



MAPUCHE CONFLICT

Arson attacks and continued protests in 2019

📍 Chile, South America

BACKGROUND

The Mapuche are an indigenous community that consists of 1.5 million members in south-central Chile and 200,000 in south-western Argentina.

The community includes various ethnicities all connected via a shared social, religious, and economic structure, as well as a shared linguistic heritage. The group is the largest indigenous group in Chile. The group's traditional economy is based on agriculture.

The Mapuche remained independent in the region of Araucania, until the middle of the 19th century and the pacification of Araucania by the Chilean government. Today, the Mapuche are in a low-intensity conflict with the Chilean state, fighting for greater jurisdictional autonomy, the return of ancestral lands, and recognition of their cultural identity.

The conflict arose in the 1990's until the mid-2000s, but has seen a resurgence in activity since 2016.

TARGETS AND TACTICS

The targets attacked by members of the Mapuche community are concentrated to industries involved in construction and forestry, particularly as they see them as stealing their lands and damaging the environment.

Attacks have also targeted churches and members of the security forces. Firearms and incendiary devices are used, but casualties are rare, as machinery and buildings are the primary target. The suspects will often use the cover of darkness to arrive at forestry company properties, where they will threaten the guards and then set fire to equipment, leave pamphlets, and then flee the scene.



CURRENT SITUATION AND ANALYSIS

In November 2018, a Mapuche leader and activist, Camilo Catrillanca, was shot and killed by a special forces unit of the police who were looking for armed robbers, in the commune of Ercilla, in the region of Araucania.

The death led to protests by Mapuche community members at the end of the year, and through the start of 2019. Protests will continue to take place against any perceived threat to the Mapuche lands, economy or culture. The year has seen protests take place against energy projects planned by international companies, particularly hydroelectric projects that could have impacts on water sources. In addition to protests, 2019 has seen an increase in arson attacks against forestry companies, particularly Forestal Mininco and Forestal Arauco. The year will continue to see such attacks, as the Mapuche see such tactics as a viable option to regain their ancestral lands. These attacks will continue to significantly impact the profits of forestry companies.

Foreign companies looking to do business in the agribusiness or energy sector in the region, will need to be aware of the probability of delays in their projects due to protest actions or physical sabotage by Mapuche groups. As for the government's response to the actions by Mapuche communities, the repressing of protests and the deployment of additional security elements to the various regions affected will hamper any efforts to end the conflict. Until the government broaden their strategy in dealing with the conflict, and address the ethnic dimensions of the conflict, there will likely be no progress in find a solution.

