

THE STATE OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN ASIA 2021

Identity-based Conflict and Extremism

This second edition of The Asia Foundation's State of Conflict and Violence in Asia explores recent events and patterns of events through regional assessments and country-specific overviews, in particular addressing contemporary concerns over political polarization and identity-based tensions. Following this introductory chapter, three keynote essays, featuring regional experts, offer closer assessments of recent conflict trends. Ten concise country summaries then present greater detail. Data is drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources, including country-level and regional datasets on violence and conflict, academic analyses, reporting on contemporary events, and other research conducted by The Asia Foundation.

The world has endured a tumultuous few years. Disenchantment with the political mainstream and economic stagnation facilitated the emergence of controversial leaders, identity politics rose to the fore, and public debate grew increasingly polarized. Global power struggles returned as China gained in confidence and stature, while violence and long-term fragility remained widespread in parts of the Middle East and Africa. The Covid-19 pandemic swept across this tense and confrontational terrain, adding fear and misery to an unstable setting.

Today, across Asia, political violence and organized conflicts persist. The war in Afghanistan continues to cause more fatalities than all other conflicts on the continent. Elsewhere, violence is less intense, but high-profile incidents and entrenched local tensions continue to affect several nations. In Myanmar, the military takeover of February 1, 2021, demonstrated the fragility of that country's new democracy. The 2019 elections in Thailand controversially offered some legitimacy to the leadership installed by the 2014 military coup, while Hun Sen's largely unopposed election victory in Cambodia extended his period of power beyond 35 years.

The trend towards more authoritarian governance, even in established democracies, is well established in many Asian countries, and indicators such as The Economist's Democracy Index show a significant decline. The deterioration of political rights and civil liberties is reflected in the diminishing space for free media and growing restrictions on civil society.

This second edition of The Asia Foundation's State of Conflict and Violence in Asia explores recent events and patterns of events through regional assessments and country-specific overviews, in particular addressing contemporary concerns over political polarization and identity-based tensions. Following this introductory chapter, three keynote essays, featuring regional experts, offer closer assessments of recent conflict trends. Ten concise country summaries then present greater detail. Data is drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources, including country-level and regional datasets on violence and conflict, academic analyses, reporting on contemporary events, and other research conducted by The Asia Foundation.



Keynote essays

Polarization, Power, and the Pandemic –
New Drivers of Conflict in Asia

Identity Conflicts in Southeast Asia – an
Overview

How Does Social Media Affect Conflict in
Asia? Expert Views



Country overviews

Afghanistan

Bangladesh

Malaysia

Myanmar

Nepal

Pakistan

Philippines

Sri Lanka

Thailand

Timor-Leste