Map 2.1. **Socio-political crises**

Japan
Rep. of Korea
Korea, DPR
Philippines
Lao PDR
Papua New Guinea
Fiji
Russia
China
Thailand
Bangladesh
India
Sri Lanka
Indonesia
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Kazakhstan
Uzbekistan
Afghanistan
Pakistan
Azerbaijan
Iran
Djibouti
Rwanda
Burundi
Tanzania
Madagascar
Armenia
Georgia
Moldova, Rep.
Türkiye
Syria
Iraq
Bahrein
Saudi Arabia
Somalia
Uganda
Kenya
Eswatini
Belarus
Ukraine
Serbia
Kosovo
Cyprus
Lebanon
Palestine
Israel
Egypt
Eritrea
Sudan
Ethiopia
South Sudan
DRC
Mozambique
Tunisia
Chad
Niger
Nigeria
Benin
Gabon
Angola
Zimbabwe
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Greece
Cyprus
Morocco
Algeria
Togo
Equatorial Guinea
Côte d'Ivoire
*Belgium
Western Sahara
Mali
Senegal
Guinea-Bissau
Guinea
Burkina Faso
Brasil
Venezuela
Guyana
Paraguay
Cuba
Haiti
Honduras
Bolivia
Argentina
Jamaica
Nicaragua
Panamá
Colombia
Peru
Chile
Guatemala
El Salvador
Ecuador
USA
Mexico

Countries with socio-political crises

* The Russia – US, NATO, EU tension is indicated on this map in a simplified manner, for reasons of graphic representation. Not all the countries that are part of NATO or those that are part of the EU have been marked, but Belgium as a country that hosts the headquarters of the EU and NATO, Russia and the USA.

2. Socio-political crises

- There were 114 socio-political crises around the world in 2023. They mainly took place in Africa (38) and Asia and the Pacific (33), while the rest were in the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10).

- The political crisis between the Senegalese government and the opposition worsened during the year, triggering many protests and clashes with security forces that left dozens dead.

- The situation in the DRC got worse during 2023 as a consequence of electoral political violence and escalating violence in the armed conflicts in the country.

- Ethiopia remained seriously unstable due to the regional crises, the fragile implementation of the peace agreement in Tigray and the impacts of the wars in Oromia and Amhara.

- In Tunisia, the president continued to behave in a more authoritarian manner and attacks and policies increased against the sub-Saharan migrant and asylum-seeking population.

- The security situation and the humanitarian crisis seriously deteriorated in Haiti, with a substantial rise in the homicide rate while hundreds of armed gangs expanded their territorial control.

- Ecuador experienced a serious political crisis and an unprecedented spike in violence, prompting the declaration of a state of emergency.

- Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan deteriorated markedly and Pakistan began to deport hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees.

- Tension seriously escalated in the Indian state of Manipur, where intercommunity clashes between the Meitei and Kuki populations killed more than 170 people.

- In the Indonesian region of Papua New Guinea, there was a leap in the frequency, lethality and territorial scope of clashes between the Indonesian Armed Forces and the armed group OPM.

- An Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, its annexation by Azerbaijan and the forced exodus of almost its entire Armenian population.

- In 2023, the Iranian authorities continued their crackdown on the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and on their critics.

This chapter analyses the socio-political crises that occurred in 2023. It is organised into three sections. The socio-political crises and their characteristics are defined in the first section. In the second section, we analyse the global and regional trends of the socio-political crises in 2023. The third section describes the development and key events of the year in the various contexts. A map is included at the start of chapter that indicates the countries affected by socio-political crises in 2023.

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 2023

Conflict[1] -beginning-	Type[2]	Main parties	Intensity[3] / Trend[4]
AFRICA			
Algeria	Internal	Government, military power, political and social opposition, Hirak movement, jihadist armed groups	1
	Government, System		↓
Benin	Internationalised internal	Government, regional armed actors	2
	Government		=
Burkina Faso	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, army sectors	2
	Government		↓
Chad	Internal	Transitional Military Council, political and social opposition (including the coalition Wakit Tama, which includes the party Les Transformateurs), Chadian armed groups (52 groups, including the main ones: FACT, CCMSR, UFDD, UFR), community militias, private militias	3
	Government, Resources, Territory, Identity		↓
Côte d'Ivoire	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed actors	2
	Government, Identity, Resources		=
Djibouti	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed group FRUD-Armé	1
	Government		=
DRC	Internal	Government led by the Union Sacrée coalition (led by Félix Tshisekedi and made up of different political actors, including dissidents from former President Joseph Kabila's Front Commun pour le Congo coalition), political opposition (including Front Commun pour le Congo and Lamuka) and social opposition	3
	Government		↑
DRC – Rwanda[5]	International	Government of the DRC, government of Rwanda, Rwandan armed group FDLR, pro-Rwandan Congolese armed group M23 (formerly CNDP)	3
	Identity, Government, Resources		↑
Equatorial Guinea	Internal	Government, political opposition in exile	1
	Government		=
Eritrea	Internationalised internal	Government, political-military opposition coalition EDA (EPDF, EFDM, EIPJD, ELF, EPC, DMLEK, RSADO, ENSF, EIC, Nahda), other groups	1
	Government, Self-government, Identity		=
Eritrea – Ethiopia	International	Eritrea, Ethiopia	3
	Territory		↑
Ethiopia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups	3
	Government		=
Ethiopia – Egypt – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan	2
	Resources		↓
Ethiopia – Somalia	International	Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland	2
	Government, Territory, Resources		↑
Ethiopia – Sudan	International	Ethiopia, Sudan, community militias	1
	Resources		↓

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 sociopolitical 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 2023 with 2022, using the ↑ symbol to indicate that the general situation during 2023 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. Although the DRC-Rwanda crisis is not explored in this chapter, elements of this crisis are included in the DRC summary in this chapter, in the DRC (east) summary in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) and in the analysis included in the risk scenario "Rwanda: never again?" in chapter 5 (Risk scenarios).

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
AFRICA			
Gabon	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Guinea	Internal	Government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, trade unions	2
	Government		↑
Guinea-Bissau	Internationalised internal	Transitional government, Armed Forces, political opposition, international drug trafficking networks	1
	Government		↓
Kenya	Internationalised internal	Government, ethnic militias, political and social opposition (political parties, civil society organisations), armed group SLDF, Mungiki sect, MRC party, Somali armed group al-Shabaab and groups sympathetic to al-Shabaab in Kenya, ISIS	3
	Government, System, Resources, Identity, Self-government		↑
Madagascar	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Mali	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ECOWAS	2
	Government		↓
Morocco – Western Sahara	International[6]	Morocco, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), armed group POLISARIO Front	2
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↓
Mozambique	Internal	Government, RENAMO	1
	Government, System		↑
Niger[7]	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Nigeria	Internal	Government, political opposition, civil society organisations, Christian and Muslim communities, ranchers and farmers, community militias, criminal groups, IMN	3
	Identity, Resources, Government		=
Nigeria (Biafra)	Internationalised internal	Government, separatist organisations MASSOB, IPOB (which has an armed wing, the ESN)	3
	Identity, Self-government		=
Nigeria (Niger Delta)	Internal	Government, armed groups, MEND, MOSOP, NDPVF, NDV, NDA, NDGJM, IWF, REWL, PANDEF, Joint Revolutionary Council, militias of 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 ruling party (RPF), Rwandan diaspora in other countries in Africa and the West	1
	Government, Identity		=
Rwanda – Burundi	International	Government of Rwanda, government of Burundi, armed groups	1
	Government		=
Senegal	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Senegal (Casamance)	Internal	Government, factions of the armed group Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC)	1
	Self-government		↓
Sierra Leone	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, army sectors	1
	Government		↑
Sudan – South Sudan	International	Government of Sudan, government of South Sudan, community militias	2
	Resources, Identity		↑

6. 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.
7. Although the tension in Niger is not explored in this chapter, elements of this crisis are included in the summary of the Western Sahel region in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AFRICA			
Tanzania	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↓
Tunisia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, jihadist armed groups	3
	Government, System		↑
Uganda	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, ADF	2
	Government		↑
Zimbabwe	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		=
AMERICA			
Argentina	Government	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Internal		↑
Bolivia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Brazil	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	2
	Government		↑
Chile	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government, Self-government, Identity		↑
Colombia	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government		↑
Cuba	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Government, System		↑
Ecuador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government, Resources		↑
El Salvador	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised bands (drug trafficking, gangs)	3
	Government		↓
Guatemala	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	2
	Government		↑
Haiti	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government		↑
Honduras	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	3
	Government		↑
Jamaica	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups	1
	Government		↓
Mexico	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups, armed opposition groups	3
	Government, Resources, Identity		=
Nicaragua	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↑
Panama	Government	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Internal		↑
Paraguay	Government	Government, political and social opposition	1
	Internal		↑

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
AMERICA			
Peru	Internal	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (farmer and indigenous organisations)	3
	Government, Resources		↑
USA	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, citizen militias	1
	Government		↓
Venezuela	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3
	Government		↓
Venezuela – Guyana	Government	Venezuela, Guyana	3
	International		↑
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC			
Afghanistan – Pakistan	International	Afghanistan, Pakistan	3
	Government		↑
Bangladesh	Internal	Government (Awami League), political opposition (Bangladesh National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami), International Crimes Tribunal, armed groups (Ansar-al-Islam, JMB)	2
	Government		=
China (Hong Kong)	Internal	Government, 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	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China (Xinjiang)	Internationalised internal	Government, armed opposition (ETIM, ETLO), political and social opposition	1
	Self-government, Identity, System		=
China – Japan	International	China, Japan, USA	3
	Territory, Resources		↑
China – Philippines	International	China, Philippines, USA	3
	Territory, Resources		↑
China – Taiwan	International	China, Taiwan, USA	3
	Territory, Resources, System		↑
China – USA	International	China, USA	2
	System, Government, Territory		↑
Fiji	Internal	Government, political opposition	1
	Government		=
India (Manipur)	Internal	Government, armed groups (PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA)	3
	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	2
	Identity, Territory		↓
Indonesia (Sulawesi)	Internal	Government, armed group MIT	1
	System, Identity		=
Indonesia (West Papua)	Internal	Government, armed group OPM, political and social opposition, Papuan indigenous groups	3
	Self-government, Identity, Resources		↑

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity / Trend
ASIA			
Japan – Russia (Kuril Islands)	International	Japan, Russia	1
	Territory, Resources		=
Kazakhstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, local and regional armed groups	1
	System, Government		↓
Korea, DPR	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	1
	System, Government		=
Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	International	DPR Korea, Rep. of Korea	3
	System		↑
Korea, DPR – USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[8]	International	DPR Korea, USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea, China, Russia	3
	Government		↑
Kyrgyzstan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, regional armed groups, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	1
	System, Government, Identity, Resources, Territory		↑
Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan	International	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	1
	Territory, resources		↓
Lao, PDR	Internal	Government, political and social opposition, political and armed organisations of Hmong origin	1
	System, Identity		=
Pakistan	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↓
Papua New Guinea	Internal	Government, community militias, government of Bougainville	3
	Identity, Resources, Territory, Self-governmen		↑
South China Sea	International	China, Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam	2
	Territory, Resources		↑
Sri Lanka	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	2
	Government		↓
Tajikistan	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, former warlords, regional armed groups, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan	2
	Government, System, Resources, Territory		=
Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan)	Internal	Government, informal local leaders of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), social opposition to the central government in the GBAO, China	1
	Identity, Government		↓
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, Territory		↑
Uzbekistan (Karakalpakstan)	Internal	Government, social opposition in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan	1
	Self-government, Identity		↓
EUROPE			
Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	International	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Türkiye	3
	Self-government, Identity, Territory		↑
Belarus	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, EU, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, USA, Ukraine, NATO, Russia	2
	Government		↑
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Internationalised internal	State institutions, institutions of sub-state entities (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), high representative of the international community, USA, EU, NATO, Serbia, Russia	2
	Self-government, Identity, Government		↑

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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
EUROPE				
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	Internationalised internal	Government, political opposition, Russia, EU, Ukraine, NATO	2	
	Government			↑
Moldova, Rep. of (Transdniestria)	Internationalised internal	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia, Ukraine	2	
	Self-government, Identity			=
Russia	Internationalised internal	Government, Wagner Group, political and social opposition, armed opposition actors	3	
	Government			↑
Russia (North Caucasus)	Internal	Russian federal government, governments of the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, armed opposition groups (Caucasus Emirate and ISIS), social opposition in the diaspora	1	
	System, Identity, Government			↑
Russia – USA, NATO, EU	Internacional	Russia, Belarus, USA, NATO, EU, United Kingdom, Ukraine	2	
	Sistema, Gobierno, Territorio, Recursos			↑
Serbia – Kosovo	International[9]	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community of Kosovo, UN mission (UNMIK), NATO mission (KFOR), EU mission (EULEX)	2	
	Self-government, Identity, Government			↑
Türkiye	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, ISIS, organisation of Fetullah Gülen	2	
	Government, System			↑
Türkiye – Greece, Cyprus	International	Türkiye, Greece, Republic of Cyprus, self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus	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	2	
	Government			=
Iran	Internal	Government, political and social opposition	3	
	Government			=
Iran (northwest)	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups (PJAK, PDKI and Komala), Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq	2	
	Self-government, Identity			↓
Iran (Sistan and Balochistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups Jundallah (Soldiers of God / People's Resistance Movement), Harakat Ansar Iran and Jaish al-Adl, Pakistan	2	
	Self-government, Identity			↓
Iran – USA, Israel[10]	International	Iran, USA, Israel	3	
	System, Government			=
Iraq (Kurdistan)	Internationalised internal	Government, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Türkiye, Iran, PKK	1	
	Self-government, Identity, Resources, Territory			=
Lebanon	Internationalised internal	Government, Hezbollah (party and militia), political and social opposition	2	
	Government, System			=

9. 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. However, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion in 2010 establishing that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence did not violate international law.

10. This international socio-political crisis refers mainly to the dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme.

Socio-political crisis	Type	Main parties	Intensity
			Trend
MIDDLE EAST			
Palestine	Internal	ANP, Fatah, armed group Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas and its armed wing, the Ezzedin al-Qassam Brigades, Salafist groups	1
	Government		=
Saudi Arabia	Internationalised internal	Government, political and social opposition, armed groups, including AQAP and branches of ISIS (Hijaz Province, Najd Province)	1
	Government, Identity		=

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

2.2. Socio-political crises: analysis of trends in 2023

This section examines the general trends observed in areas experiencing socio-political crises throughout 2023, at both the global and regional levels.

2.2.1. Global trends

There were 114 socio-political crises around the world in 2023, six more than in 2022, in line with the climbing trend in the number of socio-political crises reported in recent years (31 more since 2018). Africa and Asia and the Pacific were the regions in the world with the highest number of socio-political crises (38 and 33, respectively), followed by the Americas (20), Europe (13) and the Middle East (10). Thirteen new cases were identified in 2023, concentrated mainly in Africa and the Americas: Ethiopia-Somalia; Gabon; Madagascar; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Togo; Argentina; Panama; Paraguay; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Philippines; and Russia-USA, NATO, EU. Seven other cases were no longer classified socio-political crises, most of them in Africa: Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland), India, India (Assam) and Israel-Syria-Lebanon. The socio-political crises in Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, India and India (Assam) were removed from consideration due to a drop in intensity, whereas those in Sudan, Somalia (Somaliland-Puntland)[11] and Israel-Syria-Lebanon[12] were reclassified as armed conflicts.

For one more year in 2023, one of the most notable aspects of our analysis of the socio-political crises is

In 2023, the number of socio-political crises increased again to 114, which was 31 more cases since 2018

that **half of them (49%) worsened compared to the previous year**. In 28% of the socio-political crises there were no observable changes and in 23% the tension eased. This was reflected in part by a **rise in the number of high-intensity cases, from 28 in 2022 to 31 in 2023**: Chad; Eritrea-Ethiopia; Ethiopia; Kenya; Nigeria; Nigeria (Biafra); DRC; DRC-Rwanda; Tunisia; Ecuador; El Salvador; Haiti; Honduras; Mexico; Peru; Venezuela; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India (Manipur); India-China; Indonesia (West Papua); Papua New Guinea; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); Russia; Iran; and Iran-US, Israel. In addition to the 31 high-intensity cases, which accounted for nearly one third of the total, 39% of the 114 socio-political crises were of low intensity (in 2022 this percentage was 42%) and 33% were of medium intensity (32% in 2022). As such, **the trend of 2022 was repeated in 2023, raising the number and average intensity of the socio-political crises**. The intensity of the socio-political crises especially rose in Europe (where 85% of cases escalated) and in the Americas (where 75% did so). In the Middle East, 80% of the socio-political crises maintained a dynamic similar to the previous year.

The socio-political crises continued to be predominantly **multi-causal**, with two or more causes identified in 56% of the crises. Opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological **system** of a state or to the internal or international policies of a **government** were factors in 75% of the crises analysed; demands for self-

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11. In early 2023, there was an escalation of fighting between the security forces of Somaliland (a self-proclaimed independent region of Somalia whose status is still disputed) and the militias of the regions of Sool, Sannag and Cayn, which are part of Somaliland and call themselves the SSC-Khatumo administration. Somaliland and Puntland have had their own historical dispute over the control of these border regions since 1998, when Puntland was established as an autonomous republic. This dispute has currently set off an armed conflict between the militias of these regions and Somaliland. This case is renamed Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo). For more information, see the summary on Somalia (Somaliland-SSC Khatumo) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
12. The dynamics of this context are analysed in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) under the heading "Israel-Hezbollah".

Box 2.1. **High intensity socio-political crises in 2023**

AFRICA (9)	ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (10)	MIDDLE EAST (2)
Chad	Afghanistan-Pakistan	Iran
Eritrea-Ethiopia	China-Japan	Iran-US, Israel
Ethiopia	China-Taiwan	
Kenya	China-Philippines	**AMERICA (8)**
Nigeria	North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea	Ecuador
Nigeria (Biafra)	North Korea-South Korea	El Salvador
DRC	India (Manipur)	Haiti
DRC-Rwanda	India-China	Honduras
Tunisia	Indonesia (West Papua)	Mexico
	Papua New Guinea	Peru
		Venezuela
		Venezuela-Guyana
		EUROPE (2)
		Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)
		Russia

determination and **self-government**, or identity-related aspirations were present in 356%; and control of **resources** or **territory** were found in 31%. These figures maintain a certain continuity with those of the previous year. In a disaggregated analysis of factors, opposition to the **government's** internal or international policies was once again the most predominant cause and was present in 69% of the 114 socio-political crises, a similar percentage to the previous year. Thirty such cases were identified in Africa, equivalent to 79% of the cases in the region. In the Americas, there were 19 cases, equivalent to 95% (only in the crisis of Venezuela-Guyana was it not a factor). There were 14 in Asia and the Pacific (42%), nine in Europe and seven in the Middle East, accounting for 69% and 70% of all crises there, respectively. The second most prevalent factor, **identity-related aspirations** (33%), was especially significant in Europe (62%) and the Middle East (50%). Next, with very similar percentages, were issues related to the control of **resources** (24%), **demands for self-determination and self-government**

Half the socio-political crises identified in 2023 (49%) worsened compared to the previous year and only 23% improved

(22%), **opposition** to the political, social or ideological **system** of the state as a whole (20%) and the control of **territory** (20%). The different factors causing the socio-political crises also oscillated greatly between regions. For example, opposition to the government is present in 95% of the crises in the Americas, while in Asia and the Pacific it was found in 64% of all cases. However, demands for self-determination and/or self-government are only seen in 15% of the crises in the Americas and in 29% in Africa, compared to 62% in Europe. Nearly half the crises in Asia and the Pacific were linked to the controlling and accessing resources and territory (45%).

Approximately half the socio-political tensions worldwide were **internal in nature (49%)**, though with a pronounced geographic variability (90% of the crises in the Americas and 8% in Europe). Nearly one fourth of the crises (23%) were **international**, but some were among the most intense in the world: Eritrea-Ethiopia; DRC-Rwanda; Venezuela-Guyana; Afghanistan-Pakistan; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; China-Philippines; North Korea-US, Japan, South Korea; North Korea-South Korea; India-China; Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh); and Iran-US, Israel. Finally, over one quarter (28%) of the crises were **internationalised internal**, meaning that one of the main actors is foreign and/or that the tension extends to the territory of neighbouring countries. Once again, major variations were observed between regions (62% of the crises in Europe were of this type, while only one was reported in Latin American, the socio-political crisis in Ecuador).

In a more detailed geographical analysis, some of the subregions with the highest number of crises were, in this order: West Africa (14 cases); East Asia (12); Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (11); South America

Graph 2.1. **Trending number of socio-political crises 2018-2023**
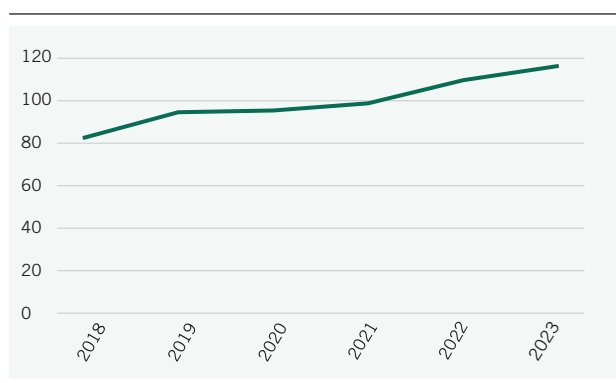
(10); South Asia, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf (seven each); Russia and the Caucasus (six); Central America (five); and the Mashreq, South-east Europe, Central Asia and South-east Asia (four each). The countries that suffered the most crises in their territory or whose governments were main actors in the greatest number of foreign disputes were, in this order: Russia (12 cases); China (11); USA (10); Ethiopia, Iran and Tajikistan (five each); India, Ukraine, Türkiye, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (four); and Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Indonesia, Japan and North Korea (three).[13]

2.2.2. Regional trends

As in recent years, **Africa** was the region with the highest number of socio-political crises (38), upholding the same percentage of all cases (33%) as the previous year. Four crises were reclassified during the year, namely Central Africa (LRA), Eswatini, Sudan and Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), while six new crises were added: Ethiopia-Somalia, Gabon, Madagascar, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The crisis in Gabon is related to a successful coup d'état that took place and the crisis in Sierra Leone is connected with a failed coup attempt. Senegal and Madagascar's crises are related to rising political tension between the government and the political opposition. The case of Togo is included due to the growing impact there coming from the cross-border dynamics of the armed conflict in the Western Sahel region. Finally, the tension between Ethiopia and Somalia owes to their deteriorating relationship stemming from the agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland, a region that is part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence since 1991, which is not internationally recognised. The agreement included Ethiopia's future international recognition of Somaliland and other actions. Broken down by subregions, West Africa was the part of Africa (and the world) with the highest number of crises (14), including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Nigeria (Biafra), Nigeria (Niger Delta), Senegal, Senegal (Casamance), Sierra Leone and Togo. In second place was Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (11): Chad, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, DRC, DRC-Rwanda, Kenya, Rwanda, Rwanda-Burundi, Sudan-South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. These were followed by the Horn of Africa (7 – Djibouti, Eritrea, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia, Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan, Ethiopia-Sudan and Ethiopia-Somalia; Southern Africa (3 – Madagascar, Mozambique and Zimbabwe); and North Africa-Maghreb (3 – Algeria, Morocco-Western Sahara and Tunisia). Finally, several countries suffered from various socio-political crises, such as Ethiopia (five crises) and Nigeria, Sudan and Rwanda (three).

During 2023, 114 socio-political crises were identified: 38 in Africa, 33 in Asia and the Pacific, 20 in the Americas, 13 in Europe and 10 in the Middle East

Graph 2.2. **Regional distribution of the number of socio-political crises in 2023**
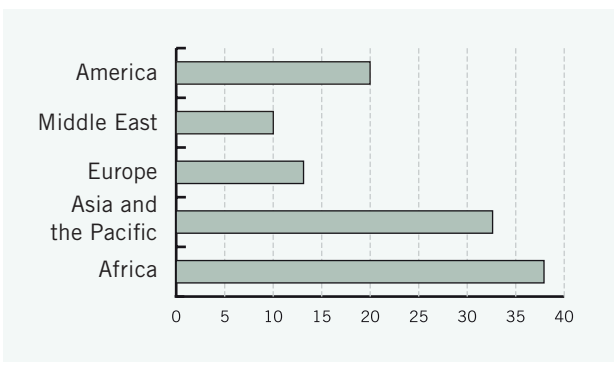
Graph 2.3. **Intensity of the socio-political crises by region**
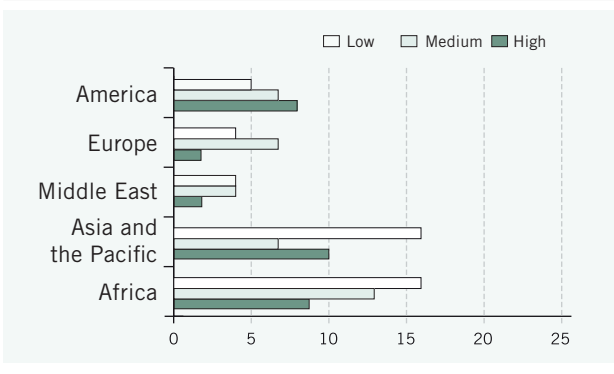
After Asia and the Pacific, Africa was the region with the second-highest number of high-intensity crises (nine of 38), equivalent to 24% of all cases there and one fewer than those identified the previous year (10 of 36). Overall, 42% of the socio-political crises were of low intensity, 34% were of medium intensity and 24% were of high intensity. The high-intensity crises were: Chad, Eritrea-Ethiopia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Nigeria (Biafra), DRC, DRC-Rwanda and Tunisia. Forty-two per cent of the socio-political crises got worse, 32% did not report any fundamental changes and the remaining 26% decreased. During the year, the number of worsening crises in Africa rose from 13 in 2022 to 16, including the cases of Ethiopia-Eritrea, Ethiopia-Somalia and Rwanda-DRC; countries that experienced coups d'état, whether they succeeded or not, namely Gabon and Sierra Leone; and countries that were gripped by deep political crises, meaning the DRC, Mozambique, Senegal, Uganda and others. Two crises escalated significantly during the year, Sudan and Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) and were considered armed conflicts, so overall the violence became more intense compared to the previous year. The most predominant causes of the crises in the

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13. The actors appearing in the table as main actors of the socio-political crisis are included in the count.

region were once again opposition to the government or the system, which were found in most of them (79%, or 30 of 38), while control over resources and/or territory (12) and identity-related issues or demands for self-government and self-determination (11) accounted for 32% and 29%, respectively. These data are continuous with those of the previous year. Finally, internal tensions accounted for 47% of the cases (50% in 2022), internationalised internal crises accounted for 32% (28% in 2021) and international tensions accounted for 21% (22% in 2021). In all cases, these percentages were very similar to the world average.

The subregion of West Africa was the part of the world with the highest number of socio-political crises (14)

Twenty socio-political crises were reported in the **Americas** (18% of the total), four more than in 2022: Argentina, Panama, Paraguay and Venezuela-Guyana. Most of those 20 cases were located in South America (10), followed by Central America (5), the Caribbean (3) and North America (2). A significant characteristic of the region is that there was an escalation of tension in 75% of the crises, while violence subsided in only 20%. This caused the average intensity of the crises in the region to rise significantly compared to the previous year, as high-intensity cases climbed from 31% in 2022 to 40% in 2023. However, low-intensity cases fell by half, from 50% in 2022 to 25% in 2023. Similarly, medium-intensity cases also grew in 2023 to represent 35% of the total, compared to 19% of 2022. In comparative terms, the Americas were once again the region of the world with the highest proportion of high-intensity cases: Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and Venezuela-Guyana. The crises in Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela had already been classified as high-intensity in 2022 and in previous years, while conflict dynamics rose significantly in El Salvador and Honduras in 2023 and the dispute between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region (a territory historically claimed by Venezuela, but formally under the effective control and administration of the government of Guyana) increased tension between them. The number of homicides clearly fell in El Salvador, but the detention of tens of thousands of people continued to be reported under the state of emergency and many organisations complained of the deterioration of the human rights situation, Bukele's unprecedented concentration of power and growing authoritarian inclinations in the country. In Honduras, there was an increase in social and political protests during the year, many reported human rights violations linked to the declaration of the state of emergency in December 2022 and a major political crisis paralysed Parliament for four months. Finally, the government of Venezuela's decision to call a referendum on the annexation of Essequibo and to implement actions to make its results effective caused a major political and

Tension rose in 75% of the socio-political crises in the Americas, once again making it the region with the highest proportion of high-intensity cases (40%)

diplomatic crisis in the region, with several countries undergoing military mobilisation.

Nineteen of the 20 crises identified were linked to opposition to the government's domestic or international policies, except for the socio-political crisis between Venezuela-Guyana, which is related to control over resources and territory. Factors such as control of resources and identity-related issues were associated with three crises each, while dynamics linked to self-government were behind two others and opposition to the system was found in only one (Cuba). Eighteen of the 20 socio-political crises in the region were internal, which contrasts with the aggregated data at the international level, according to which approximately half the socio-political crises worldwide were internal in nature. Only the case of Ecuador was described as internationalised internal in nature and only the crisis in Venezuela-Guyana was international.

Once again, 33 socio-political crises were identified in **Asia and the Pacific**, accounting for 29% of the total worldwide. There were two new crises compared to 2022 (Afghanistan-Pakistan and China-Philippines), while the cases of India and India (Assam) stopped being considered socio-political crises. Broken down by subregion, 12 of the crises were in East Asia: China (Xinjiang); China (Tibet); China (Hong Kong); China-Philippines; China-Japan; China-Taiwan; North Korea-US, Japan and South Korea; and the South China Sea. Seven of the crises took place in South Asia: Afghanistan-Pakistan, Bangladesh, India (Manipur), India (Nagaland), India-China, India-Pakistan and Pakistan; four in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan); four in South-east Asia (Indonesia (Sulawesi), Indonesia (West Papua), Laos and Thailand; and two in the Pacific (Papua New Guinea and Fiji). As in previous years, some countries were the scene of several socio-political crises, like China (9), India (four) and Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and North Korea (three). Almost half the crises (48%) were of low intensity, 21% were of medium intensity and the remaining 30% were of high intensity. Forty-two per cent of the cases identified in Asia and the Pacific escalated in 2023 compared to the previous year, while 27% of the crises decreased in intensity. No changes were observed in the remaining 30%. There was a notable escalation in socio-political crises considered high-intensity in 2023. Afghanistan-Pakistan was considered a new socio-political crisis since tension between both countries increased throughout 2023, with some episodes of violence on the border, constant diplomatic confrontations and Pakistan's expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees. The three crises that China maintains with Japan, Taiwan and the

Philippines also became more strained. Political and military tension between China and the Philippines increased substantially during the year, with some of the most serious maritime incidents in recent years, a rise in bellicose rhetoric and the strengthening of defensive alliances between the Philippines and several countries, especially the United States. Finally, tension escalated in the Indian state of Manipur with intercommunity clashes between Meitei and Kuki groups, which led to the death of 163 people.

The most significant underlying causes of the socio-political crises in the region were opposition to the state and/or the government, which was found in 64% of the cases, followed by issues linked to the control of territory and/or resources (45%) and finally demands for self-government or identity-related aspirations (39%). Nearly half the crises were internal in nature (45%), a little less than one fifth (18%) were internationalised internal and 36% were international, making Asia and the Pacific the region with the highest proportion of international crises. Most 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 tension with its southern neighbour and with several other countries over its weapons programme; the crises between China and Taiwan; the dispute between China and the US, with one of its main scenarios in East Asia; the historical dispute between Russia and Japan over the Kuril Islands; and the crisis in the South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

There were 13 socio-political crises in **Europe**, or 11% of the total. Compared to the previous year, the dispute between Russia-USA, NATO and the EU began to be analysed as a socio-political crisis. The subregion with the highest number of active cases (6) was Russia and the Caucasus, followed by South-east Europe (4) and Eastern Europe (3). In addition to the two crises in Russia and Russia (North Caucasus), and the one between Russia and the US, NATO and the EU, Russia was clearly the country most involved in disputes in the region, both in Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Moldova (Transdniestria)) and the Caucasus (Armenia-Azerbaijan, Georgia (South Ossetia) and Georgia (Abkhazia)). Türkiye was an actor in three of the crises in the region (Türkiye, Türkiye-Greece-Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)).

For yet another year, the most notable aspect of our analysis of the socio-political crises in Europe is that escalating tensions were reported in 85% of the

Almost half (48%) the cases identified in Asia and the Pacific were of low intensity, despite an observable escalation in 42% over the previous year

Europe was once again the region with the highest percentage of crises that got worse in 2023 (85%)

cases there in 2023. In only one crisis did the tension subside or de-escalate (Türkiye-Greece-Cyprus, due to the rapprochement between Ankara and Athens) or remain unchanged (Moldova (Transdniestria)), though the context in both cases was still uncertain and fragile. Therefore, Europe was once again the region with the highest percentage of cases that worsened in 2023, maintaining the dynamics of the previous year, in which 92% of the crises got worse. This deterioration was linked both to repercussions across Europe of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to other local and regional dynamics. This escalation of tensions did not involve an increase in intensity, since 31% of the cases were of low intensity, 54% were of medium intensity and 15% were of high intensity. These percentages are similar to those reported in 2022. The two most intense socio-political crises were Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Russia. In relation to the former, an Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, causing its annexation by Azerbaijan and forcing the exodus of practically the entire Armenian population there. Moreover, the situation in Russia deteriorated in 2023, including a failed armed insurrection by the Wagner Group.

Opposition to the government and/or the system were causes of 69% of the crises, followed by disputes linked to identity and/or demands for self-government (62%) and for control of territory and/or resources (23%). Europe continues to be the part of the world with the highest percentage of demands linked to identity and/or self-government, double the world average of 35%. In any case, these factors are found in complex contexts of tension within broader and internationalised dynamics involving geostrategic disputes and interests of foreign actors, as is the case of Russia in relation to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transdniestria, as well as Türkiye's influence over the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Finally, 62% of the crises were internationalised internal in nature, 31% were international and one was internal. The most significant thing about Europe's sole internal case, in Russia (North Caucasus), is the great disparity between the proportion of internal socio-political crises worldwide (an average of 49%) and in Europe (8%). Internationalised internal crises were more than twice as prevalent in Europe (62%) as in all other regions combined (28%). Thus, external dynamics and agendas were projected onto crises in Europe once again in 2023. Accentuated since the war in Ukraine, this dimension is combined with internal factors.

In the **Middle East**, 10 socio-political crises were identified, accounting for 9% of the total. Compared to the previous year, one case, Israel-Syria-Lebanon,

stopped being considered a crisis, as it escalated to an armed conflict (Israel-Hezbollah) due to the rising hostilities and the effects of the violence of the final quarter of 2023 stemming from the crisis in Gaza. Seven of the 10 identified crises took place in the Gulf and the remaining three were in the Mashreq. Most (80%) of the crises reported no significant changes over the previous year, though a relative decrease in tension was observed in two cases (20%), Iran (northwest) and Iran (Sistan Balochistan), which had witnessed higher levels of violence in 2022 as part of Tehran's crackdown on internal dissent. The intensity of the crises was similar to the previous year, with four low-intensity cases, accounting for 40% (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq (Kurdistan) and Palestine (internal tension between Fatah and Hamas)), four medium-intensity cases, also representing 40% (Egypt, Iran (northwest), Iran (Sistan Balochistan) and Lebanon) and two high-intensity cases (Iran and Iran-US, Israel), making up the remaining 20%.

The crisis in Gaza also had a direct and indirect impact on the dynamics of armed conflict and tensions in the region. In the last quarter, there was a multiplication of attacks by groups of the self-proclaimed "Axis of Resistance" (made up of Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen and others) against US forces in Iraq and Syria, as well as US attacks against these organisations and Israel's attacks against Hezbollah and Iran's positions and interests, in addition to other dynamics. Along with these repercussions, which are analysed in the chapter on armed conflicts, the consequences of the crisis in Gaza also influenced tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme.

The causes of the socio-political crises were similar to those of the previous year: 70% were related to opposition to the government or the system, 50% were linked to issues related to identity and/or self-government and only in 10% were caused by demands related to control of territory and/or resources. Finally, as in recent years, 50% of the socio-political crises were internationalised internal and 40% were internal. The sole international case (10%) was Iran-USA, Israel.

2.3. Socio-political crises: annual evolution

2.3.1. Africa

Great Lakes and Central Africa

Chad	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↓
Type:	Government, Resources, Territory, Identity Internationalised Internal
Main parties:	Transitional Military Council, political and social opposition (such as the Wakit Tama coalition, which includes the party Les Transformateurs), Chadian armed groups (mainly FACT, CCMSR, UFDD, UFR), community militias, private militias, France

Summary:
Often classified as one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, Chad has faced a complex atmosphere of instability and violence for much of the period following independence in 1960. The country's ethnic diversity has cynically been exploited by a tradition of factionalism. French colonialism also exacerbated the animosity between the predominantly Muslim north and the more Christian and animist south, a politically exploited division at the heart of the conflict. Successive governments since 1966 have been confronted by insurgents seeking to gain power. Libya and France have historically been present in Chadian internal affairs, supporting insurgents and governments, respectively. Idriss Déby came to power after a coup d'état in 1990. An amendment to the Constitution in 2005 allowed him to become one of the longest-serving leaders in Africa, but it also planted the seed of an insurgency composed of disaffected people against the regime. After his death in 2021, a military junta carried out a coup d'état and installed his son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, as the new president. During 2022, Déby reached an agreement with part of the insurgency in Doha and held the National, Inclusive and Sovereign Dialogue (DNIS) that allowed him to extend his mandate beyond the initially promised 18-month transition. Meanwhile, other internal sources of instability include periodic outbreaks of inter-community violence due to cattle theft and land ownership and use, persistent insurgent attacks in the north and illegal mining. Regional tensions include antagonism between Arab tribes and black populations in the border area between Sudan and Chad, linked to local grievances, competition for resources and an extension of the war in neighbouring Sudan, as well as participation in the offensive against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region.

Chad remained mired in instability and violence following the extension of the presidential mandate in October 2022 and the constitutional referendum held in December 2023. The 18-month transition declared by the military council in April 2021, which had seized power through a coup d'état, suspended the Constitution and installed Idriss Déby's son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, as

president after his death, was extended for 24 months. The military junta's decision triggered demonstrations and protests against them, which were broken up by the security forces, causing dozens of deaths (50 according to the government, including 10 police officers, and 100 according to the opposition, mostly civilians). The crackdown become known as Chad's "Black Thursday", 20 October 2022.[14] After this new transition period, elections are expected to be held in October 2024, in which Mahamat Déby may run. The security forces' repression, the sporadic outbreaks of violence in the north by the armed group FACT and clashes over cattle theft and land use remained constant during 2023, though less so than in 2022. In the country as a whole, 148 violent events caused 264 fatalities in 2023, according to ACLED,[15] down from the 239 violent events and 742 deaths in 2022.

The transitional government launched the organising committee for the constitutional referendum in 2013, one of the recommendations of the dialogue process (DNIS) held in 2022,[16] which took place on 17 December 2023. The referendum was boycotted by several political opposition figures and civil society leaders,[17] who complained that the draft Constitution focused on a unitary state at the expense of the federal one, that the main political actors were not involved and that the census was prepared too quickly and did not cover everyone eligible to vote, especially in the southern provinces. Prepared under the supervision of the military junta, the new Constitution was approved with low turnout, especially in the main cities and particularly the southern part of the country. On 24 December, the Electoral Commission reported that 86% of the voters approved the Constitution, with a turnout of 63.75%. Former Prime Minister Pahimi Padacké and former minister Yaya Dillo questioned the results. According to the opposition, the referendum was aimed at strengthening the powers of the president and at legitimising a more centralist state and the transition process begun after the coup d'état committed in April 2021 by making it easier for the leader of the military junta, Mahamat Déby, to run in the election scheduled for 2024.

The ratification of the new Constitution led to the renewal of the transitional government of former opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo, co-opted by the military junta,

The coup-backed president of Chad strengthened his powers through the December 2023 constitutional referendum that will allow him to run in the October 2024 election

and the appointment of former opposition leader Succès Masra as the new prime minister on 2 January 2024.[18] On 3 November, Masra had returned from exile, where he had lived since October 2022 after the crackdown on protestors that killed dozens (around 300, according to the opposition). The agreement for his return, facilitated by ECCAS, was reached in Kinshasa and includes amnesty for all members of the military and civilians involved in the violent events of 20 October 2022 and Masra's promise to support the transition process and promote reconciliation. On 5 November, the authorities released 72 members of the opposition party Les Transformateurs detained since 2022. On 19 November, Masra addressed hundreds of supporters in the capital, N'Djamena, and urged reconciliation with the military leaders. The civil opposition platform movement Wakit Tama rejected the amnesty and the leader of the party Les Démocrates spurned the agreement and urged justice for the victims of the 2022 police crackdown. Despite the amnesties and pardons, many opponents were still imprisoned as a result of the October 2022 protests. As such, Masra's acceptance of his office prompted mixed opinions among the opposition and civil society.[19] However, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in January 2024, Déby asserted his authority in the following days, as the new government retained key figures from the previous government, while Masra secured only three ministries for his party. In a likely attempt to tighten his control over Masra, according to the ICG, Déby appointed another figure who had left Les Transformateurs, Moustapha Masri, as the deputy chief of his civilian cabinet on 8 January 2024. The ruling Patriotic Salvation Movement party of the late President Idriss Déby nominated President Mahamat Déby as its candidate for the presidential election scheduled for 13 October 2024.

Various analysts also indicated that Déby had failed to launch the committee that was supposed to follow up on the resolutions of the Doha peace talks and was not implementing the recommendations of the national dialogue. This was repeated by one of the main signatories of the Doha agreement, the co-leader of the armed group UFR, Timan Erdimi. His brother, Tom Erdimi, was included as a minister in the transitional government. Timan Erdimi argued that the international community had to witness the non-implementation of

14. See the summary on Chad in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises), *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
15. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024]. This figure includes five types of violent events (battles, violence against civilians, attacks with improvised explosive devices, riots and protests). If riots and protests are excluded, the number of violent events falls to 86 and the number of deaths stays roughly similar (259).
16. For more on this subject, see Royo, Josep Maria, "Claves y retos de la transición en Chad (2) esperanzas frustradas con el proceso de paz y el diálogo nacional", Escola de Cultura de Pau, *ECP Notes on conflict and peace* no. 23, December 2022; Royo, Josep Maria, "Claves y retos de la transición en Chad (1) Cambio climático, inestabilidad y conflicto", Escola de Cultura de Pau, *ECP notes on conflict and peace* no. 19, November 2022.
17. Royo, Josep Maria, "Chad, ante un referéndum constitucional que perpetúa la dinastía Déby", *Africaye,* 16 December 2023.
18. Al-Jazeera, "Former Chad opposition leader appointed as PM of transitional government", *Al-Jazeera*, 1 January 2024.
19. Africanews, "Tchad : Masra nommé Premier ministre, réactions mitigées à N'Djamena", *Africanews*, 2 January 2024.

the agreements. In June and July, Déby retired a hundred generals and promoted a similar number of young officers close to him to the rank of general (around 500 generals in the country, one of the highest figures worldwide in proportion to the size of the army). Meanwhile, the chair of the AU Commission, Chadian politician Moussa Faki, repeated that Chadian military men should not be able to run in the 2024 elections and should hand over power to civilians. In early July, the transitional government established the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission, in line with the Doha Agreement, as well as another commission on national reconciliation and social cohesion. On 16 October, the transitional authorities declared that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process had begun, as noted by the UN in November.

The transitional government gave out various pardons and decreed an amnesty for those responsible for the anti-government protests of 20 October 2022 and for various political-military actors in different phases. In December 2022, the country's prosecutor's office had convicted 262 people arrested during the protests and ordered the release of another 139 people in a trial that lacked procedural guarantees, according to international standards. The trial of around 400 FACT members (Front for Change and Concord in Chad, FACT, its acronym in French) captured in April 2021 during the fighting that led to the death of President Idriss Déby took place in February 2023. The defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment. President Mahamat Déby pardoned 380 of them, as well as another 259 activists imprisoned for their participation in the October 2022 protests. FACT leader Mahamat Mahdi Ali, sentenced along with others in absentia, did not receive a pardon. In July, another 110 people were pardoned for their participation in the protests of 20 October 2022.

In August, FACT ended the unilateral ceasefire that it had upheld since April 2021 as a result of the offensive launched that month by the Libyan National Army and the Chadian Armed Forces in the Tibesti region (north). Although the government had not agreed to any ceasefire with the group, it had released hundreds of its members after the March ruling to facilitate their participation in the Doha process. The government's offensive weakened the armed group to the point that the general secretary of FACT, Mahamat Barh Béchir Kendji, surrendered to the Chadian authorities in early November along with hundreds of combatants. On 9 November, FACT accused Kendji of treason. The members of the opposition coalition Cadre Permanent de Concertation et de Réflexion (CPCR), made up of the 18 armed groups that did not sign the Doha agreement (including FACT), said they willing to negotiate with the transitional authorities with the support of neutral and impartial mediators, but the transitional government did not respond.

At the regional level, bilateral relations between Chad and Sudan deteriorated due to accusations by the Sudanese Army and Sudan's foreign minister that Chad was helping the United Arab Emirates to support the Sudanese paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces. As the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) came to an end, Chad recalled its contingent to the mission. On 6 December, Mauritania and Chad, the last two members of the G5 Sahel mission, an alliance created in 2014 to confront jihadism and other challenges in the subregion, announced its imminent dissolution following previous announcements of the withdrawal of Niger and Burkina Faso. In September, a French soldier's killing of a Chadian soldier at the French military base in the town of Faya, in the province of Borkou, sparked social protests demanding the withdrawal of French troops from the country. The authorities established a joint French-Chadian commission of inquiry. These protests increased in hostility towards the French, leading in October to a letter from 20 leaders of political parties and local and diaspora social organisations, including the Wakit Tama platform, demanding that Déby withdraw French troops from Chad.

DRC	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government led by the Union Sacrée coalition (led by Félix Tshisekedi and made up of different political actors, including dissidents from the Front Commun pour le Congo, the coalition of former President Joseph Kabila), political opposition (including the Front Commun pour le Congo and Lamuka) and social opposition

Summary:
The DRC is immersed in a cycle of instability and violence that has its origins in colonial times under the tutelage first of Belgian King Leopold II and later of Belgium. The country did not escape the international dynamics of the Cold War, so the crisis persisted after its independence in 1965, following the coup d'état and subsequent dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997). It was also affected by the regional dynamics of conflict in neighbouring countries during the 1980s and 1990s, especially the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its interference in the DRC. The 1996 Rwandan-backed rebellion against the Mobutu regime led to the fall of the regime in 1997, followed by the "First African World War" (1998-2003) in which a dozen countries in the region participated. The transition between 2003 and 2006 helped to secure Joseph Kabila in power, who through control of the state apparatus, fraud and irregularities in the 2006 and 2011 elections, managed to prolong his 2016 term (when a new election was to be held) to 2018. The deep and persistent crisis affecting the country combines frustrated promises of democratisation, a high climate of corruption and patronage, omnipresent poverty and chronic violence. Control of the government is exercised through the recurrent excessive use of force and serious violations of human rights by the security forces. In 2018, new elections were held that marked the first peaceful

transition in the country and led to the controversial rise to power of Félix Tshisekedi, son of the historical opposition Étienne Tshisekedi, through a fragile coalition in which the supporters of Joseph Kabila (the FCC coalition) continued to exert their determining influence. This climate of political instability coexists with the ongoing conflict in eastern DRC, affected by local, regional and international dynamics. The coalition collapsed at the end of 2020, opening a new stage of change while political instability and violence continued in the east of the country.

The situation in the DRC got worse in 2023 as a consequence of the political violence linked to the elections, in addition to the escalation of violence in the different scenarios of conflict. First, starting in October, the armed group March 23 Movement (M23) intensified its attacks in North Kivu.[20] This escalation in the final quarter of the year, in addition to attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)[21] and other groups in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, contributed to a lingering general atmosphere of insecurity. This was made worse with the political violence linked to the election campaign that ended in the general elections on 20 December. Finally, the armed conflict that began in mid-2022 in the territory of Kwamouth, in the province of Mai-Ndombe (west of the country), intensified in 2023 and spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kwango, Kwilu, Kinshasa and Kongo Central, claiming hundreds of lives.[22]

The situation in the DRC worsened during 2023 as a consequence of the escalation of violence in the different fronts opened in the country, in addition to the political violence linked to the elections

On 20 December, general elections were held in the DRC, in which President Félix Tshisekedi was re-elected for a second term after receiving more than 73% of the votes with 43% turnout, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), a result ratified by the Constitutional Court. President Félix Tshisekedi was the favourite to win the election, as the opposition was fragmented. He took office in 2019 after a disputed election that, according to various sources, may have been won by another candidate, Martin Fayulu. The 2023 elections were plagued by irregularities, according to many analysts and the Congolese Episcopal Conference, and several of the main candidates called for a rerun and denounced fraud, including Moïse Katumbi, Martin Fayulu, Denis Mukwege and the party of former President Joseph Kabila.[23] Logistical problems, allegations of fraud, non-transparent vote counting, faulty equipment and delays in the delivery of election materials forced an unscheduled extension of the election, which opposition

leaders said was unconstitutional. The Catholic and Protestant Churches of the DRC, which acted as local observers of the elections, reported that the many cases of irregularities found could affect the integrity of the results. The government ruled out a repeat election and banned opposition protests in the days after the elections. The provisional results of the legislative elections were published by the CENI on 14 January. Félix Tshisekedi's party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), was declared the winner, taking 66 of the 500 seats, increasing the result obtained in 2018 (35 seats). The UDPS is expected to form a new government with the rest of the allied parties of the Union Sacrée coalition, which in the outgoing Parliament controlled 390 seats. The parties of some Tshisekedi allies, such as that of Senate President Modeste Bahati Lukwebo, Defence Minister Jean Pierre Bemba and Economy Minister Vital Kamerhe, won 35, 17 and 32 seats, respectively. This serious post-election situation caused a dispute that threatens to destabilise the country and the region.

In the run-up to the elections, human rights groups had accused the authorities of restricting political space and the UN documented violence against civil society activists.[24] Since October, organisations like Human Rights Watch have warned of clashes across the country between supporters of rival political parties that have resulted in assaults and sexual violence.[25] These incidents of political violence continued after the elections. Supporters of the ruling UDPS party were involved in threats and attacks against opposition leaders and journalists. Opposition supporters were also involved in violence. Fighting between security forces and their allies and the M23 in the east of the country also prevented 1.5 million internally displaced people from registering to vote.

Security in the east deteriorated during Tshisekedi's government[26] and by the end of 2023 there was a record number of seven million internally displaced people.[27] Although the government and the M23 engaged in less fighting between April and October, after the East African Community (EAC) military mission, which began in November 2022, completed its deployment in the first quarter, the M23 continued fighting local pro-government armed groups for control of territory in North Kivu province. However, in October the M23 intensified its offensive in North Kivu, with support from Rwanda.[28]

20. See the summary on DRC (east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
21. See the summary on DRC (east-ADF) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
22. See the summary on DRC (west) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
23. Kombi, Yassin and Rolley, Sonia, Congo's Katumbi says election should be annulled as opposition plans protest, *Reuters*, 23 December 2023.
24. Security Council Report, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Briefing and Consultations", *SCR*, 27 27 September 2023.
25. Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Electoral Violence Threatens Vote", *HRW,* 16 December 2023.
26. The News Humanitarian, "Gaza's historic toll, DR Congo elections, and a city falls in Sudan: The Cheat Sheet", 22 December 2023.
27. IOM, "Record High Displacement in DRC at Nearly 7 Million", *IOM*, 30 October 2023.
28. See the summary on DRC (east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) of this report and in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

The EAC mission completed its withdrawal from the country on 21 December at the government's request due to its ineffectiveness. There were also talks between the Congolese government and South Africa, which began in March, and culminated in the deployment of a SADC force in the area to cooperate in FARDC combat operations against the M23. In May, the deployment of the SADC mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) was approved by the SADC and became effective on 15 December 2023. At the start of 2024, MONUSCO completed the first phase of its withdrawal, with 2,000 peacekeepers leaving the country.

Uganda	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, ADF

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 2021, he won re-election again, this time against young new opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi, known popularly as Bobi Wine. In parallel, Uganda's military intervention in Somalia and the DRC (east) increased the threats of the Somali armed group al-Shabaab and of the armed Ugandan group based in the DRC, the ADF, against Uganda. Finally, various parts of the country are affected by periodic intercommunity disputes and grievances exploited during the electoral period.

The year was marked by persistent strain between the government and the political opposition, the rise in insecurity caused by the attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the enactment of a law that criminalises and persecutes the LGTBIQ+ community. Political tensions between the government of Yoweri Museveni and the political opposition intensified in the last quarter of the year after the government restricted the right of assembly of the main opposition party, the National Unity Platform (NUP). This happened after the NUP announced the start of a nationwide campaign tour called the "march of a million". Later, on 5 October, police arrested its leader, Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, at Entebbe Airport while returning from a trip abroad. In response, on 26 October, the opposition walked out of Parliament for the third time in two weeks, demanding a debate on human rights and an end to the repression of opposition parties, leading to a shutdown of Parliament until December.

Beyond the political crisis, Uganda also had to face a deteriorating security situation due to the increase in ADF armed actions and violence caused by cattle theft in the northern and eastern regions of the country, including the border with Kenya. **Due to the insecurity caused by the ADF and the instability in the neighbouring DRC,**[29] in February the military chiefs of the East African Community (EAC) agreed that Uganda could deploy troops to North Kivu province (eastern DRC) to fight alongside Kenyan forces against the M23 and other rebel groups like the ADF. In late March, around 1,000 Ugandan soldiers were deployed to the town of Bunagana in North Kivu province. In mid-June, suspected ADF members attacked a secondary school in the town of Mpondwe, near the DRC border, killing at least 44 people, mostly children. In response, the Ugandan and Congolese Armed Forces intensified operations against the ADF in the Mwalika Valley, Beni Territory (North Kivu), reportedly killing 16 fighters, including several leaders of the group. Later, on October 13, suspected ADF members ambushed a civilian vehicle in Katojo, near the DRC border, killing two people. Days later, they killed two foreign tourists and their local guide in Queen Elizabeth National Park. While the government announced an amnesty for ADF members willing to surrender on 25 October, in December the ADF stepped up its attacks on Ugandan soil, carrying out two bomb attacks in Kampala that injured one person, and an attack in Kitehurizi village, Kamwenge district, in which 10 civilians were killed and hundreds displaced from their homes.

In the Karamoja region, bordering Kenya and South Sudan, attacks by alleged cattle thieves continued throughout the year, leaving dozens dead. On 11 May, the Ugandan Army deployed additional troops to Karamoja in a bid to contain **cattle theft and violence** between herders and farmers. In mid-May, President Yoweri K. Museveni issued an executive order banning Kenyan Turkana herders from entering Uganda, as they are accused of many cases of cattle theft and murder on Ugandan soil.

Finally, in February, the government announced the closure of the OHCHR office in Uganda despite criticism from Ugandan activists and human rights groups, particularly the Human Rights Awareness and

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29. For further information, see the summary on DRC (ADF-east) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).

Promotion Forum. On 21 March, Parliament almost unanimously approved **a draft bill criminalising sexual relations between people of the same sex**, which was ratified and signed into law by President Museveni in late May, provoking widespread international condemnation. In particular, US President Joe Biden deplored the bill as a "tragic violation" of human rights, announcing visa restrictions on people who "undermine the democratic process" in Uganda and excluding the country from the African trade initiative for human rights violations. Ugandan human rights groups urged the World Bank (WB) to suspend its loans to Uganda. On 8 August, it announced a freeze on new loans to Uganda, causing the Ugandan shilling to fall to its lowest level against the US dollar in nearly eight years.

Horn of Africa

Eritrea - Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory
	International
Main parties:	Eritrea, Ethiopia

Summary:
Eritrea became independent from Ethiopia in 1993, although the border between both countries was not clearly defined, causing them to face off between 1998 and 2000 in a war that cost over 100,000 lives. In June 2000 they signed a cessation of hostilities agreement, the UN Security Council established the UNMEE mission to monitor it and they signed the Algiers peace agreement in December. This agreement established that both would submit to the ruling issued by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), which is in charge of delimiting and demarcating the border based on the relevant colonial treaties (1900, 1902 and 1908) and on international law. The EEBC announced its opinion in April 2002, assigning the disputed border village of Badme (the epicentre of the war, currently administered by Ethiopia) to Eritrea, though Ethiopia rejected the decision. Frustrated by the lack of progress in implementing the EEBC's ruling due to insufficient pressure on Ethiopia to comply, Eritrea decided to restrict UNMEE operations in late 2005, forcing its withdrawal in 2008. A year earlier, the EEBC had ended its work without being able to implement its mandate due to obstructions in Ethiopia. Tensions have remained high since then, with thousands of soldiers on the common border, sporadic clashes and belligerent rhetoric. In 2018, a historic agreement was reached between both governments, beginning the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, with flights resuming and their borders reopening. However, the initial optimism soon faded, and a few months later the border was closed again and many issues remained unresolved. The war between Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray from 2020 to 2022 brought the former enemies together in an alliance to fight the TPLF, but old grievances and new disputes could threaten to renew the conflict between them.

Five years after the historic peace agreement was signed by Eritrea and Ethiopia, the war between Ethiopia and the political and military authorities of Tigray between 2020 and 2022 helped the erstwhile enemies to ally to fight against the TPLF, but old grievances and new disputes could threaten to revive the conflict, according to various analysts. The fact that neither the Amhara militias nor the Eritrean militias participated in the South Africa agreement of November 2022 between Ethiopia and the TPLF, and that both had wanted to eliminate TPLF resistance instead of reaching an agreement, among other issues, increased tension between the two.[30] The 2018 agreement led to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the resumption of flights and the reopening of their borders. The initial optimism waned after a few months when the border was closed again and many issues remained unresolved. During the year, troop movements on the shared border and the lack of meetings between the parties, in addition to possible Eritrean support for the Amhara Faro militias and the Oromo insurgent group OLA, which is fighting against the Ethiopian security forces, raised alarms.[31] Meanwhile, although the practical withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopian territory had been announced, various analysts also warned of Eritrean troops in Ethiopian towns near their common border.

Eritrean military sources[32] suggested that their country was ready for a possible war. According to analysts, Ethiopia built up troops near the Eritrean border in the Ethiopian town of Zalambessa, which is 100 miles from the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and close to the border with the Southern Red Sea Region, which includes the Eritrean port of Assab. The port is only 45 miles from the Ethiopian border and could be difficult for Eritrea to defend. Those areas recently witnessed greater air activity and troop movements.

Tensions rose in October, when Abiy asserted Ethiopia's "right" to access to the sea, emphasising its historical claims to the Red Sea coast.[33] Regional leaders saw Abiy's comments, which he had long expressed privately, as an implicit threat to seize part of Eritrea, whose secession from Ethiopia in 1991 left the latter landlocked. Their growing mistrust and the mobilisation of forces and accumulation of weapons in the border area created a climate of concern. The agreement in early 2024 between Ethiopia and Somaliland on possible Ethiopian access to the coast of this region disputed with Somalia showed that Ethiopia remained committed to maximising its strategic interests at the cost of worsening relations with its neighbours.[34] The agreement could help to lower Ethiopian interest in Eritrean ports.

30. Kheir Omer, Mohammed, "How Eritrea Could Derail the Ethiopian Peace Deal", *Foreign Policy,* 10 November 2022.
31. Kheir Omer, Mohammed, "Are Ethiopia and Eritrea on the Path to War?", *Foreign Policy,* 7 November 2023.
32. Ibid.
33. The Economist, "Ethiopia's prime minister wants a Red Sea harbour", *The Economist*, 2 November 2023.
34. See the summary on Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.

Ethiopia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, various armed groups

Summary:

The Ethiopian administration that has governed since 1991 is facing a series of opposition movements that demand advances in the democracy and governability of the country, as well as a greater degree of self-government. The government coalition EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) is controlled by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party, of the Tigrayan minority, that rules the country with growing authoritarianism with the consent of the Amhara elite. There is discontent in the country with the ethnic federal regime implemented by the EPRDF which has not resolved the national issue and has led to the consolidation of a strong political and social opposition. Along with the demands for the democratization of the institutions, there are political-military sectors that believe that ethnic federalism does not meet their nationalist demands and other sectors, from the ruling classes and present throughout the country, that consider ethnic federalism to be a deterrent to the consolidation of the Nation-State. In the 2005 elections this diverse opposition proved to be a challenge for the EPRDF, who was reluctant to accept genuine multi-party competition, and post-election protests were violently repressed. The following elections (2010, 2015) further limited democratic openness by increasing the verticality of the regime and the repression of the political opposition. The 2009 Counter-Terrorism Act helped decimate the opposition. The attempt since 2014 to 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 –including dissolving the EPRDF coalition and refounding it in December 2019 into a new national party, the Prosperity Party (PP), which shunned ethnic federalism, making the TPLF not want to join– 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, especially between the federal government controlled by the PP and the TPLF, which culminated in a war (2020-2022) in which Eritrea and the militias of the Amhara region supported the federal government. The agreement between the government and the TPLF that ended the war did not include Eritrea and the Amhara militias. When they were forced to lay down their arms, these militias rebelled, starting a new conflict. Other political and military movements, such as the Oromo armed group OLA, question Abiy Ahmed's plans for the country.

Additional sources of tension were linked to Ethiopia's regional hegemony and defence of its national interests, such as its competition for water resources with its neighbours Egypt and Sudan and its diversification of access to the sea via its neighbours Djibouti, Eritrea and Somaliland.

Ethiopia was still affected by many challenges and sources of internal and regional instability and violence.[35] The internal challenges stem from the **consequences of the war in the Tigray region**, one of the most serious in recent years in terms of fatalities, forced displacement and sexual violence. The Ethiopian federal government and the Tigrayan political and military movement continued to implement the November 2022 peace agreement during the year, despite the many open challenges it faced, the fragility of the situation, human rights violations and the famine desolating the region.[36] Moreover, **the situation in the Oromia region continued to be extremely serious in 2023**, with persistent clashes and attacks by the armed group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and counterinsurgency activity by the federal security forces.[37] In April 2023, the federal security forces lost the support of the Amhara Fano militias to combat the OLA after the federal government announced that all special forces across the country, especially the Amhara special forces and Amhara Fano militias, had to disarm, disband and integrate into the Ethiopian Army and police. The militias refused, triggering escalating clashes between them and the federal security forces. The Amhara militias mostly retreated to the Amhara region, where they began a guerrilla war against the federal government. Since then, there have been spikes of violence, repression and clashes between the federal security forces and these militias, who were joined by part of the regional security forces who deserted their posts.[38] Dissident groups from the Benishangul-Gumuz region opposed the 2022 agreement to disarm the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement, which led to an uptick in secessionist groups' attacks and counterinsurgency operations by the security forces in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and other regions. The federal government continued to deal with demands and demonstrations from political and military actors linked to Ethiopia's more than 80 ethnic groups.

In regional developments, **Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan** agreed to resume talks to reach an agreement on the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), but no progress was made in the different rounds of negotiations held during the year and Ethiopia filled the dam despite opposition from its neighbours Egypt and Sudan.[39] Finally, a memorandum of understanding reached between Ethiopia and Somaliland triggered a serious diplomatic crisis between Somaliland and

35. See the summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia and Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.
36. See the summary on Ethiopia (Tigray) in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
37. See the summary on Ethiopia (Oromia) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
38. See the summary on Ethiopia (Amhara) in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
39. See the summary on Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan in chapter 2 (Peace negotiations in Africa). Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Somalia and particularly an escalation of tension between **Ethiopia and Somalia** that could have regional consequences.[40] There was a gradual deterioration in relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, countries that signed a historic peace agreement five years ago and that just two years ago were cooperating in the armed conflict against the TPLF, a political and military movement in the Tigray region. The end of the war and Eritrea's marginalisation in the peace agreement between the TPLF and the Ethiopian federal government could threaten to bring the two countries into conflict again, according to various analysts.[41]

Ethiopia-Somalia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland

Summary:

The conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia dates back to the 14th century, when the rulers of the Christian highlands of Ethiopia carried out military expeditions in the coast where Islam dominated, particularly in what is now northern Somalia, to open commercial routes giving them access to the sea. Later, in the late 19th century, Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II conquered the Somali city of Harar and announced an ambitious expansion programme in 1891. After the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895-1896), in which it defeated colonial Italy, Ethiopia won recognition of its independence from the colonial powers. In response to Menelik's expansionist threat, many clans in what became British Somaliland accepted British protection. After Ethiopia's defeat in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War by Mussolini's Italy and due to Ethiopian positioning in the Second World War, in the late 1940s Ethiopia arranged for the British Empire to give it the Somali region of Ogaden, to the dismay of the Somalis. After Somalia's independence in 1960, both countries fought several wars (1964, 1977-1978, 1982) in which Somalia was defeated. The Somali Civil War of the late 1980s and the collapse of Somalia in 1991 put Ethiopia at a clear military and economic advantage and made Somalia a national security issue for Ethiopia. As such, Addis Abeba intervened in Somali internal affairs to promote peace and security in Somalia in defence of its own interests, which do not always align with Somali interests. Ethiopia supported some political and military actors at the expense of others, upheld a permanent unilateral and non-public military presence and later participated in multilateral frameworks (AMISOM and currently ATMIS), which the Somali armed group al-Shabaab has used to partly justify its armed campaign.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding[42] between Ethiopia and Somaliland on 1 January 2024 set off a serious diplomatic crisis between both administrations and Somalia and especially escalated tension between Ethiopia and Somalia that could have regional consequences. This agreement would give land-locked Ethiopia the chance to acquire a permanent naval base and commercial maritime service in the Gulf of Aden through an agreement to lease a 20-kilometre stretch of coastline for 50 years, as detailed by the authorities of Ethiopia and Somaliland. In exchange, according to Somaliland's President Muse Bihi Abdi, Ethiopia would internationally recognise his region as an independent country. Addis Abeba clarified that it still had to evaluate that request and promised "an in-depth evaluation".[43] According to various analysts, the agreement could revolve around the port of Lugaya, near the border with Djibouti, or the port of Berbera, which was recently expanded by the UAE-based port logistics company DP World. Ethiopia has historically sought to diversify its access to the sea, as 95% of its trade goes through Djibouti. Tensions between Ethiopia and Djibouti, in part due to Ethiopian complaints about Djibouti's port fees and excessive bureaucracy, may have influenced Abiy Ahmed's calculations to promote the agreement. The deal also includes leasing land from Somaliland to build a naval base. In exchange, Somaliland would receive the equivalent value in the form of shares in Ethiopian Airlines. The Ethiopian prime minister's office hailed the agreement, but it made no mention of recognising Somaliland's independence. It did however commit to advancing their mutual interests on the basis of reciprocity.

Somalia declared the agreement void and even threatened Ethiopia with starting a war to preserve its national sovereignty if necessary, as Somalia continues to consider Somaliland part of Somalia, despite its de facto independence in 1991, which has never been internationally recognised. Demonstrations against the agreement were staged in Somalia. In Somaliland itself, the agreement was met with protests and the defence minister resigned. The United States and the EU, AU, IGAD, Arab League and other bodies called for dialogue and to reduce tension. The regional organisation IGAD, through the government of Djibouti, which holds the rotating presidency, urgently convened an extraordinary meeting on 18 January 2024 to address the diplomatic tensions. Ethiopia announced that it would not be able to attend the meeting because it overlapped with the 19th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). According to various analysts,[44] although a confrontation between both countries is unlikely due to Ethiopia's superior military strength, the agreement could seriously harm their relations and have consequences in the war against the Somali Islamist armed group al-Shabaab. Somalia's

40. See the summary on Ethiopia-Somalia in this chapter.
41. See the summary on Eritrea-Ethiopia in this chapter.
42. Faisal, Ali, "Ethiopia and Somaliland reach agreement over access to ports", *The Guardian*, 1 January 2024.
43. Ehl, David, "Polémico acuerdo: salida al mar a cambio de reconocimiento", *DW*, 4 January 2024.
44. Weldemariam, Alemayehu, "Ethiopia's deal with Somaliland upends regional dynamics, risking strife across the Horn of Africa", *The Conversation*, 13 January 2024.

pushback against Ethiopia could raise questions about Ethiopian troops in the AU mission in Somalia (ATMIS), to which Ethiopia is one of the main contributing countries.

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

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. The father of independence and founder of KANU, Jomo Kenyatta, ruled the country from 1964 until his death in 1978 and was succeeded by the autocratic Daniel Arap Moi. In 1991, Moi began a transition towards the end of single-party rule and in 1992 the first multi-party elections were held, which KANU also won. 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, which together with KANU dissidents and others created the National Alliance of Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and defeated Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of the independence leader and official KANU candidate. Since then, different ethno-political conflicts have emerged in the country, which has produced a climate of political violence instrumentalized 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 (the son of historical opposition leader Oginga Odinga). Uhuru Kenyatta was elected president in 2013 and William Ruto became vice president, though the results were challenged by the opposition led by Raila Odinga, just like in 2017, when Kenyatta won re-election. Ruto and Odinga faced off in the 2022 election, also affected by irregularities in a climate of political violence, as in previous elections. In the end, Ruto was declared the winner. In parallel, several areas of the country were affected by inter-community disputes over land ownership and cattle theft, 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.

The situation in the country was marked by persistent attacks by the Somali armed group al-Shabaab in the east and northeast, as well as intercommunity violence and crime, mainly in the north and the central north, linked to structural disputes over livestock theft and land use and ownership aggravated by extreme drought and floods resulting from the consequences of climate change. The government announced that floods linked to the El Niño climate phenomenon may have caused the deaths of 120 people and displaced tens of thousands between October and late November.[45]

According to ACLED,[46] there were 147 violent events (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in the four counties bordering Somalia (Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Lamu), where most acts of violence linked to the armed jihadist group al-Shabaab take place, costing the lives of 297 people in 2023. The situation was worse than the previous year, when 109 violent events led to 170 fatalities in the four border counties. Al-Shabaab was less active at the start of the year, though by April it resumed attacking at the intensity of previous years. In September, the US and Kenya signed a military cooperation agreement to deal with al-Shabaab in the country and collaborate on other national and international aspects of mutual interest. In October, the United States issued a warning about possible imminent attacks by the armed group in the capital. If statistics on inter-community violence (mainly, but not exclusively, in the centre and north of the country) and other forms of violence in the country as a whole are added to al-Shabaab's numbers, 541 violent events took place in Kenya in 2023, causing 741 fatalities. In 2022, there were 440 events and a death toll of 482 in the country as a whole.[47] The most notable inter-community disputes of the year included cross-border clashes between the counties of Kericho and Kisumu, which claimed dozens of lives and prompted police intervention, and disputes in other counties of a more structural nature, such as in Turkana, Marsabit, Samburu and Isiolo.

The opposition staged major demonstrations and protests against the government at different times of the year. Several people died and hundreds were arrested in the police crackdown. The previous discussion and subsequent approval in June of the 2023 finance bill, which doubled the fuel tax, increased corn prices and introduced a new housing tax, eliminating previous subsidies, sparked large demonstrations and protests throughout the year. Opposition leader Raila Odinga's party, the Azimio la Umoja coalition, called for total rejection of the new legislation. The government claimed that it had to hike tax rates to stabilise the economy due

45. Reuters, "Death toll from Kenya's El Nino floods jumps to 120", *Reuters*, 28 November 2023.
46. ACLED, online [Viewed on 15 February 2024].
47. If the violence linked to protests and demonstrations with riots is added to this figures in 2023, the number of violent events reached 2,248, with 1,011 fatalities, more than the 1,660 events and 698 fatalities in 2022.

to the serious volatility of international developments. In December, Secretary of the Treasury Njuguna Ndun'gu admitted that the government had been unable to pay civil servants for five months. Meanwhile, the Kenya Kwanza alliance, President William Ruto's ruling party, and the main opposition coalition, Azimio la Umoja, maintained bilateral contacts during the year until they agreed in August to create the National Dialogue Committee (NDC) to address various disagreements and deadlock between them, including the high cost of living in the country and the results of the 2022 elections. The NDC started to meet with other political parties and civil society groups in September and in late November it published a report with recommendations that included calls for restructuring and reconstituting the electoral commission, auditing the last presidential election, reviewing tax policy, streamlining public spending, expanding social protection and reducing the cost of living. The government welcomed the recommendations. However, on 28 November the High Court ruled that the salary tax introduced by Ruto in June was illegal, dealing a blow to the government's efforts to increase tax revenue, and one of Azimio la Umoja's leaders, Kalonzo Musyoka, celebrated what he described as the opposition coalition's victory.

Finally, Nairobi withdrew its troops from the DRC as part of its participation in the EAC mission and was preparing to deploy troops to Haiti,[48] though this issue was still pending acceptance by the Supreme Court of Kenya at the end of the year.

North Africa – Maghreb

Tunisia	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, System Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, jihadist armed groups

Summary:
Since its independence in 1956 and until early 2011, Tunisia was governed by only two presidents. For three decades, Habib Bourghiba laid the foundations of the authoritarian regime in the country, which was later continued by Zine el Abidine Ben Ali after a coup d'état in 1987. The concentration of power, the persecution of the secular and Islamist political opposition and the ironclad social control that characterised the country's internal situation contrasted with its international image of stability. Despite allegations of corruption, electoral fraud and human rights violations, Tunisia established itself for years as a privileged ally of the West. In December 2010, the outbreak of a popular revolt exposed cracks in Ben Ali's government, leading to its downfall early 2011, and inspired demonstrations against authoritarian governments throughout the Arab world. Since then, Tunisia has been navigating a rocky transition process clearly showing tensions between the secular and Islamist groups in the country. At the same time, Tunisia has been the scene of armed group activity, including branches of AQIM and ISIS. Since mid-2021, Tunisia has been immersed in a new crisis characterised by President Kais Saïed's attempts to accumulate power.

The authoritarian bent of President Kais Saïed and government's repression of critics intensified in 2023 alongside worrying attacks against the sub-Saharan migrant population. In line with behaviour observed since mid-2021, throughout the year Saïed continued to accumulate power and reduce the mechanisms for the balance of powers and control of the executive branch. Following the second round of legislative elections in January, a new Parliament was established in March amid criticism from the main opposition coalition. The National Salvation Front (FSN) did not recognise the legitimacy of the new legislature, which emerged from the elections with a turnout of 11% and which, according to some, has much fewer powers as established in the Constitution promoted by Saïed himself and adopted in 2022. Also in March, the Tunisian president unilaterally decided to dissolve the democratically elected municipal councils and replace them with new local authorities, chosen with new rules. These local elections held their first round in December and also had a very low turnout (11%) amid calls for a boycott. The second was scheduled for February 2024. Opposition figures and intellectuals argued that this vote would only help to entrench the repressive system in the country. Throughout the year, there was a constant stream of legal action, arrests and convictions against representatives of the opposition and other critics, businessmen and journalists. Top members of the Islamist-inspired party Ennahda were especially targeted by the campaign. Its leader, **Rachid Ghannouchi, was arrested in April after warning that the persecution of Islamist forces could lead to a civil war. In May, Ghannouchi was sentenced to a year in prison on terrorism charges**. Tunisian authorities ordered the closure of Ennahda's central office and several regional offices, in what was seen as an unofficial ban on the party. The actions taken against the opposition were deplored by Tunisian civil society organisations and international actors, including the OHCHR, which demanded the release of people arbitrarily detained in the North African country. Throughout the year, demonstrations took place to demand the release of detained people and to protest against the anti-democratic drift, the rise in the cost of living and the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, which at the end of the year was reflected in the lack of basic products and tensions in some areas of the country.

Another notable dynamic of tension in the country was related to the situation of the black migrant, refugee

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48. See the summary on Haiti in this chapter.

or asylum-seeking population, which suffered from more persecution and attacks, especially after some controversial statements made by Saïed. In February, **the Tunisian president said that the flow of sub-Saharan migrants was part of a "criminal plan" aimed at changing the demographic composition of the country and linked the migrant population to violence and crime**.[49] Saïed's comments were rejected by actors inside and outside Tunisia, including the African Union, which was "concerned and dismayed by the form and substance of the statements". Local and international human rights organisations and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also complained of racism. The president's statements were followed by a wave of arrests, involving more than 800 migrants in February alone, and **violent attacks intensified in the following months, leaving around 30 people dead and dozens wounded**. The most violent incidents occurred in Sfax, a town that was the scene of protests against the migrant population and fighting until the end of the year. Two young sub-Saharans died there, one in May and another in July. At the same time, there were mass expulsions of sub-Saharan migrants (more than 2,000 of 16 nationalities) to remote areas bordering Algeria and Libya where two and 28 people died, respectively, some of hunger and thirst, according to the OHCHR.[50] Other sources raised the number of expulsions to 4,000 and the death toll to between 50 and 70.[52]UN experts urged the Tunisian authorities to stop the deportations, reminded them that mass expulsions are prohibited by international law and warned of the rise in racist and hate speech in the country. In August, the UN Secretary-General demanded that the deported population be relocated to safe places. Despite these controversial actions against the migrant population, the EU signed a memorandum of understanding with the Tunisian government in the middle of the year to intensify border controls and stop the flows of people to Europe. The agreement drew criticism of the EU from various sides, including from the European Parliament and organisations such as HRW, which argued that it did not include guarantees of the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers or provisions to prevent European aid from reaching groups responsible for violations.[53] In October, Saïed returned the money he had received from the EU under this agreement. During the last quarter of 2023, the crisis in Gaza also had an echo in Tunisia, where protesters attacked a Jewish facility (in October) and a legal initiative was launched to criminalise the normalisation of relations with Israel that failed after Saïed objected. According to reports, the Tunisian government was pressured by the US to stop the initiative. Finally, limited armed group activity was reported in 2023.

In December, the Tunisian authorities reported the death of three people they identified as "terrorists" in the Kasserine area. In May, a violent incident at a synagogue left five people dead, but the authorities called it a crime and not an act of terrorism. **Some analysts highlighted the decline of jihadist activity in North Africa, including in Tunisia, in contrast to the recent increased activity of jihadist groups in sub-Saharan Africa**.[53] The AQIM branch in Tunisia has not claimed responsibility for an attack since 2019 and reports indicate that attacks by jihadist groups in Tunisia (by ISIS, AQIM or other actors) dropped from 47 in 2017 to only four in 2022. None of these last four attacks were attributed to any group. Specialists warn, however, that the deterioration of the political and socio-economic situation in the country could result in greater future activity among these types of organisations.

West Africa

Guinea	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, Armed Forces, opposition political parties, unions

Summary:
The army took advantage of the death of President Lansana Conté in December 2008, after more than two decades in power, to carry out a new coup d'état and form a military junta. The holding of elections in 2010, won by the opposition leader Alpha Condé, paved the way for a return to the democratic system. However, the elections were marred by violence and by the coming to the fore of identity-related tensions between the country's main ethnic communities. The country remains unstable due to the lack of a strategy for national reconciliation and obstacles to the reform of the security sector, with an army that is omnipresent in Guinean political activity, kept the country in a state of instability for years. In 2021, political tension in the country rose significantly after the presidential election in late 2020 that gave President Alpha Condé his third term, which the opposition claimed is unconstitutional. The political crisis led to a new coup d'état on 5 September 2021, led by Colonel Mamay Doumbouya, who overthrew Condé's government.

Tensions between the military junta and the political opposition simmered throughout the year after no progress was made in the national dialogue and signs of division in the security forces increased. The year began with the sustained efforts of the West African regional bloc ECOWAS to relaunch the inter-Guinean inclusive

49. Blaise, Lilia, Tunisia's President Saied claims sub-Saharan migrants threaten country's identity, *Le Monde*, 23 February 2023.
50. OHCHR, Türk: Human rights are antidote to prevailing politics of distraction, deception, indifference and repression, 11 September 2023.
51. Tondo, Lorenzo, 'I had to drink my own urine to survive': Africans tell of being forced into the desert at Tunisia border, *The Guardian*, 28 September 2023.
52. Human Rights Watch, Tunisia, *World Report 2024*, 2024.
53. Zelin, Aaron, All Quiet on the North African Jihadi Front, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 6 June 2023.

dialogue that had been held in late 2022 to ease tensions between the military junta and political and civil society groups, but the government led by Lieutenant Colonel Doumbouya rejected the idea, saying that the dialogue had ended. Later, in early March, religious leaders launched a new initiative to resume the national dialogue. Though they managed to hold several rounds of negotiations in the capital, Conakry, the talks did not achieve any tangible progress to alleviate the political crisis. The Living Forces of Guinea (FVG), an opposition coalition that includes the banned National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC), the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) of former President Condé and the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) led by Cellou Dalein Diallo, demanded the release of detained opposition figures, the lifting of the ban on protests and the creation of a new national dialogue overseen by ECOWAS. In early May, the FVG pulled out of the dialogue and demonstrated in Conakry, but the gathering was broken up by the security forces, causing the death of seven protesters and injuring 32 others, according to the FVG. The tension in the capital caused the authorities to deploy the Guinean Army in late May. In June, the FVG paused its demonstrations due to the celebration of Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, one of the two most important Islamic celebrations of the year, temporarily easing the tension. A court subsequently acquitted three leaders of the civil society platform FNDC, including Oumar Sylla, also known as Foniké Mengué, of all charges against them in mid-2022, though the prosecutor appealed the decision. The acquittal was one of the FVG's main preconditions for resuming negotiations with the military junta. During the rest of the year, talks were not resumed and opposition protests against the military junta continued.

Alongside the tensions with the opposition, **various events took place related to the security forces' growing opposition to the military junta**. For instance, in late April and early May, President Doumbouya sacked the military intelligence chief, Lieutenant Colonel Ismaël Keïta, and the main figure of the junta, General Sadiba Coulibaly, as chief of the General Staff of the Guinean Armed Forces. He also dissolved the battalion in charge of presidential security. In late August, there were rumours of an attempted coup d'état in the country that would have pitted the forces of the junta against the National Guard, leading to the arrest of an unknown number of military officers. Finally, on 4 November, armed individuals released former military President Moussa Dadis Camara from prison in Conakry along with three close collaborators who had been on trial since 2022 for the Conakry stadium massacre in 2009, though they were captured days later by the security forces, with the exception of the former Minister of Presidential Security, Colonel Claude Pivi, who remained at large at the end of the year. These events caused new purges in the military, resulting in the dismissal of more than 60 soldiers, gendarmes and prison officials accused of being collaborators.

Relations between the military junta and ECOWAS gradually deteriorated during the year. In early February, the foreign ministers of Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso met in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, and asked ECOWAS and the African Union to lift the sanctions imposed on them following the military coups in 2021 and 2022. Meanwhile, the Guinean military junta unilaterally created a committee to oversee the political transition in the country, ignoring ECOWAS' efforts to create an inclusive committee. In October, the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled that the continued detentions of former Prime Minister Ibrahima Kassory Fofana and two Condé-era ministers were "arbitrary" and ordered their immediate release, giving the Guinean government three months to comply.

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

Summary:
After gaining its independence in 1960, the inability of the country's successive governments to address issues associated with citizenship, ethnicity, religion and resource distribution has aggravated perceptions of grievances and discontent, leading to the rise of separatist demands in various regions. Moreover, 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. At the same time, the actions of criminal groups in the northwestern part of the country, caused by different factors, have multiplied since 2018.

The climate of political violence and of criminal violence perpetrated by criminal groups persisted in northwest north central Nigeria, while violence in the Lake Chad basin (northeast) rose compared to 2022.[54]The presidential and parliamentary elections held on 25 February 2023 only aggravated the situation. Added to this was the recurring climate of intercommunity violence between ranchers and farmers in the Middle Belt, the persistence of clashes and insurgent attacks

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

in Biafra region[55] and the proliferation of militias and local security forces that has taken place in recent years.[56] In the country as a whole, 3,272 violent events were reported that caused 8,510 fatalities in 2023, according to ACLED, though these figures also included the violence connected to the armed conflict with Boko Haram.[57] In the four northwestern states of the country (Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger), the epicentre of violence caused by criminal groups, 2,344 people were killed, according to ACLED, though this figure rises to 2,869 if the states of Kebbi and Sokoto are included. This death toll in these states is practically half of the 4,481 in 2022 (4,920 including Kebbi and Sokoto) and the 3,918 in 2021 (4,484 including Kebbi and Sokoto). The body counts showed a drop in violence in these states during 2023 compared to previous years.[58] The most important events included a drone strike conducted by the Nigerian Army that mistook a religious celebration for a gathering of criminal groups in Kaduna State in December in which 85 civilians died. The strike was criticised at home and abroad[59] until the government announced that it was opening an investigation. The Nigerian Army's operations, including its use of air strikes against criminal groups, were harshly criticised during the year for their ineffectiveness and their consequences for the civilian population. According to UNHCR, the number of forcibly displaced people in the entire country rose to almost 3.5 million, nearly 1.2 million of which were in the northwestern and north-central states.[60]

In political and social developments, the elections took place amidst intense political violence, especially in the southern states. In January, the electoral commission warned that insecurity could derail the general elections scheduled for 25 February and 11 March. The All Progressives Congress (APC) consolidated its power by winning the presidential election, then expanded its control by winning 22 of the 36 state governor elections (ratified by the courts in favour of the APC). The former governor of Lagos State and APC candidate Bola Tinubu won the presidential election with 36.61% of the votes (8.8 million). The election was intensely questioned, with accusations of fraud. The main contenders were former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and former Anambra State Governor Peter Obi of the Labor Party. A climate of political violence hung over

the general elections and the process was marred by reports of vote buying, voter intimidation, attacks on election workers and offices in certain areas and accusations of outright fraud by the opposition, which harmed its credibility. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) acknowledged that it made mistakes in displaying the results, prompting significant criticism and mistrust of the results and new accusations of fraud. These circumstances, along with statements made by observers and civil society groups criticising the INEC, led the Abubakar, Obi and Rabi'u Kwankwaso campaigns first to question, then to officially reject the election results announced before 28 February. The three main opposition candidates, some civil society groups and former President Olusegun Obasanjo called on the INEC to hold the elections again. On 29 May, Tinubu was officially named president, though the political and social opposition's appeals were not dismissed until September by the Presidential Election Petitions Court. A second appeal was definitively rejected by the Supreme Court in late October.

Tinubu replaced all the heads of the intelligence services, appointed a cabinet of 48 ministers (one of the largest in the country's recent history, including major figures from previous governments)[61] and attempted to carry out unpopular economic reforms in a year marked by growing social and economic instability[62] due to the increase in inflation (close to 29%, a level that had not been seen in the country since the 1990s) linked to the rising prices of basic products and the withdrawal of the petrol subsidy, which sparked major protests and union demonstrations. Furthermore, the official currency, the naira, had lost 41% of its value (30% in the parallel market) against the US dollar between May and December.

Nigeria (Biafra)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, separatist organisations MASSOB and IPOB (which has an armed wing, the ESN)

55. See the summary on Nigeria (Biafra) in this chapter.
56. See the summary on Nigeria in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.
57. ACLED, Dashboard [Viewed on 19 February 2024]. This figure includes three types of violent events (battles, violence against civilians and attacks with improvised explosive devices). If we include the categories of riots, protests and strategic events, it rises to 8,764 fatalities.
58. However, this death toll must be relativised given the difficulties in distinguishing the actions of these groups of criminal gangs from other dynamics of violence due to the many different actors, including criminal groups, security forces, armed jihadist actors, groups linked to ranching communities and civilian self-defence militias.
59. Amnesty International, Nigeria: Military attempting to cover up mass killing of civilians, 7 December 2023.
60. UNHCR, Operational Data Portal – Nigeria, 30 June 2023.
61. Adekaiyaoja, Afolabi, Tinubu's cabinet nominees: Renewed hope or recycled tropes?, African Arguments, 8 August 2023.
62. Busari, Stephany, "Nigeria's Bola Tinubu sworn in as president, facing divided nation and economic woes," *CNN*, 29 May 2023.

Summary:

After winning its independence in 1960, Nigeria has faced the challenge of bringing together the different ethnic nationalities. The most paradigmatic example was the civil war between the government and the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra (1967-1970), in which between one and three million people died. After three decades of military rule, the advent of democracy in 1999 gave rise to new expectations that the various identities could be accommodated and demands for political restructuring that have not come true, fuelling separatist grievances. In this context, demands for self-determination have resurfaced in the southeastern part of the country—known as Biafra by separatist movements—through nonviolent organisations, mainly with the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), created in 1999, then by other secessionist movements, including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), created in 2012. The rise to power of Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, perceived as a threat in the southern regions, has contributed to a rise in tension. The imprisonment in 2015 of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu caused an increase in demonstrations that were harshly repressed by the Nigerian security forces, which have since launched a campaign of violence and extrajudicial executions. This situation worsened with the banning of the IPOB in 2017 and the increase in violence in the second half of 2020, especially in light of the IPOB ban.

In southeastern Nigeria, fighting continued between insurgents and the security forces, causing dozens of fatalities. The armed wing of the IPOB independence movement, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), continued to carry out armed attacks throughout the year. According to the research centre ACLED, there were 660 violent deaths (battles, violence against civilians and improvised explosive devices) in 2023 that claimed 776 lives in the 10 states that make up the Biafra region (Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, Abia, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Cross River, though most conflict-related deaths were concentrated in the first five, where the Igbo community is the majority). In 2022, there were 703 events and 985 fatalities. ACLED's body count included the violence linked to the armed clashes in Biafra between the Nigerian government and armed pro-independence groups, which killed dozens, as well as the many attacks in these states committed by criminal groups and inter-community clashes over land use and ownership and access to water, which claim hundreds of lives each year.

Dozens of people died during the year as a result of the climate of instability, recurring military operations and attacks on police stations and military detachments, which seriously hindered the development of the presidential and parliamentary elections in February 2023. The most notable events of the year included an IPOB commando ambush in Ehime Mbano (Imo State) in September in which eight members of the security forces died and an attack in the town of Oba (Anambra State) in December against a self-defence militia that killed seven civilians and members of the militia. In late September, the Nigerian Air Force bombed two locations identified as possible IPOB training bases and armouries in the Nnewi North area (Anambra State) and Okigwe area (Imo State). In November, the Abia State government discovered a mass grave containing 70 bodies, allegedly those of people kidnapped for ransom.

Some statements made in October could reveal tension within the IPOB. Two major IPOB factions issued conflicting messages on future plans. On 5 October, the self-proclaimed prime minister of the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (BRGIE), Simon Ekpa, who had declared himself commander of the new Biafra Liberation Army (BLA) in August, said the Biafran authorities would "soon begin full government". Two days later, however, the dominant IPOB faction said that the group was open to talks with the federal government on Biafran independence through a UN-supervised referendum, offering Tinubu the opportunity to start a dialogue on the issue.[63] In addition, the Supreme Court reinstated terrorism charges against IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu in December 2023. The charges had previously been withdrawn on 13 October 2022 by the Court of Appeal in Abuja.[64] The Supreme Court's decision in December could change the previous announcements made by different parts of the IPOB. The Supreme Court ruled that Nnamdi Kanu should be tried for terrorism even though his extradition from Kenya had been illegal. It is feared that this decision will lead to an escalation of violence by the IPOB.

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

Summary:
Between 1960, when it gained its independence, and 2000, Senegal was ruled by a one-party state system headed by the Socialist Party of Senegal. From then on, Senegal began to use a multiparty system and opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade won the presidential election of 2000 as the candidate of the Senegalese Democratic Party. Wade remained in power until 2012, when he was defeated by Macky Sall, the candidate of the Alliance for the Republic. In 2019, Ousmane Sonko, a young man from the southern region of Casamance, ran for election leading the Senegalese Patriots for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) party on an anti-colonial platform focused on the lack of opportunities for Senegalese youth. Sonko finished third in the race, but his stature grew throughout

63. Ugwu, Chinagorom, 'We're now ready for dialogue with Nigerian govt,' – IPOB, *Premium Times Nigeria,* 7 October 2023.
64. See the summary on Nigeria (Biafra) in chapter 2 (Socio-political crises) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2023! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2023.

the country, which demanded a change in government. This marked the beginning of mass demonstrations staged by Senegalese youth. Later, in February 2021, Sonko was arrested, causing his followers to take to the streets in what they considered a move to disqualify him from running for president. Thereafter, a major political crisis broke out in 2022 between the government of President Macky Sall and the political and social opposition.

The political crisis worsened in Senegal between the government and the opposition during the year, causing many protests and clashes with security forces that claimed dozens of lives. In May, the political tensions that had emerged in 2022 increased significantly when the Court of Appeal extended the suspended prison sentence given to Ousmane Sonko, the leader of the opposition party African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF), from two to six months for a defamation case. This could block him from running in the presidential election initially scheduled for February 2024. The sentence sparked protests and clashes between Sonko's followers and security forces in the city of Ziguinchor, Sonko's stronghold in the Casamance region, and in the capital, Dakar, leaving at least two dead. In another trial, in which Sonko was charged with rape, the prosecutor asked the court to declare Sonko guilty on 24 May and asked for a 10-year prison sentence. This mobilised Sonko's followers, who marched from Ziguinchor to Dakar led by the opposition leader. On 1 June, Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for "corrupting the youth", which de facto disqualified him running for president, and he was acquitted of the rape charge. The verdict sparked protests by Sonko supporters, mainly in Ziguinchor and Dakar, who claimed it was politically motivated. On 2 June, the government deployed the Senegalese Army in Dakar. Days later, it cut off Internet access. According to government data, the harsh crackdowns on the protests left 16 protesters dead, while Amnesty International reported 23 fatalities and PASTEF cited 30. Dozens of other people were injured and around 500 people were arrested across the country.

Amidst this tension, on 3 July, President Macky Sall announced that he would not run for re-election in what would have been his third candidacy for the presidency. The announcement eased tensions in the country for a time, as it was one of the opposition's main demands. At the end of July, however, Senegalese police arrested Sonko on charges of planning an insurrection. The government dissolved PASTEF and restricted access to the Internet once again, triggering new social protests and clashes that left two people dead. In response, Sonko declared that he would begin a hunger strike. He was admitted to hospital on 6 August. Many different Senegalese figures, including former minister Serigne Diop and the president of the Senegalese League for Human Rights, Alassane Seck, signed a petition

demanding Sonko's release and a lift on the ban against PASTEF. On 14 December, the Court of First Instance in Dakar reinstated Sonko to the electoral register, allowing him to run in the 2024 presidential elections. However, the government challenged the court's decision, talking it to the Supreme Court. The "Sonko President 2024" coalition nominated Sonko as a presidential candidate in a virtual ceremony on 31 December after the authorities banned the nomination meeting initially scheduled for 30 December in Dakar, citing risks to public order.[65] By the end of the year, political tension in the country remained high ahead of the presidential election and Sonko was facing charges of inciting insurrection, conspiring with terrorist groups and threatening state security.

2.3.2. America

North America, Central America and the Caribbean

Haiti	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

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.

In 2023, the unprecedented political, humanitarian and security crisis in the country worsened after the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. In 2023, 4,789 homicides were reported, 119.4% more than the previous year, with a rate of 41 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in the world and notably higher than in 2022 (when there were 18 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants).

65. Le Monde, "*Senegal's authorities prohibit nomination meeting planned for opposition leader Sonko*", 30 December 2023.

The number of kidnappings in 2023 rose by 83% compared to 2022 and reached 2,490. **According to the United Nations, by the end of the year, over 300 organised criminal gangs controlled over 80% of the metropolitan region of the capital, as well as the main connecting routes between Port-au-Prince and the rest of the country and some key infrastructure for providing basic services**. Beyond the metropolitan region of the capital, several reports indicated that organised criminal gangs had expanded their territorial coverage, especially towards the Artibonite Valley and the areas around the cities of Gonaives (northwest) and Cap Haitien (north). By the end of 2023, around two million people lived in areas controlled by criminal gangs. The violence and clashes between the two main coalitions of criminal organisations (called G9 and G-Pèp) rose sharply in the second half of the year, especially after the death of one of the leaders and founders of the G9 coalition in mid-November. According to ACLED, over 450 people lost their lives due to clashes between rival gangs, while over 460 were killed in fighting between the armed groups and state security forces. Civilian self-defence groups and militias have proliferated in the main urban areas of the country, especially the Bwa Kale group, formed in April 2023 to prevent criminal gangs from becoming entrenched in certain neighbourhoods of the capital. According to official data, 388 alleged members of criminal gangs were lynched between April and September 2023 alone. ACLED reported that deaths caused by the activities of self-defence militias (around 300) accounted for 15% of the political violence in 2023. For example, on 24 April, civilian self-defence groups killed at least 57 armed gang members in several neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince.

In December, the United Nations warned that Haiti was one of nine countries facing the risk of famine, with 4.35 million people suffering from food insecurity, one of the worst rates in the world in proportion to the country's population. The number of people needing humanitarian aid has almost doubled in the last three years. OCHA also warned of the risk of collapse of basic services, such as healthcare and education. The United Nations said that attacks on schools by gang members had multiplied by nine in 2023 and OCHA estimates that one million minors are not going to school, increasing their risk of recruitment by gangs. Gang attacks against healthcare staff and hospitals multiplied, some of which had to close (such as Doctors without Borders in Port-au-Prince) or could no longer function due to a lack of fuel, medical supplies or employees. **ACLED estimates that over 650 civilians were killed by dozens of armed gangs operating in the country. Furthermore, in the areas controlled by these gangs, several NGOs reported the use of sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war** and a means of intimidation, territorial control and domination. Between January and August 2023 alone, a total of 3,056 cases of rape

In 2023, the unprecedented political, humanitarian and security crisis in Haiti worsened following the assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021

were reported, 49% more than in 2022, though the real figure could be much higher. According to other estimates, sexual violence increased by 80% compared to the previous year. According to the OHCHR and the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, civilians are not only victims of sexual violence in areas controlled by armed groups, but they are also targeted for kidnapping when using public transport. Gangs also loot civilians' homes, farms, fields and livestock and destroy irrigation canals. Finally, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) indicated that there were more than 310,000 internally displaced people in December 2023 and that 60% of them had fled their homes in 2023, especially in the metropolitan region around the capital. In addition to internal displacement, the violence and economic insecurity led to an unprecedented rise in the number of people leaving the country. In 2023 alone, it is estimated that over 100,000 Haitians entered the United States illegally.

Faced with this situation, on 2 October **the UN Security Council authorised the creation of the Multinational Security Support Mission** (MSS) with the primary objective of supporting the Haitian National Police to restore security, protect infrastructure and communication routes vital to the country and create favourable conditions for holding elections. Though the UN Security Council passed the resolution creating the MSS for 12 months under the mandate of Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter, this is not a UN mission, but rather an ad hoc coalition of countries led by Kenya and will be financed via voluntary contributions through a United Nations trust fund. At the request of the Haitian government, the United Nations had been discussing intervention formats for more than a year to address the worsening security situation. The UN Secretary-General had made several calls in this regard and in 2022 the UN Security Council had previously imposed sanctions and an arms embargo that it extended in 2023. In addition, the US and Canada had sent military equipment to the Haitian police to strengthen their capabilities. In early 2024, over three months after the resolution creating the MSS was passed, there were still serious doubts about some of the mission's operational issues. Some analysts say that the MSS will be made up of between 2,500 and 5,000 troops from a dozen countries, but some Caribbean countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados and Belize) that had expressed their commitment to the mission had not yet finalised their contribution to it. Even the participation of Kenya, the country that leads the MSS, whose government opposition questioned such a deployment of troops abroad, was pending a judicial decision from the Supreme Court.

The political situation also deteriorated noticeably in the last quarter of the year. **No elections have been held in Haiti since 2016, neither of the two legislative chambers have been in session since January 2020**,

when the term of office of most MPs and senators ended, and the term of office of the last 10 senators ended in January 2023. De facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry took office in mid-2021 after the assassination of Jovenel Moïse without being directly elected. Since then, he has led the government with the support of a significant part of the international community but has faced major internal political and social opposition and high levels of protest. To deal with this situation, in the middle of the year CARICOM called the government and the opposition to a summit in Kingston (Jamaica) to try to reach an agreement that would facilitate a more inclusive transition and new elections. A delegation of former CARICOM leaders facilitated the talks in the second half of the year (with five visits to the country), but by the end of the year not only had no agreement been reached, but several of the participating political and social organisations abandoned the talks, demanded Henry's immediate resignation and joined the opposition parties leading the anti-government protests.

Honduras	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:

In recent decades, Honduras has had one of the highest homicide rates in the region and the world, becoming the world leader in 2011. The Honduran authorities blame much of the country's high levels of violence on the gangs (such as Mara Salvatrucha or Mara 18) that have grown in the last two decades and on organised crime and drug trafficking organisations, which became significantly stronger during the two terms of former President Juan Orlando Hernández (2014-2022), who was extradited, tried and convicted in the US for crimes linked to drug trafficking. The country has recently undergone notable political crises with high levels of social polarisation, especially during the presidency of Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009) and after the 2009 coup d'état that overthrew him and was condemned by the international community, the suspension of Honduras' membership in the OAS and Zelaya's exile. After returning to the country in 2011, he led one of the main political groups in the country. In December 2022, President Xiomara Castro decreed a state of emergency to address the country's high levels of crime, prompting widespread criticism from human rights organisations.

In 2023, the country experienced a rise in social and political protests, many complaints of human rights violations linked to the state of emergency declared in December 2022 and a major political crisis that paralysed Parliament for four months and worsened strain between the government and the opposition. Furthermore, even though there were slightly fewer homicides in Honduras in 2023 compared to 2022, it continued to have one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America and the world and several analysts

observed more fighting between organised criminal gangs and between them and the state security forces. The government declared that 3,030 homicides had been reported in 2023, 631 fewer than in 2022. In line with the steady fall in the homicide rate in the country since reaching its historical peak in 2011 (85 per 100,000 inhabitants), in 2023 (31.1) it was lower than those of previous years, tumbling from 38.1 in 2022, 41.7 in 2021, 38.9 in 2020 and 44.7 in 2019. However, the homicide rate in Honduras is still one of the highest in Latin America (only surpassed by Ecuador if the Caribbean is not included) and in the world. President Xiomara Castro said on several occasions that the drop in homicides and other crimes during 2023 was mainly due to the state of emergency declared in December 2022, which was successively renewed throughout 2023 and is applicable in 17 of the 18 departments of the country and specifically in 158 of its 298 municipalities. The state of emergency allows the military police to support the national police in providing public security, allows the Honduran Armed Forces and security forces to make arrests and conduct searches without a court order and suspends some constitutional rights such as freedom of association, assembly and circulation. According to the government, during the first month of the state of emergency alone, 39 organised criminal gangs were dismantled and 652 people were arrested. Castro also said that thanks to the state of emergency, 48 municipalities in the country (out of a total of 298) did not report one homicide.

However, the organisation ACLED said that the Honduran government's action had ambivalent results for security in the country. Compared to the previous year, attacks by armed groups against civilians were down by 14%, while the number of civilians killed in those attacks also dropped by 7%. However, ACLED reported that between January and November 2023, armed clashes between state forces and armed groups increased by 45% over 2022, especially in the departments of San Francisco Morazán and Cortés (where Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula are located, respectively). In December 2022, the government deployed 20,000 police officers there to support anti-gang operations. According to the National Violence Observatory, run by the National Autonomous University, both the number of clashes between organised criminal gangs and the number of multiple homicides increased in 2023. Specifically, there were 44 massacres (or multiple homicides, with a minimum of three fatalities) that claimed 209 lives, 27% more than in 2022. Therefore, according to ACLED, the decrease in violent death reflects significantly fewer homicides due to interpersonal violence rather than to armed gangs and extortion activities. In December, the NGO Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) indicated that 11% of the Honduran population were victims of extortion in 2023, two per cent more than a year ago. Some analysts said that armed organised criminal gangs did not just increase their activity in 2023, but also their territorial reach. Although historically gangs have been concentrated in urban areas, a clear rise in

crime has recently been observed in rural areas. Such a trend could be motivated by the security forces' greater pressure on armed organised criminal gangs after the state of emergency and the growing militarisation of the country's public security, but some analysts also cited the reorganisation of criminal networks following the extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernández to the United States for drug and weapons trafficking in July 2022.

According to data from ECLAC's Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, Honduras had the highest feminicide rate in Latin America (six per 100,000 inhabitants), over double that of the second country, the Dominican Republic (2.9). In December, ECLAC stated that one woman was murdered every 21 hours. These data are consistent with those of Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, which in 2023 reported the violent deaths of 386 women. In November, human rights organisations reported that 47 LGTBI+ people had been murdered in 2023, of a total of 194 since 2001. The National Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras reported that 97 journalists, social communicators and media owners have died violently in Honduras since 2001. The OHCHR reported that 15 human rights activists were murdered between January and September 2023, most of them (over 81%) for defending land, territory and the environment. During the same period, the OHCHR documented 297 attacks against 267 human rights defenders and 105 journalists in Honduras. There was also an unprecedented rise in the number of refugees and migrants in Honduras in 2023, many of them victims of violence, extortion and other illegal practices. According to data from the National Migration Institute (INM), the number of refugees and migrants who entered, registered and transited through Honduras in 2023 rose to approximately 545,000, almost triple that of 2022 and an all-time high for the country. According to UNHCR, 38% of these people reported having suffered some type of mistreatment or abuse during the trip from their country of origin or last place of residence to Honduras and 16% said that they experienced mistreatment or another form of abuse in Honduras. More than half of these people were women and minors, in line with the trend of recent years. The five largest nationalities were Venezuelan, Cuban, Guinean, Ecuadoran and Haitian. According to the United Nations, around 3.2 million people in Honduras need assistance and food aid.

During 2023, several international bodies and human rights organisations voiced concern about the militarisation of public security in Honduras and the consequences of the state of emergency. For example, Amnesty International (AI) said that the security strategy being implemented by President Castro, which according

In 2023, Honduras experienced an increase in social and political protests, many complaints of human rights violations linked to the state of emergency declared in December 2022 and a significant political crisis

to AI imitates the one pursued by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, is leading to a notable deterioration of human rights. Between December 2022, the date that the state of emergency was announced, and September 2023, the National Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras received almost 300 complaints of human rights violations. Some human rights organisations reported that the national police and the military police carried out constant operations in certain areas with high levels of social exclusion against young people whom they accused of belonging to a criminal organisation. They also said that since the state of emergency was imposed, cases of arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killing and forced disappearance had increased throughout the country. Thus, after visiting Honduras between late May and early June, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Morris Tidball-Binz, said that extrajudicial killings are still pervasive across the country. Impunity is also widespread due to serious shortcomings in the legal system, including unjustified procedural delays, no or limited possibility for victims to participate in the criminal process, a lack of effective investigations, the investigating authorities' obstruction or refusal to accept complaints from victims and a lack of coordination between specialised prosecutors' offices. Other United Nations expert mechanisms that visited Honduras during the year also expressed concern about the human rights situation. The OHCHR questioned the Honduran government's decision to transfer command and control of the prison system to the military police, announced in June shortly after a serious episode of gang violence at the Tamara National Women's Prison led to the death of 46 inmates. Since then, the military police carried out operations in all the country's prisons, where different forms of mistreatment and torture were reported against inmates linked to criminal gangs.

Finally, a political and institutional crisis began in August after the end of the ordinary sessions of Parliament and the constitution of a Permanent Commission of Congress (made up of nine MPs and only one member of the opposition) responsible for appointing high officials, such as the state prosecutor. This crisis shut down Parliament for four months (from August to December), notably raising political tension between the government and the opposition. Social and political protests multiplied to around 800, a number similar to that of 2022 but clearly more than in 2021 (31) and 2020 (45). The massive anti-government protests in mid-August and November were led by the Citizen Opposition Bloc, made up of the National Party, the Honduran Patriotic Alliance and the Saviour Party of Honduras (PSH) and civil society organisations. Some analysts highlighted the acute social and political polarisation in the country and warned that the current situation has some parallels

with the political and social situation that ended in a coup d'état in 2009 against President Mel Zelaya, the husband of the current president.

Mexico	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime 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 2023, there was a slight drop in the number of homicides compared to 2022, but the levels of violence in the country were still among the highest in the world and several analysts confirmed that organised crime structures were strengthening. According to data from the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, an autonomous body that aggregates data from state prosecutors, 30,253 homicides were reported in 2023, 1,431 fewer than in 2022. Almost half the homicides took place in six states, in descending order, from the highest to the lowest number of homicides: Guanajuato, México, Baja California, Chihuahua, Jalisco and Michoacán. According to government data (specifically from the Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection), there were 29,675 homicides in 2023, 4.2% less than in 2022, making it the fourth year in a row that this number has fallen, from 34,696 in 2019 to 34,554 in 2020 and 33,308 in 2021. According to the government, since the beginning of the current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's term in December 2018, homicides have fallen by 20%, kidnappings by 70% and feminicides by 39% (and 19% compared to 2022). The government also reported that there had been significantly fewer common crimes (such as theft or robberies) and crimes linked to organised crime. The downward trend in the number of homicides compared to previous years was also identified by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), the main official source on this matter, which publishes its data with a greater delay than the two aforementioned institutions. According to

the INEGI, there were 15,082 homicides in the first six months of 2023, 7.6% less than in 2022, the lowest figure since 2017. However, some questioned these figures because they do not include the people found in mass graves or missing people. Despite the decrease in homicides observed in 2023, the number of people murdered in Mexico during the current president's administration (166,278, including 4,760 cases of feminicide) was already clearly higher than that of his two predecessors in office, with 156,066 under Peña Nieto (2012-18) and 120,613 under Felipe Calderón (2006-12). According to some analysts, at the end of the current president's six-year term in December 2024, the number of homicides in Mexico may approach 200,000. There was also an increase in police officers killed on duty (412 in 2023, compared to 381 in 2022). Meanwhile, in mid-December, the NGO Causa en Común published a report indicating that **in 2023 there were 427 massacres, defined as the murder of three or more people in the same violent act, for a total of 2,130 since 1 January 2020**. The states with the highest number of massacres in 2023 were Guanajuato (57), Zacatecas (43) and Guerrero (41). In addition, from 2020 to the third quarter of 2023, Causa en Común also recorded 22,930 "atrocities": events including massacres, discoveries of clandestine graves, human trafficking, torture, burning, violence against migrants and the murder of minors. In the first six months of 2023 alone, 1,453 cases of torture and 729 murders of women with extreme cruelty were reported.

The OHCHR documented the murder of at least 13 human rights activists in possible relation to their work during 2023. Along the same lines, the organisation Comité Cerezo México reported that 14 human rights activists were killed by state agents in 2023, rising to a total of 93 during the current president's administration, much fewer than during Peña Nieto's six-year term (189), but many more than during Calderón's presidency (67). The NGO Article 19 reported that five journalists were killed for doing their jobs in 2023 (a clear drop from the 13 killed in 2022, of a total of 163 since 2000). It also warned that there were 561 attacks against journalists and media outlets during the year, such as armed attacks and abductions. Along the same lines, **the NGO Reporters without Borders considered Mexico the country with the highest number of missing active journalists in the world** (with 31 of a total of 84 cases, from 1995 to 1 December 2023). It added that **Mexico was the second most dangerous country for journalists in 2023, after Palestine.** Furthermore, the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) indicated that violence in the country had forcibly displaced nearly 8,000 people in the first six months of 2023, estimating that since 2006, around 410,000 people had been forced to leave their homes due to violence.

In addition to the high number of homicides, the number of missing people increased significantly in 2023.

According to the National Search Commission's National Registry of Missing or Unlocated Persons, 12,301 cases were reported in 2023, a 30% increase compared to 2022 and 155% more over the last decade. Since the aforementioned registry began in the early 1960s until late December 2023, 113,820 cases have been reported, 42% of them during the current president's six-year term and almost 10% in 2023 alone. **Since the so-called war on drugs began in 2006, more than 100,000 people have been reported missing.** The states with the highest number of cases are Jalisco (14,927), Tamaulipas (12,931), México (12,212), Veracruz (6,966) and Mexico City (6,934), and the two states with the highest number of cases in 2023 were México (2,136) and Mexico City (1,808). The Mexican Institute of Human Rights and Democracy (IMDHD) also spoke of a forensic crisis, since more than 52,000 bodies remained unidentified at the end of 2023. **During 2023 it was revealed that 5,696 clandestine graves have been identified in 570 municipalities in the country (almost a quarter of the total) since 2007**, when mass graves began to increase drastically. Approximately half (2,864 as of April 2023) the total graves identified have been located during the current president's term, with his first year in office (2019) being when the most graves were identified (970). Fewer locations have been found since then, but this does not imply fewer illegal burials, as the hiding places could be more inaccessible to groups of searchers and the authorities, the prosecutor's office may not report its findings to the National Search Commission and the number of field searches may have been lowered. In November, the Citizen Council of the Search Commission of Mexico City reported that there were 18,000 unclaimed or unidentified bodies in the capital's mass graves alone. In December 2023, the government stated that only 11% of the cases included in the aforementioned National Registry of Missing or Unlocated Persons (that is, 12,377 people) were confirmed cases of disappearance, while the rest involved people who had been found and located and there were not enough identification or search data. This methodological change by the government prompted criticism from many human rights organisations and led to the resignation of the director of the National Search Commission. Shortly before the resignation, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, which was investigating the disappearance of 43 people in Ayotzinapa in 2014, announced its departure from the country and criticised the competent authorities' obstruction, pressure, restrictions and lack of cooperation to fully shed light on the case.

The Mexico Peace Index 2023 report, prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, indicated that **between 2015 and 2021 the number of homicides linked to organised crime and drug cartels grew from around 8,000 to over 23,500 (an increase of approximately 190%),** while the number of homicides not connected to organised crime remained relatively stable, at around 10,000 to 12,500 per year. Along the same lines, according to Uppsala University, **the total number of deaths from non-state violence increased drastically between 2011 and 2021, soaring from 2,657 to 18,783**. According to the university, one of the factors behind this sharp increase is the great territorial expansion of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), which has spread to 28 of the 32 states in the country since 2017 and is currently associated with more than 80% of homicides caused by fighting between cartels. The rivalry increased between the two most powerful cartels in the country, the Sinaloa Cartel and the CJNG, which in 2021 alone (latest data available) may have claimed 4,890 lives, more than a quarter of the total body count associated with violence between cartels. Whereas the number of clashes involving either of the two cartels accounted for 42% of the total number of deaths due to violence between cartels in 2015, the proportion had risen to 95% by 2021. In 2023, a research team published an influential article in the journal *Science* arguing that there are currently about 150 cartels in Mexico with between 160,000 and 185,000 members, about 60,000 more than in 2012. The largest cartel would be the CJNG (approximately 20% of the total), followed by the Sinaloa Cartel (10%) and La Familia Michoacana. According to the article, which had a great impact, **drug cartels are the fifth largest source of employment in the country and need to recruit about 19,000 people each year to replace those who are arrested (about 6,000 a year) or who die (17% of the total number of people recruited)**. These data are in line with statements made in the middle of the year by the director of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) that the CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel have about 45,000 members and collaborators in around 100 countries around the world. According to some analysts, most cartels have increasingly sophisticated weapons. In mid-July, the Secretariat of National Defence declared that from 2021 to March 2023, 23 drones allegedly belonging to drug cartels had been seized that were going to be used in bomb attacks. For example, in early January 2024, about 30 people died in the state of Guerrero after La Familia Michoacana attacked a rival criminal organisation, Los Taclos, with drones loaded with explosives. One of the most significant events in the fight against organised crime in 2023 was the arrest in January and subsequent extradition to the United States of Ovidio Guzmán, the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel and son of one of its founders, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. His capture in the northeastern part of the state of Sinaloa caused the death of 29 people (including 10 soldiers) and the burning of vehicles and buildings in the area. Two days before Guzmán's arrest, 17 people (including 10 prison officials) died during a riot in a Ciudad Juárez prison that 30 people used to escape, including the leader of the criminal group Los Mexicles, an organisation that several analysts link to the Sinaloa Cartel. At various times during the year, the government authorised the deployment of military personnel and National Guard troops in the state

At the end of the current president's six-year term in December 2024, the number of homicides in Mexico may approach 200,000

of Chiapas (both around San Cristóbal de las Casas and in the border region of Comalapa) to deal with the rise in fighting between groups connected to the Sinaloa Cartel and the CJNG. President López Obrador said that the drop in the number of homicides reported in recent years owes mainly to the government's strategy against organised crime and especially the role played by the National Guard. However, civil society organisations and the political opposition once again criticised the growing militarisation of public security. Thus, the Senate created a commission in March to supervise and control the role of the Mexican Armed Forces in public security and in April the Supreme Court ruled that the transfer of the National Guard to the Secretariat of National Defence was unconstitutional.

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

Summary:
The massive protests of 2023 were against the activity of the Canadian company First Quantum Minerals and its subsidiary Minera Panamá in an open-pit mine of copper, gold, silver and other minerals covering around 13,600 hectares, making it one of the largest in the world, according to some analysts. Located in the province of Colón, it lies a few kilometres from the Caribbean Sea, in the heart of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor. In 1997, the Panamanian government granted the mining company Petaquilla Minerals the right to exploit the aforementioned deposit, sparking protests from the start due to its environmental impact and prompting the filing of unconstitutionality appeals. In 2017, a few months after the government of Juan Carlos Varela extended the contract for another 20 years, the concession was declared unconstitutional, but the ruling was not published until the end of 2021, so the company was able to continue operating without a current legal contract. In early 2022, the Cortizo government and the company began negotiations to extend the contract, but due to the lack of agreement and the government's accusations that First Quantum Mineral was non-compliant with its commitments, it ordered the company to suspend its activities in December 2022. However, negotiations between both parties continued in the first few months of 2023.

Panama witnessed the largest protests in recent decades in which five people died, dozens were injured and over 1,000 were arrested. In addition, road blockades in various parts of the country, including the Pan-American Highway, which connects it from north to south and with the rest of the Central American isthmus, caused shortages of basic products in different places. The protests began in October 2023, shortly after Parliament passed and the president fast-tracked a law that extended First Quantum Minerals' mining concession for another 20 years, with the option of renewal for another 20 years, alleging that the company's activity accounted

for 5% of the country's GDP (Panama is the 14th largest exporter of copper worldwide). After learning of this decision, **tens of thousands of people demonstrated uninterruptedly in the capital and in various parts of the country to protest the extension of the concession** on the grounds that it would bring serious environmental damage to a region that is especially important for the country's biodiversity, which threatens Panama's national sovereignty and harms the economic interests of the state (because the taxes paid by the company are considered insufficient). Mass protests for several days led to clashes between protesters and security forces that injured dozens of people, caused significant material damage and closed many roads throughout the country. Given this situation, in early November the government declared a moratorium on mining activity in the country, excluding the concessions already approved, which lowered the intensity of the protests to some extent. The government also announced its interest in the Supreme Court's ruling on appeals of the unconstitutionality of the contract extension to prevent millions in penalties in a possible judicial or arbitration process with the company if it were repealed. In late November, the Supreme Court declared the contract between the state and First Quantum Minerals (and its subsidiary Minera Panamá) unconstitutional. Shortly thereafter, the state announced the gradual and orderly termination of the company's activities and the resignation of the Minister of Commerce and Industry.

South America

Ecuador	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political and social opposition, organised crime groups

Summary:
In recent years, Ecuador has experienced one of the sharpest rises in violence in all of Latin America. In 2022, the government reported that the homicide rate had multiplied by almost five since 2017 and that over 80% of the murders in the country are linked to drug trafficking. Although Ecuador has historically been a transit point for illicit drugs, some analysts indicate that the country is steadily playing a more prominent role in the international drug supply chain, especially for cocaine, including more participation in the storage, processing, production and international distribution of narcotics, mainly through Pacific routes (a significant percentage of the homicides takes place in the coastal city of Guayaquil) and the Amazon, thanks to its border with Brazil. The situation has led to a substantial increase in clashes for the control of strategic places and routes between local organised crime groups (such as Los Lobos, Los Choneros and Los Lagartos), Mexican cartels (especially the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel), dissident factions of the FARC (such as the Oliver Sinisterra Front and the Urías Rondón column) and international criminal organisations.

Ecuador faced a serious political crisis in 2023 that led to the dissolution of the National Assembly and calls for early elections, as well as an unprecedented rise in violence, prompting a state of emergency at various times of the year. According to official data, 7,878 violent deaths were reported in 2023, with a homicide rate of 46.5 for every 100,000 inhabitants, the highest in the Americas (except in the Caribbean). During the government of Lenín Moreno (2017-2021), the homicide rate ranged from six to eight per 100,000 inhabitants, but in 2021, when Guillermo Lasso became president, it climbed to 14, then soared to 25.9 in 2022. The provinces of Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, El Oro, Esmeraldas and Santo Domingo accounted for 86.44% of all homicides in 2023. Various analysts consider these areas key in the value chains of drug trafficking and international arms trafficking. The province of Guayas stands out especially as the location of nearly half the intentional homicides in the country, and specifically its capital, Guayaquil, which is home to neighbourhoods like Nueva Prosperina, with a homicide rate of 114 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in the world. Some organisations reported an impunity rate of more than 91%. According to the police, 80% of the killings in Ecuador were caused by clashes between criminal groups like Los Choneros, Los Lobos and Los Tiguerones, which seek to control the distribution and export of drugs, mainly cocaine. Given this situation, in April the Public and State Security Council declared that organised criminal groups linked to Colombian and Mexican cartels (especially the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel) and to other international organised criminal groups have officially been listed as terrorist organisations. This allows the mobilisation of the Ecuadoran Armed Forces without the prior declaration of a state of emergency and could affect around 20 criminal organisations, according to some media outlets. The day after this statement was made, 10 people were murdered in Guayaquil in an armed attack that the government linked to fighting between gangs for territorial control. The government also declared a state of emergency in July and August (that it later extended) to address the crisis of violence rocking the country.

Ecuador faced a serious political crisis that caused the dissolution of Parliament and calls for early elections, as well as an unprecedented rise in violence, prompting a state of emergency at various times of the year

In line with the rise in violence observed in the prison system since 2020 (around 500 people are estimated to have been killed during that period), there were several major episodes of violence in some prisons in 2023. In July, 31 inmates died and another 14 were injured during clashes between rival gangs at the Litoral prison in Guayaquil. Two days later, after inmates from 13 prisons in the country began a hunger strike and took several prison officials hostage, President Lasso decreed a state of emergency throughout the country's prison system and authorised the deployment of 2,700 troops to regain control of the Litoral prison. In April, 18 inmates and three prison officers had died in another episode of violence between rival gangs in the same prison. According to the government, 67 violent deaths were reported in the country's prisons in 2023.

In addition to the high levels of violence linked to organised crime and within the prison system, there was a drastic increase in political violence during the year, to the point that the Citizen Observatory of Political Violence (OCVP) declared that the presidential election in August had been the most violent election in the history of the country. The research centre reported 88 cases of political violence in 2023, 86% of which targeted political leaders (candidates and public officials) and the remaining 14% targeted their family members and people close to them. The OCVP blamed most of these episodes on organised criminal groups, especially those related to drug trafficking. The murders with the greatest social and political impact were that of the mayor of Manta (the third largest city in the country, in the province of Manabí) in late July and that of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in Quito in mid-August. After the mayor of Manta was assassinated, President Lasso decreed a state of emergency in the provinces of Manabí and Los Ríos and in the city of Durán (Guayas), as well as a curfew in Manta. The curfew coincided with a state of emergency in the penal system so the authorities could regain control over the country's prisons. The assassination of Villavicencio in mid-August, 10 days before the elections, also prompted the deployment of the Ecuadoran Armed Forces throughout the country and a state of emergency that allowed the Ecuadoran Armed Forces and police to use force legitimately and exceptionally to control public order and ensure public security and to conduct inspections and searches aimed at finding weapons and illicit substances. The government also ordered a large-scale military and police operation involving around 4,000 troops to transfer José Adolfo "Fito" Macías, the leader of Los Choneros, to a maximum security centre. Los Choneros is one of the most powerful criminal gangs in the country and "Fito" Macías had threated Villavicencio. However, this government action failed to put an end to the riots or episodes of violence in the country's prisons. For example, in late August, shortly after Villavicencio was killed and the presidential election was held, the criminal gang Los Lobos detained 50 prison guards and seven police officers during several riots in six prisons in the country in response to an operation carried out by the Ecuadoran Armed Forces and police in the Latacunga prison to seize weapons and in protest against a series of prisoner transfers.

Alongside the unprecedented rise in violence, the country also underwent a major political crisis in 2023.

In mid-May, the day after the National Assembly began a political trial against Guillermo Lasso on charges of plotting corruption, he claimed internal disturbances and a serious political crisis and signed a decree dissolving Parliament and calling extraordinary presidential and legislative elections, so that both Lasso and the National Assembly were elected. Lasso also ordered the Ecuadoran Armed Forces to surround the Parliament building so it could not remain in session or continue the recently initiated impeachment trial. This provoked some protests in the days immediately thereafter and drew criticism from many opposition parties and social organisations, which asserted that the president only dissolved Parliament to avoid prosecution, saying it was proof of the country's democratic backsliding. Some organisations like the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), which has historically demonstrated a great capacity for mobilisation, said that Lasso had pulled off a covert self-coup, opening the door to dictatorship. Finally, in the presidential election held on 20 August (first round) and 15 October (second round) during the state of emergency, Daniel Noboa won by a narrow margin over the candidate of the Citizen Revolution Movement, Luisa González. The Citizen Revolution Movement won the legislative elections, with Movimiento Construye (MC25) coming in second place. Fernando Villavicencio had been Movimiento Construye's presidential candidate.

Peru	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government, Resources Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed opposition (Militarised Communist Party of Peru), political and social opposition (peasant 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, renamed Militarized Communist Party of Peru, 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.

Peru remained mired in one of the largest political crises in the country's recent history, caused mainly by massive anti-government protests that took place between January and March in various parts of the country in which about 50 people died, more than 700 were injured and hundreds more were arrested. Especially intense in Quito and in the regions of Apurímac, La Libertad, Puno, Junín, Arequipa and Ayacucho, the protests were the continuation of those that had been active since early December 2022 following the removal and arrest of President Pedro Castillo, charged with planning to carry out a coup d'état against himself. Some protesters demanded the resignation of President Dina Boluarte (who as vice president of the country assumed the presidency after Castillo was removed), the closure of Congress, the calling of a constituent assembly, the formation of a transitional government to move the elections forward and the end of police crackdowns on protests. Some groups called for the release of former President Castillo. Since Boluarte assumed the presidency in December 2022 until 20 February 2023, the OHCHR reported 1,327 protests nationwide, 882 demonstrations, 240 blocked roads, 195 gatherings and 60 peace marches. According to figures recognised by the Office of the Ombudsman, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Amnesty International (AI) and the United Nations, 77 people have died since the beginning of the protests in December, 70 of them civilians, as well as one police officer and six soldiers. Forty-nine of the civilian fatalities were due to state repression and clashes with security forces and 11 were caused during road blockades. Around 1,880 people were injured. The deadliest episode of violence occurred on 9 January 2023 in Juliaca, when 18 protesters and bystanders died from gunshot wounds and pellets and, according to some media outlets, one police officer died from burns. The United Nations, the OAS, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International denounced the police's excessive use of force in containing the protests and urged the government to begin a dialogue with the protesters and the communities affected by the violence, take concrete action to regain public trust, launch thorough and independent investigations into abuse committed by the security forces and expedite judicial processes so that those responsible are held accountable. In May, the IACHR concluded that the security forces used excessive force and that some of the deaths could have been cases of extrajudicial killing. Amnesty International also claimed that the government's response to the protests had a racial bias, since 80% of the total people reported dead since they began were members of the indigenous and peasant population. Along the same lines, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, said that Peru's deeply-rooted exclusion, racism and discrimination shaped the government's response to the protests and described the indigenous communities that protested as stigmatised.

In a context of national and international condemnations for the excessive use of force, on 11 January the Prosecutor's Office opened a preliminary investigation into the alleged crimes of genocide, aggravated homicide and serious injury against President Dina Boluarte, Prime Minister Alberto Otárola, the minister of the interior, the minister of defence and two former ministers. Boluarte refused to resign and convene a constituent assembly and extended the state of emergency issued in December to Lima and several parts of the country. Boluarte criticised the violence carried out by certain groups of demonstrators, claiming that some protests sought to break and sabotage the rule of law and that some groups that had encouraged the protests had links to drug trafficking, illegal mining and smuggling. Days later, however, she urged the organisers for a national truce, apologised to the families of those killed in the protests and asked Congress to move the elections forward to 2023 (the first round in October and the second in December). Congress rejected her request, so in principle Boluarte should remain in office until 2026. The president also announced her intention to amend the 1993 Constitution, ratified during the administration of Alberto Fujimori. These announcements failed to put an end to the demonstrations, however, and were followed by serious clashes between police and protesters in Lima. Finally, the protests subsided noticeably starting in early March, but were revived again in mid-July for reasons similar to those of December 2022 and early 2023, but with greater emphasis on the president's resignation. According to the Office of the Ombudsman, there were marches in 59 provinces and road blockades in 64. In Lima, new clashes were reported between security forces and hundreds of people trying to enter Congress. In late July, a new wave of protests swept the country, with demonstrations in 18 provinces and 14 blocked roads, according to the Office of the Ombudsman. Boluarte offered a national reconciliation pact in response, guaranteed that justice would be granted to the victims of state repression and asked the victims' families for forgiveness. Boluarte also asked Congress to delegate legislative powers to the executive branch for 120 days to be able to crack down on crime. In December, on the first anniversary of the arrest of former President Castillo, the Office of the Ombudsman said that demonstrations were reported in 20 provinces, in 15 of the 25 regions of Peru, but they were clearly smaller in scope than those in the early and middle parts of the year and no serious incidents were reported. **There was also fighting during the year between police and military personnel and members of the Militarised Communist Party of Peru (MPCP),** the name of the remaining Shining Path faction in the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers Valley region (VRAEM). Seven police officers died in mid-February in an ambush by the group in Cuzco (VRAEM) led by Comrade Carlos, who is part of the group's first generation of combatants. According to some media reports, Carlos may have participated in the massacre of 16 people in the department of Junín in May 2021, a few days before the second round of the presidential election. A few days later, two other soldiers died in another clash in Vizcatán del Ene (Satipo province, Junín department). In September, four soldiers and two members of the MPCP were killed and three soldiers were wounded during fighting in the VRAEM, specifically in the province of Huanta (department of Ayacucho). In November, the minister of the interior declared that he had dealt one of the heaviest blows against the MPCP in recent years after the arrest of four of the group's leaders, including the son of MPCP leader Víctor Quispe Palomino.

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 massive and continuous anti-government protests in Venezuela, as in previous years, and **the government and the majority of the opposition reached an important political agreement in October, but the country continued to report high murder rates, demonstrations and complaints about the fragile humanitarian and human rights situation while political groups and international organisations criticised the government for setting up obstacles** to political reform that would lead to a presidential election. Although there is no official data on the number of homicides, the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV) counted 6,973 violent deaths in 2023, one quarter fewer than in 2022 (9,367) and 2021 (9,447) and 75% fewer than in 2016, the year that saw the highest number of violent deaths: 28,475. Although the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in 2023 (26.8) was clearly lower than those of 2021 (34.9) and 2022 (35.3), it remained one of the highest in the Americas and was only surpassed by those of Ecuador and Honduras. Furthermore, the OVV figures do not include disappearances, which in 2023

(1,443) were up slightly over 2022 (1,370). Despite the drop in homicides, several analysts warned of the growing role of organised criminal groups in recent years. The 2023 Index of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime ranked Venezuela eighth among the countries in the Americas with the highest level of organised crime and last place in terms of the state's capacity to combat it. According to the report, armed organised criminal groups are currently present in at least 22 of the country's 24 states, controlling the drug, gold and human trafficking markets, among other illicit activities, and exercising more social and territorial control in border areas. President Nicolás Maduro announced that 1,844 organised criminal organisations had been dismantled in 2023 and that the number of police officers had increased by 12%, from 160,000 to 179,000. In the middle of the year, the government said that kidnapping cases were down by 54.2% in 2023 compared to 2022.

Regarding the humanitarian and migration situation, the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants of Venezuela (R4V), made up of UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and many other NGOs, indicated that **over half a million people were forced to leave Venezuela in 2023**, climbing from 7,180,000 in January 2023 to 7,720,000 in November 2023. However, according to some sources, the real figure may be even higher. Specifically, the Venezuelan Diaspora Observatory declared that the total number of Venezuelan migrants was about 8.5 million, spread across 90 countries, so that, in the last quarter of a century, Venezuela may have experienced over a 25% drop in population. According to R4V, 85% (6,540,000) of the Venezuelan diaspora is found in countries in the region, mainly in Colombia (44%), Peru (23%), Brazil (8%), Ecuador (7%) and Chile (7%). If the United States is included, this number rises to 90%. The IOM declared that around four million Venezuelans in Latin America were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023. At the end of 2023, there were more than one million Venezuelan asylum seekers in the world and more than 230,000 Venezuelans recognised as refugees. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) reported that 88% of the protests nationwide demanded basic goods and services such as access to water, electricity, fuel, health services and pensions.

According to the OVCS, 6,956 protests were reported in 2023, most of which (5,583) demanded social, cultural, economic and environmental rights, and very specifically labour rights (4,100), while the rest (1,373) defended civil and political rights. The number of demonstrations in Venezuela was slightly lower than in 2022 (7,032) and significantly higher than in 2021 (8,560). Despite the progress made in the negotiations between the government and the Unitary Platform, which are facilitated by Norway, the parties

The Venezuelan Diaspora Observatory reported that the total number of Venezuelan migrants was about 8.5 million

traded accusations at various times during the year. The peak of the tension came in late October, coinciding with the opposition's primaries to elect the person who will run in the 2024 presidential election. According to the opposition, around 2.4 million people participated in the primaries, which gave María Corina Machado 93% of the votes. In 2015, María Corina Machado was disqualified from running for public office for 15 years. However, the government claimed that the primaries had been fraudulent and in late October the Supreme Court invalidated their results. Meanwhile, **the United States warned that it could reinstate the sanctions it had announced it would loosen a few days earlier if the disqualifications against opposition candidates were not withdrawn before 30 November**. Later, in December, two days after the referendum on Essequibo organised by the government, the public prosecutor of Venezuela issued an arrest warrant against 13 people (including prominent leaders abroad, such as Juan Guaidó, Julio Borges and Leopoldo López, and three people from Machado's team), charging them with treason for participating in a national and international conspiracy to boycott the referendum. Another source of acute tension between the government and the opposition was the ruling party majority's renewal of the National Assembly of the National Electoral Council. Even though it has long been made up of a clear majority of people considered close to the government, the opposition criticised the renewal as Caracas' attempt to further control the electoral process, while Human Rights Watch (HRW) expressed concern about the impact that it could have on holding free and competitive elections.

Like HRW, other human rights organisations denounced the human rights situation in the country in 2023. Organisations such as Foro Penal and Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón (JEP) estimate that there are currently between 286 and 319 people incarcerated for political reasons in Venezuela. Amnesty International (AI) said that the use of arbitrary detention for political reasons was part of a government repression strategy and a widespread and systematic attack against the population. Amnesty International argued that Caracas' arrests without court orders, short periods of forced disappearance following arrest, accusation of crimes with a wide margin of discretion, limits on access to the right to defence and use of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading forms of treatment could constitute crimes against humanity. According to Amnesty International, the purpose of arbitrary arrest, directed at political opponents, but also at human rights activists and trade unionists, is to neutralise any perceived threat against the government. In September 2023, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (MIIV) noted that even though recently human rights have been violated less and such violations target certain groups more selectively, such as union leaders, journalists and human rights activists, there

are still many cases of serious human rights violations in Venezuela and the repressive structure of the state has not been dismantled. Furthermore, according to the MIIV, the government has recently stepped up its efforts to undermine civic and democratic space, increasing its control over civil society organisations, unions, media outlets and political parties and using threats, surveillance, harassment, defamation and censorship to silence and discourage opposition to the government.

Venezuela – Guyana	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	Venezuela, Guyana

Summary:

The tension between Venezuela and Guyana over Essequibo, a territory covering almost 160,000 km2 that is rich in minerals and other natural resources, controlled and administered by Guyana, dates back to the lack of agreement in the late 19th century on defining the border between Venezuela and the British Empire. While Guyana, a former British colony, maintains that an arbitral award issued in Paris in 1899 gave the disputed territory to the British Empire, Venezuela protested the ruling and bases its position on the 1966 Geneva Agreement between Venezuela and the United Kingdom (in consultation with the government of Guyana, which won independence from the United Kingdom that same year), by which the parties undertook to resolve the dispute through friendly negotiations. Tension increased significantly after the International Court of Justice declared itself competent to resolve and issue a ruling on the matter in 2020, though Venezuela rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction. Adding to the strain in relations, Guyana granted several companies the right to explore for hydrocarbon deposits in waters disputed with Venezuela and Caracas planned to hold a referendum on the sovereignty of Essequibo in December 2023.

The government of Venezuela's decision to call a referendum on annexing Essequibo (known in Spanish as "Guayana Esequiba", a territory historically claimed by Venezuela, but which is formally under the effective control and administration of the government of Guyana) **and to take action to make its results effective caused a major political and diplomatic crisis in the region, with several countries undergoing significant military mobilisation**. According to Caracas, the turnout for the referendum held on 3 December was around 50% and 95% of the voters selected "yes" on all five questions on the ballot, including whether to reject the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve the territorial controversy over Essequibo; whether to create the state of Guayana Esequiba, grant citizenship to its population and incorporate it into the map of Venezuelan territory; and whether to oppose Guyana's claim to have a

sea pending delimitation. However, several analysts questioned the turnout cited by the government and said that not even Hugo Chávez got more than 10.4 million votes at the peak of his popularity. A few days earlier, the ICJ had issued a ruling urging Venezuela to refrain from any action that would change the situation prevailing in the disputed territory, though without prohibiting the referendum from being held, as previously requested by the government of Guyana, considering that its objective is to prepare the ground for Venezuela's annexation of Essequibo. The ICJ ruling also urged both sides to refrain from taking any action that could aggravate the dispute or make it more difficult to resolve. The ICJ set the hearing for April 2024, when Venezuela should argue and document its position for a substantive resolution of the dispute (which according to some analysts could take years), but at the end of 2023, Venezuela continued to firmly reject the ICJ's jurisdiction and competence to settle the dispute.

Two days after the referendum was held, Nicolás Maduro announced that Essequibo had been incorporated into the official map of Venezuela and that a "human" and "social" care plan had been launched for the population of Guayana Esequiba, with the beginning of a census, the issuance of identity cards and the opening of an office of the Administrative Service for Identification and Migration (SAIME) in the region. Maduro asked Parliament to begin the legislative process to turn Guayana Esequiba into a new state of the republic and announced that the town of Tumeremo (Bolívar state, bordering Essequibo) will provisionally be the headquarters of the Comprehensive Defence Zone (ZODI) and the political and administrative headquarters of the new state, of which Major General Alexis Rodríguez Cabello was appointed as sole authority. Maduro also ordered the creation of the Essequibo division of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) and the Corporación Venezolana de Guayana Esequibo (CVG), the creation of a map for exploring for and exploiting resources in the region and the granting of operational licenses for exploring for and exploiting oil, gas and mines in Essequibo. He also gave oil companies authorised by Guyana to operate in disputed waters a three-month grace period to end their activities.

In addition to these decisions**, the government of Venezuela sent a military contingent to Puerto Barima**, in the state of Delta Amacuro, on Venezuela's Atlantic border, very close to Essequibo. The following day, the US conducted air exercises with the Guyana Defence Force and said that it was willing to cooperate to improve Guyana's defensive capabilities. In early January, the US Undersecretary of Defence visited Guyana, giving rise to speculation in Venezuela that Washington was setting up a military base in the region, though Georgetown denied it. Meanwhile,

the governments of Brazil and Suriname mobilised their armies on their respective borders with Guyana. Though both countries showed solidarity with Guyana's position, the border between Brazil and Guyana was delimited through an arbitration treaty and Guyana and Suriname dispute a territorial border in the Tigri region, which is de facto occupied and administered by Guyana. In this sense, some parties in Suriname complained that Guyana had not fulfilled its promises made in the 1960s to demilitarise the Tigri region and had demanded that the government protest diplomatically before the International Court of Justice, CARICOM and the United Nations. The opposition also expressed its desire to hold a referendum similar to the one Venezuela held in December and officially incorporate the Tigri region into the map of Suriname. Military tension escalated in late December when the United Kingdom, a former colonial power in the region, sent a warship to the coast of Guyana. Venezuela considered this an extremely serious and hostile provocation, urged Guyana not to involve military powers in the territorial dispute and began military exercises of considerable magnitude in the Atlantic. In this context, the government of Brazil was concerned about the dynamics of military escalation in the region and said that military demonstrations in support of any of the disputing parties should be avoided and were against the agreement reached by Maduro and the president of Guyana at the bilateral summit organised by CELAC, CARICOM and the Brazilian government in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in mid-December.

Though the diplomatic and military situation escalated in December, there had already been a significant increase in tension between Venezuela and Guyana in the last quarter of the year. In October, the government of Guyana criticised the Venezuelan Armed Forces' troop mobilisation and military manoeuvres near their common border, voiced concern to CARICOM and several of its international allies and placed the Guyanese Armed Forces on alert. Shortly before, the government of Venezuela and the Unitary Platform (which are in negotiations facilitated by Norway) had agreed on the joint defence of Guayana Esequiba in Barbados. Thus, some opposition leaders (such as former presidential candidates Henrique Capriles and Manuel Rosales) said they supported the referendum, while others, including Juan Guaidó and the main opposition leader María Corina Machado, were against it. In fact, Machado asked for the referendum to be cancelled and for a team to be formed to bring the dispute before the ICJ. Two days after the referendum, **Venezuela's public prosecutor issued an arrest warrant against 13 people** (including prominent leaders abroad, such as Juan Guaidó, Julio Borges and Leopoldo López, as well as three people from Machado's team) **on charges of treason for participating in a national and international conspiracy to boycott the referendum.**

2.3.3. Asia and the Pacífic

2.3.3.1 Asia

East Asia

China – Japan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	China, Japan, Taiwan, USA

Summary:
China and Japan's dispute over the sovereignty and administration of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (in Japanese and Chinese, respectively) in the East China Sea dates back to the early 1970s, when the United States, which had administered the islands since 1945, relinquished control of them to Japan. The dispute over the islands, which have a high geostrategic value and are estimated to contain enormous hydrocarbon reserves, is part of China and Japan's conflictive historical relations since the first third of the 20th century as a result of the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s and the Second World War. The territorial dispute between China and Japan had been managed relatively peacefully since the early 1970s, but tension between the two increased significantly in 2012, when the Japanese government purchased three of the disputed islands from a private owner. In 2013, China unilaterally declared a new Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) that includes the airspace of the islands. In the following years, incursions by Chinese Coast Guard patrol vessels and Chinese vessels into the contiguous and even territorial waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands increased significantly, as did the number of fighters deployed by Japan to control and supervise its airspace. Japan adopted an increasingly assertive national security strategy in the region, notably increased its military spending and consolidated defence alliances with other countries active in the region such as the United States, which has repeatedly expressed its military commitment to Japan's sovereignty and territorial integrity under the bilateral security treaty of 1951. Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) also considers the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands an integral part of its territory for reasons of history, geography and international law, though its policy regarding the dispute has drawn comparatively less international attention and caused less friction with Japan, which controls the islands.

In 2023, tension increased between China and Japan regarding the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, regarding the number of incidents in the nearby waters and airspace as well as the alliances, strategies and military manoeuvring of both countries in the region. The Japanese government reported that in 2023, a total of 1,287 Chinese government ships operated in the area adjacent to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (between 12 and 24 nautical miles) for 352 days, the most since records have been kept (since 2008). According to some Japanese media outlets, in 2024 the Chinese government intends to increase the number of

incursions every day of the year and to authorise the Chinese Coast Guard to conduct on-site inspections of Japanese fishing vessels when it deems necessary. Tokyo also complained that Chinese Coast Guard ships maintained an uninterrupted presence in the contiguous Senkaku/Diaoyu Island area for 134 consecutive days between August and December and even entered Japanese territorial waters (12 nautical miles from the coast) for 42 days. Chinese incursions into the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands have increased substantially in recent years, rising from one between 2009 and 2011 to 23 in 2012 and holding steady at around 30 in recent years. Each time Chinese Coast Guard ships enter the territorial waters of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, Tokyo sends the Japanese Coast Guard to the disputed area to demand that the Chinese ships leave. Sometimes Tokyo raises a diplomatic protest to Beijing. At various times of the year, but especially between October and December, both countries accused each other of invading the vicinity of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Incidents, dangerous manoeuvres and intimidating movements were reported between Chinese and Japanese coast guard patrol vessels and other ships.

In April 2023, the Japanese government declared that between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, it deployed 778 fighters, the vast majority (575) against Chinese aircraft (575) and Russian aircraft (116). Though fewer than the over 1,000 fighters deployed in 2021, some media outlets suggested that the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine caused a drop in the number of Russian aircraft flying near Japan. Since 2013, over 700 fighters on average per year have taken off to monitor Japan's airspace or Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). For example, in December 2023 Tokyo deployed several fighters in response to the joint flight of 17 Chinese and Russian aircraft near Japan and, shortly thereafter, the joint flight of two Chinese bombers and two Russian bombers over the Sea of Japan. The Chinese government also issued several warnings against Japanese planes flying near the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands during the year. Such incidents have increased exponentially since Beijing included the islands' airspace in its ADIZ in 2013, requiring any foreign aircraft to request authorisation to enter its ADIZ and reserving the possibility of taking emergency defensive action.

At various times during 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida warned that China's growing aggressiveness in the region, as well as Russia and North Korea's military activities, were causing Japan to confront the most dangerous and complex security crisis since the end of the Second World War. Specifically, Kishida accused China of permanently harassing its neighbours in the East and South China Seas and warned that China's military development presents an unprecedented strategic challenge for Japan and the international community. Along these lines, in 2023 Japan strengthened its defence alliances with other countries, increased its military budget and continued to deploy the new national security strategy approved in December 2022, which many analysts interpreted as an important turning point for the self-defence strategy that the country has followed since the end of the Second World War, largely due to the restrictions on defence imposed by the powers that won it. Among other issues, the new security strategy includes the acquisition within 10 years of counterattack capabilities to stop aggression against the country much sooner and at a greater distance, as well as the doubling of its defence spending by 2027, giving it the third-largest military budget in the world, only behind the US and China. In 2023, Tokyo also substantially increased the budget of the Japanese Coast Guard, the government agency most active in controlling the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and the Japanese Coast Guard, police and Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) conducted exercises to improve coordination between them in the event that Japan suffered an attack and the Japanese Coast Guard had to be integrated into the ministry of defence. Finally, in mid-March Japan deployed the JSDF and missiles on the island of Ishigaki (in Okinawa prefecture), near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and Taiwan. The next day, it conducted exercises for the first time to evacuate more than 100,000 people from the islands near Taiwan.

Japan also substantially strengthened its alliances and defence pacts with many actors operating in the region in 2023. In addition to the joint military exercises that it conducts with the US routinely each year and its acquisition of large amounts of war equipment from Washington, Japan and the United Kingdom signed a defence pact in January, the first of its kind with a European country, which includes the possibility of joint military training and exercises and even the deployment of troops in their respective countries. In January, Tokyo announced a strategic partnership with Italy. In January and March, it held its first joint military and air exercises with India. In March, it conducted joint military exercises in the region with the US, Canada, India and South Korea. In October, it carried out joint military exercises with the US and South Korea. In early November, negotiations began between Japan and the Philippines for the deployment of troops in their respective countries. In November, senior Japanese political officials proposed including Japan in AUKUS, the strategic defence alliance between the US, the United Kingdom and Australia. Finally, in December, Japan conducted its first trilateral military exercises with the US and Australia. There was also rapprochement between Japan and NATO. In July, during the NATO summit in Lithuania, both sides announced their intention to increase their cooperation in several defensive areas (such as cybersecurity) and to increase NATO's presence in the Indo-Pacific region, prompting significant criticism from the Chinese government.

China – Philippines	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources International
Main parties:	China, Philippines, USA

Summary:

As part of the conflict between several states in the South China Sea, in recent years the territorial dispute between China and the Philippines that has had the greatest military, political and diplomatic implications has been over two land formations located in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines (200 nautical miles from the coast, in what the Philippines calls the East Philippine Sea). Beijing claims these territories as its own, as they fall within the "ten-dash line", a region covering approximately 90% of the South China Sea. The first of these territories, Scarborough Shoal, was occupied by the Philippines until 2012, when a naval incident between both countries led China to assume de facto control. The second disputed territory is Second Thomas Shoal (also known as Ayungin in Tagalog and Renai in Chinese), a sandbar in the Spratly Islands that is about 100 nautical miles from the island of Palawan (Philippines) and 620 from China, but only about 20 miles from Mischief Reef, controlled and militarised by Beijing. Since 1999, the Philippines has permanently maintained troops aboard a Second World War ship stranded in Second Thomas Shoal to ensure its control. Alongside the maritime incidents reported in the vicinity of both disputed territories, in 2016 an arbitration tribunal of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ruled that there was no legal basis for China's appeal to historical rights over resources falling within the "ten-dash line", noted that China had violated the Philippines' sovereign rights over its exclusive economic zone and declared that the disputed geography of the Spratly Islands does not compose an exclusive economic zone, as Beijing argues. However, neither China nor Taiwan recognised the validity of the ruling, asserting that territorial disputes are not subject to the UNCLOS and should be resolved through bilateral negotiations. On several occasions, the US has publicly recalled its military obligations towards the Philippines under their bilateral Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951.

Political and military tension between China and the Philippines increased substantially in 2023, with some of the most serious maritime incidents in recent years, a rise in bellicose rhetoric and the strengthening of defensive alliances between Manila and several countries, especially the US. In early February, Manila reported that the Chinese Coast Guard carried out dangerous manoeuvres less than 140 metres from several Philippine ships and used a military-grade laser against one of its vessels near Second Thomas Shoal, temporarily blinding the crew. According to some media outlets, a laser attack is often considered hostile because it can precede the firing of projectiles at a target. Manila also reported in February that around 30 Chinese vessels remained in its exclusive economic zone and that the Chinese Coast Guard sent radio warnings to several Philippine planes flying over Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippine government summoned the Chinese ambassador for consultations to express

its serious concern over the increasing frequency and intensity of China's activity and what it considered a clear violation of the Philippines' sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea. **Some analysts think that the Philippine government's decision to publicly reveal China's use of the laser and to summon its ambassador is a turning point in the foreign policy that Manila has pursued thus far, especially under the administration of Rodrigo Duterte**. This strategy, described as "assertive transparency" by some media outlets, mainly consists of openly denouncing Chinese transgressions in its exclusive economic zone and intensifying patrols in the area. Shortly thereafter, in March, Manila reported that over 40 vessels belonging to the Chinese Coast Guard, the Chinese Navy and the Chinese Maritime Militia (fishing boats that according to some analysts operate in coordination with the Chinese authorities) remained in the vicinity of Thitu/Pagasa Island, administered by the Philippines. In late April, Manila stated that more than 100 Chinese vessels were sighted in the region and claimed that several of its coastal patrol vessels almost collided with a Chinese Navy ship. In August, military tension between both countries rose again after the Chinese Coast Guard fired water cannons at Philippine ships on a mission to resupply the grounded Second World War ship BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal. Some analysts believe that the high pressure of water cannons can sink ships and cause serious harm and even death to crew. In October, a Chinese Coast Guard ship collided with a Philippine supply ship about 25 km off Second Thomas Shoal in addition to another collision between a Chinese Maritime Militia vessel and a Philippine Coast Guard ship. Shortly before, a Chinese ship had come within about 320 meters of a Philippine ship southwest of Thitu/Pagasa Island, Manila's largest outpost in the South China Sea. In December, there were two other incidents that the Philippine government considered serious. In the first, Chinese ships used water cannons eight times against Philippine ships on a humanitarian mission to distribute products to fishermen near Scarborough Shoal, controlled by China since 2012. In the second, Manila reported that Chinese ships used water cannons against ships on a resupply mission in Second Thomas Shoal, seriously damaging one of the ships and endangering the lives of its crew. The Philippine Coast Guard said that it was harassed by a total of 13 ships belonging to the Chinese Coast Guard and the Chinese Maritime Militia and that it detected over 48 Chinese vessels in the area, the largest number of maritime forces in relation to supply missions. As in previous incidents in the vicinity of Second Thomas Shoal, the Chinese government said that it had to take legitimate defensive measures after the Philippine supply ships ignored repeated warnings that they had illegally entered the waters adjacent to Second Thomas Shoal, claimed as belonging to Beijing.

Alongside a clear increase in incidents and episodes of conflict between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, **President Marcos announced his intention to**

modernise and increase the budgetary allocation of the Philippine Armed Forces, citing the challenges facing the county in the South China Sea. Moreover, in 2023 the Philippines significantly boosted its cooperation with various countries that also have territorial disputes with China, such as India, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. Particularly noteworthy is Manila's enhanced cooperation on security and defence issues with Australia, the US and Japan. In November, the Philippines and Australia carried out joint maritime and air patrols in the South China Sea for the first time. In 2023, the Philippine and Japanese governments decided to begin negotiations for a Reciprocal Access Agreement aimed at facilitating the accommodation of visiting forces and conducting joint military training activities. The agreement would be Japan's first with an ASEAN member state and the third it has signed in its history after the agreements with Australia and the United Kingdom. Some analysts do not rule out that both countries could even sign a broader pact, such as a Visiting Forces Agreement, similar to the one that the US and the Philippines have had for years, prompting some in the media to describe the current relationship between the Philippines and Japan as a "quasi-alliance". In June, the Philippine, Japanese and US coast guards conducted joint manoeuvres in the South China Sea, the first of this type.

In February 2023, the United States and the Philippines announced a deal to expand their Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to allow US military access to four additional military installations in the Philippines. Several analysts considered the agreement as one of the most significant recent developments in the relations between the United States and the Philippines and noted that it could have important geostrategic implications for the South China Sea and the East China Sea, as well as for the relations between China and the US. On 3 April, Manila announced the locations of the four additional bases accessible to US forces under the EDCA, three of which are in the north, facing Taiwan, and the other near the Spratly Islands. Washington announced that it would allocate over $100 million by the end of fiscal year 2023 to improve infrastructure at the five existing EDCA sites and support quick implementation of the four new sites. Although Marcos said that the new bases were for purely defensive purposes and should not cause concern to anyone who does not attack the country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Beijing warned that the expansion of the EDCA will seriously harm Philippine national interests and endanger regional peace and stability. On several occasions during the year, the US government repeated its military commitment to the Philippines under the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty. In April, the US and the Philippines carried out the largest joint military exercise ever, involving more than 17,000 troops. In November 2023 and early January 2024, both countries carried out joint patrols from the Taiwan Strait to the South China Sea. Finally, the relationship between both countries

deteriorated following China's publication in August of an updated map of the country that included territorial claims contested by other countries on the western border with India, the South China Sea and Taiwan. The new "ten-dash line," which covers 90% of the South China Sea, includes the entire island of Taiwan (the tenth dash), as well as several small islands and islets claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Philippine government claimed that the map was intended to legitimise China's alleged sovereignty and jurisdiction over maritime and territorial areas of the Philippines and asserted that its position had no basis in international law or in the 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated China's claims in the South China Sea.

China – Taiwan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Territory, Resources, System International
Main parties:	China, Taiwan, USA

Summary:
The conflict between the People's Republic of China (China) and Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) dates back to 1949, after the Communist Party of China won the Chinese Civil War (1927-36 and 1945-49) against the government of the Republic of China (created in 1912 and led by the Kuomintang party). This victory led to Mao Zedong's proclamation of the People's Republic of China and the flight of Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai Chek and hundreds of thousands of people to the island of Formosa (Taiwan), where the Kuomintang established authoritarian one-party rule and martial law until the country's democratisation in the late 1980s. Since its creation in 1949, the People's Republic of China has considered Taiwan a rebellious province, refusing to establish diplomatic relations with it and asserting that no country that wants to maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing can recognise Taiwan. On various occasions, different Chinese leaders have expressed their desire to achieve reunification under the principle of "one country, two systems", but they have not ruled out the use of force to do so. The Republic of China, which exercises effective control over Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu and smaller islands, maintained that it was the sole legitimate representative of China and its territory until 1991, when it stopped considering the Communist Party a rebel group and recognised its jurisdiction over mainland China. Until 1971, the Republic of China (Taiwan) represented China in the United Nations, occupying a permanent seat on the Security Council. That year, the United Nations recognised Beijing as the sole legitimate representative of China. Washington did the same in 1979 as part of the normalisation of its diplomatic relations. Alongside the political tensions associated with the political status of Taiwan, there have been three significant military episodes. In 1954-55, Beijing bombed the islands of Kinmen, Matsu and Tachen and took effective control of the Yijiangshan Islands, prompting the signing of the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty in 1954. In 1958, the People's Republic of China bombed the islands of Kinmen and Matsu again and there was a naval clash between both countries around Dongding Island. In 1995 and 1996, Beijing launched several missiles coinciding with the 1996 presidential election, the first direct election to end authoritarian rule.

In 2023, both China's military pressure on Taiwan and the political tension between both countries rose significantly. This tension was linked to the upcoming presidential election in Taiwan in January 2024, the rise in military cooperation between Taiwan and the US and Taiwan's foreign relations with the US and other countries. **Many Chinese aircraft (1,714) entered Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ),** an area much larger than Taiwan's airspace. Some countries have established ADIZs to have more time to identify potentially hostile aircraft. The most concerning development, however, was the clear rise in airplanes crossing the "median line" between China and Taiwan, a de facto maritime border (though not official or sanctioned by any treaty) drawn in 1955 to minimise the risk of clashes and accidental collisions in the Taiwan Strait. Except for a sporadic incursion stemming from a brief diplomatic incident in 1999, China tacitly respected the median line until 2019. Following the election of Tsai Ing-wen as president of Taiwan in January 2020, Beijing drastically increased its incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ and its crossing of the median line. **While there were 565 crossings of the median line, a few kilometres from Taiwan's territorial waters, in 2022, there were 703 in 2023**.

In September, Taiwan's ministry of defence reported that it had detected a record number of combat Chinese aircraft (103) flying over the airspace around Taiwan in just one day. Throughout 2023, Taipei said that it was detecting between 150 and 200 Chinese ships per month in nearby waters. In response to all this Chinese activity, particular the incursions of Chinese aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ and the crossing of the median line by Chinese aircraft and ships, **the Taiwanese government deployed its jet aircraft and coast guard ships hundreds of times and even activated its missile system on occasion.**

The frequency, scope and complexity of China's military exercises also increased during 2023. Particularly noteworthy are the military exercises that Beijing held in early April, in which dozens of Chinese fighter jets and warships simulated attacks on Taiwan and surrounded the island. These exercises were a response to the meeting held a few days earlier in the United States by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, during which both reaffirmed the solid alliance between the two countries. In late April, Taiwan said that 548 incursions by Chinese aircraft into its ADIZ had been reported during that month. In July, China also conducted exercises with fighters, bombers and warships south and southwest of the island. A few days later, Taiwan held its annual military exercises. In April, China sent a drone around Taiwan for the first time. It did so again five more times over the course of the rest of the year. Some analysts also warned of the growing presence of Chinese aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean, from

Many Chinese aircraft (1,714) entered Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ)

where planes take off in the direction of the eastern coast of Taiwan, which is much less protected than the western one, and carry out military exercises to repel the United States in the event of an invasion of Taiwan. During the year, the United States, Taiwan and other countries complained of China's growing aggressiveness towards ships conducting freedom of navigation operations in international waters. In June, for example, the governments of Canada and the United States reported that two of their ships sailing through the Taiwan Strait nearly collided with a Chinese warship due to its dangerous manoeuvring. **Washington said that the Chinese Army has become more aggressive against US surveillance aircraft in the Pacific, carrying out more than 180 risky interceptions (300 if other countries are included) since 2021, more than in the entire previous decade**.

Another source of tension throughout the year was **the rise in military cooperation between the United States and Taiwan**. In February, for example, several media outlets reported Washington's intention to increase the number of troops deployed in Taiwan from the current 30 to between 100 and 200. At around the same time, a US bicameral congressional delegation met in Taipei with President Tsai and both parties pledged to continue strengthening defence ties. A few days later, Taiwan's foreign minister and the Secretary General of the Taiwanese National Security Council met in Washington with the Undersecretary of State and other senior US government officials to discuss military cooperation between the two countries. In addition to the many contracts signed between the government of Taiwan and US companies to modernise or enhance Taiwan's military capabilities and Washington's approval of several military aid packages for Taiwan, in July the US House of Representatives and in December the Senate passed a law allowing substantial expenditure to boost Taiwan's defensive capabilities, including military training and exercises, greater interoperability with US forces and greater cooperation between both countries on cybersecurity and military intelligence. The law also stipulates a report that the secretary of defence must submit semi-annually to Congress on China's military activities in Taiwan, South-east Asia, and the South China Sea. **In 2023, Taiwan's defence spending reached a record high of more than $19 billion, but experts in the field estimate that China spends about twelve times more than Taiwan on its military**. Taiwan has about 169,000 active troops (and about two million in reserve), while China's military has over two million active troops, the most in the world. In August, during a meeting with MPs from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, President Tsai asked if Taiwan could participate in the NATO Centres of Excellence in the Baltic countries, which address issues such as cybersecurity, communications and energy security.

Finally, **the presidential election in Taiwan in January 2024 also gave rise to escalating rhetoric and Chinese military pressure on Taiwan**, increasing the number of ships crossing the median line and planes entering Taiwan's ADIZ. On a rhetorical level, at the end of the year the Chinese government declared that Taiwanese independence would mean war, and Xi Jinping once again repeated that Taiwan's reunification with China was a historical inevitability during his end-of-year speech. Beijing also said that the results of the election would not change the fact that Taiwan is a non-negotiable part of China. Beijing has considered Taiwan a rebel province since 1949. In fact, some analysts believe that tension between China and Taiwan has reached its peak since 1996, when Beijing fired missiles off the coast of Taiwan during Taiwan's first democratic elections to end the Kuomintang's decades of authoritarianism.

Korea, DPR – Rep. of Korea	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
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 rise in political and military tension between North Korea and the United States and Pyongyang's notable weapons development during 2023, several analysts indicated that relations between North Korea and South Korea reached their tensest and most delicate stage of development in recent years. Although there were no significant episodes of war between the two countries, Kim Jong-un warned of the possibility of war on the Korean Peninsula on several occasions.

Relations between North Korea and South Korea reached their tensest and most delicate stage in recent years, according to various analysts

Furthermore, both countries' suspension of a 2018 agreement to improve bilateral relations in November hindered any contact or negotiations and paved the way for more militarisation and belligerent incidents on the land and maritime border. In January, tension rose significantly after South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol warned that his country could develop its own nuclear weapons if the nuclear threat from North Korea persisted or increased, adding that South Korea's scientific and technological capabilities gave reason to believe that such weapons would be developed quickly. Previously, Kim Jong-un had promised an exponential increase of North Korea's nuclear arsenal during 2023 in response to the threat posed to his country by the US and South Korea. In late January, the United Nations Command (UNC), the UN mission under US jurisdiction that has monitored the armistice since 1953, concluded an investigation indicating that both North and South Korea had violated the 1953 armistice by deploying drones across the border (in late December, North Korea sent five such drones into South Korean airspace, prompting Seoul to send another drone to North Korea). Later, in April, the South Korean Armed Forces fired warning shots to expel a North Korean patrol vessel that crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the de facto maritime border between the two countries drawn by the UNC at the end of the Korean War (1950-53). South Korea has patrolled the waters around the NLL for decades because North Korea does not recognise the NLL and considers the border to be in waters controlled by South Korea. During the operation to expel the North Korean ship, a South Korean patrol boat collided with a nearby Chinese fishing boat due to poor visibility, causing minor injuries to part of the South Korean crew.

The episode with the greatest political impact of the year occurred in late November, when North Korea launched a military reconnaissance satellite into orbit after two failed attempts in 2023 and Seoul responded by resuming aerial surveillance along the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and **partially suspending the agreement signed in 2018** by Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moo Jae-in during a time of rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea, as well as between North Korea and the US. The next day, Pyongyang completely pulled out of the agreement, officially known as the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, which some analysts consider the highest expression of the prospects for achieving the reunification and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula through dialogue. Among other issues, the agreement provided for transforming the DMZ into a zone of peace, completely ceasing all hostile acts on land, air and sea as of 2 May 2018, jointly designing a plan to turn the areas around the NLL in the West Sea into a maritime zone

of peace to avoid accidental military clashes and ensure safe fishing activities and periodically holding military meetings at the highest level, including between the defence ministers of both countries. The 2018 agreement also reaffirmed the Non-Aggression Agreement, which excludes the use of any form of force against each other, called for disarmament to be carried out gradually as military tension eased and substantial progress was made in building military trust and confirmed the common goal of achieving a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons. Both countries were committed to actively holding trilateral meetings with the United States or quadrilateral meetings with China with a view to declaring the end of the war and establishing a permanent system of peace on the Korean Peninsula, as well as to take confidence-building action (such as by establishing a joint liaison office to facilitate dialogue between authorities, jointly managing humanitarian issues and the programme for reuniting families separated by war, jointly participating in international sporting events and connecting and modernising railways and border roads).

At the end of the year, Kim Jong-un declared that his government would no longer seek or accept any type of dialogue about reunification and reconciliation, claiming that South Korea was the country's main enemy and that Seoul only sought "unification by absorption". The North Korean leader ordered the elimination of symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation (for example, he demanded the demolition of a monument in honour of the dream of reunification in Pyongyang) and the abolition of concepts such as "reunification", "reconciliation" and "compatriots" from the country's national history. North Korea also cut cross-border railways and eliminated government agencies managing relations and dialogue with South Korea. Kim Jong-un also asked the legislative assembly to rewrite North Korea's Constitution to specify that the country will seek to "occupy, subjugate and claim" South Korea as part of North Korean territory if another war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula and said that the North Korean Armed Forces would completely annihilate the US and South Korea if North Korea were provoked. In fact, in his usual speech at the end of the year at the Workers' Party congress, he said that war could break out on the Korean Peninsula at any moment.

Korea, DPR - USA, Japan, Rep. of Korea[66]	
Intensity:	3
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.

Alongside the notable deterioration of inter-Korean relations, tension clearly rose during the year between North Korea and several countries (especially the United States, South Korea and Japan) over Pyongyang's weapons programme. Other causes of concern included the growing defence cooperation between North Korea and Russia, the South Korean government's demands regarding the development of nuclear capabilities, the increase in joint military exercises between the US and South Korea and the strengthening of the trilateral military alliance between the US, Japan and South Korea. At the end of 2023, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un noted that it had been a year of great transformation and progress in Pyongyang's weapons development. **In addition to the launch of several short- and medium-range ballistic missiles over the course of the year, the two highlights were the launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the sending of a military reconnaissance satellite into orbit. Five tests were conducted with intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2023, three of which used the Hwasong 18 model, the most powerful weapon in North Korea's nuclear arsenal according to Kim Jong-un.** Such missiles are propelled with solid fuel (which are much more difficult to detect than those that run on liquid fuel) and, according to some analysts, can transport a nuclear warhead and reach a distance of about 15,000 kilometres, striking many different targets in the United States. According to these analysts, the test that Pyongyang carried out in December, at an altitude of about 6,000 kilometres, was the most successful. Previously, Pyongyang's release of photos of a nuclear warhead casing prompted speculation about the progress it has been making in its ability to miniaturise nuclear warheads so they can be attached to ballistic missiles. North Korea's second most notable technological leap of the year was its launch into orbit of a military reconnaissance satellite in late November, one of the five military priorities for the five-year period 2021-2026 announced by Kim Jong-un in January 2023. Although the South Korean government was sceptical about the progress that the

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

satellite technology could represent, some analysts suggest that its successful operation could be a turning point in North Korea's ability to obtain information about military resources and strategies from South Korea and the United States. Pyongyang made two previous attempts to launch the satellite in May and August, both times drawing criticism from the international community on the grounds that it contravened several UN Security Council resolutions. The fact that the satellite was launched shortly after a meeting in Russia between Kim Jong-un and Russian President Vladimir Putin led to speculation that the Russian government may have collaborated in developing the satellite launch technology. According to this speculation, the North Korean government had provided considerable ammunition for Russia's war against Ukraine, as US intelligence sources confirmed in October. In addition to consulting on satellite launches, some analysts indicate that Pyongyang would also be interested in collaborating with Russia to obtain nuclear submarines, modernise its fighter fleet and obtain surface-to-air missiles. Before the meeting between Kim Jong-un and Putin, the Russian defence minister had travelled to Pyongyang in July to attend the events of the 70th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War (1950-1953), together with a member of the Chinese Politburo, in one of the highest-ranking visits to North Korea in recent years. In October, the Russian foreign minister met with the North Korean leader, while in November the Russian minister of natural resources met in North Korea with the North Korean minister of foreign economic relations to sign an agreement on joint geological exploration in North Korea.

On several occasions, the President of South Korea expressed his country's willingness to develop its own nuclear capabilities to confront the North Korean weapons programme

Another source of greater tension on the Korean Peninsula was the deepening of South Korea's military cooperation with the United States and Japan, both bilaterally and trilaterally. In August, a summit was held in Camp David (USA) for the trilateral alliance between the leaders of South Korea, the United States and Japan in which they pledged to further extend their military cooperation, share intelligence information, coordinate their responses and policies regarding North Korea and hold an annual summit-level meeting for the Trilateral Indo-Pacific Dialogue. In February, October and December, the three countries conducted joint military exercises, in some cases in response to missile launches by North Korea. Relations between South Korea and Japan, historically harmed by the Japanese Empire's annexation of the Korean Peninsula between 1910 and 1945, were also notably strengthened during the year. The top leaders of both countries, who met in Tokyo and Seoul in March and May, respectively, agreed to compensate some of the victims of the colonial era, strengthen their military cooperation and improve integration of their respective defence systems.

In late April, the United States and South Korea issued their joint Washington Declaration after the summit between US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, during which both leaders promised to strengthen their historic defensive alliance (which marked its 70th anniversary in 2024), develop US deterrent capabilities on the Korean Peninsula, boost the magnitude of their joint military exercises, deploy nuclear submarines in South Korean ports and especially create the **Nuclear Consultative Group** (NCG). This group, which met twice during the year, **aims to give a greater role to the South Korean government in the US nuclear strategy on the Korean Peninsula and to provide an outlet for Yoon Suk-yeol's desire, expressed several times, for South Korea to develop its own nuclear capabilities to confront the North Korean weapons programme**. After the Washington Declaration was issued in April, the United States sent a nuclear submarine to the South Korean port of Busan twice, in June and December. The United States and South Korea conducted some of the largest military naval, land and air exercises in recent times in 2023, with those held in March (Freedom Shield), May and June (the largest ever carried out near the border) and August (Ulchi Freedom Shield) standing out especially for their magnitude. Finally, military tension rose between North Korea and the US in the middle of the year. In July, North Korea threatened to shoot down US reconnaissance planes that it claimed had crossed the demarcated maritime border and entered its exclusive economic zone. In mid-August, Pyongyang deployed military aircraft in response to what it considered a new US incursion into its exclusive economic zone, calling it militarily provocative.

South Asia

Afghanistan - Pakistan	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government International
Main parties:	Afghanistan, Pakistan

Summary:
Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have historically been characterised by complexity and disputes over the borderline established during the British colonisation of Pakistan known as the Durand Line, which divided the Pashtun population. In 1996, the Islamic Emirate was established in Afghanistan. It was governed by the Taliban, a religious and military movement formed in 1994 by men who had trained in religious schools in Pakistan and promoted by the Pakistani secret services. Pakistan was one of the few countries to recognise the Taliban government of Afghanistan. Following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the fall of the Taliban regime, Pakistan sided with

the US government, though the Taliban continued to receive Pakistani support and established important operational bases in Pakistan. Although Pakistan always officially denied having helped the Taliban, parts of the government, the secret services and the Pakistani Armed Forces provided them with logistical, military and political support during the two decades of armed conflict and foreign military presence in Afghanistan. With the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021, the government of Pakistan pressured the new Afghan authorities to exercise control over the Pakistani Taliban insurgency, the armed group TTP. The Afghan Taliban government tried to mediate between the Pakistani government and the TTP, but after the negotiations failed, tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan increased.

Throughout 2023, tension between the two countries increased, with some episodes of violence on the border, constant diplomatic clashes and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Following the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement between the government of Pakistan and the Pakistani Taliban armed group TTP in November 2022 and the escalation of violence in Pakistan during 2023, the Pakistani government stepped up pressure on the Taliban government of Afghanistan, demanding that it halt its support for the insurgency. Afghanistan had offered to act as a mediator and facilitated contact between the Pakistani government and the TTP. However, after the negotiations failed, the Pakistani government accused the Afghan government of allowing the TTP to operate from Afghan soil to carry out its attacks against the Pakistani security forces. Given the Afghan government's refusal to take action against the TTP, claiming that it is an internal Pakistani problem, tension escalated between both governments. In October, there was a considerable spike in tension when Pakistan announced a plan for the mass deportation of foreigners, designed specifically for the Afghan population. The announcement came after fighting between Pakistani security forces and the TTP in Chitral, on the border between both countries, in which four soldiers and at least 12 insurgents were killed. Between three and four million Afghans reside in Pakistan, 600,000 of which arrived from Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. According to the International Crisis Group, 1.3 million Afghans are legally registered as refugees and 850,000 have an Afghan Citizen Card that grants them some protection. However, nearly two million people do not have any documentation authorising their residence in Pakistan, and this figure could be higher due to the porosity of the borders between both countries, which makes frequent population movement easy. After the plan was announced, people began to get deported and return voluntarily in the face of threats from the Pakistani government of expropriation, detention and punishment, even for Pakistanis providing support to Afghan people living in the country illegally. By the end of the year, 500,000 people had been deported to Afghanistan in highly vulnerable conditions, as the Pakistani authorities limited the amount of livestock and money that returnees could bring to a value of $175.

In November, Pakistan's interim Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar, charged with leading the country until the elections scheduled for the first quarter of 2024, claimed that Afghanistan's Taliban government was supporting the TTP insurgents, which had contributed to the escalation of violence in Pakistan. This accusation was unprecedented due to its lack of ambiguity. Kakar is considered close to the Pakistani Armed Forces and demanded that Afghanistan hand over those responsible for committing acts of terrorism in Pakistan, noting that although Pakistan hoped that the change in Afghanistan's government would lead to peace, it had increased TTP violence in Pakistan. His assertions were denied by the Afghan government, which in turn demanded that the Pakistani authorities behave in accordance with the "principles of Islam" in an attempt to stop the forced return of tens of thousands of people. In addition to the deportations, the government of Pakistan also increased obstacles to trade, which could have a serious impact on the frayed Afghan economy, which is already facing one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. The return of hundreds of thousands of people to Afghanistan may also be having a significant impact on the humanitarian situation in the country, though the Afghan government announced the establishment of camps to receive the returnees.

India (Manipur)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups (PLA, PREPAK, PREPAK (Pro), KCP, KYKL, RPF, UNLF, KNF, KNA)

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

Tension escalated in the Indian state of Manipur, with clashes between members of the Meitei and Kuki

communities that claimed 163 lives, according to figures compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal. In October, the International Crisis Group noted that at least 176 people had died as a result of violence since the socio-political crisis escalated in May, making it the highest associated death toll since 2009. The violence also forcibly displaced more than 67,000 people. The crisis began after the Manipur High Court directed the government to consider "scheduled tribe" status for the state's Meitei population, the majority ethnic group in Manipur, which is Hindu and lives in the capital and flat parts of the state. The ruling was opposed mainly by the Kuki and Naga minority communities, which live in the mountainous areas of the state and are mostly Christian. Among other issues, "scheduled tribe" status provides access to reserved quotas in jobs and public services. The High Court's ruling also allowed the Meitei to acquire land in areas inhabited by the Kuki, which increased Kuki fears of losing territorial control. After learning of the High Court's ruling, the organisation All Tribal Students' Union Manipur called for protests in 10 mountainous districts of the state, where the majority of the Kuki population lives. During **the protests, there were riots and clashes between protesters and the police in which many people were injured**. Houses were also burned by Meitei militias made up of thousands of people. As a result of the violence, a curfew was established and the Indian Army was deployed with orders to shoot without warning. In addition, 20,000 people were evacuated, including Meitei who lived in predominantly Kuki areas and vice versa. These evacuees were transferred to camps for displaced people.

In July, a video went viral showing scenes of sexual violence perpetrated by a group of Meitei men against two women from the Kuki community, triggering new clashes and riots. The video had not previously been released as a result of Internet restrictions that the Indian government imposed after the May riots. Many women spoke out in defence of the victims. Multiple complaints subsequently emerged about other cases of sexual violence and the police were accused of complicity with the perpetrators. Human rights organisations also noted that fake news had spread about sexual violence against Meitei women, leading to an intensification of unrest. There were no formal complaints of sexual violence against Meitei women, whereas over a dozen cases of sexual violence against Kuki women were reported. As a consequence of the violence, segregation between the Kuki and Meitei communities increased significantly, drastically reducing the areas inhabited by people from both groups. In the following months, violence and clashes continued. The police, made up mainly of members of the Meitei community, accused the federal security body Assam Rifles of supporting the Kuki insurgency in the state and the Meitei increased their demands for the government to withdraw Assam Rifles from Manipur. In March, the Indian government ended the ceasefire agreement that it had upheld since 2008 with the Kuki armed groups Kuki National Army and Zoumi Revolutionary Front, accusing both insurgent groups of being behind the social protests that had taken place in the districts of Churachandpur, Kangpokpi and Tengnoupa, demanding that the state respect tribal land rights.

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. There was a serious escalation of tension in 2020, with the first direct fighting between the armies of both countries in which 20 Indian soldiers died.

Tension between both countries did subside throughout the year and despite political and military talks at different levels, no positive progress was made. Though there were no direct clashes or any episode of escalation of the crisis as had happened in 2022, the tension remained and different analysts said there were risks that it could rise on a large scale. The risk factors include both countries' enormous military deployment, as well as the military structures that have been built since the 2020 crisis and the development of infrastructure by both countries to enable rapid troop deployment in case military tension escalates again. The International Crisis Group estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 Chinese troops are deployed in the area, with the possibility of adding 120,000 more soldiers within a week.[67] India has 50,000 soldiers in the area and has deployed heavy weaponry. Political and military talks

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67. International Crisis Group, *Thin Ice in the Himalayas: Handling the India-China Border Dispute*, Asia Report no. 334, 14 November 2023

continued throughout the year, but no agreement was reached for the complete military withdrawal from the disputed areas where military buffer zones have been agreed to prevent a direct clash between both armies. Twenty rounds of high-level military talks have been carried out since the crisis broke out in 2020, but none of those that took place in 2023 made any real progress, though both sides agreed to continue them. In addition to the technical military dialogue, some high-level political meetings took place during the year, such as the informal conversation between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the BRICS summit in South Africa in late August. After this meeting, the Chinese president said that the border dispute did not reflect all bilateral relations between the two countries. Days after the BRICS summit, however, China published a new standardised map of its territory that included areas disputed with India in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. India responded by discrediting China's border demarcation. President Xi did not attend the G20 summit in New Delhi, which India hosted for the first time. It was also the first time that a Chinese president did not attend this summit that brings together the 19 largest economies in the world and the EU. Xi's absence at the G20 summit showed the gap between both governments and the risk of escalating tension, though many media outlets described the summit as a diplomatic success for Modi. Though there were no serious military incidents during the year, there were some episodes of tension. In April, the Indian home minister announced more resources for security in Arunachal Pradesh in response to China's construction of many towns in areas near the Actual Line of Control, the de facto border between both countries. The Chinese government makes settlers in these newly built "model towns" participate in joint patrols in areas near the border. In July, the Indian authorities said that China had pitched some tents in the eastern Ladakh military buffer zone, which were removed following Indian protests.

South-east Asia

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

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.

Many clashes between the state security forces and the armed opposition group OPM continued to be reported in 2023, in addition to complaints of significant human rights violations as part of the Indonesian Armed Forces' counterinsurgency strategy and accusations that the OPM had attacked the civilian population. According to official government data, there were 209 incidents of political violence in Papua in 2023 in which 79 people died, including 37 civilians, 20 soldiers, three police officers and 19 members of armed groups. According to these same figures, the body count increased over the previous year, when 53 people lost their lives. According to other sources, the conflict was more intense. **The research centre ACLED noted that 187 events of political violence were reported in 2023, which caused 152 fatalities, notably more than in 2022**, when 81 people were killed in 104 episodes of violence. In 2022, the violence had already started to climb significantly, as a clearly higher number of civilians died (43) than in the two preceding years (27 and 28, respectively). According to the authorities, the area of Papua that experienced the highest number of violent incidents in 2023 was Yahukimo Regency, in Highland Papua Province. According to several human rights organisations, in September 2023 more than 76,000 people had been internally displaced by the conflict, significantly more than the estimated 60,000 at the beginning of the year. In March 2022, the United Nations stated that between 60,000 and 100,000 West Papuans had been forced to leave their homes since 2018. The dynamics of the conflict in 2023 remained in line with trends observed since 2018. Though the insurgency had observably stepped up its attacks in previous years (from 11 in 2010 to 52 in 2017), several analysts argue that the turning point came in 2018, firstly with the OPM's declaration of war against the Indonesian government, which also called for more attacks against foreign companies operating in Papua, and secondly with the murder of 19 construction workers in December 2018 in Nduga Regency (Highland Papua Province). According to these analysts, OPM armed attacks have increased in number, frequency, sophistication, lethality and territorial reach since then, after having historically been largely limited to the central highlands of the region (especially in the regencies of Puncak Jaya and Mimika, in Central Papua Province, and in the regency of Lanny Jaya, in Highland Papua Province). As such, they have expanded to areas traditionally less affected by the insurgency, such as Pegunungan Bintang, Intan Jaya, Yahukimo, Deiyai and Keerom.

One of the violent events with the greatest political impact in 2023 was an OPM attack in early February against an Indonesian light plane that had landed in Nduga Regency and the subsequent kidnapping of its five Indonesian passengers and pilot from New Zealand. The passengers were immediately released, but the OPM held the pilot hostage (he had not been released by the end of 2023) and publicly demanded that the government recognise Papua's sovereignty and end Indonesian colonialism in the region. They also demanded that several countries stop selling weapons to and training the Indonesian Armed Forces. The plane in question, which was set on fire, had been transporting material to the Timika area (where one of the largest gold and copper mines in the world operates) and was trying to evacuate 15 construction workers who had received death threats from the OPM. The workers were rescued by the Indonesian Armed Forces the day after the attack on the plane. In mid-April, the OPM declared that it had killed 15 soldiers in Nduga Regency during an ambush on a military contingent tasked with rescuing the kidnapped New Zealander pilot, though days later the government only acknowledged that five soldiers had died. In another significant incident of violence in early October, the military said five rebels were killed during a military operation in the mountainous Serambakon region of Highland Papua Province. Days later, in mid-October, the government declared that seven people were killed and 11 others wounded following an OPM attack against an illegal gold mine in Serdala, Yahukimo Regency. The OPM said that the mine workers were spies for the Indonesian Armed Forces and that they had warned civilians to leave the area before the attack. In late August, two workers were killed and seven were wounded following an OPM attack on a gold mine in Pegunungan Bintang Regency.

Thus, **the Indonesian government and some human rights organisations reported an increase in the OPM's threats and attacks against civilians in recent years**. Particularly noteworthy is the murder of activist Michelle Kurisi in late August in Lanny Jaya Regency (Highland Papua Province), claimed by the OPM in a statement in which it alleged that the victim had collaborated with the security forces and had engaged in espionage activities, including information related to the release of the kidnapped New Zealand pilot. In mid-August, Jakarta declared that three people (two of them government workers) died in an OPM attack on the truck in which they were travelling in Nduga Regency. At various times during the year, the OPM warned that foreign citizens in the region could be targeted by their actions and announced their intention to increasingly target certain aircraft landing in the region. During the year, in addition to the aforementioned attack in mid-February, the OPM carried out several attacks against aircraft. In March, the Indonesian airlines Wings Air and Trigana Air suspended their operations at the airport in Yahukimo Regency (Highland Papua Province) after an aircraft with 66 passengers on board was attacked by the OPM. In April, the OPM shot at a small plane that was landing in Intan Jaya Regency (Central Papua Province). In July, the OPM attacked a plane carrying military personnel at Pogapa Airport, also in Intan Jaya Regency.

Both the OPM and local and international human rights organisations said that the human rights situation was becoming worse in West Papua during 2023 and urged the government and the international community to reverse the trend. On 5 May 2023, **five Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council initiated correspondence with the government of Indonesia regarding cases of violence, including extrajudicial killings in West Papua**. Later, in early July, the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide expressed her concern about the human rights situation in Papua at the United Nations Human Rights Council, mentioning harassment, arbitrary arrest and land grabbing and encouraging the government of Indonesia to guarantee access to humanitarian assistance. In August, several human rights organisations called on the government to make some commitments to human rights in light of its bid to be elected as a member of the Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 period. Such commitments could include fully cooperating with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, eradicating impunity, guaranteeing the safety of human rights activists, allowing foreign journalists and international observers to access the region and ratifying several international human rights documents, especially the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Forced Disappearance (ICPPED). Also in mid-August, a human rights organisation based in Germany, Human Rights Monitor, reported that the Indonesian Armed Forces may have committed crimes against humanity in the counterinsurgency operations they conducted in September and October 2021 in the Kiwirok district, where they used helicopters, drones and heavy weapons. Both the OPM and some human rights organisations accused Jakarta and the Indonesian Armed Forces of significant human rights violations in the region in 2023. In late February, nine people were killed and 14 were injured in the city of Wamena (the largest in Highland Papua Province) during a police and military operation to break up protests sparked by rumours of the kidnapping of a child. In September, five children apparently shot to death were found at the mouth of the Brasa River, in Dekai, the capital of Yahukimo Regency (Highland Papua Province). The Indonesian Army said that they died during its fighting with the OPM, yet the OPM claimed that the deceased were civilians and not members of their group. Some civil society organisations reported that around 20 people were injured during a demonstration in Jayapura, the largest city in West Papua, to mark the 61st anniversary of the New York Agreement in 1962, which made Indonesia's annexation of Papua possible. According to these organisations, dozens were arrested in 2023 during the many demonstrations that took place throughout Papua in favour of the self-determination of the region and against human rights violations in Papua.

2.3.3.2 The Pacific

Papua New Guinea	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Identity, Resources, Territory, Self-government Internal
Main parties:	Government, community militias, Government of Bougainville

Summary:

In recent decades, high levels of intercommunity, clan and tribal tension and violence have been reported in various regions of Papua New Guinea, a country made up of more than 600 islands and with great cultural diversity (more than 850 languages are spoken). Most of this intercommunity violence, which especially affects the provinces of Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands, is linked to conflicts over land tenure (a very high percentage of which is regulated by customary law), though historically there have also been episodes of violence related to other issues, such as control of resources, family and clan rivalries and accusations of witchcraft and black magic, which have caused the death of dozens of people. Community tensions get worse around elections (as happened in 2022) and are becoming deadlier due to growing access to firearms. In addition, the regions most affected by intercommunity violence are among those that suffer from the highest rates of poverty, the lowest levels of formal education and the absence and fragility of institutions related to security, law enforcement and access to justice and conflict resolution.

A significant increase in community, clan and tribal violence was reported in various parts of the country in 2023, especially in the province of Enga, in the Highlands region. According to ACLED, 208 people were reportedly killed in Enga, clearly more than in 2022 (58) and 2021(52). However, some sources maintain that the real body count is closer to 300. According to several media outlets, tribal clashes throughout August caused the death of around 150 people. Other major episodes of community violence in Enga were reported in January, when Sangu, Mun and Malee community militias attacked the municipality of Tole, killing 11 people and kidnapping another 11; in March, when 44 people were killed in clashes between Pyakaili clans; in June, when clan fighting in the Wapenamanda district caused the death of 10 people; in July, when clashes involving the Kaekin and Sikin tribes against the Ambulin, Antiokon, Lungupin and Saus communities claimed 15 lives; in November, when fighting between the Maimai and Pokale clans resulted in an unknown death toll and the declaration of the Wapenamanda and Wabag districts as war zones, with an imposed curfew; and in December, when episodes of violence involving around 15 tribes and the Sau Walep and Itiokon Neninein clans claimed around 30 lives. Episodes of community violence were also reported in neighbouring provinces in the Highlands region during 2023. ACLED reported a body count of 44, adding that 347 people died in outbreaks of political and community violence in the country as a whole. According to the New Guinean

police, although clan and tribal-related clashes have been a historical reality in certain parts of the country, the intense violence and lethality observed in recent years is related to the development and outcome of the 2022 elections and to greater access to sophisticated weapons. Specifically, the police said that while a rise in violence is common during election periods, in last year's elections, certain communities were more aligned with certain local candidates, more patronage practices were detected and there were rumours and accusations of ballot box stuffing and fraud and bribery in counting the votes. The authorities said that while fighting in the past was done with very rudimentary weapons, **they have recently observed a greater use of automatic and sophisticated firearms. The regional authorities also cited the increasing use of "mercenaries" or people from outside the conflict zone who had been hired to participate in certain attacks.** In this regard, the police reported the deaths of at least 20 non-local people who had participated in the spiral of violence in Enga. The authorities also noted that the increase in drug trafficking from Indonesia could also be a factor in the rise in violence and the involvement of foreign mercenaries. They explained other impediments to preventing and ending community violence, such as the geographical dispersion of the population, the difficulty in accessing certain regions and especially the lack of police (in Enga, there are around 200 police officers serving about 300,000 people). The government deployed additional police forces in Enga and pledged to enact the legislative reforms to provide the state security forces with the resources and powers necessary to deal with what it described as "domestic terrorism". The high levels of violence drew much criticism from the opposition and several parties involved in the ruling coalition withdrew their parliamentary support for the government.

2.3.4. Europe

Eastern Europe

Belarus	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, social and political opposition, EU, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, United States, Ukraine, NATO, Russia

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 regime's massive crackdown on the demonstrations set off a serious political and social crisis. The war in Ukraine, triggered by Russia's invasion in 2022, which was assisted by Russian troops deployed in Belarus, increased tension inside Belarus and between it and Ukraine and Western actors.

Tensions remained high, as the repression unleashed since the serious electoral crisis of 2020 continued alongside rising militarisation in the country, influenced by the war in Ukraine and the tension between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors. In January, the Belarusian defence ministry announced the arrival of more troops, weapons and equipment, raising alarms about the risks of a new war front in Ukraine if Russia attacked from Belarus, as it did at the start of the invasion in 2022. However, this did not come to pass. In any case, Belarus continued to host Russian troops and training camps in 2023, with estimates of the number of troops varying between one and several thousand. In January, the Belarusian Army carried out joint military exercises with Russia in Belarus. Ukraine continued to denounce Russia's use of Belarusian airspace to launch drone and missile attacks. In February, Belarusian President Alexander **Lukashenko ordered the creation of a territorial defence force**, with volunteers that the defence ministry estimates will have between 100,000 and 150,000 members. Lukashenko warned that in the event of aggression, the country would respond severely and quickly. In April, Belarus asked Russia for security guarantees. In June, **Belarus and Russia announced Russia's first deployment of "tactical" nuclear weapons in Belarus**. Russian President Vladimir Putin warned in July that any attack on Belarus would be tantamount to attacking the Russian Federation.

After Wagner Group's failed armed uprising in Russia in June, its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and thousands of his mercenaries marched to Belarus as part of the conditions imposed on it by the Kremlin, with Lukashenko's alleged intermediation. Ukraine counted around 5,000 Wagner Group fighters in Belarus in July. Some analysts indicated that their arrival caused social tension and some opposition, even in the Belarusian Armed Forces.[68] The Belarusian defence ministry and Wagner Group reported conducting joint military training near the Polish border in July. In any case, some

Belarus and Russia announced the deployment of Russian "tactical" nuclear weapons in Belarus

analysts said that after Prigozhin's death in August,[69] there were significantly fewer Wagner Group troops and some media outlets estimated it had one thousand mercenaries at the beginning of 2024.

At the same time, **political and military tension increased between Belarus, on the one hand, and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, on the other**. Poland responded to the arrival of Wagner Group fighters in Belarus and to the joint military exercises near its the border with Belarus by deploying around one thousand troops there, according to some media outlets. Latvia also sent troops to the Polish border area. Poland warned that it was prepared for different scenarios and that it could close the border with Belarus and the enclave of Kaliningrad if the situation became critical. On several occasions, Poland and Belarus accused each other of violating their respective airspaces. Lithuania closed two border crossings with Belarus in August and revoked the residence permits of 910 Belarusian citizens and 254 Russian citizens on the grounds of threatening national security. In addition, the migrant population was used politically, attacked and dehumanised as part of the dispute between Belarus and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Poland deployed additional troops, expelled migrants and put forward the securitization narrative that Belarus was sending migrants to Poland to destabilise it. HRW reported that the Polish authorities conducted illegal summary expulsions of migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Belarus, sometimes using violence to do so. As reported by HRW, migrants, including minors, remained trapped on the Belarusian border and faced serious human rights violations by Belarusian agents as well as the risk of death.[70] In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Felipe González Morales, published a report on his visit to Belarus in 2022 and his assessment of the rights situation of migrants on the Belarusian-Polish border. The report concluded that the border situation reflected the geopolitical crisis in the region and criticised the use of migrants as a political tool.[71]

In relation to the dispute between the government and parts of the population over political and civil rights and freedoms, 1,500 people remained imprisoned on politically motivated charges in 2023, according to HRW's annual report.[72] This number included human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, political opponents and others. According to HRW, the authorities increasingly subjected prisoners to solitary confinement, torture and other forms of mistreatment. There were many acts of persecution during the year.

68. Harhalyk, Tatsiana, "What are Wagner Group mercenaries still doing in Belarus?", *DW*, 25 January 2024.
69. The leader of the Wagner Group died in August when the plane he was traveling in crashed, killing ten people. Many analysts blamed Prigozhin's death on the Russian government.
70. Human Rights Watch, "Belarus", in *World Report 2024*, HRW, 2024.
71. Human Rights Council, *Visit to Belarus - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, HRC*, A/HRC/53/26/Add.2, 18 May 2023.
72. Human Rights Watch, "Belarus", in *World Report 2024*, HRW, 2024.

In August, the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of the political party Belarusian Popular Front and the United Civic Party. Overall, according to some analysts, the authorities had dissolved all opposition parties and some pro-regime parties, and by the end of the year the number of political parties had fallen from 11 to four.[73] In November, Lukashenko announced parliamentary and local elections for February 2024. Through an amendment made to the Constitution in 2022, the creation of a People's Assembly of Belarus, a new body that will have authority over all branches of government, was also planned for 2024.[74]

Moldova	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Government Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, political opposition, Russia, EU, Ukraine, NATO

Summary:

Moldova proclaimed itself an independent republic in 1991 during the dissolution of the USSR. Historically, its current territory to the left of the Dniester River was part of the mediaeval principality of Moldavia, which also included parts of present-day Romania and Ukraine. It went through stages when it was under the control of different powers, including the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Romania and the USSR. During World War II and after the non-aggression pact between the USSR and Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia established the Moldovan SSR in 1940 (which would become one of the fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics that were part of the USSR) uniting part of the historical region of Bessarabia and Transdniestria, a territorial strip east of the Dniester River that was formerly part of an autonomous region of the Ukrainian SSR. Today a country of 2.6 million inhabitants with an absolute poverty rate of 24.5% (2021), Moldova is beset by tension in different intersecting areas. For instance, it has an unresolved conflict over the status of Transdniestria, an area with a Russian-speaking majority that has been de facto independent since 1992, supported by Russia and internationally recognised as part of Moldova. The country has also been affected by instability and political division, including in relation to its outlook on foreign policy, and serious corruption problems. It has maintained neutrality with respect to NATO, though it also has a cooperative relationship with the military alliance. Tension between Russia and Moldova has increased at different periods, including in the energy sphere, as Moldova has traditionally been dependent on Russian gas. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased tension and uncertainty in neighbouring Moldova due to the risks of the conflict spreading.

The multidimensional tension rising since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 continued. During the year, the critical situation in Moldova included alarms raised by the government and allied international actors, such as Ukraine, the EU and the US, about the risks of hostile Russian action against Moldova; government action against local political actors and media considered pro-Russian; warnings from Russia to Moldova; and hostile actions between them, such as the expulsion of diplomats. Some NGOs worried about the risk of violations of human rights such as freedom of expression due to the government's shutdown of media outlets considered pro-Russian. In February, Moldova reported two violations of its airspace by Russian missiles fired from the Black Sea and aimed at Ukraine, as well as the impact of Russian missile fragments on its territory.

In February 2023, based on intelligence shared by Ukraine, Moldovan President Maria Sandu reported Russian plans for a coup in Moldova by individuals with military experience from Russia, Belarus, Serbia and Montenegro who would infiltrate as civilians and seize government buildings. According to Sandu, the coup attempt expected to have the support of local groups such as the pro-Kremlin opposition Shor party, led by magnate and politician Ilan Shor, sentenced in April 2023 *in absentia* for massive fraud in the banking system in 2014 (in a case in which financial and political actors of other stripes were also found guilty). In the closing months of 2022, fears of the risk of outside interference had increased due to the anti-government protests staged by the Shor party in September, which lasted until 2023, demanding the resignation of the Moldovan government and president. Moldova denied entry to the country to a team of boxers from Montenegro and made several arrests in March. In June, the Moldovan police warned that Russian intelligence services were using protests promoted by the Shor party to destabilise the country. Russia denied allegations of a plot against the Moldovan government. The protests in the first few months of 2023 were limited in scope, with between a few hundred and a few thousand people participating, including pensioners opposed to price hikes. There were also smaller protests against the change of the official name of the country's language, from "Moldovan" to "Romanian". This change was made in March through a bill promoted by the government and passed on the second reading with 58 votes of the 101 MPs. Some analysts said that it was mistake and sent a negative message to the population that identifies as Moldovan.[75]

In June, **the Constitutional Court of Moldova ordered the dissolution of the pro-Russian opposition party Shor**, declaring it unconstitutional, in a ruling that determined that the party acted against the principles of the rule of law and that it posed a threat to the country's sovereignty and independence.[76] The ruling was ratified by the court in September and made final and unappealable. In June, the leader of the party, Ilan

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73. Shraibman, Artyom, "Belarus Gears Up for Elections and Powerful New People's Assembly". *Carnegie*, 14 November 2023.
74. Ibid.
75. De Waal, Thomas, "Time to Get Serious About Moldova", *Carnegie Europe*, 11 May 2023.
76. Novaya Gazeta Europe, "Moldova: pro-Russian Șor Party ruled unconstitutional", *Novaya Gazeta*, 19 June 2023.

Shor, announced the creation of a new political bloc, "Șansă, Obligații, Realizări" (SOR), bringing together various parties ahead of the upcoming local elections in November 2023, the presidential election in 2024 and the parliamentary elections in 2025. Shor party candidate Eugenia Gutul won the runoff election to be governor of the Gagauzia region in May 2023.

In July, Moldova ordered the expulsion from the country of 18 Russian diplomats from the diplomatic corps of the Russian Embassy and another 27 people from the technical corps, leaving only 10 diplomats and 15 technical personnel remaining. Moldova claimed that it had acted according to alleged hostile actions by Russia. The expulsion occurred after a new report was published that identified 28 antennas in the Russian diplomatic buildings in the country, located next to the headquarters of the Moldovan president, Parliament and government. In response, Russia announced a ban on 20 Moldovan representatives from entering the country.

In the local elections in November, the ruling party (PAS) won around 40% of the votes, but did not carry the large cities, such as the capital, where Ion Ceban, of the Miscarea Alternativa Nationala (MAN) party, was re-elected. A week before the local elections, the Moldovan authorities suspended the licenses of six TV channels owned or affiliated with Ilan Șhor and Vladimir Plahotniuc, an oligarch and former leader of the Democratic Party who fled the country in 2019 on charges of corruption, including in the massive fraud of 2014. They also blocked 31 websites, including Tass and Interfax. Moldova's Security and Intelligence Service accused them of spreading false information and the government said it was a response to what it considers Russia's hybrid war against Moldova. **Various Moldovan NGOs (Centre for Independent Journalism, the Electronic Press Association, RISE Moldova, Access-Info Centre and others) voiced concern about the measures given what they considered insufficient explanations of the legal circumstances and facts.** Days before the elections, the National Emergency Situations Commission disqualified the Șansă party, a member party of the SOR bloc. Created in 2020 and previously known as "Ai Noștri", it renamed itself Șansă during the creation of the SOR bloc, which it joined. Șansă's disqualification prevented 652 candidates from running. The OSCE noted that the elections were calm and that most candidates could campaign freely, but that the broad powers of the National Emergency Situations Commission were used to restrict freedom of expression and association and the freedom to run for election.[77] The OSCE also expressed concern about foreign interference and allegations of vote buying during the campaign. In April, the EU established a new civilian mission in Moldova, the European Union Partnership Mission in

the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova), in response to Moldova's request for support. The mission aims to "reinforce crisis management structures" and build resilience to "hybrid threats", including cybersecurity, information manipulation and interference from "foreign agents". In December, the EU approved the start of negotiations for the accession of Moldova, after having received candidate country status in 2022. Also in December, the Moldovan Parliament approved a new national security strategy that identifies Russia as a threat and replaces the previous one, from 2011. The strategy had the support of 59 votes out of a total of 101 seats. Tension around the dispute with the Transdniestria region also remained high throughout the year.[78]

Moldova (Transdniestria)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	=
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Moldova, self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria, Russia, Ukraine

Summary:
Transdniestria is a 4,000 km^2 enclave with half a million inhabitants that are mostly Russian-speaking. Legally under Moldovan sovereignty, but with de facto independence, since the 1990s it has been the stage for an unresolved dispute regarding its status. The conflict surfaced during the final stages of the breakup of the USSR, when fears increased in Transdniestria over a possible unification between the independent Moldova and Romania, which have both historical and cultural links. Transdniestria rejected Moldovan sovereignty and declared itself independent. This sparked an escalation in the number of incidents, which eventually became an armed conflict in 1992. A ceasefire agreement that same year brought the war to an end and gave way to a peace process under international mediation. One of the main issues is the status of the territory. Moldova defends its territorial integrity, but is willing to accept a special status for the entity, while Transdniestria has fluctuated between proposals for a confederalist model that would give the area broad powers and demands full independence. Other points of friction in the negotiations include cultural and socio-economic issues and Russian military presence in Transdniestria. The issue of Transdniestria is one of the lines of tension in a broader scenario of fragility in Moldova, a former Soviet republic and one of the poorest countries in Europe, which is affected by political division running along a pro-EU and pro-Russia fault line and by a history of corruption problems. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 increased uncertainty in the Transdniestria region and across Moldova, which borders Ukraine.

Tension remained high in the Transdniestria region, influenced by the war in neighbouring Ukraine and the risks of the conflict spreading. In February, Russia threatened Moldova with a scenario like that in Ukraine

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77. OSCE, "Moldova's elections peaceful and efficient, but marred by sweeping restrictive measures amid national security concerns: international observers", *OSCE*, 6 November 2023.
78. See the summary on Moldova (Transdniestria) in this chapter.

if it tried to resolve the dispute over the status of the Transdniestria region by force and warned Moldova against its calls for the "demilitarisation" of the region. Furthermore, in rhetoric reminiscent of that used by Russia in Ukraine to justify the invasion, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that they would defend Russian citizens living in Moldova in the event of any risk coming from Moldova, the USA or the EU. In the presentation of the new government's priorities in February, new Prime Minister Dorin Recean had mentioned the withdrawal of Russian troops from Transdniestria and the demilitarisation of the strip. According to analysts, other priorities for the government included the search for a diplomatic solution that would restore full Moldovan sovereignty over Transdniestria. The Moldovan government urged calm in the face of Russian warnings about a possible military scenario. In February, Moscow revoked a 2012 decree that reflected the concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation at that time ant that explicitly stated Russia's commitment to seek ways to resolve the Transdniestrian issue on the basis of respect for Moldova's sovereignty, territorial integrity and neutral status. The 2012 decree also suggested the development of closer relations with the US and the EU. In March, Moscow unveiled its new concept of foreign policy and the leaders of Transdniestria highlighted the concept's clause of support for the security of Russia's allies.

Other moments of tension during the year included complaints by the Transdniestrian authorities in March of an alleged Ukrainian plan to assassinate representatives of the region through a car bomb attack next to a presidential motorcade in the capital. The Kremlin accused Ukraine of preparing provocations as part of a plan to invade the region. The government of Moldova and the media said there was a lack of evidence for the accusations and Ukraine rejected them, describing them as provocations directed by Moscow. Moldova was concerned about military manoeuvres conducted by the Russian peacekeeping forces in Transdniestria in April that had not been announced in advance. According to Moldova, the manoeuvres breached the terms of the system regulating the buffer zone. Russia maintains around 1,500 troops in Transdniestria, some as part of the trilateral peacekeeping forces (Moldova, Transdniestria and Russia) and some as members of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF), considered illegal by Moldova. Moldova also carried out military exercises near Transdniestria in December.

Moldova's reform of the penal code, with amendments approved by Parliament in February, was another cause for confrontation between the parties to the conflict. The approved changes provide punishment for funding and inciting "separatism", conspiring against Moldova and obtaining or stealing information that could harm the sovereignty, independence and integrity of the country. Throughout the year, the Transdniestrian authorities criticised the reform and complained of the lack of guarantees for their representatives. In response to a request from the OSCE mission to Moldova, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) released a statement on the reform, warning that classifying "separatism" as a criminal offence risked criminalising the mere expression of ideas and could be used as a pretext to suppress peaceful demonstrations or opinions on different territorial arrangements, autonomy or even independence. The statement also included a series of recommendations.[79] In developments inside Transdniestria, a prominent Transdniestrian political opposition leader, Oleg Khorzhan, was assassinated in July. The leader of the Communist Party in Transdniestria since 2004 and a member of the region's Parliament between 2010 and 2019, he had been critical of the local de facto authorities and imprisoned between 2018 and 2022. Moldovan human rights NGOs urged the Moldovan government to investigate his death. Moldova asked the OSCE for support to investigate the case.

During the year, various analysts warned of the challenges faced by Moldova and Transdniestria in the new context opened since the war in Ukraine. At the end of 2023, **Transdniestria's population and economy were still dependent on Russian gas, but the future continuity of the gas transit contract between Russia and Ukraine**, which expires in December 2024, was in doubt. Some analysis said that the termination of this agreement or the lack of alternatives could set off an economic shock and a humanitarian crisis in the disputed region.[80] Meanwhile, Moldova continued to be dependent on electricity from Transdniestria produced with Russian gas. Other challenges were related to Moldova's EU accession process, having reached candidate country status in 2022 and having received approval for negotiations to start in December 2023, and how the unresolved dispute over Transdniestria will affect and be affected by that process.[81] Meanwhile, peace negotiations between Moldova and Transdniestria continued to face many obstacles, also due to the influence of the war in Ukraine.[82]

79. ODIHR, *Comments on the criminalization of "separatism" and related criminal offences in Moldova*. Opinion-Nr.: CRIM-MDA/490/2023, 4 December 2023.
80. Ibragimova, Galiya, "Is Moldova Ready to Pay the Price of Reintegrating Transnistria?". *Carnegie*, 24 January 2024; Ceban, Evghenii, "Time is running out to solve Moldova's Transnistria question". *Open Democracy*, 23 August 2023.
81. Ibid.
82. See the summary on Moldova (Transdniestria) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Russia and the Caucasus

Armenia – Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh)	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Territory International
Main parties:	Azerbaijan, Armenia, self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, Türkiye

Summary:

Armenia and Azerbaijan faced various dimensions of interstate tension. On one hand, they have had a dispute over the sovereignty of Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory historically inhabited by a predominantly local Armenian population and that was integrated by the USSR in 1923 as an autonomous region within Azerbaijan. In the late 1980s, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and their local authorities began a campaign to join Armenia. Preceded by incidents and civil violence since 1988, amidst the decomposition of the USSR and the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the tension around Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into an armed conflict between Azerbaijan and the local forces of the enclave, that were supported by Armenia. It ended with a ceasefire in 1994. In that war, Nagorno-Karabakh's forces took control of the enclave and the seven surrounding districts, which belonged to Azerbaijan and whose Azerbaijani population was expelled. More than 24,000 people (over 30,000, by some estimates) died and more than a million people were displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. A peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the years that followed failed to resolve the conflict. Since the 1994 ceasefire, there have been several escalations of violence, such as in 2016, which claimed several hundred lives. The conflict resumed in 2020 with an Azerbaijani military offensive and a 44-day war, in which Baku recaptured the districts around Nagorno-Karabakh and a third of the enclave. Several thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were displaced. A cessation of hostilities agreement was reached, which authorised the deployment of Russian peacekeeping troops, but left the political status of the disputed territory unresolved. Azerbaijan launched a new one-day military offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, which led to the exodus of its Armenian population and by which Baku forced the reintegration of the enclave into Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Baku and Yerevan continue to disagree on the delimitation of their border and the opening of transport routes, aggravated by their historical hostility over Nagorno-Karabakh. The political dispute has been punctuated by cross-border incidents of violence.

Three years after the war of 2020, an Azerbaijani one-day military offensive in September led to the exodus of almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, amounting to over 100,000 people, and the enclave's forcible reintegration into Azerbaijan. In 2023, before the military offensive, incidents of violence occurred on the interstate border and between the forces of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, which blamed each other for several fatalities and injuries. In response to a request from Armenia, the EU deployed a civilian observation mission on the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan (EUMA) in February, taking over from EUMCAP (October-December 2022). Azerbaijan and Russia criticised the establishment of the mission. Despite its deployment, border incidents continued to occur between Armenian and Azerbaijani security forces, claiming several lives and wounding others. In addition to these armed hostilities, in the months prior to the September military offensive, the Lachin corridor remained blocked. It was the only route connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and had been closed in December 2022 by alleged Azerbaijani environmental activists, while Armenia blamed Azerbaijan, whose government does not tolerate independent protest. Azerbaijan set up a military checkpoint in the corridor in April 2023. **UN experts urged Azerbaijan to lift the blockade, which caused an emergency humanitarian situation**, with serious restrictions on basic goods, including food and medicine, and impacts on the running of medical centres and schools, which worsened as the months dragged on.[83] Since mid-June, it blocked all transport of humanitarian products and periodically prevented the ICRC from passing through, according to HRW.[84] Baku also cut power and gas lines, causing blackouts.[85] In August, the UN Security Council held an emergency session on Nagorno-Karabakh, requested by Armenia, invoking Article 35(1) of the United Nations Charter.

Tensions escalated in September. **Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh. After 24 hours of clashes, the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh capitulated and signed a complete cessation of hostilities agreement, facilitated by Russia and written under the terms imposed by Azerbaijan**. The agreement included the withdrawal of all the Armenian Armed Forces present in Nagorno-Karabakh, which the Armenian government claimed did not exist, and the full dissolution and disarmament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armed Forces. Estimates put the death toll at several hundred on 19 and 20 September (around 200 Azerbaijani soldiers, according to the defence ministry, approximately 200 soldiers from Nagorno-Karabakh, according to the region's emergency services spokesperson, and 10 civilians, including 5 minors, according to the Ombudsman of Nagorno-Karabakh). The Ombudsman of Nagorno-Karabakh claimed that another 400 people were wounded, including around 40 civilians, 13 of them children. At least other 218 people died and 120 were injured in an explosion and fire at a petrol depot around which hundreds of vehicles had gathered to refuel and flee to Armenia. The authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh blamed the explosion on a failure to comply with safety regulations. **Azerbaijan's military offensive forcibly displaced almost the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh**. In early October,

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83. OHCHR, "UN experts urge Azerbaijan to lift Lachin corridor blockade and end humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh", *OHCHR*, 7 August 2023.
84. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024*, 2024.
85. Ibid.

around 100,500 people had already moved to Armenia. A UN mission visited parts of Nagorno-Karabakh on 1 October and noted that according to their interlocutors, only between 50 and 1,000 remained in the region. The previous estimated population was 120,000.

In the days after the cessation of hostilities, meetings took place between representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan that addressed humanitarian issues, disarmament and the integration of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, at least some of them without agreement. Nagorno-Karabakh's President Samvel Shahramanyan issued a decree on 28 September dissolving the self-proclaimed republic, by which it would cease to exist on 1 January 2024. Some incidents and violations of the cessation of hostilities took place in the weeks following the offensive.

An Azerbaijani military offensive led to the dismantling of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh republic, its forcible reintegration into Azerbaijan and the forced exodus of virtually its entire Armenian population

In parallel, between late September and early October, Azerbaijan arrested several political and military leaders of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Azerbaijan presented its integration plan in early October, which encompassed five spheres (legal and administrative sphere; security; economy; social sphere; culture; education and religion), claiming that it contained guarantees of educational, cultural, linguistic and religious rights. However, the plan contrasted with Baku's belligerent actions and rhetoric and with the lack of guarantees of rights in Azerbaijan itself, as well as the uncertain prospects for the right of return of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. On 15 October, the Azerbaijani president visited the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, dressed in military fatigues, raised the flag of Azerbaijan, stepped on the flag of the extinct republic of Nagorno-Karabakh at the former headquarters of its government and gave a triumphalist speech accusing international mediators of a decades-long lack of interest in resolving the conflict and of preferring to freeze it.

Anti-government protests took place in Armenia against what was considered Armenia's inaction during Azerbaijan's military offensive and its consequences, with demands for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. In late October, Shahramanyan reneged on the document dissolving the region. **Representatives of the Nagorno-Karabakh government promoted the idea of establishing a government in exile, but it was rejected by the Armenian authorities**. Relations between Armenia and Russia seriously deteriorated, as Russia did not condemn the Azerbaijani offensive and its peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh did not intervene.

After the invasion, Armenia and Azerbaijan maintained their dialogue regarding the normalisation of relations, though with difficulties.[86] At different times, Armenia indicated the risks of new Azerbaijani military operations leading to the forcible seizure of parts of Armenia, including to connect the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan with the rest of the country. Between October and December, there were some incidents on the border between both countries, killing one person and wounding several others. In December, the EU agreed to boost the number of EUMA troops from 138 to 209. Meanwhile, the **International Court of Justice ordered Azerbaijan to take urgent and mandatory provisional action under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**, and in response to Armenia's request to the Court for action. The required action included ensuring that people who have left Nagorno-Karabakh and wish to return can do so safely, guaranteeing that people who wish to stay are safe from the use of force or intimidation that could force them to flee and protecting and safeguarding the identity documents, records and private property of the affected persons. The ruling, dated 17 December, required Baku to submit a report on the action to take within eight weeks.

South-east Europe

Serbia – Kosovo	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↑
Type:	Self-government, Identity, Government International[87]
Main parties:	Serbia, Kosovo, political and social representatives of the Serbian community in Kosovo, UNMIK, KFOR, EULEX

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

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86. See the summary on the Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiating process (Nagorno-Karabakh) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024. .
87. The socio-political crisis between Kosovo and Serbia is considered "international" because even though its international legal status is still unclear, Kosovo has been recognised as a state by more than a hundred countries.

unemployment, corruption and criminality. The process of determining this final status, which began in 2006, failed to achieve an agreement between the parties or backing from the UN Security Council for the proposal put forward by the UN special envoy. In 2008, Kosovo's parliament proclaimed the independence of the territory, which was rejected by the Serbian population of Kosovo and by Serbia. In 2011, the parties began a new negotiating process facilitated by the EU with the support of other actors. However, the political dispute between Serbia and Kosovo continues, as does the political and social tension between the institutions of Kosovo, on the one hand, and political and social actors and the Kosovo Serb population, on the other hand, with intermittent expressions of violence.

Tension increased between Serbia and Kosovo and in northern Kosovo, including with violent incidents. Despite the progress made in the negotiating process early in the year, with Kosovo and Serbia's verbal support for the Agreement on the path of normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia, on 27 February, and its implementation annex, on 18 March, political and social tension continued in the following months, along with obstacles in the negotiations.[88] The main party in the Serb-majority areas of northern Kosovo, Srpska Lista, called for a boycott of the April municipal elections of the four northern Kosovo municipalities. It had made its participation conditional on the establishment of the association of Serbian-majority municipalities in Kosovo, a substantive issue in the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo and delayed by Pristina, and on the withdrawal of special police units in northern Kosovo. Without their participation, the elections only had a turnout of 3.4%. They were won by Kosovo Albanian parties, which took office amid heavy police deployments and some clashes, while Belgrade put the Serbian Army on alert and ordered the deployment of troops near the border with Kosovo**. Post-election protests were staged in late May, with serious incidents of violence that injured over one hundred people, including Kosovo Serb protesters, police and KFOR forces**. After the clashes, NATO announced the deployment of 700 more troops to boost the mission. It also placed an additional battalion of reserve forces in highest state of "combat readiness". The US and the EU imposed some sanctions on Kosovo. The EU urged the Kosovo government to take action to de-escalate the crisis, including withdrawing special police operation units from the surroundings of municipal facilities and calling early elections in those towns. New incidents and clashes were reported in June. In July and August, Kosovo withdrew part of the special police units, but other actions such as calls for new elections were still pending.

Tensions escalated again in September. On 24 September, Kosovo reported that around 30 paramilitary fighters ambushed a police patrol in Banjska (northern Kosovo, 15 km from the border with Serbia) and later took refuge in the town's Orthodox monastery. One police officer and three assailants were killed and the Kosovo authorities seized heavy weapons, explosives and uniforms. Kosovo accused Serbia of organising the assault, which the Kosovo authorities said was aimed at annexing northern Kosovo. Belgrade denied any involvement. The US ambassador to Kosovo noted that the attack had been coordinated and sophisticated, that the attackers appeared to have military training and that the amount of weaponry suggested there was a plan to destabilise security in the region. Washington had yet to determine whether Serbia was responsible for it. In late September, Srpska Lista Vice President Milan Radoičić claimed responsibility for the attack, claiming to have planned the operation without support from Serbia, and resigned from his position in the Kosovo Serb party. He was arrested in Belgrade and released, with Serbia saying that he would be prosecuted. Kosovo demanded his extradition and Interpol issued an arrest warrant for him and 18 other people in December. NATO sent several hundred additional troops to Kosovo after the attack. In November, NATO said that it was considering permanently increasing its troops. The attack on 24 September presented a towering new challenge due to its magnitude. It also took place in a tense local context onto which the international dispute between Russia and Euro-Atlantic actors is also projected. The UN Secretary-General's October report warned that the growing tensions in Kosovo continued to erode the fragile trust between communities and between institutions and communities, and therefore announced that the UN mission would prioritise confidence-building initiatives and inter-community exchanges. Around 20 civil society organisations from Serbia and Kosovo warned of the profound impact that the violence of 24 September had on the deteriorated relations inside Kosovo, inside Serbia and between both, and in October they jointly called for peacebuilding and the normalisation of relations in the region and urged the authorities at all levels to support the building of links and cooperation within and between Kosovo and Serbia.[89] International actors with a third-party role in the negotiating process urged Kosovo and Serbia to resume it,[90] saying that a new escalation could happen otherwise.

2.3.5 Middle East

The Gulf

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

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88. See the summary on Serbia-Kosovo in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
89. VVAA, *Renewing commitments to the cause of peace*, 26 October 2023.
90. See the summary on the Serbia-Kosovo negotiating process in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.

Summary:
The tension is framed in a decades-long context of political polarisation between conservatives and reformists in Iran and is characterised by the key role played by religious authorities and armed forces in the future of Iran, particularly the Republican Guard. The internal tension worsened in mid-2009, when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in elections described as fraudulent by the opposition that led to the largest popular protests in the country since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The end of Ahmadinejad's two consecutive terms and the rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani in 2013 seemed to open a new era in the country, raising expectations about a possible drop in domestic political tension and a potential change in Iran's relations with the outside world. However, the internal tensions persisted. Recent protest movements, especially in 2019, 2022 and 2023, have put a spotlight on political and social unrest among the Iranian population and have been harshly repressed by the regime.

After the mass demonstrations sparked by the death of the young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in police custody in 2022[91] and the regime's harsh crackdown that may have caused the death of 500 people,[92] **in 2023 the Iranian authorities persisted in their repressive policies to quell the protests.** The action taken by Tehran to confront the movement known by the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" led to fewer protests in public spaces than in the previous year (over 1,600 demonstrations were reported between mid-September and early December 2022) and many human rights violations. Several NGOs and the UN's international fact-finding mission confirmed the abuse and blasted the use of physical, psychological and sexual violence, judicial harassment and other practices to prevent and deter peaceful dissent that continued to take shape in other forms of protest even if it decreased in the streets.[93] **During 2023, the regime continued to arbitrarily arrest and intimidate protesters and critics, their families, people who provided them with help (lawyers and healthcare staff) and others who expressed solidarity with the movement.** Arrests of victims of repression were documented during protests, in schools, at hospital entrances and even during funerals. Many of those prosecuted and convicted were charged with "spreading propaganda against the system", "crimes against security", "disrupting the public order", "spreading lies to disturb the public order" and "insulting the supreme leader". In February, the government announced that it had "pardoned" 22,000 people detained as part of the protests. There are no official figures for the total number of arrests during and after the demonstrations, but human rights groups estimate that they could involve 60,000 people.

In 2023 the Iranian authorities persisted in their repressive policies to quell protests, arbitrarily arresting and intimidating protesters and critics

There are also no official figures for death sentences in these cases, but **information suggests that at least 28 people were sentenced to capital punishment in relation to the protests, of which at least nine (all men) have already been executed** (in December 2022 and January 2024). These death sentences were part of an intensified application of the death penalty, with more than 700 executions between January and November 2023, according to data from the Iran Human Rights Organisation cited by HRW.[94]

There were various warnings of the excessive use of torture against detainees, sometimes resulting in death in 2023. **The use of sexual and gender-based violence was reported, including rape, genital torture, forced nudity and other practices. From late 2022 to November 2023, but especially in the first quarter of 2023, many poisonings of girls in schools were reported**, affecting thousands of students. No fatalities were reported and the official information about the events was confusing, but these episodes were interpreted as a form of intimidation and punishment of the girls for their involvement in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. More than 400 university students were also suspended or expelled for their involvement in the protests during 2023, while another 2,800 were submitted to disciplinary committees. Changes of directors were also announced in more than 20,000 schools as part of the "purification" of the educational system. **The authorities also intensified rules and measures to force women to wear the hijab according to the regime's standards, increasing punishment, intimidation and the campaign of harassment and surveillance** against women and girls. The regime promoted regulations to make private actors responsible for monitoring the use of the hijab, expanded the use of cameras in public spaces to pursue "offenders" and even developed an application to facilitate complaints. In this context, on 1 October, a new case very similar to that of Masha Amini occurred when young student Armita Garavand died after an altercation with a group of people in the underground train over use of the hijab. The authorities detained many people during her funeral, including journalists and renowned human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Several international awards recognised the struggle of Iranian women against oppression and for the human rights and freedoms of the entire Iranian population. The 2023 Nobel Peace Prize went to imprisoned activist Narges Mohammadi, while the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Mahsa Amini and the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. After 2022, with especially

91. For more information, see the summary on Iran in the 2023 edition of *Alert!* and Urrutia, Pamela, La revuelta de las mujeres en Irán: ¿un punto de inflexión? Claves desde el análisis de conflictos con perspectiva feminista, *ECP Notes on Conflict and Peace,* no. 27, March 2023.
92. A year after the protests began, the most established reports indicate that 551 died, including 68 minors. The Iranian government also reported the death of 75 security agents.
93. Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, A/HRC/55/67, 2 February 2024.
94. Human Rights Watch, Iran, *World Report 2024.*

intense repression in the Baloch and Kurdish parts of the country,[95] Tehran pursued its repressive policies with lower levels of violence in 2023. Balochistan, which in 2022 was the scene of mass demonstrations and serious acts of violence, continued to be affected by the general climate of repression in the country. Amnesty International reported events that occurred in Zahedan, including cases of arrest, mistreatment, torture and forced disappearance.[96] In December, the armed group Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for an attack against a police station in the town of Rask, in which 11 officers died.

Iran (northwest)	
Intensity:	2
Trend:	↓
Type:	Self-government, Identity Internationalised internal
Main parties:	Government, armed groups PJAK and PDKI, Komala, KDP, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq

Summary:
Despite the heterogeneous and multiethnic nature of Iran, the minorities that inhabit the country, including the Kurds, have been subjected to decades of centralist and homogenisation policies and have reported suffering discrimination from the Iranian authorities. Since 1946, different political and armed groups of Kurdish origin have confronted Tehran in an attempt to gain greater autonomy for the Kurdish population, which lives mostly in the northwestern provinces of the country. Groups like the Kurdish Democratic Party (PDKI) and Komala led this fight for decades. Since 2004, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), linked to Türkiye's PKK, has been involved in the conflict with Tehran, and its armed wing, the People's Defence Forces, periodically clashes with Iranian forces, particularly members of the Revolutionary Guard. According to reports, in 2011 the PJAK and the Iranian government agreed to a ceasefire according to which the armed group would stop its attacks and the authorities would stop executing Kurdish prisoners, but hostilities and low-intensity clashes persist.

In 2022, government repression was especially intense in areas inhabited by ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Kurds and Baloch (Sunni), in response to the challenge to the regime throughout the country.[97] The repression continued in 2023, though the actions and incidents were less violent than in the previous year. The situation continued to be shaped by the effects of the crackdown on popular demonstrations following the death of the young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini in police custody. Human rights organisations continued

to report politically motivated judicial persecution and arrests. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, over 100 people had been arrested by security forces for political reasons in July alone.[98] Also in June, 55 lawyers who had signed a statement offering legal assistance to the family of Mahsa Amini were summoned by the prosecutor's office of Bukan, in the province of Kurdistan, due to their support. **On the eve of the first anniversary of the young Kurdish woman's death in police custody, the Iranian authorities deployed thousands of troops in the areas with the greatest Kurdish presence, where the demonstrations were especially massive in 2023.** Meanwhile, Iraq continued to target Kurdish political and armed groups in 2023. **Tehran and Baghdad reached a border agreement by which the Iraqi government pledged to disarm and relocate Iranian Kurdish organisations operating in the border area with Iran** (mainly from the north of the country) before 19 September.[99] In July, Iranian military representatives warned that they would use force in northern Iraq against these opposition organisations, which they have described as secessionists and terrorists, if the authorities in Baghdad did not act in accordance with the provisions of the deal by the established deadline. In 2022, as part of its response to the protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, Iran attacked the positions of several of these Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. On the agreed date, the Iraqi government announced that it had complied with the terms of the agreement. In December, after a meeting of senior representatives of both countries in Baghdad, Iran thanked Iraq for removing these organisations from the border area, but it added that it was still concerned about evidence of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in the border area.[100] Balochistan, which in 2022 was the scene of mass demonstrations and serious acts of violence, continued to be affected by the general climate of repression in the country. Amnesty International reported events that occurred in Zahedan, including cases of arrest, mistreatment, torture and forced disappearance.[101] In December, the armed group Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for an attack against a police station in the town of Rask, in which 11 officers died.

Iran – USA, Israel[102]	
Intensity:	3
Trend:	=
Type:	System, Government International
Main:	Iran, USA, Israel

95.   See the summary on Iran (northwest) in this chapter.
96.   Amnesty International, Iran: New wave of brutal attacks against Baluchi protesters and worshippers, 26 October 2023.
97.   For more information, see La revuelta de las mujeres en Irán: ¿un punto de inflexión? Claves desde el análisis de conflictos con perspectiva feminista, *ECP Notes on Conflict and Peace*, no. 27, March 2023.
98.   Human Rights Watch, Iran: World Report 2023, January 2024.
99.   Motamedi, Maziar, Iran says deal agreed with Iraq for disarming, relocation of Kurdish rebels, Al-Jazeera, 28 August 2023.
100. Rudaw, Iranian general says concerns remain over Kurdish groups on border, Rudaw, 3 December 2023.
101. Amnesty International, Iran: New wave of brutal attacks against Baluchi protesters and worshippers, 26 October 2023.
102. This international tension affects other countries not mentioned, which are involved in different degrees.

Summary:

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which ousted the regime of Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi (an ally of Washington) and proclaimed Ayatollah Khomeini as the Supreme Leader of the country, relations between the US, Israel and Iran have been tense. International pressure on Iran intensified after the 9/11 attacks, when the George W. Bush administration declared Iran, Iraq and North Korea as members of the "Axis of Evil" and as an enemy state due to its alleged links with terrorism. In this context, the Iranian nuclear programme has been one of the issues that has generated the greatest concern in the West, which is suspicious of its military purposes. Thus, the Iranian programme has developed alongside the imposition of international sanctions and threats to use force, especially from Israel. Iran's approach to the conflict during the consecutive terms of office of the ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) did not help to de-escalate the tension. The rise to power of the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani raised expectations about a thaw in Iran's relations with the outside world, especially after the start of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme in late 2013 and the signing of a related agreement in mid-2015. In recent years, the US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the intensification of its sanctions policy, Iran's gradual distancing from the promises it made in the agreement and a turbulent regional context have aggravated tension and made it difficult to find a solution to the dispute.

In keeping with the trend of the previous year, **the tension around the Iranian nuclear programme remained high throughout 2023, in a scenario characterised by a standstill in the diplomatic negotiations** to restore compliance with the 2015 agreement (JCPOA) **and by the security incidents that mainly involved Iranian, US and Israeli forces that intensified in the last quarter**. In 2023, there were no new direct rounds in the Vienna process, though contacts through diplomatic channels continued.[103] In the first few months of the year, Iran faced international accusations for its nuclear activities and growing criticism for its harsh crackdown on internal opposition in the country, which intensified after the death of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, in police custody in September 2022.[104] In this context, new sanctions were imposed on Tehran in retaliation for human rights abuses and for providing miliary materiel to Russia, especially drones that were being used in Ukraine, in violation of the provisions of UNSC Resolution 2231, which formalised the UN's endorsement of the JCPOA. The IAEA continued to complain that the boundaries established in the nuclear agreement were being broken and although some progress was identified in the middle of the year and some activities were clarified, by the end of 2023, expectations for the nuclear dialogue worsened again, partly as an indirect consequence of the crisis in Gaza, but also due to other variables, such as Tehran's

withdrawal of its authorisation for several inspectors to carry out verification tasks. Thus, the EU and the United Kingdom decided to maintain their restrictions and sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile programme, which expired in October 2023, on the grounds that Tehran had not complied since 2019. The US also announced new sanctions on entities and people linked to the Iranian programme and others for the alleged transfer of weapons to Hamas.

Security incidents between different actors directly or indirectly involved in the tension continued to be reported throughout the year, such as a drone attack on the Isfahan power plant attributed to Israel (January), attacks against US forces allegedly by Tehran-backed forces in Iraq and Syria and US strikes against these groups in both countries. The friction also led to maritime tension mainly in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz that involved some oil tankers. The interception of vessels from Iran heading to Yemen, allegedly carrying weapons for the Houthis, was also reported. In the middle of the year, the United States announced that it was strengthening its naval capabilities, including troops, aircraft and amphibious units. There were relatively fewer incidents after the regional detente linked to the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia (May), after years of broken diplomatic relations, and alongside indirect talks between Tehran and Washington mediated by Oman that led to a temporary exemption from the sanctions (July) and an agreement for Tehran's release of five Americans imprisoned in Iran in exchange for restoring its access to $6 billion that was held in bank accounts in South Korea (September). **Since October 2023, incidents have increased as a result of the crisis in Gaza, given Tehran's support for Hamas and Washington's support for Israel.** Until the end of the year, attacks multiplied, carried out by groups of the self-proclaimed "Axis of Resistance" (made up of Hezbollah, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen and others) against US forces in Iraq and Syria, by the US against these organisations and by Israel against Hezbollah and Iran's positions and interests.[105] In December, Iran warned of consequences for the death of a senior Republican Guard (IRGC) official in Syria in an air strike it blamed on Israel. The US and Israel also singled out Tehran for action taken by the Houthis in the last quarter, including attacks from Yemen to Israel and against ships in the Red Sea.[106] In this highly volatile regional context, at the end of the year the UN Secretary-General defended the JCPOA as the best option available to address the Iranian nuclear issue, guarantee its peaceful nature and work for non-proliferation and security in the region.

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103. For more information, see chapter 6 (Peace negotiations in the Middle East) in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Peace Talks in Focus 2023. Report on Trends and Scenarios*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2024.
104. See the summary on Iran in this chapter.
105. For more information, see the summaries on Iraq, Israel-Palestine and Syria in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts).
106. For more information, see the summary on Yemen in chapter 1 (Armed conflicts) and "Yemen: escalada de tensión en el Mar Rojo" in Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Escenarios de riesgo y oportunidades de paz*, January 2024.