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Peoples under Threat 2019

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In many parts of the world, wide-ranging atrocities and other human rights abuses continue to threaten populations, especially those belonging to minority groups and indigenous peoples. As the reach of social media grows ever more pervasive globally, so too does its impact in contexts where genocide, mass killing, or systematic violent repression have occurred or there is a risk of such things taking place. The country situations at the top of the 2019 *Peoples under Threat* index illustrate how, in case after case, social media is playing a major role in encouraging the killing. Social media platforms now occupy a central role in stigmatizing target groups, legitimizing violence and recruiting the killers.

Deliberate misinformation, including false allegations and dehumanization of targeted groups, has been an enduring feature of conflict over the ages. But in the social media age, the process has accelerated to an unprecedented degree. Ease of access to social media has given every violent racist a potential public platform, and the anonymity of social media has given states the ability to incubate and incite hatred across international borders. Conflict narratives, conspiracy theories and extremist views quickly find a home on platforms where every voice competes for attention, and the moderate voices and restrained language necessary for peace-building are drowned out.

Political leaders, rebel groups, activists and ordinary civilians have all used social media as a tool for communication. Even in the most fragile and divided societies where internet access remains minimal, such as South Sudan, the role of social media is growing, as traditional media landscapes and technologies rapidly transform. Syria's devastating conflict, on the other hand – where social media platforms are used by all sides and videos uploaded to YouTube have received hundreds of millions of views – has led to it being repeatedly described as a 'social media war'.

Social media promises to increasingly influence how conflict and episodes of violence are perceived, their trajectories, and the ways they are responded to. No divided society or context of conflict can be understood without considering how social media is being used by an array of state and non-state actors. Indeed, critics have accused social media firms of accepting too little responsibility for the use of their technologies to foment division and violence in unstable and conflict-affected societies. Many point to Myanmar – where the United Nations (UN) has called for authorities to face charges of genocide – as

the starkest example of the link between social media and the commission of atrocities. There dehumanizing language and outright incitement to mass murder were amplified via Facebook and Twitter, contributing to the widespread targeting of the mainly Muslim Rohingya minority. In November, Facebook released a report it had commissioned related to the killing of Rohingya which concluded that 'Facebook has become a means for those seeking to spread hate and cause harm'. But while the company acknowledged that 'we can and should do more', Facebook and other social media corporations continue to rely on self-regulation, based heavily on moderation in line with 'community standards' - an approach which has proved woefully ineffective when confronted by organized, and at times officially-sanctioned, campaigns of violent hatred.

Peoples under Threat draws much-needed attention to numerous other cases where, in the context of social cleavages, political instability and insecurity, social media risks exacerbating or paving the path to systematic violent repression or mass killings. In many of those countries where the risk of mass atrocity crimes is most pronounced, the internet-savvy youth often outnumbers the rest of the population. Where deadly armed conflict rages on, from Libya to Afghanistan, combatants often wield a gun in one hand and a smartphone in the other – their cameras weaponized in a propaganda war uniting battlefields and cyberspace.

Social media is a tool in the hands of states brutally oppressing their populations, as in Syria, where supporters of President Bashar al-Assad popularized a #SyriaHoax hashtag on Twitter to discredit evidence of horrific chemical attacks on civilian targets, such as in Khan Sheikhoun and Douma. Social media can also be manipulated by outside powers to generate support for policies that harm civilians. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, have used 'bot armies' to legitimate their bombing campaign in Yemen, while rising hostilities between India and Pakistan following the killing of 40 Indian soldiers in Kashmir were stoked by the trending of rival Twitter hashtags by nationalists in the two countries.

In conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Cameroon, where threats are on the rise, armed groups ranging from the Taliban to Anglophone separatists rely on social media platforms for a range of activities: to coordinate movements, recruit supporters and fighters, glorify victories and dispute opposing narratives, and solicit funds. The so-called

Major risers 2019

Rank	Rise in rank	Country	Groups	Total
4	2	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	20.529
10	3	Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	17.718
16	4	Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Bahá'í, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomen	15.087
17	14	Cameroon	Anglophones, Bakassi	14.939
23	5	Chad	Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	13.610
27	3	Mali	Tuareg, Arabs, Maure, and others in the north	12.914
32	3	Venezuela	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, political/social targets	11.928
34	12	Niger	Djerema-Songhai, Hausa, Tuaregs	11.866
43	8	El Salvador	Political/social targets	10.690
47	27	Nicaragua	Indigenous peoples, Creoles	10.264
54	16	India	Assamese, Bodos, Nagas, Tripuras, other Adivasis; Kashmiris, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalits	9.910
70	12	Burkina Faso	Mossi, Foulse, Peuhl (Fulani)	8.912

Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has employed similar tactics. During its ascendancy, the fear instilled by graphic videos of executions, attacks and other content distributed through its sophisticated online presence encouraged many members of minorities to flee the territory under its control. But with the collapse of the group's self-described caliphate in Iraq and Syria, along with its rebranding as a global entity now under way, ISIS likely will seek to leverage social media to promote further attacks on civilian populations in future.

There is currently a debate around the effectiveness of restricting social media to prevent violence when tensions are running high. While many governments impose social media controls in an attempt to lessen dissent or division, easing restrictions can unintentionally empower and unite extreme voices, as has occurred in the wake of Ethiopia's democratic reforms. Religious or ethnic divides – often linked to colonial legacies and manipulated by contemporary elites – can become more salient through social media, prompting retreats into insular solidarities amenable to radicalization. Where inter-communal animosities exist, inflammatory misinformation and disinformation promoted on social media can spiral quickly into violence. Online hate speech and incitement in the Central African Republic (CAR) has played a role in fuelling cycles of atrocities between Christians and Muslims in recent years. In India, where social media has invigorated an aggressive, exclusionary Hindu nationalism, rumours and hate speech spread on WhatsApp have led to a

number of mob attacks on Muslims. In Sri Lanka, similarly, rumours on social media sparked anti-Muslim mob attacks in Sri Lanka last year, which have re-ignited in the wake of Easter Sunday church and hotel bombings by ISIS in April 2019.

Yet social media can play a positive role too. Through circulating valuable information, it can provide a public service. Many platforms monitor the movements of militaries and insurgents, such as Libya's 'SafePath' Facebook group, which directs users to avoid certain roads due to fighting. Civilians can be similarly guided to humanitarian aid locations. Dialogue across social divides can be facilitated by social media, shifting attitudes and promoting understanding among groups that may not otherwise communicate with each other, reverse-engineering conditions of enmity and violence. With low opportunity costs for acquiring, tailoring, and circulating information, social media is crucial to bearing and sharing witness, to documenting violations of international humanitarian law or human rights, and widely broadcasting content to provoke action among human rights groups and international organizations. Social media can play a role in ending inaction and impunity, securing accountability and reparation for violations.

No society can prevent violence or build peace without accounting for the role of social media – least of all, those populating the upper reaches of the *Peoples under Threat* table, where the risk of mass killing has become pressing or critical. But even in states where the imminent risk is much lower and which do not therefore appear on the list (including those in Western Europe and North America), social media penetration has quickly created effectively unregulated platforms for the dissemination of hatred against minorities. Longstanding support for freedom of expression has been subverted into widespread societal tolerance for the expression of violent extremism. Governments have universally failed to live up to their obligations not just to protect freedom of expression but also to prohibit any 'advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence', as required by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 20(2)).

Peoples under Threat identifies those 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), 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 will account for the vast majority of civilians who are likely to be killed over the following year.

Peoples at greatest risk

Syria retains its highest-ranked position in the *Peoples under Threat* index as signs of President Assad's military 'victory' grow ever clearer. Syria's largest cities are now under government control, although significant territory remains in the hands of predominantly Islamist opposition fighters as well as an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias, the Syrian Democratic Forces. In March 2019, Kurdish forces captured the eastern village of Baghouz, the last populated area in Syria controlled by ISIS. Backed by Russia, Iran and numerous Shi'a militias, government forces are closing in on Idlib province, the final opposition holdout. While all sides have committed widespread atrocities, the vast majority of civilian deaths in Syria have come at the hands of the regime, which along with Russia continues to bomb hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. While figures are impossible to verify, more than 500,000 people are estimated to have been killed and 12 million more displaced inside Syria or abroad. Social media has played an unprecedented role in the Syria conflict, with all sides exploiting online platforms to communicate competing narratives, recruit fighters, fundraise and document or deny human rights abuses.

Cycles of deadly violence are unrelenting in **Somalia**. Civilians face serious abuses, including targeted and indiscriminate killings, forced recruitment and evictions, and sexual violence. Al-Shabaab has used Twitter and Facebook as tools to broadcast propaganda and recruit supporters in an environment where mobile phone penetration has been rising steadily in recent years. The majority of its bombing, shelling and gunfire attacks on politicians, other state officials, joint forces and civilians are in Mogadishu and the adjacent Lower Shabelle region, but also often take place in Jubaland and Puntland. Countervailing military operations by Somali government forces, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops and other foreign forces, including escalating airstrikes by the United States

(US) Africa Command, have resulted in further civilian deaths and widespread abuses. Civilians have also been targeted or faced indiscriminate attacks during inter-clan violence in several regions. Midway through 2018, renewed armed conflict between the Somaliland and Puntland regional governments uprooted at least 12,500 people, while across the country more than 2.6 million remain displaced.

South Sudan remains on the precipice of another round of brutal violence. Despite a September 2018 agreement between the government and the main opposition group to enter into a power-sharing arrangement, conflict has ebbed but not ended. Forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar remain responsible for depredations against civilians including unlawful killings, torture, sexual violence, and use and recruitment of child soldiers. Efforts to hold to account perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity via a Hybrid Court for South Sudan have been obstructed. Particularly in former Unity State, famine has also exacerbated fatal inter-ethnic violence between Dinka, Nuer and Muerle communities seeking to acquire cattle and pastureland. While internet coverage is low even in population centres, civil society actors have suggested that social media literacy could accelerate peace efforts. Still, lasting peace remains distant and threatened by opportunistic manoeuvring by the main parties.

While **Iraq** remains prone to further outbreaks of violence, the Twitter hashtag #AllEyesOnISIS – previously used to amplify propaganda and generate a climate of fear as the group conquered swathes of the country – has lost much of its currency. While the Iraqi military, and affiliated mainly Shi'a sectarian militias, Kurdish forces and the US-led international coalition continue to clash with ISIS fighters in rural holdouts, the group has been reduced mainly to operating sleeper cells and launching terrorist attacks in population centres. While 2018 saw the lowest number of civilian casualties in Iraq since the US-led invasion of the country in 2003, approximately 1.8 million Iraqis are still internally displaced, and deep socio-political fault lines have yet to be resolved. Particularly in Nineva and Anbar, where ISIS drew significant support, civilians continue to face harsh measures amounting to collective punishment by security forces, including arbitrary detentions and torture. Iraqi judges have prosecuted thousands of ISIS suspects based on flawed procedures, although some improvements have been made.

In the wake of a rigged and long-delayed election in December 2018, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** remains riven by conflict and instability. More than 140 armed groups, including government security forces and militias based in neighbouring countries, are active in central and eastern Congo. Various forces, including the Congolese army, have committed atrocities including massacres and recruitment of child soldiers. The year 2018 also saw an upsurge of violence in north-eastern Ituri province, where ethnic Lendu armed groups clashed with ethnic Hema and the Congolese army. The country holds more than 5 million displaced people from within and outside its borders, representing Africa's largest displacement crisis. Authorities in Kinshasa have engineered internet and social media bans to assist in denying the severity of Congo's enduring mismanagement and insecurity.

Looking towards an uncertain future, **Sudan** sits high in the *Peoples under Threat* table. Mass anti-austerity demonstrations in late 2018 led, nearly four months later, to the end of President Omar al-Bashir's three-decade reign. A prominent mobilizing and organizing role was played by social media – banned but still accessible through virtual private networks (VPNs) – which rallied protesters around an iconic video of a young female activist that went viral globally. Steps towards a civilian-led transitional government have been tentative, with a military council attempting to take control and confronting ongoing demonstrations with deadly force. It remains to be seen whether Bashir will one day be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for atrocity crimes against Darfur's non-Arab ethnic groups. Fighting is ongoing in Darfur's Jebel Marra region, where civilians have been attacked by paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese army, which also continues to battle rebels in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

With no end in sight, and against the backdrop of the world's worst humanitarian disaster, the war in **Yemen** has entered its fifth year. Fierce fighting has resumed several months after a fragile UN-backed ceasefire deal in December between Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized government of Abd-Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Civilians have suffered airstrikes and shelling from all sides of the conflict, but the Saudi-led coalition – supporting Hadi and itself backed by the US, UK, and France – has been responsible for a disproportionate number of civilian

deaths. Around 70,000 people – five times more than commonly reported – may have been killed in Yemen since January 2016, according to new statistics. Pro-Houthi and pro-Saudi social media narratives have each sought to discredit the other in a process of vigorous contestation. There has also been an escalation of clashes between southern secessionist fighters and Hadi-aligned forces, as well as unprecedented violence between ISIS and al-Qaeda factions in Bayda province.

Insecurity continues unabated in **Pakistan**, where religious minorities, politicians and security forces continue to be targeted by Islamist militants. The Pakistani Taliban and ISIS affiliates failed to derail parliamentary elections in July but killed hundreds of civilians, including 149 in Mastung, Baluchistan – the country's second deadliest attack by extremists to date. In response, security personnel continue to perpetrate a range of abuses, including against civilians. Owing to suppression of traditional journalism by government authorities and militants alike, social media plays a significant role in reporting on such issues. In May, following the overturning of a high-profile blasphemy charge against Asia Bibi, massive demonstrations led by clerics erupted across the country, calling for her death. In February 2019, the government announced plans to crack down on extremism and hate speech on social media, which feed into the broader atmosphere of discrimination and intolerance towards Bibi, a Christian, as well as other religious minorities.

Discord persists between **Libya**'s rival governments, backed by loyal or loosely affiliated militias and autonomous armed groups battling one another. After formidable territorial gains throughout 2018, the self-styled Libyan National Army, led by Khalifa Haftar, advanced on Tripoli in April 2019 intending to capture the city from the UN-backed Government of National Accord. Haftar's all-out push for military victory raises the stakes for all parties and risks skyrocketing casualties and other human rights abuses that have long been perpetrated by armed groups with impunity. Facebook and Twitter have become significant online battlefields, where adversaries – including many pro-Haftar bots – weaponize photos and video footage. In Libya's south, Tebu, Tuareg, and Arab armed groups continue to fight over territory and resources. While weakened, ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked fighters seek to regain influence.

While the April 2018 arrival of reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has given rise to optimism,

Ethiopia faces dire challenges. Ahmed has released thousands of political prisoners, invited former rebel groups to dialogue, and lifted severe restrictions on the country's television and online media landscape. Yet freeing up political space has energized power struggles between dominant ethnic groups who stand to benefit or lose from wide-ranging reforms. With little constraint on expression of grievances, proliferation of extreme views on social media risks inflaming ethnic violence. In the south, deadly conflict between ethnic Oromo and Somalis intensified, as did clashes between armed groups and the army in the west. Some opposition groups returning from Eritrea have failed to disarm, attacking military and civilian targets and triggering inter-communal violence, notably among Guji and Gedeo. More people were internally displaced in Ethiopia in 2018 than in any other country, totalling nearly 3 million according to some estimates.

Rising threats

The civilian death toll in **Afghanistan** reached an all-time yearly high in 2018, with 3,804 killed and another 7,189 injured. Fighting spiked between the government – supported by international forces – and armed groups, with government-controlled territory shrinking to its lowest level since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. To counter this discouraging picture, the Afghan Ministry of Defence publishes on its Twitter feed the daily number of Taliban fighters killed or captured. The Taliban, in turn, widely use WhatsApp and Twitter to recruit, plan and claim responsibility for attacks, and fundraise. Civilians continue to be victimized by security personnel and targeted by both Taliban and ISIS insurgents, who have also engaged in fighting with each other. Bombings and other attacks have struck hotels and schools, including numerous polling stations during the October parliamentary elections, with the Hazara Shi'a minority specifically targeted. The Taliban entered into peace talks with US officials in October, but has derived leverage through stepped-up offensives likely to surge further if talks collapse.

Throughout 2018 conflict wore on in the **CAR** between largely Muslim ex-*Séléka* rebels and mainly Christian anti-*balaka* militias, who have fought since 2013. Hate speech and incitement on social media have played a significant role in fuelling inter-communal bloodshed. Within the past year, between 70 and 80

Peoples most under threat – highest-rated countries 2019

Rank	Country	Groups	Total
1	Syria	Political targets, Sunnis, Shi'a/Alawites, Yezidis, Christians, Druze, Kurds, Palestinians	28.820
2	Somalia	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gabooye etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	23.116
3	South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	21.571
4	Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	20.529
5	Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Faili Kurds, Bahá'í, Palestinians	20.394
6	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambuti, other groups	20.289
7	Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	20.284
8	Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	19.804
9	Pakistan	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	18.313
10	Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	17.718
11	Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers; religious targets	17.705
12	Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	17.462

per cent of the country has been controlled by various armed groups, which in some cases have established their own governance structures. Clashes between these groups, as well as frequent attacks on civilians, state authorities, UN peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers have continued. The total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached 655,000 while almost 600,000 others have fled the country, the highest numbers in five years. In February 2019 the government and 14 armed groups signed a peace accord aiming to end what has become a civil war, but the situation in the country remains highly volatile.

Tensions in **Iran** are on the rise, as worsening economic conditions, official corruption and the continued repression of political and social freedoms have led to numerous anti-government protests, ongoing at the beginning of 2018 and reigniting in July. At least 30 people have died and thousands have been arrested by security personnel. While Facebook and Twitter have been banned since they were used to organize demonstrations in 2009, in April 2018 authorities added Telegram to the list as well. Economic and political pressures are growing more acute due to the US reimposing several sanctions on Iran that were previously lifted as a result of the 2015 nuclear deal. Iran continues to repress and discriminate against religious minorities such as Bahá'í and Christians, including converts from Islam who have been imprisoned for 'missionary work'. Iranian security forces continue to be involved in frequent

deadly clashes with Kurdish groups near the Iran-Iraq border, who have intensified their armed struggle for autonomy in the past few years.

After a worrying trend in recent years, **Cameroon** has leapt up the index amid sharply escalating political violence in the country's north-west and south-west regions. Peaceful demonstrations in 2016 against decades-old political and economic marginalization of the country's Anglophone regions by the French-dominated government has led to a separatist movement for an independent state, Ambazonia. Thousands of people have been killed or disappeared at the hands of government forces and numerous emerging separatist groups, who have committed a range of abuses, often against civilians. At the same time, Boko Haram attacks persist in the far north, adding to the growing numbers of IDPs and a deepening humanitarian crisis. President Paul Biya, in power since 1982, has labelled the separatists as terrorists and social media 'a new form of terrorism'. Facing prolonged internet shutdowns and scant international attention, protesters, and later separatists, have relied heavily on Twitter hashtags to mobilize.

In **Chad**, following the violent repression of anti-austerity protests, President Idriss Déby pushed through constitutional reforms in April 2018 that enable him to stay in power until 2033. In the lead-up to this, authorities launched a social media ban – now in its second year – which aims at stymying the ability of critics to mobilize. The government also claims that social media aids the recruitment of rebel coalition fighters, who have grown bolder in their attempts to overthrow Déby's regime: in February 2019, the Chadian Army relied on French airstrikes to repel a heavily armed rebel convoy arriving from southern Libya. Fatal clashes between government forces and militants over control of gold mines in Tibesti region escalated in August 2018, and in south-west Chad, attacks on civilians and security personnel by the Boko Haram faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province have risen in frequency and scale from 2018 into 2019.

While violence has now reached unprecedented levels, **Mali** has been the epicentre of instability extending beyond its borders since a rebellion by allied Tuaregs and jihadists in 2012 was confronted by French military intervention. From 2018, northern and central Mali saw an escalation of deadly assaults by Islamist armed groups linked to al-Qaeda, and to a lesser extent ISIS, on security personnel and members of the UN

peacekeeping mission. Many civilians have been killed, often by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on roadways, and the army has committed atrocities, including summary executions during counter-terrorism operations. Deep-rooted communal tensions exploded in 2018, resulting in hundreds of deaths from attacks and reprisals between Dogon and Peuhl (Fulani) ethnic groups, with members of the latter being viewed by the former as potential recruits of extremist groups. At the heart of the tensions are issues to do with land use and access to grazing and water. In April 2019, facing mass protests against its failure to provide security, Mali's recently elected government resigned after some 160 Peuhl herders were brutally massacred in Ogossagou village.

The aftermath of **Venezuela**'s deeply flawed and contested re-election of Nicolás Maduro in May 2018 has fuelled fears of escalating violence. Thousands of injuries and more than 100 deaths have resulted from continued clashes between pro- and anti-government protesters, and security forces have acted with impunity in violently cracking down on the latter. Provocations by domestic and international actors, namely the US, have deepened the country's political and economic crisis and led to a failed uprising in April 2019 by opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who has been endorsed by some members of the international community as the 'interim President'. The government has strategically alternated between blocking and allowing the use of social media, on which both sides have relied to construct legitimacy and mobilize supporters. Venezuela's worsening situation, including skyrocketing inflation and a public health crisis, have led to the largest exodus in recent Latin American history, with some 2.7 million Venezuelans having left the country since 2015. The country has continued its climb up the index, following on from a rise in 2018's table.

Niger is facing the spillover effects of conflicts raging in neighbouring Mali and Nigeria as well as internal drivers of insecurity and political instability. Violence in the border regions has resulted in population displacement and contributed to the country's deepening humanitarian crisis. In the south-east Diffa region, near the border with Nigeria, ISIS-linked Boko Haram fighters and other supporting militants continue to strike state security forces. Near the Malian border in the western Tillabéri region, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara has launched attacks on military and police officers and

abducted international aid workers. While the Nigerien army continues to collaborate with Opération Barkhane, the French regional counter-terrorism operation based in Chad, in June 2018 Islamist militants destroyed the headquarters of the G5 Sahel multinational counter-terrorism force, established in 2017 between Niger and its neighbours.

In **El Salvador**, national security is threatened by high levels of killings linked to gang violence with its roots in late-1990s US deportation policies. Criminal gangs have committed an array of human rights abuses, including murder of journalists, government officials and security personnel. They have also perpetrated widespread sexual violence and recruitment of children. Government efforts to address deep-seated socio-economic issues underlying the proliferation of gang violence have come up short, as have heavy-handed, militarized repression tactics, which have further victimized many Salvadorians. In 2018, the number of missing persons reached a new high at nearly 3,400 cases. Internal displacement resulting from gang violence has recently become a major issue, with civil society and international organizations placing the number of affected people in the tens or hundreds of thousands. It remains to be seen whether Nayib Bukele, a social media star who became President in February 2018, can parlay his massive popularity into productive policy.

After years of relative stability, **Nicaragua** is a new entrant and the country that has leapt furthest up the *Peoples under Threat* rankings. From April to August 2018, President Daniel Ortega's government brutally quashed protests against increasingly unpopular policies related to social reform and plans to hand over power to his wife, Rosario Murillo, in the 2021 elections. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans took to the streets across the country, aided by the organizational and mobilizational power of Facebook and Twitter in a context where coverage of events was censored from the air and journalists repressed. Harsh measures by security forces and pro-government paramilitaries caused nearly 500 deaths and several thousand injuries. According to the Organization of American States, these acts – including extra-judicial killings, torture, sexual violence and arbitrary arrests – constituted crimes against humanity. Killings and abductions of indigenous people by illegal settlers in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region have also quietly continued.

India has been embroiled in escalating violence in Kashmir since 2016, when soldiers killed a separatist commander with a major social media following among alienated locals. With stepped-up Indian army operations, 2018 saw the highest death toll in a decade as well as greater collaboration between several Islamist separatist groups. Indian security forces have enjoyed impunity for a range of human rights violations in Kashmir and elsewhere, such as the 'Northeast' states and in Naxalite-Maoist areas, fighting worsened in 2018. In the lead-up to the 2019 general elections, social media played a central role in advancing chauvinist Hindu nationalism in a climate of paranoia and intolerance towards minorities and perceived outsiders. While WhatsApp rumours had already led to deadly mob violence by extremist Hindu groups, members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), supporters and bots ratcheted up the production of inflammatory, anti-Muslim messaging on- and offline. The BJP President Amit Shah called Bangladeshi migrants 'termites' and the party's Twitter account echoed his words: with the exception of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs, 'we will remove every single infiltrator from the country'.

A new entrant, **Burkina Faso**, appears poised to continue its tragic rise in the *Peoples under Threat* table. Home-grown militants as well as al-Qaeda and ISIS operatives have exploited local grievances and a security vacuum left after the popular overthrow of dictator Blaise Compaoré in 2014. Since late 2018, violence has sharply escalated and spread from the northern Soum province to eastern and south-western parts of the country. Security forces have faced ongoing attacks from armed groups and civilians have suffered abuses, including summary executions, from various parties to the conflict. In the context of spiralling insecurity, ethnic 'self-defence' militias have ignited a string of mass reprisal killings between members of Mossi and Foulse communities who have faced the brunt of jihadist violence, and marginalized Peuhl who have been perceived as supporting extremists. Spring 2019 saw the emergence of an alarming new trend when gunmen murdered Catholic and Protestant churchgoers in two attacks in the north of the country. Burkina Faso's unprecedented violence has displaced more than 1,000 people each day since the beginning of 2019.

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Peoples under Threat 2019

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	0.7456	9.9	9.9	-1.968	-2.631	-2.090	7	28.820
Somalia	Minorities incl. Bantu, Benadiri and 'caste' groups (Gabooye etc.); clan members at risk in fighting incl. Hawiye, Darod, etc.	4	2	1	0.2657	9.0	10.0	-1.778	-2.326	-2.313	7	23.116
South Sudan	Murle, Nuer, Dinka, Anuak, Jie, Kachipo	0	2	1	0.3248	9.7	9.7	-1.816	-2.461	-1.938	7	21.571
Afghanistan	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchis, Kuchis	4	2	1	0.1528	8.1	8.6	-0.992	-2.781	-1.570	7	20.529
Iraq	Shi'a, Sunnis, Kurds, Turkmen, Christians, Mandaeans, Yezidis, Shabak, Faili Kurds, Bahá'í, Palestinians	5	2	1	0.0853	9.3	9.6	-1.048	-2.331	-1.637	7	20.394
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Hema and Lendu, Hutu, Luba, Lunda, Tutsi/Banyamulenge, Batwa/Bambuti, other groups	4	2	1	0.0679	10.0	9.8	-1.443	-2.302	-1.690	7	20.289
Sudan	Fur, Zaghawa, Massalit and others in Darfur; Ngok Dinka, Nuba, Beja	5	2	1	0.0684	10.0	9.7	-1.826	-2.007	-1.109	7	20.284
Yemen	Zaydi Shi'a, Sunni tribes, al-Muhamasheen, Southerners	5	2	0	0.0773	9.5	10.0	-1.692	-2.961	-1.753	7	19.804
Pakistan	Shi'a (incl. Hazara), Ahmadis, Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities; Baluchis, Mohhajirs, Pashtun, Sindhis	5	2	1	0.0020	9.7	8.9	-0.695	-2.399	-0.724	7	18.313
Central African Republic	Muslims, Christians; Kaba (Sara), Mboum, Mbororo, Gula, Aka	0	2	0	0.2983	8.8	9.7	-1.107	-1.939	-1.731	7	17.718
Libya	Black Libyans, Sub-Saharan migrants, Tebu, Berbers; religious targets	4	2	0	0.0410	7.8	9.4	-1.443	-2.326	-1.784	7	17.705
Ethiopia	Anuak, Afars, Oromo, Somalis, smaller minorities	4	2	1	0.0137	8.8	8.4	-1.442	-1.687	-0.454	7	17.462
Nigeria	Ibo, Ijaw, Ogoni, Yoruba, Hausa (Muslims) and Christians in the North	5	2	1	0.0132	9.3	9.6	-0.342	-1.943	-0.866	6	17.183
Burma/ Myanmar	Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mons, Rakhine, Rohingyas, Shan, Chin (Zomis), Wa	5	2	1	0.0296	9.8	8.3	-0.866	-1.084	-0.945	6	16.958
Burundi	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	1	1	0.0648	7.6	7.9	-1.568	-1.970	-1.396	7	15.790
Iran	Arabs, Azeris, Bahá'í, Baluchis, Kurds, Turkomen	4	1	1	0.0025	9.3	9.6	-1.299	-0.930	-0.683	6	15.087
Cameroon	Anglophones, Bakassi	5	2	0	0.0114	8.4	9.1	-1.049	-1.085	-1.024	6	14.939
Ukraine	Tatars, Krymchak and Karaites in Crimea; Russians, Hungarians, Moldovans and other national minorities	5	2	0	0.0441	6.4	8.0	0.013	-1.886	-0.711	7	14.800
Eritrea	Afars, Saho, Tigre, religious minorities	4	0	0	0.1129	7.4	8.1	-2.165	-0.656	-1.564	7	14.472
State of Palestine	Gazans, Bedouin	5	1	0	0.0230	10.0	8.1	-1.031	-1.644	-0.416	7	14.463
Egypt	Copts, Shi'a, Bahá'í; Nubians, Bedouin	5	2	0	0.0004	8.9	8.8	-1.249	-1.415	-0.535	5	14.278
Turkey	Kurds, Alevis, Roma, Armenians and other Christians	5	2	0	0.0012	10.0	9.1	-0.707	-1.797	-0.250	5	14.074
Chad	'Black African' groups, Arabs, Southerners	2	1	0	0.0110	7.7	9.5	-1.372	-1.341	-1.295	7	13.610
Zimbabwe	Ndebele, Europeans, political/social targets	2	0	1	0.0020	7.0	10.0	-1.202	-0.774	-1.379	7	13.583
Russian Federation	Chechens, Ingush and others in North Caucasus; indigenous northern peoples, Roma, Jews, Central Asians, migrants	5	1	1	0.0007	8.5	8.1	-1.091	-0.674	-0.794	4	13.582
Philippines	Indigenous peoples, Moros (Muslims), Chinese	5	2	1	0.0048	8.2	8.0	0.082	-1.237	-0.414	3	13.192
Mali	Tuareg, Arabs, Maure, and others in the north	4	1	0	0.0129	7.9	5.4	-0.256	-1.910	-0.777	7	12.914
Equatorial Guinea	Bubi, Annobon Islanders	1	0	1	0.0002	6.0	8.2	-1.974	-0.148	-1.489	7	12.855
Angola	Bakongo, Cabindans, Ovimbundu, Pastoralists, San and Kwisi	4	0	1	0.0012	7.2	7.2	-1.099	-0.295	-1.104	6	12.660
Lebanon	Druze, Maronite Christians, Palestinians, Shi'a, Sunnis	2	1	0	0.0023	8.2	9.6	-0.577	-1.594	-0.824	7	12.610
Uganda	Acholi, Karamojong, Bakonzo, Bamba, Basongora, Batwa	2	1	1	0.0046	8.6	8.6	-0.593	-0.557	-0.296	6	12.359
Venezuela	Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, political/social targets	0	0	0	0.0274	7.3	8.5	-1.211	-1.180	-2.255	7	11.928
Algeria	Berbers, Saharawi	2	1	1	0.0002	7.3	7.1	-0.895	-0.960	-0.865	4	11.872
Niger	Djerema-songhai, Hausa, Tuaregs	2	1	0	0.0081	7.7	8.9	-0.414	-1.303	-0.676	7	11.866
China	Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols, Hui, religious minorities	5	1	1	0.0002	7.6	7.2	-1.505	-0.251	-0.263	2	11.488

Peoples under Threat 2019

Country	Groups	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	Total
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croats, Bosniac Muslims, Serbs, Roma	2	0	1	0.0474	6.9	8.7	-0.207	-0.382	-0.211	7	11.249
Tajikistan	Uzbeks, Pamiris, Russians	1	0	0	0.0006	7.1	8.4	-1.723	-0.668	-1.354	7	11.209
North Korea	Political/social targets, religious minorities	0	0	0	0.0001	5.8	8.8	-2.202	-0.481	-1.715	7	11.207
Colombia	Political/social targets, Afro-descendants, indigenous peoples	2	2	0	0.1628	7.0	7.6	0.111	-0.786	-0.360	4	11.096
Azerbaijan	Armenians	4	0	0	0.0644	6.2	7.9	-1.565	-0.760	-0.556	5	11.000
Sri Lanka	Tamils, Muslims	4	0	1	0.0082	8.7	8.8	-0.063	-0.061	0.055	6	10.818
Mozambique	Northerners	4	0	0	0.0011	5.1	6.6	-0.423	-0.976	-1.006	7	10.741
El Salvador	Political/social targets	0	2	1	0.0332	6.4	4.3	0.153	-0.247	-0.856	5	10.690
Congo (Rep.)	Lari, M'Boshi, Aka	1	0	0	0.0354	7.5	6.7	-1.122	-0.527	-1.104	7	10.349
Thailand	Chinese, Malay-Muslims, Northern Hill Tribes	5	1	0	0.0000	8.2	9.4	-1.047	-0.757	0.044	3	10.318
Kenya	Borana, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Somalis, Turkana, Endorois, Masai, Ogiek, other indigenous groups, Muslims	1	1	0	0.0003	8.9	9.6	-0.202	-1.084	-0.413	6	10.285
Nicaragua	Indigenous peoples, Creoles	2	1	0	0.0013	6.2	7.1	-0.719	-0.045	-0.645	7	10.264
Djibouti	Afars	1	0	0	0.0033	6.2	7.3	-1.406	-0.708	-0.913	7	10.185
Bangladesh	Ahmadis, Hindus, other religious minorities; Chittagong Hill Tribes	3	0	0	0.0005	8.4	9.3	-0.616	-1.249	-0.671	5	10.116
Cote d'Ivoire	Northern Mande (Dioula), Senoufo, Bete, newly-settled groups	3	0	0	0.0025	7.8	9.1	-0.273	-1.094	-0.631	6	10.090
Guinea	Fulani (Peuhl), Malinke	0	0	0	0.0041	8.9	9.6	-0.741	-0.606	-1.229	7	10.075
Laos	Hmong, other highland peoples	2	0	0	0.0011	6.4	8.3	-1.751	0.430	-0.881	7	10.038
Kosovo	Serbs, Roma/Ashkali/Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, Gorani	4	0	0	0.0296	7.3	8.3	-0.116	-0.207	-0.421	7	10.015
India	Assamese, Bodos, Nagas, Tripuras, other Adivasis; Kashmiris, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalits	5	2	0	0.0000	8.3	7.3	0.386	-0.826	0.005	3	9.910
Turkmenistan	Uzbeks, Russians, Kazakhs, religious minorities	0	0	0	0.0003	6.3	7.8	-2.159	-0.148	-1.488	6	9.898
Rwanda	Hutu, Tutsi, Batwa	0	0	1	0.0227	9.7	8.0	-1.122	0.039	0.129	6	9.881
Kyrgyzstan	Uzbeks, Russians	2	0	0	0.0009	8.1	8.0	-0.438	-0.433	-0.925	7	9.863
Guinea Bissau	Balanta, Peuhl (Fulani), Manjaco, Mandinga, Papel, Ejamat (Felupe), Jola (Diola), Susu, Cape Verdeans	0	0	0	0.0028	5.2	9.6	-0.797	-0.600	-1.436	7	9.703
Moldova	Trans-Dniester Slavs	4	0	0	0.0016	7.3	8.3	-0.030	-0.240	-0.414	7	9.675
Haiti	Political/social targets	0	0	0	0.0059	6.2	9.6	-0.737	-0.705	-1.088	7	9.597
Uzbekistan	Tajiks, Islamic political groups, religious minorities, Karakalpaks, Russians	1	0	0	0.0002	6.9	8.8	-1.796	-0.278	-1.108	5	9.426
Nepal	Madheshis (Terai), Dalits, Janajati, linguistic minorities	2	0	0	0.0007	9.6	8.8	-0.234	-0.662	-0.676	6	9.396
Cambodia	Cham, Vietnamese, indigenous hill tribes (Khmer Leou)	0	0	1	0.0009	6.6	8.6	-1.156	0.168	-0.056	6	9.336
Papua New Guinea	Bougainvilleans, tribal peoples	4	0	0	0.0001	6.0	7.1	0.131	-0.583	-0.825	6	9.211
Guatemala	Indigenous peoples, Garifuna	0	0	1	0.0055	8.8	7.1	-0.281	-0.573	-1.060	4	9.119
Georgia	Adzhars, Abkhazians, South Ossetians	4	0	0	0.0775	7.6	9.1	0.263	-0.371	0.329	6	9.087
Mauritania	Haratins ('Black Moors'), Kewri	0	0	0	0.0100	6.7	8.8	-0.800	-0.619	-0.599	7	9.076
Serbia	Bosniaks, Ethnic Albanians, Croats, Roma	2	0	1	0.0296	7.3	8.3	0.116	0.102	-0.192	5	8.995
Indonesia	Acehnese, Chinese, Dayaks, Madurese, Papuans, religious minorities	4	0	1	0.0001	7.2	7.0	0.130	-0.512	-0.346	3	8.970
Burkina Faso	Mossi, Foulse, Fulani	0	1	0	0.0016	4.2	7.8	0.059	-0.925	-0.405	7	8.912
Vietnam	Montagnards (Degar), other highland peoples, religious minorities	1	0	1	0.0036	5.7	6.9	-1.402	0.305	0.070	5	8.788
Mexico	Mayans, Indigenous peoples, Zapotecs	2	2	0	0.0007	6.9	5.4	-0.078	-0.647	-0.567	3	8.724

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 2018, Heidelberg, HIIK, 2019), Minority Rights Group International, and the Center for Systemic Peace ('Major Episodes of Political Violence 1946-2016' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2017). Self-determination/autonomy conflicts in 2016 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 2018; 1=emerging from conflict since 2014 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 2018, as a proportion of total country population (population figures from UN DESA, 2017 revision). Group division indicators are from the Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018.
- *Democracy/Governance Indicators:* Annual Governance Indicators, World Bank, 2017.
- *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 2019.

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:

$$(A/2) + (Bx1.25) + (Cx2) + (Dx10) + (E+F)/6 + (G+H+I)/-1 + (Jx0.625)$$

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 longtitudinal 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, internallydisplaced 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 2019.

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