Increasing refugee numbers are not the only way in which the European public is feeling the direct impact of international crises. Yet solutions to the world’s conflicts remain elusive. In fact, political and social tensions are growing around the globe and are testing Europe in profound ways – as the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) shows.

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Democracy and efforts to create socially just market economies are being challenged worldwide. At the same time, the influence of religion on political institutions and legal systems is on the rise. These are the key findings from the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI), which has analyzed 129 developing and transformation countries biennially since 2006. According
to the current BTI, many governments have placed tighter restrictions on political and civil rights as a means of consolidating their power. Even in relatively stable democracies, many governments are unable to defuse political and social conflicts.

The 250 experts who assess the surveyed countries according to 17 criteria for the BTI have identified only six states as having "very good" governance – a record low. In contrast, there are 46 countries whose governments demonstrate either failed or weak transformation efforts.

**Religion's influence on politics is growing**

According to the BTI findings, the intensity of social, ethnic and religious conflicts has increased in the past 10 years and conflicts within societies increasingly make themselves felt along religious lines. Extremist organizations primarily associated with a militant-jihadist ideology – from Boko Haram and the Taliban to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – are driving these conflicts.

Religiously charged politics are not exclusive to Arab states or Muslim-majority societies, even if they are most often found there. For example, in Iraq, Libya, Turkey and Ethiopia, legal structures and political institutions are now subject to more religious influence than they were in 2014. In the last 10 years, the influence of religious dogmas has increased in 53 countries and declined in only 12. This represents one of the most profound negative developments among all BTI criteria.

The Transformation Atlas in fullscreen

**Negative developments in both autocracies and democracies**

While the number of democratically governed countries has slightly increased among the 129 states examined and the number of autocracies has declined, the trend within each category is negative. In the last two years, the percentage of autocracies classified by the BTI as "hard-line" has increased from 58 percent to 73 percent. In the majority of autocracies, the arbitrary detention of human rights advocates and journalists is a daily occurrence, as is the repression of civil society organizations. In authoritarian countries like Egypt, China or Russia, critics of the government are subject to increasingly persistent persecution and repression.

According to the BTI, one-half of all democracies surveyed are classified as "defective" and one-fifth as "highly defective." Particularly pronounced are the restrictions placed by governments on association and assembly rights. In
nearly every country of East-Central and Southeast Europe, freedoms of expression and the press are now subject to tighter restrictions than they were 10 years ago.

"Our neighborhood has become more conflict-ridden, more unstable and more authoritarian. Western Europe is now surrounded by a ring of fire."

Aart De Geus, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung

In terms of political and economic development, states in North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe have taken clear steps backward – to varying but no less alarming degrees. "What's most disconcerting is the growing inability to engage in civic and political debate. This development fosters populism and the cultivation of radical views. The western world must do more to create new means of dialogue both in and among countries," says Aart De Geus, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

As the BTI's findings show, transformation crises and conflicts are also inseparably associated with social ills. Governments around the world failed to take advantage of favorable economic conditions and invest more resources in education, health and social equality. Instead, poverty, inequality and lack of economic opportunity now represent a kind of social dynamite, apt to explode into protests against poor governance.

You can download the executive summary of the BTI 2016 results below. On the right hand side, you can find our book about the BTI with more detailed results.