tehran from commitments made in the deal on its nuclear activities and a series of acts of violence in the Middle East*

in the Gulf of Oman and the shooting down of a United States drone, which the United States attributed to Iran. Tehran denied responsibility in the first incident and claimed that the United States aircraft had violated its airspace in the second. **The media then reported that the President of the United States had approved military attacks against Iran in response to the shooting down of the drone, but that he retracted his decision hours later**. Donald Trump later explained his decision by the disproportionate impact the US military strike would have had. In July, another drone was reportedly shot down, this time Iranian, by the United States. **One of the most significant events occurred in September, when the oil facilities operated by the Saudi state company Aramco in Abqaiq and Khurais (Eastern Province) were seriously damaged by a missile and drone attack, temporarily forcing the suspension of 50% of Saudi oil production. Although the Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack, the United States, Saudi Arabia and the European E3 countries (Germany, France and the United Kingdom) held Iran responsible for the aggression**. Tehran denied any link to the attacks and threatened mass retaliation in the event of an offensive. In December, a new escalation of violence between Washington and Tehran, which materialised in a series of violent events in Iraq and a United States air strike that resulted in the death of the top Iranian general, Qassem Suleimani, in the first days of January 2020, sounded further alarms about the evolution of this conflict.[45]

It should be noted that throughout 2019 the United States also announced a greater deployment of forces in the Middle East (including air forces, naval forces and anti-missile defence systems) on the grounds of a greater perception of threat by Iran, and also promoted a new maritime security scheme for the area, which was joined by the United Kingdom, Australia and Bahrain. Iran launched its own maritime security initiative for the area in September, promised to strengthen regional ties and held meetings with the UAE on maritime affairs. In this context of growing tensions, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) published a study in which it highlighted that the balance in terms of conventional military forces is favourable to the United States and its allies in the region, but that the effective balance of forces is in favour of Iran due to its capacity to resort to third party non-state armed actors in several countries in the area. The IISS stresses that through this policy Iran has avoided a direct conflict with its adversaries and that its capacity to mobilise different militias would permit it to raise a force of some 200,000 troops.

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44. See the summary on Iran (nuclear) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020: Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Icaria: Barcelona, 2020.
45. See the summary on Iraq in chapter 1 (Armed Conflicts)