ACLED
Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Welcome to the January issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project's (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published through our research partners at Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS) and also on the **ACLED website**.

This month, ACLED launched Version 5: a fully revised and updated conflict event dataset containing records of all political violence in Africa from 1997 through 2014 inclusive. This month's report is an overview of conflict in 2014 and profiles on-going violence in **Central African Republic,** civilian-directed violence by political and communal militias in **Democratic Republic of Congo,** declining protest rates in **Egypt,** Al Shabaab activity in **Kenya,** Boko Haram violence in North-East **Nigeria**, escalating factional conflict in **Libya,** service delivery protests in **South Africa,** government and rebel clashes in **South Sudan,** geographically-concentrated violence in **Sudan's** Darfur region and a special report on **Remote Violence and Political Militias in 2014.** Elsewhere on the continent, conflict levels dropped in **Mali, Angola** and **Kenya** throughout 2014 with persistent levels of violence experienced in **Algeria, Somalia** and **Niger**.

In 2014, ACLED recorded 15,513 violent conflict events on the African continent, an increase of 12.9% compared with 2013. As many as 20 African states witnessed an increase in violence over the previous year, highlighting that violent conflict is not limited to a few warring regions on
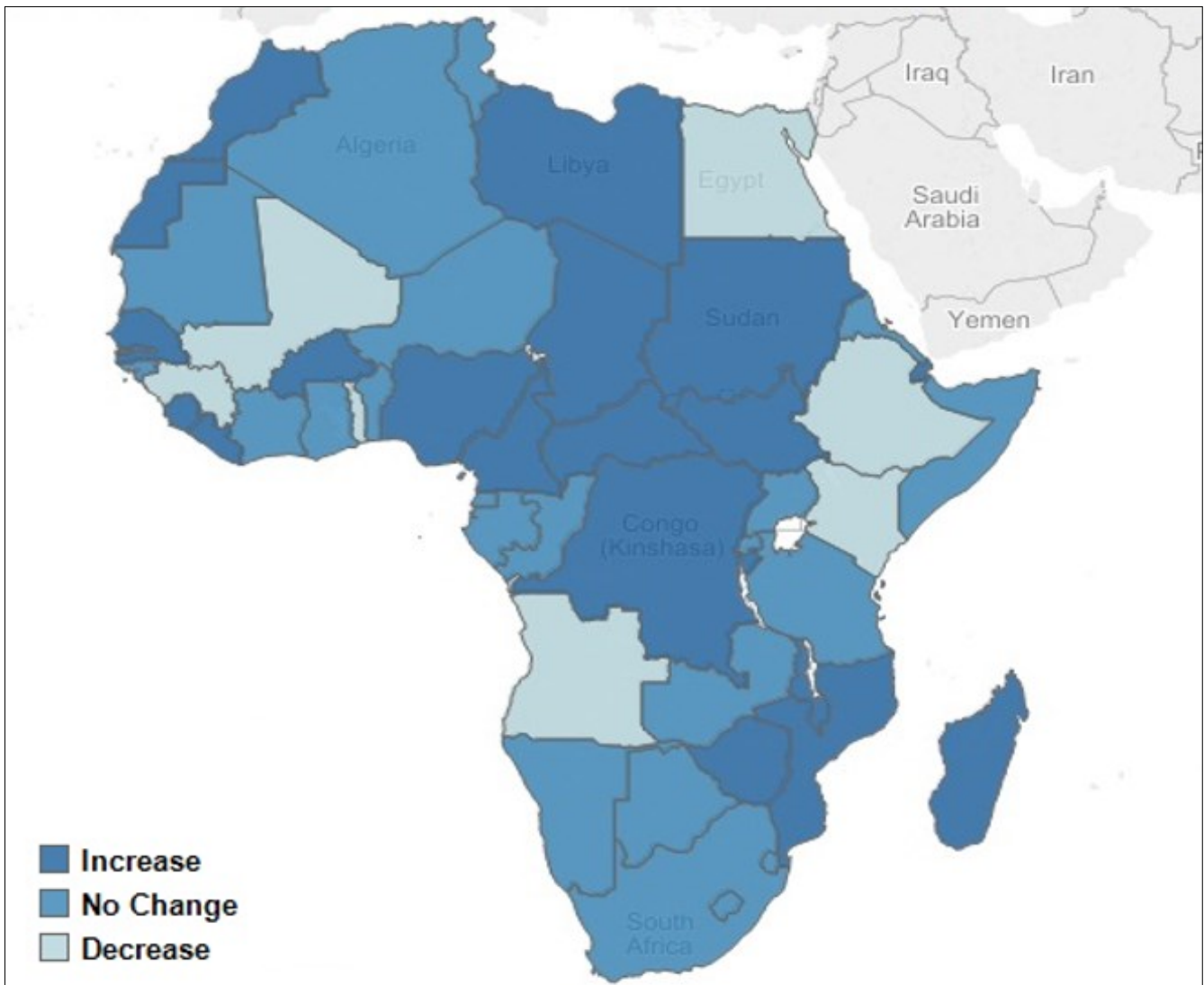

Figure 1: Conflict Increase, Decrease and No Change across Africa from 2013-2014.

African Overview

the continent, but represents a far more widespread phenomenon (*see* **Figure 1**). The escalation was most substantive in South Sudan, Libya and the Central African Republic, although a small number of relatively high-activity countries, such as Egypt and Kenya, reported a decrease.

While the average rate of conflict events per 100,000 population **(World Bank, 2014)** in countries covered by ACLED stands at 1.4, Somalia (26.9), Libya (20.8) and the Central African Republic (20.7) displayed rates around ten times higher. In the same vein, the number of related fatalities rose from 29,813 in 2013 up to 39,177 in 2014, resulting in an annual increase of almost one-third (*see* **Figure 2**). With an average African rate of 3.5, the Central African Republic reported the highest fatality rate per 100,000 population at 72.5, followed by South Sudan (56.5), Libya (42.4) and Somalia (42.3). These numbers reflect an overall increase in the intensity of conflict events, with the average event becoming more lethal.

With regard to the nature of conflict, 34.4% of the conflict events involved riots and protests; 30.2% battles between armed groups; 27.3% violence against civilians; and 8.0% remote violence. Although rioting and protesting accounted for the majority of conflict events on a continental scale, the sharp upward trend in this form of violence recorded in the past few years has come to a halt, largely as a consequence of the authoritarian turn in Egypt **(ACLED, 2014a)**: as a result of state repression, the number of riots

and protests in this country dropped by nearly 50%. By contrast, the other types of political violence showed sustained increase rates, as battles between armed groups rose by 16.8% compared to 2013, remote violence by 44.5% and civilian targeting by 21.1%.

Additionally, after five years where the proportion of conflict events involving violence against civilians constantly decreased, it returned to increase in 2014; civilian fatalities now constitute the highest proportion of reported conflict deaths since 2009. Recent contributions highlighted the increasingly important role of political and communal militias as perpetrators of violence against civilians **(Raleigh, 2012)**.

In 2014, militias carried out 69.7% of attacks against civilian population across Africa, with a 27.8% increase from 2013. While this may suggest that state forces and rebel groups have become less willing to engage in civilian targeting, militias often conduct violence against civilians in association with, or at the behest of, governments and rebels. This surge in civilian targeting notwithstanding, battles between armed groups remain the primary cause of conflict-related fatalities in Africa. Eight countries account for almost 90.0% of all battles on the continent: these are Somalia, South Sudan, Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Egypt, Central African Republic and Sudan.
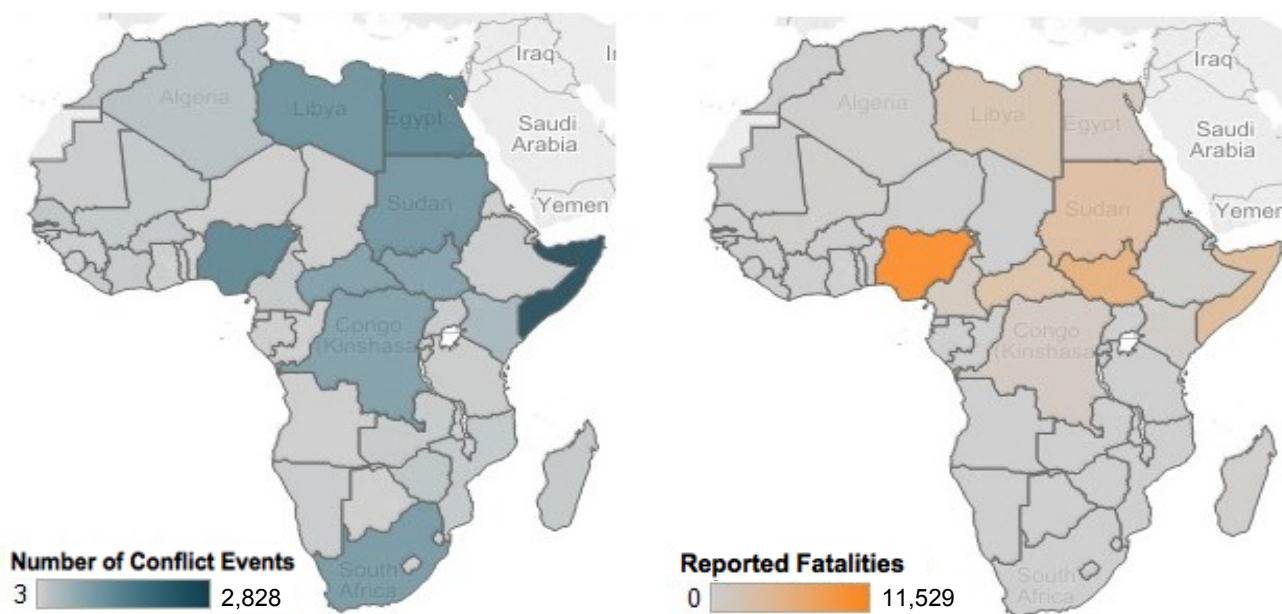

Figure 2: Conflict Events (Left) and Reported Fatalities (Right) by Country, 2014.

Central African Republic

Conflict in Central African Republic raged in 2014 with more than double the violent events of 2013, despite a ceasefire and peace talks in July (*see* **Figure 3)**. Reported tallies of war related deaths surpassed 3,300 (a conservative estimate), while the conflict also diffused to more than double the number of towns and villages it was active in throughout 2013. Increases in fatality totals from 2013 are entirely driven by violence against civilians, and mainly perpetrated by both Anti-Balaka and Séléka (now often referred to as Ex-Séléka). Both groups are responsible for an almost equal number of armed interactions and acts of violence against civilians, despite the impression that Séléka has been hurt by the presence of international troops. The majority of events continue to be comprised of battles between Anti-Balaka and Séléka, but increases in acts involving Fulani (Muslim affiliated) militias and Anti-Balaka, and continued LRA activity also plagued the citizens of CAR.

In 2014, significant internal feuds within both camps saw the dismissal of Séléka members who were appointed by the new Prime Minister (Mahamat Kamoun, a Muslim and former head of cabinet for Djotodia), who had named three Séléka members to the cabinet. Séléka rejected the named members, the offer of inclusion and the government. It is a group that does not know which direction to move in, and the Anti-Balaka (whose group size ranges from a conservative 20,000 to 75,000 as claimed by their leaders) take full advantage of their work eradicating Muslims from the East and South. Anti-Balaka recently claimed to have reformed into a political party, and time

will tell whether this has been a front and military wing for Bozizé and the Kwa Na Kwa coalition.

Despite political changes, there is little evidence of an active military or state presence in the war. A minute percentage of events involved any CAR state forces, while foreign forces (now totaling 10,116 according to **(IRIN, 12 January, 2015)** have arrived in various waves. But given the increase in these forces, what has been the effect on the conflict as a whole? The key periods of international intervention are January, October and December, 2013 followed by changes in 2014 as the UN took over the African Union mandate (renamed MINUSCA) and the EU's mission remains unchanged. Activities by all Foreign and State forces totaled 164 events in 2014, and violent acts concentrated on Anti-Balaka (previously the EU force had concentrated on Séléka). Conflict has dropped precipitously since the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014, but have been increasing since November. The involvement of these forces is critical, as they function as the only check on both militias' activity, but their functions outside Bangui are limited.

The consequence of this largely forgotten conflict mainly resonates within CAR, which might help to explain why it is generally ignored. Over 400,000 IDPs and an equally high number of refugees are recorded from CAR, and over 300 mosques have been destroyed **(IRIN, 12 January, 2015)**. The continued eradication of Muslims, the dominance of Anti-Balaka, and the poor representation the Muslim community has in Séléka, suggests that the plight of these victims will continue.
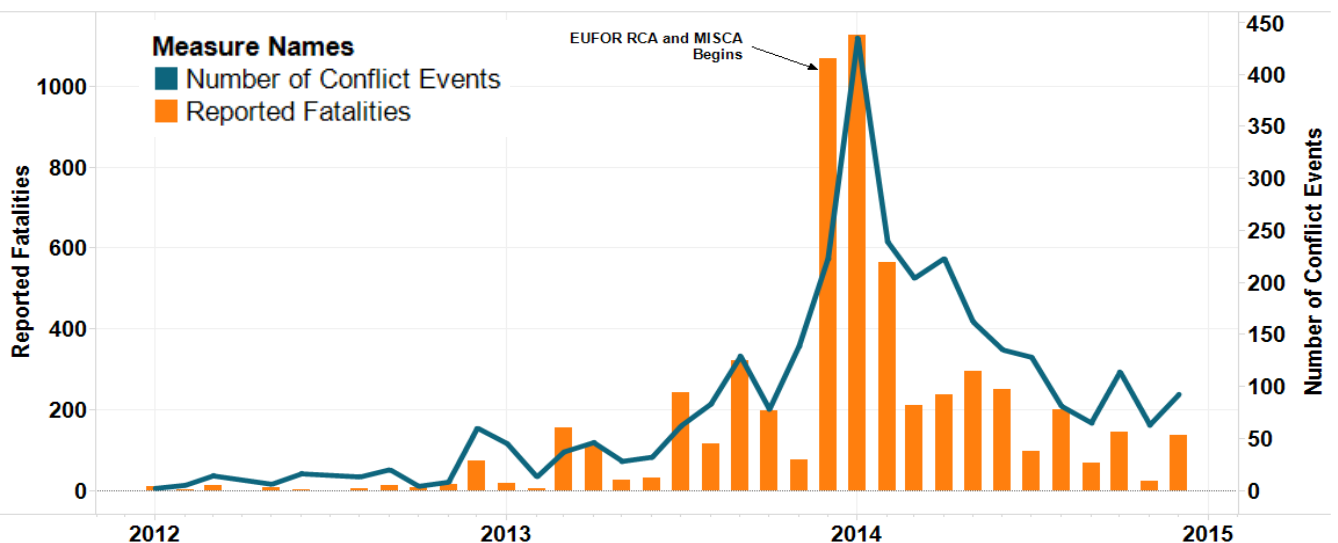

Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in CAR, from 2012-2014.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Conflict in Congo continued to decline in 2014. There are only minor differences in events totals between 2012, 2013 and 2014, but fatality totals dropped substantially in 2014. While activity totals are largely similar, the violence composition changed to reveal increases of violence against civilians by FARDC, political militias and local communal militias. Government activity against militias increased in 2014; intra-militia competition was not as fierce as in 2013, as these varied groups focused instead of increasing acts of violence against civilians. Militias continue to be the most significant threat to civilians in DR-Congo, although rebels (e.g. ADF) kill more than double the number of people per event than militias.

Congo in 2014 focused on sustaining the military momentum that eradicated the M23 movement as 2013 came to a close. FARDC and MONUSCO forces promised to clean the East of the militias and struggling rebel groups. Whether this agenda can be considered a success is yet to be determined: the number of active non-state armed groups has not significantly declined from 2013, and is higher than in 2012. Of the most active non-state violent groups in DR-Congo last year, the majority increased activity in 2014 over previous years. This may be due to competition arising from the political vacuum the

M23 dissolution has created with the 'violence market' in the East, or illustrate how groups have become more active locally to avoid FARDC attention. Despite the persistence of smaller group activity, the measures of entrenched instability have declined: non-state groups have failed to acquire territory, and the government has doubled the level of territorial reacquisition, and the average fatalities of combatants in that process.

> "Hotspots of armed violent activity in 2014 include Walikale, Irumu, Oicha, Beni and Gombe, whereas in 2013, Rutshuru, Walikale, Goma and Masisi were most active".

Hotspots of armed violent activity in 2014 include Walikale, Irumu, Oicha, Beni and Gombe, whereas in 2013, Rutshuru, Walikale, Goma and Masisi were most active (although zones of highest fatalities differ from activity hotspots- *see* **Figure 4)**. These changes reflect the altered agents responsible for instability in the East.

These new areas of activity are significant as they illustrate that non-Congolese groups mainly drive continued threats to the stability of the East. The FDLR, the ADF, the LRA and the presumed increase of activity of the Burundian FNL in the border region are threats that the FARDC and regional powers are determined to eradicate. The ADF is a growing threat- after a massacre in Beni, the Sudanese supported group (with vague illusions to an Islamist agenda) engaged in more activity in 2014 than the FDLR.

There is more success in dealing with local Congolese groups: the leader of Mayi Mayi Rutomboki surrendered last week, but the year saw a number of splinter groups emerge (at least seven, including Raia Mutomboki-Bravo, Cynthia, Kikuni Jurist, Makombo, Ntoto, Nsindo, and Sisawa).

As of the beginning of 2015, MONUSCU troops, supplemented by FARDC, is intent of driving out the FDLR. The focus on the FDLR is part of a larger strategy to deal with smaller groups operating in the East, who have long plagued citizens there, and turned conflict into a business enterprise. But, as noted by Jason Sterns in his blog "Congo Siasa", the FDLR campaign is not likely to be a repeat of the M23 success for the following reasons: 1) this group has been operational for over twenty years, they are scattered and settled across a vast territory that is difficult to fight in; 2) there is a debate about whether the FDLR should be the main focus, given the activity in Beni by ADF (or supposedly ADF) and 3) the population tends to suffer tremendously when the FDLR are attacked.
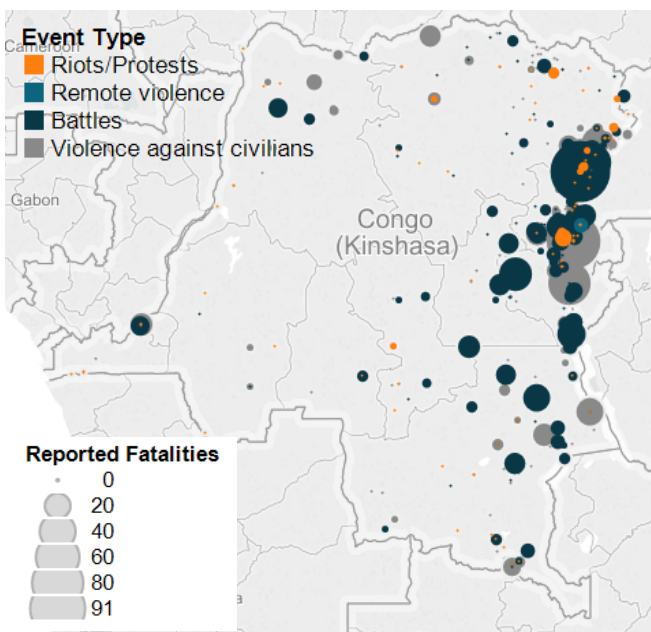

Figure 4: Conflict Events by Type in DR-Congo, 2014.

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Egypt

The most significant trend witnessed throughout 2014 in Egypt was the dramatic decline of riot and protest events nationwide (*see* **Figure 5**). Sweeping detentions of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, unconstitutional civilian and military trials, and the introduction of legislation that curtails representation has seen Egypt slip into a counter-revolution reminiscent of past regimes under Mubarak in the late 1980s, and Nasser's government in the 1950's **(Origins, July 2014)**.

This pattern is reflective of the attitudes of Egyptian citizens where, "once thrilled by the people power which removed Mubarak's ruthless security forces, Egyptians are now tolerating tough crackdowns under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for the sake of stability…" **(Reuters, 12 January, 2015)**. The Council on Foreign Relations reported that since the summer of 2013, an estimated 16,000 people have been indicted or jailed for taking part in protests **(CFR, 15 December, 2014)**.

The security forces' focus on repressing the Egyptian public has taken precedent over their engagement with the localized insurgency threat based in the Sinai Peninsula. From Q1 to Q3 of 2014, excluding September 2014, there were 229 more events where security forces were engaged with rioters, protesters, or violence directed towards civilians than with political militias and armed groups. Whilst this may be indicative of a larger number of organized civil society demonstrations compared to militant activity, it remains that the number of protests fell throughout this period (*see* **Figure 5**).

History is repeating itself in Egypt – just as Mubarak feared the ascendency of moderate Islamist groups in the 1990s, al-Sisi reacted to the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in 2012. This has paved the way for a backlash by more radical Islamist groups, with Ansar Beit-al Maqdis gaining prominent international coverage in the media and December witnessed the largest attack on security forces since the beginning of the Sinai conflict in 2013.

The number of battles was relatively stable throughout the year. This further exposes the Egyptian military's languid commitment to combatting regional threats, as neighboring Libya also struggled to contain the growth of radical Islamists in the eastern city of Derna. The creation of a buffer zone at the Gaza border and weekly raids on militant hideouts failed to dampen the growing threat to national stability from North Sinai. Despite this, Egypt's conflict landscape was nevertheless dominated by continual suppression of regime-dissenters.
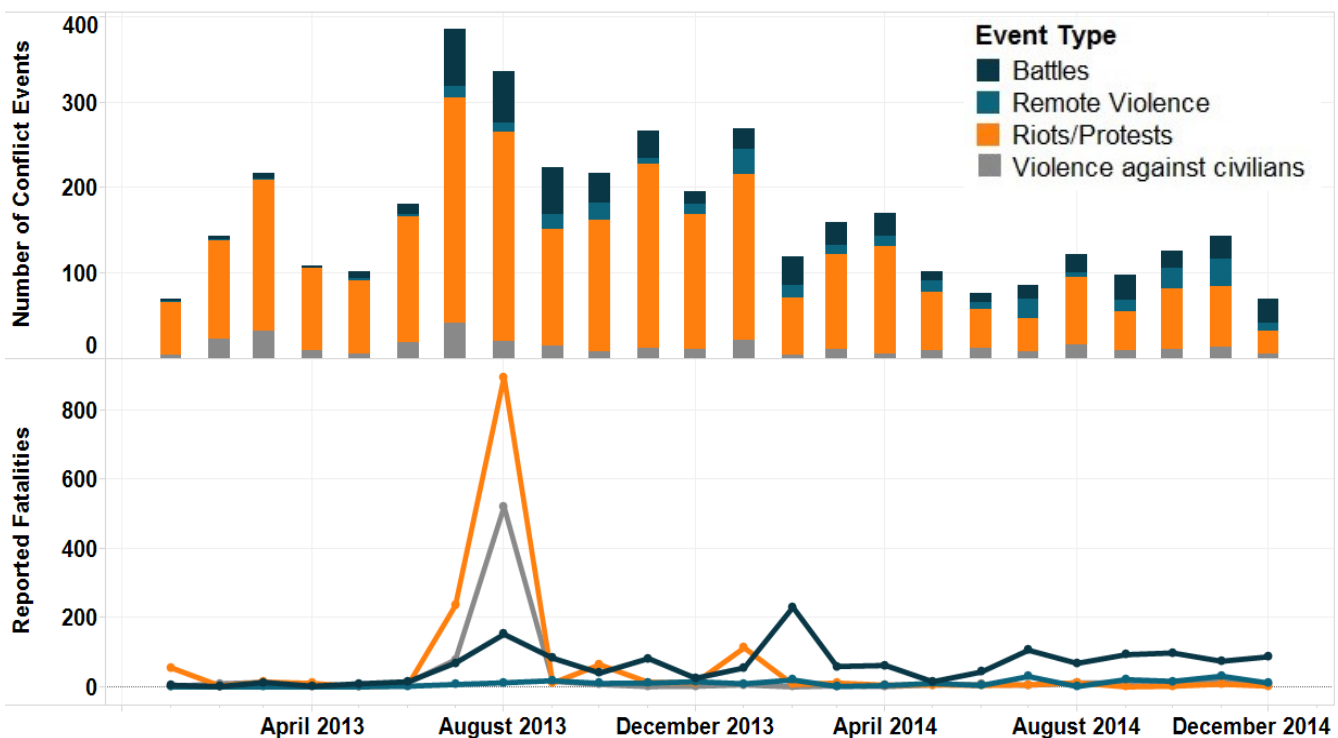

Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Egypt, from 2013-2014.
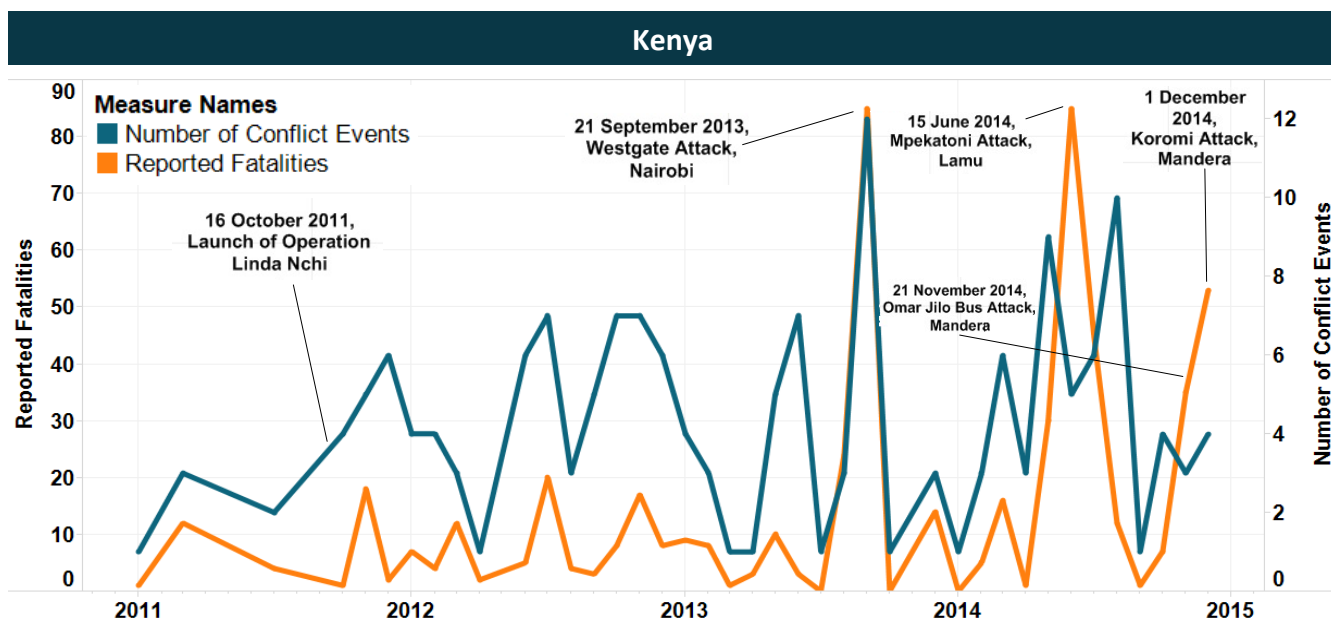
Kenya

Figure 6: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities attributed to Al Shabaab, Kenya, from January 2010 - December 2014.

Kenya witnessed an overall decline in violence levels in 2013, and a particularly noticeable decline in the proportion of violence which involves civilian targeting, now at its lowest rates in over a decade. Reported fatalities also fell from 2013, although the decrease was considerably smaller. While Kenya faces a wide range of security threats and sources of instability, the activity of Al Shabaab and aligned militants has garnered the most international attention in the past year.

As **Figure 6** shows, the group's activity in Kenya is characterised by a very high rate of volatility: since October 2011 (when Kenya launched its incursion into Somalia with Operation Linda Nchi), Al Shabaab violence has been marked by significant peaks and troughs in frequency and intensity. Two patterns emerge from this volatility: first, a clear increase in events post-intervention in Somalia compared with the time period prior. Attacks by Al Shabaab in Kenya have increased alongside their gradual loss of territory in Somalia. Their activity in Kenya now more closely resembles their actions in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, since the Federal Government reclaimed control over most of the city in 2010: sporadic bombings and attacks which, though politically destabilising and tragic in their often devastating cost to civilians, reflect a weakened organisation with more limited military capacity than previously.

The second pattern also speaks to this dynamic: in addition to an increase in the frequency of attacks, there has been a dramatic escalation in the frequency of high-intensity attacks, represented by those months with large

numbers of reported fatalities. Since the Westgate attack in September 2013, there have been three further attacks which resulted in dozens of casualties each.

Al Shabaab violence has historically affected two of the country's former provinces (in addition to Nairobi): the North-Eastern province, along the border with Somalia, and the Coast, which runs along Kenya's coastline and up to Somalia's. In 2014, however, a clearer pattern of clustering at the sub-provincial appears to have emerged: the first is along the Somali border close to Ethiopia and down as far as Wajir; the second emerges in the band running from Garissa town to Liboi; the third, closer to the coast between Tana River and Lamu. A final cluster appears around Mombasa, where clashes have erupted following the targeted killings – some allege, by security forces – of radical clerics (*IRIN*, 28 July 2014).

2015 is likely to witness a continuation of the same dynamics: sporadic bouts of violence by Al Shabaab along the North-East and the Coast; and the strategic interplay of issues of religion, together with disputes over land, ethnicity, and regime interests. The context in which these attacks will continue, however, is likely to be one of increasingly restricted public space and room for dissent: crackdowns on demonstrations, stringent and controversial (*Guardian*, 18 December 2014; *Business Insider*, 2 January 2015) anti-terror legislation, restrictions on a range of civil liberties, and an increase in the impunity of security agents all seem to suggest the potential rolling back of hard-won freedoms in Kenya with the promise of more effective security.
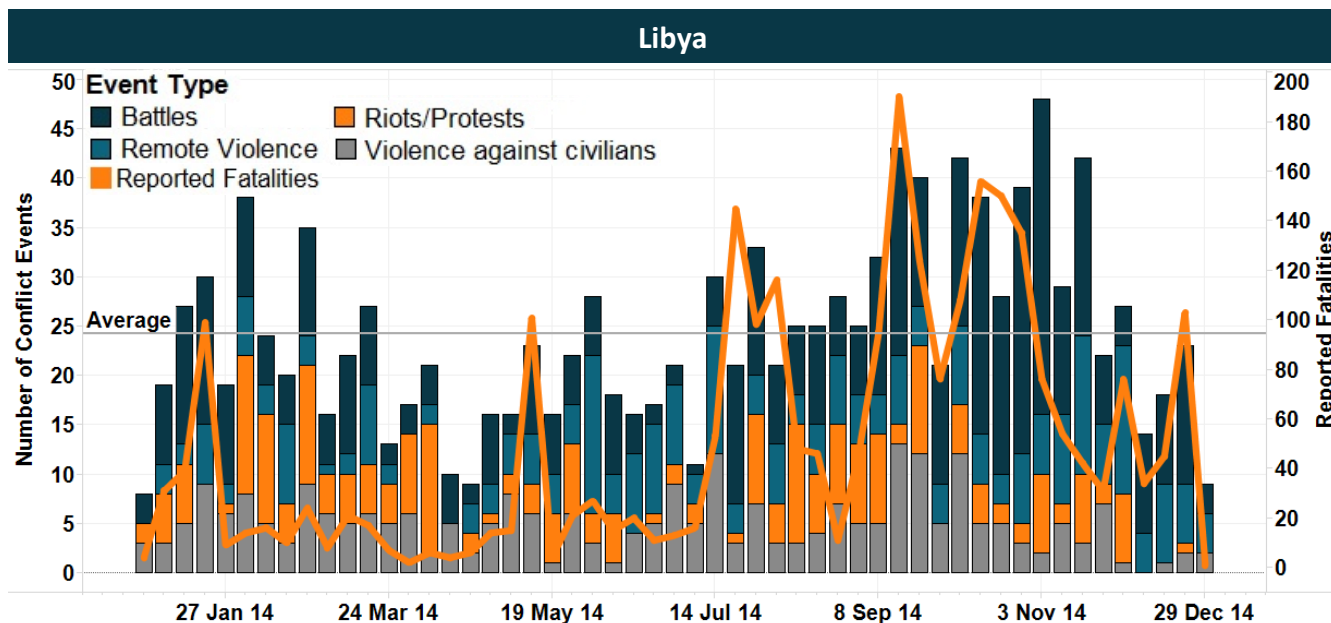
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Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Event Type in Libya, from January - December 2014.

Libya was the fourth most active and the sixth most violent country in the ACLED dataset with 2383 reported fatalities from battles and remote violence in 2014. The deterioration of security in Libya throughout 2014 has been characterized by a myriad of factional armed groups with complex competing claims and two divided governments mobilizing competing narratives in the pursuit of 'political legitimacy'. For a country that is rich through oil revenues with a relatively homogenous population **(The Economist, 10 January, 2015)**, how can we begin to understand the drivers of this escalatory factional violence?

The 2014 conflict has been characterized by many as an ideological battle between a largely Islamist camp led by the militia groups from Misratah, and anti-Islamist coalition between military forces under the command of ex-General Khalifa Haftar and the Zintan militia. However, given that the Libya Dawn coalition is formed by Islamist and non-Islamist groups, and multiple tribal groups are involved, this is a broad oversimplification of the nature of the conflict.

An alternative analysis of the fluidity of alliance formation in 2014 can be explained as an attempt to consolidate political positions in order to maintain leverage over the weak Libyan government. The protracted escalation of battles and remote violence (*see* **Figure 7**) over the course of 2014 can be understood by government-funded militias pursuit to secure resources and financial assistance from outside powers such as Egypt, the UAE, Sudan, Qatar and Turkey, as well as through informal redistributive networks by the Libyan government. This has acted as an incentive for divergent groups to prolong conflict in pursuit of material gain and political aspirations **(Forbes, 6 January 2015)**, rather than meet at the negotiation table. From mid-May, members of the Libya Dawn coalition undertook a campaign to capture state institutions taking control of the airport and government administration in Tripoli. This was followed by attempts to divert funds from the Libyan Central Bank, a concerted effort for backing from the National Oil Corporation and in December, attacks on the oil ports of Sidra and Ra's Lanuf.

The shift in tactics by Operation Sunrise (under the banner of Libya Dawn) to attack oil installations has added to the severe consequences facing the Libyan economy. As oil production fell to 350,000 barrels per day this week **(Forbes, 6 January, 2015)**, the UN Special Representative for Libya, Bernadino Léon announced that the previously uncooperative warring parties agreed to a dialogue in Geneva.

The complex 'militia rule' is further underpinned by regional divisions. Revolutionary brigades that still operate in Libya are mobilized around city-based alliances formed during the 2011 uprising, under local municipal councils **(McQuinn, 2012)** (e.g. the Misratan Military Council (MMC)). Whilst armed groups were once aligned to overthrow Qaddafi, they are intrinsically tied to their local political constituencies. The upsurge in violence can be seen as an outcome of these distinct geographical units jockeying for position in a centralized political system.

Nigeria

Nigeria witnessed an increase in conflict events of over 40% in 2014 over the previous year; while reported fatalities increased by almost 150% in the same time period, representing a very dramatic intensification of violence in the past twelve months. The activity of the militant Islamist organisation, Boko Haram, active primarily in the North-East of the country, directly accounted for just under 400 of these events, but well over 7,500 of the reported fatalities recorded over the course of the year. 2014 marked several strategic and tactical evolutions on the part of Boko Haram. First, militants vastly expanded the frequency and intensity of anti-civilian violence: high-profile attacks on villages in which inhabitants were massacred characterised mid-2014 in particular. The intensity of anti-civilian violence seems to be driven, in part, by a reaction to the increase in local vigilante militias throughout the north-east. Local populations, faced with the absence – or withdrawal (**BBC News, 25 August 2014a**) – of security forces, formed local policing and security units, themselves accused of human rights abuses (**IRIN, 12 December 2013**), which may in part explain the severity and intensity of subsequent attacks on civilians.

Another strategic evolution has been the seizure of territory (**BBC News, 25 August 2014b**) in the north-east. The Nigerian military has had the most success in tackling Boko Haram when it has secured large urban areas such as the Borno capital, Maiduguri (although, sporadic bombings there, and in nearby capitals such as Kano, point to limitations even in these areas). The campaign to oust Boko Haram from Maiduguri and its surrounds pushed militants into rural areas, which are far more difficult to secure, leaving isolated populations extremely vulnerable to attack.

A final development is the territorial coverage of the group, whose geographic profile has evolved over recent years (*see* **Figure 8**). 2012 represented the peak of Boko Haram's geographic reach, with extensive activity outside the north-east. 2013, by contrast, and the declaration of the state of emergency, saw a contraction back into the group's strongholds, and a clear concentration in Borno state and around Maiduguri in particular.

While all this may appear to suggest that Boko Haram is the only actor of significance, the group's violence does not take place in a vacuum: elections are fast approaching up in February, and look set to be among the most contentious yet. Alongside heated debate about whether President Jonathan can even legitimately take office again, there are also voting irregularities emerging (*Africa Confidential*, 19 December 2014). These have a strong political dimension in that the electoral commission will face challenges holding elections in the north (an opposition stronghold) and registering the estimated 1.5million IDPs displaced by the conflict. December saw a stall in Boko Haram's territorial gains, and overall violence in the country has been declining since its peak mid-2014, but its consequences for Nigerian stability are far from over.
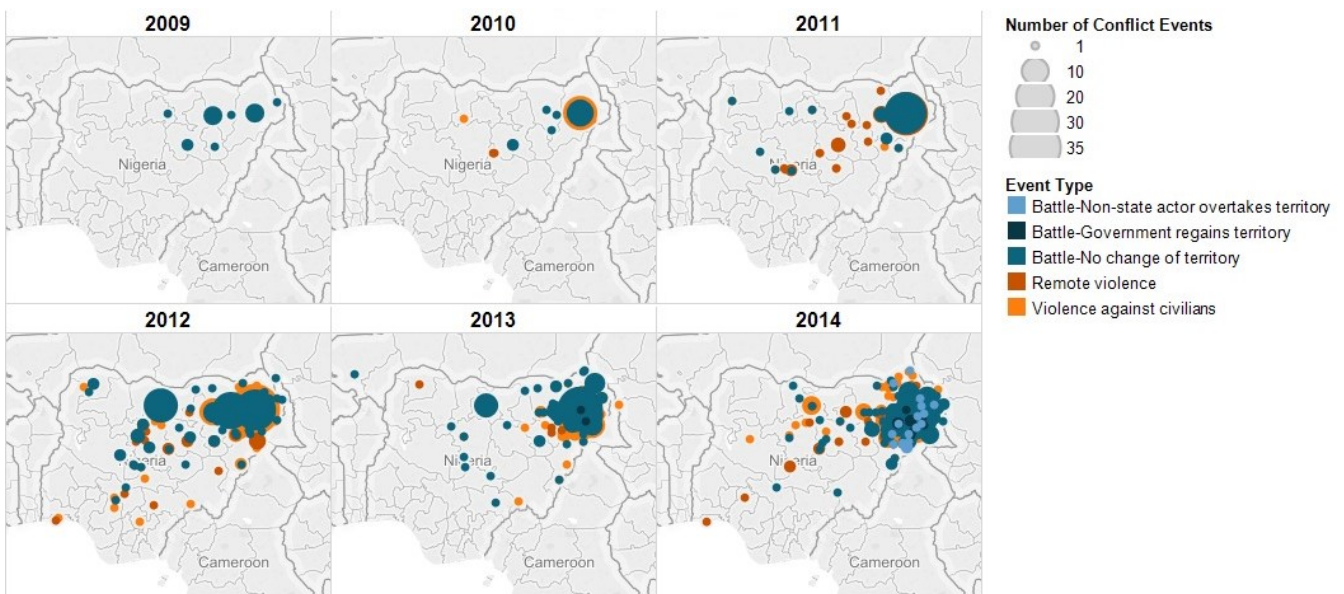

Figure 8: Conflict Events by Location and Type, Boko Haram, 2009 - 2014.

South Africa

South Africa was the seventh most active country in the ACLED dataset in 2014, in spite of lacking any form of armed insurgency or rebellion. This means that the form of conflict in South Africa differs drastically from countries with similar activity levels such as Libya and Sudan. What has defined South Africa as a politically volatile country is the prevalence of protest and civilian collective action as a method of provoking a response from a secure incumbent government which faces no severe political threat, armed or otherwise.

The general election in May 2014 showed that the ANC still retained a secure, albeit diminishing, lead with 62% of seats in parliament and a majority in eight out of nine provincial legislatures (Smith, 9 May 2014). Elections, both general and municipal, are on a five year rotation; the population is unable to impose their political will through the ballot box for long periods of time. Furthermore, the ANC policy of 'cadre deployment', in which loyal and politically connected individuals are given municipal positions, means that public servants are more concerned about the support of party bosses than the electorate (Alexander, 2010).

As a result, demonstrations have become an important method by which communities interact the local government. Riots and protests accounted for 82% of all conflict events in South Africa. The emergence of the 'service delivery' demonstrations by communities against the perceived substandard provision of utilities (such as water, sanitation, electricity and subsidised housing) by the local government shows that civilian collective action is becoming an useful tool in provoking a response from a secure government, which is often perceived as inflexible.

However, 2014 represented the first year that service delivery demonstrations declined since 2011, accounting for 22% of all riots and protests as opposed to 26% in 2013. This could be due to the interrupting factor of the 2014 general elections. Though the number of service delivery demonstrations has tended to mirror the number of non-service delivery demonstrations, April 2014 marked a point of departure when service delivery demonstrations declined and others increased.

Previous studies on service delivery demonstrations have found that elections can dampen rates as communities can express their grievance through the ballot box (Karamoka, 2011). The aftermath of the electoral period in 2014 saw a slow but steady rise in service delivery demonstrations as communities begin to fight for the fulfilment of promises made during the electoral period. In contrast, a significant portion of the increase in other forms of demonstration comes from party members and cadres marching to display their political allegiance.

Service delivery demonstrations are generally more violent than other forms with 59% being classified as 'rioting'. The next electoral contest is the municipal elections in 2016. This raises the possibility that 2015 may see an increase in service delivery demonstrations, leading to an increase in violent collective action overall.
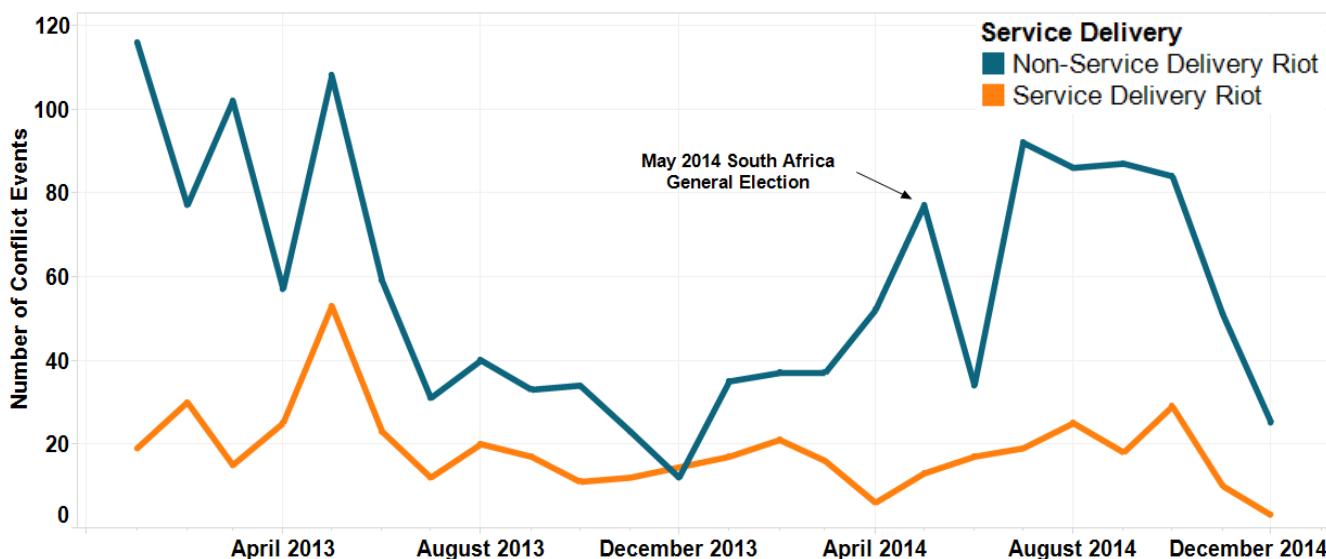

Figure 9: Riots and Protests by Type in South Africa, from January 2013 to December 2014.
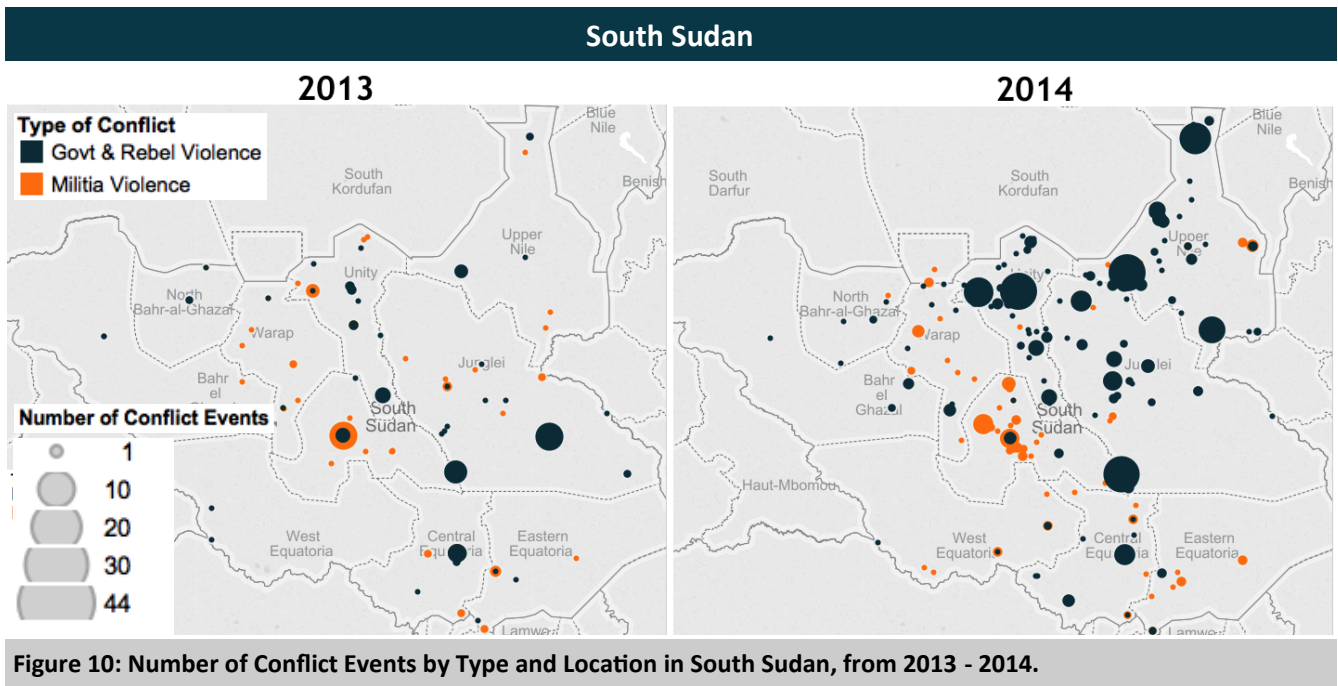
South Sudan

Figure 10: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location in South Sudan, from 2013 - 2014.

South Sudan faces multiple, largely geographically distinct, security challenges – the civil war between government forces and the SPLA/M-In Opposition rebel groups, and increased militia violence – both of which have contributed to an alarming increase in civilian targeting in the country in 2014. December marked the first anniversary of the South Sudanese civil war – a war stemming from government factionalism, pitting forces loyal to President Salva Kiir against rebel forces (SPLA/M-IO) led by former Vice President Riek Machar. Thousands of child soldiers have been recruited as a part of the conflict **(Enough Project, 2014)**. Despite internationally-led peace talks and a number of short-lived cease-fire agreements (leading to temporary decreases in violence), peace between the groups has not lasted and battles continue. Approximately half of all organized, armed conflict events in South Sudan last year are attributed to battles between these two groups.

These battles occur almost exclusively in the Greater Upper Nile region (Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states). This region is responsible for the vast majority of South Sudan's oil production. Rebel forces have halted oil production in Unity State **(Copnall, 2014)** while threatening oil fields in Upper Nile state, especially as control of these would compromise the government's ability to pay its army forces, making it an attractive and strategic target **(Small Arms Survey, 2014)**.

In addition to civil war, militia violence continues to be a concern in South Sudan **(Saferworld, 2012)**; these groups saw an increase in their involvement in organized, armed

conflict last year (an increase of 90 conflict events). Over 20% of organized, armed conflict in South Sudan last year involved political and communal militias. Violence against civilians is at the highest levels reported in the young country's history; in addition to killings, entire towns have been pillaged, burned, and destroyed, resulting in massive displacement **(The Guardian, 2014)**.

Political and communal militias are large perpetrators of violence against civilians, responsible for almost half (47.3%) of all civilian targeting in 2014. While civilian targeting by government and rebel forces saw decreases in the second half of 2014, militias increased their targeting of civilians during this time. Violence involving these groups occurs primarily in Lakes state. While cattle-raiding contributes to communal conflict in South Sudan, violence targeting ethnic groups is also common (in which looting and raiding are not the main drivers of the attack). Kiir and Machar are of different ethnicities – Dinka and Nuer, respectively – and violence against civilians (including aid workers) of these ethnicities has occurred as a proxy of civil war tensions **(The Associated Press, 2014)**.

Though peace processes between the government and opposition forces are continuing, they have not yet been successful in bringing about a cessation of violence. Even those closely connected to the negotiations admit that unless significant changes are made in mediation processes in 2015, peace efforts are likely to remain less than effective **(African Arguments, 2015)**.

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Sudan

Sudan continues to be one of the top three most violent countries in Africa (990 organized, armed conflict events last year). Sudan also continues to be amongst the deadliest countries on the continent, responsible for 3,892 fatalities in 2014. The majority of this violence occurs in the Darfur region where last year, with over 77% of conflict activities – and over 68% of resulting fatalities.

The majority of conflict in Darfur continues to be the targeting of civilians (especially internally displaced populations) by political militias – 'armed gangs' operating on behalf of political elites. While pro-government militias are the lead instigators of this targeting (190 instances of violence against civilians), the Rapid Support Forces (paramilitary forces operated by the Sudanese government) are the deadliest (responsible for 270 civilian deaths), making the RSF one of the most lethal non-state actors on the continent. In addition to targeting civilians, the RSF attacks communities accused of supporting rebels, raping, looting, burning houses, and displacing tens of thousands of people **(Reuters, 2014)**.

Despite the increase in civilian targeting in Darfur, the majority of fatalities in the region continue to result from other types of violence – mainly battles between government forces and rebel groups, as well as inter-communal conflict. Though military-vs-rebel battles made up only 6% of conflict events in Darfur last year, these battles were responsible for a third of all conflict-related fatalities (or 888 deaths) in the region. The majority of these battles pitted Sudanese military forces against the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Darfur Joint Resistance Forces. Despite a series of national dialogues between the

warring parties throughout the year, no significant peace agreements were made. In December 2014 a joint declaration (the "Sudan Call") was signed between political and armed opposition forces to: end the war, dismantle the one-party state, and achieve peace and a democratic transition in the country (**The Sudan Tribune, 2014**) – though the government has been less than supportive, seeing the Call as treasonous (**The Guardian, 2014**).* Given President al-Bashir's statement later in the month that the government would make no concessions to rebel forces – in addition to his refusing opposition demands for a conducive environment and transitional government – it seems unlikely that any real changes will be seen soon (**The Sudan Tribune, 2014**).

In 2014, Darfur surpassed Banaadir (Somalia) in the number of conflict events it experienced, making it the most violent subnational region in Africa (a 'title' Banaadir had held since 2010). Darfur saw 766 organized, armed conflict events last year (or 7.5% of all conflict on the continent). Of these, 517 events were instances of violence against civilians. This is over three times as many instances of civilian targeting when compared to Banaadir – making Darfur one of the most dangerous region on the continent for civilians. With al-Bashir having launched his bid for re-election earlier this week – "facing little threat to his quarter century in power" (**Agence France Presse, 2015**) – these ominous trends may continue – especially given the president's views on negotiations with opposition forces in order to reach peace. This could translate into continued mass displacement, civilian targeting, and ethnic and land-based tensions in Darfur and Sudan at large.
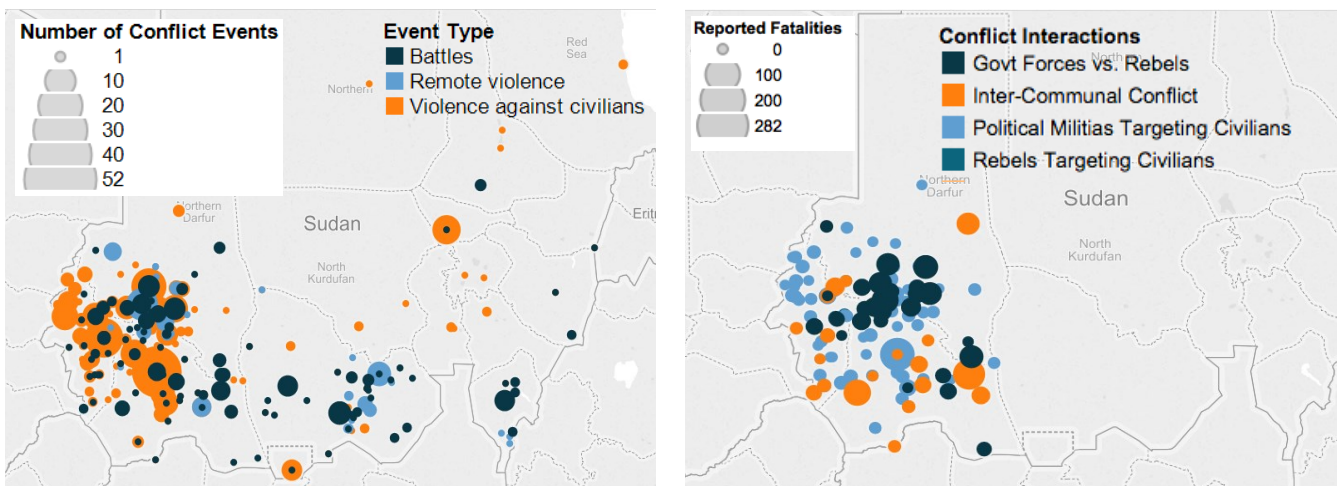

Figure 11: Organised Armed Conflict in Sudan (Left), and Fatalities by Conflict Interactions in Darfur (Right), in 2014.

* Please note: An earlier version of this report incorrectly stated that the government was a signatory on the joint declaration ("Sudan Call") signed in December 2014. This has since been corrected to note that the signatories on the Call were only the political and armed opposition forces.

Special Focus Topic: Political Militias and Remote Violence in 2014

Version 5 of ACLED carries a new event type termed 'Remote violence'. Remote violence is a event wherea conflict actor engages another group while remaining spatially removed from the area of attack. This can take the form of improvised explosive devices, air strikes, rocket attacks and bombs. In Africa, the use of these methods by various conflict actors has grown exponentially with remote violence accounting for 8.93% of recorded conflict events in 2014, up from 0.95% in 2005.

One reason for this increase is likely the growth of political militias as the dominant conflict actor in modern African states and the decline of the heavily armed rebel group. Political militias are now involved in 22% of conflict events and account for 37% of all events involving remote violence. Particular forms of remote violence, such as improvised explosive devices, are seen as a weapon by which actors that lack the ability or will to take over the government can still dictate government policy **(Merari, 1993)**. Previous analysis of particular case studies has found that groups will often defer to these tactics as they become weakened **(ACLED, 29 October 2014)**.

> **"Political militias are now involved in 22% of conflict events and account for 37% of all events involving remote violence".**

Analysis of the ACLED dataset has found that the rise in militia activity has been spearheaded by the growth in competition militias **(Raleigh, 2014)**. These militias are linked to politically active patrons and use force to advance or obstruct political change. Most importantly, they are active where government power is present but contested. Under such circumstances the deniability and intimidating nature of remote violence makes it an effective coercive tactic.

Remote violence attacks rose in Algeria just prior to the presidential elections on the 17 April (*see* **Figure 12**), and in Libya around the time of the February National Assembly elections, although remote violence would rise further late in the year as the country became split between two competing parliaments. In Egypt, remote violence spiked in early 2014 after the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group **(Abdelaziz and Almasy, 25 December 2013)**. There was also a spike in April before the controversial 2014 presidential elections on 26 May.
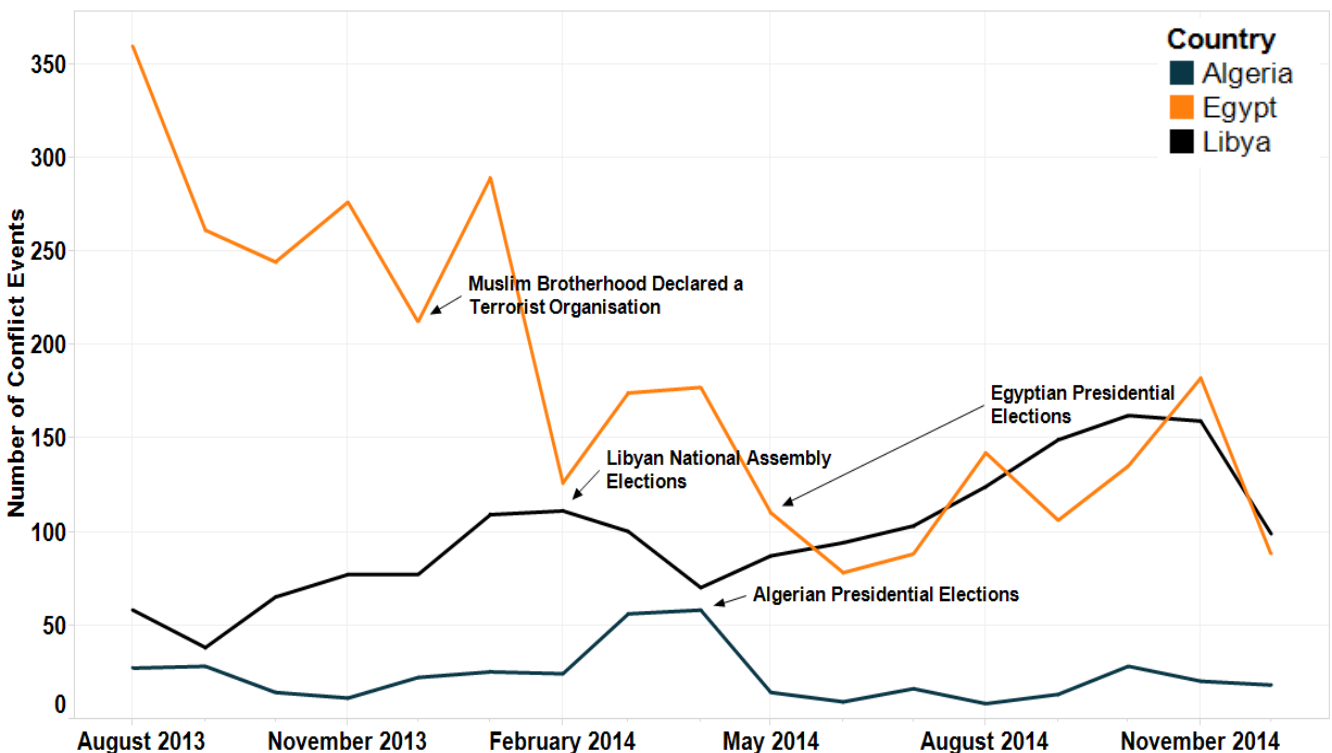

Figure 12: Remote Violence by Country , Algeria, Egypt and Libya, from 1 August 2013 - 31 December 2014.

Special Focus Topic: Political Militias and Remote Violence in 2014

In 2014, state forces were involved in 22% of events involving remote violence; in many cases they were the perpetrators. Airstrikes and bombing runs by government forces have been especially common in areas where insurgents control significant portions of territory, such as Somalia and Darfur (*see* **Figure 13**). Remote violence offers a means by which the Sudanese and Somalian state can attack the insurgents with minimal risk to their own troops. The presence of defined insurgent territory also means that state forces can launch attacks with a certain

degree of impunity, knowing that such attacks will damage insurgent resources. However government participation in remote violence, especially against civilians and rebel movements, has decreased year on year from 36% in 2008. The one type of remote violence engagement where state participation is increasing is between the state and political militias. Should the trend of increased militia activity continue, it is likely that 2015 will see another increase in remote violence.
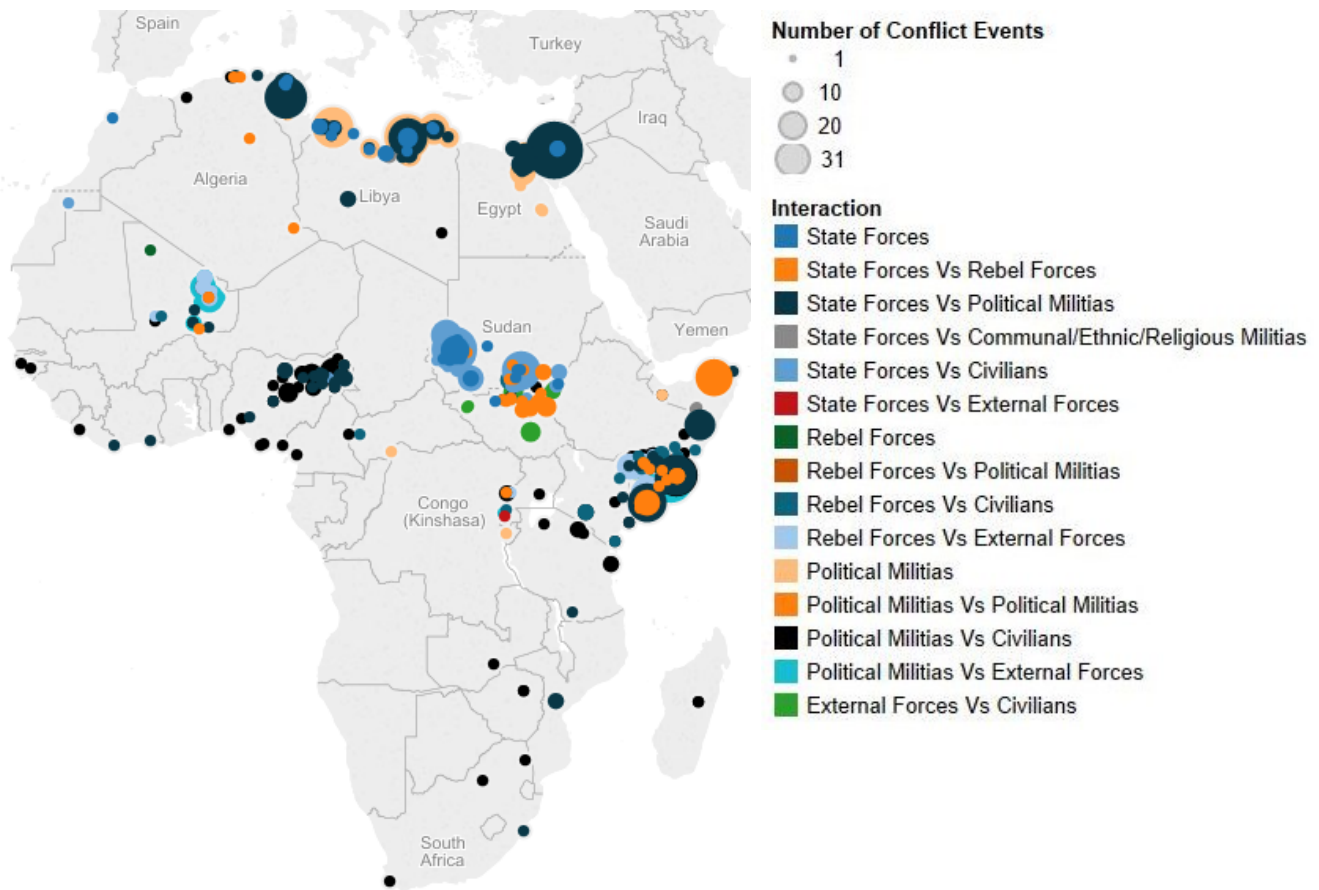

Figure 13: Remote Violence by Interaction in Africa, from 1 January - 31 December 2014.

Support

Sources

Conflict Trends reports are compiled from ACLED data and draw on news sources, civil society reports, and academic and policy analyses.
Full details of sources and coding processes are available online on the **ACLED website**.