

Geopolitics

BBVA Research Big Data Geopolitics Monitor

Big Data Unit
11 December 2024

Syrian Regime finally collapsed with several regional implications

Assad Syrian Regime Collapse and Mohammed al-Bashir appointed as interim Leader: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fled to Moscow after rebels captured Damascus, ending over five decades of his family's rule. His departure signals the collapse of his government, previously backed by Russia and Iran. Moscow's reaction to Assad's exile will influence Syria's political and military future. Al Bashir, a former administrator in rebel-controlled northwest Syria, has been appointed interim prime minister. He will serve until March 1, with backing from rebel groups including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Regional implications:

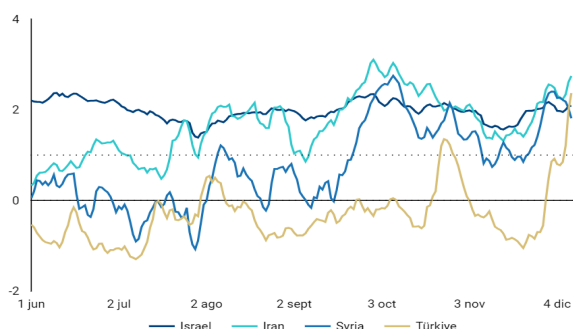
- **US Support & UN Engagement:** Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed support for a political transition towards inclusive and non-sectarian governance. He emphasized preventing Syria from becoming a base for terrorism and ensuring the destruction of chemical weapons. The UN envoy to Syria acknowledged positive signals from HTS, downplaying its terrorist designation.
- **Israeli Military Actions:** Israel launched airstrikes on Syrian army positions and advanced beyond the demilitarized zone, reaching areas near Damascus airport. Israel's Defense Minister declared a "sterile defensive zone" in southern Syria. Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia condemned Israel's incursions.
- **Turkey solidifies its position in the Syria conflict:** Ankara's support for certain rebel groups enhances its influence in the evolving Syrian power structure ([Al Jazeera](#)).

Ukraine peace talks gain traction: Negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow have reportedly progressed, with a potential ceasefire agreement under discussion. European leaders remain cautiously optimistic. ([The FT](#)).

The BBVA Monitor: conflict intensity indicators rose in the Middle East during the week

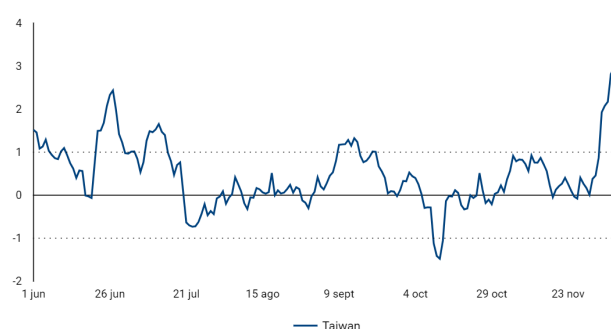
- The **conflict intensity index** and the **geopolitical risk indicator** rose in **Turkey** after his involvement in Syrian power structure (Fig.1 and Fig. 3). These indicators remain in the high risk area in the case of **Ukraine** and **Russia** despite negotiations of a potential ceasefire (Fig. 3 and Fig. 5).
- **Political tensions** increased sharply in **Taiwan** given the largest Chinese deployment of navy fleet in nearby waters in the last decades ([Reuters](#)) (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).
- The **economic policy uncertainty index** remained high in **France** and **Germany**, while it eased off in **Mexico**, coming back to the neutral area (Fig. 3).
- **In Latin America, the political tensions indicator** kept high in **Venezuela** (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).

Fig1. **CONFLICT INDEX: ISRAEL&IRAN&SYRIA&TURKIYE**
(28-day weighted moving avg, normalized by its own history)



Source: .BBVA Research & www.gdelt.org. Positive (negative) values indicate greater (lower) risk relative to the mean of period 2021-nowadays)

Fig2. **POLITICAL TENSION INDEX: TAIWAN**
(28-day weighted moving avg, normalized by its own history)



Source: BBVA Research & www.gdelt.org. Positive (negative) values indicate greater (lower) risk relative to the mean of period 2021-nowadays)

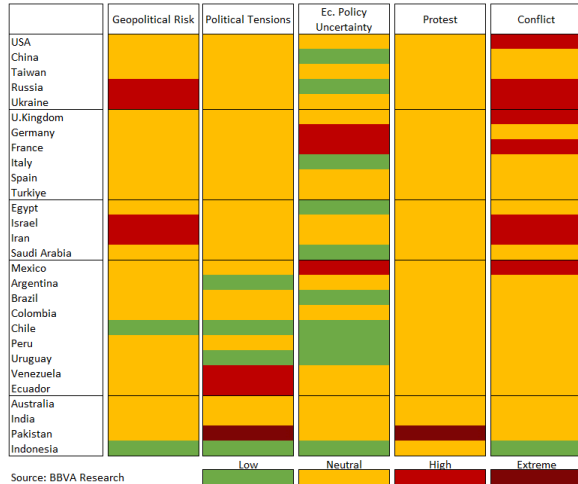
*The selection of news has been enriched by the BBVA Research Geo Assistant developed with Chat-GPT.

Fig3. **BBVA RESEARCH GEOPOLITICS MONITOR "SIGNAL" CHANGES**

(Signals in Geopolitical Risk, Political Tensions, Economic Policy Uncertainties, Protest and Conflict according to Standard Dev)

BBVA Research Geopolitics Monitor main "Signal" changes after the Hamas-Israel Conflict

Summary of Signals After Hamas-Israel Conflict December 3rd, 2024
(News Sentiment Map. Sentiment relative to average sentiment in each country)



Source: BBVA Research

Summary of Signals After Hamas-Israel Conflict December 10th, 2024
(News Sentiment Map. Sentiment relative to average sentiment in each country)

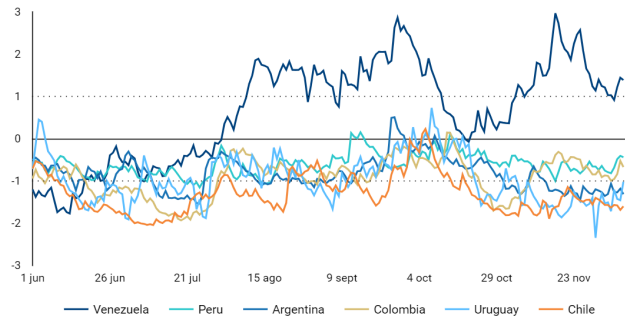


Source: BBVA Research

Source: BBVA Research and www.qdelt.org.

Fig4. **POLITICAL TENSIONS INDEX: LATIN AMERICA**

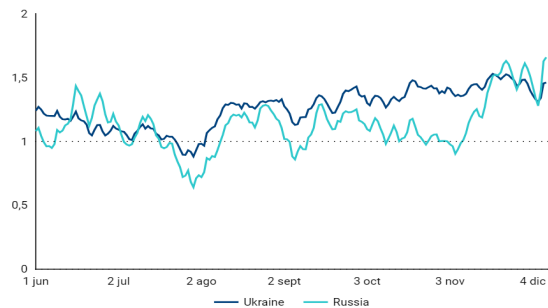
(28-day weighted moving avg, normalized by its own history)



Source: BBVA Research & www.qdelt.org. Positive (negative) values indicate greater (lower) risk relative to the mean of period 2021-nowadays

Fig5. **CONFLICT INDEX: UKRAINE & RUSSIA**

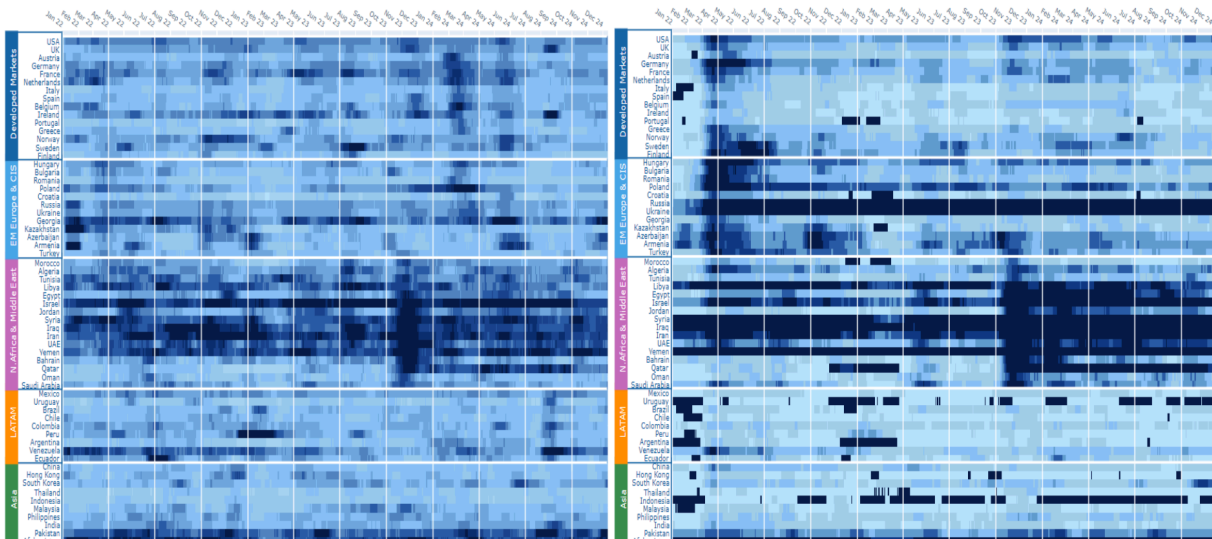
(28-day weighted moving avg, normalized by its own history)



Source: BBVA Research & www.qdelt.org. Positive (negative) values indicate greater (lower) risk relative to the mean of period 2021-nowadays

Fig6. **BBVA RESEARCH PROTEST AND CONFLICT HEAT MAPS**

(Evolution of Protest and Conflict over time by regions)



Source: BBVA Research and www.qdelt.org.

Methodological annex: indicators' construction

We have developed a daily tracker with weekly updates to monitor protest and conflict indicators for every country in the world from 2019 to present day. To construct this, we use a rich 'big database' of international events (GDELT), created by Leetaru and Schrodt (2013). GDELT is an open-source database that extracts and parses digital news monitoring 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. Thus, it contains a comprehensive and high-resolution catalog of geo-referenced events and themes.

Using different dictionaries, several thousands of taxonomies and themes are identified in the news pieces to classify the information. The algorithms used by GDELT also identify emotions, organizations, locations, news sources, and events across the world as well as their average sentiment using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques and the lexicon approach.

The included indicators are:

- Geopolitical Risk: or sentiment (weighted by coverage) of the country's geopolitical risk perception.
- Political Tensions: or sentiment (weighted by coverage) of the country's political tensions.
- Economic Policy Uncertainty or sentiment (weighted by coverage) about the country's economic policy uncertainty, also disaggregated by media origin.
- Protests or coverage regarding social protests or unrest in the country.
- Conflict or coverage of armed conflicts, which go beyond verbal protests.
- Bilateral Tensions or the sentiment (weighted by coverage) between a specific pair of countries that appear together in the news article (plus NATO and EU).

The indicators track the evolution of tensions and are normalized by their country's history since 2019, thus they are all expressed in terms of standard deviations from their historical patterns. Indicators usually lie within the range [-1,1]. Therefore, when the values exceed one (the upper boundary of the range), this means escalating tensions. While it's possible to observe simultaneous tensions arising in multiple countries (for example, due to geopolitical events affecting several nations, as seen in some of our heatmaps), using these indicators for direct quantitative comparisons of risk levels between countries is not recommended.

We apply a weighted moving average of 28 days (to include four complete weeks with the same number of days of the weeks) to reduce the noise of daily information and identify signals more clearly. The weights have been calculated using a discrete geometric distribution such that it puts more weight on recent data and less on past data (see Graph 1). Aggregating by weeks, the weight of the most recent week has a weight of 68%, the past week 22%, the previous 7%, and the fourth 3%. The weight of the 28 days can be seen in the following image. In such a way, the indicators reflect what has been happening in the last few days.

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