

Geostrategic Analysis

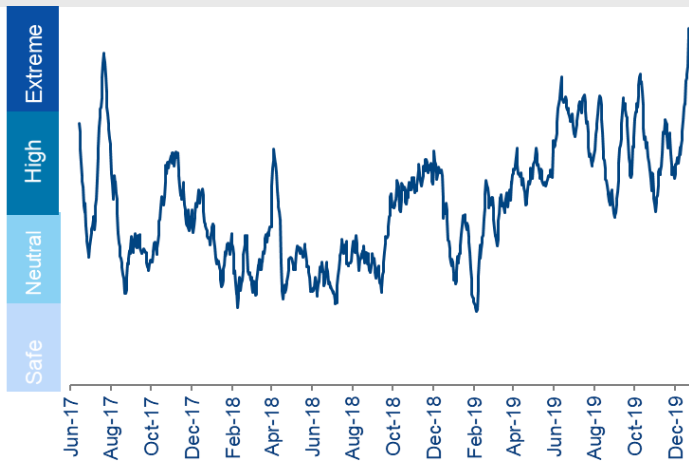
# Geo-World: Conflict & Protest December

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December 2019

The U.S. airstrike against Iranian Quds Forces General Qassem Soleimani triggered high levels of uncertainty in the region as Iran threatened to take revenge and the U.S. warned of further retaliation. Iran retaliated with missile attacks against two U.S. bases in Iraq but U.S. de-escalated the situation as no casualties happened in Iran strikes. Turkey and UE enhance diplomatic relations to fight the tension escalation. Meanwhile, the situation in Iraq remained uncertain as the Iraqi Parliament voted to expel U.S. troops. The geopolitical race in the Eastern Mediterranean continued as different parties sought to gain the upper hand. The U.K. Parliament approved the EU Withdrawal Bill in principle after PM Boris Johnson’s victory in the latest election. The U.S. and China to sign the Phase One Trade Deal in January.

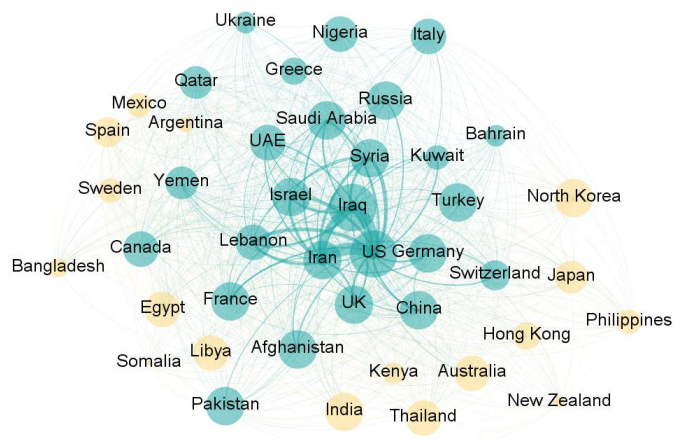
## U.S. – Iran tensions increased risks in the region to uncertain levels.

Figure 2. **BBVA RESEARCH FOREIGN AFFAIRS MEDIA SENTIMENT INDEX US-IRAN** (from safe to extreme negative)



Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 3. **BBVA RESEARCH FOREIGN AFFAIRS US-IRAN COUNTRY NETWORK** (most related countries with US-Iran tensions during DEC 2019 – JAN 2020)



Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

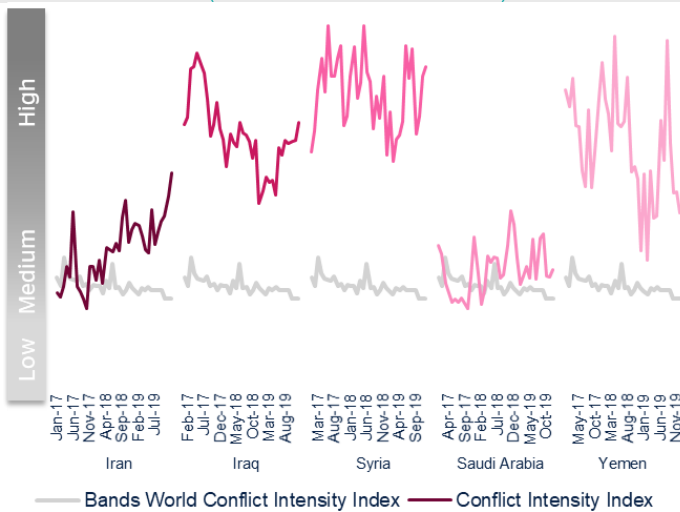
The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index<sup>1</sup> increased during December. The main developments during the month were:

- **On January 3, the U.S. conducted an airstrike targeting Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iranian Quds Forces and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the founder of Iraqi Kata’ib Hezbollah militia (pro-Iranian). Both have been reported as dead.** The attack was the final incident after a series of escalating incidents in Iraq. On December 27, Iranian-backed units attacked a U.S. base in Kirkuk, Iraq. On December 29, U.S. forces targeted five Iran-linked bases in Iraq and Syria. On December 31, pro-Iranian militias stormed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and besieged the building for two days. Meanwhile, Iran retaliated with missile attacks against two U.S. bases in Iraq. **U.S. President Trump had threatened to attack multiple Iranian sites if it strikes any U.S. people or assets but since there is no U.S. casualties in Iranian strike, President Trump said Iran appears to be standing down.** “The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it,” he added. Before the strikes, the Iranian government had announced it would no longer abide by the limits imposed by the nuclear deal signed in 2015. Iranian Foreign Minister said Tehran would continue to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to review its nuclear research and was willing to re-join the agreement if sanctions were lifted. **Iraqi Parliament voted to expel U.S. troops from the country.** The resolution needs to be signed by Prime Minister Mahdi, however, Mr. Mahdi is currently serving in a caretaker capacity, which could create uncertainty on the implementation of the Parliament’s decision, even though Mahdi backs the resolution. President Trump has said that the U.S. will not leave Iraq unless it is repaid for the U.S. air base it built there. He also said that sanctions will be imposed on Iraq “like they’ve never seen before” if the U.S. is not able to leave Iraq on a “very friendly basis.”
- **Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed a deal to build a subsea natural gas pipeline from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe.** The countries plan to complete the pipeline by 2025. Meanwhile, **Turkish President Erdogan said that Ankara began sending military units to Libya** to support the Government of National Accord (GNA), with which Turkey signed an agreement on maritime boundaries. **Turkish army units** will not serve as combat forces, the soldiers’ **duty there is coordination.** President Erdogan added that there would be a Turkish lieutenant general at the operation center there. Meanwhile, Turkey and Russia called on warring parties in Libya to reach a ceasefire agreement by midnight January 12. In Syria, around 200,000 migrants are moving toward the Turkish border after renewed Assad regime operation in Idlib.

<sup>1</sup> Further details about the methodology could be found in the annex  
Geo-World Monthly Update / December 2019

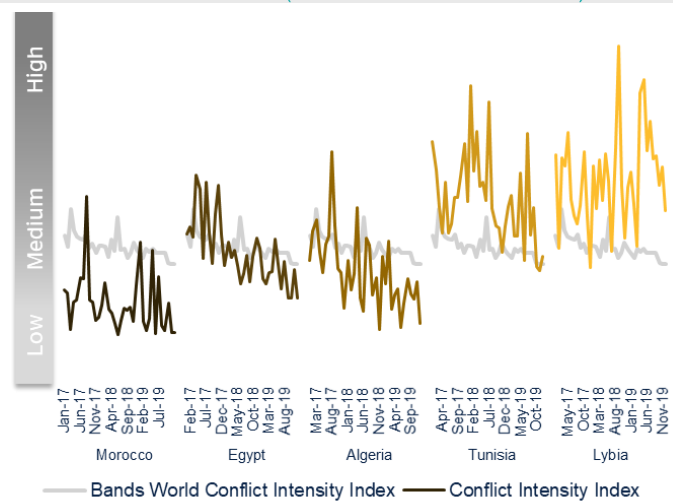
- **United Kingdom lawmakers have agreed to the Withdrawal Agreement Bill (Brexit bill) in principle, with 358 MPs (members of Parliament) backing the bill and 234 voting against it. It will be debated in both chambers of the Parliament.** The new bill will forbid any extension to the U.K.'s transition period. Former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic wins Croatia's presidential election.
- **Chairman of U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Lindsey Graham has said that he wants the Senate to initiate the impeachment trial of President Trump, even if it means changing Senate rules, if House Speaker Nancy Pelosi does not send the articles of impeachment to the Senate. On New Year's Eve, President Trump announced that he would be signing a comprehensive Phase One Trade Deal with China on January 15. At a later date, the President will be going to Beijing to initiate Phase Two talks.** A Chinese trade delegation is planning to travel to Washington on January 13. **Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has said he is ending the suspension of nuclear and long-range missile tests put in place during talks with the U.S.** He has left a door opens for dialogue and said that the scope of any testing would depend on Washington's attitude. **China has replaced a top official in Hong Kong as anti-government protests enter their eight-month. Venezuela's government installed a new Congress chair (Luis Parra to replace Juan Guaido) after armed units blocked opposition lawmakers from entering the parliament building.**

Figure 2. **BBVA RESEARCH MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX 2013 - DECEMBER19** (number of conflicts / total events)



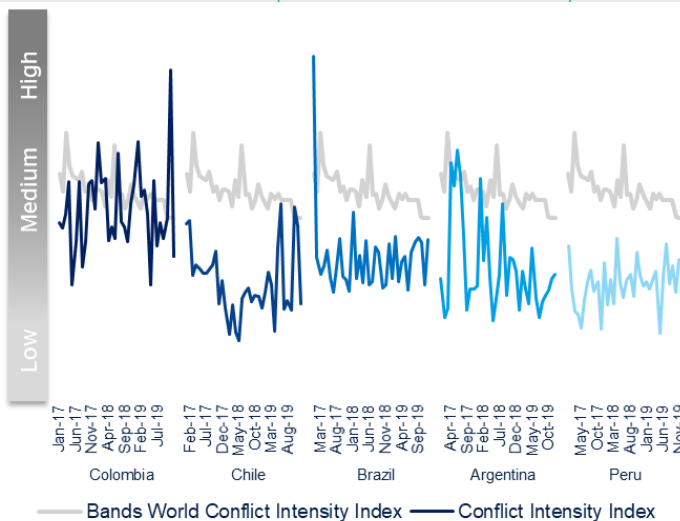
Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 3. **BBVA RESEARCH NORTH AFRICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX 2013 - DECEMBER19** (number of conflicts / total events)



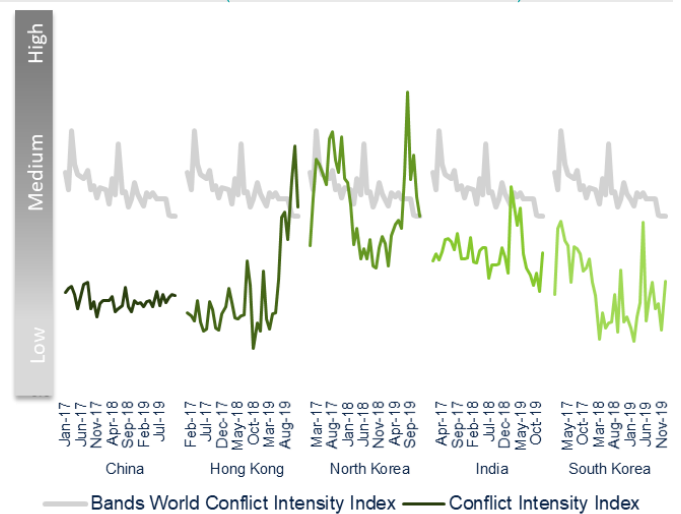
Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 4. **BBVA RESEARCH SOUTH AMERICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX 2013 - DECEMBER19** (number of conflicts / total events)



Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 5. **BBVA RESEARCH ASIA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX 2013 - DECEMBER 19** (number of conflicts / total events)

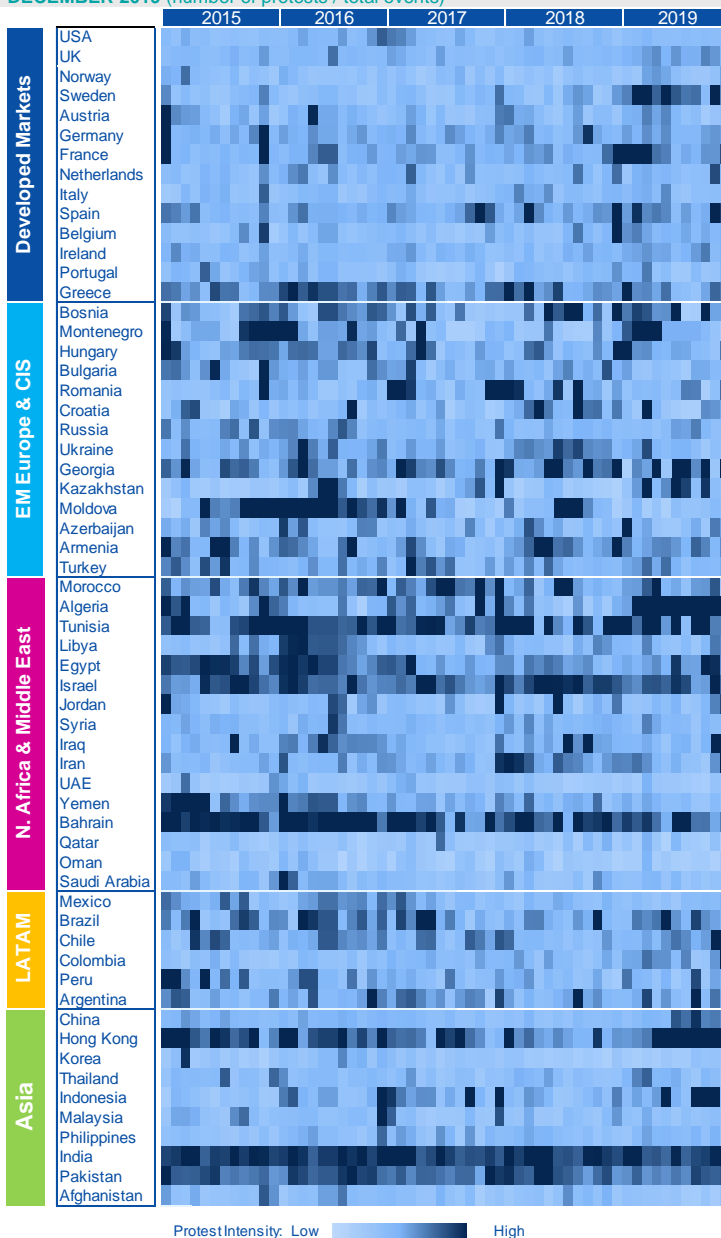


Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

## Global social unrest increased during December

The World Protest Intensity Index<sup>2</sup> increased in December (as shown by our BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Index). According to the BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Map, the key facts were:

Figure 6. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST INTENSITY MAP JAN 2015 – DECEMBER 2019** (number of protests / total events)



Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research. Color distribution according to 2015-2019 time horizon.

- **In regional terms, social unrest increased considerably in North Africa and Middle East countries. Latin American, Eastern European and Asian countries remained at similar levels. Instability decreased in some European countries.**
- **In Europe, in Sweden,** a large demonstration was organized against the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Peter Handke (considered a denier of the Serbian genocide). **In France** protesters marched against the pension reform planned by the French government.
- **In Emerging Europe, in Montenegro** people gathered to protest against the law which states that religious communities will have to provide clear evidence of ownership in order to retain their properties. **In Georgia** the unrest began after negotiations to produce an electoral system reform failed, the opposition had decided to expand the geography of protests.
- **In North Africa and the Middle East, in Algeria,** the elections results had been rejected. The long-standing protest movement against political corruption continues. **In Tunisia,** unrest had growth after a 25 years old man set himself on fire in protest against poverty and poor living conditions. **In Iraq, Iran and Pakistan** demonstrations were organized to call attention to rising tensions in the Middle East.
- **In Latin America, in Chile,** thousands poured into the streets to protest economic inequality and to commemorate the people who have been killed during the demonstrations. **In Colombia** new protests erupted against Duque and the cost-cutting measures it has employed. Indigenous groups were mobilized from all over the country to converge in Bogotá.
- **In Asia, in Honk Kong,** a massive pro-democracy demonstration took place in Hong Kong, with over a million people joining together to keep up the pressure on the government in the early days of 2020. **In India** a new citizenship law that excludes Muslims has increased turmoil. Social unrest also increased in **Pakistan** during the month.

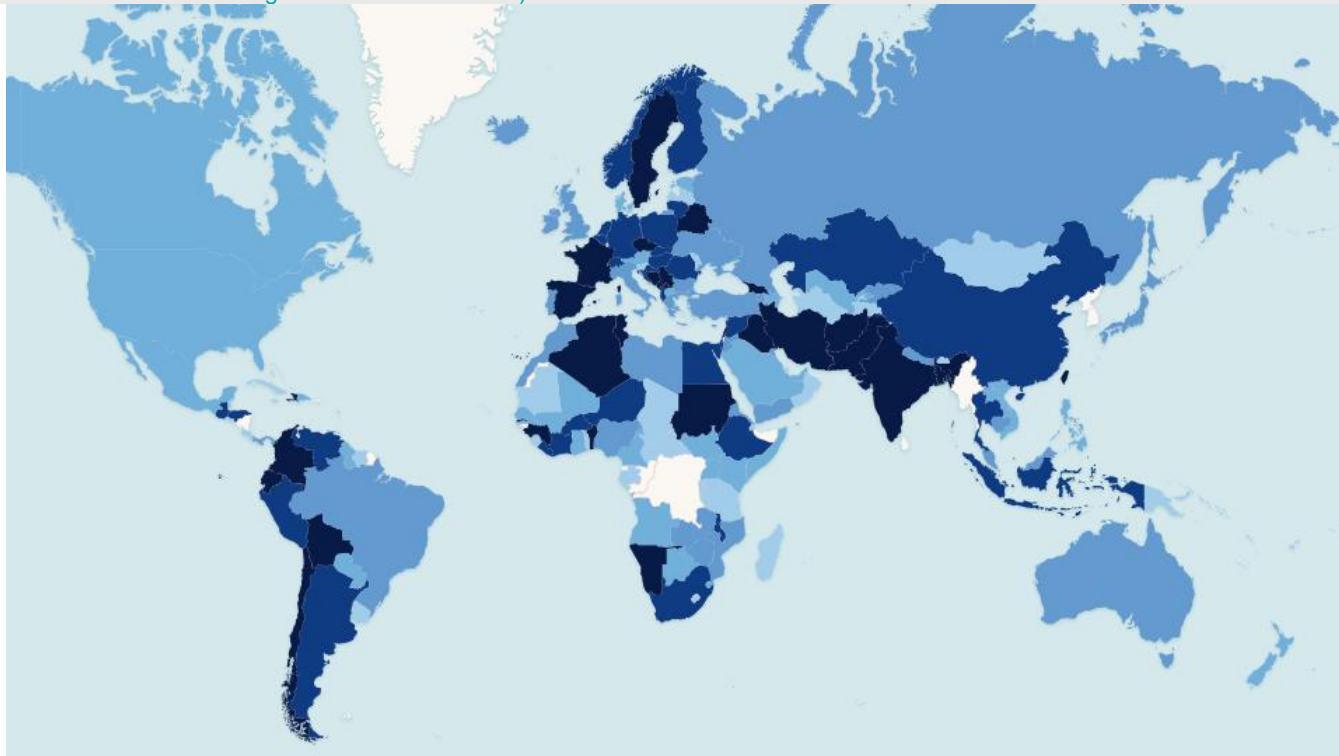
## Summary

Tensions grew after the U.S. targeted Iranian Quds Forces General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, causing further uncertainty in the region. President Trump had threatened to hit Iranian sites if Iran retaliated but since Iran's recent missile attacks caused no casualties the U.S. administration de-escalated the situation and opened the way for diplomacy. Furthermore, the geopolitical situation in the Eastern Mediterranean remains uncertain as the civil war in Libya advances and the dispute regarding energy sharing in Cyprus continues. The U.K. Parliament is close to completing the approval of the Brexit agreement after Boris Johnson's election victory. The impeachment process in the U.S. continues. Chinese and U.S. delegates are to meet in mid-January to sign the first phase of the trade deal.

<sup>2</sup> Further details about the methodology could be found in the annex.

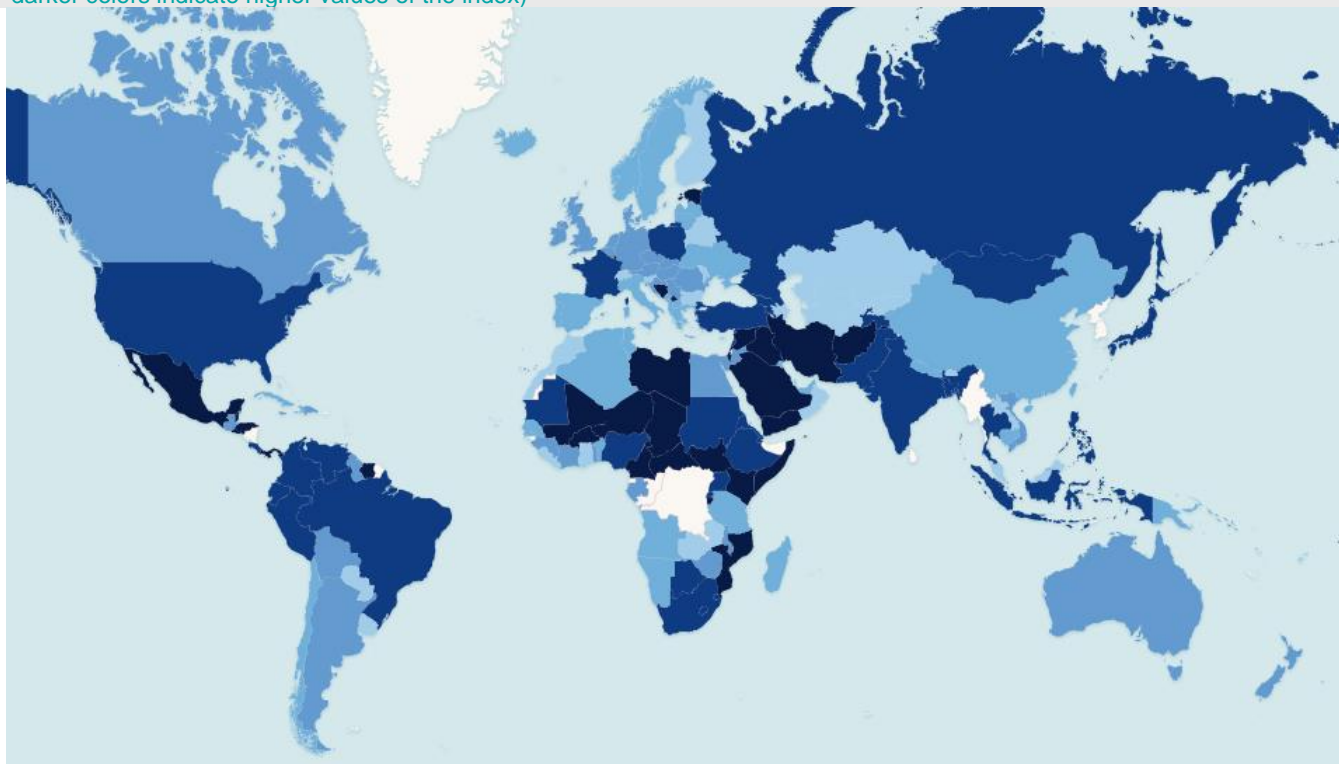
## Annex

Figure 7. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST MAP DECEMBER 2019** (number of protest events / total events by country. darker colors indicate higher values of the index)



Source: BBVA Research and [www.gdelt.org](http://www.gdelt.org)

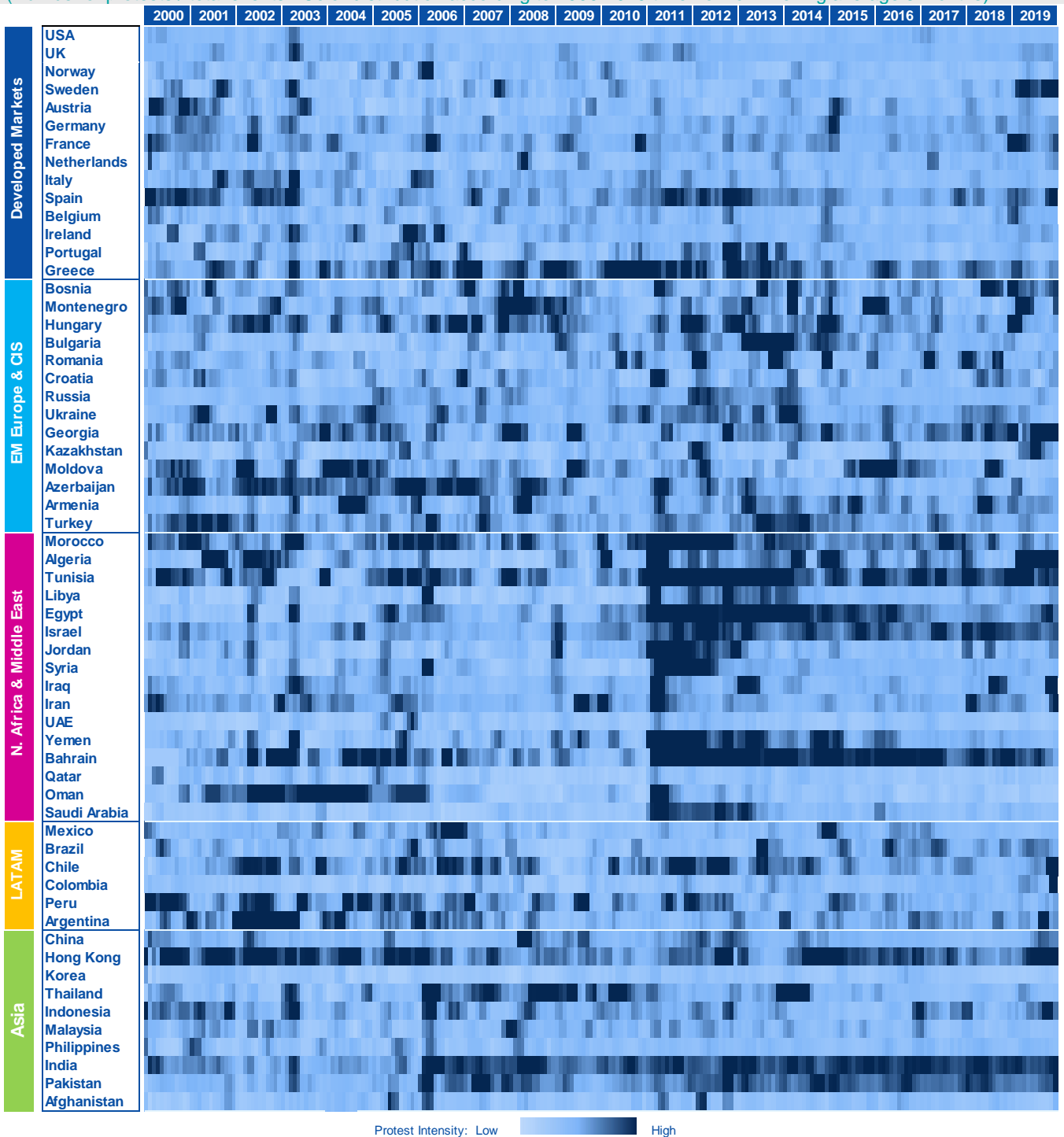
Figure 8. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD CONFLICT MAP DECEMBER 2019** (number of conflict events/ total events by country. darker colors indicate higher values of the index)



Source: BBVA Research and [www.gdelt.org](http://www.gdelt.org)

Figure 9. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST INTENSITY MAP JAN 2000 – DECEMBER 2019**

(Number of protests / total events. Color distribution according to 2000-2019 time horizon. Moving average 3 months)



Source: BBVA Research and [www.gdelt.org](http://www.gdelt.org)

## METHODOLOGY: TRACKING PROTESTS AND CONFLICTS

We have developed tracking for protest and conflict indexes for every country in the world from January 1, 1979 through to present day, with daily, monthly, quarterly and annual frequencies. To construct this, we use a rich 'big database' of international events (**GDELT**), which monitors world events covered by news media from nearly every corner of the world, whether broadcast, printed or published on the web, in over 100 languages, every moment of every day, updated every 15 minutes.

- **BBVA Protest Intensity Index:** We collect information on every registered protest in the world for a particular time, which are then separately collated under the various headings of the **CAMEO taxonomy** as: demonstration or rally, demonstration for leadership change, demonstration for policy change, demonstration for rights, demonstration for change in institutions and regime, conducting hunger strikes for leadership change, conducting hunger strikes for policy change, conducting hunger strikes for rights, conducting hunger strikes for change in institutions and regime, conducting previously unspecified hunger strikes, conducting strikes or boycotting for leadership change, conducting strikes or boycotting for policy change, conducting strikes or boycotting for change in institutions and regime, conducting previously unspecified strikes or boycotting, obstructing passage or blocking, obstructing passage to demand leadership change, obstructing passage to demand policy change, obstructing passage to demand rights, obstructing passage to demand change in institutions and regime, protesting violently or rioting, engaging in violent protest for leadership change, engaging in violent protest for policy change, engaging in violent protest for rights, engaging in violent protest for change in institutions and regime, engaging in previously unspecified political dissent.
- **BBVA Conflict Intensity index:** In the same way, we collect information on every registered conflict in the world for a particular time, considering a **wide variety of conflicts under the CAMEO taxonomy headings** as: imposing restrictions on political freedoms, banning political parties or politicians, imposing a curfew, imposing a state of emergency or martial law, committing suicide, carrying out suicide bombing, carrying out car bombing, carrying out roadside bombing, car or other non-military bombing not specified below, use of a human shield, use of previously unspecified conventional military force, impose blockade, restricting movement, occupying territory, fighting with artillery and tanks, employing aerial weapons, violating ceasefire, engaging in mass expulsion, engaging in mass killings, engaging in ethnic cleansing, using previously unspecified unconventional mass violence, using chemical, biological, or radiological weapons, detonating nuclear weapons, using previously unspecified weapons of mass destruction.
- We use this information to construct an intensity index for both events. **The number of protests and conflicts each day/month/quarter/year are divided by the total number of all events recorded by GDELT for that day/month/quarter/year to create a protest and conflict intensity score** that tracks just how prevalent protest and conflict activity has been over the last quarter-century, correcting for the exponential rise in media coverage over the last 30 years and the imperfect nature in which news is processed by computers.

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