

Geostrategic Analysis

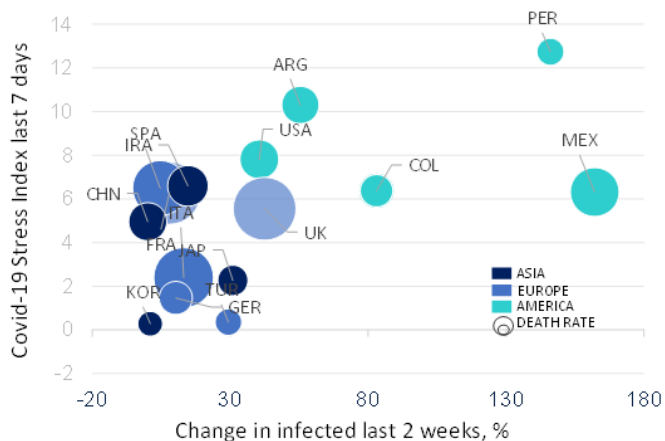
Geo-World: Conflict & Protest April 2020

Fernando Bolívar / Yigit Engin / Gabriela Meliá / Álvaro Ortiz / Tomasa Rodrigo
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In April, the coronavirus crisis remains in the spotlight. More than 3.4 million people have been diagnosed with COVID-19. However, in many European countries the number of new cases began to decline and in the United States they remain stable. Some countries are preparing for a gradual easing of restrictions but uncertainties are still alive. The exchange of accusations over the pandemic between the United States and China continued during the month. In North Africa, the war in Libya escalated further, with the UN recognized government gaining ground. Disputes involving Iran heated up once again in the Middle East, as Washington would increase the pressure. The United Kingdom will begin new trade talks with the United States and the European Union.

New COVID-19 cases in Europe decreased in April

Figure 1. **MEDIA STRESS INDEX OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK* AND NEW INFECTED PEOPLE** (*Tone in the media speaking about covid-19 weighted by coverage, last week of April)



Source: BBVA Research, WHO & www.gdelt.org

New cases in many European countries have been decreasing during the month

In the US the increasing trend has been contained too.

China-US war words over the pandemic escalated once again

US remains critical of China regarding coronavirus pandemic.

Geopolitical issues in the Middle East and North Africa are still tense despite pandemic

The war in Libya continues. US-Iran dispute is still alive in diplomatic arena.

UK discusses trade deals with the EU and US

UK seeks new trade deals. In some countries political discussions continue.

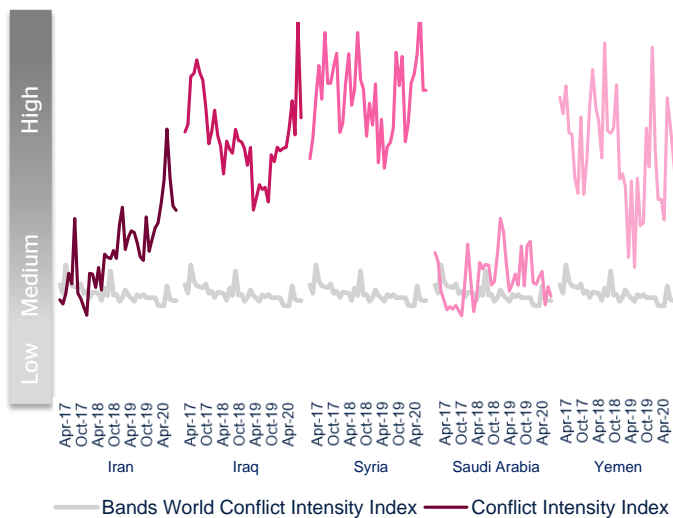
The BBVA Research World Conflict Intensity Index¹ decreased in April. The main developments of the month were:

- According to official data, the coronavirus pandemic has sickened more than 3.4 million people in at least 177 countries. The United States is still the epicenter of the pandemic with more than 1.1 million cases. Nonetheless, in many European countries including Italy, Spain, Germany and France, the number of new cases is decreasing. This decreasing trend is also observed in Turkey, Iran, China and Japan among others. On the contrary, in Russia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Egypt and Iraq, the virus is spreading and new cases are increasing. In the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, India, South Korea and Saudi Arabia the epidemic seems contained with new cases remaining stable. Countries with a decreasing trend are seeking a gradual opening of lockdown restrictions. France will gradually reopen schools and businesses from May 11. "There will be several phases and May 11 will be one of them," French President Macron said. Germany will reopen playgrounds, museums and churches as of May 4, and will decide on schools and sports events in the coming days. Russian Prime Minister Mishustin told President Putin that he had been diagnosed with coronavirus and was temporarily stepping down in order to recover. In addition, President Putin ordered his government to begin preparations for a gradual lifting of the restrictions from mid-May. **US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the COVID-19 pandemic shows the need to overhaul the World Health Organization (WHO)** also stating that the US may never restore WHO funding, which President Trump suspended, and could even work to establish an alternative body instead.
- The dispute over the coronavirus pandemic between China and the United States continued during the month. US President Trump said on May 2 that raising tariffs on China is an option, in line with his comments saying, "We signed a trade deal where they're supposed to buy, and they've been buying a lot, actually. But that now becomes secondary to what took place with the virus." Meanwhile, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister stated that Beijing opposes any international inquiry into the coronavirus pandemic that presume China's guilt. On April 29, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said China should provide the world access to its virology labs in Wuhan.

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

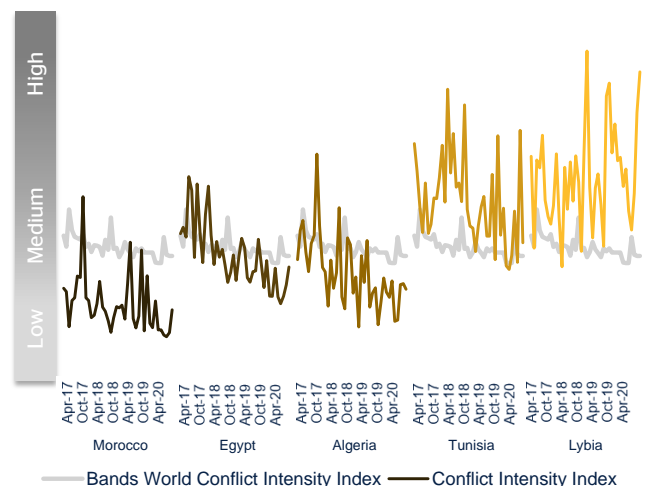
- **In Libya, the UN recognized government in Tripoli (GNA) made critical gains in the west of the country against Khalifa Haftar forces.** The military operations still continue. Meanwhile, Khalifa Haftar forces declared a unilateral ceasefire but the GNA rejected. The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Italy, and the EU's top diplomat made a joint call for a humanitarian truce. Turkey has sent medical aid supplies to the United States as donation. Ankara also announced that the activation of the Russian S-400 missile defense system will be delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, "but it will move forward as it was planned" according to Turkey's presidential spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin. **On April 22, Iran said it successfully launched its first military satellite into orbit.** US Secretary of State Pompeo called for Iran to be held accountable. He stated that Washington would not allow Iran to purchase conventional arms after UN prohibition expires in October. **On April 24, the Saudi-led coalition extended a unilateral ceasefire in Yemen by one month.**
- **In the second week of May, UK ministers will being trade deal discussions with US officials.** UK Foreign Minister Dominic Raab said that his country and the European Union should reach a trade deal by the end of the year to contain further uncertainties. Meanwhile, the US Trade Representative said that the new US-Mexico-Canada trade deal would take effect on July 1. **Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said a parliament election scheduled for the end of this year may not be held** if the coronavirus pandemic cannot be contained. **Israel's Supreme Court began a two-day hearing on May 3 to decide whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's indictment disqualifies him from forming a cabinet.**

Figure 2. **BBVA RESEARCH MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 – APR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



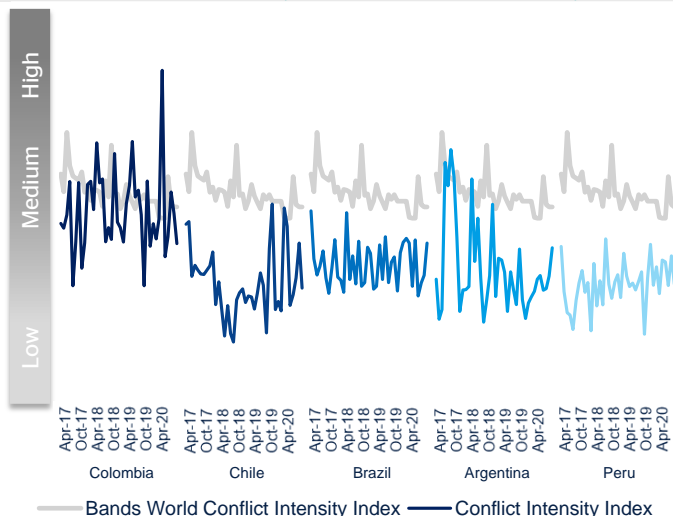
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 3. **BBVA RESEARCH NORTH AFRICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 – APR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



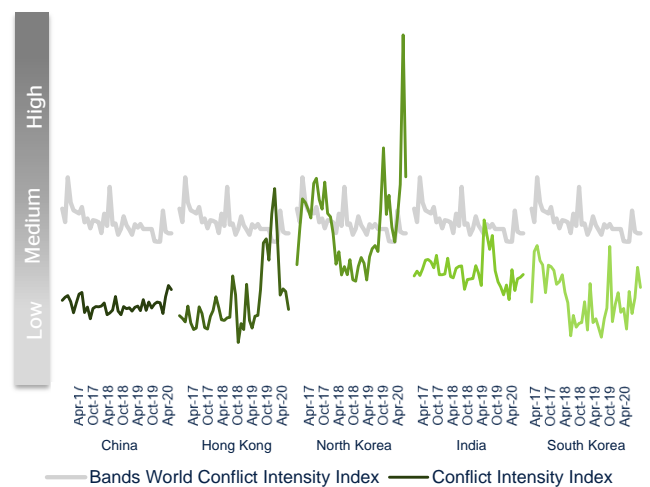
Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 4. **BBVA RESEARCH SOUTH AMERICA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 – APR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Figure 5. **BBVA RESEARCH ASIA CONFLICT INTENSITY INDEX JAN 2017 – APR 2020** (number of conflicts / total events)

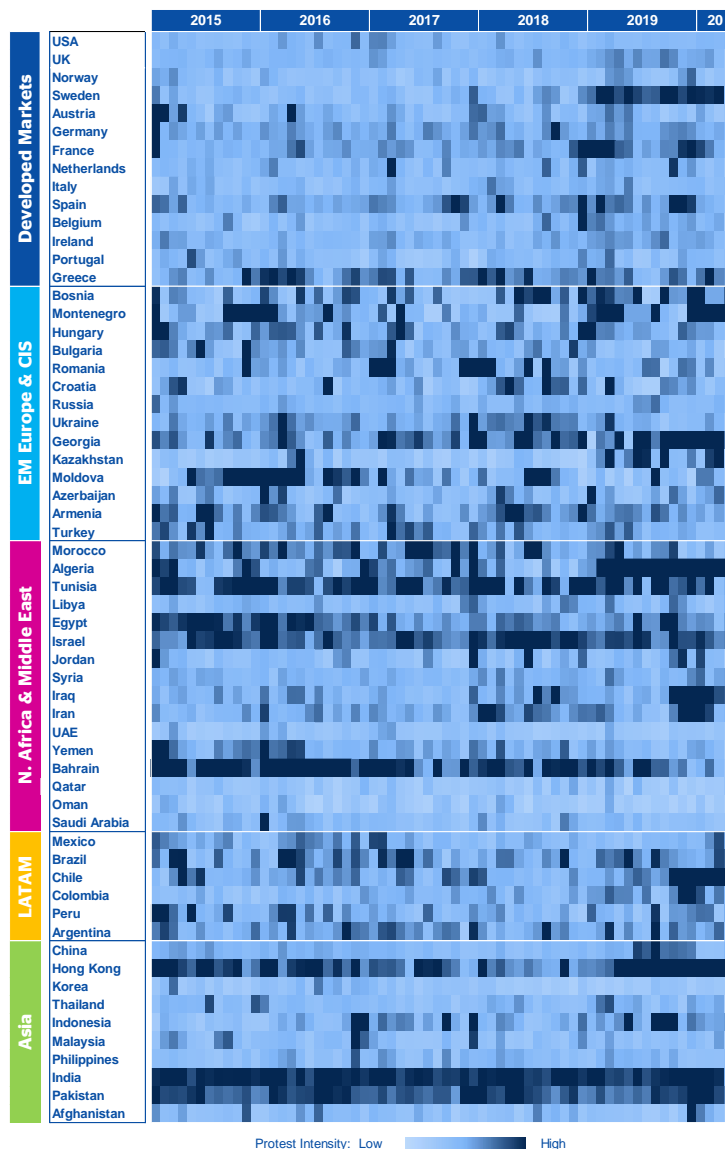


Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

Global social unrest continued to decrease amid the Covid-19 crisis

The World Protest Intensity Index² decreased in April (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 – APR 2020 (NUMBER OF PROTESTS / TOTAL EVENTS)



Source: www.dgelt.org & BBVA Research

- In regional terms, whereas social unrest increased in some countries in Latin America, it has decreased elsewhere.
- In Europe, lockdowns are having an attenuating effect on protests. In **Greece**, medical workers staged protests due to the lack of resources. Unrest at refugee camps has increased due to the danger the virus represents and, in Chios, a fire caused extensive damage after a riot. **Swedish** pro-migrant protests continued to take place despite coronavirus bans.
- In Emerging Europe, in **Georgia**, a rally was held after the state of emergency was extended by one month. **Kazakhstan's** Foreign Ministry officially protested against an article saying that Kazakhstan wanted to become part of China. In **Montenegro**, religious protests have been ongoing since January, which further strains the situation caused by crisis management. In **Azerbaijan**, there were demonstrations in Iran when a video emerged allegedly showing Iran supporting Armenia.
- In North Africa and the Middle East, **Algeria** is at risk of collapsing under the weight of falling oil prices due to COVID-19. In **Syria**, while a bombed-out oil tanker kills dozens of people, COVID-19's calls for a ceasefire have little weight among the armed factions. Internal tensions in **Iraqi Kurdistan** rose due to the presence of the PKK and the Turkish response. Risks increased in tense **Israeli** unity talks after inconclusive March elections.
- In Latin America, **Brazil** calls for the president's removal from office have increased following the resignation of Justice Minister Sergio Moro. There has been outcry. In **Chile**, as attempt is made to free Pinochet's human rights abusers from jail. In **Mexico**, as concerns about COVID-19 grow, the president is accused of having misplaced priorities.
- In Asia, anti-government activists in **Hong Kong** are preparing to resume protests when social distancing policies are relaxed. In **Indonesia**, desperate workers announced mass protests against the controversial job creation bill despite the pandemic. The COVID-19 health crisis is barely holding back tensions between **India and Pakistan**, accusations were exchanged about the recent cross-border bombing in Kashmir.

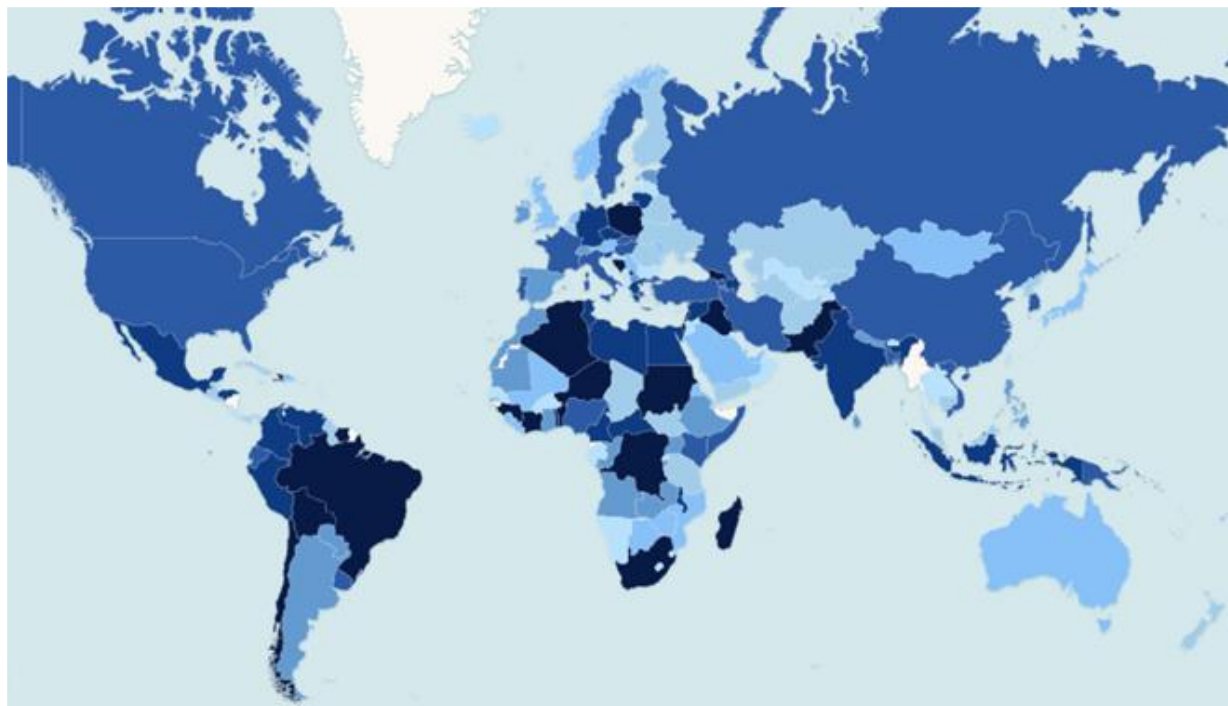
Summary

More than 3.4 million people were diagnosed with Covid-19 around the world, and the United States is still the epicenter of the pandemic with more than 1.1 million cases. Nevertheless, many European countries, as well as China, experienced decreases in the number of new cases. In the United States new cases remain stable. The war of words between Washington and Beijing created uncertainties in the diplomatic arena. The Libyan civil war continues to escalate. Geopolitical tensions surrounding Iran agenda is well alive as Tehran launches a military satellite and Washington looks to increase pressure on Iran. UK trade deal talks will resume in the coming period as it continues its Brexit process.

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

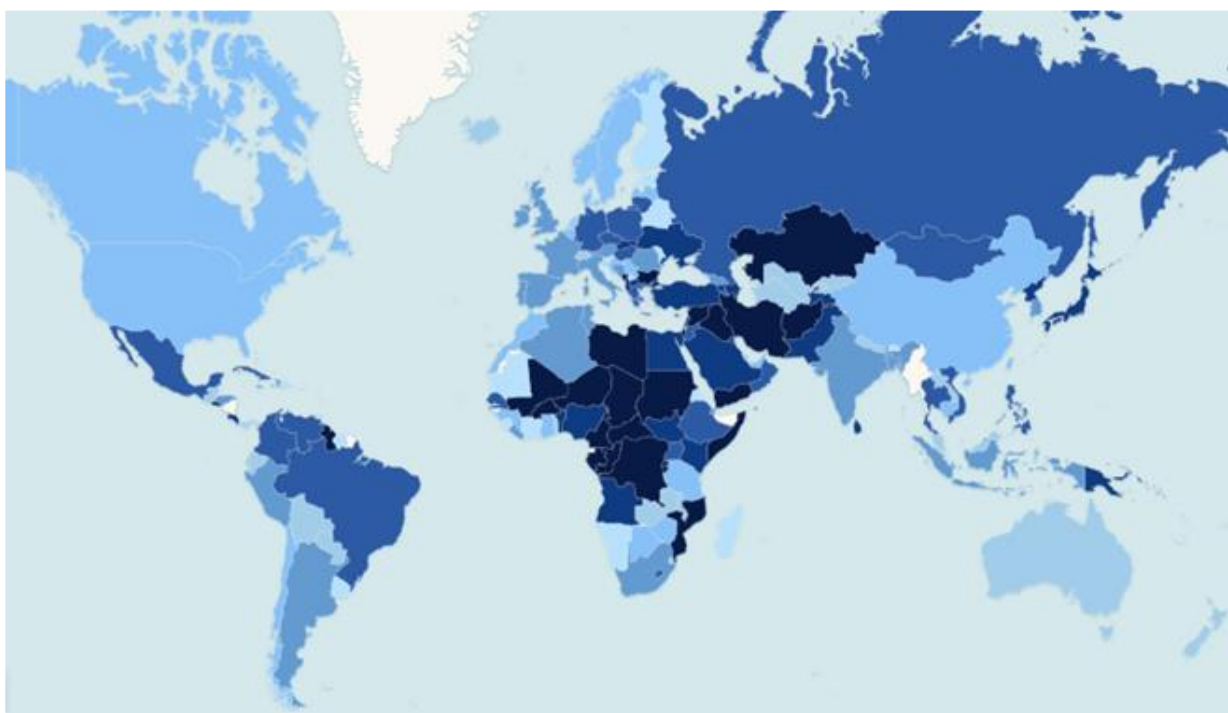
Annex

Figure 7. **BBVA RESEARCH WORLD PROTEST MAP APRIL 2020** (NUMBER OF PROTEST EVENTS / TOTAL EVENTS BY COUNTRY. DARKER COLORS INDICATE HIGHER VALUES OF THE INDEX)



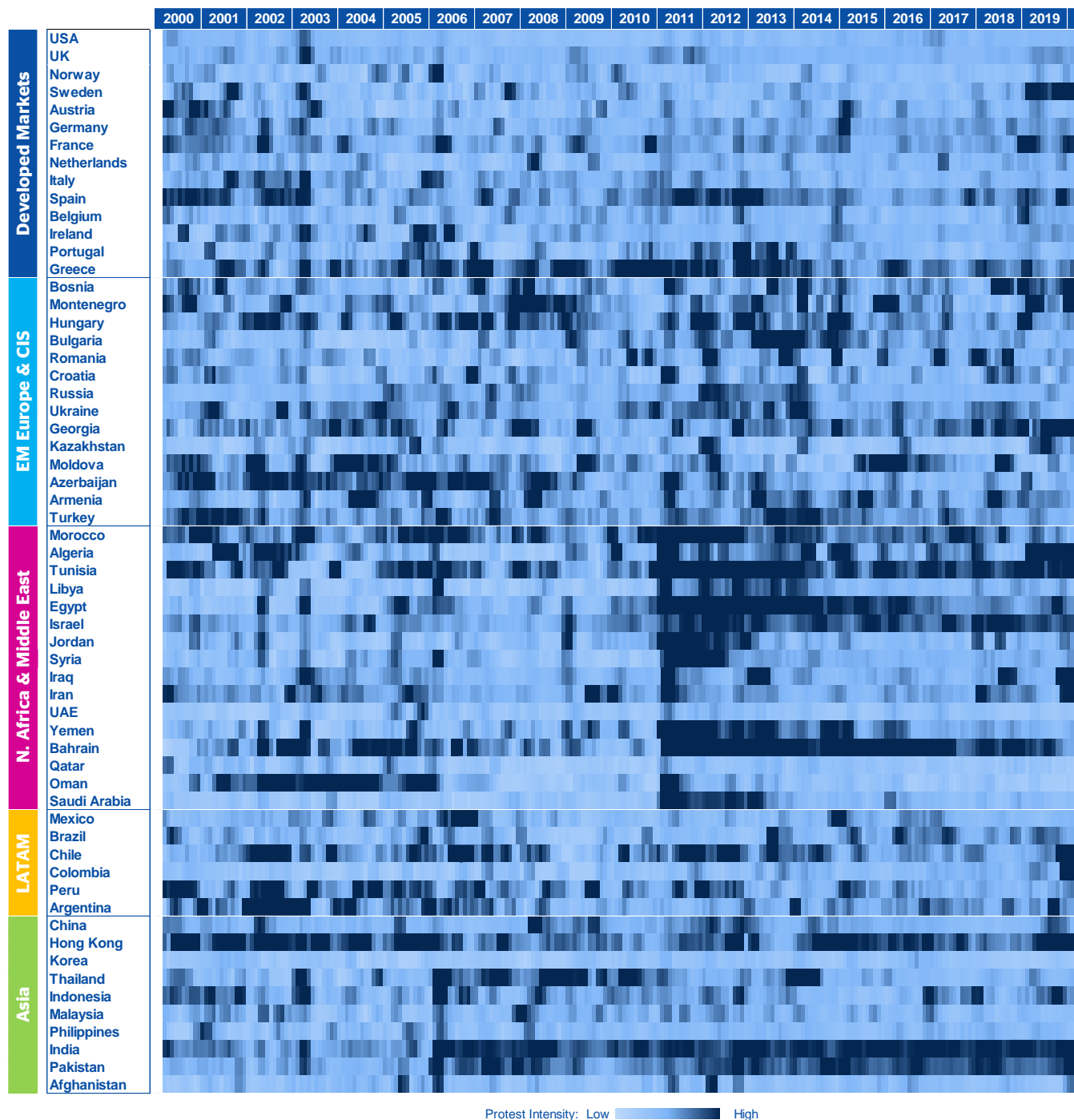
Source: BBVA Research and www.gdelt.org

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



Source: BBVA Research and www.gdelt.org

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

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 rights, 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

