



Global Peace Index Briefing 2026

Results
& Trends

Conflict
Spread

Economic
Impact

AI, Conflict,
and Peace

2026 Global Peace Index Briefing

Measuring peace in a complex world

The 2026 Global Peace Index reveals a world struggling with the economic consequences of a record-high number of conflicts that are increasingly interconnected and difficult to resolve. Global peacefulness deteriorated for the 12th consecutive year, driven by a profound geopolitical shift, known as the 'Great Fragmentation', characterised by the rising influence of middle powers and the waning strength of traditional European powers.

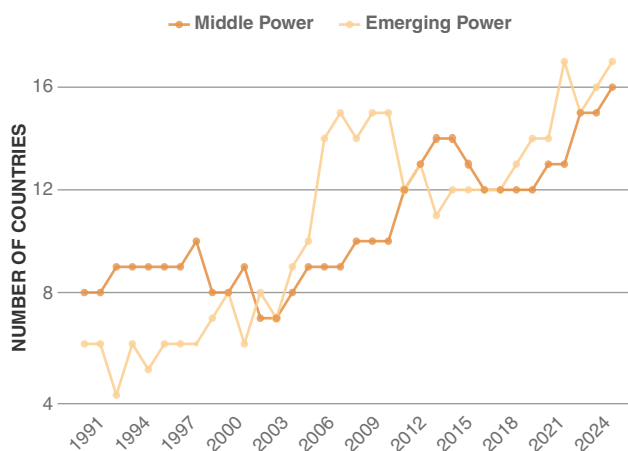
This is also accompanied by a rapid technological revolution in warfare that is leaving international law and diplomacy far behind. For the first time in history, machines are making life-and-death combat decisions faster than any human can review them, and the international frameworks meant to govern them lack global commitment.

2026 Key Findings

- There are now 119 countries in the world that are less peaceful now than they were in 2008. Conflict has been the primary driver of the deterioration.
- The three indicators with the largest deterioration since 2008 are *violent demonstrations*, *internal conflicts fought*, and *external conflicts fought*.
- Expenditure on peacebuilding and peacekeeping was US\$49.2 billion in 2025, just 0.5 per cent of total military spending in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. While this has increased from US\$37.3 billion in 2008, peacebuilding and peacekeeping continue to receive only a small share of total violence containment expenditure.
- The number of conflicts is at its highest point since the end of World War II, with 61 active state-based conflicts in 2024, with the number having doubled in the last 15 years. The expansion has been driven almost entirely by internationalised intrastate conflicts, which have increased by more than 175 per cent since 2010.
- Drones have become the defining weapon of modern warfare, spreading faster than any government can keep up with. Drone attacks rose roughly 11,500 per cent between 2018 and 2025, and 565 different armed groups carried out at least one attack in that period.
- AI's physical footprint is rapidly reshaping global energy systems. Data centre electricity use is projected to reach 945 terawatt-hours by 2030, a doubling from 2024. Ireland's data centres already consume 22 per cent of national metered electricity.

Number of middle and emerging power countries, 1991–2024

The number of middle power countries has almost doubled since the end of the Cold War.

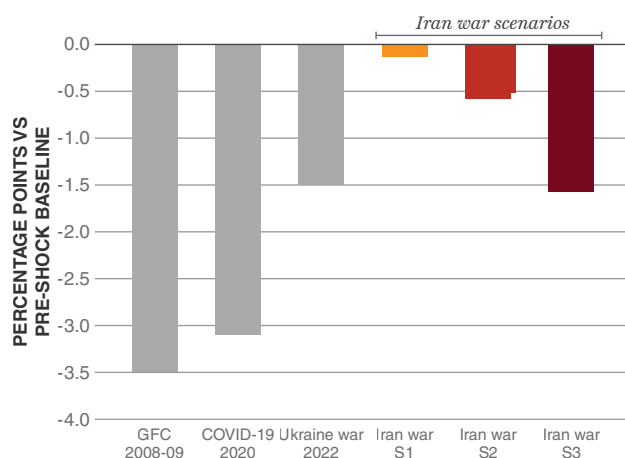


Source: IEP Calculations

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Economic impact of major global shocks vs Iran war

If the Iran war fully resumes, the economic shock it would cause would be greater than that of the Russia-Ukraine war.



Source: IMF WEO, Federal Reserve Board, Brookings, IEP Calculations

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IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

RESULTS & TRENDS

There are now 103 countries that were at least partially involved in some form of external conflict in the past five years, up from 59 in 2008. In most cases, countries were offering support to an existing government in its conflict with an internal armed rebel or terrorist group.

The geopolitical influence of European great powers is declining, most notably in the economic sphere. Between 1995 and 2023, Germany's share of global GDP fell by 49 per cent, France by 44 per cent, Italy by 42 per cent, and the United Kingdom by 27 per cent.

There have been three key geopolitical periods over the past 50 years: the Cold War, the rapid globalisation that began in the 1990s, and now the 'Great Fragmentation', which began at the start of the Global Financial Crisis.

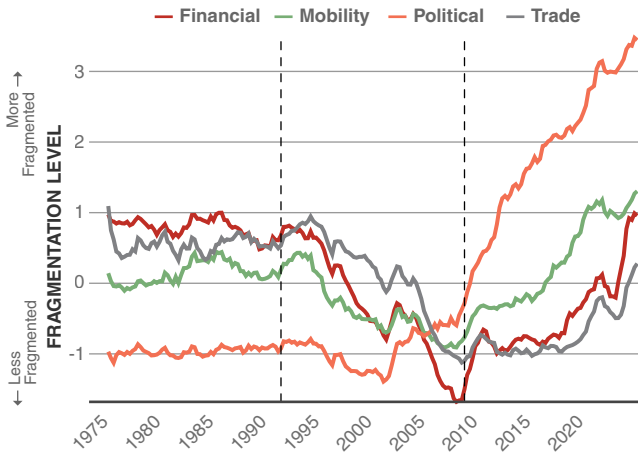
Middle powers are filling the gap left by declining European influence. The rising middle powers, including the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Türkiye, and Mexico, are less likely to be as closely aligned to the United States than more established middle powers such as Australia.



The impact of technological warfare is reflected in the decreases in the average armed forces personnel rate, which fell from 638 per 100,000 people in 2008 to 518 per 100,000 people in 2026.

Geopolitical fragmentation, 1975–2024

Fragmentation has skyrocketed since 2008, particularly in the political sphere.

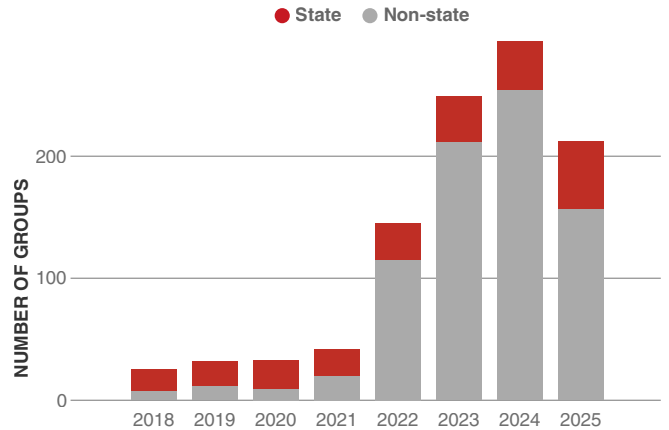


Source: OECD

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State and non-state groups recording at least one drone strike, 2018–2025

The number of states with a recorded drone strike has increased more than 200 per cent.

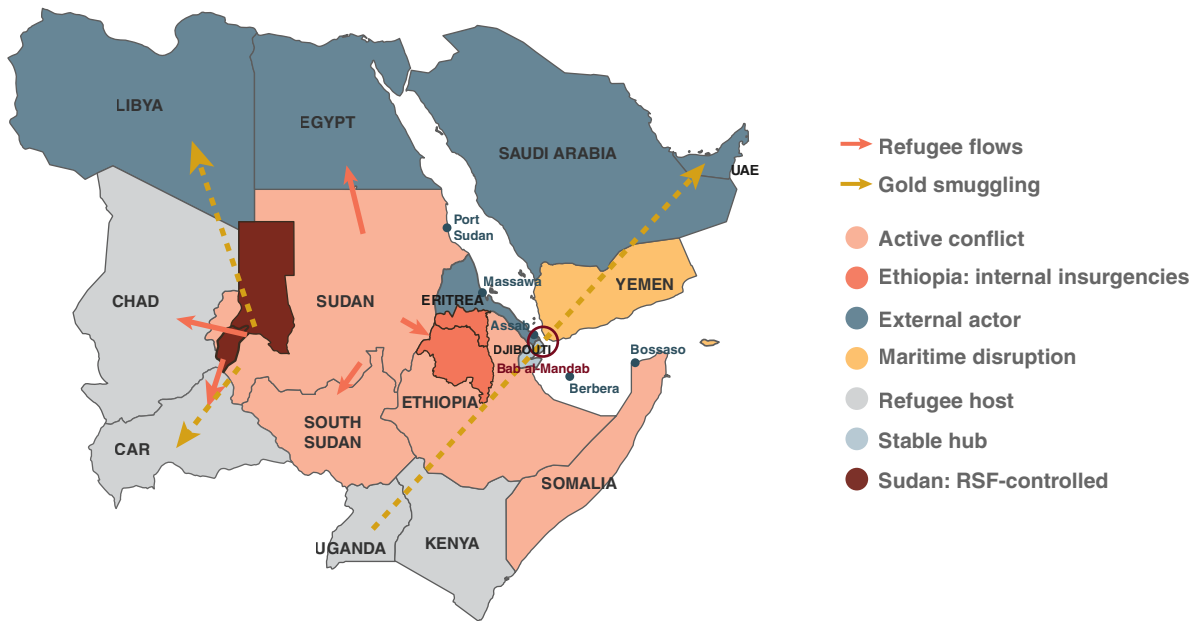


Source: OECD

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SEE SECTION 5: AI, CONFLICT, AND PEACE

The Horn of Africa as a Single Conflict System, 2026

All nine conflict spread factors are present in the Horn of Africa.



Source: IEP Analysis

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SEE SECTION 4: HOW CONFLICTS SPREAD

CONFLICT SPREAD

The factors that drive the spread of conflict can be divided into three categories: material factors that move people such as weapons and money; relational channels of ethnic kin, sponsorship, and ideology; and factors such as state capacity.

The spread of conflict is not automatic. Whether a war crosses a border depends on specific mechanisms and on the resilience of neighbouring states.

The Horn of Africa is no longer a set of separate conflicts. The conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, and Somalia are now interlocked through every channel that causes conflicts to spread.

AI, CONFLICT, AND PEACE

Artificial intelligence is reshaping both peace and conflict. As the level of conflict globally reaches record levels, AI-enabled war infrastructure is already in the field, while AI for Peace remains fragmented and underfunded.

The international community remains largely unprepared or unwilling to adopt basic humanitarian AI governance. Of 193 UN Member States, 118 are not participating in any of the seven leading AI governance initiatives.

Frontier AI models systematically prefer escalation in simulated nuclear crises. In a study of 21 nuclear-crisis scenarios across three frontier models, 95 per cent featured nuclear signalling and 76 per cent strategic nuclear threats.

