



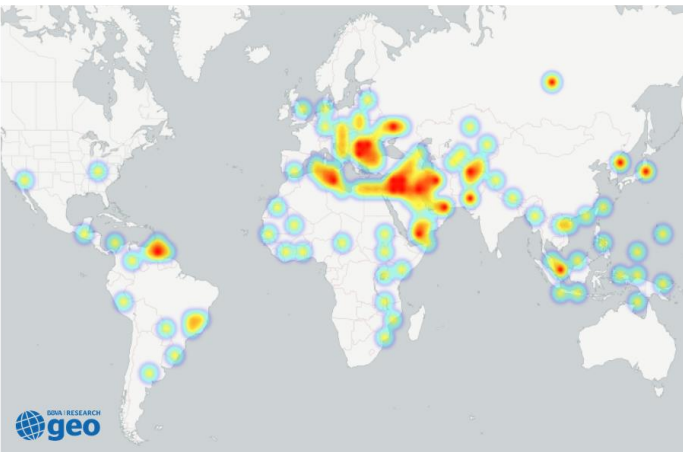
Geo-World: Conflict & Social Unrest January Update

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Geopolitical conflicts have become one of the main threats to world stability in 2015 and will continue to be challenging during 2016. The Syrian war is far from solved despite the Geneva talks, Russian support to the regime is showing once again its inability to find a solution. ISIS continued spreading its regional campaign, taking advantage of the sectarian clashes and internal instability in the Middle East and North Africa. Russia showed no sign of making peace in Ukraine and prompted further confrontations with NATO after violating Turkish airspace again. Tensions in Latin America eased in most of the region's countries during the month, but a new health crisis arose with the spread of the Zika virus. Europe remained stable although the refugee crisis continued posing risks to stability, as well as Asia, where some hot spots appeared in Indonesia following the ISIS attack.

Geopolitical conflicts around the world eased slightly during January...

BBVA Research World Conflict Heatmap (Jan, monthly changes)
(Number of conflicts / Total events)



Source: www.gdelt.org & BBVA Research

- **Russian-backed separatist intensified operations in Eastern Ukraine**

They bombed Ukrainian positions with heavy artillery near Mariupol and across the frontline.

- **ISIS expanded through the MENA region**

It took advantage of social instability in the region - as is the case in Tunisia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Libya - to expand its terrain.

- **Complex challenges in 2016 for the West**

Further US involvement against ISIS is expected. Europe will have to counter Russian violence and to manage the uncontrolled refugee crisis.

The BBVA Research world conflict intensity index¹ slightly decreased during January, but is still at worrisome levels and above the long-term average. The main reasons behind this above-average rate are the continued expansion of ISIS through the MENA region, the intensification of Russian operations across the frontline in Ukraine and the Russian support for major Syrian regime victories during the month ensuring its preservation. Moreover, **Russia violated Turkish airspace** for the first time since Turkey downed a Russian warplane last November, indicating a further escalation in its confrontation with Turkey.

ISIS continued exploiting disorder and political instability in the region, as is the case in **Tunisia and Yemen**. ISIS also carried out attacks in **Turkey**, which signalled a major Turkish involvement against the group, and in **Saudi Arabia** with attacks against Shi'a Moslems, exacerbating the critical situation in the country after the recent clashes with Iran. **ISIS also targeted Libya** during the month, and this will be worrisome as Libya could become an important source of funds for ISIS and will favour the destabilisation of Egypt.

ISIS is **expanding its networks in South-east Asia** too, and carried out its first attack in Indonesia. This once again challenges the US's effectiveness in the fight against ISIS and prompted the **West to consider further involvement against ISIS** in the short term.

Media coverage around the world related to Zika virus
(Number of sources about Zika virus/ Number of sources about each location)
Source: www.gdelt.org and BBVA Research



Besides **Russian-backed separatists escalating their offensive operations in eastern Ukraine**, bombarding Ukrainian positions with heavy artillery, Russia also **supported anti-European Union and anti-NATO opposition groups** in Moldova and Montenegro, heating up the confrontation with Europe and regional instability. Therefore, deterring Russian violence has become the top US military priority in Europe, according to the US European Command.

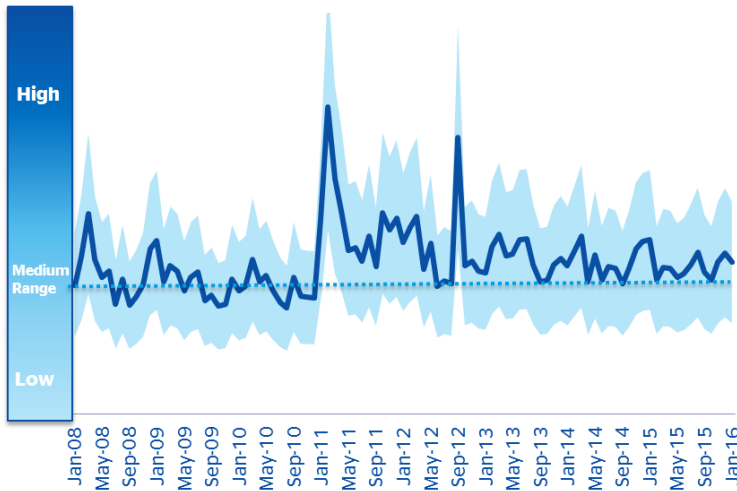
The end of the month has been marked by the third round of the Geneva talks. It will be difficult to make progress as there is resistance to participate among the main Syrian opposition delegation.

¹Details about methodology can be found in the following link: [Methodology, tracking protests and conflicts](#).

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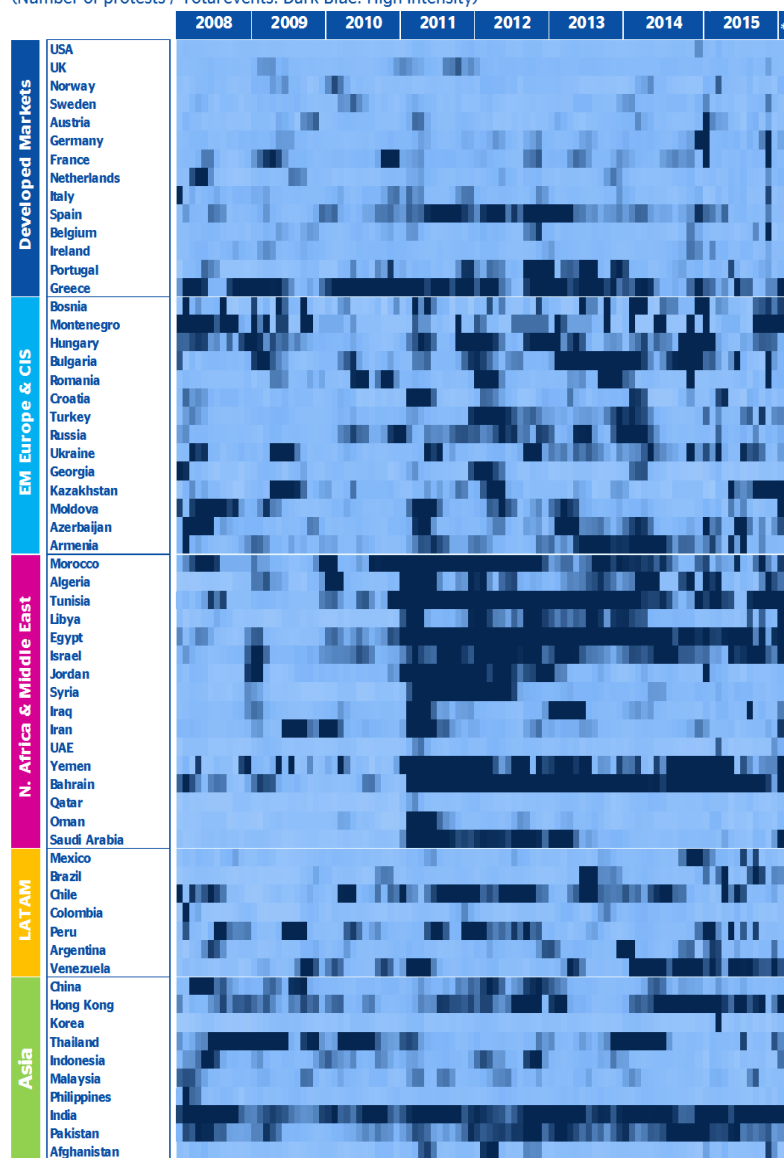
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BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Index 2008-16 (Number of protests in the world / Total events in the world)



Source: www.gdelt.org & BBVA Research

BBVA Research World Protest Intensity Map Jan 2008 - Jan 2016 (Number of protests / Total events. Dark Blue: High Intensity)



Source: www.gdelt.org & BBVA Research

Protest Intensity: Low High

... as well as social unrest

The World Protest index mildly decreased in January after three months on the rise (as shown by our BBVA Research world protest intensity index²), but still far above the long-term average. According to our BBVA Research world protest intensity map, the main key takeaways were the following:

- In regional terms, social unrest remained calm in Western Europe. In emerging Europe, the refugee crisis remained, triggering unrest in the Balkans. In Eastern Asia, the situation is generally calm, while the Middle East and North Africa remain in a critical situation. Demonstrations also eased in Latin America, but Zika health crisis erupted introducing new concerns in the region.

- In Western Europe, social unrest continued at low levels, reaching values similar to those observed before the ISIS attacks in November. The main hot spot remains in Greece, given the continuing demonstrations against austerity.

- In Emerging Europe, the pressures of the refugee crisis in the Balkans are triggering social tensions and will not evaporate until a comprehensive solution is reached in Europe. On the other hand, tensions rose in Turkey, given the ISIS terrorist attack in Sultanahmet and the pressure between the government and PKK.

- In North Africa and the Middle East, instability spread across several countries. Violent protests resumed in Tunisia, challenging the government, which imposed a curfew and held an emergency cabinet meeting to stabilise the situation. Unrest also worsened in Morocco, Libya, Egypt and Israel. In the Middle East, sectarian clashes resurged between Iran and Saudi Arabia prompting instability, which also rose in Yemen, Iraq and Bahrain.

- In Latin America, tensions eased in most countries, with the exception of Venezuela. In Brazil, economic woes and unemployment led to several popular protests. The Zika crisis could trigger some problems.

- Pressures in Asia remained relatively contained in most countries, apart from Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia, which soared after the ISIS attack. India situation remained a concern too.

Summing up

The expansion of ISIS in the region, the resurgence of instability in North Africa, the resumed sectarian clashes in the Middle East as well as Russia's stance in Ukraine and Syria present a complex panorama with crucial challenges and risks for 2016.

²Details about methodology can be found in the following link: [Methodology, tracking protests and conflicts](#).



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