

# The Socio-Political Instability Observer

## Results from the Socio-Political Instability Survey

### May 2023



Source (from left to right): Former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (Taiwan Presidential Office). A Sudanese refugee camp. Semiconductor manufacturing. Police in Ukraine (National Police of Ukraine).

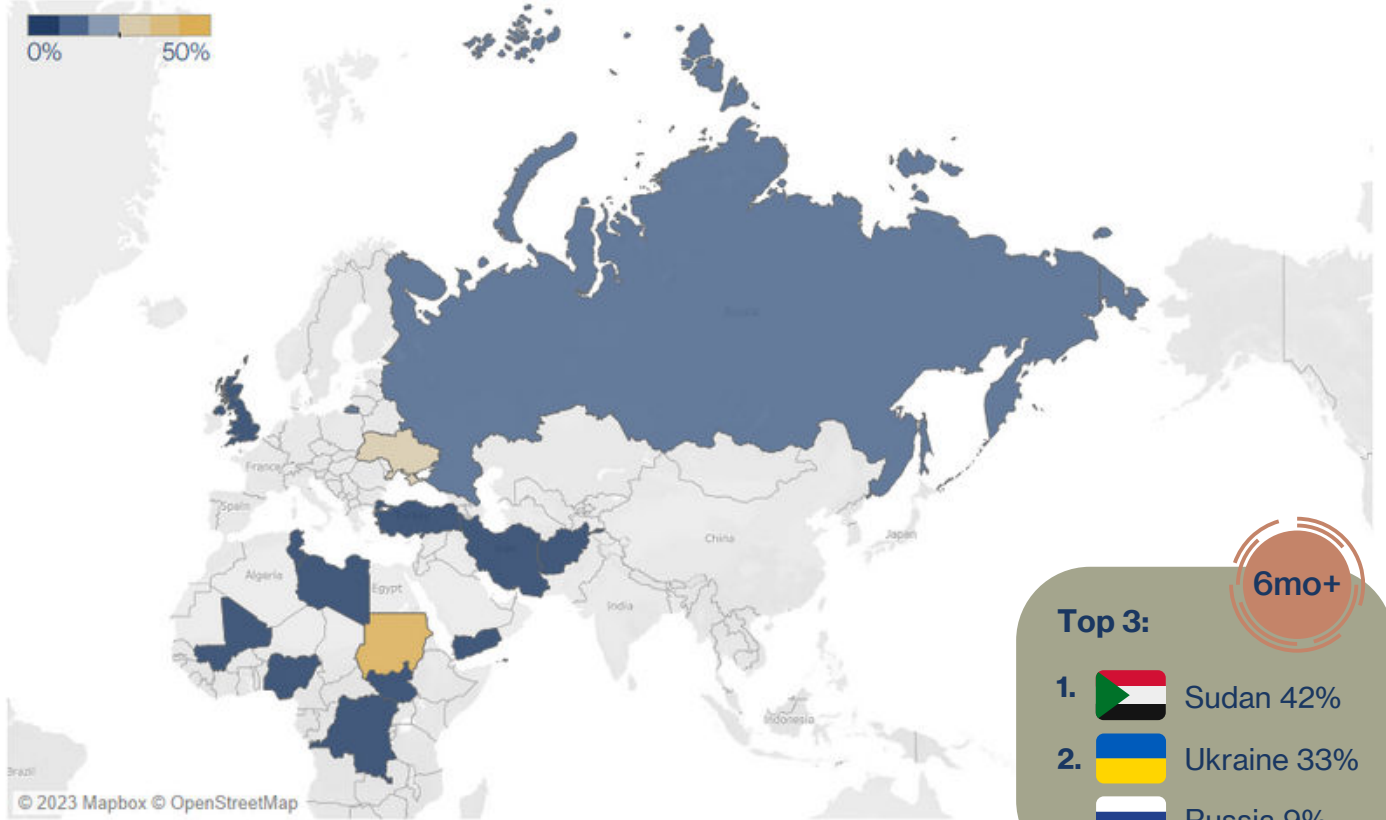
This 'Observer' outlines the results of the first Socio-Political Instability Survey and provides analysis. In this survey, [socio-political instability](#) is the probability of conflict fatalities, specifically, the incidence of armed conflict that leads to fatalities. This includes drivers of volatility, be that economic, diplomatic, environmental, demographic or armed that could lead to conflict fatalities. Please note that in this observer, the 'west' is used to refer to North America and Europe, particularly countries of the European Union. If you would like to learn more about the Survey, please visit the [HCSS website](#).

The first edition of the Observer highlights Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a significant factor in shaping expert perceptions of global socio-political instability in the short term. Russia is a major source of instability, both internally and through military and political involvement in various locations. The instability in Sudan underscores the potential for volatile situations, whether due to environmental or armed conflicts, to escalate and spread across fragile neighbouring states in Middle and Eastern Africa, making them potential sources of future socio-political instability. While China is a dominant global player, experts downplay its disruptive power in the short term compared to Russia. Many experts emphasise China's inter-dependencies with the west and uncertainties surrounding its next moves regarding Taiwan and Ukraine.

# 1. Socio-political instability: feeling the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

## Country likely to experience the most socio-political instability in the next six months

Experts surveyed predict that Ukraine, Sudan and Russia will face the most socio-political instability in the short-term



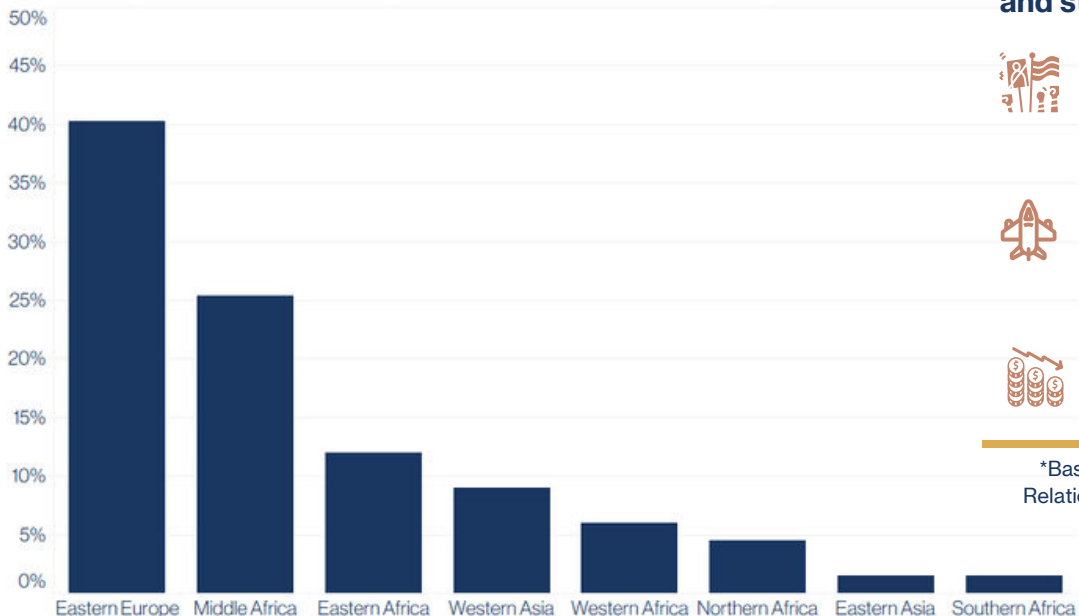
**6mo+**

**Top 3:**

-  Sudan 42%
-  Ukraine 33%
-  Russia 9%

## Region likely to experience the most socio-political instability in the next six months

Experts surveyed predict that Eastern Europe will face the most socio-political instability in the short-term



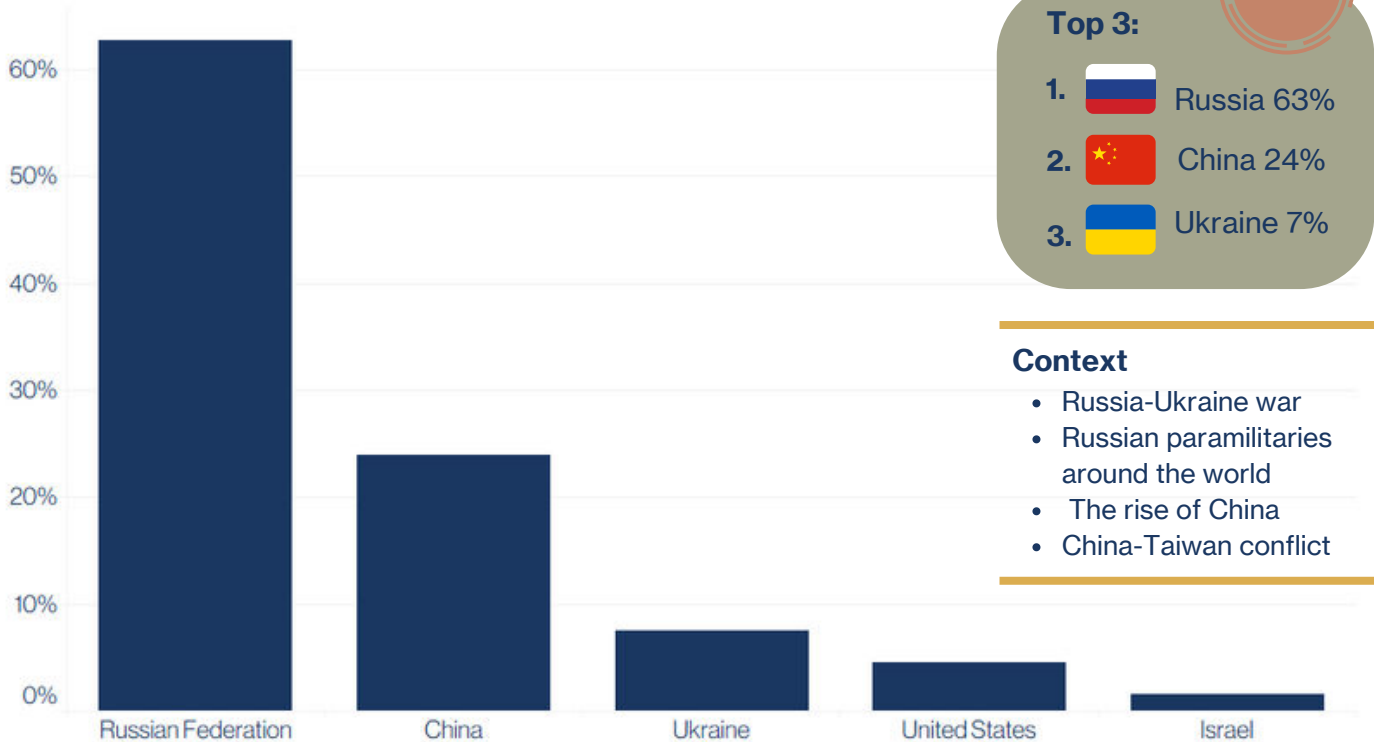
### Present form of instability and status

-  Sudan: Political instability\*  
Status: Worsening\*
-  Ukraine: Interstate conflict\*  
Status: Worsening\*
-  Russia: **Economic**  
Status: Unchanged

\*Based on Council on Foreign Relations [Global Conflict Tracker](#)

## Country likely to exert the most influence on global socio-political instability in the next six months

Experts surveyed predict that the Russian Federation will exert the greatest influence on global socio-political instability in the short-term



### Top 3:

- Russia 63%
- China 24%
- Ukraine 7%

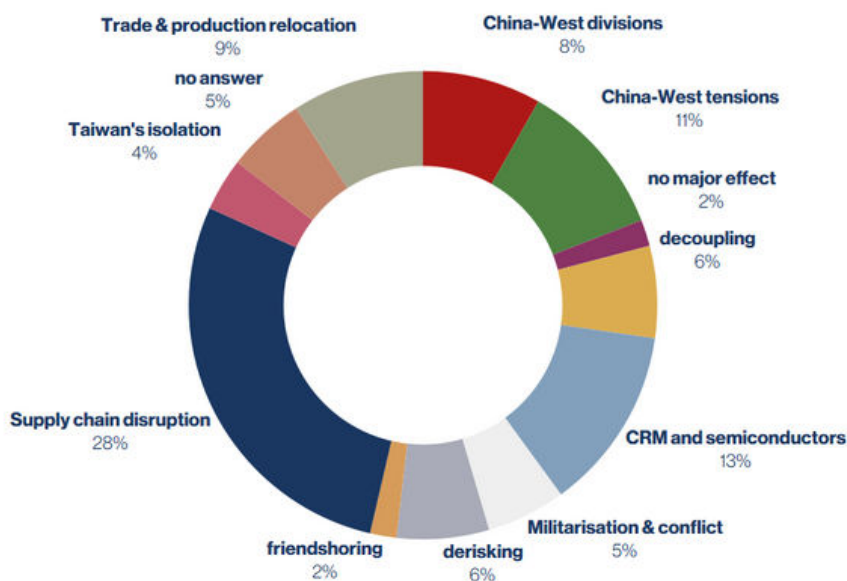
### Context

- Russia-Ukraine war
- Russian paramilitaries around the world
- The rise of China
- China-Taiwan conflict

## 2. A future China-Taiwan conflict: trade disruption and division

### The impact of China-Taiwan tensions on the world trade over the next 2-5 years

Experts surveyed predict that "supply chain disruption" will be the most important effect in the next two to five years



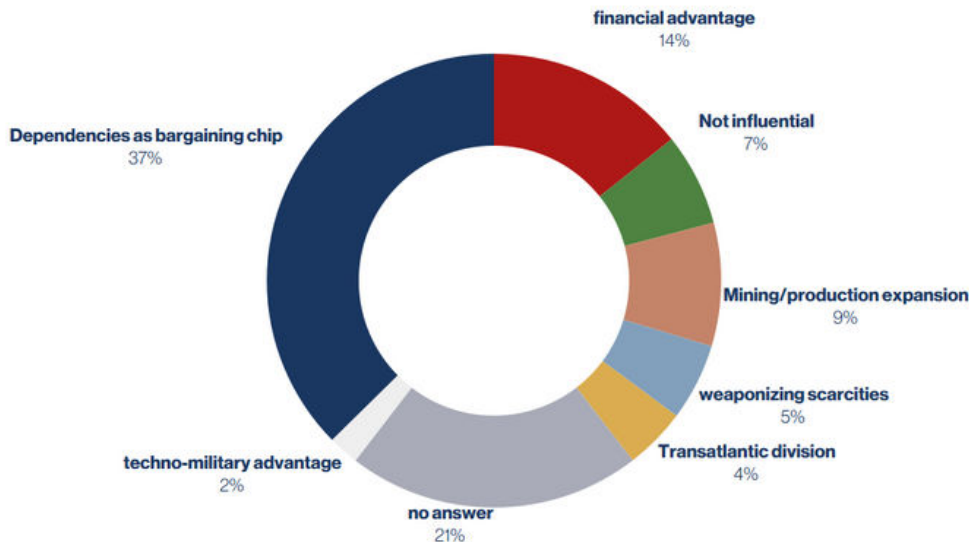
- Impact supply chains and trade routes (28%).
- Scarcities in raw materials and semiconductors (12%) will arise, given reliance on the U.S and East Asian economy.
- Tensions between China and the West are expected (11%) and 8% felt this would cause division.
- Experts are divided (6%) on if this will result in "de-risking", reducing ties, or "de-coupling", cutting ties, with China.
- Only 5% anticipate a trade war escalating into military action.



### 3. Critical minerals, autocratic states and the dependency dilemma

#### Potential strategies for China and other states to exploit western dependency on critical minerals in the next 2-5 years

Experts surveyed predict that "dependencies as bargaining chip" is most likely way the Western dependency will be played out by China and other states

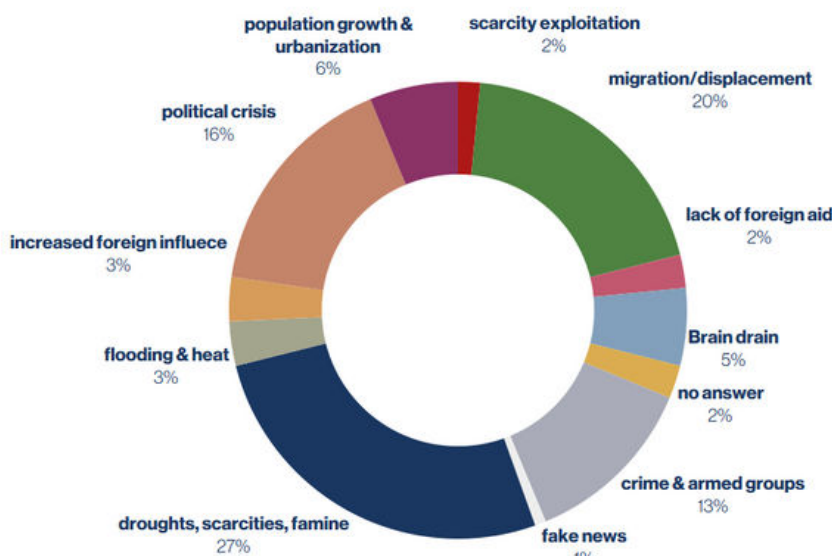


- 70% predict that western dependencies on critical minerals will be used as a bargaining chip for [political advantage](#).
- Of these 14% feel that dependencies will be exploited for financial advantage i.e. price raising or export restrictions.
- 5% draw parallels with [Russia's weaponization of metals and gas](#) in 2022.
- 7% feel there will be no influence because China is dependent on the west or the west will find alternative sources of critical minerals.
- 9% of experts predict that mining and production in alternative or friendly states will be expanded, e.g. [South America](#) or in [Europe](#) itself.

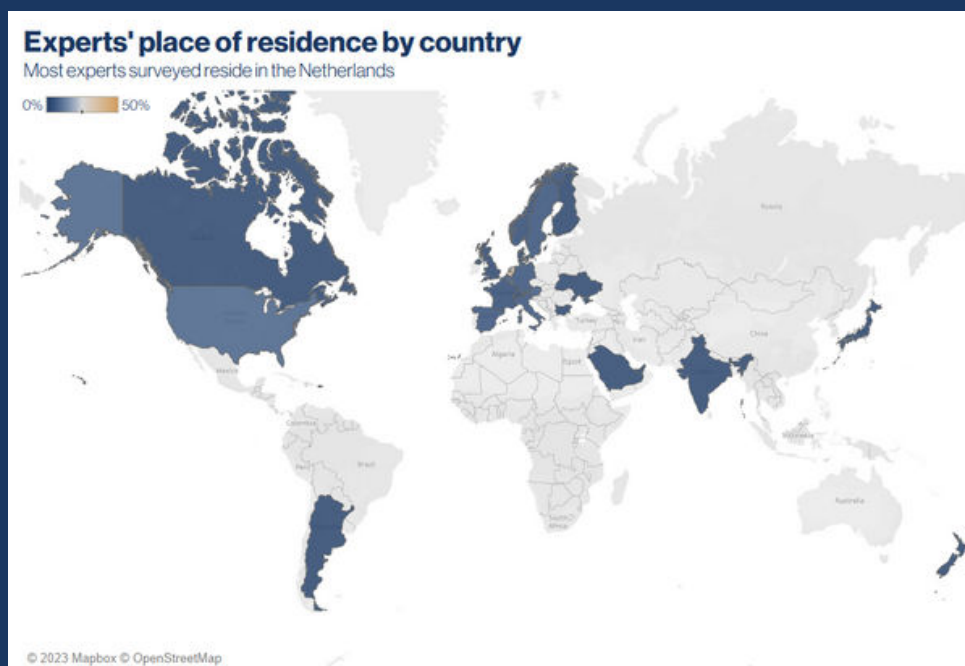
### 4. The impact of climate change in Africa: scarcities and migration

#### Key security challenges facing African countries in the next 2-5 years as a result of climate change

Experts surveyed predict that "droughts, scarcities, famine" will be the greatest challenge in the next two to five years



- Africa will face food and water scarcities caused by [drought or famine](#) (27%).
- These factors will also contribute to migration and displacement (20%), from rural to urban areas and out of Africa.
- Displacement will cause instability, with 6% emphasising population growth and urbanisation, and 5% noting the loss of human capital (brain drain).
- Fragile or corrupt governments will struggle to respond to the climate crisis (16%).
- The decline in international solidarity (2% foreign aid), and increased foreign influence (3%) from Russia and China are significant factors.



- 68 experts from universities, think tanks and research institutes completed this version of the survey.
- 34% of respondents were from the Netherlands, 7% from the U.S.A., 5% from Austria and Belgium and 4% from Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden.
- Most of the respondents were Europe-based perhaps accounting for the importance placed on the war in Ukraine. We endeavour to expand participation in future surveys.

This year HCSS launched The Socio-Political Instability Survey, inviting over 500 think tankers from around the world to give their views on the short term likelihood and geography of volatility globally using multiple-choice questions. The survey also delved into three 'hot-topics' using open-ended questions formulated by our Strategic Analysts. For this version of the survey the topics included the China-Taiwan conflict and world trade, western dependencies on critical minerals and the impact of climate change on Africa. The results of the open-ended questions were gained through a process of quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis. With specified themes or coding categories determined by the authors. The most popular categories are those included in the most responses, but each response usually includes multiple categories. The survey was completed throughout the month of May 2023 and is the first of a series of surveys, to be completed three times a year. The survey results will contribute to the Socio-Political Instability Monitor (a dashboard). Each survey will produce an 'Observer', like this document, highlighting key findings which will be available on the HCSS website.

## References

1. Socio-political instability definition: <https://hcss.nl/the-socio-political-instability-survey/>
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