

Peoples under Threat 2020

Across many parts of the globe, populations continue facing threats of wide-ranging atrocities and other human rights abuses from states and other actors. Political opponents, minority groups and indigenous peoples tend to be the most affected. The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 virus and the varying responses of different governments to its containment have had profound implications across the world, but particularly in societies already struggling with conflict or division.

While more affluent and relatively stable countries tend to have been first hit by the virus, more volatile and vulnerable regions of the world may not yet have felt the full force of the health crisis. The intersection of the pandemic with political, social and economic dynamics continues to unfold – sometimes predictably and sometimes not – but frequently in ways that exacerbate or inflame situations where the possibility of mass violence is close at hand. And where political instability and insecurity are high, testing and treatment capacities tend to be low, leaving populations at risk of transmission and infection. The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, recognized the urgency of the situation in late March 2020, calling for the world to ‘put armed conflict on lockdown’.

One of the foremost concerns raised by the COVID-19 crisis has been the direct impact on the life chances of populations already affected by conflict and instability – in other words, those who inhabit, or have fled, the countries profiled in *Peoples under Threat*. Where wars, uprisings or unrest are ongoing or not far in the rearview, healthcare infrastructure tends to be limited and overstretched, placing vulnerable populations at great risk to the disease. Endemic mismanagement, corruption and foreign sanctions often add to the problem, diminishing faith in government – as is evident, for instance, in Sudan or Venezuela. Dangers of armed conflict combined with lockdown restrictions pose challenges to medical aid and personnel reaching people in need, many of whom are stuck in overcrowded, unsanitary camps where the virus could explode. Those in or near Idlib in Syria and Yemen’s Marib governorate are at especially high risk, as are the camps around Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, housing nearly 1 million Rohingya who have been rendered stateless, but have so far survived ethnic cleansing of such intensity that the Myanmar government stands accused of genocide.

COVID-19 has also hindered international solidarity and cooperation necessary for effective crisis

management and conflict resolution. Many world leaders have diverted greater attention to what they perceive to be more pressing domestic concerns. In the cases of Yemen and Libya, occupying the top two spots in the *Peoples under Threat* ‘Rising threats’ table, international officials involved in mediation efforts have also been waylaid by sudden travel restrictions. Long-awaited peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban have been similarly handicapped. International peacekeeping operations have also been encumbered by concerns about the spread of COVID-19. In April, following earlier measures, the UN fully suspended the rotation and deployment of peacekeepers until the end of June. Particularly in the most demanding mission settings, such as Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), there is a risk that troops’ morale and effectiveness will dip. Lockdowns have also impeded the programming and reporting of NGOs and media outlets, which play a crucial role bearing and sharing witness to human rights violations and holding perpetrators accountable.

At the same time, some positive prospects for peace have emerged from the pandemic. Several ethnic armed groups in Myanmar have ceased hostilities and entered into coordinated efforts with the central government to provide health services, potentially a step towards reviving peace talks. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte announced a one-month unilateral ceasefire with communist rebels in March, and while ceasefires in Syria have come and gone, a shaky Russian-Turkish agreement has allowed humanitarian aid to reach embattled civilians in Idlib.

But more often than not, armed groups have sought to exploit newfound breathing room afforded by national governments and their international partners pulling back. Militants loyal to so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) provinces in West Africa have intensified their activities, particularly around the Lake Chad basin and the border region between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – one of the world’s most violent hotspots. Regional state security forces, already outmatched, have become even less able to challenge the cross-border operations of highly mobile and adaptable insurgents. In Iraq, too, ISIS attacks are picking up steam as international cooperation has become less engaged. Many members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS have pulled troops out of Iraq due to fears of infection, halting coalition training activities for Iraqi security forces.

Peoples most under threat – highest-rated countries 2020

Rank	Country	Groups	Total
1	Syria	Political targets, Sunnis, Shi'a/Alawites, Yezidis, Christians, Druze, Kurds, Palestinians	29.029
2	Somalia	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gabooye etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	22.729
3	South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	22.121
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	20.510
5	Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	20.476
6	Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Faili Kurds, Bahá'ís, Palestinians	20.325
7	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambutu, other groups	20.163
8	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	18.178
9	Pakistan	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	18.147
10	Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers; religious targets	17.966
11	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	17.527
12	Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	17.238

At the same time, some armed groups have attempted to eclipse the state and assert their own governance credentials by taking the fight to COVID-19. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham rebels in Syria have promoted healthcare information and physical distancing, while the Afghan Taliban has distributed personal protective equipment. Yet there is a risk of this backfiring: if the virus uncontrollably surges, so too might public disaffection. Other groups have advocated for more general exploitation of state fragility and disorder, a call that has been trumpeted recently across ISIS media platforms.

COVID-19 has also been instrumentalized by extremists seeking to scapegoat and further marginalize minority communities, many of whom

already face systematic violence ranging from hate speech to mass killings. Accusations of minorities deliberately spreading the virus proliferate quickly on social media. Sowing intercommunal enmity, populist politicians and media have gotten in on the act: in India, against a backdrop of widespread demonization of Muslims, officials from the ruling BJP party have denounced 'corona terrorism' and called for Muslims who attend mosques amid the pandemic to be 'punished like terrorists'. Working from a different script, an extremist Egyptian preacher created a YouTube video in April expressing hopes that the coronavirus would annihilate Shi'a and other 'infidels'.

Immense pressure is placed on societies and political systems by the pandemic and its effects,

particularly where state institutions are weak, creating the potential for increased violence. While fears of contracting the virus tend to have deterred large public demonstrations in the early days, tolerance for lockdowns wears increasingly thin. The public health and economic consequences of the pandemic generate discord between citizens and their governments. An economic downturn has caused unemployment and income loss while disrupting trade and food supplies, such as Afghanistan's vital wheat imports. According to the World Food Program, nearly 1 billion people could face a 'hunger pandemic' by the end of 2020. Even where the health crisis is relatively contained, the economic impact of COVID-19 could wreak havoc in fragile states already prone to unrest and violent conflict.

Perhaps contemplating such a future, many governments have used COVID-19 as a pretext to stifle dissent and consolidate state power. The pandemic has enabled states of emergency and led to restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association – measures which could long outlive the health crisis. In the Philippines, President Duterte acquired extraordinary emergency powers that his government has exploited to roll out highly militarized anti-COVID measures. There is a danger that criticism of government responses to the pandemic are treated as threats to political stability and public order, as in Turkmenistan, where officially no infections have occurred and merely uttering the word 'coronavirus' is illegal. Adjustments to electoral processes for public health reasons, such as delayed voting, could also benefit leaders seeking prolonged stays in office or enhanced powers. This has been the case in Sri Lanka, where Gotabaya Rajapaksa, an accused war criminal, remains president. Where similar machinations are seen as underhanded and resisted by opponents, there is risk of violence erupting. Crucial transitional justice processes have also stalled under the pandemic, as in Sudan and the Gambia.

Impacts of the COVID-19 health crisis are still unfolding and will last long into the future, unevenly but inexorably affecting those countries populating the upper reaches of the *Peoples under Threat* table. *Peoples under Threat* identifies country situations around the world where communities face the greatest risk of genocide, mass killing, or systematic violent repression. Based on current indicators from authoritative sources (see box on page 15), *Peoples*

under Threat has been compiled every year since 2005 to provide early warning of potential future mass atrocities. *Peoples under Threat* highlights 20 situations with pressing risks – states either at the top of the index or those swiftly rising. It is estimated that these accounted for the vast majority of civilians who were killed last year. The ongoing tragedy of the pandemic is a sad reminder of the crucial importance of good governance, rule of law and inclusion, a message underscored by *Peoples under Threat* in its 15 years of annual publication.

Peoples at greatest risk

As the conflict enters its 10th year, **Syria** remains at the top of the *Peoples under Threat* index. While a precise death toll is difficult to calculate, more than 500,000 Syrians are estimated to have been killed during the conflict and upwards of 12 million displaced, almost half of whom are now living outside the country. While all sides have perpetrated atrocities, the Syrian government and its allied Russian forces remain responsible for the vast majority of civilian casualties. The regime of President Bashar al-Assad has increasingly re-established power, a trend evident since Russia's military intervention in 2015. While Kurdish-led forces pushed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) fighters from the group's last outpost in March 2019, the Syrian military – boosted by Russia, Iran and various Shi'a militias – continues its onslaught on areas still held by Islamists, other rebels and Turkish-backed forces in and near Idlib province. Government and Russian forces have for years systematically targeted hospitals and medical facilities, and an offensive beginning in December 2019 resulted in the worst displacement crisis to date. Many of the 1 million uprooted people in northwest Syria now crowd camps in conditions that leaves them highly vulnerable to a COVID-19 outbreak.

While elections are scheduled for late 2020 and early 2021, the first expression of universal suffrage in more than 50 years, **Somalia** remains unstable. With a frail healthcare infrastructure and more than 2.6 million people internally displaced, a COVID-19 crisis risks fueling political tensions and even violence between supporters and opponents of President Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo'. Al-Shabaab, claiming its enemies are 'crusader forces' weaponizing COVID-19, has continued deadly gunfire, improvised explosive device (IED) and shelling attacks on the

Somali National Army and its allies, as well as civilians, government officials and politicians. Most attacks occur in Mogadishu, Middle and Lower Shabelle, as well as Jubaland and Puntland, where al-Shabaab have also clashed with ISIS-affiliated fighters. African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other foreign forces continue to support the government, but AMISOM is scheduled to withdraw from Somalia by 2021, raising concerns about the government's preparedness. Civilians continue to be affected by deadly inter-clan clashes and US airstrikes.

With the February 2020 formation of **South Sudan's** new Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, the country's civil war formally came to an end. Yet the six-year conflict has caused approximately 400,000 'excess deaths,' around half due to violent injuries, with limited healthcare facilities and higher levels of disease also contributing. A COVID-19 outbreak could be devastating in such conditions, where over half the country's population require humanitarian assistance and 1.7 million internally displaced survivors crowd camps with poor sanitation. Throughout 2019, civilians faced atrocities by armed groups including the forces of President Salva Kiir and longtime rival Riek Machar, who have not been held accountable. Their new government faces challenges to its unity and capabilities by armed non-signatories to the power-sharing agreement: a sustainable peace remains illusory until weak institutions, corruption and a lack of inclusive citizenship are rectified. Inter-ethnic violence between Dinka, Nuer and Muerle pastoralists has continued.

The number of civilian casualties in **Afghanistan** in 2019 only slightly improved on the tragic record of the previous year, with July-September being the deadliest three months since the UN began counting in 2009. The 3,400 civilian deaths and nearly 7,000 injuries in 2019 resulted mostly from fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government, supported by NATO and additional US forces. The Taliban has leveraged unprecedented territorial gains in peace negotiations with the US government, with whom it reached an agreement in February 2020. Yet in advance of the planned next step, intra-Afghan negotiations, Taliban offensives have escalated further. The economic downturn caused by COVID-19 has raised worries of food insecurity and resulting unrest. The spread of COVID-19 has also animated conspiracies about the mainly Shi'a Hazara community, which has long faced deadly extremist

violence, including an ISIS-claimed suicide attack on a wedding in August that killed 63 people and an assault by the same group in March 2020 on a ceremony commemorating a prominent Hazara leader. At least 32 people were killed in the latter attack, many of whom were also Hazaras.

While gradually improving, the situation in **Iraq** remains precarious. From October, massive nationwide anti-government demonstrations have been met by security forces with violence, leaving over 500 dead by the end of the year. Since the second half of 2019, ISIS militants have ramped up attacks on civilians, infrastructure and security forces in Iraq, aiming to exploit the diversion of government resources to the popular unrest as well as preparations for a COVID-19 outbreak. Healthcare capabilities are poor and nearly half a million internally displaced people are in camps. The US-led coalition against ISIS, supporting the Iraqi military and Kurdish forces, has also been weakened by the focus of international attention elsewhere, and several coalition members have announced troop withdrawals due to fear of COVID-19's spread. Tensions between the US and Iran have led to the exchange of fire between US forces and Iraqi state-sanctioned, mainly-Shi'a militias, undermining the joint fight against ISIS.

The **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** has seen increased demobilization of armed groups following the January 2019 inauguration of President Félix Tshisekedi, the declared winner of a widely disputed election the previous month. Yet, particularly in the country's eastern provinces, atrocities have continued at the hands of government forces and more than 130 armed groups – many originating from neighbouring countries – who have fought one another as well as UN peacekeepers. Beni territory, North Kivu and the South Kivu highlands have been especially hard hit, with unidentified militias continually attacking civilians. Deadly conflict between Hema and Lendu ethnic groups escalated in Ituri province, uprooting around 300,000 people. In April 2019, for the first time, ISIS-linked fighters carried out offensives in the DRC. With poor healthcare facilities and 4.5 million people internally displaced as a result of decades of conflict and instability, a COVID-19 outbreak would severely compound the existing humanitarian emergency.

Following months of countrywide mass protests in which security personnel killed hundreds of demonstrators, **Sudan's** dictator of nearly three

decades, Omar al-Bashir, was overthrown by the military in April 2019. Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces then murdered more than 100 protestors in June and brutalized many others. A transition from military to civilian rule is now underway but shaky. Positive political, social and economic reforms have occurred, including a framework agreement for peace talks in Darfur and a ceasefire between the government and rebel groups in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. But peace processes have faltered as funding for demobilization is scarce and rebel leaders have misgivings – shared with many other Sudanese – about Bashir-era military commanders retaining excessive influence in the transitional government. For Sudan, COVID-19 also intersects with an economic crisis, where soaring inflation and a lockdown makes survival difficult for millions of people.

Pakistan continues to be plagued by conflict between the government and various armed Islamist groups, mainly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with civilians often abused by state and non-state actors. Security personnel, ordinary civilians, journalists and even healthcare workers have been targeted by the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), ISIS and other armed groups who have carried out shootings, suicide attacks and detonated improvised explosive devices. Pakistan-based Islamist militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for a major attack on Indian soldiers in February 2019, and exchange of fire over the disputed ‘Line of Control’ between Pakistan and India has since killed civilians. Fearing economic consequences, Pakistan has taken a lax approach to a COVID-19 lockdown, but if infections skyrocket, state institutions could be severely burdened. Extremists have also blamed the spread of COVID-19 on minorities, particularly the Hazara Shi’a and Ahmadi communities, who already face societal discrimination, hate crimes and periodic bombings.

Rising threats

Prolonging the world’s worst humanitarian disaster, the war in **Yemen** has directly resulted in more than 100,000 deaths. Often by airstrikes and shelling, civilians continue to be killed by all sides, including the Iran-backed Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized government of Abd-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, supported by a Saudi-led Arab coalition and Western powers. Clashes between members of a

decades-old southern secessionist movement and Hadi-aligned forces, allied against Houthi forces, erupted in August 2019 in Aden. Despite a power-sharing deal agreed between separatists and the government in November that year, in April 2020 the Southern Transitional Council, backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), declared self-rule. By creating a rift between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, this may complicate efforts to end the war. ISIS and al-Qaeda fighters continue to regularly attack Houthi and Hadi-aligned forces as well as one another in Bayda governorate. COVID-19 has slowed international peacemaking efforts and with 24 million people already in need of humanitarian assistance, an outbreak could worsen the catastrophe.

Libya has predictably risen in the *Peoples under Threat* table. Renegade general Khalifa Haftar’s April 2019 offensive on the capital, Tripoli, appears to be defeated more than one year later, having generated the country’s worst violence since 2011. In Tripoli and across western Libya, civilians have been caught in the middle of fighting between forces aligned with Haftar’s so-called Libyan National Army, backed by an eastern government, and forces loyal to the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. The conflict has become more intractable due to the increased involvement of external powers, namely Turkey and Russia, who have fueled the bloodshed by funneling military and financial aid to opposing sides. Tribal and ethnic groups in Libya’s southern desert continue clashing over territory and resources and have been more-and-more involved in the wider conflict. The GNA has earmarked funds to fight a COVID-19 outbreak, but Libya is lacking medical staff and equipment.

For **Nigeria**, 2019 marked the tenth year of conflict between the government and the Islamist militant group, Boko Haram, which split into two factions in 2016. Mainly in northeastern Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, the number of deaths increased from the previous year as Boko Haram fighters clashed with military targets and carried out attacks on civilians, including suicide bombings and abductions. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction has been strengthening ties with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, which will exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria and across state borders. In the northwest, a conflict rooted in resource competition between Fulani herders and mostly-Hausa farmers has become increasingly entangled with organized crime and

Major risers 2020

Rank	Rise in rank	Country	Groups	Total
5	3	Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	20.476
10	1	Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers; religious targets	17.966
11	2	Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	17.527
12	2	Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	17.238
19	8	Mali	Tuareg, Arabs, Maure, and others in the north	14.549
25	7	Venezuela	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, political/social targets	13.678
28	6	Niger	Djerema-Songhai, Hausa, Tuaregs	13.176
35	7	Mozambique	Northerners	11.990
36	11	Nicaragua	Indigenous peoples, Creoles	11.791
45	25	Burkina Faso	Mossi, Foulse, Fulani	10.530
46	17	Cambodia	Cham, Vietnamese, indigenous hill tribes (Khmer Leou)	10.419
51	18	Indonesia	Acehnese, Chinese, Dayaks, Madurese, Papuans, religious minorities	10.210

ISWAP activities, and in the so-called Middle Belt, deadly attacks and reprisals continue between the primarily Muslim Fulani and predominantly Christian farmers of Berom and Tiv tribes. Conflict-ravaged communities already suffering from food insecurity are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

According to a September 2019 report by a UN-led independent fact-finding mission on **Myanmar**, roughly 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Rakhine state are living under the threat of genocide. Underlining the danger, in January 2020, the International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar to take urgent measures to prevent genocide. Following decades of persecution, including imposed statelessness, Myanmar's mostly-Muslim Rohingya population faced a military-led campaign of mass killings and forced expulsion beginning in August

2017. Today another 900,000 Rohingya remain in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where COVID-19 threatens to run rampant in the world's largest refugee settlement. Sanitation and health services are meagre. An outbreak could also devastate Myanmar's conflict-affected states – mainly Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine – where the military clashes with ethnic armed groups. In Rakhine, fighting continues to escalate between the Arakan Army and security forces, whose methods of brutalizing the ethnic Rakhine population include arson and other attacks reminiscent of 2017.

Violence in **Mali** continues to spiral out of control and spill into neighbouring states. In swathes of territory where state authority is minimal, armed Islamist groups – namely the Malian branch of al-Qaeda in the Sahel, several supporting factions, and

the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara – continue to launch attacks on civilian targets and the Malian army, who have perpetrated abuses as well. Armed Islamists are also fighting the counterinsurgency campaigns of France’s Operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, mounted by a regional coalition of states. Making matters worse, the lines between Islamist insurgency and long-running ethnic conflict have become increasingly blurred, particularly in central Mopti region. Bloodshed has escalated between herder communities and their Dozo self-defense groups, on the one hand, and on the other Fulani pastoralists who have been accused of aligning with Islamist militants. Pressures on Mali’s population from a pre-existing, conflict-related state of emergency are compounded by its COVID-19 health emergency.

Turmoil persists in **Venezuela**, where President Nicolás Maduro retains his grip on power following a failed coup in April 2019 by opposition leader Juan Guaidó. Guaidó, claiming to be the rightful interim president after a controversial 2018 election, is backed by several dozen countries including the US, which has piled sanctions on the Maduro government. In March 2020, timed alongside mounting COVID-19 concerns, the US indicted Maduro and other high-ranking officials on narcoterrorism charges, aiming to ratchet up the pressure on a government presiding over already calamitous inflation, food and healthcare crises. While living conditions for ordinary Venezuelans deteriorate further, the number fleeing the country has reach nearly 5 million. Police and military, who continue to commit human rights abuses, are focused on resisting domestic opposition while an array of paramilitaries and criminal gangs have expanded their violent operations across the country, particularly in border areas.

Niger continues to be roiled by escalating conflict concentrated in the Liptako Gourma border area with Mali and Burkina Faso. Particularly in Tillabéri region, ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked fighters have exploited local grievances, expanded recruitment and launched numerous deadly attacks on Nigerien security personnel and civilians, who have suffered from an increased use of roadside improvised explosive devices. After abandoning a population outreach-based counterinsurgency strategy, a redoubled military response in late 2019 and early 2020 by Nigerien troops with French support has resulted in mounting civilian casualties. COVID-19

restrictions risk fanning the flames of conflict as well: violent demonstrations against mosque closures at the start of Ramadan have benefitted jihadist efforts to discredit the state. Another cause for concern is the apparent expansion of operations to Tillabéri by Nigeria-based Boko Haram fighters active in Niger’s far southeastern Diffa region.

Mozambique’s ascent up the *Peoples under Threat* table, observable over the past five years, appears far from over. In gas-rich, northern Cabo Delgado province, Islamist militants now regularly attack urban centres. Rooted in local grievances around state incapacity, corruption and economic mismanagement, ISIS-affiliated Ahlu Sunna Wal Jammaa has attacked military and police personnel, infrastructure and civilians. In response to the insurgency, repressive violence by security forces and Russian mercenaries have further alienated the local population. At the centre of the country’s COVID-19 crisis, Cabo Delgado is also riven by malaria and cholera outbreaks and hundreds of thousands of people uprooted by conflict. While a peace process between the ruling FRELIMO and RENAMO opposition resulted in an August 2019 treaty, an emerging militant faction within RENAMO rejected the deal. Inter-party tensions – and political instability more generally – have flared further due to deadly clashes between rival supporters leading up to general elections October 2019.

Nicaragua continues its climb up the *Peoples under Threat* index as the government of President Daniel Ortega further entrenches itself. Following more than a decade of dismantling institutional checks on his power, Ortega ordered a massive crackdown on anti-government protests in 2018, leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured. Hundreds of criminal cases have since been brought against protestors and critics, many who experienced torture or other ill-treatment. In March 2019, with support from across the region, the UN Human Rights Council adopted its first resolution on Nicaragua, condemning the Ortega’s government’s abuses. Setting the stage for future abuses, the government and supporters continue stifling journalists, media outlets and NGOs through threats, attacks, arbitrary searches and forced closures. Fears of an economic downturn sparking unrest have led the government to resist COVID-19 preventative measures, a situation worsened by the firing in 2018 of more than 400 health workers who treated victims during the protests.

As violent conflict reaches unprecedented levels, expanding from the north to nearly every part of the country, **Burkina Faso** has leapt up the *Peoples under Threat* table. As is the case elsewhere in the Sahel, Islamist insurgencies, organized crime and ethnic conflict are interlocking crises. Mali-based Islamic State and al-Qaeda outfits as well as the Burkinabé group Ansarul Islam have exploited porous borders and a weak state to launch attacks – growing in number and deadliness – on military personnel, infrastructure and civilians. Jihadists now attack Christian churches with regularity as well. Supported mainly by France and regional allies, heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations have contributed to rising civilian casualties. ‘Self-defence’ militias formed by Mossi and Foulse communities, which have faced extremist violence, continue clashing with ethnic Fulani, who are accused of being jihadi sympathizers. Exceptionally hard-hit by COVID-19, the government has impossible demands placed on its strained resources and attention.

Cambodia is experiencing a steady descent into authoritarian rule and a plummeting human rights situation. While a measure of repression and electoral manipulations are nothing new, Hun Sen, the leader of the Cambodian People’s Party (CCP), dissolved the main opposition party in 2017, ushering in one-party rule when it won every seat in a rigged election the following year. This momentum has carried into an ongoing crackdown on what remains of public dissent towards the CCP, including by imprisoning

opposition activists and politicians while suffocating independent media. A series of new repressive laws and amendments to existing laws were passed in 2019 to curtail freedom of expression, assembly and association. The COVID-19 crisis has been used as a pretext to target remaining critics: an April 2020 state of emergency law grants the government a freer hand by conflating criticism of the regime’s laissez-faire COVID-19 response with threats to political stability and public order.

Indonesia’s human rights situation deteriorated worryingly in the latter half of 2019. After West Papuan students were subjected to a racist attack in Surabaya in August, mass pro-independence protests and riots broke out in Papua and West Papua provinces, adding fuel to a mostly low-level insurgency underway for decades. The government of President Joko ‘Jokowi’ Widodo, who won re-election in April 2019, responded by sending more than 6,000 soldiers and police to quell the unrest, leading to the deaths of more than 50 people. Further instability came during largest nationwide protests in decades – a response to proposed laws weakening anti-corruption measures and diminishing basic freedoms and protections for minority groups, who already face oppressive blasphemy laws. ISIS-inspired militants also continue carrying out periodic deadly attacks against security forces and civilians. With one of the world’s highest mortality rates, Indonesia’s hands-off approach to COVID-19 appears to be entrenching an intertwined economic/public health crisis.

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Country	Groups	Conflict indicators			Indicators of population flight/group division			Democracy/governance indicators				Total
		A. Self-determination conflicts	B. Major armed conflict	C. Prior genocide/politicide	D. Flight of refugees and IDPs	E. Legacy of vengeance – group grievance	F. Rise of factionalized elites	G. Voice and accountability	H. Political stability	I. Rule of law	J. OECD country risk classification	
Syria	Political targets, Sunnis, Shi'a/Alawites, Yezidis, Christians, Druze, Kurds, Palestinians	5	2	1	0.7591	10.0	9.9	-1.958	-2.740	-2.048	7	29.029
Somalia	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gabooye etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	4	2	1	0.2318	8.6	10.0	-1.883	-2.220	-2.333	7	22.729
South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	0	2	1	0.3738	9.1	9.7	-1.978	-2.439	-1.958	7	22.121
Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	4	2	1	0.1492	7.5	8.9	-0.995	-2.747	-1.668	7	20.510
Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	5	2	0	0.1275	9.7	10.0	-1.751	-3.002	-1.790	7	20.476
Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Failsi Kurds, Bahá'is, Palestinians	5	2	1	0.0631	8.5	9.6	-0.987	-2.556	-1.759	7	20.325
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambutu, other groups	4	2	1	0.0626	9.7	9.8	-1.512	-2.116	-1.784	7	20.163
Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	4	1	1	0.0623	9.4	9.4	-1.841	-1.836	-1.120	7	18.178
Pakistan	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	5	2	1	0.0014	9.1	9.0	-0.801	-2.267	-0.673	7	18.147
Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers; religious targets	4	2	0	0.0426	7.8	9.7	-1.521	-2.441	-1.786	7	17.966
Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	5	2	1	0.0128	9.1	9.9	-0.408	-2.193	-0.881	6	17.527
Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	5	2	1	0.0292	9.8	8.0	-0.887	-1.309	-1.033	6	17.238
Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	0	1	0	0.2836	8.0	9.7	-1.189	-2.281	-1.688	7	16.569
Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Bahá'is, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomen	4	1	1	0.0026	9.6	9.6	-1.318	-1.307	-0.694	7	16.170
Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	4	1	1	0.0450	9.0	8.9	-1.159	-1.343	-0.428	7	15.988
Cameroon	Anglophones, Bakassi	5	2	0	0.0436	8.6	9.3	-1.104	-1.376	-1.080	6	15.729
Burundi	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	1	1	0.0431	7.6	7.9	-1.652	-1.598	-1.497	7	15.386
Eritrea	Afars, Saho, Tigre, religious minorities	4	0	0	0.1453	8.0	8.1	-2.176	-0.605	-1.586	7	14.878
Mali	Tuareg, Arabs, Maure, and others in the north	4	2	0	0.0166	8.4	5.7	-0.309	-2.051	-0.798	7	14.549
State of Palestine	Gazans, Bedouin	5	1	0	0.0221	10.0	8.4	-0.902	-1.736	-0.484	7	14.535
Ukraine	Tatars, Krymchak and Karaites in Crimea; Russians, Hungarians, Moldovans and other national minorities	5	2	0	0.0365	5.8	8.0	-0.014	-1.826	-0.718	6	13.973
Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	2	1	0	0.0122	8.3	9.5	-1.454	-1.479	-1.305	7	13.952
Egypt	Copts, Shi'a, Bahá'is; Nubians, Bedouin	5	2	0	0.0004	8.6	9.1	-1.284	-1.165	-0.412	5	13.940
Turkey	Kurds, Alevis, Roma, Armenians and other Christians	5	2	0	0.0014	10.0	8.8	-0.833	-1.329	-0.319	5	13.753
Venezuela	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, political/social targets	0	0	0	0.1456	7.3	9.2	-1.414	-1.344	-2.339	7	13.678
Russian Federation	Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus; indigenous northern peoples, Roma, Jews, Central Asians, migrants	5	1	1	0.0007	8.3	8.1	-1.058	-0.504	-0.815	4	13.367
Zimbabwe	Ndebele, Europeans, political/social targets	2	0	1	0.0020	6.4	10.0	-1.135	-0.707	-1.274	7	13.244
Niger	Djerema-songhai, Hausa, Tuaregs	2	2	0	0.0092	7.8	8.9	-0.585	-1.261	-0.580	7	13.176
Philippines	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims), Chinese	5	2	1	0.0029	7.6	8.0	0.038	-1.122	-0.478	3	13.066
Uganda	Acholi, Karamojong, Bakonzo, Bamba, Basongora, Batwa	2	1	1	0.0264	8.0	8.9	-0.667	-0.691	-0.295	6	12.734
Equatorial Guinea	Bubi, Annobon Islanders	1	0	1	0.0002	6.6	8.2	-1.865	-0.051	-1.415	7	12.675
Angola	Bakongo, Cabindans, Ovimbundu, Pastoralists, San and Kwisi	4	0	1	0.0011	7.8	7.2	-0.920	-0.319	-1.048	6	12.548
Lebanon	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shi'a, Sunnis	2	1	0	0.0019	8.2	9.6	-0.499	-1.645	-0.764	7	12.519
Algeria	Berbers, Saharawi	2	1	1	0.0002	7.5	7.8	-0.981	-0.794	-0.775	5	12.477
Mozambique	Northerners	4	1	0	0.0003	5.3	7.1	-0.467	-0.784	-1.044	7	11.990

Country	Groups	Conflict indicators			Indicators of population flight/group division			Democracy/governance indicators				Total
		A. Self-determination conflicts	B. Major armed conflict	C. Prior genocide/politicide	D. Flight of refugees and IDPs	E. Legacy of vengeance – group grievance	F. Rise of factionalized elites	G. Voice and accountability	H. Political stability	I. Rule of law	J. OECD country risk classification	
Nicaragua	Indigenous peoples, Creoles	2	1	0	0.0125	5.6	7.1	-1.083	-0.801	-1.040	7	11.791
China	Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Hui, religious minorities	5	1	1	0.0002	7.4	7.2	-1.449	-0.261	-0.202	2	11.347
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croats, Bosniac Muslims, Serbs, Roma	2	0	1	0.0496	6.9	8.7	-0.244	-0.392	-0.233	7	11.340
Colombia	Political/social targets, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples	2	2	0	0.1690	7.2	7.6	0.191	-0.813	-0.408	4	11.187
Tajikistan	Uzbeks, Pamiris, Russians	1	0	0	0.0001	6.5	8.4	-1.689	-0.724	-1.283	7	11.055
Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	4	0	1	0.0075	9.1	9.1	0.009	-0.183	0.026	6	11.006
North Korea	Political/social targets, religious minorities	0	0	0	0.0000	5.5	8.5	-2.202	-0.352	-1.635	7	10.897
El Salvador	Political/social targets	0	2	1	0.0442	5.8	4.3	0.042	-0.335	-0.825	5	10.868
Azerbaijan	Armenians	4	0	0	0.0637	5.6	7.9	-1.498	-0.697	-0.600	5	10.807
Burkina Faso	Mossi, Foulse, Fulani	0	2	0	0.0092	4.4	7.8	-0.043	-1.041	-0.446	7	10.530
Cambodia	Cham, Vietnamese, indigenous hill tribes (Khmer Leou)	0	0	1	0.0008	6.0	8.6	-1.221	0.108	-1.115	6	10.419
Guinea	Fulani (Peul), Malinke	0	0	0	0.0041	9.2	9.6	-0.754	-0.877	-1.212	7	10.392
Congo (Rep.)	Lari, M'Boshi, Aka	1	0	0	0.0299	8.1	6.7	-1.181	-0.443	-1.101	7	10.366
Kenya	Borana, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Somalis, Turkana, Endorois, Masai, Ogiek, other indigenous groups, Muslims	1	1	0	0.0003	8.3	8.6	-0.361	-1.164	-0.411	6	10.256
Thailand	Chinese, Malay-Muslims, Northern Hill Tribes	5	1	0	0.0000	7.6	9.7	-1.006	-0.733	0.023	3	10.224
Indonesia	Acchinese, Chinese, Dayaks, Madurese, Papuans, religious minorities	4	1	1	0.0000	7.4	7.1	0.180	-0.533	-0.315	3	10.210
Turkmenistan	Uzbeks, Russians, Kazakhs, religious minorities	0	0	0	0.0002	5.7	7.8	-2.114	-0.007	-1.452	7	10.200
Laos	Hmong, other highland peoples	2	0	0	0.0010	6.9	8.3	-1.739	0.415	-0.843	7	10.085
India	Assamese, Bodos, Nagas, Tripuras, other Adivasis; Kashmiris, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalits	5	2	0	0.0001	8.5	7.3	0.379	-0.957	0.026	3	10.061
Kyrgyzstan	Uzbeks, Russians	2	0	0	0.0008	8.4	8.0	-0.374	-0.582	-0.908	7	9.980
Bangladesh	Ahmadis, Hindus, other religious minorities; Chittagong Hill Tribes	3	0	0	0.0005	8.3	9.3	-0.728	-1.032	-0.640	5	9.963
Rwanda	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	0	1	0.0219	9.9	8.0	-1.130	0.116	0.118	6	9.848
Cote d'Ivoire	Northern Mande (Dioula), Senoufo, Bete, newly-settled groups	3	0	0	0.0024	7.6	9.1	-0.216	-0.931	-0.580	6	9.784
Moldova	Trans-Dniester Slavs	4	0	0	0.0016	6.7	8.3	-0.107	-0.349	-0.414	7	9.761
Kosovo	Serbs, Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani	4	0	0	0.0290	7.4	8.0	-0.120	-0.605	-0.371	6	9.703
Djibouti	Afars	1	0	0	0.0025	5.6	7.3	-1.352	-0.134	-0.923	7	9.459
Haiti	Political/social targets	0	0	0	0.0064	5.6	9.6	-0.745	-0.627	-1.028	7	9.372
Mauritania	Haratins ('Black Moors'), Kewri	0	0	0	0.0099	7.3	8.8	-0.854	-0.668	-0.686	7	9.365
Guinea Bissau	Balanta, Fula (Fulani), Manjaco, Mandinga, Papel, Ejamat (Felupe), Jola (Diola), Susu, Cape Verdeans	0	0	0	0.0025	4.6	9.6	-0.666	-0.670	-1.234	7	9.337
Guatemala	Indigenous peoples, Garifuna	0	0	1	0.0062	9.4	7.1	-0.342	-0.541	-1.051	4	9.246
Papua New Guinea	Bougainvilleans, tribal peoples	4	0	0	0.0001	5.4	7.1	0.043	-0.667	-0.776	6	9.234
Georgia	Adzhars, Abkhazians, South Ossetians	4	0	0	0.0773	7.6	9.1	0.247	-0.426	0.328	6	9.157
Uzbekistan	Tajiks, Islamic political groups, religious minorities, Karakalpaks, Russians	1	0	0	0.0002	6.3	8.8	-1.616	-0.283	-1.074	5	9.117
Nepal	Madheshis (Terai), Dalits, Janajati, linguistic minorities	2	0	0	0.0006	9.7	8.8	-0.132	-0.625	-0.478	6	9.074
Honduras	Miskitos, Garifuna	2	0	0	0.0470	5.0	7.0	-0.508	-0.551	-1.023	5	8.677
Mexico	Mayans, Indigenous peoples, Zapotecs	2	2	0	0.0008	6.3	5.4	-0.006	-0.572	-0.674	3	8.585
Serbia	Bosniaks, Ethnic Albanians, Croats, Roma	2	0	1	0.0290	7.4	8.0	0.002	0.082	-0.146	4	8.419

Notes to Table

Sources of the indicators are as follows:

- *Conflict indicators*: The base data used was from the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (Conflict Barometer 2019, Heidelberg, HIIK, 2020), Minority Rights Group International, and the Center for Systemic Peace ('Major Episodes of Political Violence 1946-2018' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2019). Self-determination/autonomy conflicts in 2019 were ranked on a scale of 0-5 as follows: 5=ongoing armed conflict; 4=contained armed conflict; 3=settled armed conflict; 2=militant politics; 1=conventional politics. Major armed conflicts were classified as 2=ongoing in late 2019; 1=emerging from conflict since 2015 or ongoing conflict with deaths under 1,000.
- *Prior genocide or politicide*: Harff, US Political Instability Task Force (formerly State Failure Task Force). 1=one or more episodes since 1945, updated using MRG data.
- *Indicators of Flight and Group Division*: Data for the flight of refugees and IDPs comes from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, total population of concern by country of origin, Mid-Year Trends 2019, as a proportion of total country population (population figures from UN DESA, 2019 revision). Group division indicators are from the Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020.
- *Democracy/Governance Indicators*: Annual Governance Indicators, World Bank, 2018.
- *OECD country risk classification*: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 'Country Risk Classifications of the Participants to the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits', January 2020.

Data for Kosovo include some indicators relating to Serbia. Data for the State of Palestine include some indicators relating to both Israel/Palestine; data relating to Palestinian refugees include those under the UNHCR mandate only. Indicators were rebased as necessary to give an approximate equal weighting to the five categories above, with the exception of the prior geno-/politicide indicator. As a dichotomous variable this received a lesser weighting to avoid too great a distortion to the final ranking. Resulting values were then summed.

The full formula is:

$$(A/2) + (B \times 1.25) + (C \times 2) + (D \times 10) + (E+F)/6 + (G+H+I)/-1 + (J \times 0.625)$$

How is *Peoples under Threat* calculated?

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, our ability to identify those situations most likely to lead to genocide or mass killing has improved. A number of comparative studies of the factors preceding historic episodes of political mass killing had been undertaken since the 1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that researchers pioneered quantitative longitudinal analysis of a wide range of such factors, enabling the testing of different causal hypotheses. This research enabled the identification of those preconditions that were most likely to lead to genocide and political mass murder (politicide).

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) has drawn on these research findings to construct the *Peoples under Threat* table, although responsibility for the final table is exclusively our own. *Peoples under Threat* is specifically designed to identify the risk of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression, unlike most other early warning tools, which focus on violent conflict as such. Its primary application is civilian protection.

Indicators of conflict are included in the table's construction, however, as most, although not all, episodes of mass ethnic or religious killing occur during armed conflicts. War provides the state of emergency, domestic mobilization and justification, international cover, and in some cases the military and logistic capacity, that enable massacres to be carried out. Some massacres, however, occur in peacetime, or may accompany armed conflict from its inception, presenting a problem to risk models that focus exclusively on current conflicts. In addition, severe and even violent repression of minorities or indigenous peoples may occur for years before the onset of armed conflict provides the catalyst for larger scale killing.

The statistical indicators used all relate to the state. The state is the basic unit of enquiry, rather than particular ethnic or religious groups at risk, as governments or militias connected to the government are responsible for most cases of genocidal violence. Formally, the state will reserve to itself the monopoly over the legitimate means of violence, so that where non-state actors are responsible for widespread or continued killing, it usually occurs with either the complicity of the state or in a 'failed state' situation where the rule of law has disintegrated. Certain characteristics at the level of the state will greatly increase the likelihood of atrocity, including

habituation to illegal violence among the armed forces or police, prevailing impunity for human rights violations, official tolerance or encouragement of hate speech against particular groups, and in extreme cases, prior experience of mass killing. Egregious episodes of mass killing targeted principally at one group have also seen other groups deliberately decimated or destroyed.

However, some groups may experience higher levels of discrimination and be at greater risk than others in any given state. MRG has identified those groups in each state which we believe to be under most threat. (This does not mean that other groups or indeed the general population may not also be at some risk.) It should be noted that although these groups are most often minorities, in some cases ethnic or religious majorities will also be at risk and in relevant cases are therefore also listed in the table. In some cases, all the groups in the country are at risk of ethnic or sectarian killing.

The overall measure is based on a basket of ten indicators. These include indicators of democracy or good governance from the World Bank; conflict data from the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research and the Center for Systemic Peace; data on the flight of refugees, internally displaced persons and other populations of concern from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); indicators of group division or elite factionalization from the Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; the US State Failure Task Force data on prior genocides and politicides; and the country credit risk classification published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (as a proxy for trade openness). For citations and further information, see the notes to the table. For a fuller discussion of the methodology, see *State of the World's Minorities 2006*.

Based on current indicators from authoritative sources, *Peoples under Threat* seeks to identify those groups or peoples most under threat in 2020.



Norad

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