Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**

Countries with socio-political crises

2. Socio-political crises

- There were 95 socio-political crises around the world in 2020. The largest number of them were concentrated in Africa (38 cases), followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12) and Latin America and Europa (10 cases in each region).
- The exceptional action taken by the government of Nigeria to stop the advance of COVID-19, together with the excessive use of force by the security forces, sparked widespread social protests.
- In several African countries, political crises worsened due to the tensions generated by elections or constitutional reforms that were marked by political repression against the opposition (Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and others).
- In Western Sahara, after an incursion by Moroccan troops in the Guerguerat area, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war.
- The US Government removed Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.
- In Central America, there were significant drops in the number of murders.
- The government of Venezuela announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup.
- On the Korean peninsula, concerns mounted about North Korea's weapons programme and inter-Korean relations seriously deteriorated.
- The crisis between India and China worsened, leading to the first deadly clash in 45 years, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers.
- The crisis in India persisted due to the approval of the Citizenship Act in 2019 and Hindu extremist groups and supporters of the BJP attacked Muslims, triggering violent clashes in which 53 people died.
- A serious crisis broke out in Belarus with massive anti-government protests against the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko, which protestors denounced as fraudulent, followed by serious crackdowns by the authorities.
- Militarised tension increased in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece and other actors over the exploration of natural gas in disputed waters.
- The severe political, economic and social crisis facing Lebanon worsened in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and an explosion that devastated Beirut in August.

The present chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2020. 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 2020. 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 2020.

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 2020

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties	Intensity[3] / Trend[4]
AFRICA[5]			
Algeria	Internal	Government, military, social and political opposition, Hirak movement	1
	Government		↓
Algeria (AQIM)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups AQIM (formerly GSPC), MUJAO, al-Mourabitoun, Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), governments of North Africa and the Sahel	2
	System		=
Benin	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Central Africa (LRA)	International	Ugandan, CAR, Congolese, Sudanese and South Sudanese Armed Forces, self-defence militias of the countries of the region	1
	Resources		=
Chad	Internal	Government, armed groups (UFR, UFDD), political and social opposition, communitary militias	3
	Government		↑
Côte d'Ivoire	Internationalised internal	Government, militias loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo, mercenaries, UNOCI	2
	Government, Identity, Resources		↑
DRC	Internal	Government led by Cap pour le Changement (coalition led by Félix Tshisekedi), in coalition with Front Commun pour le Congo (coalition led by Joseph Kabila, successor to the Alliance of the Presidential Majority), political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
DRC – Rwanda	International	Governments of DRC, Rwanda, armed groups FDLR and M23 (former CNDP)	1
	Identity, Government, Resources		=
DRC – Uganda	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	Eritrea, Ethiopia	1
	Territory		↓
Ethiopia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups	3
	Government		↑

1. This column includes the states in which socio-political crises are taking place, specifying in brackets the region within each state to which the crisis is confined or the name of the armed group involved in the conflict. This last option is used in cases involving more than one socio-political crisis in the same state or in the same territory within a state, for the purpose of distinguishing them.
2. This report classifies and analyses socio-political crises using two criteria: on the one hand, the causes or clashes of interests and, on the other hand, the convergence between the scenario of conflict and the actors involved. The following causes can be distinguished: demands for self-determination and self-government (Self-government) or identity aspirations (Identity); opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state (System) or the internal or international policies of a government (Government), which in both cases produces a struggle to take or erode power; or struggle for the control of resources (Resources) or territory (Territory). Regarding the second type, the socio-political crises may be of an internal, internationalised internal or international nature. As such, an internal socio-political crisis involves actors from the state itself who operate exclusively within its territory. Secondly, internationalised internal socio-political crises are defined as those in which at least one of the main actors is foreign and/or the crisis spills over into the territory of neighbouring countries. Thirdly, international socio-political crises are defined as those that involve conflict between state or non-state actors of two or more countries.
3. The intensity of a socio-political crisis (high, medium or low) and its trend (escalation, decrease, no changes) is mainly evaluated on the basis of the level of violence reported and the degree of socio-political mobilisation.
4. This column compares the trend of the events of 2020 with 2019, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2020 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!*

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Ethiopia (Oromia)	Internal	Central government, regional government, political opposition (OFDM, OPC parties) and social opposition, armed opposition (OLF, IFLO)	3
	Self-government, Identity		↑
Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan	2
	Resources		↑
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	2
	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		↑
Mali	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	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[7]	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Mozambique	Internal	Government, RENAMO	1
	Government, System		↓
Nigeria	Internal	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, farmers and livestock raisers, community militias, criminal gangs, 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	1
	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	2
	Government		↓

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7. 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

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity	Trend
AFRICA				
Sudan – South Sudan	International	Sudan, South Sudan	1	
	Resources, Identity			↓
Tanzania	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2	
	Government			↑
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	2	
	Government			↑
Zimbabwe	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1	
	Government			=
AMERICA				
Bolivia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1	
	Government			↓
Chile	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1	
	Government			↓
El Salvador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs	1	
	Government			↓
Guatemala	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, gangs	1	
	Government			↑
Haiti	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, BINUH, gangs	2	
	Government			↓
Honduras	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, gangs	1	
	Government			↓
Mexico	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, cartels, armed opposition groups	3	
	Government, Resources			=
Nicaragua	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1	
	Government			↓
Peru	Internal	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)	2	
	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)	1	
	Government			↓
China (Xinjiang)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition	1	
	Self-government, Identity, System			=
China (Tibet)	Internationalised internal	Chinese government, Dalai Lama and Tibetan government-in-exile, political and social opposition in Tibet and in neighbouring provinces and countries	1	
	Self-government, Identity, System			=

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity Trend

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
ASIA			
China (Hong Kong)	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		↓
China – Japan	International	China, Japan	1
	Territory, Resources		=
China – Taiwan	International	China, Taiwan	1
	Territory, Resources		=
India	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	System, Government		↑
India (Assam)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
India (Manipur)	Internal	Government, armed groups PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
India (Nagaland)	Internal	Government, armed groups NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN (K-K), NSCN-R, NNC, ZUF	1
	Identity, Self-government		↓
India – China	International	India, China	3
	Territory		↑
India – Pakistan	International	India, Pakistan	3
	Identity, Territory		↑
Indonesia (Sulawesi)	Internal	Government, armed group MIT	1
	System, Identity		↑
Indonesia (West Papua)	Internal	Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition, indigenous Papuan groups, Freeport mining company	2
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↓
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	1
	System		↓
Kazakhstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups	1
	System, Government		↑
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	2
	System		↑
Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[8]	International	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia	2
	Government		↑
Kyrgyzstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1
	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Lao, PDR	Internationalised internal	Government, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin	1
	System, Identity		=
Pakistan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed opposition (Taliban militias, political party militias), Armed Forces, secret services	2
	Government, System		=
South China Sea	International	China Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam	1
	Territory, Resources		↑

8.   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

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
ASIA			
Sri Lanka	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, Tamil political and social organizations	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
Tajikistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	1
	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			
Belarus	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	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		=
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)[9]	Internal	Russian federal government, governments of the republic of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasian Emirate and ISIS)	2
	System, Identity, Government		↑
Serbia – Kosovo	International[10]	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX	1
	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		=
Turkey – Greece, Cyprus[11]	International	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, EU, Egypt, Italy, United Arab Emirates, France, Libya Government of National Accord	1
	Territory, Resources, Self-government, Identity		↑
MIDDLE EAST			
Bahrain	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, Identity		=
Egypt	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		=
Iran	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Iran (northwest)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed group PJAK and PDKI, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)	1
	Self-government, Identity		=

9. In previous editions of this report, the socio-political crises between Russia (Dagestan) and Russia (Chechnya) were analysed separately.
10. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status remains unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by over 100 countries.
11. In previous editions of this report this crisis was codified as "Cyprus".

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
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	1
	Self-government, Identity		=
Iran – USA, Israel[12]	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.

2.2. Socio-political crises: analysis of trends in 2020

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

Ninety-five socio-political crisis scenarios were identified around the world in 2020, one more than in the previous year. This increase is significantly lower than the change between 2018 and 2019, when the number of crises rose by 11. As in previous years, the highest number of socio-political crises was concentrated in Africa, with 38 cases, followed by Asia (25), the Middle East (12) and Europe and Latin America (10 in each region).
Even though the rise in the number of socio-political crises in 2020 was almost imperceptible, seven new cases were identified while six other contexts were no longer considered as such. Four of the new crises took place in Africa. In Mali, rising political tensions led to a coup that was widely condemned by the international

Ninety-five socio-political crisis scenarios were identified in 2020: 38 in Africa, 25 in Asia, 12 in the Middle East and 10 in Latin America and Europe

community. In Tanzania, the elections held in October were accompanied by the growing authoritarianism of the ruling party and a notable rise in human rights violations, as well as the first attack in the country for which ISIS claimed responsibility. In Algeria (AQIM), despite the persistence of the underlying dynamics of the dispute, with sporadic incidents reported throughout 2020 (with an approximate death toll of 30), the drop in the levels of violence and the clashes between the security forces and AQIM caused it to cease being considered an armed conflict in 2019. In the case of Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, the political dispute stemming from Ethiopia's continued construction of Africa's largest hydroelectric dam, Ethiopia's Great Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River, worsened during 2020. In Asia, two new crises were identified. Tension between China and India increased dramatically, with several clashes on their common border causing fatalities for the first time in 45 years. Furthermore, the Indonesian region of Sulawesi saw an increase in activity by the armed group MIT.

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12. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear program.

Graph 2.1. **Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2020**
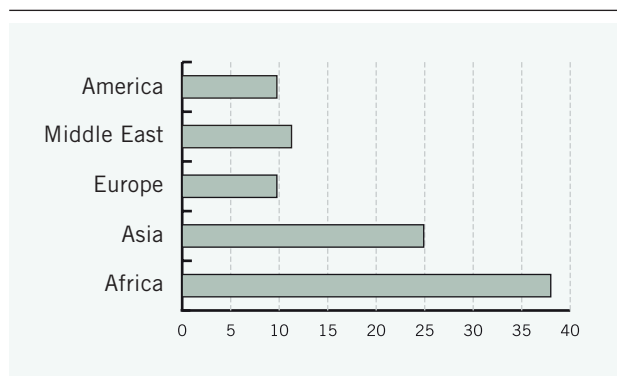
The vast majority (57%) of the socio-political crises were of low intensity, 26% were of medium intensity and 17% were of high intensity. Compared to the previous year, the number of crises of greater intensity was practically the same, but there was a clear rise in the percentage of less intense cases (from 49% in 2019 to 57% in 2020) and a consequent drop in the percentage of medium-intense crises (35% to 26%). Half of the 16 maximum-intensity crises were concentrated in Africa. In **Chad**, instability persisted in the north and east of the country, along with intercommunity violence and attacks by the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region, causing the deaths of hundreds of civilians and the start of counterinsurgency operations that killed more than 1,000 combatants. In **Mali**, the increase in anti-government protests due to the political crisis and high levels of insecurity during the first half of the year led to a coup by the self-styled National Committee for the Salvation of the People that was widely condemned by the international community, whose pressure led to the formation of a mixed (military-civil) transition government. In **Nigeria**, in addition to the persistence of the armed conflict between the state and Boko Haram in the three northeastern states of the country and the Lake Chad basin, inter-community fighting continued in the Middle Belt and criminal group activities increased notably, which caused the deaths of around 2,500 people. In **Ethiopia**, hundreds of people were killed in clashes between the state and the armed group OLA and many attacks were reported against the Amhara population in various parts of the country by various militias and self-defence groups. In **Ethiopia (Oromia)**, a highly tense atmosphere persisted as a result of the demonstrations against the political reforms promoted by the federal government, as well as inter-community clashes that occurred at different times of the year in the region. In **Kenya**, alongside the rise in polarisation and political violence linked to the elections scheduled for 2022, attacks by the al-Shabaab group and inter-community clashes continued (killing more than 200)

High-intensity crises in 2020 took place in Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, Mexico, Venezuela, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA, Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon

and complaints against the police's excessive use of force and the high number of deaths in custody increased significantly. Regarding the tension between **Rwanda and Burundi**, sporadic clashes between the militaries of both countries were reported along the land and sea borders. The dispute between **Morocco and Western Sahara** experienced one of the most important escalations of tension in recent years in 2020. After Moroccan forces entered the Guerguerat region to face several protests by the Saharawi population, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war, while Morocco warned of a forceful response in case of a threat to its security.

The other region with a high number of maximum-intensity crises was the Middle East. In addition to the increase in international tension over the Iranian nuclear programme regarding the case of Iran-USA-Israel, the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the al-Quds brigade of the Revolutionary Guard, in a US attack in Iraq in January, also had a destabilising impact. In Egypt, the policies of repression and persecution of dissent by the government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi persisted and intensified. In Iraq, more than 100 people were killed in the crackdown on protests against corruption, nepotism and mismanagement that had escalated since October 2019, as well as clashes between protesters and Iraqi security forces. In the case of Israel-Syria-Lebanon, which increasingly also involves Iran and the United States, around 90 people died as part of the violent episodes that took place in the region, especially Israeli air strikes around the occupied Golan Heights and in different parts of Syria, such as Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra and Damascus. The rest of the high-intensity crises occurred in Asia (two cases) and in Latin America (two other cases). In Asia, fighting between the militaries of **China and India** in the border region of the Galwan Valley caused fatalities for the first time in the last 45 years and triggered one of the most important escalations of political tension between China and India since the war that both countries fought in the 1960s. Regarding the tension between **India and Pakistan**, more than 70 people died and dozens were injured by the crossfire between the militaries of both countries that occurred practically uninterruptedly throughout the year along the Line of Control, the de facto border between India and Pakistan. Finally, the cases of Venezuela and Mexico stood out in Latin America. The political and institutional crisis in **Venezuela** continued (in 2020 it was closely linked to the legislative elections and the control of the National Assembly), one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America was reported and the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had stopped a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup. In **Mexico**, more

than 35,000 homicides were reported, many of which were linked to clashes between rival drug cartels or between them and state security forces.

Regarding the evolution of the crises, 38% of them worsened during 2020, 36% did not substantively change compared to the previous year and 26% enjoyed noticeable improvement. Overall, therefore, the number of crises that escalated during the year (36) was clearly higher than the number in which the tension subsided. However, the percentage of scenarios in which tension increased in 2019 (44% of the total) was clearly higher than in 2020. In 2020, more than half the crises that escalated were located in Africa. Regarding the main causes or motivations for the crises, the outlook in 2020 was very similar to that of the previous year. **Seventy-three per cent of the crises analysed were linked to opposition to the internal or international policies of certain governments** or to the political, social or ideological system of the state as a whole, 39% to **demands for self-government and/or identity and 31%** to struggles to control territories and/or resources. Significant regional variations were observed in terms of factors causing the crises. For example, factors linked to opposition to the government or to the system were present in 100% and 76% of the cases in Latin America and Asia respectively, while these percentages were 60% in Asia and in Europe. Similarly, identity-related claims or demands for greater self-government were significant in 80% of the crises in Europe, but were irrelevant in Latin America or represented less than a third of the crises in Africa. Finally, in Africa almost 40% of the crises were linked to disputes over territory or resources, while these factors were significant in only two cases in Europe and the Middle East.

The main causes of around 73% of the crises were opposition to internal or international polices implemented by the respective governments or opposition to the political, social or ideological system of the respective states

In line with previous years, **more than half the crises in the world were internal (53%)**, although this percentage was clearly higher in Africa (61%) and in Latin America, where 100% were internal. Over one quarter of the crises were internationalised internal (26%), although in the Middle East and Europe half were of this type. Finally, just over one fifth (21%) of the crises were international in nature. Despite the fact that there were comparatively less international crises than the other two types, they represent a significant percentage of maximum-intensity cases, such as those of Morocco-Sahara, Rwanda-Burundi, India-China, India-Pakistan, Iran-USA-Israel and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

2.2.2. Regional trends

In 2020, **Africa** was once again the continent with the highest number of active crises, with 38, or 40% of the total. This figure has remained relatively stable over the

Graph 2.2. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**
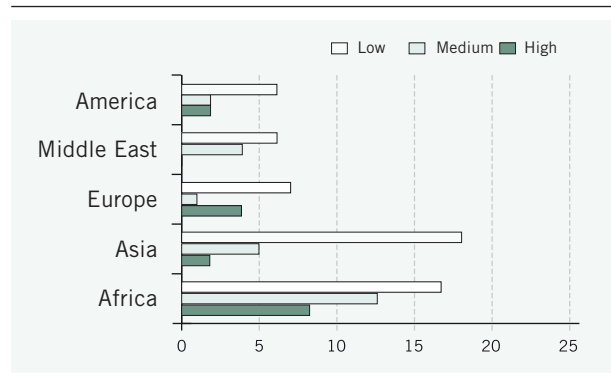
last few years. Compared to the previous year, four new cases were included (Mali, Tanzania, Algeria (AQIM) and Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan) and two others (Angola (Cabinda) and Congo) were no longer considered to be socio-political crises. In addition to concentrating the highest percentage of active crises in the world, Africa also had the highest number of maximum-intensity crises, eight out of a total of 16: Chad, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Mali, Morocco-Western Sahara, Nigeria and Rwanda-Burundi. This is a major increase compared to the previous year, when the highest-intensity crises in Africa accounted for 35% of all cases. In addition, half of the cases that escalated in 2020 (specifically 53%) were located in Africa: Benin, Chad, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco-Western Sahara, Nigeria, the DRC, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda. In contrast, there were only seven scenarios in which the situation improved from the previous year: Algeria, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda-Burundi, Rwanda-Uganda, Sudan and Sudan-South Sudan. Nevertheless, as a whole almost half the crises in Africa (45%) were of low intensity, a figure relatively similar to that of previous years.

Opposition to the government was a causal factor in 27 of the 38 crises in Africa, a comparatively high proportion compared to other regions. Opposition to the system was also one of the root causes of four other crises: Mozambique, Kenya, Tunisia and Algeria (AQIM). One third of the crises in Africa were related to identity issues and/or demands for self-government, but there were only five cases specifically linked to demands for greater self-government (Eritrea, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara and Senegal (Casamance)), a low figure compared to other regions. Finally, competition for control of resources and/or territory was an important explanatory factor in almost 40% of the cases. Thus, there were 12 contexts in Africa in which competition for resources was one of the main causes of the crisis in question, a figure clearly higher than elsewhere. The vast majority of the crises

in Africa (23) **were internal, the same as the previous year**. Although only about one quarter of the crises in Africa were international, accounting for almost half the international crises reported worldwide: Central Africa (LRA), Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Morocco-Western Sahara, DRC-Rwanda, DRC-Uganda, Rwanda-Burundi, Rwanda-Uganda and Sudan-South Sudan. The remaining 16% of the cases in Africa were internationalised internal, which witnessed 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. Finally, there were several countries that were involved in various crisis scenarios, such as Ethiopia, the DRC, Sudan and Rwanda (four crises in each country).

Africa concentrated half of the highest-intensity crises worldwide: Chad, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ethiopia (Oromia), Kenya, Morocco-Western Sahara and Rwanda-Burundi

America reported 10 crisis scenarios, 11% of the total. Two fewer cases were observed compared to the previous year (Colombia and Ecuador), where protests subsided significantly compared to the demonstrations of 2019. Although the region continued to host the highest homicide rates in the world, in general terms lower levels of conflict were observed than in 2019, a year marked by significant and massive protests in several Latin American countries. Therefore, in 2020 the tension subsided in 70% of the cases analysed in this chapter, with the only increases in Guatemala, where the most important protests in recent years were reported, and in Peru, where the removal of President Martín Vizcarra led to massive protests and a rise in the activity of a remnant faction of the Shining Path. Sixty per cent of the crises in the region were of low intensity, but two in Latin America were among the most serious in the world. The political, social and economic crisis in Venezuela persisted, as the country suffered one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America and the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had stopped a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup d'état. Over 35,000 homicides were reported in Mexico, many of them linked to frequent and sometimes fatal clashes between drug cartels and between them and the state security forces. All the crises in Latin America were internal, which at 100% was almost double the world average. One of the main causes of all the crises in the region was opposition to government policies (in many cases there were major protests against the government and political and institutional crises), while control for resources

Latin America was the only region in which all the crises were internal

was also a significant explanatory factor in Mexico and Peru.

There were 25 crises in **Asia**, which accounted for 26% of the total worldwide. Compared to the previous year, two new cases were identified: India-China, where the tension increased notably, to the point that clashes between the two countries' militaries along their common border caused fatalities for the first time in 45 years, and Indonesia (Sulawesi), where the armed group MIT stepped up its armed operations. More than 70% of the crises were of low intensity and only two were considered of high intensity: India-China and India-Pakistan. In both cases, it was mainly border disputes that led to direct confrontations between the militaries of three of the most populated countries in the world, although it should be remembered that India had already fought with both Pakistan and China in the past. More than one third of the crises in Asia escalated compared to the previous year: North Korea-USA-Japan-South Korea, North Korea-South Korea, India, India-China, India-Pakistan, Indonesia (Sulawesi), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Thailand. In eight cases, the intensity did not change significantly in relation to the previous year, while in another eight cases it subsided.

Forty per cent of the crises in Asia were internal and 32% were internationalised internal, whether due to regional armed groups and border tensions, as in four of Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan); owing to transnational links with local armed organisations, such as in the Chinese province of Xinjiang or the Indian state of Assam; because of Hmong organisations in Laos or because of the location of the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile in India. The remaining 28% of the crises in Asia were international, being the region of the world with the highest percentage of this type of crisis, as in previous years. Most of them are located 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. As mentioned above, the other two international crises involved disputes between India and China and India and Pakistan. Regarding the underlying causes, 60% of the cases were linked to opposition to the government or the state, the lowest percentage in the world together with Europe. Forty-eight per cent of the 25 crises were linked to identity issues or demands

for self-government. Asia was the part of the world in which the greatest number of crises associated with identity were observed, specifically 12: in the regions of Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong in China; in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in India, as well as the historical dispute between India and Pakistan; in the Sulawesi and West Papua regions of Indonesia; and in Kyrgyzstan, Laos and Sri Lanka. Finally, 36% of the cases analysed in Asia were partly motivated by issues related to the control of resources or territory, a percentage similar to that of Africa, making both Asia and Africa the areas with the greatest tension related to the issue. Of the eight crises that revolved around disputes over territory, four were linked to China (China-Japan; China-Taiwan; India-China and the South China Sea), three took place in former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and the eighth was the conflict between India and Pakistan. Two countries, India and China, were involved in eight and six crisis scenarios, respectively.

Ten socio-political crises were counted in **Europe**, one less than in 2019. One scenario was no longer considered a crisis: Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh), where the restart of the war in September and a previous escalation of hostilities in July on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border resulted in the deaths of around 5,000 people and forcibly displaced tens of thousands more (mostly Armenian), reclassifying the case as an armed conflict. As in the previous year, no high-intensity crisis was reported, but the situation worsened in 50% of the cases in the region. The crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, in a conflict over the delimitation of territorial waters and exclusive economic zones involving Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, as well as the exploration of oil in the area, provoked increasing local militarisation and internationalisation of the conflict, with countries such as France, Italy and the UAE conducting joint military exercises shortly after a collision between two Turkish and Greek warships. In addition to the aforementioned case involving Turkey, Greece and Cyprus and the situation in the two self-proclaimed independent republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, tension also rose in Belarus, where massive anti-government protests that followed the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko and the authorities' subsequent crackdown led to serious human rights violations and a major political and social crisis in the country, and in Russia (North Caucasus), where incidents of violence between federal security forces and local and insurgents claimed around 40 lives during the year.

In Europe, there were two international crises: the one already mentioned in the Eastern Mediterranean and

Asia was the part of the world with the highest percentage of international crises, many of them in the area between the Yellow Sea and the South China Sea

Eighty per cent of the crises in Europe were linked to identity issues and to demands for self-government

the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo, four of them internal and six internationalised internal. Russia was directly involved in four crises (those occurring in the North Caucasus, in the self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and in the self-proclaimed republic of Transdniestria, in Moldova) and played an important role in the crisis in Belarus. Eighty per cent of the cases were linked to identity issues and demands for self-government, a similar percentage to previous years, making Europe the part of the world in which these factors are clearly most present. Opposition to the government or the system was also present in 60% of the cases, a slightly higher percentage than last year (55%), but lower than in other regions. Disputes for control of resources and/or territory accounted for only 10% of the cases analysed, the lowest percentage in the world.

Finally, there were 12 crises in the **Middle East**, the same as in 2019, accounting for 13% of all cases worldwide. One third of the crises in the Middle East were of high intensity (Egypt, Iran-USA-Israel, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon), so it was the region with the highest percentage of crises of this type. Almost none of the crises in the Middle East experienced significant changes in intensity compared to the previous year, but there was one in which the tension subsided (Iran, which in 2019 was the scene of massive protests that caused the deaths of more than 300 people) and another in which the situation worsened (Iran-USA-Israel, in which international tension around the Iranian nuclear programme intensified, coupled with the US assassination in Iraq of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's al-Quds Brigade, which had a very destabilising impact in the region). Iran was directly or indirectly linked to seven crises: Iran, Iran (northwest), Iran (Sistan Balochistan), Iran-USA-Israel, Iraq, Iraq (Kurdistan) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon, while a country that does not belong to the region, the United States, was involved in three cases: Iran-US-Israel, Iraq and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

The main causes of 75% of the crises reported in the region (nine out of 12) included opposition to the internal or international policies of the government or the system, the same figures as last year. More than 40% of the crises were linked to identity and self-government issues, while struggles to control resources or territory were important in 17% of the cases, a lower percentage than in other regions. Half the crises in the Middle East were internationalised internal (the highest percentage in the world, together with Europe), while one third were internal and the remaining 17% were international. Two international tensions were of maximum intensity: Iran-USA-Israel and Israel-Syria-Lebanon.

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 persisted in northern and eastern Chad, with attacks and retaliation in other parts of the country linked to intercommunity violence and attacks by the Nigerian armed group Boko Haram (BH) in the Lake Chad region.[13] BH's attacks claimed hundreds of lives. The worst attack to date occurred in the Boma Peninsula on 23 March and killed about 100 soldiers. In response, the Chadian Armed Forces carried out a military operation in early April during which they claimed to have killed 1,000 BH fighters and lost 52 Chadian soldiers. The Chadian government took political advantage of the exceptional situation to crack down on the political opposition, as has happened elsewhere in Africa. Intercommunity violence caused more than 100 fatalities during the year. In particular, there were clashes between militias from livestock and agricultural communities in the provinces of Ouaddai (east), Dar Sila (east), Batha (centre), Tandjilé (south), Mayo-Kebbi Est (southwest) and others. Tension persisted in the mining areas of the province of Tibesti (northwest) and starting in October the tension rose after the government decided to eliminate all mining rights, except those approved with companies that demonstrated experience in the mining sector. This decision came after Miski's militia withdrew from the agreement reached in 2019, in protest against the government's decision to change the legal framework for mining gold deposits to the militia's detriment. Given the persistence of attacks by Chadian armed rebel groups based in neighbouring countries such as Libya and Sudan, the government tried to boost security. In November, President Déby met with Abdelwahid Aboud Mackaye, a rebel leader based in Sudan, and asked him to give up the armed struggle. The Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), an armed group based in Libya, carried out some attacks during the year, mainly in February and September in the Kouri-Bougoudi area, Tibesti province (north).

On the political front, President Idriss Déby pushed for the amendment of the 2018 Constitution in view of the presidential election that was to be held in December and was finally postponed to April 2021, citing interruptions in the electoral preparations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Legislative elections were postponed until October 2021. In an attempt to improve relations with the majority community groups ahead of the 2021 elections, Déby reinstated former Defence Minister Mahamat Nour Abdelkerim into the Chadian Army and pardoned three imprisoned rebel leaders in August. Most opposition and civil society groups boycotted the governmental National Inclusive Forum on constitutional reform held in N'Djamena between 29 October and 1 November. They justified the boycott by claiming that the Forum did not intend to address structural issues or reform of the Chadian Army. Déby restructured the security forces in February, appointing relatives and members of his ethnic group as senior members of the Chadian Army and the police. In the Forum, among other things, the creation of a vice president was discussed, who would be appointed by the president. The proposal was subsequently approved, sowing concern that Déby was trying to promote people from his closest circles to this position. However, in December Parliament approved a constitutional amendment allowing the head of the Senate, and not the vice president, to occupy the position of acting president, as Déby had intended, in the event of the president's absence or incapacitation. This amendment finally came into force on 14 December. According to various analysts, the government politically exploited the emergency situation to repress the political opposition under the cover of the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government put pressure on the political

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13. See the summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

opposition and civil society activists throughout the year. According to some, the government's mismanagement of the crisis caused by the pandemic led the ruling party and the political opposition to join forces to demand improvements in its handling of the situation, which prompted Déby to dissolve the institution in charge of managing the pandemic in May and create a new structure under his personal leadership. On 11 December, the government suspended opposition party Parti Réformiste for three months after its leader, Yacine Abdramane Sakine, claimed that the Chadian Army was controlled by a minority to allow Déby's corrupt regime to remain in power. On 12 and 23 December, the opposition party Les Transformateurs organised demonstrations in N'Djamena to demand greater political freedom. These demonstrations were dispersed with tear gas on the grounds that they disrespected the provisions of the pandemic regulations. Three people were injured. The government prohibited a citizen forum from being held by the opposition in late November, arguing it would violate the restrictions of the pandemic and detained 70 people, most of them journalists, at the FM Liberté radio facilities for trying to organise such a forum. In December, a court dropped charges against human rights activist Alain Kemba and two other collaborators for organising the forum in N'Djamena in November, which had led to their arrest on charges of promoting acts of rebellion and violating the public order, as well as breaching the COVID-19 restrictions.

The Chadian government took political advantage of the exceptional situation to crack down on the political opposition as part of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19

DRC	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Governance Internal
Main parties:	Government led by Cap pour le Changement (coalition led by Félix Tshisekedi), in coalition with Front Commun pour le Congo (coalition led by Joseph Kabila, successor to the Alliance of the Presidential Majority), political and social opposition

Summary:
Between 1998 and 2003, what has been called "Africa's First World War" took place in DRC.[14] The signing of a series of peace agreements between 2002 and 2003 involved the withdrawal of foreign troops and the creation of a National Transitional Government (NTG), incorporating the former government, the political opposition, the RCD-Goma, RCD-K-ML, RCD-N and MLC armed groups, and the Mai Mai militias. From June 2003, the NTG was led by President Joseph Kabila and four vice presidents, two of whom belonged to the former insurgency: Azarias Ruberwa of the RCD-Goma and Jean-Pierre Bemba of the MLC. The NTG drew up the constitution, on which a referendum was held in December 2005. Legislative and presidential elections

were held between July and October 2006, in which Kabila was elected president and Jean-Pierre Bemba came second, amid a climate of high tension and accusations of electoral fraud. The formation of the new government in 2007 failed to bring a halt to the instability and disputes taking place in the political sphere. The elections of November 2011, in which a series of irregularities were committed, fuelled the instability. The extension of President Kabila's 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 DRC continued to be affected by an atmosphere of violence and political instability stemming from tension within the ruling coalition, which finally broke down in December, and by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. To this was added persistent violence caused by many armed groups in the eastern part of the country. In the political sphere, tensions remained constant within the ruling coalition between the Cap pour le changement (CACH), an alliance between President Félix Tshisekedi and Vital Kamerhe, and former President Kabila's Front Commun pour le Congo (FCC). Since the controversial parliamentary elections were held in March 2019, which marked the first peaceful transition in the country, albeit under accusations of fraud by the opposition Lamuka coalition, President Tshisekedi has governed through a coalition consisting of the CACH and the FCC. As the 2023 presidential election approaches, these groups have increased their power struggles. The CACH and the FCC discussed ministerial posts, military reorganisation, appointments to the judiciary and the national electoral council and anti-corruption policies. Political infighting led to a series of protests across the DRC during July, although at the time Tshisekedi was still in favour of upholding the coalition. The early protests denounced Kabila's attempts to gain more power and influence before the election by appointing his ally, Ronsard Malonda, to head the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). They were followed by counter-demonstrations by Kabila supporters. Civil society organisations, the political parties CACH and Lamuka (led by Martin Fayulu and bringing together the main opposition actors, including Moïse Katumbi and Jean-Pierre Bemba) and some religious groups organised protests throughout the country. President Tshisekedi advised the groups tasked with appointing the CENI board members to unify their positions and seek consensus, and later declared that he would not approve Malonda.

Despite restrictions on movement related to the COVID-19 pandemic, civil society organisations were actively involved in political life and staged multiple large-scale demonstrations across the country against

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

the proposed judicial reforms, the appointment of the new president of the CENI the lack of electoral reform. At the same time, various announcements by the FCC, such as allegations of a secret clause in the government's deal establishing that Kabila could run in the 2023 election, which the CACH denied, as well as one minister's statement that they were working for Kabila to come back, coupled with the ex-president's appearance in his seat in the Senate, raised rumours of his possible return. In October, the FCC boycotted Tshisekedi's appointment of three new judges to the Constitutional Court, whose replacement was key to promoting greater plurality and independence in the upcoming Congolese elections.

Tensions rose in November. In an attempt to gain support for his plan to separate from the FCC, from 1 to 24 November Tshisekedi held a series of meetings with religious and opposition leaders and some members of the FCC to enlist their support. After messages circulating on social media in early November called on the Congolese Army to rebel against poor working conditions, on 12 November the military body denied any unrest among its ranks and warned politicians against any attempt to manipulate it. Thousands of Tshisekedi's supporters marched in the capital, Kinshasa, to demand an end to the coalition with the FCC. During the demonstration, a wing of Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party accused the FCC finance minister of freezing funds earmarked for the salaries of public officials and especially military officers to turn them against the president. In early December, the events that culminated in the breakdown of the government coalition accelerated, generating serious concern about its consequences for the country as a whole. In early November, the opposition had obtained the signatures necessary to present a motion of censure against the president of the National Assembly, Jeanine Mabunda (of the FCC), who was accused of bias. On 10 December, Mabunda lost the vote and left office. Previously, on 6 December, Tshisekedi had announced the dissolution of the coalition between the CACH and the FCC and his willingness to build a new majority or call new elections if this was not possible. On 7 December, there were serious clashes and altercations in the National Assembly between MPs from both parties as a result of the previous day's announcement. However, the conflict was inevitable, according to various analysts, since if Prime Minister Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba (of the FCC) did not resign, the National Assembly could reaffirm him, since the FCC has a majority.

Finally, tensions rose in March over the border demarcation crisis between the DRC and Zambia, with their armies clashing in the border area. The dispute remained unresolved until the South Africa Development Community (SADC) deployed a technical mission to the affected border area from 23 to 29 July, which led to the adoption of a gradual approach to begin to demarcate the borders in September.

Rwanda – Burundi	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance 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.

During the year, the relationship between Rwanda and Burundi remained tense, with mutual accusations of incursions and military actions on the common border. However, since the beginning of the year, Rwanda had announced a willingness to engage in dialogue in order to normalise relations with Burundi. The tension escalated seriously when the Burundian Armed Forces of both countries clashed on the maritime border of Lake Rweru on 8 May, killing a Burundian soldier. Nevertheless, Rwandan President Paul Kagame repeated his desire to improve relations with Burundi: on 6 June he congratulated Ndayishimiye on his election victory and on 10 June he expressed his condolences for the death of Nkurunziza. However, on 27 June the Rwandan defence minister said that around 100 armed men from Burundi with materiel from the Burundian Armed Forces had attacked a Rwandan Army post in Ruheru, near the border. The government of Burundi denied the accusation, though independent media reports confirmed it. On 10 July, Kagame said that he was ready to work with the new president of Burundi. However, on 6 August, Ndayishimiye said that he did not wish to maintain relations with a "hypocritical" state that was holding Burundian refugees in Rwanda. Despite this, Rwanda responded by facilitating the return of the first 500 refugees in late August. At the same time, the heads of the intelligence services of both countries

met at the Nemba border post in Rwanda and agreed to cooperate on border security. This is the first high-level meeting between both countries since 2015. Gradually, in mid-September, the Burundian government took steps to normalise relations with Rwanda and the Rwandan government began procedures to extradite the alleged perpetrators of the 2015 coup attempt against President Nkurunziza.

Sudan	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance 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 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 and the opening of a transitional process.

After the formation of the transitional government in Sudan and the signing of the new constitutional agreement in 2019, the country made progress in implementing the established reforms in 2020, as well as in the search for peace in the conflict regions. At the beginning of the year, as part of the reforms in the former regime's security sector, the Sudanese security forces faced an orchestrated riot by members of the former National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). The riot originated because the NISS had been transformed into a new agency called the General Intelligence Service (GIS) in June 2019, which generated resistance. As a result of the incident, the chairman of the Sovereign Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, announced the replacement of GIS Director Abu Bakr Mustafa Damblab with the Sudanese Army intelligence chief. Subsequently, on 9 March, there was a car bomb attack against Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who was unharmed. The Sudanese Islamic Youth Movement claimed responsibility for the attack,

which prompted additional measures to dismantle the old regime's security system. Alongside the implementation of the security sector reforms, progress was also made on new political and economic action based on negotiations between the government, the Sovereign Council and the opposition coalition Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). On 6 April, these actors formed a committee to accelerate the transitional reforms, committing to appoint the Transitional Legislative Council and the Economic Emergency Committee by mid-May, as well as the civilian governors by 18 April. However, disagreements between the parties, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, prevented major progress on the transition agenda during the year. This sparked major social demonstrations demanding the agreed reforms. Meanwhile, after a year of peace negotiations in the capital of South Sudan, Juba, the Sudanese government and the rebel coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and the faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM/A-MM) **signed a historic peace agreement on 31 August**. The agreement was not signed by the faction of the North Sudan People's Liberation Movement, another rebel group headed by Abdelaziz al-Hilu (SPLM-N), or the Sudan Liberation Movement faction led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM/A-AW), which are still in separate peace negotiating processes.[15]

Some of the clauses signed in the agreement establish the beginning of a three-year transitional period; the integration of the former rebel leaders into the Sovereign Council, the ministerial cabinet and the Transitional Legislative Council; the establishment of a federal regional government system in Sudan; the formation of a joint security force in Darfur; the consideration of Darfur as a single region where power will be shared; and the granting of autonomy to the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, in addition to West Kordofan. Subsequently, in December the head of the Sovereign Council of Sudan, al-Burhan, announced the formation of a **Transitional Partners Council (TPC)** composed of 29 members: the prime minister, six members of the Sudanese Army, 13 members of the CFF and nine members of the SRF. The establishment of the TPC was justified due to the need to align the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement with the Constitution. However, the Council of Ministers, civil society organisations, Resistance Committees, the FCC and political parties rejected its formation, calling it contrary to the spirit of the December revolution and the objectives of the transition period and rejected the powers bestowed on it. The Sudanese National Alliance, which brings together stakeholders that forged the transition in the country, asked for the TPC's work to halt until more consultations are held, proposing greater representation of women and youth and of all parties to the peace agreement. These events caused the head of the Sovereign Council to reverse his decision to form the TPC. Likewise, the formalisation

15. See summary on Sudan in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.

of the peace agreement, its approval by the Sovereign Council and its incorporation as a constitutional statement generated misgivings in the eastern part of the country against what is called the "eastern track" of the peace agreement, calling for self-determination for eastern Sudan. These events provoked outbreaks of violence in the states of Red Sea and Kassala, where at least 30 people were killed on 20 October.

As part of the progress made in the transition process, in early February, the UN Secretary-General agreed to Khartoum's request to establish a political mission in the country to support peacebuilding and development. In June 2020, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2524 to establish the **United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS)** as of 1 January 2021. The new political mission will complement the work of United Nations agencies and programmes in Sudan and work closely with the Transitional Government and the people of the Sudan in support of the transition. In turn, the UN Security Council announced the end of the **United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID),** which will cease operations after 13 years in June 2021.

Headway was also made during the year in relation to the case that the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has open against former president Omar al-Bashir and four other former officials of the regime accused of charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the Darfur region since the beginning of the armed conflict in 2003. In February 2020, the Sudanese government agreed to cooperate with the ICC, stating that it was willing to hand over the accused, as well as to sign and ratify the Rome Statute. In August, the trial of al-Bashir and other members of his regime, accused of perpetrating the 1989 coup and other charges, began in Sudan.

Finally, on 23 October, US President Donald Trump signed an order to **remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism**. This came after Sudan agreed to financially compensate the families of the victims of the Al Qaeda attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and of an attack on a US warship in Yemen in 2000. The normalisation of relations between the US and Sudan also included US approval of the arrival of the Sudanese ambassador to the country, which had not occurred for two decades. As part of the agreement, President Trump announced that Sudan and Israel had agreed to normalise diplomatic relations, which had been broken for many years. In December, Russia and Sudan signed an agreement to establish a Russian naval base for at least 25 years in Port Sudan, on the Red Sea. The agreement states that the Russian naval base should "help to strengthen peace and stability in the region" and is not directed against third parties. In return, Russia will provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment.

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

Summary:
The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has held power in Tanzania since it gained independence in 1961, cementing its dominance for decades under a single-party state formula, and it was not until 1995 that a multi-party system was introduced in the country. Since the rise to power of John Magulufi (CCM) in 2015, this control has increased and the country has been affected by a growing authoritarianism and continuous harassment towards civil society and the political opposition, restricting the political space. Magulufi became president of the country on a wave of anti-corruption discourse and nationalist rhetoric, depicting the political opposition as saboteurs of the country's development agenda and even traitors doing the bidding of the West. Tanzania has become increasingly divided and polarised between supporters of the governing CCM and its detractors, creating a climate of uncertainty and concern about its political future. Magulufi has repeatedly promised that he would only serve as president for two terms, as established by the current Constitution. However, senior officials of the CCM have proposed eliminating the term limit for the presidency, to which the elections held in October 2020 left the door open given the CCM's massive victory, which gave them more than the two-thirds of parliamentary seats necessary to amend the Constitution. These elections were considered fraudulent and were affected by an atmosphere of intimidation, violence and arbitrary detentions. Instability also rose in the semi-autonomous archipelago of Zanzibar, historically affected by fraudulent and violent elections.

In Tanzania there was a serious deterioration of the political space, with grave violations of human rights. The country was affected by the growing authoritarianism of the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, as well as President John Magulufi, which escalated with the general elections that were held on 28 October. His presidency has been characterised by continuous harassment of civil society and the political opposition. Added to this situation was the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. President Magufuli downplayed the risk posed by COVID-19 and silenced critics of the government's response, ruling out any closure of the financial capital or the country due to the escalation of infections and the deaths of at least two MPs and a minister. He also fired the deputy minister of health for having criticised the government's response to the crisis and questioned the credibility of the national laboratory and a special committee on COVID-19. Since April, the government has refused to provide official figures on the spread of the pandemic, arguing that they were being used to chip away at it.

In relation to the restriction of the political space, the repression and persecution of the political opposition and media critical of government management

increased during the year. One example was the 11-month suspension of Kwanza Online TV in July for broadcasting information from the US embassy warning of the exponential growth of the pandemic in the country. In July, three UN special rapporteurs (on the rights of association and peaceful assembly, on the situation of human rights activists and on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression) urged an end to the repression of the civic space and to the restrictions on different basic rights. Amnesty International warned in October that the government had created a battery of laws to suppress all forms of dissent and effectively suppress the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly before the 28 October elections.[16] In the preceding months, opposition candidates had been arrested on trumped-up charges that deprived them of their right to freedom of assembly, association and movement. At the same time, regulations aimed at strengthening the government's control over what the local and foreign media published came into force, violating the right to freedom of expression. There was a climate of violence during the pre-campaign period and the electoral campaign, with continuous acts of repression of political parties, their candidates and electoral events, as well as non-governmental organisations and the media, as reported by many local and international human rights organisations. Dozens of members of the political opposition have been arrested since June and the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC) suspended its activities in August, citing a constant atmosphere of intimidation and interference in their activities by the security forces. In October, election violence broke out with the death of at least 10 people in the archipelago of Zanzibar at the hands of the police and the opposition party Chadema denounced the deaths of two people when two officials of the party in power fired live ammunition into an election rally in the town of Nyamongo. Other sources raised the total number of fatalities until November to 15.

Critical media outlets and the Internet and digital messaging applications were shut down temporarily on 27 October, the eve of the election. Many irregularities were found on election day and fraud was reported. The results gave the victory to President John Magulufi with 84% of the votes and his party obtained 253 of the 261 seats, or 98%, a figure well above 70% of the seats in 2015. Also on election day, the regional expert group Tanzania Elections Watch declared that the way that the situation had developed meant there had been a profound drop in the country's democratic standards. Various opposition figures went into exile before the turn of events (the presidential candidate of the Chadema party, Tundu Lissu sought refuge in the German embassy and later moved to Belgium, while the MP Godbless Lema went into exile in Kenya), after being temporarily

There was a serious deterioration of the situation in Tanzania as a result of the authoritarian and repressive drift of John Magulufi's government

arrested prior to protests against Magulufi's re-election. In line with the growing climate of human rights violations, the country decided to restrict access to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), which was created by the AU and is the main African human rights mechanism, supposedly for receiving unfavourable answers from it. Tanzania, which hosts the court, withdrew on 21 November, one year after the request made by the Tanzanian government. However, its withdrawal does not mean that the country will not continue to adhere to provisions of its protocol, as the AfCHPR allows individuals and NGOs from other countries to sue Tanzania even if it has withdrawn.

On 14 October, the first attack committed by the jihadist insurgents operating in the neighbouring Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado in the country was verified. The attack killed at least 22 people, including three members of the security forces in the town of Kitaya, in the region of Mtwara, and was the first attack for which ISIS claimed responsibility in Tanzania. Later there were other attacks in other Tanzanian towns.

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

Summary:

President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, when an insurgent movement he commanded succeeded in overthrowing the government of Milton Obote, and has since ruled the country using authoritarian means and a political system controlled by the former rebel movement, the NRM (the Movement). In the 2001 presidential elections Museveni defeated his main opponent, Kizza Besigye, a former colonel in the NRM, amid allegations of fraud. In a referendum held in July 2005 Ugandans voted to return to a multiparty system. Following an amendment to the Constitution in 2005 to increase the existing limit of two consecutive terms to three, Museveni won the 2006 elections, amid serious allegations of fraud. They were the first multiparty elections that had been held since he had come to power in 1986. In 2011 and 2016 presidential elections, Museveni again beat his eternal rival and former ally Kizza Besigye amid new allegations of fraud, which has led to an escalation of social tension and Government repression of the demands for democratic change and protests against the rising cost of living. In parallel, Uganda's military intervention in Somalia increased the threats of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab against Uganda. Finally, various parts of the country are affected by periodic intercommunity disputes and grievances exploited during the electoral period.

Political tension in the country increased considerably during the year due to the start of the campaign for

16. Amnesty International, "Lawfare – Repression by Law Ahead of Tanzania's General Elections", 12 October 2020.

the presidential election scheduled for 4 January 2021. In keeping with the trend of government repression in Ugandan election campaigns in previous years, the year was marked by the arrest of opposition leaders and the criminalisation of and violent crackdowns against the opposition movement. In the five weeks since the election campaign began on 9 November, dozens of people were killed in election-related violence, most of them shot dead by police and other security forces. President Yoweri Museveni, in power since 1986, said that 54 people lost their lives between 18 and 19 November in the protests and riots that followed the arrest of main opposition presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi (popularly known as Bobi Wine). Wine, a popular figure among Ugandan youth, announced in 2019 that he would run in the 2021 election, prompting a campaign of repression and arrests by the Ugandan authorities. On 6 January, Wine suffered the first arrest of the year on charges of violating the 2000 Election Law and the 2013 Public Order Management Law. In March, the police also arrested Henry Tumukunde, a former retired general and former minister of security who was planning to run for president, on suspicion of treason. On 14 October, Ugandan security forces re-arrested Bobi Wine in a raid on the campaign headquarters of his party, the National Unity Platform. Ugandan Army spokeswoman Flavia Byekwaso justified the arrest and the operation as being aimed at seizing the suits and red berets worn by Wine's supporters, since in 2019 Uganda designated them as official military attire, imposing a punishment of up to five years prison on any civilian wearing them. Bobi Wine was arrested again on 18 November on charges of violating health restrictions, triggering two days of protests that caused more than 50 deaths at the hands of the security forces. In total, according to local media reports, over 800 people were arrested in the protests. At the same time, Patrick Oboi Amuriat, who was also a presidential candidate, was arrested for organising an unauthorised demonstration in the northern city of Gulu. Different domestic and foreign actors, including the UN, the US embassy, the European Union delegation and the country's religious leaders, appealed to the security forces to curb their violence, asking them to ensure that the elections proceed properly. The EU asked the government of Uganda for an investigation into the violent events that occurred between 18 and 19 November. Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused Uganda of trying to militarise the pandemic-related restrictions, using limitations on meetings to stop political demonstrations. The organisation claimed to have evidence of the disproportionate use of Ugandan law to restrict opposition meetings. In this repressive atmosphere, the media also saw their rights violated. The Ugandan NGO Human Rights Network for Journalists (HNRJ) reported more than 100 cases of human rights violations against journalists in the country as part of the election campaign, including cases of police violence. The Ugandan Foreign Correspondents' Association also reported at least three incidents of police attacks on its

journalists. The Ugandan Media Council cancelled the accreditation of all foreign journalists on 10 December, ordering them to obtain a special media pass before 31 December. This requirement was also applicable to all local media.

Horn of Africa

Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Governance 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 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. However, the changes introduced by the government of Abiy Ahmed caused tension in the federation.

The situation in the country deteriorated seriously due to the start of the violent conflagration between Tigray and the federal government,[17] as well as the persistent outbreaks of intercommunity violence and the actions of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) at different times of the year. Violence was committed by civilian self-defence groups

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17. See the summary on Ethiopia (Tigray) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

and militias against the Amhara community, the largest in the country and present in different regions, which displaced tens of thousands of people in different areas. There was also fighting between members of the Amhara community and other communities, mainly in the Oromia region in the centre of the country, where the OLA clashed with the security forces, causing hundreds of fatalities. Serious clashes and outbreaks of violence also took place in the Benishangul-Gumuz region (especially in the Metekel Zone), where the Amhara community also suffered reprisals, and in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), against the Amhara civilian population. Clashes and spirals of retaliation also occurred between Afar and Somali communities in the area bordering the Afar and Somali regions. Furthermore, mass protests were staged in June over the death of the singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa. The protests were led by youths from the Oromo community against minorities from other communities that they blamed for his death. The protests were harshly put down by the security forces, causing at least 239 fatalities between 30 June and 2 July in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region, the shutdown of the Internet, the deployment of the Ethiopian Army in Addis Ababa and the arrest of at least 5,000 people. The detainees included people critical of Abiy Ahmed's government, such as opposition leader Jawar Mohammed and journalist Eskinder Nega, imprisoned in 2011 and released by Ahmed in 2018 for his alleged role in instigating a violent response to Hundessa's death. Abiy Ahmed described Hundessa's death and the subsequent violence as coordinated attempts to destabilise the country. The attorney general announced the arrest of two suspects on 10 July who allegedly confessed to Hundessa's murder on orders from the OLA with the aim of inciting tensions to destabilise the government, although the group denied any responsibility for the events. The security forces used excessive force to impose the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing various victims during the year. Moreover, amid the debate between the supporters and detractors of the system of ethnic federalism in the country,[18] on 18 June the regional Parliament of the SNNPR transferred power to the new federal state of Sidama as a result of the referendum called by the Sidama community on 20 November 2019.[19] After this, on 6 October the federal Parliament approved a request to call a referendum on the creation of new regional states by five other area administrations and a district of the SNNPR.

According to an Amnesty International report made public in May, security forces have been committing serious human rights violations in recent years, such as extrajudicial killings, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions and the burning of houses as part of military operations in the Amhara and Oromia regions.[20] Produced between December 2018 and December 2019, the report documents these human rights violations despite the reforms undertaken by the government such as the release of thousands of detainees, the opening of the social and political space and the repeal of draconian laws like the Antiterrorist Law. However, in trying to mobilise support, the political class has been instigating ethnic and religious animosities, provoking violence between communities and armed attacks in five of the nine regional states of the country: Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Harari, Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), as well as in the administrative state of Dire Dawa.

Furthermore, Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt decided to resume tripartite talks on 21 May regarding the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, which has been a source of tension between these three countries as a result of the control that Ethiopia can exercise over a strategic resource that poses a threat to Sudanese and Egyptian national security. The talks were subsequently stalled by Ethiopia's unilateral decision to start refilling the reservoir's reserves as a result of the rainy season and its refusal to accept a binding dispute resolution mechanism on 13 July. Faced with this stalemate, the AU tried to reactivate the talks on 3 August. At the same time, the US decided to cut part of its aid to Ethiopia (about 130 million dollars) due to the lack of progress in the tripartite talks in order to force the negotiations. Egypt warned in September that the talks could not be extended indefinitely, to which Ethiopia responded that it had no intention of harming Sudan and Egypt and expressed its commitment to the AU-led talks. However, statements by US President Donald Trump in October exacerbated the situation, saying that Egypt could not live with the dam and could "blow up" the construction. The Ethiopian prime minister did not respond to these inflammatory statements, but shortly afterwards the Ethiopian foreign minister called the US ambassador for consultations to clarify Washington's position on the issue.

Kenya	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-Government 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

18.   See Josep Maria Royo, "Etiopía y la ofensiva sobre Tigray. Claves de una transición en riesgo", *ECP notes on conflict and peace* no. 9, December 2020.
19.   See the summary on Ethiopia in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in *Alert 2020! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2020.
20.   Amnesty International, *Beyond law enforcement: human rights violations by Ethiopian security forces in Amhara and Oromia*, AFR 25/2358/2020, 29 May 2020.

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. Starting in 2002, the client process to succeed the autocratic Daniel Arap Moi (in power for 24 years) was interrupted by the victory of Mwai Kibaki. Since then, different ethno-political conflicts have emerged in the country, which has produced a climate of political violence during the different electoral cycles. 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. After this election, a fragile national unity government was formed between Mwai Kibabi and Raila Odinga. 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. In addition, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia triggered attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in Kenya, subsequent animosity towards the Somali population in Kenya and tensions between Kenya and Somalia over their different political agendas, posing added challenges to the stability of the country.

Different issues aggravated the political and social situation in Kenya over the past year. The climate of political violence and polarisation worsened ahead of the 2022 elections. The Somali group al-Shabaab continued to carry out armed attacks in the north and east of the country. However, 2020 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, which, as in other African countries, were reflected in a serious increase in police brutality while imposing restrictions to limit the spread of the disease. Political polarisation grew during the year between the supporters of current President Uhuru Kenyatta and Vice President William Ruto, who was gradually marginalised by Kenyatta within the party and political institutions. The race for the presidential elections in 2022 was expected to be long and the first key event will be the referendum for constitutional reform in June 2021, which has united Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga, who are in favour of it, against Ruto, who opposes it. In this sense, on 25 November, the president signed a bill paving the way for the referendum to amend the Constitution in June 2021.

To this situation was added the excessive use of force while imposing the restrictions to limit the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many cases of abuse and police brutality that caused the deaths of dozens of people, as came to light through different reports by HRW[21] and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights,[22] among others. As a result, there were various lawsuits against the government for alleged murders and human rights violations, as well as multiple protests in various cities against police brutality, which were again forcibly repressed. Following harsh criticism, on 1 April President Kenyatta lamented the excessive use of force but did not issue instructions to end the abuse, according to HRW. In June, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, a government institution that supervises the police in the country, claimed that there had been at least 15 police deaths related to the enforcement of the curfew since March. Human rights organisations indicated that the figure could be higher. Media reports singled out businessmen and state officials for having misappropriated 400 million dollars earmarked for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, sparking fresh protests.[23] This scandal sparked public outrage and protests organised by hundreds of anti-corruption activists between 21 and 25 August in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu, in which the police intervened with tear gas to disperse the protesters, arresting dozens. Kenyatta opened an investigation into the contracts of the governmental Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) and extended the curfew until the end of September.

ACLED established that 208 people were killed in attacks launched by al-Shabaab and intercommunity violence, a figure higher than in previous years. There were clashes between militias linked to different communities in the northern part of the country throughout the year, mainly due to the theft of cattle, border demarcations between territories of different communities and reprisals for previous attacks over land ownership. On 10 February, the US announced an agreement with the Kenyan government to create a Joint Terrorism Task Force led by Kenya. At the same time, **attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab persisted** in the northeast and east, mainly in Wajir, Mandera and Lamu counties, causing dozens of fatalities during the year, although there were also attacks by possible members of al-Shabaab in the south. In January, al-Shabaab launched an attack against the US military base Camp Simba in Manda Bay in which three Americans died. It was the first attack by al-Shabaab against the US military base in the country. The number of deaths at the hands of the police also rose in 2020, as revealed by Deadly Force when compared to previous years.[24] In 2015, 143 people died at the hands of the police and this figure increased to 205 people in 2016, 256 in 2017, 250 in 2018, 122 in 2019 and 137 in 2020. The escalation

21. Human Rights Watch, *Kenya: Police Brutality During Curfew*, 2020.
22. Sarah Kimani, "Report outlines human rights violations in Kenya during COVID-19 containment", *SABCNews*, 1 July 2020.
23. France24, "Kenya ministry told to publish Covid-19 deals amid graft scandal", 31 August 2020.
24. Deadly Force is a database of murders committed by the police. The Kenyan newspaper *Daily Nation's* project, Nation Newsplex, seeks to record all 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 compiled from information published by the media, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, other government agencies and counts maintained by human rights organisations.

of police violence in 2017 coincided with the elections in the country at the time, so the fresh escalation of violence may coincide with the restrictions linked to the pandemic, the pre-electoral climate ahead of the constitutional referendum of 2021 and the 2022 elections.

The relations between Kenya and Somalia deteriorated during the year, after having improved in late 2019. In December 2020, Somalia broke diplomatic relations with Kenya and ordered the withdrawal of Somali diplomatic personnel from the country after accusing Nairobi of continuing to meddle in its internal political affairs and ignoring all previous calls to stop violating its sovereignty.[25] The announcement came in the wake of a meeting between the Kenyan president and Somaliland leader Musa Bihi Abdi in Nairobi. Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. Both leaders declared that they would forge closer relations with the opening of a Kenyan consulate in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, in March, and a direct air connection between Nairobi and Hargeisa.

Kenyan Foreign Minister Cyrus Oguna announced the establishment of a committee to seek a solution to the diplomatic conflict, underlining Kenya's reception of 200,000 Somali refugees who have lived in camps in the eastern part of the country for almost 30 years and recalling that Kenya is currently one of the main contributors of troops to the AU mission in Somalia, AMISOM. Various analysts pointed out that any change in the security situation and Kenya's decisive role due to its participation in the AU mission in Somalia may have serious consequences, alluding to the possibility that Kenya may modify its role in the mission and withdraw troops due to the tense atmosphere between both governments. Another source of tension between Kenya and Somalia was found in the Somali state of Jubaland, which shares a border with Kenya. In late November, Somalia expelled the Kenyan ambassador and called its representative in Nairobi for consultations, accusing Kenya of interfering in the elections in the Somali state of Jubaland. Kenya accuses Mogadishu of trying to replace the regional president, Ahmed Madobe, with someone closer to Mogadishu. Madobe is a key ally of Kenya, which sees Jubaland as a buffer zone against al-Shabaab fighters, who have carried out many attacks across the shared border. The deteriorating relations between both countries is also linked to the upcoming elections, as the administration of President Famajo perceives that Kenya supports the Somali political opposition against him, including Madobe or any other Somali regional leader. Finally, both countries had disputes over their territorial waters due to the possible existence of oil and gas there.

North Africa – Maghreb

Argelia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Governance 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.

Although the restrictions on movement imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the dynamics of massive and periodic protests that characterised 2019, the climate of political tension persisted in Algeria in 2020. After the election of Abdelmadjid Tebboune in December 2019, which had less than 40% turnout, the lowest for a presidential election since the country's independence in 1962, the new president took some steps aimed at placating the Hirak movement, including abolishing the office of the deputy minister of defence, the last civilian position held by a member of the Algerian Army, transferring powers to the prime minister to appoint senior management positions and establishing a commission to design the proposed new Constitution. At the same time, dozens of Hirak activists who remained in prison were released. However, this period of relaxation only lasted a few weeks. In February, with the first anniversary of the massive Hirak protests approaching, the authorities prohibited meetings of Hirak groups and banned all demonstrations in March due to the pandemic. Hirak mostly complied with the public health restrictions as a way to stop the contagion of COVID-19, and as of 20 March, the demonstrations held continuously on Thursdays and Fridays since February 2019 were suspended, with some exceptions. Protests against the regime became more frequent during the year amidst the persecution

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25. Al-Jazeera, "Somalia cuts diplomatic ties with Kenya citing interference", 15 December 2020.

of prominent Hirak activists, journalists and critical voices. Throughout the period, there were reports of the imprisonment, prosecution and sentencing of Hirak leaders and reporters for crimes such as "inciting illegal demonstrations", "endangering state security", "attacking national territorial integrity", "attacking the president", "insulting state institutions" and even for "incitement to atheism" and "offences against Islam", in the case of a prominent member of Hirak and representative of the Amazigh community. In April, the Algerian authorities also passed a law criminalising the spread of false information. Organisations such as Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International called on the Algerian authorities not to violate press freedom and to stop the media harassment campaign.

Anti-government protests multiplied in June, despite calls and alerts from some leaders regarding the risks of contagion. In this context, some analysts highlighted Hirak's scepticism of the authorities, since the government remained reluctant to comply with some of its main demands, such as the total renewal of the political class, the end of military interference in politics, genuine respect for the freedom of association, an independent electoral commission and constitutional court, a constituent assembly and other measures that could put the regime's very survival at risk.[26] Along these lines, and despite a presidential pardon for opposition activists in July, Hirak called for a boycott of the referendum on the new Constitution announced in August by the government, perceived as a manoeuvre to neutralise the protest movement. Amidst the persistent crackdown on dissent, the demonstrations intensified and gathered hundreds of people in Algiers and elsewhere in October, coinciding with the anniversary of the 1988 protests and on the eve of the constitutional referendum. The demonstrators demanding the fall of the regime, a civilian and non-military state and the release of Hirak activists (according to the National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees (CNLD), in November a total of 90 people close to the movement remained detained. **The referendum on the new Constitution was held on 1 November and the new text was approved by 66.8% of the votes, but with a record low turnout of 23.8%.** The referendum was overshadowed by the sudden departure of President Tebboune from the country three days earlier, who was rushed to Germany after catching COVID-19. Analysts said that the referendum had not achieved the purpose of reinforcing Tebboune's legitimacy after the low turnout in the presidential election of December 2019 and that, on the contrary, the course of events, which brought to mind the fragile health of former President Bouteflika in the final years of his rule, bolstered the idea that the new government represents more continuity than a break with the old regime.[27] While Tebboune was hospitalised, in fact, the top military leader had special visibility in the media. Upon his return to the country

in December, the president insisted on his intention to enact the new Constitution and organise legislative and municipal elections.

Argelia (AQIM)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	System Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups AQIM (formerly GSPC), MUJAO, al-Mourabitoun, Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS, governments of North Africa and the Sahel

Summary:

Since the 90s of the past century, Algeria was scenario of an armed conflict that confronted the security forces against various Islamist groups, following the rise of the Islamist movement in the country due to the population's discontent, the economic crisis and the stifling of political participation. The conflict began when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was made illegal in 1992 after its triumph in the elections against the historic party that had led the independence of the country, the National Liberation Front. The armed struggle brought several groups (EIS, GIA and the GSPC, a division of the GIA that later became AQIM in 2007) into conflict with the army, supported by the self-defence militias. The conflict caused some 150,000 deaths during the 1990s and continues to claim lives. However, the levels of violence have decreased since 2002 after some of the groups gave up the armed fight. In recent years, the conflict has been led by AQIM, which became a transnational organisation, expanding its operations beyond Algerian territory and affecting the Sahel countries. Algeria, along with Mali, Libya, Mauritania, Niger and others, has fought AQIM and other armed groups that have begun operating in the area, including the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and al-Mourabitoun organisations (Those Who Sign with Blood), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS) and ISIS. The decrease in confrontations and levels of violence led the case to cease to be considered an armed conflict in 2019, although some dynamics associated with the dispute persist.

Following the trend of the previous year, **sporadic acts of violence involving the Algerian security forces and jihadist armed groups continued to be reported in 2020**. According to the official annual report on the fight against terrorism by the Algerian Ministry of Defence, 21 militiamen were killed and another nine were captured during the period, while dozens of alleged combatants' hideouts were destroyed and weapons (pistols, rifles, submachine guns), ammunition and explosives were confiscated. The Algerian authorities did not specify the total number of deaths among the security forces, but media reports indicate that at least five soldiers perished in incidents with jihadist forces or due to bomb explosions. Meanwhile, the ACLED research centre counted 31 people killed in a score of incidents. Both the official body count and

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26. International Crisis Group, *Algeria: Easing the Lockdown for the Hirak?* Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report no. 217, 27 July 2020.
27. Michaël Béchir Ayari, *Algérie: un air de déjà vu?* Q&A Middle East North Africa, International Crisis Group, 6 November 2020.

that of ACLED are slightly higher than those reported the previous year (15 and 22, respectively), but they confirm the low-intensity violence in this context. Incidents that were reported by the media included a suicide attack by a member of the ISIS affiliate against a military base in Bordj Badji Mokhtar, near the border with Mali, in February, in which a soldier also died; an operation against suspected insurgents in Ain Defla that killed one soldier and an incident that killed two other soldiers due to explosives in Medea (both took place in July, in towns south of Algiers); and clashes in the El Ancer area, in Jijel province (northwest), in December, in which a soldier and three AQIM militants were killed, including a regional chief and a member of the armed organisation's council.

The most outstanding event of the year did not take place on Algerian soil and was not carried out by the country's security forces. It involved the **death of the historical leader of AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdel, as part of a French Special Forces operation in northwestern Mali**, in the town of Talhandak, near the border with Algeria, in June. The veteran AQIM leader since 2007, whose death had been announced several times in the past, died along with several lieutenants shortly after crossing from Algerian territory in a context characterised by competition, clashes and fighting between various jihadist groups of the region to establish their influence in the Sahel.[28] In November, a new AQIM emir was announced: Yazid Mebarek, alias Abu Ubayda Yusef al-Annabi, also Algerian and a veteran of the jihadist struggle. His appointment prompted various interpretations among analysts. Some considered it a tactical error by AQIM which, by opting for a new Algerian chief, continued to ignore the growing influence and priorities of sub-Saharan actors linked to the organisation. Others highlighted his lack of operational and combat experience. Some analysts noted that the way in which al-Annabi's appointment was announced may indicate the greater practical influence of other branches of the group such as Jama'at Nusra al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a coalition of several branches officially affiliated with AQIM, but with more power and independence today. The news of the new emir was spread through a video on AQIM's official channel, al-Andalus, but through a high official (Abu Numan al-Shanqiti, very close to JNIM) and did not include a declaration of allegiance from JNIM to al-Annabi. Several experts agreed that they perceived AQIM as a group in decline, with problems of internal cohesion following the death of its top leader, a lack of connection with new Algerian generations and the reorganisation of jihadist forces that has given pre-eminence to the Sahel over the Maghreb. Furthermore, given its difficulties in recruiting new militants in Algeria and in order to

constitute a threat in the country, AQIM's strategy may be to stay in rural and desert areas.[29]

Morocco – Western Sahara	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International[30]
Main parties:	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front

Summary:
The roots of the conflict can be traced to the end of Spanish colonial rule in Western Sahara in the mid-1970s. The splitting of the territory between Morocco and Mauritania without taking into account the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people or the commitment to a referendum on independence in the area led to a large part of the territory being annexed by Rabat, forcing the displacement of thousands of Sahrawi citizens, who sought refuge in Algeria. In 1976, the POLISARIO Front, a nationalist movement, declared a government in exile (the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic - SADR) and launched an armed campaign against Morocco. Both parties accepted a peace plan in 1988 and since 1991 the UN mission in the Sahara, MINURSO, has been monitoring the ceasefire and is responsible for organising a referendum for self-determination in the territory. In 2007 Morocco presented the UN with a plan for the autonomy of Western Sahara but the POLISARIO Front demands a referendum that includes the option of independence.

Tensions rose markedly in 2020 compared to previous years, especially in the last quarter, amidst chronic impasse in the diplomatic channel to resolve the dispute. Previous dynamics prevailed in the first few months of the year. Morocco continued its investment in infrastructure west of the separation barrier and enacted laws on the limits of its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone that included areas on the coasts of Western Sahara in January. Both events were reported to the United Nations by the POLISARIO Front, which considered them a reflection of Rabat's policies to normalise and consolidate the military occupation and the illegal annexation of parts of Western Sahara, as well as violations of its legal status as a non-autonomous territory. Since December 2019 and throughout 2020, several African countries (Burundi, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, the CAR and São Tomé and Príncipe) decided to open "general consulates" in Laayoune and Dakhla, which were also denounced by the POLISARIO Front for attacking Western Sahara's status as a non-autonomous territory. Morocco maintained its position that the autonomy proposal presented in 2007 was the

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28. See the summaries on Mali and Western Sahel region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
29. Yasmina Allouche,"Al-Qaeda's Maghreb branch has revealed its weakness with new leadership", *Middle East Eye*, 2 December 2020.
30. Although Western Sahara is not an internationally recognised state, the tensions between Morocco and Western Sahara are classified as "international" and not internal as this is a territory which is awaiting decolonisation and which is not recognised as belonging to Morocco either under international law or in any United Nations resolution.

only way to make progress on a solution to the conflict. Meanwhile, the POLISARIO Front blasted the inability of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to carry out its mandate, which included holding a referendum, as its name suggests, and warned that it was reconsidering its participation in the UN peace process. In this sense, the office of the UN Secretary-General's personal envoy for Western Sahara was vacated in May 2019 after the resignation of former German President Horst Köhler and António Guterres himself acknowledged in his annual report on the Sahara Occidental that there was a "pause" in the political process stemming from his resignation. At the end of 2020, the UN had still not appointed anyone to the position.[31] At the same time, there was an increase in violations of the provisions relating to the ceasefire during the year, which has been in force since 1991. The annual report of the UN Secretary-General reported 61 violations between September 2019 and August 2020, particularly east of the barrier. In October, shortly before the renewal of MINURSO's mandate, the head of the mission also warned the UN Security Council of an increase in violations by both parties of military agreement number 1, which regulates the truce.

The situation deteriorated in November after incidents in Guerguerat, an area that had already been a source of tension in recent years and that in 2020 was also the scene of Sahrawi demonstrations and barricades in the face of what the POLISARIO Front has repeatedly denounced as an illicit step. On 21 October, about 50 Sahrawis blocked traffic in this area, located between Mauritania and the area of Western Sahara occupied by Morocco, and demonstrated to ask that the UN Security Council, which at that time was discussing the renewal of the MINURSO mandate, to fulfil the task of holding a referendum on self-determination. In line with what has happened in recent years, Resolution 2548 was approved on 30 October with wording more favourable to the Moroccan position, as it made no explicit mention of the referendum and emphasised the need for a "realistic, practicable and lasting political solution" to the issue of Western Sahara. **The Sahrawi protests in Guerguerat continued and on 13 November, Moroccan forces entered the area, which is supposed to be a demilitarised buffer zone, in order to break up the protests and re-establish commercial traffic. Faced with this incursion, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war**. Morocco avoided using the term "war" and assured that it remained committed to the ceasefire, but warned of a forceful response in the event of a threat to its security. Various analysts highlighted that with this approach, the POLISARIO Front intended to alter the status quo,

After an incursion by Moroccan forces in Guerguerat in October, the POLISARIO Front ended the ceasefire and declared a state of war

respond to the frustration of generations of young people in refugee camps who have been waiting for decades for a political solution and challenge Morocco's strategy of silencing and covering up the conflict. The UN Secretary-General lamented his organisation's failure to prevent an escalation, expressed his concern, called for preventing the collapse of the ceasefire and stressed his determination to remove obstacles to reactivate the political process. Despite its responsibilities as the administering power of Western Sahara, Spain maintained a discreet position, limited to supporting UN initiatives to guarantee the truce.

Comparing information on developments in the dispute is complex due to the limitations on access for independent observers. Since mid-November, the POLISARIO Front reported that it had mobilised its armed forces, conducted periodic attacks on Moroccan bases and announced Moroccan casualties (not confirmed by Rabat), without reporting any casualties of its own. Other sources pointed to low-intensity exchanges of fire at points along the 2,700-kilometer barrier built by Morocco. At the same time, an increase in harassment and repression was reported in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, including raids, arrests, attacks, increased surveillance and crackdowns on demonstrations in towns such as Laayoune, Smara, Dakhla and Boujdour.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said that even though no civilian casualties had been reported in the hostilities, the events reinforced the need for an effective mechanism to monitor the human rights situation, including MINURSO's powers and responsibilities in this area, continuously rejected by Rabat. **In December, the United States became the first country to recognise Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara, a position that the Trump administration adopted in exchange for Rabat "normalising" diplomatic relations with Israel**.[32] The POLISARIO Front condemned the announcement, stressing that it violates the legitimacy of international resolutions and obstructs efforts to reach a solution. The US announced that it would open a consulate in Laayoune. The United Arab Emirates, which also signed an agreement with Israel in August at the behest of the United States, opened a diplomatic office in this same city in November and media outlets reported that Bahrain and Jordan, two other Washington allies in the region, would follow the same path. Although Trump's deal was presented as a success and boosted the Moroccan position, at the end of the year no changes were foreseen in the UN or the EU's approach and the position that the incoming US administration would take in this regard was also unclear.

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31. See the summary on Morocco-Western Sahara in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2020. Report on Trends and Scenarios.* Barcelona: Icaria, 2021.
32. See the summary on Israel-Palestine in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Tunisia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups including the Uqba ibn Nafi Battalion or the Oqba ibn Nafaa Brigades (branch of AQIM), Jund al-Khilafa (branch of ISIS), ISIS

Summary:

From its independence in 1956 until early 2011, Tunisia was governed by only two presidents. For three decades Habib Bourghiba laid the foundations for the authoritarian regime in the country, which Zine Abidine Ben Ali then continued after a coup d'état in 1987. The concentration of power, the persecution of the secular and Islamist political opposition and the iron grip on society that characterised the country's internal situation stood in contrast to its international image of stability. Despite allegations of corruption, electoral fraud and human rights violations, Tunisia was a privileged ally of the West for years. In December 2010, the outbreak of a popular revolt exposed the contradictions of Ben Ali's government, led to its fall in early 2011 and inspired protests against authoritarian governments throughout the Arab world. Since then, Tunisia has been immersed in a bumpy transition that has laid bare the tensions between secular and Islamist groups in the country. At the same time, Tunisia has been the scene of increased activity from armed groups, including branches of AQIM and ISIS.

The tension in Tunisia intensified during 2020 compared to the previous year in a context marked by **greater polarisation and political instability, economic crisis and frustration among parts of the population due to the lack of improvement in living conditions 10 years after the revolt that overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's regime**. At the same time, the country continued to be the scene of sporadic acts of violence that involved the security forces and jihadist armed groups. The parliamentary elections of October 2019 outlined a more fragmented and tenser political scenario, characterised by discourses that were more populist, radical and nostalgic for the dictatorship, changing and volatile alliances and periodic struggles between Islamist and anti-Islamist groups, among other dynamics, which resulted in difficulties in forming a new government. In early January, Ennahda, the Islamist party that won the elections, but did not have a sufficient majority to govern alone, nominated a cabinet that was rejected by the assembly. The new president, Kaïs Saïed, elected in October 2019 with 73% of the vote in an election with 57% turnout, charged Elyes Fakhfakh, of the Ettakatol party, to form a new government, who obtained approval for his cabinet in late February. The new government was therefore set up more than four months after the elections, a period that laid bare the disputes and particularly the power struggle between the president

and Ennahda, which was awarded seven ministries in the new government. In the following months, the political landscape was marked by the need to respond to the pandemic (emergency powers were approved in April), by growing debates about the political system (some, including Saïed, back a presidential system instead of the current parliamentarian one defended by Ennahda) and by tensions linked to the conflict in neighbouring Libya. Ennahda's parliamentary spokesman and leader, Rached Ghannouchi, was accused of violating Tunisian neutrality regarding the Libyan conflict for his pronouncements in favour of the Libyan government led by Fayez al-Sarraj (based in Tripoli and supported by Turkey) and for his contacts with Ankara.[33]

The national anti-corruption office's accusations of a conflict of interest against Prime Minister Fakhfakh in July prompted a motion of no confidence initiated by Ennahda that ended with his resignation and the dismissal of the government. Another motion against Ghannouchi in the same period failed. Interior Minister Hichem Mechichi was charged with forming a new technocratic government, which was approved in September after new power struggles (Ennahda initially rejected a cabinet that did not reflect the political forces of Parliament, but ended up accepting it despite its reservations about the complex situation in the country). The Mechichi government therefore became the third in less than a year. In the final months of 2020, new tensions emerged, now between Saïed and the prime minister due to the latter's decision to appoint people who had worked with Ben Ali as advisors. Likewise, there was tension in Parliament and calls from political groups to dissolve the assembly. In December, the main union in the country (UGTT) called for a national dialogue, to which the president committed at the end of the year as a way to correct the course of the revolution. Ennahda also expressed its support for the dialogue, promoted in the midst of the **protests commemorating the 10th anniversary of the revolt, which revealed parts of the population's disaffection and disappointment with the political class**. During the second half and particularly the final months of 2020, the protests intensified, especially in the poorest regions of the country. There were also warnings about the increase in the number of young Tunisians who are emigrating to Europe. According to data from the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, about 13,000 young Tunisians arrived on Italian shores in 2020, compared to 2,654 in 2019 and 5,200 in 2018.

According to data from the ACLED research centre, a dozen people died in acts of violence that involved the security forces and jihadist armed groups in 2020. During the year, training camps and explosives were discovered in the Kasserine area (February), four Jund al-Khilafa militiamen were killed in two security force operations (February and April), a double suicide attack on a security

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33. See the summary on Libya in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

checkpoint near the US embassy in the Tunisian capital killed a police officer (March) and an attack on a security checkpoint in Sousse killed a guard and subsequently caused the death of three of the alleged attackers (September). In November, the government reported that it had killed four leaders and injured an unknown number of militiamen in a security force operation (at an undetermined date) in which weapons, ammunition and electronic equipment were also confiscated. According to official records, 1,020 people suspected of terrorism had been arrested in the first 11 months of the year.

West Africa

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

Summary:

Since its independence from France in 1960, Mali has lived through several periods of instability, including the coup d'état in 1968, a popular and military rebellion in 1991 and the Tuareg insurgency and uprisings since independence, demanding greater political participation and the development of the north of the country. Mali held its first multi-party elections in 1992, although since then several elections have taken place amid opposition criticism concerning the lack of democratic guarantees. The army's influence was apparent in a new attempted coup d'état of 2000, which was foiled. The instability increased once again in 2012 when control of the north was seized by Tuareg and Islamist groups and the government was ousted by a coup d'état. From that moment on, the country's successive governments have faced multiple political, economic and security challenges, with violence persisting in the northern part of the country and spreading to the central region. There was a significant increase in popular protests and demonstrations in 2019, which were followed in 2020 by a coup d'état and the formation of a new transitional government in the country.

Political tensions increased in Mali during the year, giving rise to a coup that toppled the government and opened a new transitional process in the country. The first half of the year was marked by demonstrations and social protests against the government led by Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta due to the political crisis and the deteriorating security situation in the country. Added to this was the outrage over the kidnapping (allegedly by Katiba Macina militants) of Soumaila Cissé, the leader of the main opposition party, Union for the Republic and Democracy, and of 11 members of his team in Timbuktu on 25 March, while campaigning for legislative elections. The controversies arising from the Constitutional Court's annulment of part of the results

Mali formed a civilian-military transitional government after the coup in August

of the legislative elections held between 29 March (first round) and 19 April (second round) caused greater discontent and boosted the popular demonstrations. Led by the M5-RFP movement, made up of a coalition of opposition groups and civil society groups headed by the prominent Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the protests grew in June and July and called for Keïta's resignation, the formation of a government led by the M5-RFP and the dissolution of the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court. Faced with rising tensions, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appointed former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to be the special envoy for Mali and created a high-level delegation to mediate, requesting the formation of a unity government and partial repetition of the legislative elections. The protests continued and on 18 August, a group of high-ranking military commanders calling themselves the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), led by Malian Army Colonel Assimi Goita, staged a coup that forced President Keïta to resign. Several senior government officials were arrested, including Keïta and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé.

Though it was welcomed by the M5-RFP, the coup provoked widespread international condemnation, such as from ECOWAS, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, the United States and others, which demanded the immediate release of the government and the return to constitutional order. The ECOWAS delegation held meetings with the CNSP, Keïta and Cissé in Bamako in mid-August to mediate the return of the civilian government, but no results were achieved. The CNSP announced the start of a three-year transitional period and released Keïta, but ECOWAS demanded an immediate civilian-led transition and elections within a year, imposing sanctions on Mali. Finally, after months of pressure and negotiations between the CNSP and opposition groups and civil society, including the M5-RFP coalition, a transitional government made up of civilian and military figures was created in October that obtained international recognition. The new interim president, Bah N'Daw, appointed the 25 members of the new government, awarding four key portfolios to military officers, three to the civilian movement and two to the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA). However, the M5-RFP complained that it had no representation in the new government and kept the protests going. In early November, President N'Daw decreed the formation of an interim legislative body called the National Transitional Council (CNT), granting the vice president and leader of the CNSP, Assimi Goïta, the authority to appoint its members. The CNT will have 121 seats, of which the CNSP will be the best represented group, with 22. At the same time, the government appointed military officers as governors of various regions, raising the number of those governed by military or police officers to 13 out of 20. The M5-RFP described the decrees as unacceptable, questioning the military nature of the transition and continuing to call for popular protest.

Nigeria	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Resources, Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Christian and Muslim communities, livestock and farming communities, community militias, criminal gangs, 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.

Violence and instability increased in Nigeria beyond the armed conflict linked to the actions of Boko Haram, which affects the three northeastern states of the country and the Lake Chad basin.[34] In northwestern Nigeria, there was a rise in tensions that began in 2018, centred on the activities of criminal groups, to which was added the permanent climate of intercommunity violence in the middle belt of the country and, above all, the exceptional measures imposed by the government to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and social demonstrations against the excessive use of force by the security forces and particularly by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The increase in criminal violence in the northwest spread to the capital, Abuja, prompting rising security concerns. This escalation of criminal violence has caused around 8,000 fatalities since 2011 and forcibly displaced around 200,000 people to neighbouring Niger, despite local and government-level military operations and peacebuilding initiatives, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group. This violence is rooted in competition for resources between Fulani cattle communities and Hausa agricultural communities and has escalated due to the involvement of criminal gangs dedicated to stealing cattle, kidnapping people for ransom and looting and burning various towns, a situation exploited by jihadist groups, according to the organisation. Criminal violence claimed thousands of lives during the year, mainly in the northwestern states, with 2,481 fatalities according to the Nigerian Security Tracker, most of them in the states of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. The death toll was higher than in 2019, when more than 2,000 people died as a result of the actions of many different actors,

including criminal groups, security forces, jihadists, groups linked to livestock-raising communities and civilian self-defence militias. There was a persistent climate of violence in the central states known as the "middle belt" (the states of Taraba, Benue, Plateau and Niger) due to inter-community clashes between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and agricultural communities in the centre and south. Inter-community fighting continued to spiral due to actions and reactions that exacerbated the climate of violence, including the looting and burning of fields and the theft and destruction of livestock, which caused hundreds of fatalities during the year.

Notably, there was an escalation of popular protests accompanied by a wave of repression resulting from the imposition of coercive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and especially because of the demonstrations that took place in October. In imposing the emergency measures, the security forces were accused of committing multiple human rights violations and of using excessive force, according to information received by the National Human Rights Commission. The commission received 209 complaints of human rights violations by the security forces, including at least 29 extrajudicial killings committed between 30 March and 4 May. This climate of repression continued throughout the year and worsened in October. On 5 October, there were peaceful protests and sit-ins against police brutality and impunity in Abuja and Lagos due to a video that went viral showing a police unit of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) that shot an unarmed man dead in the town of Ughelli, in Delta State. SARS had a long and previous history of abuse, extrajudicial killings and torture. Initially focused on #ENDSARS and against police brutality, the growing demonstrations increased their demands and called for greater democracy and freedom. Tens of thousands of people in the country participated in the protests, including many young people and women who received support from local and international cultural celebrities and athletes. As a result of all this, on 11 October the government agreed to dismantle SARS. However, two days later it announced the creation of a new police unit to replace it, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). This decision caused a resurgence in the protests, which were even more intense. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated and the protests turned violent due to the security forces' efforts to disperse them, including vigilante groups that attacked the protesters and acts of looting and criminal violence in many cities. On 20 October, the Nigerian Army opened fire on protesters in Lagos, killing at least a dozen people according to human rights groups, though these deaths were denied by the government. Subsequently, the protesters destroyed at least 25 police stations, killed or wounded dozens of policemen, facilitated the escape of over 2,000 prisoners and looted shopping centres and food stores. On 23 October, the government reported that 69 people had been killed in violence related to the

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34. See the summary on the Lake Chad Region (Boko Haram) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

protests, including civilians, police officers and soldiers. As of 25 October, 27 state governments and the government of the Federal Capital Territory had set up judicial commissions to investigate police abuse. However, in November the government took legal action against organisations and activists linked to the protests, such as activist Rinu Oduala, lawyer Modupe Odele and the Feminist Coalition, which included the freezing of bank accounts and the confiscation of travel documents.

The number of murders fell by 45% compared to the previous year, thus reaching the lowest homicide rate since the end of the civil war in the country in 1992

2.3.2. America

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

El Salvador	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government 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.

The number of killings fell by 45% over the previous year, reaching the lowest homicide rate since the end of the country's civil war in 1992. In 2020, the rate was 20 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, a figure clearly lower than the 36 reported in 2019 and the 103 reported in 2015, making El Salvador the country with the highest rates of violence in the world. Since then, the country has experienced a gradual decline in the number of homicides, and most pronouncedly since the current President Nayib Bukele took office in June 2019. **According to the government, in June 2019 the homicide rate was 50 per 100,000 inhabitants, and the reduction of violence in the country is mainly due to the implementation of the Territorial Control Plan, which mainly consists of increasing the police and military presence in areas with high levels of gang activity, while reasserting control over the prisons** where the main gang leaders are located (according to media reports, around 17,000 of the estimated 60,000 to 70,000

gang members in El Salvador are currently serving prison sentences).

However, some analysts argue that the sharp drop in the number of homicides is explained not only by government policies, but also by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (March was the least violent in the country's recorded history, while in other countries in the region there was a substantial drop in the number of homicides during months with more severe restrictions). These same analysts argue that since levels of violence fell across the country and not only in the 22 municipalities in which the Territorial Control Plan is focused, it may be worth considering structural and systemic explanations. Thus, according to the International Crisis Group, after more than 15 years of open warfare between El Salvador's main maras (especially MS-13 and Barrio 18) for control of several parts of the country, levels of violence both between them and involving the security forces fell substantially once each gang's areas of influence were delimited and stabilised. According to these analysts, the gangs decided to lower levels of conflict between themselves and with the state since their mechanisms of extortion and enrichment through illicit activities worked reasonably well without resorting to the high levels of violence achieved in 2015 and in previous years. Some media outlets supported the view that it was the gangs' decision to reduce violence and not so much the impact of government policies against civic insecurity, arguing that the peak of violence between 24 and 27 April, in which 74 murders were reported, should be interpreted as a message from the gangs (especially MS-13) regarding their presence in the communities and their control over levels of violence in the country.

Finally, the political crisis that rattled the country early in the year after the majority of the Legislative Assembly refused to approve the necessary funds for implementing the third phase of the aforementioned Territorial Control Plan, which led to the militarisation of Congress by Bukele to pressure lawmakers who opposed his plans. After several calls from the international community to end the serious clash between the executive and legislative branches and following criticism from the opposition for considering such an action a coup and an act of sedition, the Supreme Court demanded that Bukele refrain from using the Salvadoran Army for unconstitutional purposes.

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

Summary:

Although the end of the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), one of the longest and deadliest civil wars of the entire 20th century in Latin America, led to a notable drop in levels of violence in the country, the growing territorial expansion of gangs (especially MS-13 and Barrio 18) and other criminal organisations linked to drug trafficking caused Guatemala to have one of the highest homicide rates in the region in recent decades. In 2020, the opposition of large parts of the population to congressional approval of the new budgets and their questioning of more structural social, political and economic issues gave rise to one of the most intense protests in recent years.

The number of homicides dropped considerably compared to 2019 and previous years, but at the end of 2020 the new government of Alejandro Giammattei faced some of the most intense protests in recent times. According to government data, 2,574 homicides were recorded in 2020, or 28% less than in 2019. The homicide rate per 100,000 people was 15, while in 2019 it had been 22. This fall in the number of homicides is in keeping with the gradual decline of levels of direct violence in the country in the last decade. In 2009, for example, the homicide rate was 46 (more than triple that of 2020), and it has been steadily declining each year since. According to the government, 32% of the violent deaths were concentrated in the department of Guatemala, followed by those of Escuintla (12%) and Izabal (8%). Both the National Institute of Forensic Sciences and the NGO Mutual Support Group (GAM) released data that differ significantly from the government data, though they identify similar trends. According to the first agency, 2,500 homicides were reported in 2020 (2,276 of them with firearms), a 24.6% drop compared to 2019. The GAM also noted that there were 3,472 homicides in 2020, 25% less than in 2019, and that more than 6,500 complaints of violence against women had been processed. According to the GAM, the homicide rate was 23 per 100,000 inhabitants, but some departments far exceeded these figures, such as Chiquimula (61), Izabal (54), Escuintla (54) and Zacapa (43). As has happened in many other countries, **several analysts noted that the main reason for the decrease in violent deaths was the restrictions on mobility linked to the COVID-19 pandemic** (as evidenced by the fact that that March, April and May were clearly the months with the lowest homicide rates), but the police emphasised the new government's anti-organised crime policies. In this sense, in his inaugural speech in mid-January, Giammattei had promised to make the fight against civic insecurity one of his government's priorities, pledged to push for new legislation to declare gangs as terrorist organisations and urged the governments of Honduras and El Salvador (which together with Guatemala make up the so-called Northern Triangle, the area where gangs are most entrenched in the world) to join forces to fight gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (or MS13) and Barrio 18. The legislative processing of this law began in February, which was criticised by various human rights organisations. Citing the need to fight organised crime

with the appropriate tools, the government imposed a state of emergency in several cities (Mixco, San Juan Sacatepéquez, Escuintla or Chumaltenango), an exceptional action that does not require congressional approval and that grants additional powers to the security forces of the state. In just five days after the state of emergency implemented, more than 120 people had been detained in the cities of Escuintla and Chimaltenango alone.

Meanwhile, **one of the events that managed to capture national and international media attention were the protests that took place in the capital in November, in which Congress was set on fire and clashes were reported between protesters and police officers**. The trigger for the protests was Congress' opposition to passing the budget bill, but some analysts argue that there were other factors explaining both the exasperation of large parts of the population and the congregation of thousands of people in the late November, as well as the impact of Hurricane Eta and Hurricane Iota (which killed at least 57 people and killed 96 others in November); rising levels of malnutrition (the World Food Programme noted that 921,000 households were at risk of food insecurity and that there were 13,000 children with acute malnutrition in the country); rising electricity costs; allegations of corruption in managing funds allocated to fighting against the pandemic (and which led to the removal of the minister of health and other senior government officials in June); and the management of mobility restrictions linked to COVID-19 (between late March and late June, almost 25,000 people were arrested for violating confinement orders). Following the serious incidents, Congress withdrew the aforementioned budget bill, but protests continued in the following days and demands for the resignation of the president and many members of Congress continued. Giammattei called the incidents an attempted coup and invoked the OAS' democratic charter to preserve the country's democratic institutions. The United Nations urged an investigation into the alleged excessive use of force by the police, which allegedly led to many injuries during the protests.

Haiti	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government 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.

Although the protests were significantly less intense than those of 2019, in which around 70 people lost their lives, the political crisis in Haiti persisted, protests and clashes were reported almost uninterruptedly during the year, the economic crisis and migration crisis worsened and there was an increase in violence linked to the many armed gangs operating in certain neighbourhoods of the capital and other cities. The political crisis was significantly worse than in the previous year due to the government's intention to amend the Constitution during the first quarter of 2021 and before the next legislative elections, which were supposed to have been held in November 2019. This led to the **end of the terms of two-thirds of the Senate in January and President Jovenel Moïse has governed since then mainly through presidential decrees**. In addition, the polarisation between the government and the opposition increased due to their different interpretations of when the term of the current president ends, whether in February 2021, as the opposition maintains, or in February 2022, as the government argues. Amidst this political polarisation and institutional fragility, the Core Group (made up of the United Nations, the OAS, the EU and the governments of Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain and the United States), the United Nations Integrated Office (BINUH) and many civil society and human rights organisations expressed their concern over the rise in violence in certain cities of the country and the growing territorial spread and coordination of certain armed gangs. For example, in July the Episcopal Peace and Justice Commission (CE-JILAP) declared that 244 people had died in the first six months of the year in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince alone in episodes of violence linked to armed gangs. CE-JILAP related in its report that many of the victims were burned, lynched or beheaded. In August, the National Network for the Defence of Human Rights warned that in the Cité Soleil neighbourhood in the month of June alone, 111 people had died, 48 had disappeared and 20 more had been injured by clashes and attacks carried out by armed groups. The Je Klere Foundation (FKJL) claimed in a report published in the middle of the year that

In Haiti, one of the most worrying events of the year was the formation of G9 an Fanmi, a coalition of at least nine armed groups

the clashes between gangs are not just economically motivated and also aimed at controlling territory, but very often have political connotations, with some gangs more identified with the government and others with other political groups. This FKJL denounced the government's collusion in assassinations committed for ideological reasons in areas with an opposition majority, as well as the government's attempt to control certain armed gangs for electoral purposes and to intimidate certain political groups or prevent them from promoting or capitalising on anti-government protests.

According to some analysts, **one of the most worrying events of the year was the formation in June of G9 an Fanmi ("G9 and Family"), a coalition of at least nine armed groups** created and led by Jimmy Chérizier, aka Barbecue, a former police officer involved in the massacres of Grand Ravine in November 2017 (involving the extrajudicial killing of 14 people) and La Saline in November 2018 (in which 71 people were murdered), both while active in the police force. Despite having a search and arrest warrant against him since February 2019 on multiple murder charges, Chérizier participated in several attacks in the Bel Air neighbourhood that same year. After it became known to the public in June, the G9 participated in many acts of violence in various neighbourhoods near the capital in which many people were killed and dozens of houses were set on fire. In addition, hundreds of members of this coalition of armed groups staged violent protests to demand their legal recognition as local authorities in the areas they control and to demand the release of one of their leaders, Albert Stevenson (aka Djouma). The Je Klere Foundation (FKJL) denounced the government and the police's responsibility for and collusion in the creation and subsequent implementation of the G9, while other civil society organisations reported that some gangs even used police cars and uniforms to carry out kidnappings (the number of which increased during the year) and other illicit activities.

Another one of the main sources of tension during the year was linked to the police. In the first quarter, **the director general of the police's refusal to create a police union sparked several violent protests by hundreds of policemen in February and early March, in which dozens of roadblocks were set up, buildings and cars were burned and three people died in the violent clashes that occurred**. Although the government authorised the union in mid-March, throughout the year a group known as Fantom 509, a police cell that staged protests and disturbances at various times of the year, took a leading role in making various labour-related demands and demanded the resignation of the president of Haiti and the release one of the group's leaders, arrested in May. The government criticised the group for setting up roadblocks and barricades and starting fires with police uniforms and even threatened to designate

Fantom 509 a terrorist organisation. There were anti-government demonstrations and protests throughout the year, alongside rising insecurity and violence across the country, but the demonstrations and riots were especially intense in the final quarter of the year. **In November alone, 11 people lost their lives in the riots in Port-au-Prince and other cities.** Finally, the serious political and social situation gripping the country and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the economic and migration crisis in Haiti. According to various sources, the number of people suffering from food insecurity increased to four million people. Similarly, migratory flows from Haiti increased significantly to the point that the Dominican Republic closed the border and deployed 10,000 additional soldiers to prevent undocumented Haitians from entering.

Honduras	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government 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.

Protests linked to food shortages and deteriorating living conditions increased, as did tension between the government and the opposition in the run-up to the 2021 elections, but there was also a significant drop in the number of homicides. According to the government, 3,482 homicides were reported in 2020, a significant dip compared to 4,082 reported in 2019, 3,864 in 2018 and 3,732 in 2017. Levels of violence in the country increased dramatically between 2005 and 2001, when Honduras had the highest homicide rate in the world (92 homicides per 100,000 people). Since then, except for the increase in homicides in 2010 compared to 2018,

there has been a gradual decrease to a homicide rate of 37 in 2020. In that year, the number of "multiple murders" also fell compared to the previous year (from 66 in 2019 to 44 in 2020). **The Observatory of Violence of the National Autonomous University of Honduras stated that the decline in violence is mainly attributable to the confinement, curfew and mobility restrictions linked to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic**. The government acknowledged the impact, but also stressed the effectiveness of its strategy to combat crime, citing the breakup of drug cartels (including the extradition of people, seizures of drugs and the dismantling of secret airstrips and laboratories); the creation of the National Anti-Mara and Gang Force (FNAMP), which had detained almost 1,700 gang members by December 2020; the recovery of spaces controlled by such gangs; legislative changes to better address drug trafficking, organised crime and money laundering; and purges the police force to make it more effective and improve its reputation. According to the Observatory of Violence, 65% of the violent deaths in the country are linked to drug trafficking. Despite this reduction in levels of violence, many episodes of political violence against and killings of social and community leaders, human rights defenders and environmental activists continued to be reported during 2020.

However, the political tension between the government and the opposition over the organisation of the primary and general elections respectively scheduled for March and November 2021 rose significantly due to the lack of agreement to approve new electoral legislation (especially regarding the establishment of a second presidential term and the creation of a runoff in the presidential election) and the problems in updating the electoral census (at the end of the year, the competent authorities said they had detected problems in identifying 500,000 people, which according to some analysts could lead to serious tensions in the election and question the legitimacy of the results). **Political tension was also exacerbated by accusations against President Orlando and people he trusted for his closeness and connivance with organised crime** (in 2019 a US court convicted his brother of drug trafficking) and by the end of the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras in January, following a lack of agreement between the government and the OAS on continuing its activities. Finally, there were demonstrations and protests throughout the year due to food shortages and deteriorating living conditions.

Mexico	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, Resources 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.

In general terms, the levels of violence were similar to those of the previous year. According to data from the National Public Security System, there were 35,484 homicides in 2020 (133 less than in 2019) and the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 27. **The government warned that most of these homicides (20,188) were committed with firearms and that the number of intentional homicides with firearms has increased by 133% in the last five years.** These figures do not include missing persons or bodies found in mass graves. According to data from the National Registry of Missing and Unlocated Persons, more than 200,000 people have disappeared since 1964, almost 82,000 of which have not been located. In 2020, 15,656 people disappeared (23% less than in 2019), of which 6,753 were still unaccounted for at the end of the year. **According to media estimates based on official data, since the beginning of the war against drug trafficking that began in 2006, more than 300,000 homicides have been reported in Mexico.** In 2020, 52% of homicides were concentrated in five states (Guanajuato, Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco and Michoacán), and this percentage exceeded 80% when five other states were included (Tamaulipas, Jalisco, State of Mexico, Veracruz and Colima). According to government data published in August, 19 main cartels operate in Mexico, eight of which increased their operations during 2020: the Jalisco Nueva Generación Cartel (CJNG) and the Sinaloa Cartel at the national level; Los Viagras in Michoacán; Guerreros Unidos y Rojos in Guerrero; Cartel de Santa Rosa de Lima in Guanajuato; and Unión Tepito y Cártel de Tláhuac in the country's capital. Several analysts highlighted the rapid expansion of the CJNG, which was active in two states in 2010 and had a solid presence in 24 states in 2020, including in several of the traditional strongholds of the Sinaloa Cartel (currently considered the second largest cartel in the country), such as Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Colima, Querétaro, State of Mexico, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Quintana Roo. According to information from the DEA, the six cartels with the

According to some estimates, since the beginning of the war against drug trafficking that began in 2006, over 300,000 homicides have been reported in Mexico

greatest capacity to bring narcotics into the US were CJNG, Sinaloa, Beltrán Leyva, Juárez, Golfo and Los Zetas. In December, US President Donald Trump pointed out that despite the design of a new anti-drug strategy and the progress made in seizures and extraditions that were carried out under the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the country had yet to make many more accomplishments in this area and ran the risk of not fulfilling its international commitments to anti-drug policy.

Regarding the dynamics of violence, there were almost daily clashes between rival cartels or between them and the state security forces during 2020. Some of the episodes that generated more political and media attention were two attacks on a rehabilitation centre in Irapuato (Guanajuato) in which 10 people lost their lives (in June) and another 27 in July; clashes in January and April between the CJNG and Los Viagras in Michoacán and Guerrero, which resulted in the deaths of 10 and 21 people respectively; clashes between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels in Chihuahua in April, which killed 19 people; the killing of 12 alleged members of the Cártel del Nordeste in Tamaulipas in July by the Mexican Army; clashes in Zacatecas in December between the CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel, which killed at least 28 people; the murder of 26 people and the displacement of more than 1,000 due to fighting between the CJNG and an alliance of organized crime organisations in Michoacán in December; and the discovery of mass graves in Guanajuato in November (76 corpses in the town of Salvatierra and another 45 in the town of Cortázar) and in Colima in August (22 bodies).

The government highlighted its policy on citizen security and the fight against drugs, noting that the 2020 data represents the first drop in the number of homicides in the last five years and alleging a significant decrease in kidnappings (36%) and robberies (21%). The government also announced an agreement with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for a group of experts to resume the investigation into the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa (Guerrero) in 2014, in which evidence had been found of the complicity of state and federal security forces. However, **both human rights organisations and the National Human Rights Commission criticised the growing militarisation of citizen security policies**, especially after López Obrador signed a presidential decree in May allowing the deployment of the Mexican Armed Forces in a wide range of functions related to public security until May 2024. According to these organisations, this decree does not specify under what circumstances and in which areas the Mexican Armed Forces can be used. Along the same lines, civil society organisations warned that there are currently 31% more soldiers deployed throughout the country than during the two previous governments.

South America

Bolivia	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government 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.

Although there were significant protests before and after the presidential and legislative elections in October, there was considerably less political and social tension in Bolivia compared to the previous year, in which the country was shaken by a major crisis that caused the deaths of more than 30 people and prompted President Evo Morales to leave the country and seek political asylum. Early in the year, the protests subsided significantly compared to the final quarter of 2019, and more so in early January after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal called for new elections on 3 May. However, in February the tension increased again after the Supreme Electoral Tribunal rejected Evo Morales's candidacy to the Senate, claiming that he did not reside in Bolivia. Two different criminal proceedings were also initiated against the former president on charges of terrorism and electoral fraud in the October 2019 elections. However, the moment of greatest political and social tension began in late July, when the Supreme Electoral Tribunal postponed the elections for the third time, this time until 18 October, alleging that it would be impossible to hold them earlier due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This delay was criticised by both Morales and various parts of the opposition, which argued that the interim government led by Jeanine Áñez was using the pandemic as a pretext to prolong and consolidate her rule. In such circumstances, **the Bolivian Workers' Centre (COB) union and other organisations that the media considers close to Morales encouraged protests, called for a general strike and set up more than 70 roadblocks throughout the country in early August**. After the lack of agreement in the talks between several of these organisations and the government, protests increased in various parts of the country, causing dozens of injuries and shortages of supplies. In fact, the government deployed the Bolivian Army to guarantee the transport of oxygen for people sick with coronavirus.

The protests subsided after Áñez signed a decree that set 18 October as the maximum deadline for calling new elections and Morales called for the roadblocks to come down. Days later, the headquarters of the COB and another union were attacked with bombs and in early September, the provisional government urged the International Criminal Court to launch an investigation for crimes against humanity against the organisers of the protests and roadblocks. There were dozens of episodes of political violence against members or sympathisers of the ruling and opposition parties in September and October, as denounced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, the government, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and four electoral observation missions, including that of the OAS, certified that the legislative and presidential elections of 18 October were free and peaceful. **The party of Evo Morales (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) won the victory in both houses of Congress, while its presidential candidate, Luis Arce, the minister of the economy in the government of Evo Morales, won a massive victory (more than 55% of votes) against former President Carlos Mesa (29%) and Luis Fermando Camacho (14%).** Despite these results, protests continued to occur on a regular basis in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba in October and November, mainly by individuals and organisations alleging that there had been electoral fraud and requesting an audit of the results of the elections. Finally, a judge annulled the arrest warrant against Evo Morales for crimes of terrorism and sedition and Morales returned to Bolivia from Argentina in early November. The outgoing Congress approved a motion in October requesting that Áñez and 11 of her government ministers be prosecuted for their responsibility in the acts of violence that occurred in the final months of 2019, in which hundreds of people were injured and more than 30 died.

Peru	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)

Summary:

In 1980, just when democracy had been restored in the country, an armed conflict began between the government and the Maoist armed group Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso in Spanish) that lasted for two decades and claimed 60,000 lives. The counter-insurgency policy implemented in the 1990s pushed the state towards authoritarianism under Alberto Fujimori, who in 2000 went into exile in Japan having been deposed by congress and accused of numerous cases of corruption and human rights violations. Since 2008, the remaining Shining Path factions have stepped up their operations significantly in the Alto Huallaga region and especially in the VRAE region (Valley between the Apurímac and Ene Rivers). The government, which claims that the Shining Path organisation is involved in drug trafficking, has intensified its military operations in both regions notably and has refused to enter into talks of any sort. It has also intensified the political and legal struggle against its political arm, Movadef. Meanwhile, several collectives, especially indigenous groups, have organised periodical mobilisations to protest against the economic policy of successive governments and against the activity of mining companies.

The removal of President Martín Vizcarra by Congress in November sparked the start of some of the most important protests in recent years in many parts of the country, which in turn led to the resignation of incoming President Manuel Merino and his entire cabinet. The protests began in Lima and other cities in the country on the same day that Congress overwhelmingly approved Vizcarra's removal (with 105 votes in favour out of a total of 130) on charges of "permanent moral incapacity" for allegations of corruption during his term as governor of Moquegua between 2011 and 2014. Previously, in September, the same Congress had initiated a procedure for Vizcarra's removal, accused at that time of corruption to favour a singer, but it did not pass in the end due to lack of congressional support. Following Vizcarra's removal and the inauguration of the new president, formerly the speaker of Congress, Manuel Merino, tens of thousands of people participated in demonstrations across the country, especially during the three "national marches" on 12, 14 and 17 November, during which there were many riots and clashes between protesters and police. According to the National Coordinator for Human Rights, two people died, more than 100 were injured (more than 60 hospitalised) and more than 40 went missing. Several civil society organisations have accused the police of using rubber pellets and tear gas indiscriminately, while **international bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, expressed concern about police action in containing the protests, demanding that the state investigate.**

Faced with the scale of the protests, President Merino and most of his cabinet resigned shortly after two protesters were shot dead. Following the subsequent appointment of congressman Francisco Sagasti as the new president of the country (who had voted against Vizcarra's removal),

the protests calmed down at the end of the month and especially after Sagasti announced police reforms, the appointment of a new chief of staff and the dismissal of several officers accused of police brutality. According to some analysts, the main reason for the protests was Vizcarra's removal, described by some as a covert coup by Congress to prevent Vizcarra from carrying out his anti-corruption programme. According to various media outlets, 68 of the 130 congresspeople were being investigated for fraud, money laundering, bribery and other forms of corruption. Other analysts believe that the protests were also encouraged by other more structural factors, such as the deteriorating economy, criticism of the party system, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (at various times of the year Peru had the highest coronavirus death rate in the world), the demand for a new Constitution and the people's disgust with the high levels of corruption in Peruvian politics.

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.

There were no mass demonstrations or significant episodes of violence, but the political and institutional crisis in the country persisted. In 2020, this crisis was closely linked to the holding of legislative elections and the control of the National Assembly, while the government accused the opposition of instigating a coup d'état and a high number of homicides continued to be reported. Regarding the first issue, at the beginning of the year the government deployed the National Guard in the vicinity of the opposition-controlled National Assembly to prevent it from voting

on a one-year extension to the term of Juan Guaidó as its president, a position also disputed by the official candidate Luis Parra (expelled from Guaidó's party in late 2019). Parra was proclaimed the new president of the National Assembly, but the opposition warned that such a vote had not had the necessary quorum and held a session outside the National Assembly building in which Guaidó was ratified in office. Days later, Guaidó withdrew from holding a legislative session after groups of people known as "colectivos" attacked a convoy that was transporting several MPs to the National Assembly. In February, shortly after Juan Guaidó returned from a three-week international tour in which he was received as head of state by several countries, Caracas carried out military exercises in which 2.3 million people may have participated, combining the Venezuelan Armed Forces (with some 365,000 troops) and a good part of a civilian militia made up of around 3.7 million reservists and that the government may have formally incorporated into the state security forces.

The government of Venezuela announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup

The moment of maximum tension in the year occurred in May, when **the government announced that the Venezuelan Armed Forces had aborted a military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and carry out a coup**. This military operation in the city of Macuto resulted in the death of eight people and was led by a former captain of the National Guard and by a former member of the US special forces who was the head of a private security company called Silvercorp at the time. **The Maduro government accused the opposition and the US government of being behind the coup attempt**, and some of those involved confirmed contacts with certain people close to Guaidó, but both he and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denied any link to what was called Operation Gideon. In May, around 30 people were arrested for their alleged connection to said operation and the Attorney General urged the Supreme Court to declare Guaidó's party a terrorist organisation. The political tension continued in June, after the Supreme Court appointed the new members of the National Electoral Council and modified the electoral law. Such movement provoked complaints from the opposition and a large part of the international community, which argued that such appointments and legislative modifications correspond only to the National Assembly and not to the Supreme Court, and that the only objective of the government was to control the legislative elections called for December. In such circumstances, most of the opposition decided to boycott the elections, in which Caracas claimed that turnout was 30% and in which the parties that support the Maduro government obtained more than 90% of the seats. Guaidó ignored these results and said that the outgoing opposition-controlled National Assembly was the only legitimate legislative body until free and fair elections were called. At the end of the year, the

National Assembly extended its term for another year (which officially ended on 4 January 2021), but both the government and the Supreme Court declared such an extension unconstitutional.

Regarding the number of homicides, the Venezuelan Violence Observatory (VVO) indicated that there had been 11,891 violent deaths in 2020, a significant decrease from the 16,506 in 2019. **The homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 45.6, the highest in Latin America** according to the VVO. Of the violent deaths in 2020, 4,231 were categorised as caused by "resistance to authority". According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory, the number of deaths at the hands of state agents and structures was higher than that of criminal homicides for the first time. At the time, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, had already requested the dissolution of bodies such as the National Police's Special Actions Force after many complaints of extrajudicial executions, although other bodies such as the National Guard and the security forces of some states have also committed some abuses. In September, a United Nations investigation mission accused various state security and intelligence bodies of various human rights violations (such as extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture) that could amount to crimes against humanity since 2014, noting that Maduro and other senior government officials were aware of the situation and calling for an international investigation in this regard. Shortly afterwards, **the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, declared that there was a reasonable basis for believing that crimes against humanity may have been committed since 2017**, asked the Venezuelan government for information on the legal proceedings initiated against the alleged perpetrators of said crimes and pledged to launch a full investigation into the matter in 2021. Previously, in March, the US Attorney General had announced the prosecution of Maduro, the defence minister and others for crimes related to drug trafficking. The Venezuelan government categorically rejected all these accusations.

2.3.3. Asia and the Pacific

Central Asia

Kazakhstan	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Identity, Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups

Summary:
Since its independence from the USSR in 1991, Kazakhstan has undergone strong economic growth in parallel with mostly stable socio-political development. However, the 30 years of Nursultan Nazarbayev's presidency were also marked by democratic shortcomings and authoritarian tendencies, without space for the political and social opposition. Following his departure in 2019, Nazarbayev continued to hold leadership positions, including as Leader of the Nation and president of the ruling Nur Otan party. The sources of conflict include tension between the authorities and opposition regarding governance and access to political power and strain between the authorities and sectoral groups regarding socio-economic issues in a context of economic inequality and poor working conditions in sectors such as the petrol industry. In Central Asia as a whole, Islamist-inspired local and regional armed actors have staged incidents of violence at various times, including in Kazakhstan, while governments in the region have also exploited the alleged risk of Islamist violence to justify repressive practices.

Tension increased in the country, with a rise in opposition protests on which the authorities cracked down. One year after the resignation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who remains chairman of the Security Council, president of the ruling party and Leader of the Nation for life, protests continued at various times of the year, both in the capital, Nur-Sultan, and elsewhere. Early in the year, persecution intensified against supporters of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, hampering their plans to hold their founding congress scheduled for 22 February. Instead, the opposition staged peaceful protests, demanding the registration of opposition parties, democratic reforms and an end to repressive practices. Janbolat Mamai a journalist, activist and leader of the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, was arrested one day before the protests. Several dozen people were arrested (between 100 and 200, according to some sources). In May, the government passed legislation that allowed a certain degree of protest only under certain circumstances, with severe restrictions on the right to assembly and demonstration. In the months that followed, crackdowns continued against expressions of social and political protest. **The government's management of the pandemic was also challenged by the protests and international NGOs denounced the state's use of restrictive measures to control the pandemic to persecute opposition activity**. Another 100 protesters were arrested in new protests in June, organised by the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan and the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement, a party not registered and considered by the authorities to be an extremist organisation. Throughout the year there were also protests over the death of civil rights defender Dulat Aghadil in preventive detention in February, including demands for an independent investigation into his death. In November, opposition groups called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections scheduled for January 2021 and the persecution of the opposition and arrests continued until the end of the year.

There were also several demonstrations over socio-economic issues at various times of the year, including protests by women demanding aid in different places. Another source of tension was the **violence in February between the Kazakh population and the Dungan minority in several towns in Korday district (Zhambyl region, southeast), which killed 11 people, wounded 192** and damaged 168 houses and 122 vehicles, according to the authorities. The Interior Ministry deployed special forces. The incidents forcibly displaced 24,000 ethnic Dungans. **The government denied that they were ethnic disputes and blamed the violence on criminal gangs, while some organisations described an ethnic conflict and pogroms against the Dungan ethnic minority in the towns of Masanchi, Sortobe, Bular Batyr and Aukhatty**. The violence was preceded by two unrelated incidents involving Kazakhs and Dungans that some analysts said were interrelated on social media, generated nationalist reactions and gave way to subsequent violence. Dungan representatives denounced arbitrary detentions, torture and mistreatment of their ethnic group by the security forces after the events in February.

Kyrgyzstan	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

Summary:
Since its emergence as an independent state in August 1991, the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan has experienced several periods of instability and socio-political conflict. The presidency of Askar Akayev (1991-2005) began with reformist momentum but gradually drifted towards authoritarianism and corruption. In March 2005 a series of demonstrations denouncing fraud in that year's elections led to a social uprising that forced the collapse of the regime. The promises of change made by the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, soon came to nothing, giving way to a regime of authoritarian presidentialism in which corruption and nepotism were rife, especially from the end of 2007. All of this took place in a scenario involving economic difficulties for the population, latent tension between the north and south of the country, and the exclusion of ethnic minorities from political decision-making processes. Five years later, in April 2010, a new popular uprising led to the overthrow of the regime, with clashes that claimed 85 lives and left hundreds injured. This was followed in June by a wave of violence with an inter-ethnic dimension, claiming more than 400 lives. Other sources of tension in Kyrgyzstan are related to the presence of regional armed groups with Islamist tendencies in the Fergana Valley (an area between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and border disputes with the neighbouring countries.

There was a post-election crisis in October, with protests and a controversial regime change, while

border tensions with neighbouring countries continued. In relation to the internal political crisis, the country held parliamentary elections on 4 October amidst previous complaints of intimidation and vote buying, the significant economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, disaffection with the ruling class due to the levels of corruption and high levels of political factionalism. Only four of the 16 political parties authorised to participate in the elections exceeded the 7% threshold, leaving practically the entire opposition outside Parliament. The Birimdik (Unity) party, which supports President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, won the election with 24.9% of the votes; followed by Mekenim (Homeland), with 24.27%, which is associated with the Matraimov family, whose member and former high-ranking customs officer Raimbek Matraimov was being investigated for an alleged money-laundering and smuggling scheme. In turn, the Kyrgyz Party obtained 8.9% and Butun (United Kyrgyzstan) won 7.25%. The latter was the only party opposed to the government that entered Parliament. The opposition claimed that fraud had been committed. Protests broke out on 5 October, promoted by the parties that were left without parliamentary representation, and were joined by supporters of Butun. The security forces violently cracked down on the protests. **Opposition protesters seized the parliamentary headquarters and other government buildings** and released former President Almazbek Atambayev and former MP and member of the Mekenchil party, Sadyr Japarov, from jail, as well as other prominent figures. **The core of the protest took place in the capital, Bishkek, although there were also demonstrations in the northern towns of Talas, Naryn and Karakol** in the context of north-south regional political divisions. On 6 October, the prime minister resigned. The president of Parliament, the mayor of the capital and several regional governors also resigned.

Even though the electoral authorities cancelled the election results on 6 October, the instability continued. Three self-styled coordination councils were formed that were intended to lead the transition of power. On 9 October, the president decreed a state of emergency, authorised the deployment of the Kyrgyz Army, dismissed the entire cabinet and denounced a coup. He later went missing, while the opposition demanded his resignation. There was a controversial transfer of power **in an extraordinary meeting in a hotel in which the outgoing Parliament appointed Japarov as prime minister, though this was rejected by the president, citing illegitimate procedure**. Media outlets reported that Japarov had been nominated with 61 votes, whereas only 51 people voted (out of 120 MPs). At a press conference, Japarov defended the legitimacy of his election. In another extraordinary meeting on 13 October, Parliament appointed a new parliamentary speaker, Kanat Isayev. **The Kyrgyz president announced his resignation on 15 October and urged the political opposition to withdraw their supporters from the streets and to pursue non-violent means of protest.** Following the departure of

the president and the speaker of Parliament's refusal to assume the interim presidency, Parliament transferred presidential powers to Japarov, who simultaneously became both acting prime minister and president. The crisis initially led Russia to announce the suspension of financial aid to Kyrgyzstan until political stability was guaranteed. Russia is a strategic partner of Kyrgyzstan, with a military base in the country and links to the various political factions. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Smitry Kozak met with Jeenbekov and Japarov in the Kyrgyz capital on 12 October, in what some analysts described as an attempt to facilitate a solution to the crisis. In various statements, Japarov confirmed his interest in maintaining strategic relations with Russia. As the situation developed, Russia confirmed the disbursement of the planned funds. With growing economic importance in the country and the creditor of more than 42% of Tajikistan's external debt, China kept a low profile during the crisis.

At the end of October, the electoral commission announced the presidential election for 10 January 2021, as well as repetition of the parliamentary elections on 10 December, though it delayed the latter until no later than July 2021. In November, Japarov resigned as the president and head of government with the aim of being eligible for the presidential election. The government presented a draft constitutional amendment that expanded presidential powers, concentrating executive powers in the presidency and reducing the size of Parliament. The draft amendment triggered demonstrations with hundreds of protesters and criticism from various former presidents and other political figures for posing a threat to the democratic process and questioned the legitimacy of the interim government to promote such reforms. The government also gave the green light to changes in electoral legislation in November, lowering the electoral threshold from 7% to 3%. **On the government's initiative in December, Parliament also passed a law to hold a referendum on the controversial constitutional amendment promoted by Japarov**. The approval of the law for the referendum sparked protests from dozens of activists and civil rights defenders.

Other tension during the year emanated from borders with neighbouring countries. There were several incidents of violence with Tajikistan along with several towns in the Batken region that led to the evacuation of the population, with one person killed and several injured at various times of the year. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established a joint working group early in the year to make progress on delimiting the border, though tensions remained high throughout the year. There were also clashes along the border of the Sokh district, an enclave in the Ferghana Valley belonging to Uzbekistan inside Kyrgyzstan, due to water access issues that wounded 180 Uzbeks and 25 Kyrgyz nationals. The increase in tension prompted telephone conversations between the presidents of both countries.

East Asia

DPR Korea - USA, Japan, Rep. Of Korea[35]	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government 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.

The concerns rose among the United States and other countries about the development of new weapons by North Korea increased, while Pyongyang substantially stepped up its ballistic tests. In his end-of-year speech, **Kim Jong-un had warned that his country no longer felt bound to the commitments made on denuclearisation (especially in relation to the moratorium on nuclear and ballistic tests), so he intended to strengthen his arms programme and said that his country would soon roll out a new strategic weapon**. Kim Jong-un's statement was backed up by the North Korean government in January during the United Nations Conference on Disarmament, in which Pyongyang warned that there would never be any denuclearisation process in North Korea if the US did not lift its sanctions and end its hostile policies towards the country. When North Korea launched short-range missiles for several days in March, the governments of the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, France and Estonia condemned the tests and the US defence secretary warned that North Korea was trying to modernise its entire missile system. In April, North Korea conducted artillery exercises and carried out further tests with cruise missiles and air-to-surface missiles fired from fighter jets. In addition to the concern expressed by several governments throughout the year about the notable increase in cyber activity in North Korea, in late 2020 tension increased around the North Korean arms programme for two reasons. First, in November because the IAEA warned of the resumption of nuclear activity at the Kangson enrichment site. Previously, media outlets had reported that Pyongyang was manufacturing miniaturised nuclear devices that

could be transported in missiles. The second factor of concern was the presentation of new ICBMs and unprecedented submarine-launched missiles during a military parade commemorating the founding of the Workers' Party in October. Shortly thereafter, **the United States tested the missile defence system installed in the Marshall Islands for the first time**. Alongside these events, tension between China and several countries rose as a result of the publication of a report by the United Nations sanctions panel that noted that North Korea had violated several United Nations sanctions in 2019 with the support of the Chinese shipping industry, specifically in the import of refined petroleum and the export of coal by North Korea.

Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System International
Main parties:	Korea, DPR Rep. of Korea

Summary:
After the end of the Second World War and the occupation of the Korean peninsula by Soviet troops (north) and US troops (south), it was split into two countries. The Korean War (1950-53) ended with the signing of an armistice (under the terms of which the two countries remain technically at war) and the establishment of a de facto border at the 38th parallel. Despite the fact that in the 1970s talks began on reunification, the two countries have threatened on several occasions to take military action. As such, in recent decades numerous armed incidents have been recorded, both on the common border between the two countries (one of the most militarised zones in the world) and along the sea border in the Yellow Sea (or West Sea). Although in 2000 the leaders of the two countries held a historic meeting in which they agreed to establish trust-building measures, once Lee Myung-bak took office in 2007 the tension escalated significantly again and some military skirmishes occurred along the border. Subsequently, the death of Kim Jong-il at the end of 2011 (succeeded as supreme leader by his son Kim Jong-un) and the election of Park Geun-hye as the new South Korean president at the end of 2012 marked the start of a new phase in bilateral relations.

Alongside the deterioration in relations between the US and North Korea over the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, **the inter-Korean dialogue not only failed to resume, but the tension between both countries escalated significantly compared to previous years.** Since the beginning of the year, Pyongyang had ruled out any continuation of talks with South Korea regarding possible reunification or any other aspect and had asked South Korean President Moon Jae-in to stop trying to facilitate a rapprochement between North Korea and the US. The tension between the two countries reached its highest point in recent years in May and June. In early May, North Korea reportedly fired into the so-called Demilitarised Zone

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

several times, launching some projectiles at a South Korean border post, which responded with warning shots. North Korea later did not respond to Seoul's request for explanations or cooperate with the United Nations investigation. The incident, the first in the Demilitarised Zone since the North Korean Army fired on a defector in 2017, took place shortly after Kim Jong-un's reappearance in public (after several weeks of speculation about his health and even rumours about his death). A few days after the exchange of fire, North Korea threatened South Korea with retaliation for military exercises near the disputed border in the Yellow Sea that Seoul believed were carried out in its territorial waters and did not contravene the 2018 agreement that established a security zone free of military exercises there.

In early June, Pyongyang cut off all military and political communication with South Korea (including the direct line between Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in), called South Korea an enemy, broke relations with its authorities and announced the remilitarisation of stretches of the common border that had been demilitarised and pacified under the previous bilateral agreements reached since 2018. Shortly thereafter, **Pyongyang detonated the liaison office in the North Korean town of Kaesong that both countries had established in 2018**. In addition, the North Korean government threatened to deploy troops to the nearby border areas of Mount Kumgang and Kaesong. In 2018, both countries had begun to dismantle border military posts and deactivate mines in the Demilitarised Zone, but this progress came to an end with the interruption of inter-Korean dialogue and negotiations between North Korea and the United States. According to the media, the main reason for North Korea's actions was Seoul's alleged inactivity when private organisations sent hot air balloons with anti-government pamphlets, memory cards and food. Some analysts said that this crisis coincided with the 20th anniversary of the first inter-Korean summit between the two top leaders of both countries and that it led to a period of detente between them. Moon Jae-in urged that the inter-Korean dialogue must be saved and suggested that a special envoy try to de-escalate tensions, but this offer was rejected by North Korea. Seoul promised to investigate Pyongyang's allegations and even to press charges against the aforementioned private organisations, but also made it clear that there would be a forceful response to any military provocation. In late June, the North Korean media noted that Pyongyang had abandoned its military actions against South Korea. However, tensions between the two countries increased again in September after a South Korean fisheries officer was shot dead by a North Korean soldier on the de facto maritime border between both countries. Pyongyang threatened further action if South Korea continued with naval operations to recover the body, but days later it apologised for the shooting.

South Asia

Bangladesh	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government Internal
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.

Violence in Bangladesh dropped considerably, although political tension in the country persisted. Arrests of political dissidents and anti-terrorist police operations against members of different armed groups intensified during the year. Thus, there were dozens of arrests of members of the main armed group in the country, JMB. There were some sporadic attacks at different times of the year, especially against members of the security forces, causing some injuries. The holding of local elections was also a source of tension and there were clashes between militants and followers of the ruling AL party, which won the elections in Dhaka, the capital, and the BNP, the main opposition party, which repeated allegations of fraud. In March, former prime minister and BNP leader Khaleda Zia was temporarily released from prison, though she had to remain at her home. According to the International Crisis Group, the government used the restrictions to contain the pandemic to increase the persecution and arrests of political opponents. There were also many arrests under the Digital Security Law, especially of journalists, intellectuals and people linked

to academia. In addition, thousands of textile workers protested the situation caused by the suspension of production due to the confinement, demanding support. In November, thousands of people demonstrated against French President Emmanuel Macron for his defence of satirical cartoons against Muhammad and there were several attacks against Hindu communities for their alleged defence of Macron's position. Several houses belonging to Hindu people were set on fire. The situation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp also remained unresolved.

Over 50 people died in India in attacks by supporters of the governing BJP party against Muslims during protests against the Citizenship Act

India	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government 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.

The tense situation remained serious in India, with episodes of community violence that were especially intense in Delhi in March. Violent clashes took place over several days in the northeastern part of the city after a local leader of the ruling BJP party, Kapil Mishra, threatened to violently evict a group of Muslims who were peacefully protesting against the approved Citizenship Act in December 2019. Since the law was passed, hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Muslim, have staged protests against the law across the country. These threats prompted **Hindu extremist groups and BJP sympathisers to attack Muslims, sparking violent clashes in which 53 people were killed, most of them Muslims, and many Muslim-owned homes, businesses and mosques were attacked and burned**. The clashes took place between Hindus and Muslims and against the police, who were accused by human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, of serious human rights violations, brutality and complicity with the Hindu groups that violently attacked the Muslim population. The riots lasted for several days and spread to other parts of the capital, exacerbated by false rumours that circulated among the population that various mosques were organising actions to expel the Hindu population from Delhi. The clashes coincided with the visit to Delhi by US President Donald Trump, who in public statements expressed his support for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The governments of several states (Maharashtra, Punjab, Kerala, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan) refused to apply the law. Furthermore, **India continued to be a scenario of alarming levels of sexual violence**, especially against Dalit women. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, more than 32,000 women were victims of rape during 2019, which may only account for a small proportion of real cases, as sexual violence continues to be underreported. Finally, massive demonstrations were staged by farmers in which hundreds of thousands of people participated during 2020, with marches to the capital to protest legislation passed by the government that favoured large corporations over small-scale farmers. In recent years, hundreds of small-scale Indian farmers have committed suicide because they cannot pay their debts as a result of different laws that are detrimental to these agricultural producers.

India (Assam)	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups ULFA, ULFA(I), NDFB, NDFB(IKS), KPLT, NSLA, UPLA and KPLT

Summary:
The armed opposition group the ULFA emerged in 1979 with the aim of liberating the state of Assam from Indian colonisation and establishing a sovereign State. The demographic transformations the state underwent after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, with the arrival of two million people from Bangladesh, are the source of the demand from the population of ethnic Assamese origin for recognition of their cultural and civil rights and the establishment of an independent State. During the 1980s and 1990s there were various escalations of violence and failed attempts at negotiation. A peace process began in 2005, leading to a reduction in violence, but this process

was interrupted in 2006, giving rise to a new escalation of the conflict. Meanwhile, during the eighties, armed groups of Bodo origin, such as the NDFB, emerged demanding recognition of their identity against the majority Assamese population. Since 2011 there has been a significant reduction in violence and numerous armed groups have laid down their arms or began talks with the government.

Tension fell notably in the Indian state of Assam and the activity of armed opposition groups decreased dramatically, consolidating the trend of previous years. In January, 644 members of different insurgent groups surrendered and handed over their weapons in an official ceremony. The insurgents belonged to the armed groups National Liberation Front of Bengalis (NLFB) (301), Adivasi Dragon Force (ADF) (178), National Santhal Liberation Army (NSLA) (87), United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I) (50), Rabha National Liberation Front (RNLF) (13), National Democratic Front of Bodoland-Saoraigwra (NDFB-S) (8), Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) (6) and CPI (Maoist) (1). The handover was a result of negotiations between the armed groups and the Indian government. In November, an important leader of the ULFA-I, Drishti Rajkhowa, who is considered very close to ULFA-I leader Paresh Baruah, surrendered in Meghalaya. Some analysts said that the virtual disappearance of armed activity in Assam, as well as in other northeastern states of India, was due to factors such as the increase in the budget of the Ministry of the Interior in recent years (which had led to a greater deployment of police and security forces in the region), the use of ceasefire agreements and cooperation in counterterrorism matters with border countries.[36]

India - China	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory International
Main parties:	India, China

Summary:
The border shared by China and India has been disputed since the 1950s, after the partition of India and Pakistan and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This border has never been formally delimited by an agreement between the two countries and there are several areas whose demarcation is a source of conflict. In the western part of the border, the dispute revolves around the uninhabited Aksai Chin area, whose territory is claimed by India, which considers it part of the Ladakh region (part of Jammu and Kashmir) and is administered by China as part of the Xinjiang region. China's announcement of the construction of a highway linking Xinjiang with Tibet through the Aksai Chin region increased tension with India, which was exacerbated after the Dalai Lama was granted asylum in India in 1959. In the years that followed, there were troop movements by both countries in the area. In 1962, a war began that ended with India's military defeat, but the issue

of demarcation was left unresolved and continued to shape relations between both powers and with other countries in the region, especially Pakistan. In 1988, both governments agreed to resolve the dispute peacefully. However, since then no progress has been made in the negotiations and the military tension in the disputed areas has persisted.

Tension between China and India increased during the year, leading to violent clashes between the security forces of both countries in the Galwan Valley border area. The clashes took place along the Line of Actual Control, as the border between both countries is known, which is not demarcated and has been disputed for the last few decades. Tension between India and China had been mounting since May, when several clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers deployed on the border took place, leaving some people wounded. The trigger for the clashes may have been China's opposition to India's construction of a road in the disputed area, as well as different elements of infrastructure that could facilitate India's military access there, which is quite a challenge because it is a high-altitude mountainous area. As a consequence of the escalating tension, there was an increase in the number of troops deployed on both sides of the border. Although both sides agreed to reduce the tension, **the first deadly clash in 45 years took place on 15 June, which resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers**. China did not disclose any information regarding whether any of its soldiers had been killed. The soldiers fought with sticks, stones and fists, but did not use firearms. Both sides traded blame for the escalation of violence. China noted that Indian soldiers had broken through the Line of Actual Control and engaged in "illegal activities", initiating a provocative attack. India claimed that the clashes began during a meeting in which hundreds of soldiers from both sides participated, which was initially aimed at discussing de-escalation measures, but during which they felt insulted by China. Other sources mentioned an unplanned encounter between patrols from both countries that led to a major clash involving hundreds of soldiers. After the fighting, high military commanders of both countries held in situ meetings to try to lower the tension, though the mutual accusations were repeated. On 24 June, the parties reached an agreement as part of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, with new subsequent meetings, which were repeated during July. In late August, however, India accused China of conducting military movements that it called "provocative" and that it said were intended to alter the configuration of the Line of Actual Control.

However, in September, after the situation escalated again, the defence ministers of both countries met in Russia at the highest-level meeting since the crisis resurged in April. Three days after the meeting in Russia there was a fresh escalation, with complaints of warning shots from both sides, violating a decades-

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36. Paul Staniland, *Political Violence in South Asia: The Triumph of the State?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 September 2020.

long agreement that prohibited the use of firearms at the border, as they had in fact not been used in the different clashes throughout 2020. However, days later both governments issued a joint statement in which they agreed that no new confrontations should take place. The statement by the foreign ministers of both countries stated that both China and India agreed to "continue the dialogue, withdraw as soon as possible, maintain an appropriate distance and mitigate tensions". In the months that followed, the talks were repeated to try to ease the tension. Though no agreement was reached, there were no new escalations or episodes of violence either.

China and India clashed violently for the first time in 45 years in the disputed border area in the Galwan Valley

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

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

The tension between India and Pakistan persisted and could not be redirected after the serious deterioration suffered in 2019 following India's cancellation of the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir. Rhetorical and diplomatic confrontations were repeated throughout the year and there was also crossfire between the militaries of both countries deployed along the Line of Control, the de facto border, with exchanges of fire every month. According to figures compiled by the International Crisis Group, 74 people died on both sides of the border during the year as a result of gunfire and attacks by the Indian and Pakistani armies, most of them civilians. Furthermore, dozens of people were injured as a result of these clashes, which were violations of the 2003 ceasefire agreement. The most serious episodes of violence occurred in November, in which at least 30 people were killed (23 of them civilians) in different armed attacks. Neelum Valley, in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, was one of the areas most affected by the violence in November, where in addition to casualties, at least 100 houses were destroyed. Media outlets reported an increase in ceasefire violations since late 2019, especially those related to the cross-border infiltration of armed insurgents from Pakistan. However, Pakistan repeated its denial of accusations that it promotes armed insurgent activity. In addition to the armed violence, there were also diplomatic incidents and in June the diplomatic missions of both countries in the respective capitals cut their deployed personnel by half amid accusations of acts of espionage by officials, as well as contact with terrorist organisations. New Delhi accused Pakistan of kidnapping two diplomats held illegally for 10 hours and subsequently released after the intervention of the Indian Foreign Ministry. Pakistan claimed that they were detained after fleeing in a hit-and-run incident. The UN Security Council addressed the situation in Kashmir again in August, the third time since the region lost its autonomy in 2019. The discussion took place at the request of Pakistan, with the support of China, but did not lead to any concrete action. In December, the Indian government rejected a resolution passed by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation condemning the change in status of Jammu and Kashmir.

South-east Asia and Oceania

Indonesia (West Papua)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, OPM armed group, political and social opposition, 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.

In general terms, clashes between the Indonesia Armed Forces and the armed opposition group OPM continued at the same level of intensity, but the death rate linked to the protests in West Papua fell dramatically compared to the previous year, in which almost 60 people lost their lives and thousands were arrested during protests in August and September. The government did not provide data on associated mortality rates, but according to media outlets and research centres, around 30 people died during the year. **In July, civil society organisations protested against human rights violations in the region and against the murder of more than 200 civilians between December 2018 and July 2020.** At the end of the year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warned of the increase in tension and violence in the region in recent months and urged the government to investigate the rise in attacks against civilians and human rights activists. Regarding the war dynamics of the conflict, a military offensive was launched in April in response to a previous attack (claimed by the OPM) against FP Freeport, one of the largest mining companies in the world, in which a New Zealander was killed and two Indonesians were injured. In the middle of the offensive, on 11 April, the OPM issued a statement offering Indonesia a ceasefire to contain the spread of coronavirus in the region and also in response to the United Nations' call for the parties to the conflict to cease their armed activity. However, the government did not respond to this initiative. Also noteworthy was the assassination of a prominent OPM leader, Henking Wanmang, in August. In the days that followed, the OPM declared that it had killed several members of the state security forces and agencies. Twelve police officers and soldiers also died in September after alleged attacks by the armed group, including one perpetrated in the district of Nduga on 5 September in which eight soldiers died.

At the political level, **many protests took place in various provinces of the country between July and December against the extension of the special autonomy status granted to West Papua in 2001**, whose extension should be approved by Parliament this year. In July, a coalition of organisations (Petitsi Rakyat Papua) demanded an end to special autonomy and called for a referendum on self-determination. In August, protests were reported in several cities against the New York Agreement of 1962, by which the Netherlands (a colonial power in the region) ceded the administration of Papua to Indonesia. In September and October, there were major clashes between the police and protesters, which resulted in the arrest of more than 150 people. In November, about 100 people were also arrested during various protests against autonomy. In December, the leader of the United Liberation Movement for West Papua, Benny Wenda,

declared a provisional government-in-exile based in London with himself as president, but this was rejected by Jakarta and unknown to other actors who advocate for West Papua self-determination, such as the OPM and the National Committee for West Papua.

2.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

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

Summary:
The former soviet republic of Belarus achieved its independence in 1991 and became a presidential republic. Since 1994 it has been governed by Alexander Lukashenko, whose presidential powers and term limits were extended in referenda in 1996 and 2004. With a centralised economy inherited from the Soviet era and energy-dependent on Russia, Belarus has oscillated between a strategic alliance with Russia and a policy of affirmation of its national sovereignty that has brought it through stages of crisis with its large neighbour. The Lukashenko regime's political authoritarianism and violation of human rights has left little room for political and social opposition, while driving low-intensity tension at the same time. In 2020, Lukashenko's re-election sparked massive anti-government protests.

The country was the scene of a serious political crisis, with large-scale anti-government protests following the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko in elections considered fraudulent and a campaign of repression conducted by the authorities that resulted in mass arrests and serious human rights violations. After the call for elections for August, opposition groups said they intended to present alternative candidates to Lukashenko, who has been president since 1994, and began collecting signatures and mobilising in the months prior to the elections. Hundreds of people were arrested in those months, including leaders, activists and journalists. They included Sergei Tikhanovsky, a well-known blogger who aspired to register as a candidate, was arrested in protests in late May and replaced in his candidacy by his wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya; and Viktor Babariko, a former Gazprombank banker who received broad support in collecting signatures for his candidacy and was arrested in June. In July, the Central Election Commission authorised only four candidates in addition to Lukashenko, including Tikhanovskaya, while others such as Babariko and the diplomat and businessman Valeri Tsepkalo were denied. Tsepkalo had left the country in May due to an arrest warrant against him. Both went on to give their support to Tikhanovskaya's candidacy. Similarly, Veronika Tsepkalo

(the wife of Valeri Tsepkalo) and Maria Kolesnikova (Babariko's campaign manager) joined Tikhanovskaya's campaign. The rejection of the candidates triggered protests that were broken up harshly by the police. Amnesty International denounced the excessive use of force against protesters. The Belarusian president warned that he was prepared to use the Belarussian Army to restore order if necessary.

The elections were held on 9 August, in a context in which the government's management of the pandemic, denying the existence of the coronavirus in the country, aggravated the unease of large sectors of the population. **According to the electoral authorities, Lukashenko won 80% of the vote, followed by Tikhanovskaya (10%), with a turnout of 84%. The opposition denounced fraud and demanded new elections.** The results set off protests in Minsk and other cities, such as Brest, Gomel, Grodno and Vitebsk. Amnesty International repeated its criticism of the use of "brutal violence against peaceful protestors" by the anti-riot police in the post-election protests. Tikhanovskaya urged the police and the forces of the Ministry of the Interior to put an end to the violence and exhorted the protestors not to give them reasons to use force against them. After being detained for a few hours, Tikhanovskaya fled to Lithuania in August and later announced the creation of the Coordination Council to promote a peaceful solution to the political crisis and a transition of power. **Lukashenko ruled out holding new elections and the attorney general's office opened a criminal case against the Coordination Council on charges of trying to take power illegally** and of having an anti-Russian agenda. Several of its leaders went into exile in the weeks after it was created or were arrested, some of them by masked men.

In the weeks after the elections, protests followed one another and lasted almost continuously for months, with massive participation of up to hundreds of thousands of people in some of them. The demonstrations were peaceful and the protestors pursued strategies of nonviolent civil disobedience. There were also strikes at companies. All the demonstrations had high levels of female participation, both in the political leadership and in the protests themselves, with peaceful marches that multiplied female involvement. **Many people reported torture and ill-treatment in police custody. Several hundred were injured and several people died**. Thousands were arrested (28,000 as of mid-December, according to some media reports, and 32,000, according to Tikhanovskaya).

In October, opposition leader Tikhanovskaya spoke on behalf of the Coordination Council, threatening Lukashenko with a general strike if he did not respond to three demands: his departure from the presidency, the end of police violence against the protesters and freedom for the political prisoners. In addition, Tikhanovskaya

A serious crisis broke out in Belarus, with massive anti-government protests against the re-election of President Aleksander Lukashenko, which were denounced as fraudulent, and serious crackdowns by the authorities

claimed that new elections should enjoy international observation, while indicating at various times of the year that she would not stand for new elections. Lukashenko did not respond to the ultimatum and on 26 October, various parts of the country participated in the strike, including students and pensioners, although it was followed unevenly. According to the government, all the companies were operating normally. Previously, **on 10 October, Lukashenko met with several detained opposition figures. According to official media reports, the meeting discussed the possibility of a constitutional reform process**. Tikhanovskaya's advisors noted that there were some contacts between the Coordination Council and the regime. In late November, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Lukashenko in Minsk to promote constitutional reforms. Analysts pointed to Russia's interest in constitutional reforms aimed at a multiparty system in which it could establish influence over some factions. **One day after Lavrov's visit, Lukashenko stated that he would leave the presidency once a new Constitution was adopted, although he did not offer a timetable with the possible changes.**

In early December, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged the Belarussian government and the opposition to resolve the conflict through dialogue and said that he hoped that an internal political dialogue could take place with all political forces to resolve internal issues without interference or external pressure. Throughout the crisis, the EU condemned human rights violations, urged dialogue to resolve the crisis and imposed three rounds of sanctions against high-ranking officials of the regime responsible for cracking down on the protests, as well as against some economic actors. However, analysts noted that the sanctions had a limited impact. The opposition movement maintained that it did not want to transform the internal crisis into an international geostrategic conflict. At the end of the year, the protests continued in a decentralised way, though fewer in number and lesser in intensity, and the authorities' repressive practices continued. Tikhanovskaya warned that after the winter, the protests would intensify again.

Russia and the Caucasus

Russia (North Caucasus)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Identity, Government Internal
Main parties:	Russian Federal Government, Governments of the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition 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 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.

Low-intensity tension continued in the North Caucasus, with incidents of violence between federal and local security forces and insurgents. During the year, there were at least 40 deaths linked to the conflict, according to the body count of the independent portal Caucasian Knot, most of them allegedly insurgents. Shootings and clashes took place as part of counterinsurgency operations. The authorities conducted operations and raids and detained dozens of suspected combatants and suspected sympathisers of armed organisations, including ISIS. In October, various analysts pointed to a rise in conflict-related violence in Chechnya and Ingushetia. In that month, the security forces carried out the first counterterrorism operation in the Chechen Republic since November 2018, which was followed by several others. In Ingushetia, over a dozen such operations were carried out during the year. The pandemic also aggravated the socio-economic situation and overburdened health infrastructure in the region. Protests against the confinement orders broke out in North Ossetia with over 1,000 people dispersed by the police and more than 50 protestors arrested. Also in Dagestan, there were public protests in June opposed to the police's use of violence against citizens who had breached pandemic-related restrictions. Russian media outlets reported that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov was admitted to hospital in Moscow in May for coronavirus. At the end of the month, Kadyrov confirmed that he was in good health. Meanwhile, complaints of human rights violations by local authorities in the North Caucasus continued. Sixteen OSCE member governments sent the organisation a statement asserting that Russia had not addressed the serious human rights violations committed by the authorities in Chechnya and documented in a report prepared by the OSCE in November 2018 that indicated forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations against the population, including LGTBI people, human rights defenders, civil society organisations and independent journalists. The signatories of the statement denounced that the climate of impunity for violence against these parts of the population continued in Chechnya.

South-east Europe

Turkey – Greece, Cyprus	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources, Self-government, Identity International
Main parties:	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, EU, Egypt, Italy, United Arab Emirates, France, Libya Government of National Accord

Summary:

Turkey, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus are embroiled in disputes around various sources of tension in the eastern Mediterranean, with a growing number of international actors involved in intertwined scenarios of conflict. The disputes include the conflict over the island of Cyprus, which has been divided since the Turkish invasion in 1974 that followed the attempted coup that sought to unite it with Greece and triggered massive displacements of the Turkish-Cypriot and Greco-Cypriot populations. The Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognised, and a member of the EU since 2004, while the northern third of the island functions as a de facto state with the support of Turkey. The conflict over the status of the island is linked to disputes involving Turkey over Cyprus' maritime borders and access to its natural resources. Turkey and Greece are at odds over the delimitation of maritime borders, their exclusive economic zones, their continental shelves and airspace, as well as the sovereignty of some islands. The tension has also had a militarised expression at various times in recent decades. The discovery of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean, including in disputed waters, and the cooperative approach on energy between various countries (Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Israel and others) through mechanisms that exclude Turkey, with which they compete in various spheres, including ideologically, has aggravated the tension between Ankara and those countries in the region. The tension is also found in the armed conflict in Libya, where Turkey supports the Government of National Accord recognised by the UN in the face of attempts to expand power and territorial control by the armed group of Khalifa Haftar, supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, France and others.

The crisis in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece and Cyprus increased over the delimitation of territorial waters and their exclusive economic zones and natural gas exploration, with growing militarisation in the area and the internationalisation of the conflict.

The crisis was also projected onto other disputes, such as in Libya. In January 2020, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Italy, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine signed the founding charter of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), a platform created the previous year to promote cooperation on gas and create a regional market without Turkey, to which France also requested admission. Turkey criticised the EMGF's interest in excluding it. **During the year, Turkey continued its gas exploration activity in the waters off the Republic of Cyprus** and in its exclusive economic area, deploying several drilling vessels in the first few months of the year. The EU warned of sanctions and urged a halt to exploratory activity, while Ankara rejected the EU's warnings and confronted it. As part of their periodic coordination, known as 3+1, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and France came together with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to issue a joint statement in May expressing concern about the escalation in this part of the Mediterranean and denounced Turkey's "illegal" activities in Cyprus' waters. They also cautioned against an escalation of Turkish violations of Greece's airspace over its waters and reaffirmed their rejection of the two memoranda on the delimitation of maritime borders in the Mediterranean and on military cooperation signed in 2019 between Turkey and Libya's Government of National Accord (GAN), an actor recognised by the UN and fought by the armed group of Khalifa Haftar, the armed leader of eastern Libya, who is supported by Egypt, the UAE, France and others.

In the middle of the year, the tension escalated. In July, Turkey issued a naval alert (Navtex) on oil and gas drilling activity until 20 August near the Greek island of Kastellorizo, in Greek waters disputed by Turkey. That same month, the Greek Defence Ministry put the Greek Army on high alert, issued a notice of military operations and stepped up its naval presence near Kastellorizo. Although Greece and Turkey were open to talks in early August, the atmosphere seriously deteriorated. In early August, a partial demarcation agreement of the maritime borders between Greece and Egypt was announced, which produced an exclusive economic area and rights over natural resources and invalidated the maritime delimitation agreement between Turkey and Libya in 2019. A few days later, on 10 August, Turkey sent its drillship *Oruç Reis*, escorted by warships. Two days later, **two warships from Greece and Turkey collided in an episode that Turkey described as Greek provocation and that sources from the Greek Defence Ministry said was an accident. Greece, Cyprus and international actors allied to them, including France, Italy and the UAE, carried out joint military exercises in the area that same month**, including the deployment of two warplanes and a frigate by France, as well as UAE fighter jets in Greece. Turkey warned Greece of retaliation if it provoked the *Oruç Reis* any further, issued new notices for exploratory action, conducted naval military manoeuvres and cautioned the EU of the consequences of granting unconditional support to Greece. In late August, the Turkish foreign minister said

that if Greece expanded its maritime borders into the Aegean Sea, Turkey would view it as a cause for war. The president of the EU Council expressed full support for Greece and called for de-escalation and a priority on dialogue. In addition, the EU made progress on a list of sanctions against Turkey if Ankara did not withdraw from waters that Greece considers its own before the extraordinary EU summit on 24 September.

Turkey withdrew its vessel *Oruç Reis* from the area in September. The Turkish president was open to dialogue and linked the withdrawal to giving diplomatic channels a chance, though he said that the dialogue depended on the EU not imposing the announced sanctions. **Greece celebrated the ship's withdrawal, while announcing moves to expand its military** both in the number of troops and the purchase of war vehicles (combat aircraft, frigates and naval military helicopters). **Both countries announced the resumption of direct exploratory talks that had been suspended in 2016** (60 rounds in 14 years) to delimit the continental shelf and the exclusive economic area for both countries. The parties' willingness to talk persuaded the EU to not impose sanctions at its October summit, though it warned that it would use all tools at its disposal to defend the interests of its member states, while Turkey continued to disqualify the EU. **After high-level meetings, Greece and Turkey agreed to establish a mechanism for technical talks within NATO to move towards a military de-escalation** and reduce the risk of incidents in the eastern Mediterranean. Several rounds of technical talks were held at NATO headquarters in Brussels in September and the mechanism was formally established in October, including a direct line of communication between Greece and Turkey to help to de-escalate in the air and at sea. Germany also promoted efforts to redirect the conflict.

Despite the start of talks and the establishment of the NATO mechanism, tensions rose again in the final months of 2020 over several issues. For instance, Turkey continued its drilling activity. Political tensions also increased due to the visit of the Turkish president to the coastal town of Varosha in northern Cyprus, whose Greek Cypriot population fled after the Turkish invasion in 1974, which had been abandoned and closed ever since, then partially reopened shortly before the Turkish Cypriot elections in October 2020. In a speech during his visit, Erdogan called for discussing and negotiating a two-state solution to the conflict over the division of Cyprus, challenging the bizonal federation solution on which the peace process is predicated, a position also defended by the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar. Turkey also prevented the EU's naval Operation IRINI from searching a Turkish cargo ship that was suspected of transporting weapons to Libya, increasing the tension between Turkey and the EU. In December, Brussels imposed sanctions on Turkish officials and agencies involved in gas exploration activity, though it delayed a decision on broader forms of pressure, such as a weapons embargo and trade tariffs, to establish earlier meetings with the new US administration.

2.3.5. Middle East

Mashreq

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

Summary:

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

The government of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi continued to concentrate greater quotas of power in Egypt, while maintaining its policies of repression and persecution of dissent at the same time. Throughout the year, several rounds of legislative elections were held that strengthened the president. His allied party, Mustaqbal Watan, won an overwhelming majority of seats in the new Senate in August, in elections that had a very low turnout (15%) and were boycotted by opposition groups. In December, the final results of the lower house elections confirmed the prominence of Mustaqbal Watan and other parties sympathetic to al-Sisi in Parliament. Despite the repressive climate, during 2020 dissident groups continued to criticise and express their rejection of the government. Demonstrations in September called for the president's resignation. Hundreds of protesters took to the streets in Cairo, Alexandria, Aswan, Luxor and Giza to protest against corruption, the economic

Al-Sisi's government continued to concentrate power and persecute dissent with its policies: around 60,000 people remained in prison in Egypt for political reasons, according to estimates by human rights groups

crisis and police repression. There were some incidents with the security forces, as at least one protester died in Giza. At the same time, the harassment of critics continued during 2020. **According to estimates by human rights groups, around 60,000 people remained in prison in Egypt for political reasons, including secular activists, journalists, lawyers, academics and Islamists**. One of the most notorious cases in 2020 occurred in November, when Egyptian authorities arrested three senior officials from the NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) on charges that included "membership in a terrorist group" and "spreading fake news". The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, and organisations such as Amnesty International warned that the arrests had been made in retaliation for an EIPR meeting with diplomatic personnel that had addressed the human rights situation in the country. The case also prompted several countries to express concern.

International human rights organisations also warned of an increase in executions in the country. According to data from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, between January and October, the Egyptian authorities had applied the death penalty to 83 people, 25 of whom were charged with political violence.[37] Along the same lines, Amnesty International warned that 57 people were executed in October and November alone, a figure almost double the total number of executions in Egypt in all of 2019 (32 cases).[38] Throughout the year, some also warned of the precarious conditions of people detained in the country, which was aggravated by the pandemic. HRW reported that dozens of people imprisoned for political reasons died in custody, including at least 14 from COVID-19 between March and July, and that the authorities also arrested health officials who criticised the government's response to the pandemic. Though the government released nearly 20,000 people between March and July, human rights groups reported that those detained for political reasons were excluded and that prisons remained overcrowded. HRW also reported and documented a variety of other abuses, including detentions without trial; the harassment and arrest of relatives of dissident Egyptians living abroad; accusations of "morality" violations against popular women in social networks and against witnesses in cases of abuse; arrests, arbitrary detention and the disappearance of opponents, including minors, by the security forces of the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior and the National Security Agency; and arbitrary arrests, abuse and torture of people based on sexual orientation or gender. Regarding the latter, in June 2020 the prominent Egyptian feminist and

37. Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Events of 2020", *HRW World Report 2021*, January 2021.
38. Amnesty International, *Egypt: Chilling rise in executions reveals depth of human rights crisis*, 2 December 2020.

LGTBI rights activist Sarah Hegazy committed suicide in exile in Canada after being detained and subjected to mistreatment for several months in 2017. Despite the human rights situation and the intensification of authoritarian drift in the country, various countries maintained good commercial and/or strategic relations with the Egyptian government and collaborated in areas such as security. Thus, during 2020, information emerged about large weapons sales contracts by countries such as the US, France and Italy. Finally, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled the country for three decades until being overthrown in 2011 during the Arab uprisings, died in a military hospital in February.

Iraq	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Internationalised internal Governance
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.

The climate of opposition, anti-government protests and political ups and downs persisted in Iraq in 2020, in the wake of the massive demonstrations against corruption, nepotism and mismanagement that intensified as of October 2019. Although the protests were not as massive as the previous year, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not stop in 2020. **The crackdown on the protests and clashes between protesters and Iraqi security forces, including pro-Iranian Popular Mobilisation Unit militias (PMUs) reportedly killed more than 100 people**. According to Human Rights Watch data, at least 560 died under these circumstances between October 2019 and the end of 2020, mainly in Baghdad and southern cities (Najaf, Karbala, Nassiriyah), mostly in the last quarter of 2019, accounting for over 400 deceased persons. Data from the ACLED think tank indicate that 104 people died in Iraq in 2020 as a result of riots, violent protests, peaceful demonstrations and the excessive use of force by the security forces. After the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi at the end of 2019, there were several attempts to form a government in the first few months of 2020 that failed due to a lack of political support, while protests against the authorities and politicians, repression and clashes with security forces continued. After the unsuccessful attempts of Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi (a former minister, who failed due to the boycott of Kurdish and Sunni parties) and Adnan al Zurfi (a former governor of Najaf, who ended up withdrawing due to lack of support from Shiite parties), in April the Iraqi president appointed Intelligence Director Mustafa al-Khadimi to be the new prime minister. Rejected by the Kataib Hezbollah group, which accused him of involvement in the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad in early January,[39] al-Khadimi won a vote of confidence from Parliament in May. One of the first steps of the new government was to reinstate General Abdul-Wahab al-Saedi as the head of counterterrorism efforts, as his dismissal had been one of the triggers for the protests in 2019. The government also set up a committee to investigate abuses committed against the protesters, although by the end of the year the results of its work were not known. In the middle of the year, the authorities announced compensation for the families of those killed during the protests, medical treatment for the wounded and the arrest of some low-ranking officers, but no high-ranking prosecutions were reported.

The protests continued, with demands for the purge of senior officials for the crackdown, the creation of jobs, improvements in public services and the resignation of local authorities. In some cases, protestors led attacks against party headquarters. In August, the killing of two activists in Basra, including a prominent female leader, sparked several days of demonstrations and arson attacks on government buildings and led to the removal of the governor, the director of the national security office and the chief of police in the governorate. In October, thousands of people gathered to commemorate the first anniversary of the massive popular protest, with subsequent clashes with the police causing dozens of injuries. The protests continued in Baghdad and various cities until the end of the year. In this context, some warned of the persistence of abuses and demanded accountability. **A report by the UN mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concluded in late August that despite some promising measures taken by the new government,**

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39. See the summary on Iraq in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

impunity and abuse in response to demonstrations continued.[40] The document warns of a deliberate use of violence to silence activists, documents the deaths of 487 people and injuries to 7,715, mostly men, between October 2019 and April 2020, and identifies patterns of excessive use of force against protesters, including live ammunition. It also estimates that around 3,000 people had been arrested in this period, warning of torture, kidnapping and arbitrary detention, and denounces restrictions on the freedom of expression, with attacks on journalists, raids on media outlets and forced Internet outages. Coinciding with the UNAMI and OHCHR report, Human Rights Watch's annual report on the situation in Iraq until December 2020 warned of the arbitrary detention, forced disappearance and extrajudicial killing of protesters and regretted that the new government did not stop the abuses against the protesters, despite the commitments made when it took office. In his last periodic report of the year on the situation in Iraq, in November, the UN Secretary-General also considered insufficient the specific action taken to guarantee truth and accountability for human rights abuses committed during the demonstrations.[41]

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

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 keeping with the trend reported in recent years, **the historic international tension involving Israel, Syria and Lebanon (and increasingly Iran and the United States) continued to motivate periodic acts of violence**

that caused the deaths of around 90 people, according to informal counts. As in previous years, most of the incidents associated with this crisis were Israeli air strikes in different parts of Syria, including the areas of Homs, Aleppo, Quneitra and Damascus, as well as incidents around the occupied Golan Heights. According to the information that emerged in 2020, the most serious events occurred in February, when a series of Israeli attacks caused the deaths of 26 Syrian soldiers and pro-Iranian militiamen in the vicinity of Damascus; in June, when another series of air strikes against suspected Iranian and pro-Iranian targets killed another 26 people across Syria; and in November, when 27 other alleged pro-Iranian militiamen were killed in similar attacks. In July, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu openly acknowledged that his country was relentlessly attacking Iranian targets in Syria. Netanyahu warned the Syrian president of the risks of allowing a greater Iranian military presence and threatened further attacks. The death of a Hezbollah militiaman in Syria and subsequent incidents along the disputed border with Lebanon were also reported in July, though no casualties were reported. According to Israel, its security forces fired at a group of five suspected Hezbollah militants who crossed the Blue Line area. In August, the Lebanese Shia group claimed responsibility for shooting down an Israeli drone. In November, Israel claimed to have destroyed a Hezbollah drone that was in Israeli airspace. As in previous years, the UN Secretary-General on the mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported continuous violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel on an almost daily basis, most of them with drones. António Guterres expressed his concern about this and about indications of Israeli attacks in Syria.[42]

No progress was made in establishing a permanent ceasefire between Lebanon and Syria during the year. However, in October both governments announced a framework agreement to discuss the definition of the maritime boundary under the mediation of the US and with UN participation through its Special Coordinator for Lebanon. Although at the time it was highlighted that these were the first meetings not related to security issues in three decades and that several were held in the last quarter, at the end of the year sources linked to the process warned of the distance between the parties. Additionally, during 2020 the US government intensified its policy of punishment and sanctions against people and institutions linked to Hezbollah. Israel and the US raised the need to change UNIFIL's mandate, a demand that was publicly rejected by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. According to him, the Trump administration argued that the mission's mandate should be reconsidered to give it a more active role to confront Hezbollah.

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40. OHCHR, *UN: Accountability for human rights violations during peaceful protests is key*, Geneva, 27 August 2020.
41. UN Secretary General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Resolution 2522 (2020),* 10 November 2020.
42. UN Secretary General, *Report on the Implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)*, 14 July 2020 and 12 November 2020.

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.

If Lebanon was the scene of the largest anti-government demonstrations in a decade in 2019, **in 2020 the situation in the country worsened due to multiple overlapping and interrelated crises: a marked deterioration in the economic situation, chronic political instability and persistent social unrest, aggravated in the first quarter by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and by a devastating explosion in August that destroyed part of the capital, Beirut**. The year began amid protests against the new cabinet proposed by acting Prime Minister Hassan Diab, appointed to office after protests in October 2019 led to the resignation of Saad Hariri's government. Parliament gave its vote of confidence to the new Diab government in February amidst protest, periodic demonstrations and clashes between protesters and the security forces that in the first months of the year left hundreds of people injured and led to numerous arrests. The protesters rejected the cabinet, which they considered to be part of the Lebanese political elite, as well as rampant inflation, currency devaluation and increasing poverty. Demonstrations, arson attacks and incidents persisted despite restrictions on mobility imposed to curb the pandemic in cities such as Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tire. In Tripoli, for example, three days of clashes with the Lebanese Armed Forces in late April resulted in the death of one protester and wounded 77 civilians and 159 soldiers, according to UN data. In June and

The economic, political and social crisis in Lebanon was exacerbated in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the devastating explosion in the port of Beirut in August that killed 200 people and injured 7,000

July, the protests intensified after the Lebanese pound depreciated by 85% (compared to October 2019), increasing power cuts (which reached up to 22 hours a day) and the suicide of two men that dissatisfied groups blamed on the authorities' ineptitude in managing the crisis. Attacks on banks and clashes with sectarian overtones followed after some protesters demanded the disarmament of all militias, including Hezbollah. The incidents in June and July left more than 100 people injured and dozens arrested. President Michel Aoun then tried unsuccessfully to start a national dialogue to prevent an escalation, warning of the dangerous climate of confrontation in the country. Meanwhile, the blockade persisted in the talks between the government and the IMF to negotiate a "rescue" plan.

In this highly turbulent context, **on 4 August there was a huge explosion in the port of Beirut that destroyed a significant part of the city, causing the deaths of over 200 people, wounding 7,000 and forcibly displacing 300,000.** The detonation occurred due to 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate that were stored in the port for six years without the appropriate security measures due to the indolence of the authorities, according to various media reports. The impact of the explosion further aggravated the socio-economic crisis and especially affected the food supply (Lebanon imports 85% of its food and the port was the gateway for 70% of these supplies), destroyed or damaged almost 200 schools in the city and rendered half of the health centres inoperative, which were already running at their limits before the explosion due to the pandemic. The detonation triggered massive protests and new clashes between protesters and security forces in which 700 civilians and 70 policemen were injured. Activists denounced the excessive use of force against the protesters. Diab's government resigned one week later, attributing the crisis to "endemic corruption in the political class, the administration and the state" and in late August Parliament voted the diplomat Mustafa Adib as the new prime minister. However, Adib resigned weeks later due to the impossibility of forming a cabinet amidst growing polarisation. Added to the struggles between Lebanese political actors were disagreements between foreign actors, mainly the US and France, over the role that Hezbollah should play in a new administration. French President Emmanuel Macron promoted a donor conference co-led by the UN, travelled to Lebanon to try to press for political reforms and was in favour of incorporating Hezbollah, while the US intensified its campaign of pressure and sanctions against the Shia group. Some analysts suggested that this was not the right time to question Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, as it could increase polarisation in the country.[43] Thus in October,

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43. International Crisis Group, *Avoiding Further Polarisation in Lebanon,* Middle East and North Africa Briefing 81, 10 November 2020.

just one year after being ousted from power, Saad Hariri won the necessary votes in Parliament to return to office as prime minister and, in theory, to appoint a technocratic cabinet to implement the reforms outlined in the French initiative. By the end of the year, however, power struggles persisted, Hariri had failed to form his cabinet and both the prime minister and the president traded blame for the political impasse. In December, France, the UN and the EU announced an aid fund conditional on the formation of a new government and political reforms. Meanwhile, protests continued at the end of 2020, especially after the authorities announced the early cancellation of subsidies for basic products. The investigation into the August explosion pointed to former Prime Minister Diab and three other ministers in December for their responsibility for the events, but the development of the judicial process remained uncertain. Local and international figures called for an independent investigation on various occasions.

There were also several violent clashes between rival factions in 2020 that caused the deaths of many people in different parts of the country. The authorities also warned of an increase in crime in the last year, of several violent episodes between the security forces and suspected ISIS fighters, which left a dozen people dead between August and October, and of various incidents involving the Syrian refugee population in the country. The media and NGOs described growing tensions between refugees and the Lebanese population in a context characterised by the extreme precariousness of Syrians living in the country. According to HRW, **78% of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees lacked legal status and consequently faced a high risk of abuse, exploitation, arrest and deportation.** The NGO also said that 21 Lebanese municipalities introduced discriminatory restrictions for Syrians that were not applicable to Lebanese as part of the action taken against COVID-19. Finally, in August the Special Tribunal for Lebanon convicted a member of Hezbollah for his involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in a bomb attack in 2005. Neither the group's leaders nor Syria's participation in the crime was proven.

The Gulf

Iran	
Intensity:	1
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government 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.

Although in general the atmosphere of persecution of critics in Iran persisted, **internal tension in the country subsided compared to 2019, when the largest internal upheaval in a decade occurred**, with mass protests put down by the Iranian security forces that resulted in the deaths of at least 304 people. As 2020 began, Iran was rocked by news of the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guard's (IRGC) al-Quds brigade, in a US attack in Iraq. Amidst a very strained atmosphere with the US following the senior military officer's death, **anti-government protests started up again in January when the Revolutionary Guard admitted to having accidentally shot down a Ukrainian plane carrying 176 civilians near Tehran**.[44] The protests over the downing of the plane, for which the IRGC initially denied responsibility, spread to different cities in the country and the security forces used live ammunition to disperse the protesters in Tehran. The authorities prosecuted about 20 people for their participation in the protests and two prominent activists were sentenced to up to five years in prison for their involvement and their messages on networks about them. Meanwhile, human rights organisations such as Amnesty International presented evidence of the deliberate use of lethal force in the crackdown on the demonstrations in late 2019 and warned of the arrests of more than 7,000 people, many of them victims of serious violations, such as arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, torture, mistreatment and others.[45] Several organisations requested an independent investigation led by the UN into the events of November 2019.[46] Reinforcing demands for accountability, in December a group of UN human rights experts accused the Iranian authorities of massacres of dissidents in prisons in 1988, warning that they could constitute crimes against humanity and that they would request an international investigation if these violations persisted today. **Iran also continued to be one of the most active countries in applying the death penalty and had executed 233 people as**

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44. See the summary on Iran - USA, Israel in this chapter.
45. Amnesty International, *Iran: Trampling Humanity - Mass Arrests, Disappearances and Torture since Iran's 2019 November Protests*, 2 September 2020.
46. Amnesty International, *Joint call for states to mandate a UN-led inquiry into the serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, torture and unlawful killings during and in the aftermath of the November 2019 protests in Iran, on the occasion of the 45th session of the HRC*, 9 September 2020.

of November, according to Human Rights Watch. Regarding Iran's internal political dynamics, conservative forces triumphed in the February elections and the presidential election was announced for June 2021.

Iran – USA, Israel[47]	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	System, Government 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.

In keeping with the trend of the previous year, international tension around the Iranian nuclear programme intensified in 2020, in a context marked by various factors that exposed the challenges in preserving the validity of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015: the agreement was abandoned by the Trump administration (in 2018) according to its preference for a strategy of coercion and maximum pressure from the US on Iran; Tehran gradually backed away from the commitments made under the agreement (since 2019); there was a series of incidents affecting Iranian infrastructure, senior officials and scientists in 2020; and various acts of violence involved Iranian, US and Israeli forces in different parts of the Middle East that raised alarms about the potential for escalating tension between the parties. Notable in this regard was the **destabilising impact of the assassination of Iranian**

General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guard's al-Quds brigade in early January, who was killed in a US strike in Iraq. Soleimani's funeral was attended by tens of thousands of people in the Iranian town of Kerman, where a stampede killed 56. Suleimani's death also led to retaliatory actions by Iran, which launched attacks against US positions on Iraqi soil. In January the Revolutionary Guard acknowledged having accidentally shot down a Ukrainian civilian plane outside Tehran, killing 176 people. There were other acts of violence and skirmishes throughout 2020, mainly in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, which exposed the tension between the parties. Additionally, a series of attacks and acts of sabotage were reported in July against infrastructure linked to the Iranian atomic programme, including the Natanz and Isfahan plants. In November, the assassination of the main person in charge of the Iranian nuclear programme caused a special stir and Tehran accused Israeli forces of participating. At the same time, the Trump administration stepped up its policy of sanctions against Iran and imposed a series of them throughout the year against people, companies, scientists, banks, transport and metal companies, suppliers of fuel and electricity and others. According to the International Crisis Group, in two and a half years (until December 2020) Washington imposed almost 1,500 unilateral sanctions against Iran, with dramatic consequences for the Iranian economy. These sanctions were not only maintained, but intensified during 2020, even though Tehran asked the UN to promote lifting them to facilitate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely affected the country.

Iran also continued to violate the nuclear programme agreement. Early in the year, the three European states involved in the agreement (France, Germany and the United Kingdom, known as the E3 group) activated the dispute resolution mechanism provided for in the agreement to respond to detected breaches. Nevertheless, during a visit by the EU foreign representative to Tehran in February, the Iranian president insisted that his country was sticking to the agreement and would continue to work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In June, an IAEA report found that Iran had continued to enrich and accumulate uranium above the limits allowed by the JCPOA and warned of Tehran's lack of cooperation in accessing two sites where suspicious activities had been identified. The E3 countries urged Iran to cooperate with the IAEA and in July the deadline for implementing the dispute resolution mechanism was extended. In November, new information from the IAEA confirmed that Iran continued to maintain uranium reserves above agreed thresholds and that the country should provide explanations for sites where traces of nuclear activity had been identified.

In August, Washington unsuccessfully tried to reactivate the United Nations sanctions against Iran that were in

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

force before the 2015 nuclear agreement, a right reserved for the parties that signed it, which the US abandoned. The attempt sparked discussion within the UN Security Council and evidenced the disparity of positions between the US and the countries that signed the agreement, which Tehran celebrated as a victory. Coinciding with the expiration of the UN arms embargo against Iran, the Trump administration approved new unilateral sanctions against it. At the end of the year, media reports warned that Trump had considered military action against Iran's main atomic facility, adding that any moves against Tehran could not be ruled out until the final days of his term. In February, the US Senate approved regulations to prevent the president from launching any military strike against Iran without authorisation from Congress. **At the end of 2020, expectations rested on the changes that could take place after the new US administration came to power**. In statements prior to his election as president, Joe Biden was in favour of resuming US commitments to the JCPOA. In December, at their first meeting in a year, the foreign ministers of the countries that had signed the agreement (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Russia and Iran) agreed not to set any preconditions and welcomed Washington's possible return to the agreement. Meanwhile, in response to the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist in an attack blamed on Israel in November, Iran's Parliament passed a law in December urging the government to enrich uranium to 20% (according to the JCPOA it should remain below 4%) and to block the IAEA's access if sanctions against Iran were not lifted in the first few months of 2021.