INTERNATIONAL SOS

INSIGHT REPORT

2026 SECURITY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

ANALYSIS AND OUTLOOKS

EDITORIAL

In an **increasingly fragmented international environment**, organizations must contend with a combination of threats: geopolitical tensions, terrorism, foreign interference, social volatility, organized crime, cyber risks, and a growing number of extreme weather events. For security leaders, the challenge is no longer simply to identify risks, but to **prioritize them, anticipate their evolution, and strengthen resilience**.

This **Insight Report on 2026 Security Challenges** provides an analyses of the key dynamics to monitor across each geographic region (Sub-Saharan Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe-CIS and the Middle East/North Africa), along with a forward-looking assessment of the major threats to anticipate in the year ahead. We highlight **emerging hotspots, structural trends, and weak signals that could evolve into crises**, in order to support your decision-making, enhance your operational preparedness, and strengthen your response capabilities.

We wish you an excellent read and hope that these analyses will help **strengthen the protection of your employees** and **enhance your organization's resilience** in the face of the challenges ahead in 2026. We remain at your disposal 24/7 to support you. Please do not hesitate to contact our team.



Alexandre MOLLET
Security Manager



Beatrix RENAUT
Security Manager



Michel ISIDORE
Security Manager



Marc-Antoine LE GOFF
Senior Security Expert



Fleur HEGER
Security Expert



Clémence PERROT
Security Expert



Tiphaine COURT
Security Expert

February 2026

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



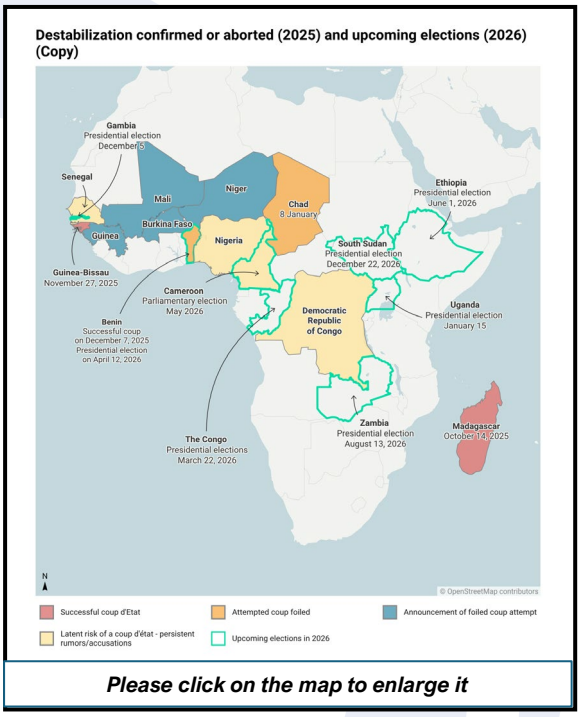
1 POLITICAL WEAKENING AND RISING TENSIONS IN 2025

In 2026, Africa's security landscape is expected to remain shaped by a persistent combination of political tensions, socio-economic pressures, and security threats, particularly terrorism. The dominant trend will not be a uniform deterioration of security, but rather a **fragmentation of risks**, marked by localized, and sometimes sporadic, hotspots that nonetheless have the potential to trigger rapid disruptive effects. Priority areas of concern will continue to include the **Sahel**, facing chronic insecurity; **Central Africa**, where conflicts with complex regional dimensions persist; as well as several states previously regarded as relatively stable, which are now experiencing a **gradual erosion of their political and social equilibrium**. These developments are unfolding within a context of fragile political transitions, limited state and security capacities, and growing external interference, all of which contribute to exposing several subregions to lasting instability.

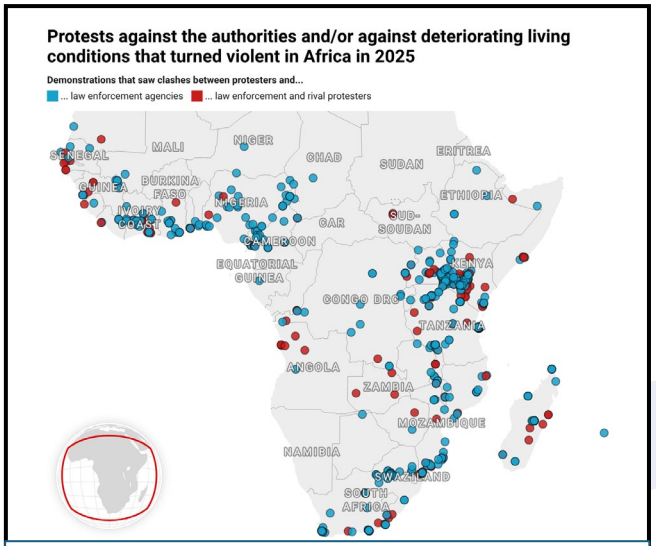
Governments under pressure

If Africa is expected to hold only a limited number of elections in 2026, **the continent will nonetheless remain marked by a high level of political instability**, driven by the gradual shrinking of democratic space, the tightening repression of opposition actors, and an increasing number of attempts at internal destabilization. The year 2025 confirmed a shift in the nature of political risk, with contestation and power-struggle dynamics often rooted in rivalries within security apparatuses or in failed coup attempts, rather than in abrupt regime changes, highlighting the persistent fragilities affecting numerous state institutions.

In **West Africa**, the attempted coup thwarted in Benin in December 2025 illustrates both the region's growing vulnerability and the spillover effect into countries historically considered stable. Ghana is another example, as it remains weakened by persistent economic and social pressures. Benin's legislative elections in January and its presidential election scheduled for April carry the risk of crystallizing **political and social tensions**, particularly due to the frustrations of an urban youth facing economic precarity and growing perceptions of political exclusion. In the member countries of the **Alliance of Sahel States** (AES), the reccuring attemps at internal destabilization, such as the one reported in early January 2026 in Burkina Faso, reflect persistent rivalries within the military regimes and their armed forces. The security stalemate in the fight against terrorist armed groups, combined with high human losses, is weakening the internal cohesion of the armed forces and fueling tensions, including at the highest levels of the state, thereby sustaining a heightened risk of the further coup attempts in 2026.



Please click on the map to enlarge it



Please click on the map to enlarge it

More broadly, **the repression of opposition movements remains a key driver of political instability** across Africa. In Tanzania, the post-election protests of October 2025 (met with an unprecedentedly harsh security response not seen since independence) further marginalized the opposition and illustrated a radicalization in law-enforcement practices. This escalation increases the likelihood of more intense, and potentially violent, political and social unrest in 2026. In Central Africa, **Cameroon** will continue to require close monitoring; the advanced age of President Paul Biya, 92, who was re-elected in October for an eight term, along with the apparent absence of any planned succession, raises concerns about the country's stability. In **Madagascar**, the formation of a new government has not eased long-standing social frustrations, and the authorities' inability to meet economic expectations leaves the door open to a resurgence of tensions in 2026.

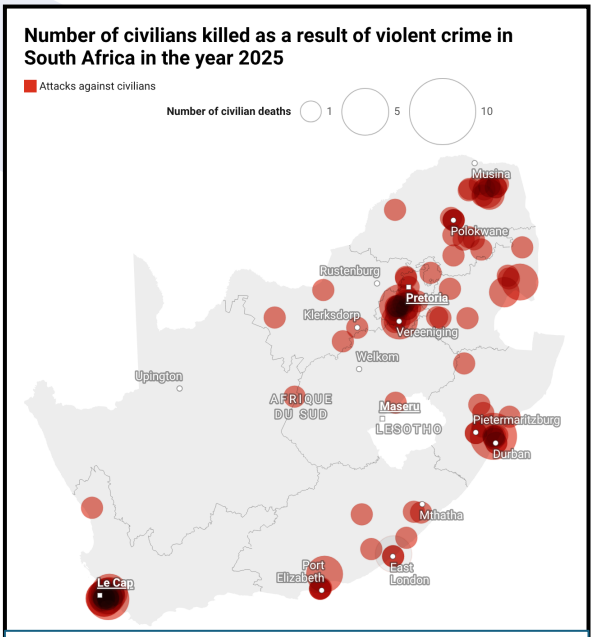
Social tensions and protests

Building on existing political fragilities, 2026 is expected to see a **resurgence of social tensions and protest movements**, exacerbated by a deepening and generational divide and growing public distrust toward authorities. The continued rise in the cost of living, the deterioration of public services, and endemic youth unemployment are fueling a strong sense of social injustice, particularly in urban centers, making protests over the high cost of living one of the main drivers of unrest in 2026.

Moreover, the widespread **access to social media (particularly among urban youth) acts as an accelerator of violent mobilization**. This dynamic is reinforced by the fact that social media platforms serve as major channels for disinformation, enabling the rapid spread of rumors, manipulated content, and polarizing narratives, especially during periods of economic or electoral tension and in a context of declining trust in traditional media.
In both Madagascar and Kenya, the violent protests of 2025 highlighted the capacity of social networks to shape and amplify unrest, particularly around narratives of corruption and economic injustice that circulate widely online. These movements are likely to intensify in 2026, as both local and international actors increasingly exploit the information space for political or ideological purposes, further undermining social cohesion and public trust in institutions. **Kenya** is expected to remain exposed to episodes of protest, following the pattern of demonstrations against fiscal reforms and tax increases, which have repeatedly degenerated into violent clashes in major urban centers.

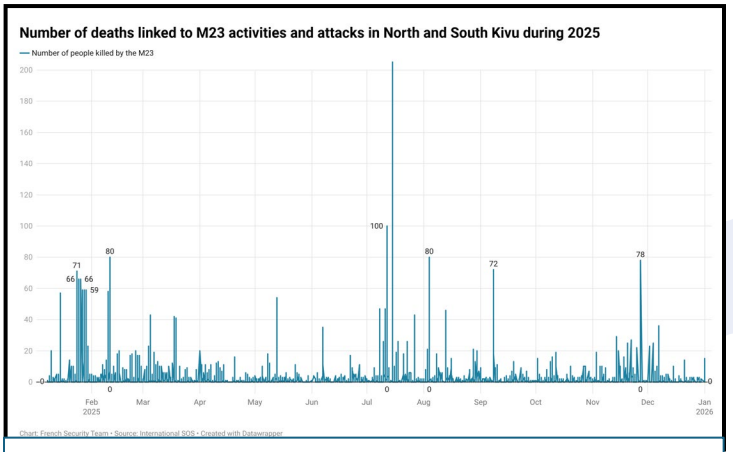
Crime as a driver of systemic destabilization

Crime will continue to be a major driver of destabilization in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2026, not only in the form of endemic delinquency, but increasingly as a structural component of local political, social, and security tensions. The expansion of trafficking networks (weapons, narcotics, minerals, fuel, smuggling) is thriving on institutional weakness, the erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions, enabling criminal groups to embed themselves sustainably within already fragile economies.
In this context, the authorities' inability to prevent, investigate, and sanction acts of violence is fostering a climate of impunity in which the use of force becomes a tool of pressure and control, facilitating its spread into urban centers, particularly those marked by high unemployment. This dynamic is contributing to the normalization of opportunistic and diffuse violence, which is increasingly embedded as an instrument of local power relations. Such violence is used to secure economic rents, control territories, or influence political and communal rivalries, blurring the boundaries between organized crime, armed dissent, and informal power strategies. This trend is severely weakening the ability of states to restore effective security control and is fueling a climate of chronic instability.



Please click on the map to enlarge it

South Africa is a particularly telling example of this trajectory. The persistently high level of homicides (among the highest in the world) largely driven by the widespread circulation of firearms, reflects an environment in which the risks of opportunistic and collateral violence remain significant, including in major economic centers. In the first quarter of 2025, the South African Police recorded 5,727 homicides. The launch in 2025 of a commission of inquiry into potential links between political leaders and criminal networks underscores the risk of institutional collusion, which could further weaken security response capabilities in 2026.
For employees traveling in the country, this endemic criminality translates into an increased risk of targeted assaults, extortion, and collateral violence, necessitating reinforced security measures, particularly in deteriorated urban environments.



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Persistent centers of destabilization

Finally, **inter and intra-state conflicts will continue to represent a significant risk factor in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes region**, where the interplay of local, regional, and international dynamics limits any prospect of lasting stabilization.
In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the evolution of the conflict opposing the Congolese Armed Forces and the M23 illustrates this persistent fragility: despite diplomatic initiatives and repeated ceasefire announcements, the armed group has continued its strategy of territorial consolidation. This was most notably demonstrated by the capture of Uvira on 10 December 2025, following the takeover of Goma and Bukavu in January and February 2025, thereby strengthening its control over strategic areas and key axes in the east of the country. This advance, taking place in the immediate vicinity of the Burundian and Rwandan borders, increases the risk of a regional escalation of tensions, in a context marked by the weakness of the Congolese army and recurrent accusations of external interference. In the medium term, the absence of a sustainable political agreement suggests a continued cycle of violence in 2026, with heightened risks of cross-border spillovers and broader security deterioration.

ZOOM IN…

THE SHIFT OF THE JIHADIST THREAT TOWARD THE GULF OF GUINEA

Resilience and adaptation of the sahelian jihadist groups

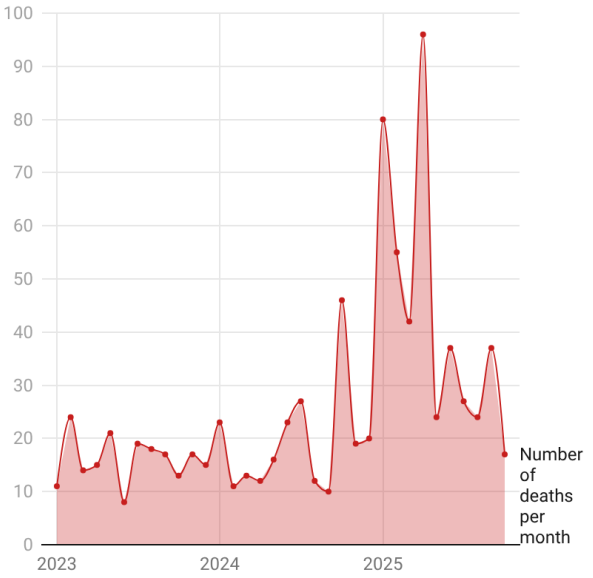
The terrorist threat will remain, in 2026, one of the main drivers of security instability on the African continent, with its presence largely concentrated in the Sahel, which has emerged as the operational, ideological, and strategic epicenter of regional jihadist dynamics. Far from weakening, Sahelian armed groups have demonstrated significant resilience and a strong capacity for adaptation, enabling them to maintain and even expand their influence despite successive military offensives, internal political shifts, and changes in security partnerships. This adaptive capacity is reflected in the diversification of their modes of action and in the gradual expansion of their areas of influence. A clear illustration of this trend is the economic-attrition strategy employed by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which has targeted energy supply chains in Mali, as well as the growing number of cross-border incursions into northern Benin and Togo. In parallel, the sustained activity of groups affiliated with the Islamic State (IS), particularly around the Lake Chad basin, reflects a broader dynamic of territorial expansion across the Sahelo-Saharan belt, accompanied by a gradual southward extension of the threat toward the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea. This shift represents both a geographical and operational evolution. The southward movement of the threat is accompanied by an adaptation of operational methods, increasingly characterized by violent criminal practices. Kidnappings, long used as tactical or media tools, now form part of broader strategies for financing and territorial control, contributing to the long-term entrenchment of armed groups within local economies and dynamics.

The geographic expansion of these groups

This threat is driven by several rival jihadist organizations, originating from the fragmentation of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the expansion of the Islamic State in the region. By 2025, their dynamics had converged toward a gradual expansion of their activities beyond the Sahelian core. In this context, JNIM has emerged as one of the deadliest actors, demonstrating its ability to project instability toward the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea by multiplying incursions from Mali and Burkina Faso into the border areas of Niger, Benin, and Togo. The coordinated attack carried out in April 2025 against two Beninese armed forces positions near W National Park (resulting in the death of at least fifty soldiers) was among the deadliest attacks. It illustrated both the growing operational capabilities of these groups and the increasing vulnerability of coastal states to a threat initially confined to the Sahel. Meanwhile in Niger, the persistent violence in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions (characterized by ambushes and the use of improvised explosive devices) continues to erode state control in rural and border areas, forming part of a broader strategy of gradual entrenchment based on sustained cross-border harassment.

Cross-border incursions increasingly deadly

Number of deaths during each incursion by a Sahelian jihadist organization in Togo, Benin, Ghana, and Ivory Coast



Please click on the map to enlarge it

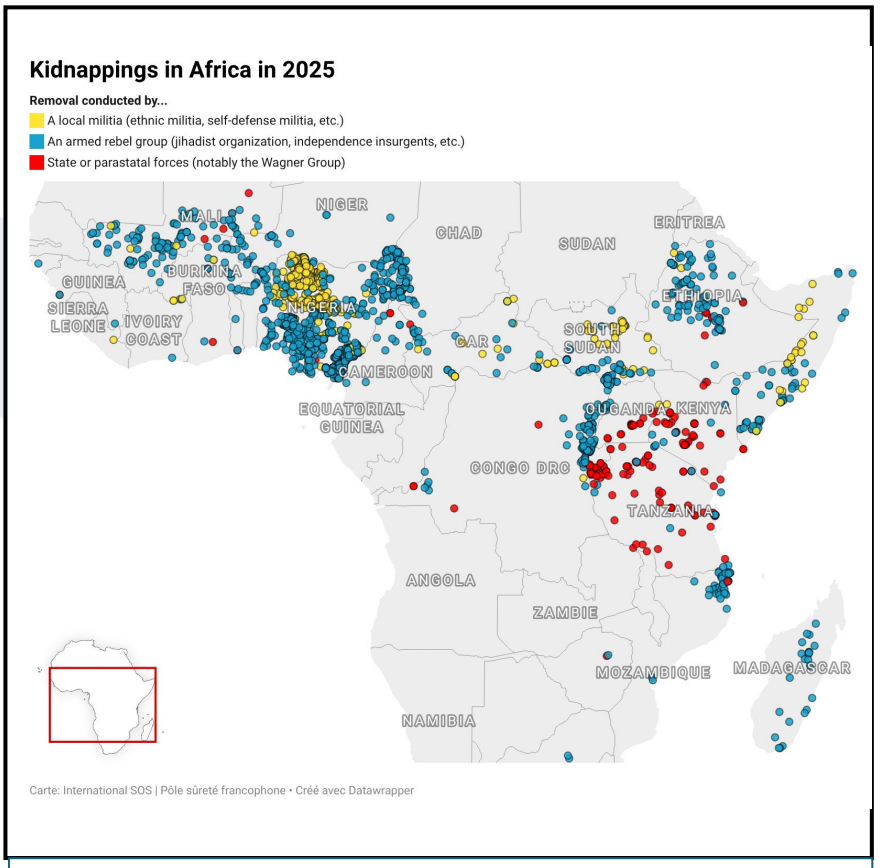
Reconfiguration of Jihadist dynamics in the Lake Chad basin

In the Lake Chad region, the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) remain particularly active in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. ISWAP has emerged as the dominant actor in the Lake Chad Basin through a strategy centered on taxing local populations, exerting community control, and conducting targeted operations against state forces. However, the jihadist threat in this area is no longer defined solely by confrontation with state actors but also by increasing internal violence between rival organizations. This intra-group competition contributes to sustained instability and to the gradual dispersion of fighters into new areas. The deadly clashes that occurred on 9 November 2025 in Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria, during which more than 200 fighters were killed in a direct confrontation between Boko Haram and ISWAP, illustrate this fragmentation and the growing level of militarization, notably through the reported use of armed drones. This rivalry fuels a constant reconfiguration of the security landscape, encouraging the movement of fighters, an increase in attacks against civilians, and a resurgence of kidnappings, particularly in northern Nigeria.

Threat projection towards the the Gulf of Guinea

Since 2023, the territorial expansion of groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has accelerated, capitalizing on political instability, successive coups, and the withdrawal or reconfiguration of certain international security mechanisms. These groups now combine territorial control with harassment tactics, including the collection of taxes, the imposition of coercive social norms, and the administration of summary justice, thereby strengthening their grip on already fragile territories.

This dynamic is gradually extending toward the Gulf of Guinea through cross-border incursions originating from Burkina Faso and, to a lesser extent, Niger. Benin and Togo appear to be the most exposed in the short term, followed by Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. In Benin, violence is concentrated around the W and Pendjari National Parks, as well as in the border departments of Alibori and Atacora, which have become genuine logistical hubs offering retreat areas and access to resources derived from illicit activities. In Togo, the threat is expanding in the form of rapid raids carried out on motorbikes or in pick-up trucks, with a notable increase in the lethality of attacks observed in 2025. In Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, incidents remain more sporadic, yet occasional infiltrations and sustained regional pressure highlight the structural vulnerability of their northern borders.



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Evolution of kidnappings for ransom

In this context, the evolution of the threat is also reflected in a significant increase in financially motivated kidnappings, which have become a central pillar of the jihadist economy. Kidnappings are no longer solely symbolic or media-driven actions; they now form part of a sustained financing strategy that supports military operations and reinforces territorial control. In Mali, JNIM (to which nearly 90% of jihadist attacks are attributed) has intensified the use of kidnappings in parallel with the expansion of its areas of influence and its strategy aimed at weakening the ruling junta. Indeed, over the last six months of 2025, at least 22 foreign nationals were abducted by JNIM, an unprecedented level. While Western nationals remain exposed, kidnappings increasingly target Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Emirati, and Egyptian nationals, whose economic presence in Sub-Saharan Africa has expanded significantly, particularly in the mining, energy, and industrial sectors. These individuals are primarily abducted from isolated industrial or mining sites, often located in southern Mali. For example, in late October, a ransom estimated at nearly USD 50 million was reportedly paid in exchange for the release of an Emirati national and his companions.

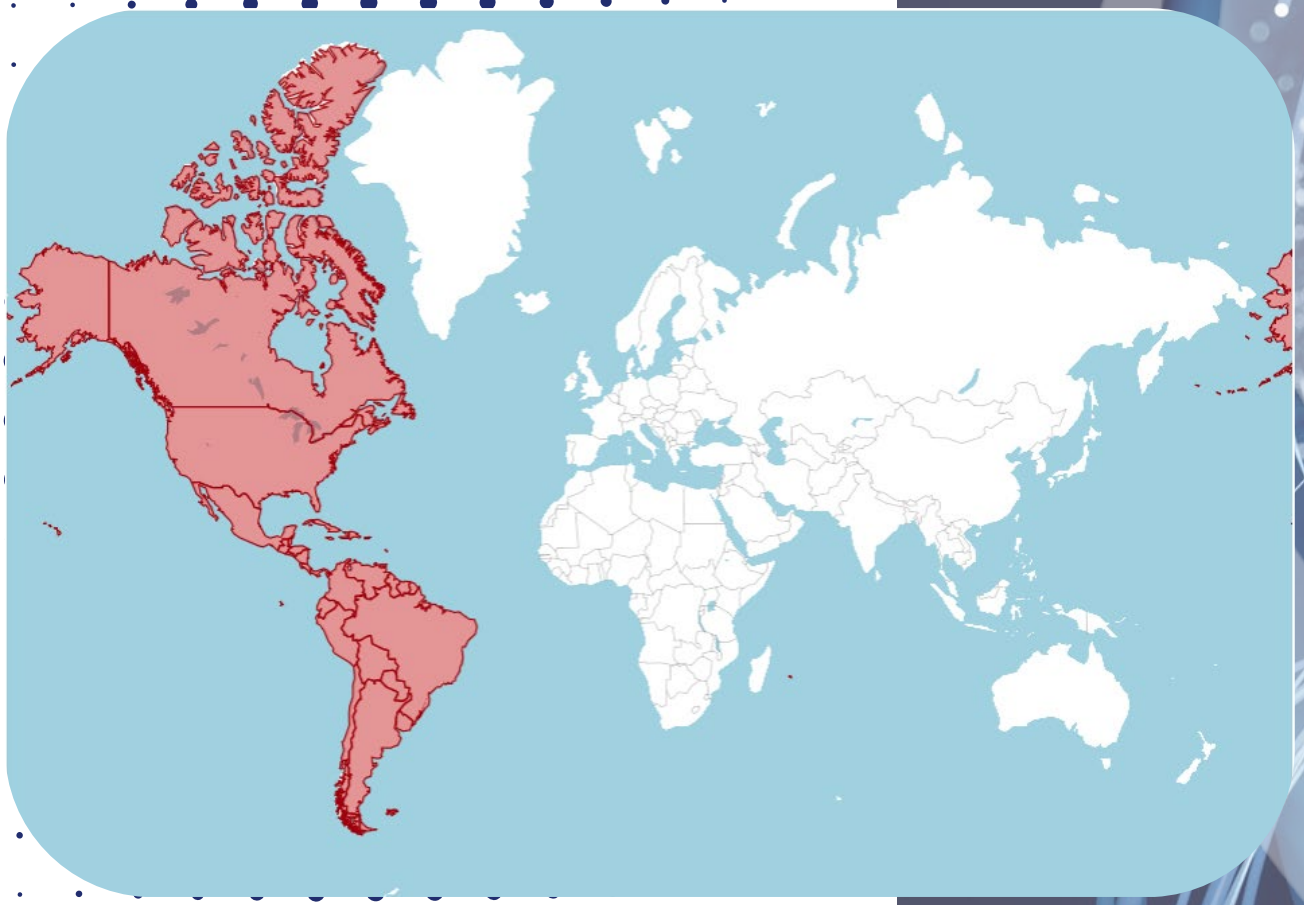
Moreover, the Islamic State is believed to have abducted at least 13 foreign nationals in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Algeria in recent months, while attempted kidnappings and abductions of Western nationals have also been reported in urban centers such as Niamey. The proliferation of kidnappings in Sahelian and border areas (often characterized by a security vacuum) is likely to continue increasing in 2026 as these groups keep expanding their presence into more densely populated zones, where expatriates (aid workers, diplomats, or corporate employees) become prime targets for terrorist groups seeking to finance their military operations.

Outlooks and recommendations

The 2026 outlook predicts a continued deterioration of the security landscape in the Sahel, along with a gradual expansion of the threat toward the peripheries of the Gulf of Guinea.
In this context, heightened vigilance during road travel in rural areas of Sahelian and Gulf of Guinea countries will be essential. Jihadist groups are likely to continue relying on strategies that combine territorial expansion, organized criminal activity, and kidnappings for ransom, thereby consolidating a threat that is both enduring and increasingly transnational.

February 2026

AMERICAS



The security environment across the Americas is expected to remain marked by chronic instability, driven by structural factors such as persistent inequalities, corruption, and fragile governance, as well as by situational elements including electoral cycles, climate shocks, and other episodic events. The dominant trend is not a uniform deterioration, but rather a **multiplication of localized spikes in violence or tension,** sometimes brief, yet highly disruptive. For organizations, these dynamics require a nuanced understanding of territories, timelines, and weak signals, going beyond national-level indicators.

1 THE DIFFUSE THREAT POSED BY ARMED GROUPS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime remains one of the main drivers of insecurity in the region, but its nature continues to evolve. The weakening or disappearance of central figures within major criminal groups is fostering the fragmentation of these structures, leading to the emergence of competing factions, autonomous local networks, and more opportunistic dynamics,characterized by greater mobility and lower predictability.

Mexico

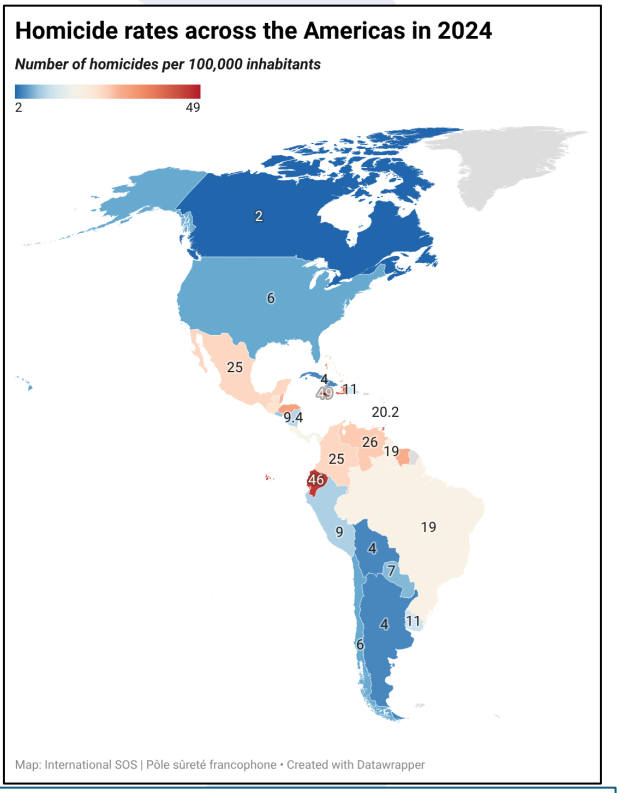
In Mexico, this restructuring is resulting in **fluctuating and unpredictable violence**, characterized by alternating periods of relative calm and localized surges, particularly in urban areas and along key transportation corridors. This dynamic has led to a marked increase in homicides in the state of Sinaloa, while simultaneously creating opportunities for cartel expansion, most notably for the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), now considered the most structured and expansionist criminal actor in the country.

Central America

In Central America, criminal activity remains dominated by **structured gangs** such as MS-13 and Barrio 18, whose operations rely primarily on extortion. For example, in Honduras, despite reinforced security measures and the prolonged implementation of a state of exception, the country continues to record one of the highest homicide rates in the region.

Southern Cone

In the Southern Cone, the threat is increasingly manifested through the expansion of **transnational criminal groups** adopting “franchised” models. In Chile, for instance, the Venezuelan group Tren de Aragua has demonstrated its ability to delegate operations to local networks while exerting control over micro-territories in urban areas. This dynamic has contributed to a significant rise in violent crime since 2022, even in countries historically little exposed to this type of threat.



Please click on the map to enlarge it

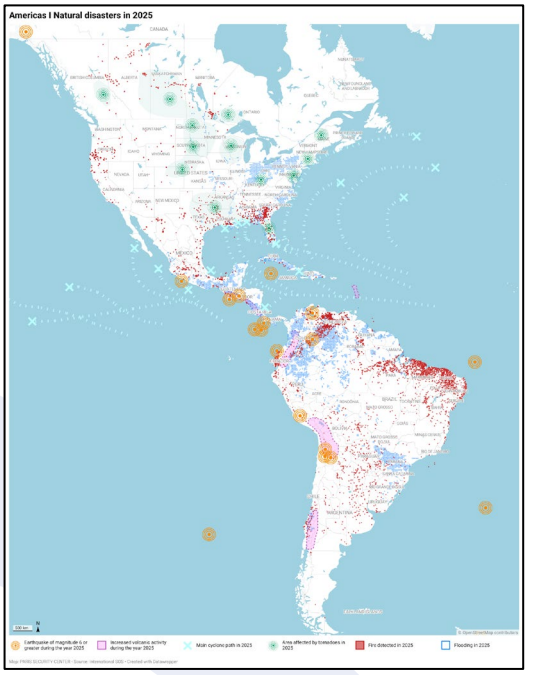
In 2026, organized crime is expected to continue evolving, marked by a **diversification of actors, increasingly sophisticated networks, and shifting modes of operation**. In this context, anticipation becomes a key lever for enhancing regional security. For organizations, the primary risk lies not so much in direct exposure as in the volatility of local power dynamics, which can produce sudden spikes in violence. This is particularly relevant given that these actors tend to favor low-visibility yet highly profitable activities such as extortion, neighborhood control, pressure on businesses and logistical flows, and the exploitation of informal economies.

2 THE RISE OF CLIMATE RISKS AS A MULTIPLIER OF SECURITY VULNERABILITIES

Climate risks constitute one of the main indirect drivers of security destabilization across the Americas. Regional mapping highlights a now well-established reality: natural hazards are neither isolated nor sequential, but geographically widespread and sometimes simultaneous, with the potential to affect multiple sub-regions at once.

In **North America**, growing exposure to fast-moving, high-impact phenomena such as tornadoes, flash floods, and wildfires **directly affects major population centers and strategic infrastructure**. The central and eastern regions of the United States,home to numerous logistical hubs,are regularly impacted by tornado outbreaks, while the western and southern regions remain vulnerable to wildfires and heatwaves. This accumulation of risks increases the likelihood of sudden mobility disruptions, pressure on emergency services, and prolonged disturbances to transportation and energy networks, including in states with high response capacities.

At the same time, in **Central America and the Caribbean**, a structural accumulation of vulnerabilities is becoming increasingly apparent. Recurrent cyclone trajectories, combined with seismic activity and seasonal flooding, place sustained pressure on populations and on logistical infrastructure (ports, airports, and road networks). These repeated shocks often go beyond the strict scope of natural disasters and generate **secondary security consequences** such as opportunistic crime, logistical disruption, and localized social tensions. In **South America**, the threat is characterized by its geographical spread. The Pacific coast remains exposed to a high level of seismic and volcanic risk, while the interior of the continent, from the Amazon basin to the Southern Cone, is increasingly affected by wildfires and flooding.



Please click on the map to enlarge it

By 2026, it is highly likely that natural disasters will neither decrease in frequency nor in impact. Current trends indicate, first and foremost, an **intensification of their security and operational consequences**, without necessarily implying a uniform increase in the occurrence of such climatic events.

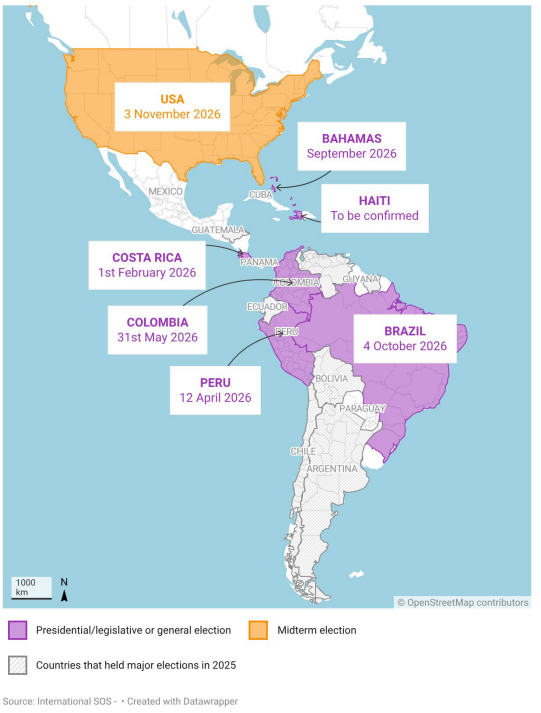
3 DEMOCRATIC STRESS, ELECTORAL CYCLES, AND SOCIOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

In many countries across the Americas, **political life now unfolds in a near-permanent state of tension**, where elections, protests, and security decisions follow one another with no real period of calm. This dynamic does not necessarily reflect a direct challenge to democratic regimes, but rather a continuous pressure on institutions, fueled by political polarization, declining trust in authorities, and an increased frequency of low-intensity crises. Electoral cycles remain the primary catalysts of this democratic stress. In Latin America, election campaigns continue to be accompanied by protests, sporadic blockades, and, at times, heavy-handed security responses. The **fragmentation of political forces and institutional distrust** heighten the likelihood of opportunistic unrest.

Recent interstate tensions, particularly the open crisis between the **United States** and **Venezuela,** illustrate how external geopolitical shocks can exacerbate existing political fragilities both domestically and at the regional level. The U.S. military operation has profoundly reshaped Venezuela's political landscape without providing lasting institutional clarity. This context is generating a high level of democratic stress which, though contained in the short term, carries a significant risk of rapid deterioration. Beyond Venezuela, the confrontational statements issued by the Trump administration toward other governments in the region have produced indirect political effects. While a broader regional military escalation appears unlikely, these dynamics increase the **risk of political mobilizations, anti-American demonstrations, and sporadic security crackdowns.**

This notion of democratic stress in the Americas is unlikely to lead to a widespread institutional collapse in 2026. It will, however, continue to generate **intermittent political instability**, marked by short-lived crises that are highly mediatized and at times triggered by exogenous factors. For international organizations, the challenge lies less in managing major crises than in anticipating localized spikes in tension that can rapidly affect staff safety, regional mobility, and country-risk perception, even in the absence of any formal political rupture.

Americas | Elections in 2026



Please click on the map to enlarge it

ZOOM IN…
THE 2026 MEN'S FOOTBALL WORLD CUP

The 23rd edition of the Men's Football World Cup will take place from 11 June to 19 July 2026 in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, across 16 host cities for a total of 104 matches. The security environment surrounding this event is characterized by heterogeneous risk levels, varying significantly from one host city and district to another.

An uneven, territory-dependent threat

The multi-site organization of the World Cup requires a highly granular assessment of risks and their potential impacts. Although the United States and Canada are generally considered low-risk destinations, hosting an event of this magnitude is likely to **temporarily heighten certain risks**, particularly opportunistic crime and logistical disruptions. In this regard, it is worth noting that certain districts within major urban centers are already assessed as moderate-risk areas due to **persistent criminal activity**. Additionally, the high level of international media attention creates increased opportunities for various actors seeking to leverage this visibility to highlight political, social, or environmental demands.

In Mexico, the three host cities (Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey) present a moderate risk level (3/5 on our risk-assessment scale) but border areas classified as high risk (4/5). While the most acute criminal dynamics affect other regions of the country, **exposure to violence remains a plausible scenario.**

2026 World Cup - Risk levels for locations involved in the event

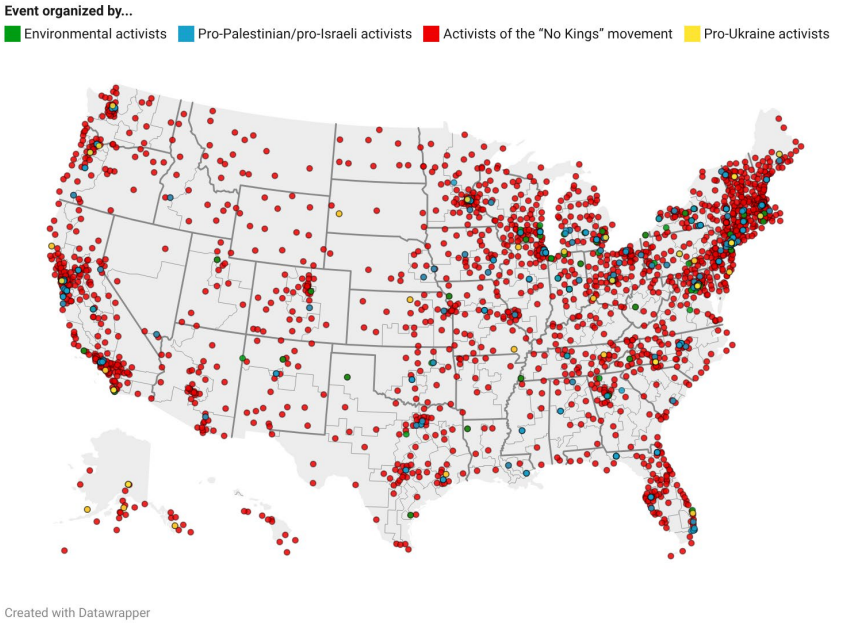


All Canadian and US cities are categorized as low risk. Mexican cities are classified as moderate risk but remain adjacent to high-risk areas.

Map: Paris Security Centre • Source: International SOS • Created with Datawrapper

Please click on the map to enlarge it

Mobilizations in the United States during the last half of 2025



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Domestic activism: what typology ?

The mobilization dynamics observed during the second half of 2025 illustrate the ability of various groups to mobilize in a diffuse, rapid, and geographically widespread manner. These mobilizations were often linked to **international developments or domestic social issues**. In 2026, the organization of the World Cup could serve as a convenient convergence point for these trends and encourage actions aimed at leveraging the event's high media visibility and the concentration of international audiences. Even when they remain peaceful, such mobilizations may lead to **sudden and localized disruptions**.
Several geopolitical and domestic issues are likely to trigger mobilization. The conflict in Ukraine, the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, the military intervention in Venezuela, and their broader regional repercussions will continue to drive regular demonstrations in the United States. Likewise, actions aimed at denouncing operations conducted by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are expected to persist.

ZOOM IN…

Demonstrations related to the US-Venezuela crisis

Protests against US actions



Map: Paris Security Centre • Source: International SOS • Created with Datawrapper

Please click on the map to enlarge it

As noted previously, the open crisis between the Trump administration and Venezuela could fuel anti-American gatherings driven by already active activist networks. Added to these issues are factors more directly linked to U.S. domestic politics. American positions and decisions,whether related to foreign policy (Greenland, Colombia, the Caribbean, etc.) or migration, remain recurrent triggers for mobilization and may resonate even more strongly in the context of a highly publicized global sporting event. It is important to note that these positions may evolve between now and June.

Another driver of mobilization during the World Cup will be the tournament's **environmental and climate-related impact**. The 2026 edition, spanning three countries and involving a historically high number of teams, has already been criticized by environmental organizations for its very large carbon footprint (estimated to be the highest in the competition's history), particularly due to international travel by teams, staff, and spectators, as well as the infrastructure associated with the event.

This situation is fueling **growing outrage among environmental activists and civil-society groups**, who view the organization of such large-scale events in the midst of a climate crisis as contradictory to international calls for drastic reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions.

Stricter entry conditions in the United States ?

Entry into the United States constitutes an **operational challenge in its own right**. U.S. authorities have broad prerogatives regarding border controls, including the ability to inspect the contents of travelers' laptops, phones, and other personal or professional electronic devices. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has strengthened security procedures for international flights bound for the United States. Foreign nationals who refuse to comply with these checks risk being denied entry, subjected to administrative detention, or facing other restrictive measures. In addition, various forms of digital content (messages, images, posts) may constitute aggravating factors during screening if perceived as hostile to the United States, supportive of states considered adversarial, or linked to organizations designated as terrorist groups.

Outlooks and recommendations

As the 2026 World Cup approaches, the security environment of the host countries is emerging as a major driver of operational disruption, characterized by highly heterogeneous risk levels depending on the location. The combination of a multi-site tournament, global media attention, and already polarized sociopolitical dynamics creates a context conducive to the emergence of diffuse threats: opportunistic crime in certain urban centers, rapidly triggered activist mobilizations, symbolic actions by environmental groups, and tightened migration controls at the borders. The possible simultaneity of these phenomena, often unpredictable and localized, raises the likelihood of sudden disruptions affecting travel, operational continuity, and personnel safety on the ground.

In this context, while we do not issue any contraindication regarding travel to any of the host countries, it will remain essential for companies and organizations to integrate these various factors into their security and logistical planning, while adopting a proactive and adaptable posture in a particularly volatile environment.

Travelers and relevant managers should therefore strengthen their local monitoring, through local contacts and our International SOS alerts, anticipate logistical constraints on match days, and adjust their movements based on the evolution of the social climate. It will also be critical to adopt a heightened level of vigilance in high-crowd areas, limit exposure to sensitive environments, and maintain a low profile.

At the same time, special attention should be paid to the vicinity of official venues and critical infrastructure, which may attract symbolic actions or attempts at disruption. Maintaining flexibility in itineraries and schedules, particularly on match days, will be essential, along with avoiding any inappropriate reaction in the event of an incident or reinforced security checks.

February 2026

ASIA - PACIFIC



1 ELECTORAL DEADLINES AND GEN-Z MOVEMENTS

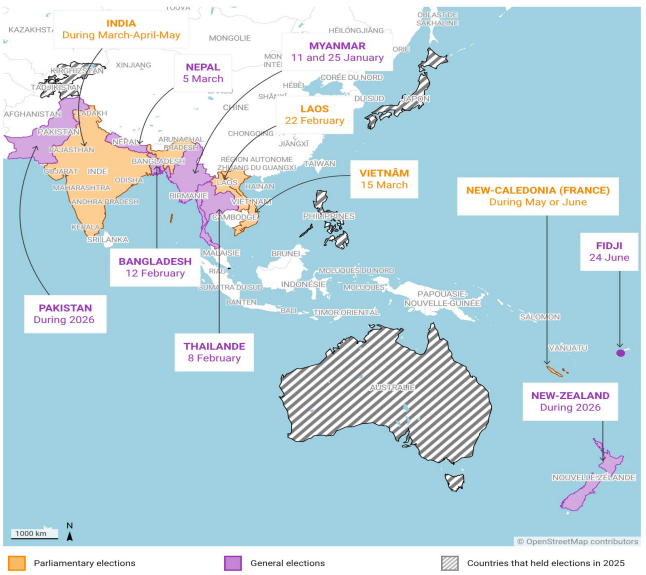
The region will face several electoral processes, some of which carry **significant security implications**, in an environment already strained by heightened geopolitical tensions, persistent socio-economic grievances, and high exposure to natural disasters. In this context, these elections are likely to exacerbate political instability and trigger **new waves of mobilization** driven by **Gen-Z in 2026**. The violence that may accompany these movements could pose a **significant risk of security and logistical disruptions** across several regional capitals.

South Asia

Nepal experienced large-scale Gen-Z-led demonstrations last September, which were met with violent repression by the Nepali authorities. Following the establishment of an interim government, the country is now heading toward general elections scheduled for **5 March 2026**. These elections will take place in an extremely tense political environment: young people remain mobilized against corruption and poor governance, and their capacity for rapid and decentralized mobilization sustains the risk of a **renewed surge of violence**.

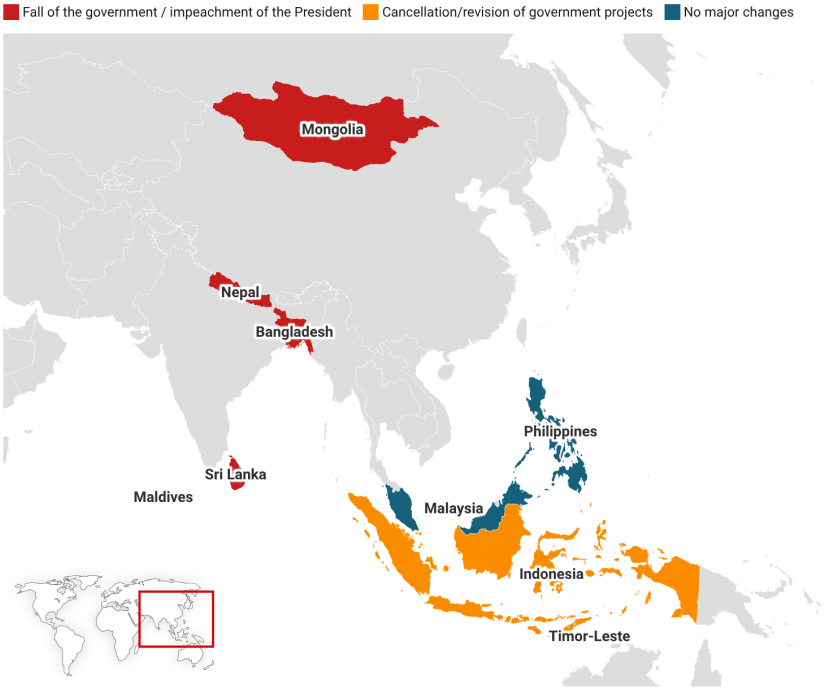
In Bangladesh, the general elections were held on 12 February 2026, together with a constitutional referendum. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led alliance secured an absolute majority, which is likely to facilitate a smooth transition of power. Nevertheless, the opposition Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel)-National Citizen Party (NCP) alliance has alleged voting irregularities, demanding recounts in some constituencies. Security will remain tight countrywide as the authorities seek to pre-empt any unrest in the short-term. Political actors will attempt to consolidate territorial influence, while the security forces adjust their command priorities. Sustained and widespread calls for vote recounts by the opposition due to alleged irregularities will trigger localised protests in the short term. Such calls for mobilisation will only be significant if they emanate from senior leaders, such as Jel's Shafiqur Rahman or the NCP's Nahid Islam. Otherwise, we expect demonstrations and associated unrest over the election outcome to dwindle in the coming weeks.

Asia-Pacific | Elections in 2026



Carte: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Créé avec Datawrapper

Impact of Gen Z activism on local politics in Asia-Pacific



Map: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Created with Datawrapper

South-East Asia

In Myanmar, the general election scheduled for **11 and 25 January** is unlikely to promote a return to stability or lead to the emergence of a legitimate government. Since the 2021 military coup, the junta has struggled to maintain effective territorial control, while the civil war continues to intensify. The opposition of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and the National Unity Government (NUG) to the electoral process poses a **high security risk** for staff and events associated with the vote. **In Indonesia**, the escalation of Gen-Z-led demonstrations contesting parliamentary privileges and widespread corruption prompted President Prabowo Subianto to reshuffle his cabinet and initiate broad reforms. Student organizations have set **31 August 2026** as a deadline for the implementation of key institutional reforms, heightening the risk of a **new protest cycle** should the government's response be deemed insufficient. **In Thailand**, the 8 February 2026 general elections saw a clear victory for the conservative Bhumjaithai Party, led by Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, also fueled by a strong nationalist atmosphere linked to border tensions with Cambodia. Although it did not achieve an absolute majority, the clear result should facilitate the formation of a governing coalition in the coming weeks. The electoral process was generally peaceful; however, protests are still likely due to reported voting irregularities. Gatherings are likely to be well attended with the potential to turn violent in tightly contested locations and traditional party strongholds. Demonstrations over alleged irregularities and the timing of National Anti-Corruption Commission's possible ban on former Move Forward Party 's (now PPLE) members are likely in Bangkok. Protest intensity and frequency will be much higher if the court moves to dissolve the party, though will not reach the level of unrest seen in 2023.

2 BORDER CONFLICTS AND HEIGHTENED REGIONAL TENSIONS

South Asia

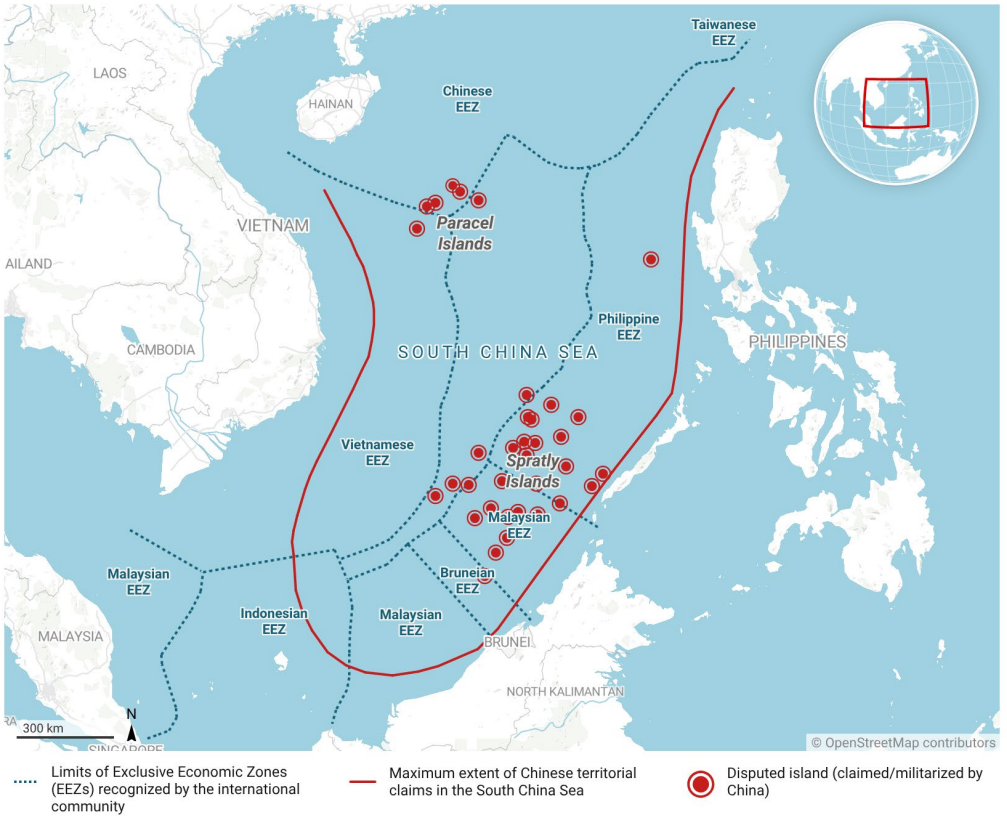
The **India–Pakistan** confrontation is expected to persist in 2026, marked by exchanges of fire and armed infiltrations along the **Line of Control in Kashmir**. Since the 2025 escalation, New Delhi has hardened its security doctrine, framing Pakistan-based terrorist attacks as acts of war, thereby paving the way for targeted military reprisals, including outside Kashmir. While nuclear deterrence reduces the likelihood of a major conflict, the risks of localized military incidents, sabotage operations, and cyberattacks remain high. The Indian regional elections scheduled for the **first half of 2026** represent an additional volatility factor, likely to reinforce the nationalist and security-focused rhetoric of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and to narrow the space for de-escalation.

The **Afghan-Pakistani border,** particularly along the Durand Line in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, will stand out as a **major hotspot of instability in 2026**. Attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), launched from Afghan territory, are expected to continue and may even intensify, leading to an increase in cross-border clashes and targeted strikes. The failure of negotiations between Islamabad and the Afghan Taliban **heightens the risk** of a long-term militarization of the border, retaliatory operations, and an expansion of attacks into Pakistani urban centers, with no prospect of **short-term** de-escalation.

South-East Asia

The border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia is also expected to remain a **significant** hotspot of tension in 2026. The resumption and escalation of hostilities last December led to a sudden deterioration of the security situation. The occasional use of airstrikes and heavy weaponry, sometimes extending beyond immediate confrontation zones, resulted in the displacement of approximately 700,000 people. Although both parties agreed to end hostilities on 27 December, the absence of a settlement on border demarcation and the lack of substantial troop withdrawals **undermine the durability of the ceasefire**. With **Thailand's 2026 general election** approaching, the risk of **localized yet recurrent clashes** remains **high**, with ongoing impacts on civilian populations, cross-border movement, and local economic activity.

Disputed areas in the South China Sea



Map: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Created with Datawrapper

East Asia & Pacific

Regional tensions are **rising** significantly between **China and its neighbors**, including **Japan** and the **Philippines**, **over the disputed maritime areas of the South China Sea**.

Beijing is intensifying its strategy of intimidation in the **Taiwan Strait**, combining repeated air incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), high-intensity naval maneuvers, and close-range interceptions of foreign vessels.

In the short term, an open conflict with Taipei is not considered the most likely scenario, but the **risk of a major maritime or aerial incident cannot be ruled out**. Such an event could trigger temporary yet critical disruptions to strategic maritime routes.

ZOOM IN…

NATURAL DISASTERS WORSENING SIGNIFICANTLY

The year 2025 confirmed it, the frequency and scale of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region continue to rise. **The year 2026 will follow the same trajectory**. Extreme weather events will have direct impacts on employee safety in a region that already accounts for more than half of all recorded natural disasters worldwide.

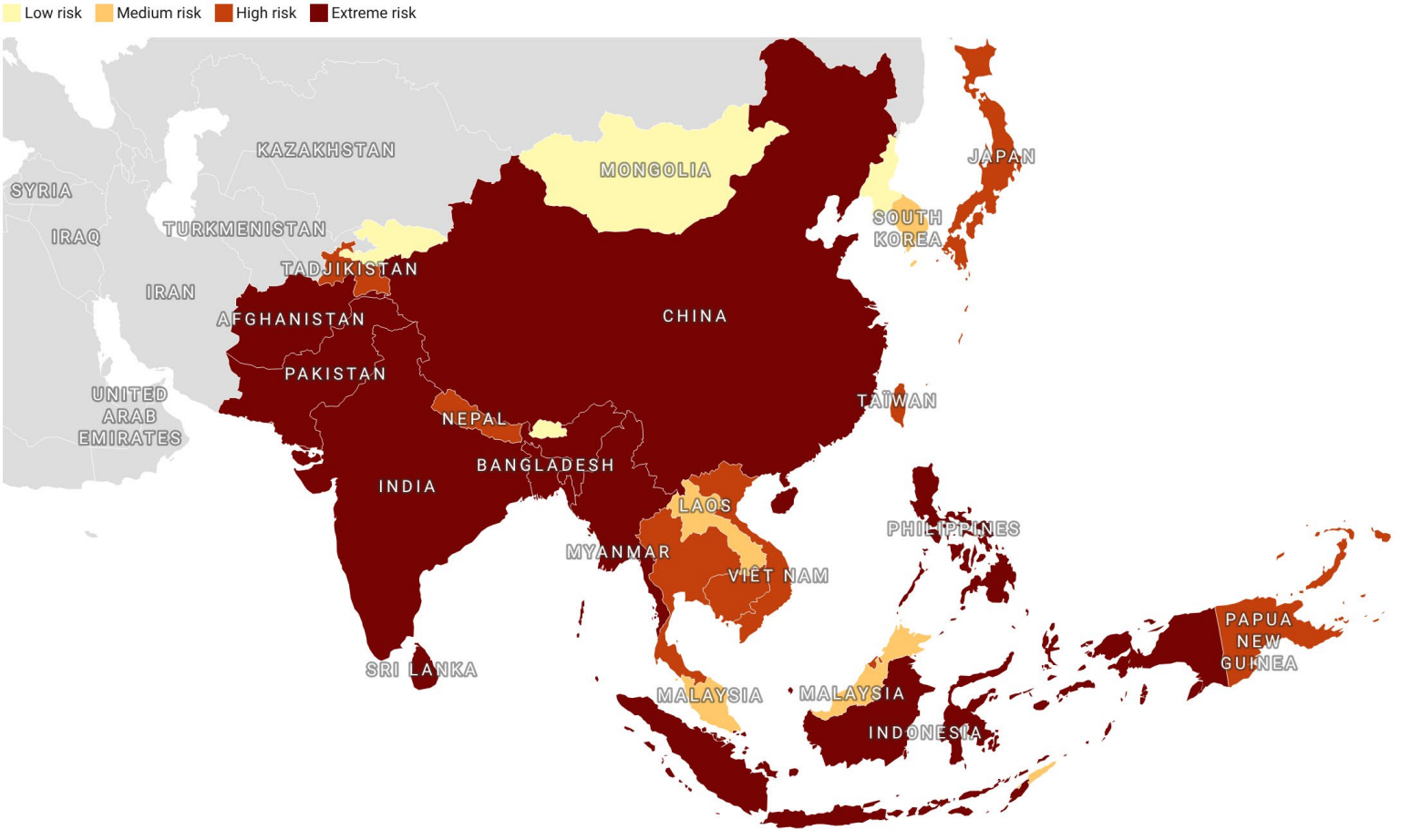
Climate Overview

Rising temperatures are profoundly reshaping the natural-risk landscape in the Asia-Pacific region and constitute the primary driver of climate-related hazards. Heatwaves, once largely seasonal, are now longer, more frequent, and more geographically widespread, affecting millions of people in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Areas historically considered low-exposure zones, such as the central highlands of Sri Lanka or the southern belt of Thailand, have now become climate-risk hotspots. Similarly, the combination of elevated surface temperatures and increased atmospheric humidity is **amplifying the intensity, frequency, and unpredictability of cyclones**.

For example, Cyclones Ditwah and Senyar, which occurred last December, followed unusual trajectories and triggered extreme rainfall, massive landslides, and nearly 1,000 deaths in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In this context, increasingly frequent and intense El Niño and La Niña episodes further heighten climate volatility. They cause lasting disruptions to rainfall patterns and increase the likelihood of successive or simultaneous extreme events (extreme heat, cyclones, flooding), particularly in East Asia and the Pacific.

Projections for 2026 indicate a high risk of an El Niño return in the second half of the year, which could aggravate these imbalances. Such a scenario would increase drought risks in South Asia, especially in India, while exposing East Asia, particularly Japan, to more intense episodes of extreme heat. In Southeast Asia, disruptions to the rainy season starting in the summer could heighten pressure on resources, infrastructure, and security conditions, with direct consequences for operations and personnel.

Asia - Exposure to natural hazards, all types combined



Map: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Created with Datawrapper

Please click on the map to enlarge it

Climate risk as a catalyst for social and political unrest in 2026

Far from being isolated events, these natural disasters now follow recurring patterns, often affecting densely populated areas with low resilience. In the Asia-Pacific region, the late-November 2025 storms caused more than 1,600 deaths across Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam, with several hundred people reported missing and more than ten million affected. Flooding and landslides displaced 1.2 million people, severely disrupted essential services, and left numerous communities cut off. The growing human toll highlights the scale of future humanitarian and security needs.

The recurrence and high visibility of climate-related disasters are also becoming an increasing driver of social tensions. In the Asia-Pacific region, younger populations, including Generation Z, are among the most exposed, living in countries characterized by high population density and heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities. The inadequacy of infrastructure and emergency-response systems fuels a sense of injustice and institutional failure, raising the likelihood that climate crises could evolve into new flashpoints for social mobilization.

Outlooks and recommendations

By 2026, climate risk is therefore emerging as a structural driver of security, economic, and operational destabilization, and is expected to intensify further. The multiplication of successive or even simultaneous events worsens damage, reduces the effectiveness of response mechanisms, and significantly prolongs recovery phases. It is therefore increasingly urgent for companies to integrate the climate dimension into their security and health-risk planning.

Over the coming year, managers must assess and understand potential climate-related threats in their areas of operation. They should keep informed of the latest climate trends and analyze how these could affect the security environment in the short, medium, and long term. In this context, it is essential to identify vulnerabilities within their operations, infrastructure, and personnel, and implement adaptation measures where necessary.
These may include:

- adapting the working environment to reduce exposure to heat stress or pluvial flooding;
- pre-positioning essential materials and equipment;
- raising staff awareness regarding personal safety and weather-related risks.

In areas where the likelihood of adverse weather conditions is higher, such as cyclone-prone regions, emergency drills or simulations should be considered to ensure that crisis-management plans are actionable and widely understood.

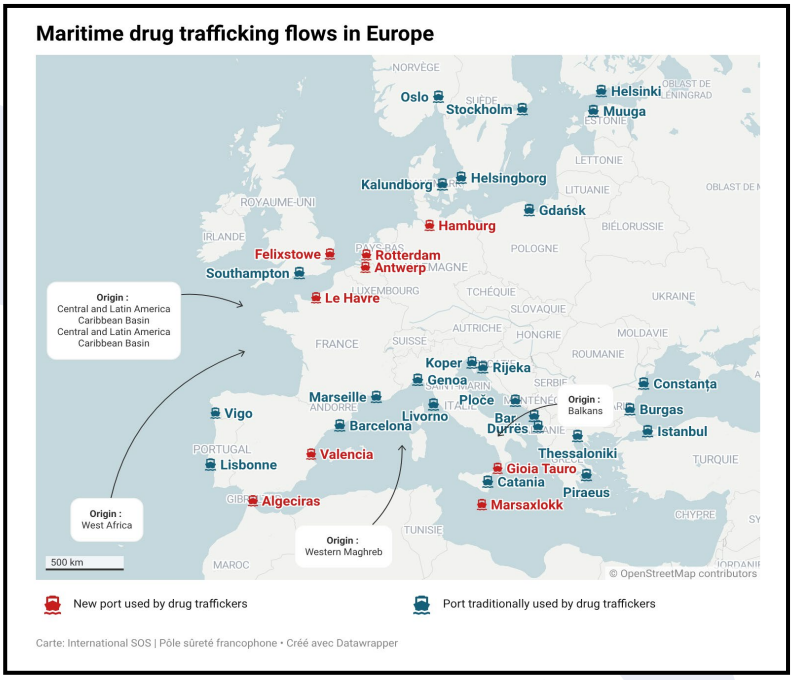
February 2026

EUROPE - CIS

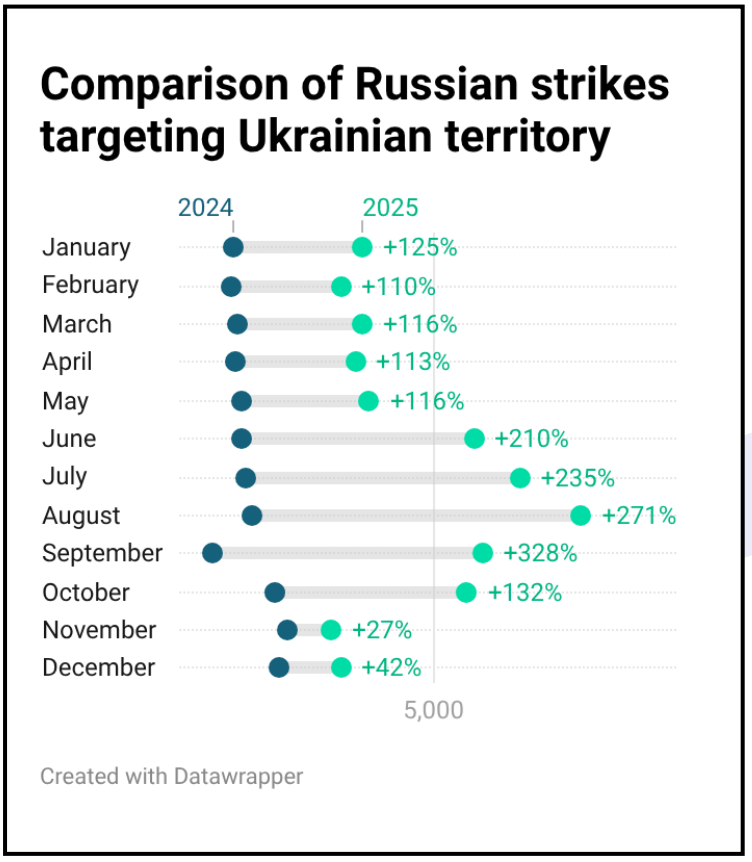


1 VARIABLE SECURITY RISKS

Organized crime undergoing profound transformation



While risks linked to social movements and terrorism persist in Europe, those associated with crime, particularly organized crime, have not only been rising for several years but are also undergoing profound transformation. **Technological expansion** is naturally one of the main drivers of this evolution. On the one hand, traditional criminal activities such as drug, weapons, and human trafficking are now **expanding significantly into the digital sphere**, especially in terms of recruitment, communication, and sales. On the other hand, digital crime itself, such as cyberattacks or online fraud, continues to surge in response to technological advances, a trend that is expected to keep intensifying with the development of artificial intelligence. At the same time, European criminal groups continue to maintain **resilient and often highly transnational networks and structures**, relying predominantly on legal mechanisms to conduct and launder their activities. These elements highlight that these are not simply loose associations of delinquents, but rather organized structures with in-depth knowledge of the political, economic, and social context, as well as the European legal framework, whose vulnerabilities they actively exploit. This is evidenced by the recruitment and growing involvement of minors in trafficking activities, who benefit from more lenient legal regimes, as well as the rise of synthetic drugs, facilitated by limited commercial regulation of certain chemical precursors required for their production. In this context, the vio**lence associated with these trafficking networks is also increasing** across major urban centers on the continent, a trend likely to persist through 2026 and to represent a major challenge for authorities.



War in Ukraine: no end in sight?

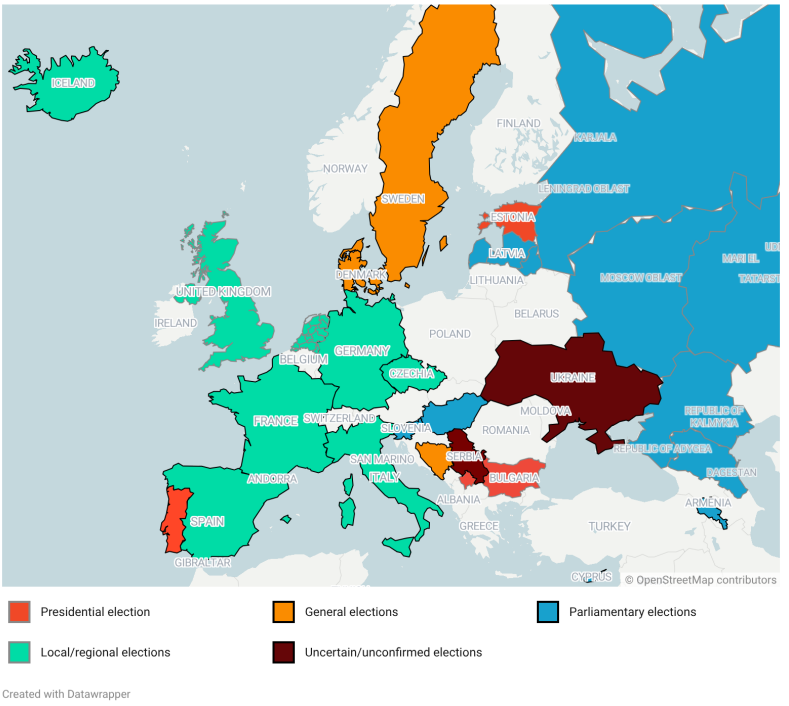
Beyond the usual security threats present on the continent, it remains essential to assess the specific evolution of the armed conflict in Ukraine. In this regard, 2025 was marked by an **intensification of Russian airstrikes on Ukrainian territory**, primarily targeting strategic infrastructure, particularly energy facilities during the winter period. Alongside the stagnation of front lines, significant diplomatic initiatives have continued in an attempt to reach a lasting resolution to the conflict. However, their results remain very limited at this stage. Thus, anticipating a concrete settlement before mid-2026 would be optimistic, as both sides remain firmly attached to their core demands. To date, the proposals raised during the U.S.–Russia discussions appear largely unfavorable to Kyiv and its European partners. Nevertheless, the considerable challenges facing Ukraine leave it with limited leverage in the negotiations, and pressure from Washington is expected to intensify in the coming months to push President Zelensky to accept a potentially disadvantageous compromise. Such an outcome could also trigger hostile public reactions within Ukraine, generating **social and political tensions** in the country and representing a sustained source of instability for Europe along its eastern flank.

2 A SENSITIVE ELECTORAL YEAR

A series of pivotal elections …

The year 2026 will once again be marked by a significant number of elections across the European continent, some of which will have major implications for the strategic orientation of the European Union. Naturally, **Hungary** will be among the most closely watched contests, with the potential fall of Viktor Orbán, who has been in power for more than 15 years and plays a central role in shaping the strategy of Europe's right-wing parties. Although the Hungarian leader is at serious risk of being defeated at the polls by his main challenger, Péter Magyar, the precedent set during the 2022 parliamentary elections highlighted several criticisms regarding the alleged excessive use of state resources in favor of the ruling party during the campaign. Therefore, in the event of a defeat, a challenge to the results by Orbán cannot be entirely ruled out.

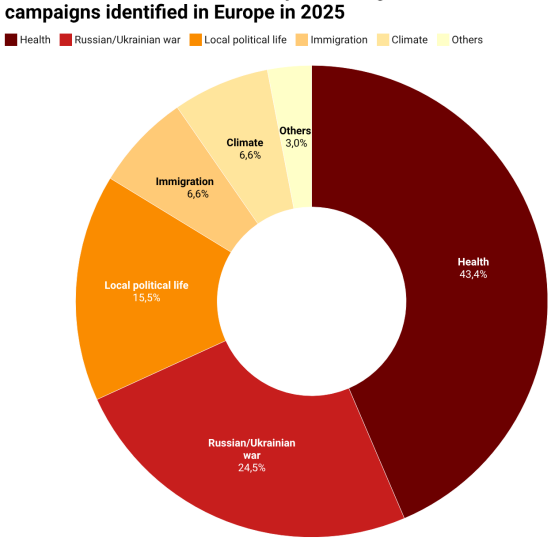
Countries hosting elections in Europe in 2026



Bosnia and Herzegovina will also call its citizens to the polls next October for general elections, in a context marked by the Republika Srpska's growing defiance toward federal authority. The Serb entity's leader was removed from office in the summer of 2025. Given the complexity of Bosnia's political system and the country's ethnic fragmentation, significant tensions surrounding the elections appear likely. The Serb entity remains dominated by a pro-Russian party, further heightening the potential for unrest on the margins of the vote. Furthermore, **Serbia** itself may hold early parliamentary elections during the year, although no date has been set to date. Such elections would follow the significant public mobilization that erupted after the Novi Sad train-station tragedy, which left 16 people dead and highlighted the deep entrenchment of corruption in the country. As such, the vote is also likely to trigger large-scale mobilization. Similarly, **Bulgaria** will head to the polls for early parliamentary elections as well as a presidential election, against a backdrop of strong public unrest that led to the fall of the government last December. Together, these electoral processes will **constitute localized hotspots of tension** that will require close monitoring.

Finally, other major elections will punctuate the European calendar, notably in **Sweden**, **Denmark**, and **Latvia**, where regional tensions with neighboring Russia, holding its own parliamentary elections, and the complex relationship with the United States will form a significant backdrop. Moreover, in several major European powers, including **Spain**, **France**, **Italy**, and **Germany,** upcoming local or regional elections may act as important barometers ahead of the major electoral milestones of 2027, in a context of rising populist parties and increasingly contested and weakened governments.

Distribution of disinformation topics among all disinformation campaigns identified in Europe in 2025



Graphique: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Créé avec Datawrapper

… amid widespread disinformation

In addition to the risks of social unrest typically associated with this type of election,risks that are further exacerbated by a climate of growing public polarization, European states will also face a major challenge in organizing these electoral processes: **disinformation operations** originating from Russia. Such operations have already been widely observed around previous elections, including in **Romania**, **Moldova**, and **Georgia**. These operations take the form of disinformation campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion and undermining key principles within targeted states, such as support for NATO or the European Union. They exploit existing structural vulnerabilities, including distrust of institutions, political polarization, perceived corruption, and socio-economic tensions. Social media platforms, certain alternative media outlets, and populist or sovereigntist political actors act as amplifiers of these narratives. Looking ahead to 2026, it is **likely that these operations will increase in both intensity and sophistication,** particularly through more targeted and technologically advanced campaigns incorporating greater use of artificial intelligence, micro-targeting, manipulated content, and concurrent cyberattacks.

ZOOM IN…

EUROPE UNDER PRESSURE: THE HYBRID WAR

In 2026, Europe, and particularly the European Union, finds itself in a precarious position. Beyond its internal difficulties, including the growing unpopularity of its governments and the increasing polarization of its political spheres, the continent is facing **significant external pressures**, driven both by the ambitions of its Russian neighbor and the unpredictability of its American ally. While the war in Ukraine remains central to understanding Europe's security environment, it is now likely to be overshadowed by other security risks, limited yet notable, that lie far beyond the front lines. Indeed, although Russia's destabilization efforts against European states are not new, the year 2025 saw a **marked intensification** of such activities, effectively drawing Kyiv's allies into a **sustained hybrid confrontation**.

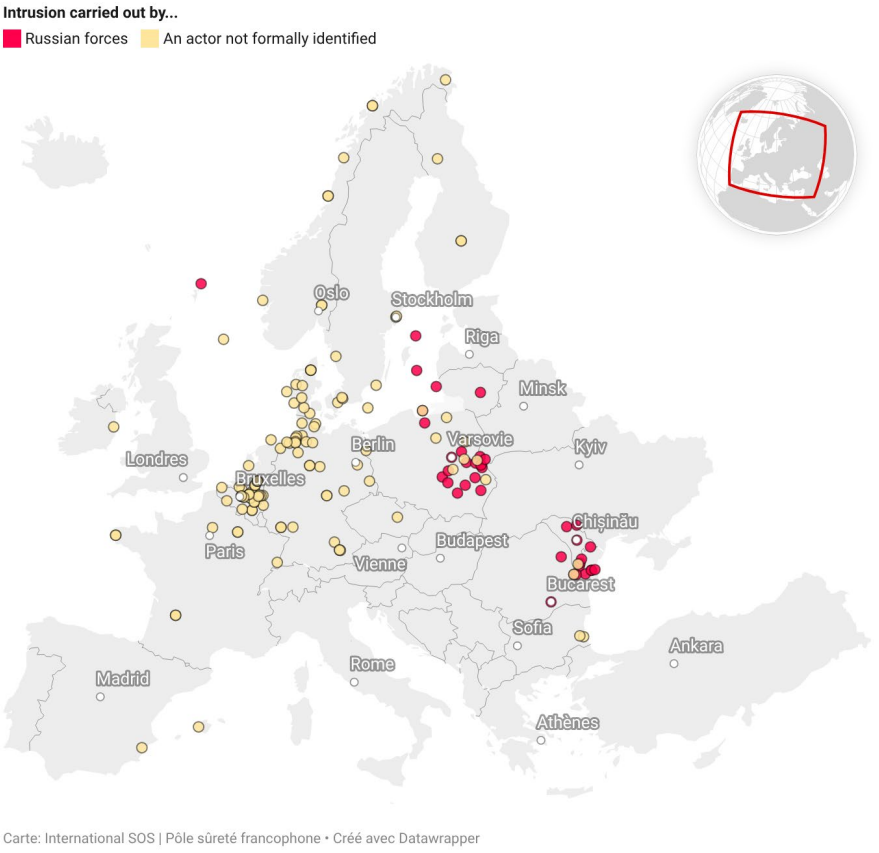
A series of All-out provocations

The year 2025 was marked by numerous incidents across the European space, **air, maritime, land, and cyber alike**. European airspace was the most affected. During the night of 9–10 September, 19 Russian drones entered Polish airspace, several of which were shot down with NATO support. On 13 September, the Romanian Ministry of Defence also detected a Russian drone in its airspace. In a similar incident on 19 September, three Russian fighter jets violated Estonian airspace before being intercepted and escorted back to the border by NATO aircraft. A few days later, unidentified drones flew over four Danish airports, a phenomenon also observed in Munich, Germany, causing significant air-traffic disruptions. Finally, at the end of October, Lithuania declared a state of emergency following multiple incursions into its airspace by balloons launched from Belarus.

Moreover, the maritime domain has not been exempt from destabilization operations, as illustrated by the numerous acts of sabotage detected in the Baltic Sea targeting submarine cables, strategic telecommunications infrastructure, such as the incidents reported between 31 December and 2 January. On land as well, **multiple acts of sabotage**, affecting rail transport in particular, underscore this destabilization strategy. For example, an explosion targeting the Warsaw–Lublin railway line last November sparked strong reactions in Poland, which immediately voiced suspicions toward Russian intelligence services, believed to have coordinated the operation.

Finally, numerous reports highlight a **substantial rise in cyberattacks** targeting NATO and EU member states, a large share of which has been attributed to Russia. Some assessments indicate an increase of nearly 25% in Russian cyberattacks against NATO countries in the span of a year.

Intrusions into European airspace during the year 2025



Please click on the map to enlarge it

A strategy of destabilization

Russia's conduct of **hybrid warfare,** and the complementary nature of the techniques it employs, combining **multiple incursions, acts of sabotage, cyberattacks, disinformation operations, and electoral interference,** reveals a long-term strategy aimed at undermining the efforts and unity of the European Union and NATO, while **avoiding the risks associated with direct military confrontation**. This strategy relies on a series of operations designed to fragment the political and diplomatic landscape of these international organizations, slow their decision-making processes, and weaken their strategic cohesion. It also seeks to generate fatigue within public opinion, potentially leading to growing skepticism regarding the continuation of large-scale support for Ukraine. Moscow's objective is to exploit the vulnerabilities of Kyiv's allies in order to erode their material and financial assistance, while running the risk of prompting an increasingly firm response from NATO members and **raising the likelihood of incidents or unintended escalation**.

A european response in a phase of reinforcement

The “strategic ambiguity” resulting from these actions is difficult for Europeans to fully grasp. Faced with this gray-zone environment and an expanding threat, Europe must contend not only with **significant internal divisions** but also with an American ally perceived as **increasingly unpredictable**, despite being its principal security partner within NATO.

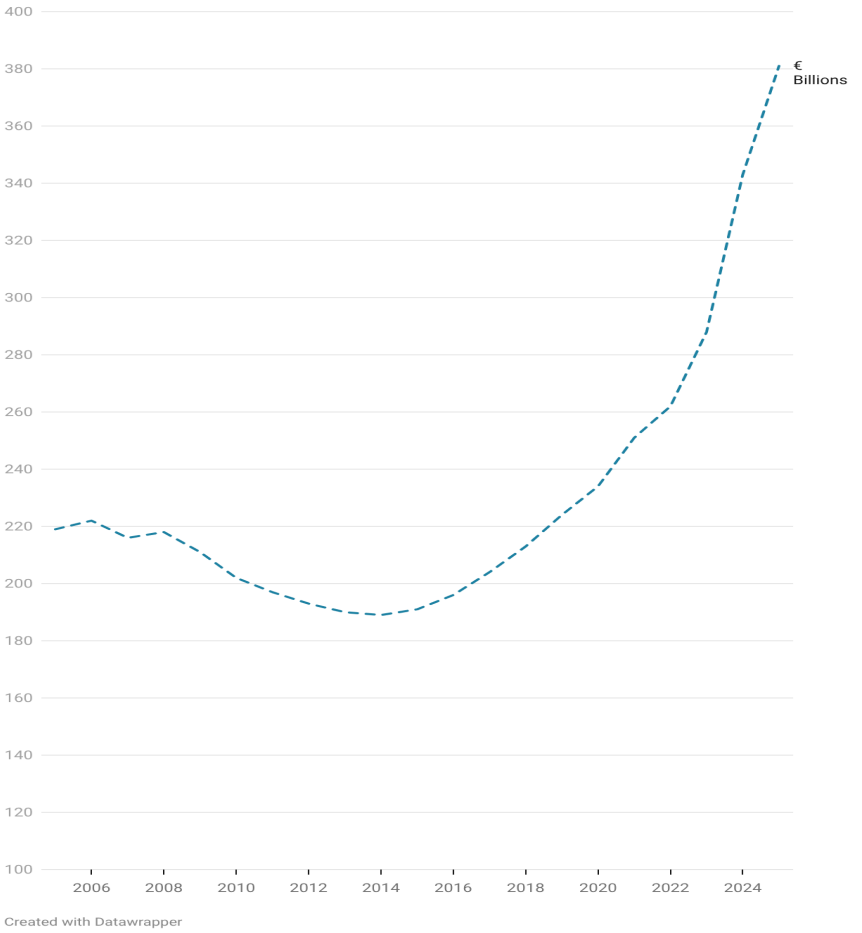
Recent statements by Donald Trump regarding his intention to annex Greenland, along with Washington’s publication of its National Security Strategy, have dealt an additional blow to a transatlantic relationship already weakened since Trump's return to the presidency. Nonetheless, despite these constraints, Europeans have collectively acknowledged **the need to strengthen their response toolkit**. In this context, NATO allies had already adopted several measures aimed at enhancing their reaction capabilities in the preceding months. This includes the Eastern Sentry operation, designed to reinforce the Alliance’s air defense along its eastern flank, which played a key role in the rapid interception of the incursions observed in Estonia last September.

At the same time, and aware of the fragility of its relationship with the United States, the European Union is taking steps to move ahead independently by considering several enhancements, notably through the Eastern Flank Watch initiative, which aims to establish an “anti-drone wall” combining acoustic sensors, radars, jamming systems, and interceptor drones. This effort builds on Baltic, Nordic, and Polish initiatives that had already launched a similar program earlier in 2025. Likewise, the European Commission stresses the need to strengthen defense cooperation through ambitious initiatives such as the ReArm Europe / Readiness 2030 plan, reflecting the EU’s determination to consolidate its capabilities.

A strategy that carries significant risks

While recent adjustments in the European and NATO posture reflect a strong willingness to adopt a firmer stance in response to Russian interference, they also highlight a non-negligible risk of unintended incidents. It is unlikely that these enhanced measures will significantly alter Russia’s determination to sustain such operations, which are therefore expected to continue. The persistence of sabotage actions and cyberattacks, already a residual yet significant security risk, combined with firmer responses from Alliance members to aerial and maritime incursions, will **increase the frequency of high-risk confrontations** with Russia. Consequently, this raises the likelihood of inadvertent incidents with potentially severe diplomatic and military repercussions.

Estimated change in defense spending by European Union member states (in billions of euros)



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Outlooks and recommendations

Thus, in 2026, Russia is **expected to maintain, if not intensify, its strategy of European destabilization** aimed at weakening Kyiv’s allies. While the Kremlin is unlikely to seek an open conflict with NATO forces, the growing number of these operations, combined with the reinforcement of the Alliance’s defense posture, particularly along its Eastern and Northern flanks, will heighten the risk of inadvertent confrontations potentially leading to serious escalation. Furthermore, it should be noted that sabotage operations targeting transport infrastructure, particularly rail networks, as well as GPS-jamming actions directed at European aviation, will also add an additional layer of escalation risk in the event of a major incident or casualties.

While the possibility of a ceasefire in Ukraine would naturally be a decisive factor in shaping Europe’s security environment, the **long-term strategy** pursued by the Kremlin suggests that such operations are likely to continue with the aim of weakening the strategic cohesion of Alliance members well beyond the current conflict.

Despite these dynamics, we assess that the likelihood of a direct military confrontation between NATO members and Russia under Article 5 **remains low** at this stage. It is also important to emphasize that, despite these incursions, we do not issue any travel contraindications for the countries concerned, provided that travelers maintain heightened vigilance, closely monitor International SOS alerts and local media, and strictly adhere to the safety instructions issued by local authorities.

February 2026

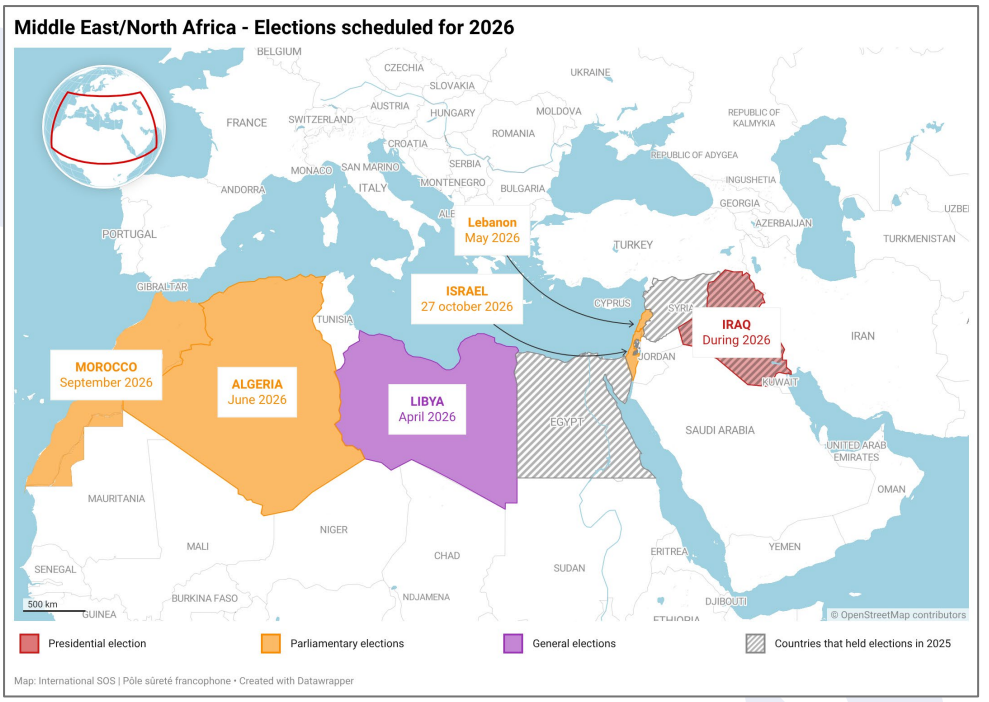
MIDDLE-EAST NORTH AFRICA



1 HIGHLY SENSITIVE ELECTIONS AHEAD

In North Africa

North Africa will see two major elections this year: **general elections in Libya** in June and **parliamentary elections in Morocco** in September.



No national election has been held in **Libya** since June 2014, at the onset of the political and institutional crisis that progressively led to the emergence of two rival governments: the Government of National Unity (GNU) in the west, based in Tripoli, and the Government of National Stability (GNS) in the east, headquartered in Benghazi. Since then, these two political poles have exercised a quasi-condominium over Libya. Their complete lack of compromise and ongoing rivalry, which has already resulted in episodes of high-intensity armed conflict, have plunged the country into persistent political-security volatility and uncertainty. Moreover, the involvement of numerous external actors, most notably Russia and Turkey, further increases the complexity of the local political-security landscape. The general elections expected to take place next April, having already been postponed multiple times and likely to be delayed again, will therefore unfold in a context of deep uncertainty and particularly heightened tensions. As for **Morocco**, traditionally stable and secure, the wave of Gen-Z protests in fall 2025 revealed the underlying tensions within Moroccan society and the potentially significant, even deadly, impacts such unrest can have on the kingdom's security environment. While the security situation is not expected to deteriorate dramatically ahead of the elections, it will nonetheless require the implementation of risk-mitigation measures and preparedness planning in anticipation of potential large-scale social unrest.



Demonstrators take part in a protest, following Tuesday's blast, in Beirut, Lebanon August 8, 2020. © REUTERS/Issam Abdallah

The Levant

The Levant will see two major elections this year: **legislative elections in Israel** in October and **general elections in Lebanon** in May.

The parliamentary elections to be held in **Israel** will be the first since the 7 October 2023 attack, which profoundly reshaped the country's social, political, and security landscape, and will therefore take place in a markedly tense context. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that he will seek another term; his government, one of the most right-wing in Israel's history, faces strong criticism from a large segment of the Israeli population for its hardline, confrontational stance and its failure to secure the release of more hostages who were still alive at the time, among other issues. The large-scale social unrest that has shaken Israel repeatedly in recent months for these reasons suggests that the upcoming legislative elections will take place in a highly charged atmosphere. **Lebanon**, Israel's neighbor, is facing a similarly fraught context: gripped by severe institutional and political uncertainty, and torn by an ongoing economic, social, and security crisis with no immediate resolution in sight, the country will be required to renew its political leadership even as the issue of Hezbollah's disarmament, firmly opposed by the group, remains unresolved. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes continue regularly, particularly in the south and center of the country.

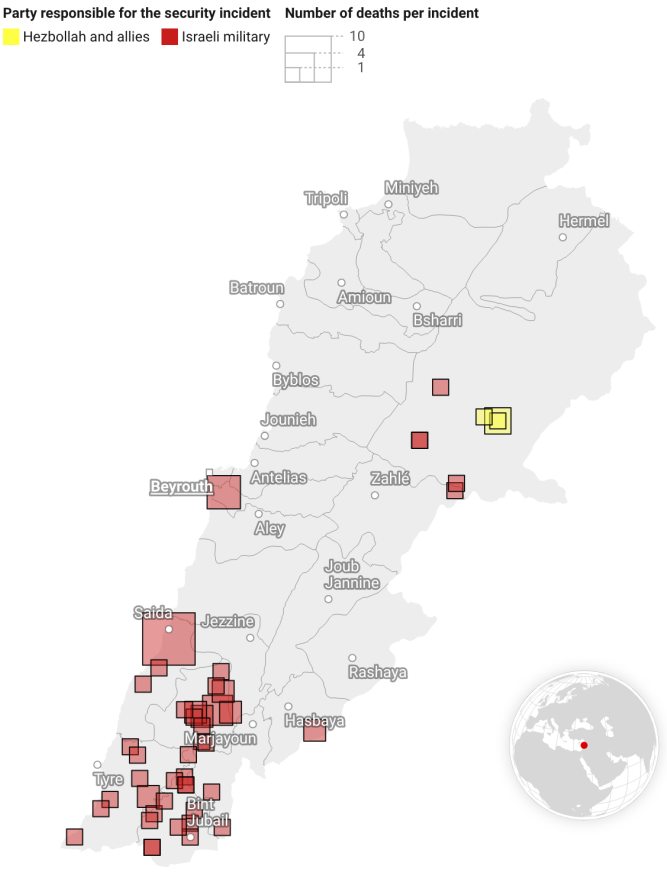
2 PERSISTENT CONFLICTS

Israel's War Against Its Regional Rivals

The **Gaza Strip** remains an active theater of military operations despite the ceasefire and the peace plan promoted by the U.S. administration: bombardments continue to be frequent and deadly. To the north, in **Lebanon**, the situation remains extremely volatile. The Lebanese state is characterized by its paralysis, in contrast to **Hezbollah**, which retains a central position as both a key political actor and an autonomous military force. It justifies the maintenance of its arsenal by citing the Israeli threat and ongoing regional tensions. The issue of Hezbollah's disarmament, although mandated by international resolutions, remains politically unrealistic in the short term, due to the absence of internal consensus and an unfavorable balance of power. Further east, the **Iranian nuclear file** remains unresolved: negotiations are at a standstill, while the United States and Israel continue to threaten new strikes should the talks fail. Meanwhile, the **Houthis in Yemen** have significantly reduced their attacks but retain considerable disruptive capability.

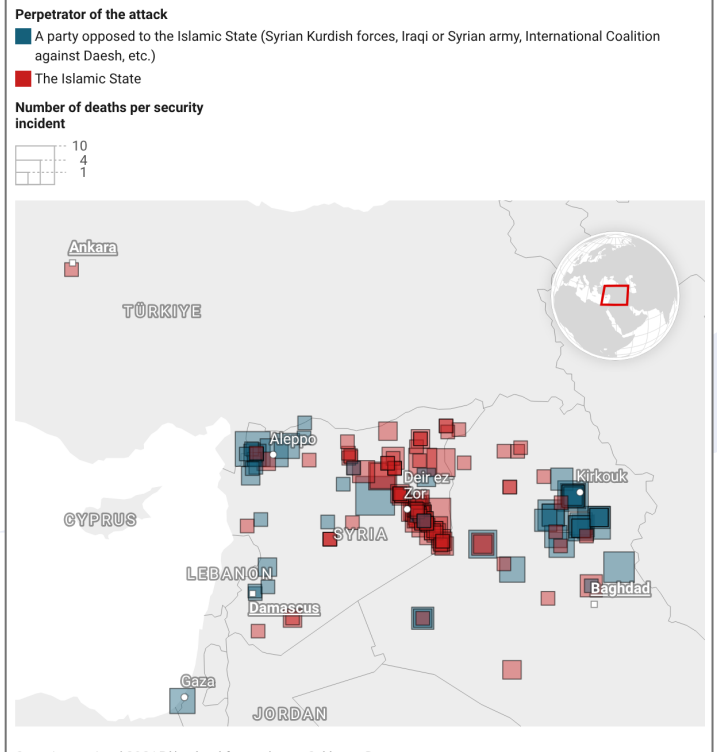
In this context, 2026 is expected to remain marked by high tensions and a volatile security environment. While the likelihood of a renewed large-scale conflict between Israel and its regional adversaries remains low, particularly due to the significant weakening of the latter, the possibility of new Israeli and/or American strikes in **Iran** and **Yemen** remains entirely plausible. Lebanon's political situation, meanwhile, will require sustained attention and could experience substantial tensions.

Lebanon - Mortality from security incidents recorded during the last three months of 2025



Carte: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Données cartographiques: © OSM • Créé avec Datawrapper

Death toll from attacks carried out by/against Daesh in the Middle East in 2025



Carte: International SOS | Pôle sûreté francophone • Créé avec Datawrapper

Enduring, Low-Intensity Conflicts That Show No Sign of Abating

Armed jihadist organizations remain notably active, particularly the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (**ISIL/Daesh**). Exploiting the political-security chaos that accompanied the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the group has reorganized in **Syria** and intensified its attacks, targeting both military and civilian objectives. Taking advantage of the weak security presence in areas claimed by Kurdish forces and by federal forces around Kirkuk in particular, Daesh also remains active in **Iraq** and continues to maintain a regional footprint; cells are regularly dismantled by security forces in countries such as **Turkey** and **Jordan**.

Yemen, meanwhile, is experiencing a major new development in the conflict that has ravaged the country since 2014: the Southern Transitional Council (STC),a political movement advocating for the independence of southern Yemen and supported by the United Arab Emirates, seized large swathes of Yemeni territory in late 2025 during a surprise offensive. This prompted Saudi Arabia to carry out airstrikes in the country for the first time in more than two years in an effort to slow the STC's advance.
The conflict in Yemen is expected to persist, if not worsen, in 2026, and Daesh will continue to represent a latent threat across the entire Middle East.

ZOOM IN…

SYRIA ONE YEAR AFTER THE OVERTHROW OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD AND THE RISE TO POWER OF AHMED AL-CHARRA

On 8 December 2024, the Syrian Baathist regime, led by President Bashar al-Assad, was overthrown during a lightning offensive carried out by the Islamist rebellion under the leadership of the jihadist organization *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS). Its leader, Ahmed al-Charra, established himself as the country's new interim head of state, pending the organization of hypothetical elections. Since then, he has sought to consolidate his political grip but has failed to prevent several major security escalations that have resulted in the deaths of several thousand people. As a result, the country's humanitarian and economic situation remains severely degraded, prompting foreign investors and economic actors to exercise caution.

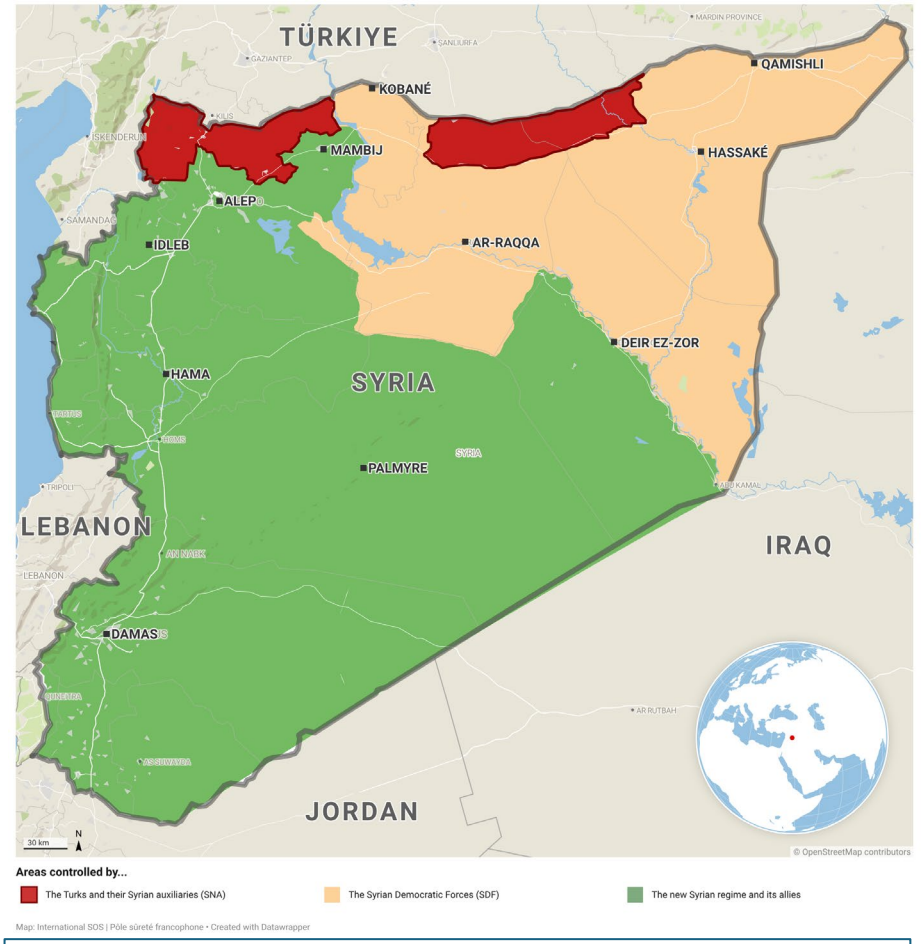
Summary of the Events Leading to the Rise of the New Syrian Regime

The overthrow of Bashar al-Assad resulted from the gradual collapse of the Syrian regime, weakened by years of war, sanctions, economic crisis, and the partial disengagement of its Russian, heavily preoccupied with Ukraine, and Iranian backers, as well as *Hezbollah*, which had been one of the spearheads of the regime's military operations. Taking advantage of this political and security vacuum, *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS), initially dominant in the Idlib pocket, managed to break the siege encircling it and force the Syrian army into retreat, seizing the western two-thirds of the country within a matter of days. During the night of 7–8 December, the insurgents entered Damascus without resistance, while Bashar al-Assad was reportedly en route to Russia.

A Political Situation in a Phase of Fragile Stabilization

On 30 January 2025, Ahmed al-Charra was appointed interim president for the transition period, suspending the former Constitution and dissolving the Baathist institutions inherited from the previous regime. In the spring, he formed a provisional government presented as pluralistic; however, several members had to be swiftly replaced after images emerged showing them committing abuses against civilians. In March, a new constitutional declaration was adopted, establishing a five-year transitional period, guaranteeing certain freedoms, and providing for the creation of an electoral commission to organize legislative elections. After several logistical delays, the first post-Assad legislative elections were held on 5 October 2025; Druze-populated areas and Kurdish-held territories were excluded. The latter, controlling the eastern third of the country, continue to refuse full integration into Syria's new institutions and security forces, despite months of negotiations and increasingly belligerent threats from both Damascus and Ankara.

Syria - Situation as of January 13, 2026



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Commercial Relations Slow to Recover

Immediately after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime, the question arose of reopening the country economically to the rest of the world and of attracting back foreign investors and economic actors. With reconstruction costs estimated at USD 345 billion, rebuilding Syria presents significant commercial opportunities for companies able to position themselves. International sanctions, particularly European and American, were therefore lifted by the end of the first half of 2025, while Qatar and Saudi Arabia wrote off Syria's debt to the World Bank in order to facilitate its reintegration into the global economy. Yet economic activity has been slow to resume. Despite the highly publicized arrival of certain foreign companies, most remain reluctant to invest in Syria, and only regional actors, especially Turkish firms, have meaningfully established themselves. The main reason, as detailed below, lies in the country's still highly volatile security situation: several major incidents occurred throughout the year, fueling persistent concerns.

Volatile Security Situation

Although Syria is no longer officially in a state of civil war following the victory of the Islamist rebellion, the security situation remains deeply unstable and volatile. The victors of December 2024 are overwhelmingly Sunni Arabs; the most radical and Islamist factions among them tolerate only with great difficulty the religious and ethnic pluralism embodied by minority communities such as the Alawites , the community from which the Assad family originates , as well as the Druze, Kurds, and Christians.

The Massacres of Alawites

Several security crises have exposed the profound fractures running through Syrian society. In March, citing alleged attacks by pro-Assad cells against the new Syrian security forces, thousands of fighters from rebel groups allied with HTS converged on the coastal region and the governorate of Latakia, the heartland of the Alawites, killing at least two thousand people , the vast majority of them civilians.

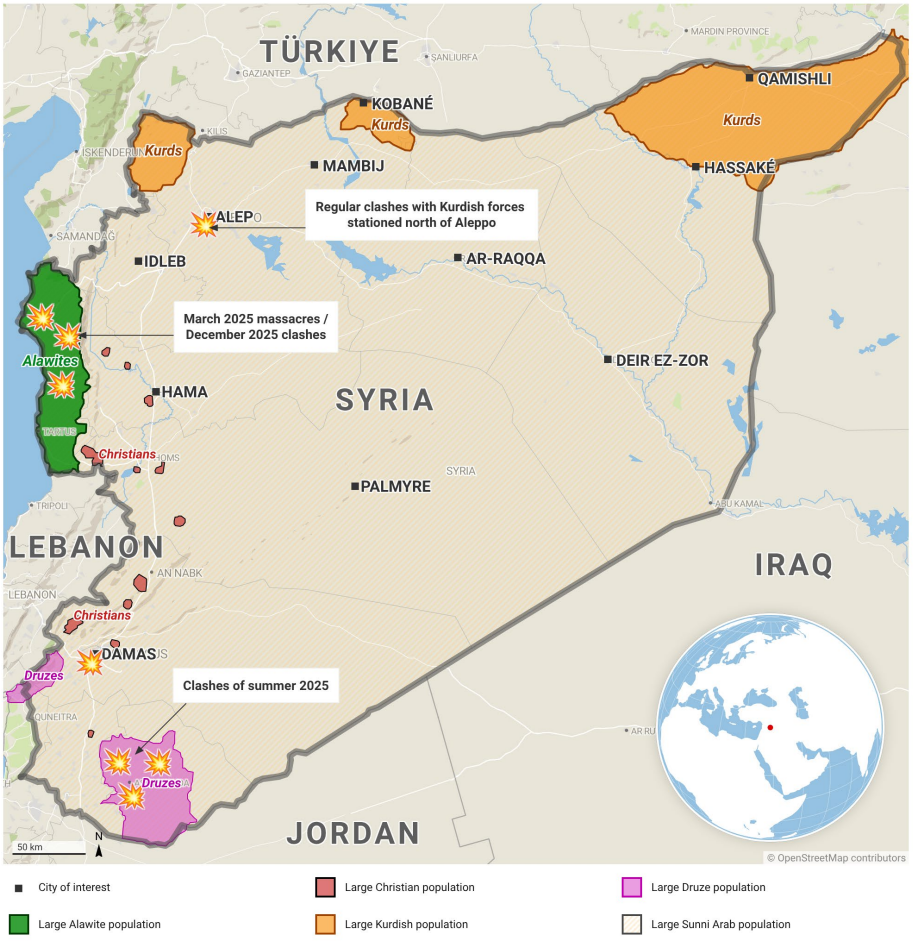
The Druze crisis

International concerns regarding the reliability of Ahmed al-Charra , who originally emerged from the ranks of the armed jihadist organization Al-Qaeda , grew significantly as, around the same time, a similar crisis involving the Druze communities of Damascus and southern Syria escalated steadily before erupting into widespread clashes in July. These confrontations brought new accusations of abuses committed by Damascus-aligned fighters and of targeted violence against Druze civilians. Simultaneously, the Kurds continue to refuse , or delay as much as possible , full integration into Syria's new institutions and security forces, leading to regular skirmishes between Syrian soldiers and Kurdish forces, particularly in Aleppo.

Persistent Security Threats

In addition, armed criminal organizations continue to operate across the territory , recalling that until December 2024, Syria was the regional hub of captagon, a highly lucrative Middle Eastern drug , as does Daesh, as noted above. Its most recent high-profile action involved infiltrating the Syrian security forces and assassinating three Americans on 15 December 2025 near the ancient city of Palmyra. Daesh's activities have intensified in recent months, encouraged both by the political-security instability triggered by the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad , and the departure of Iranian and Russian forces , and by the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops, particularly those stationed east of the Euphrates.

Syria - Ethnic distribution zones and major clashes in 2025



Please click on the map to enlarge it

Outlooks and recommendations

Syria is expected to continue experiencing high,though gradually declining,security volatility throughout 2026, alongside the increasing consolidation of Ahmed al-Charra's political control over the country. In this context, the ability of the Kurds and Damascus to reach an agreement acceptable to both parties will be absolutely crucial: a failure in negotiations could result in potential joint Turkish-Syrian military operations against Kurdish forces in Syria and trigger a new cycle of instability.

Due to the very high volatility that still characterizes the security situation in Syria, we continue to assess the country as exposed to **extreme risk** (5/5 on our risk scale) and **recommend postponing any travel, even essential**. However, we now assess the capital Damascus and the major urban centers of Aleppo, Idlib, Hama et Homs as exposed to **high risk** (4/5) due to improved security conditions, and **consider essential travel there to be possible**. Regardless of the destination considered in Syria, it will be necessary to:

- establish a particularly robust security framework, including a viable, up-to-date contingency plan known to all parties involved;
- use the services of a reliable and experienced security provider and/or trusted local partners with proven effectiveness;
- have multiple communication tools and protocols prepared in advance of the mission;
- closely monitor local and regional developments, as well as International SOS alerts;
- remain as discreet as possible (avoid taking photographs, conceal valuables such as watches, smartphones, etc.).



Follow us on social media

internationalsos.com
france@internationalsos.com

WORLDWIDE REACH. HUMAN TOUCH