

Geostrategic Analysis

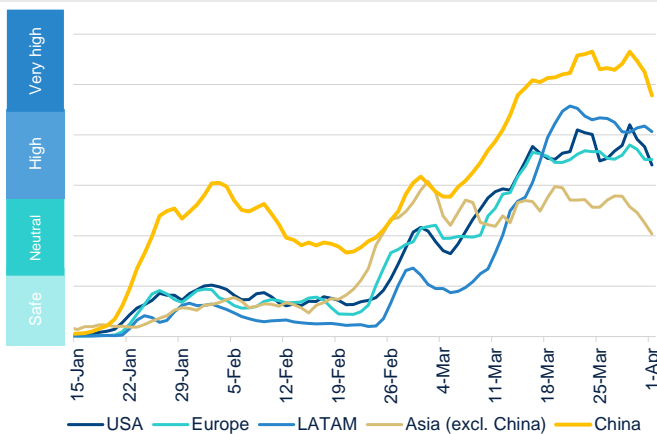
# Geo-World: Conflict & Protest March 2020

Fernando Bolívar / Yigit Engin / Gabriela Meliá / Álvaro Ortiz / Tomasa Rodrigo  
March 2020

In March, the coronavirus spread rapidly worldwide, hitting 180 countries with the United States as the epicenter of the global pandemic with more than 200k confirmed cases. Trump administration has announced that strict measures would continue for at least another month or perhaps till June to contain the virus expansion. In Europe, the fighting against the coronavirus is also the top priority on the political agenda, with Italy and Spain as the most affected countries. Meanwhile, G20 leaders also announced their united front against the pandemic. The relationship between China and the United States was tense due to the coronavirus related diplomatic discussions, but they are easing off. The oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia triggered a major fall in oil price at the beginning of the month.

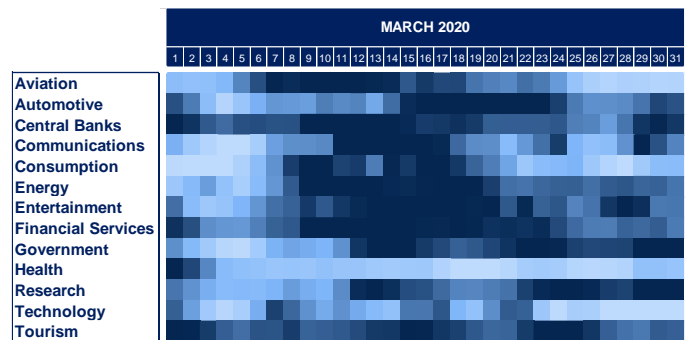
## The coronavirus pandemic continued into the spotlight in March, affecting global politics

Figure 1. **MEDIA STRES INDEX OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK** (WEIGHTED TONE BY COVERAGE, STANDARDIZED SERIES IN MOVING AVERAGE 3 DAYS)



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

Figure 2. **WORLD MEDIA SENTIMENT TO COVID-19 OUTBREAK BY ACTIVITY SECTOR** (DARKER BLUE MEANS HIGHER CONCERNS)



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

The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index<sup>1</sup> slightly decreased in March, where the main developments were:

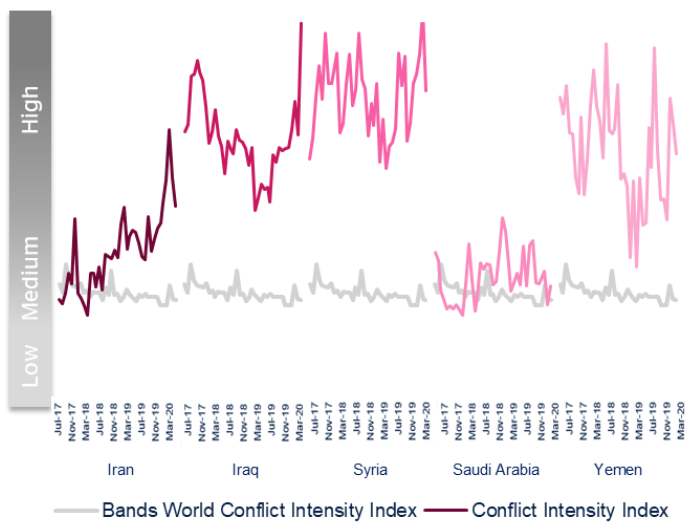
- **According to the latest official figures at the end of March, the coronavirus pandemic has sickened more than 770,000 people across the globe, hitting 180 countries.** The United States has become the epicenter of the pandemic with more than 200,000 cases and more than 5,000 deaths, focus mostly in New York and New Jersey. Italy, Spain and mainland China follows the United States as the most affected countries. U.S. President Trump announced that all Americans must continue to avoid nonessential travel, going to work, eating at bars and restaurants, or gathering in groups of more than 10 for at least another month and perhaps until June. **In Europe**, the lockdown measures extended across 16 countries, including Germany, UK, France, Italy and Spain. In Italy, the most affected European country by the containment measures were extended until April 13. In Spain, stricter lockdown measures were applied to force all non-essential workers to stay at home until mid-April. In Germany, the lockdown measures would not be eased before April 20. In the United Kingdom, British Prime Minister Johnson has tested positive for the coronavirus and restrictions will be in place until mid-April, the same as in France, with the possibility to be extended. **Meanwhile, G20 countries' leaders held a videoconference summit on March 26** to show a joint front against the pandemic by making it their "absolute priority".
- **China and the United States exchanged war of words on the rise of coronavirus this month.** President Trump and top U.S. officials have accused China of a lack of transparency. The U.S. Secretary of State said Chinese authorities were still denying the world of the information needed to prevent further cases. **Nevertheless, tensions have eased.** During a phone call in late March, **Chinese President Xi Jinping said his country was willing to support the United States in dealing with the pandemic.** On the other hand, China accused the U.S. of interfering China's internal affairs after a U.S. warship passed through the Taiwan Strait.
- **As members of OPEC discussed measures to contain the impact of the coronavirus on global oil demand**, with Saudi Arabia suggesting participants cut their oil production by around 1 million barrels per day, and Russia cutting of around 500,000 barrels a day. Russia is not a member of OPEC but was invited to the meeting. The Russians opted out of the plan and Riyadh responded by diminishing its export prices, which resulted in a slash in oil prices. The United States

1: Further details about the methodology could be found in the annex.

put pressure on Saudi Arabia via diplomatic channels but the dispute is still ongoing. **The price war has cut oil prices to around USD 25 a barrel, the lowest level in 17 years. In Syria, Turkey and Russia have conducted their second joint patrol in Idlib to ensure the ceasefire.** In Iraq, the U.S. began departing from a northern airbase to hand it over to Iraqi authorities. France announced that it would withdraw all of its troops from Iraq due to coronavirus but would continue air operations against ISIS. **On March 25, fighting between the U.N.-recognized Tripoli government and Khalifa Haftar forces in Libya escalated.** "Attacks and counterattacks in Libya continue to inflict civilian casualties," the U.N. mission in Libya said. The European Union has decided to launch a new Mediterranean naval and air mission in April to prevent arms shipments to warring parties in Libya.

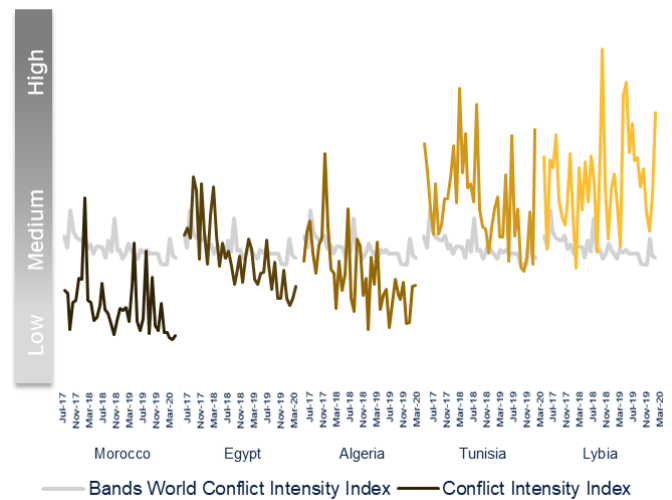
- **Russian President Putin backed constitutional amendments introduced on March 10 that would allow him run for re-election after his term ends in 2024.** In Israel, opposition leader Benny Gantz was elected as the Speaker of the Parliament on March 26, which could signal a formation of a unity government between the parties of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Benny Gantz. Meanwhile, on March 30, **Hungary's parliament has given a green light to allow Prime Minister Viktor Orban to rule by decree indefinitely in order to combat the coronavirus pandemic.**

Figure 3. **BBVA RESEARCH MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 – MAR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



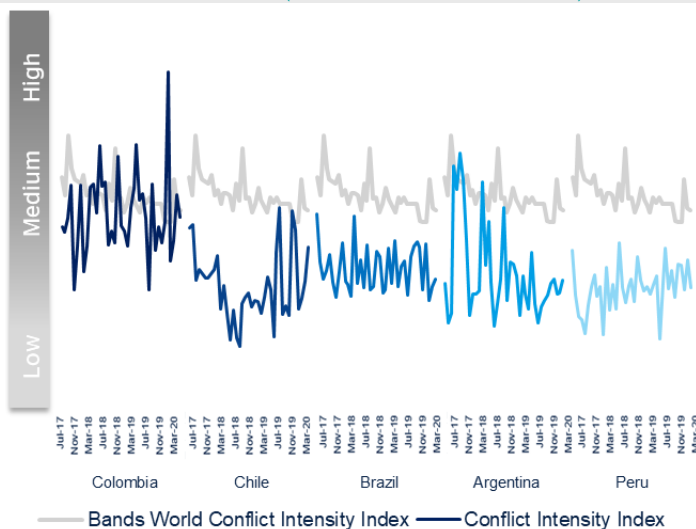
Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 4. **BBVA RESEARCH NORTH AFRICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 - MAR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



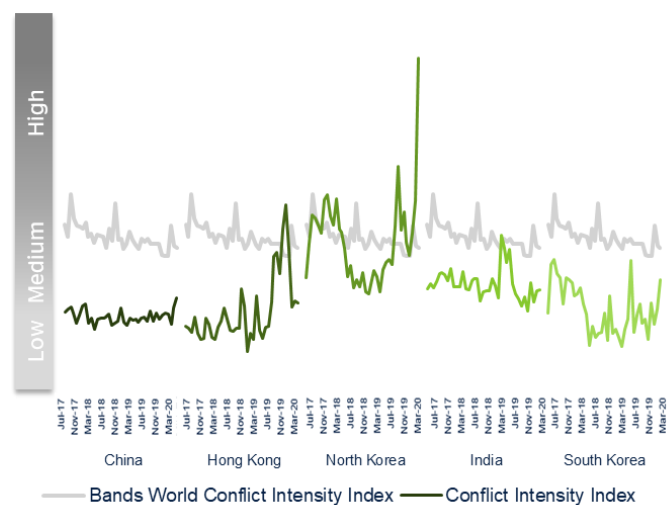
Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

Figure 5. **BBVA RESEARCH SOUTH AMERICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 - MAR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



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

Figure 6. **BBVA RESEARCH ASIA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 - MAR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)

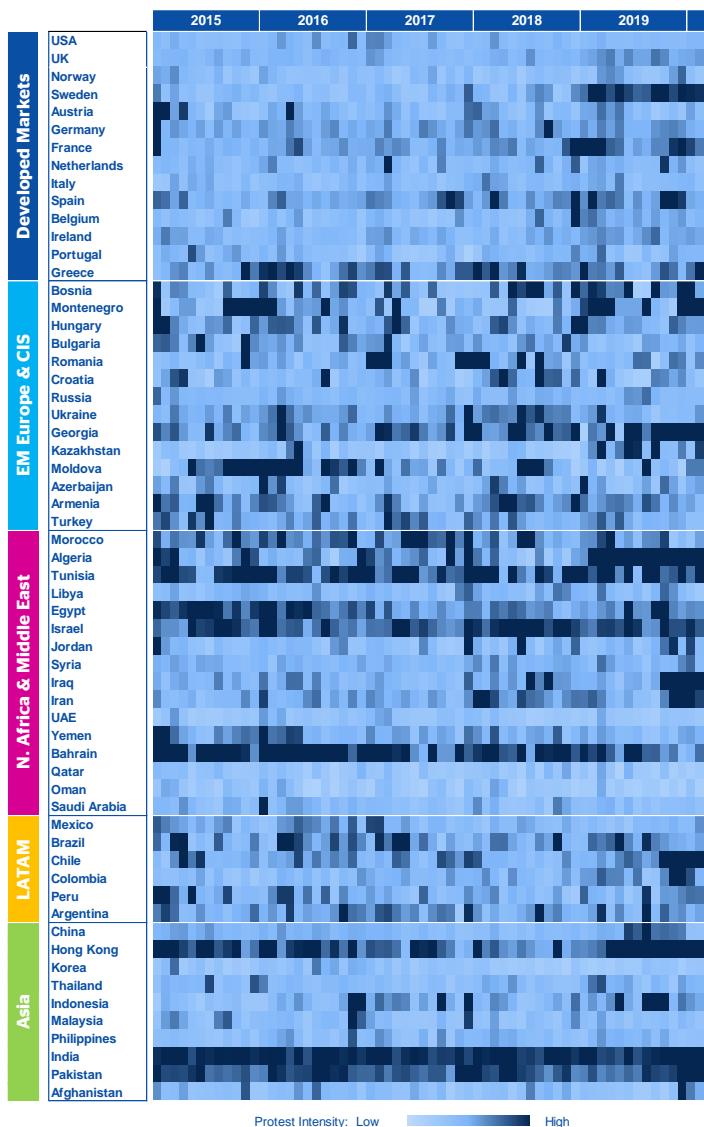


Source: [www.dgelt.org](http://www.dgelt.org) & BBVA Research

## Global social unrest softened by unity against coronavirus

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

Figure 7. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST INTENSITY MAP JAN 2015 – MAR 2020 (NUMBER OF PROTESTS / TOTAL EVENTS)**



- **In regional terms, social noise increased considerably in Latin America. In North Africa and the Middle Eastern countries as well as in Eastern Europe it remained at similar levels than previous month. European countries and Asia were largely contained.**
- **In Europe, general confinement softened protests. In Sweden, climate activists switched to online campaigns due to the virus but have not remained dormant. Thousands of Germans protested in Berlin to demand open borders for immigrants. In Belgium, students protested for more ambitious climate action. Several marches were held for International Women's Day too.**
- **In Emerging Europe, the turmoil triggered by the dynastic succession in Kazakhstan continued to take place. On International Women's Day, women from all over the Balkans held demonstrations to protest against violence, chauvinism, misogyny and nationalism. In Armenia, elections are planned to be held despite the virus, leading protests against it.**
- **In North Africa and the Middle East, despite Algeria's multidimensional crisis, weekly mass protests continued. Amidst Iran's terrifying coronavirus pandemic, the crisis with the U.S. shows no signs of abating. In Tunisia, Egypt, Israel and Bahrain, the virus threat is stimulating unity and easing social unrest. In Syria, Jihadist rebels could launch a counterattack in Idlib despite the ceasefire brokered by Russian and Turkish powers.**
- **In Latin America, gender issues fueled protests in Chile and Argentina with International Women's Day marches. In Brazil, despite repeated warnings, pro-government and anti-Congress demonstrations took place, increasing tensions and fears amid the threat of COVID-19. In Mexico, after months of demonstrations, women across the country celebrated a "day without us" by staying home to protest femicide.**
- **In Asia, in Hong Kong, the arrest of mainstream politicians and a media mogul for peaceful protests marked a sharp escalation in the assault on freedoms. India and Pakistan temporarily relaxed their differences with a plan to gradually revise the Kashmir agreement. Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia suffered from the virus spread due to exodus of migrant workers.**

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

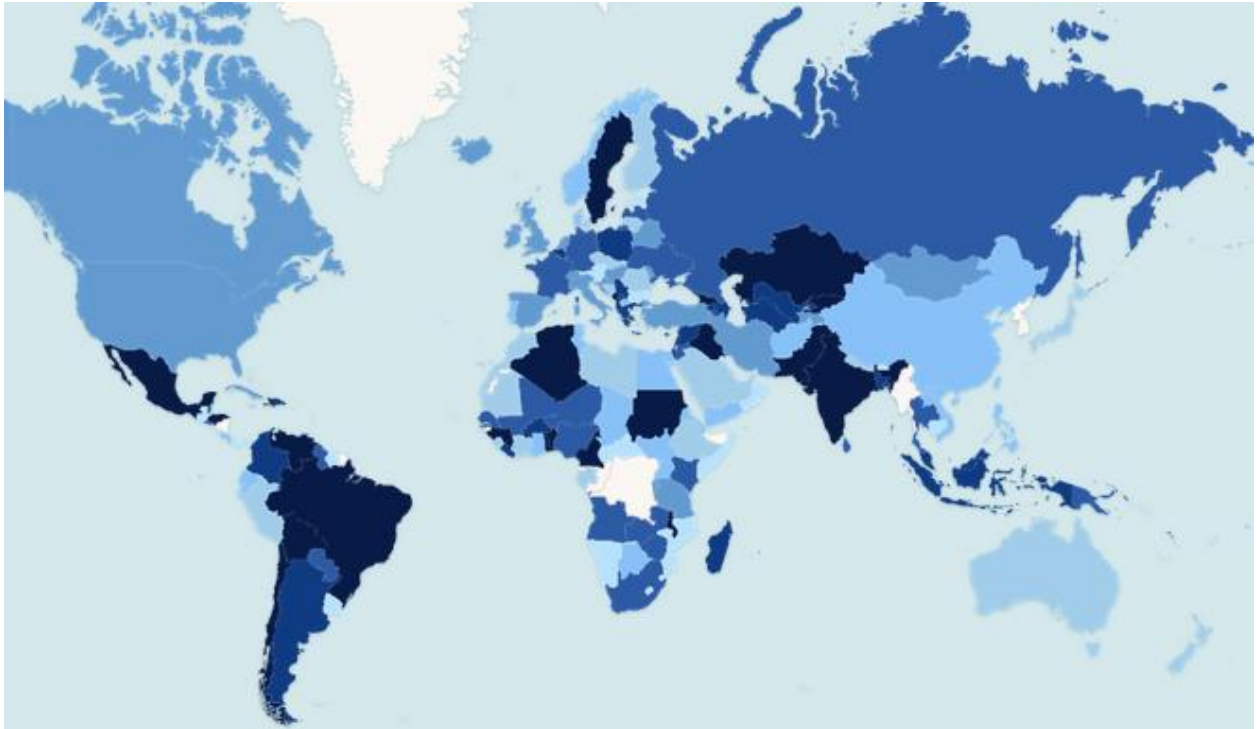
## Summary

The coronavirus pandemic has now reached more than 770,000 infections across the globe where the United States has become the epicenter of the pandemic. Therefore, Washington D.C. announced that it would continue to implement strict measures for a while. Global political leaders committed to form a united front to fight the pandemic. Policy measures to combat the humanitarian and health crisis will be key to contain spillovers effects to the economy. The United States and China have relaxed the war of words on coronavirus but regional issues, especially events concerning Taiwan still continue to cause dispute between the two countries. The oil price war sparked due to a dispute between Moscow and Riyadh on how to tackle demand issues in light of coronavirus have cut prices to the lowest levels in 17 years. Meanwhile, political agendas in Russia, Israel and some other countries were dense throughout the month.

2: Further details about the methodology could be found in the annex.

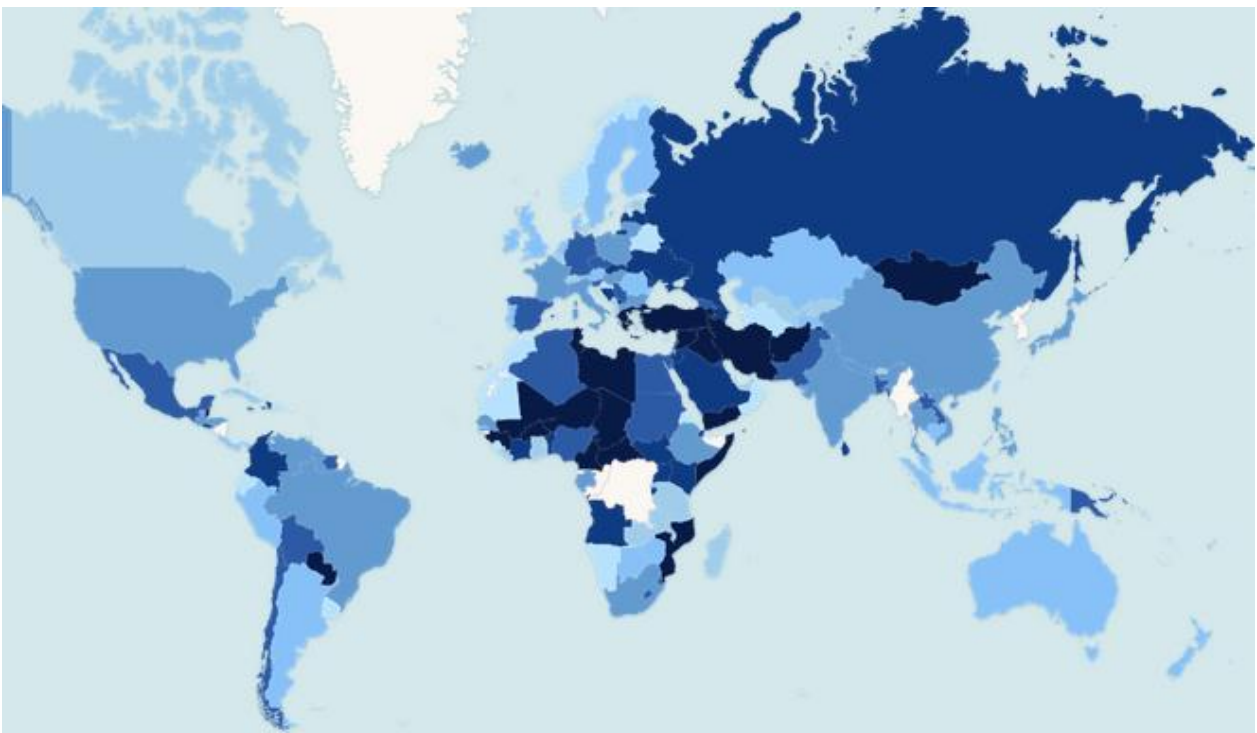
## Annex

Figure 8. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST MAP MARCH 2020** (NUMBER OF PROTEST EVENTS / TOTAL EVENTS BY COUNTRY. DARKER COLORS INDICATE HIGHER VALUES OF THE INDEX)



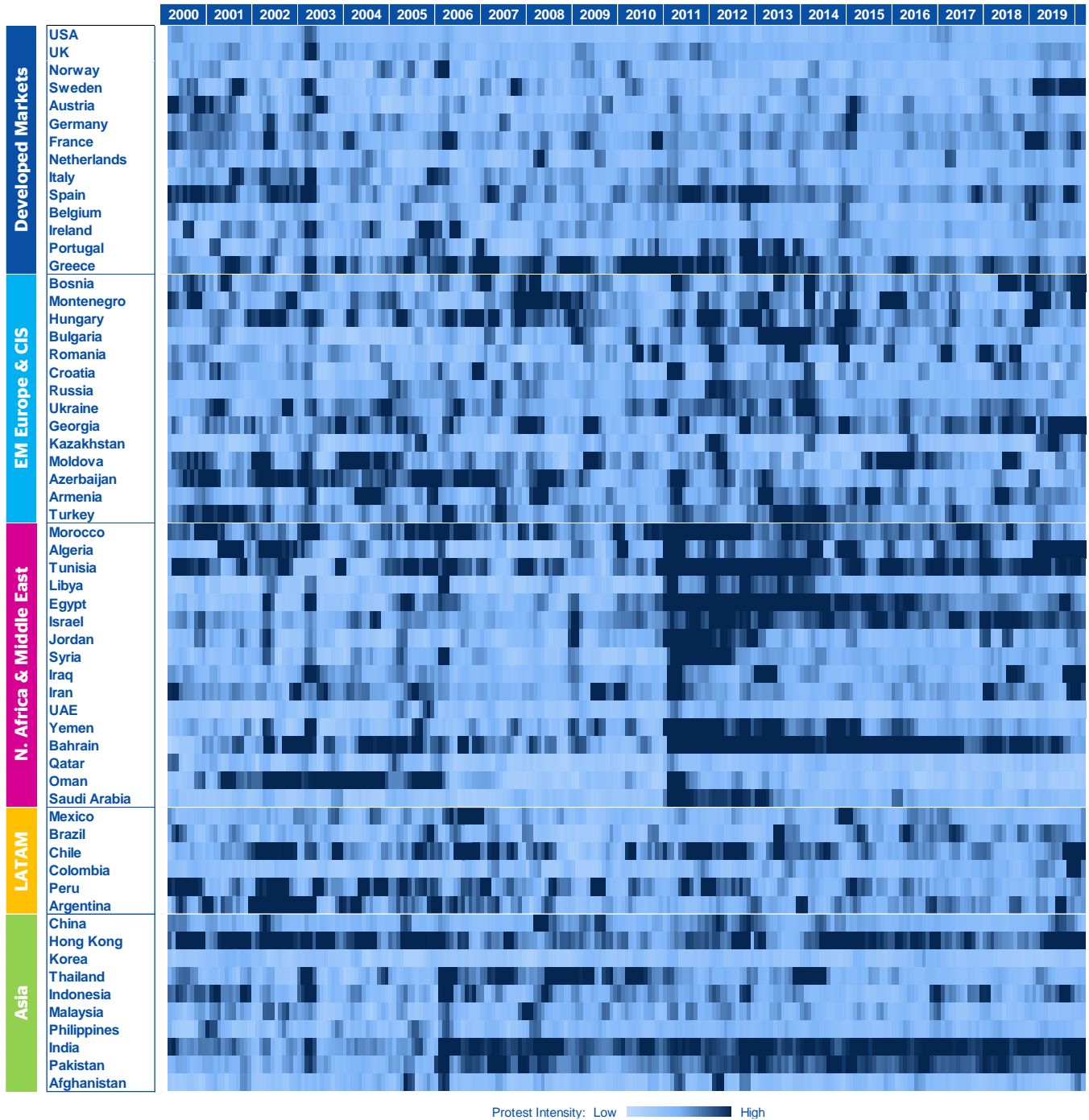
Source: BBVA Research and [www.gdelt.org](http://www.gdelt.org)

Figure 9. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD CONFLICT MAP MARCH 2020** (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 10. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST INTENSITY MAP JAN 2000 – MAR 2020** (NUMBER OF PROTESTS / TOTAL EVENTS. COLOR DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO 2000-2020 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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### ENQUIRIES TO:

BBVA Research: Azul Street. 4. La Vela Building – 4th and 5th floor. 28050 Madrid (Spain).  
Tel. +34 91 374 60 00 y +34 91 537 70 00 / Fax (+34) 91 374 30 25  
bbvaresearch@bbva.com www.bbvaresearch.com

