

Fact Sheet: Conflict Surges in Sudan

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Key Trends

- Since fighting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on 15 April, ACLED has recorded approximately 90 battle events around the country¹This analysis includes published data for the period of 15-21 April 2023, available through the [ACLED website](https://acleddata.com), as well as preliminary unpublished data for the period of 22-24 April 2023, which will be released via the next weekly update, along with data for the period of 25-28 April 2023. Details are subject to change as further information becomes available.

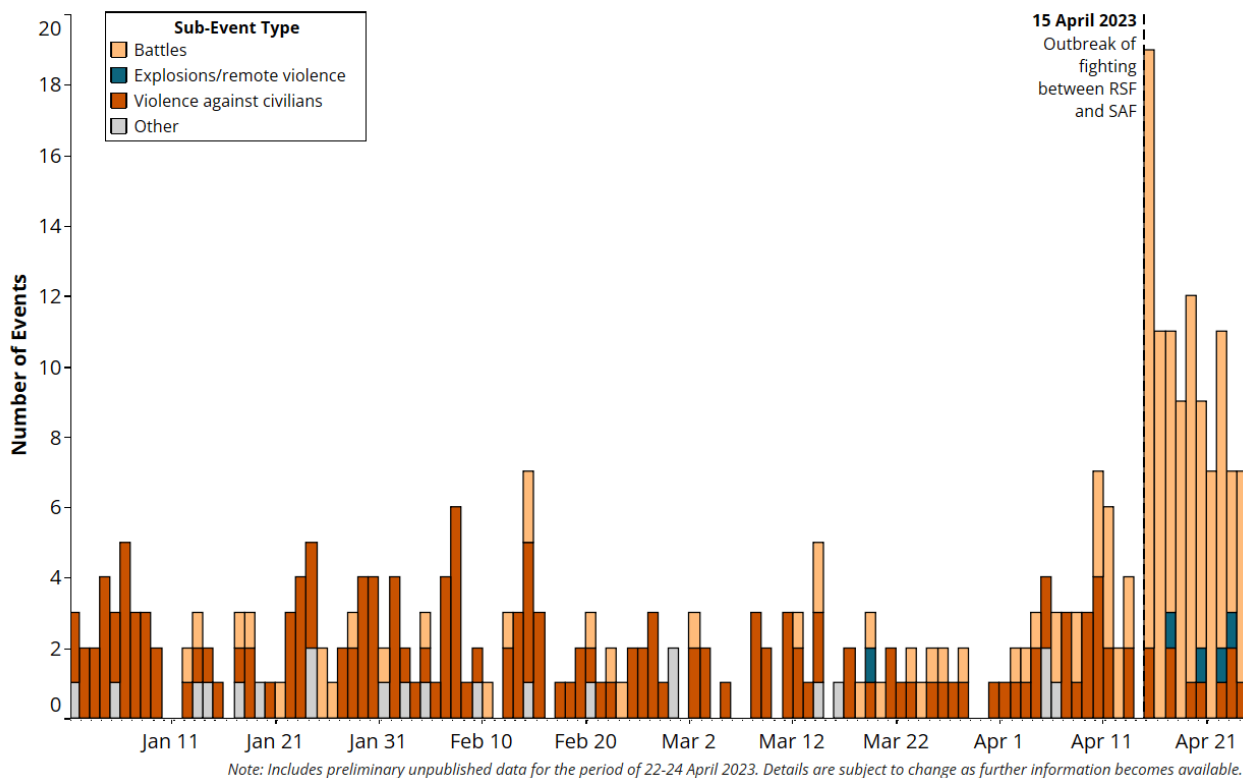
During the first week of the conflict, from 15 to 21 April, clashes increased more than 1600% relative to the weekly average for the preceding year

- The epicenter of political violence in Sudan has shifted from Darfur to Khartoum, which has accounted for nearly 50% of all recorded incidents since the start of the conflict
- Two-thirds of the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces during the first week of clashes took place in cities of over 100,000 people

Battles outside Khartoum have centered in urban areas along major roadways, especially east-west corridors from Kassala to West Darfur

Conflict Surges in Sudan

1 January 2023 - 24 April 2023



Overview

On 15 April, fighting erupted in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), aligned with General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti. The clashes represented a definitive breakdown in the delicate power arrangement that had developed between al-Burhan and Hemedti since the removal of Sudan's former leader, Omar al-Bashir, in April 2019.²The Economist, 'A general, a warlord and an economist vie to run Sudan,' 15 July 2021; Sudan Tribune, 'Sudan's hidden power struggle between Burhan, Hemedti over civil service,' 28 September 2022 The recent hostilities come less than five months after a new framework agreement to relaunch the political process for Sudan's transition to a civilian government. The SAF and RSF had shown little willingness to adhere to the framework, failing to agree on power sharing, establishing a civilian government, and integrating the RSF into the military by the deadline.³Samy Magdy, 'What sparked the violent struggle to control Sudan's future?' Associated Press, 17 April 2023

Increased military exercises and rising tensions between SAF and RSF soldiers foreshadowed fighting in Khartoum in the weeks leading up to the confrontation.⁴Declan Walsh, '2 Generals Took Over a Country. Will They Deliver Democracy or War?' The New York Times, 6 April 2023 New security measures were also put in place before the onset of the conflict, including the construction of walls around the SAF military base in Khartoum, increased civilian inspections, and frequent closures of roadways and bridges.⁵Mohammed Amin, 'Sudan simmers as Burhan-Hemeti rivalry threatens to boil over,' Middle East Eye, 30 March 2023 Both al-Burhan and Hemedti made rival diplomatic

missions to neighboring countries in recent months to solicit support – a clear indicator of the growing rifts despite the public facade of unity.⁶[Declan Walsh, '2 Generals Took Over a Country. Will They Deliver Democracy or War?' The New York Times, 6 April 2023;](#) [Mohammed Amin, Sudan simmers as Burhan-Hemeti rivalry threatens to boil over,' Middle East Eye, 30 March 2023;](#) Some also predicted a popular uprising following renewed demonstrations, a crippled economy, and rising violence in Darfur in early April, see [The Economist, 'Sudan faces collapse three years after the fall of its dictator,' 9 April 2023](#) The facade violently collapsed under the weight of these tensions on 15 April: during the following week, political violence in Sudan reached levels over four times higher than the weekly average for the past year.

Civilians Caught in the Crossfire of Escalating Fighting Between the SAF and RSF

Clashes between the SAF and RSF have constituted 85% of all political violence events recorded in Sudan since 15 April. Although attacks using explosives and remote violence have been uncommon in Sudan, making up less than 2% of political violence over the past 12 months, the most recent fighting has included frequent airstrikes, shelling, and other explosive incidents targeting military and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals. For example, SAF airstrikes have hit RSF bases in the Kafouri area of Khartoum and in the city of Omdurman.

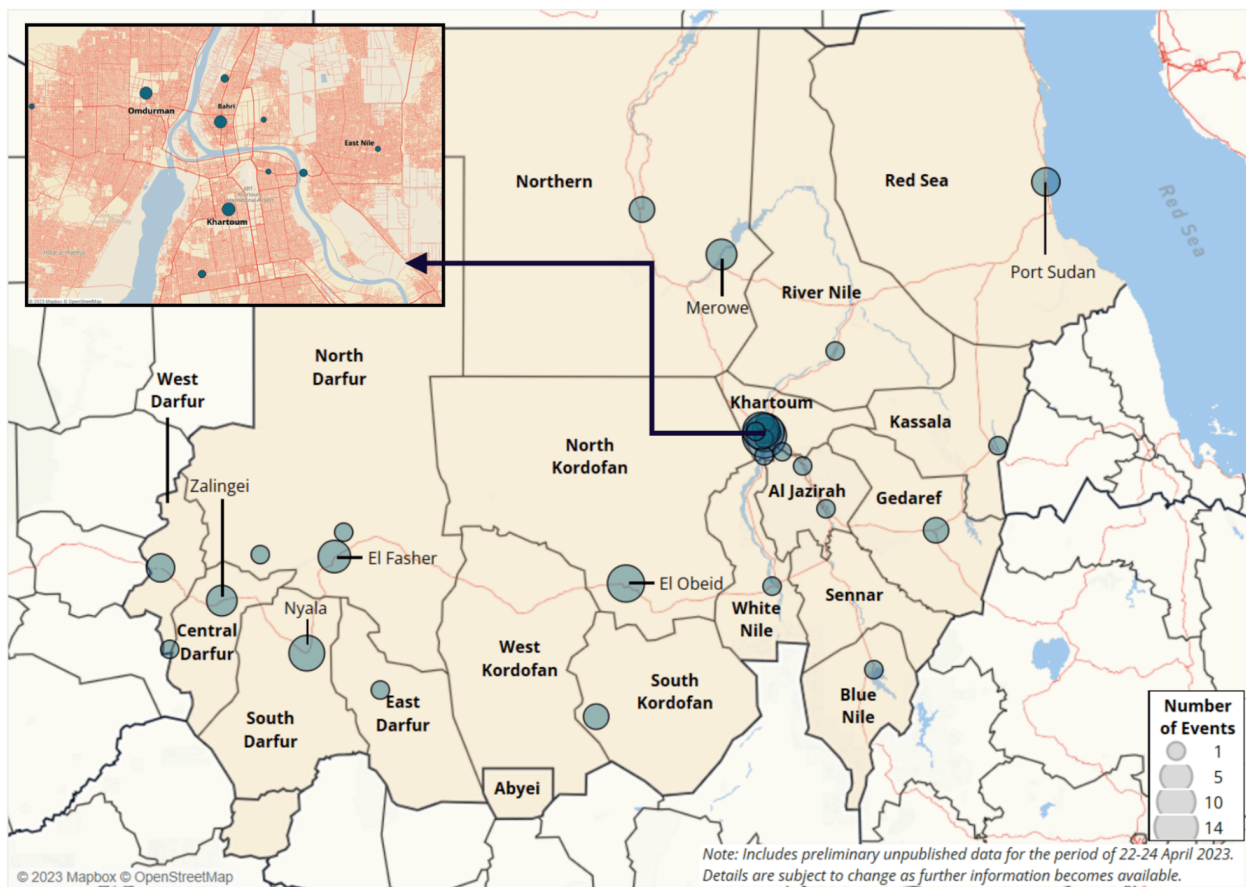
Many civilians have been caught in the crossfire of the conflict and have also been directly targeted outside of the clashes, including incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.⁷[United Nations Women, 'Statement on Sudan by UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous,' 21 April 2023](#) While figures from early reports vary as the situation continues to develop, civilian casualty estimates range from dozens to over 300.⁸[Amnesty International, 'Sudan: Parties to the conflict must ensure protection of civilians as deaths mount,' 17 April 2023;](#) [Radio Dabanga, '144+ civilians killed as Sudan clashes continue, especially in Khartoum and Merowe,' 18 April 2023;](#) [AP, 'Heavy clashes rock Sudan's capital despite truce extension,' 28 April 2023](#) In multiple civilian targeting incidents, RSF and SAF forces have detained and assaulted civil society actors and journalists, including an RSF arrest, interrogation, and physical assault of a spokesperson for the Sudanese Democratic Alliance for Social Justice in Khartoum. At the start of the fighting, a SAF soldier detained and assaulted a BBC journalist in Omdurman. In addition to these abductions and attacks, looting and destruction of civilian property is widespread, especially in Khartoum and throughout Darfur, as armed groups exploit the outbreak of conflict to steal from banks, shops, humanitarian offices, and homes. As a result, thousands of people have fled the conflict zones to other areas of Sudan and neighboring countries.⁹[International Organization for Migration, 'DTM Sudan – Sudan Situation Report,' 22 April 2023](#)

Shifting Geography of Political Violence

With the escalation of fighting in the capital, the epicenter of political violence has shifted to Khartoum (*see maps below*). Over the year prior to the latest clashes, the Darfur region was the most violent area of the country and home to 55% of all political violence incidents recorded in Sudan each week. However, during the period of 15 to 21 April 2023, political violence reported in Khartoum grew from the weekly average of 14% to almost 50% of all recorded events. Violence also escalated in other areas like North Kordofan state and Northern state, which typically experience lower levels of political violence.

SAF-RSF Fighting Centered in Urban Areas

15 - 24 April 2023

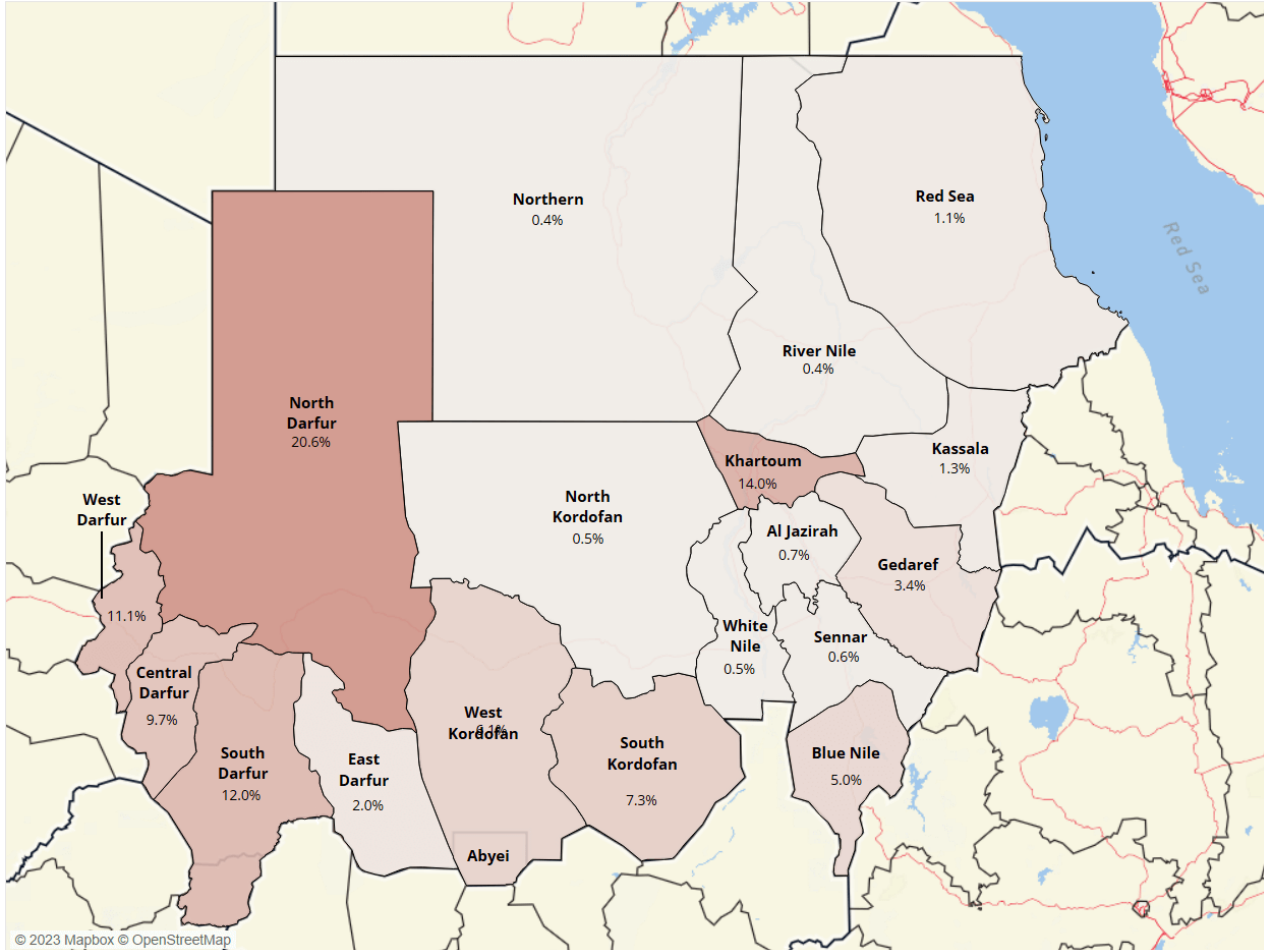


Most clashes were concentrated in Khartoum and urban areas along major roadways (*see map above*). Last week, two-thirds of the fighting between the SAF and RSF took place in cities with over 100,000 people.¹⁰World Population Review, 'Population of Cities in Sudan 2023,' 2023 Outside of battles in Khartoum and neighboring Omdurman, fighting was highest in the cities of El Obeid, Nyala, and El Fasher. Fighting beyond Khartoum is also evidence of the RSF's persistent involvement in peripheral areas. In some regions, such as Darfur, the SAF and RSF have reportedly engaged in widespread recruitment from local tribal groups in recent months.¹¹Ayin Network, 'Darfur's recruitment race: Sudan's army and Rapid Support Forces compete for influence,' 26 March 2023 While many local armed groups outside the country's main urban areas have not been reported

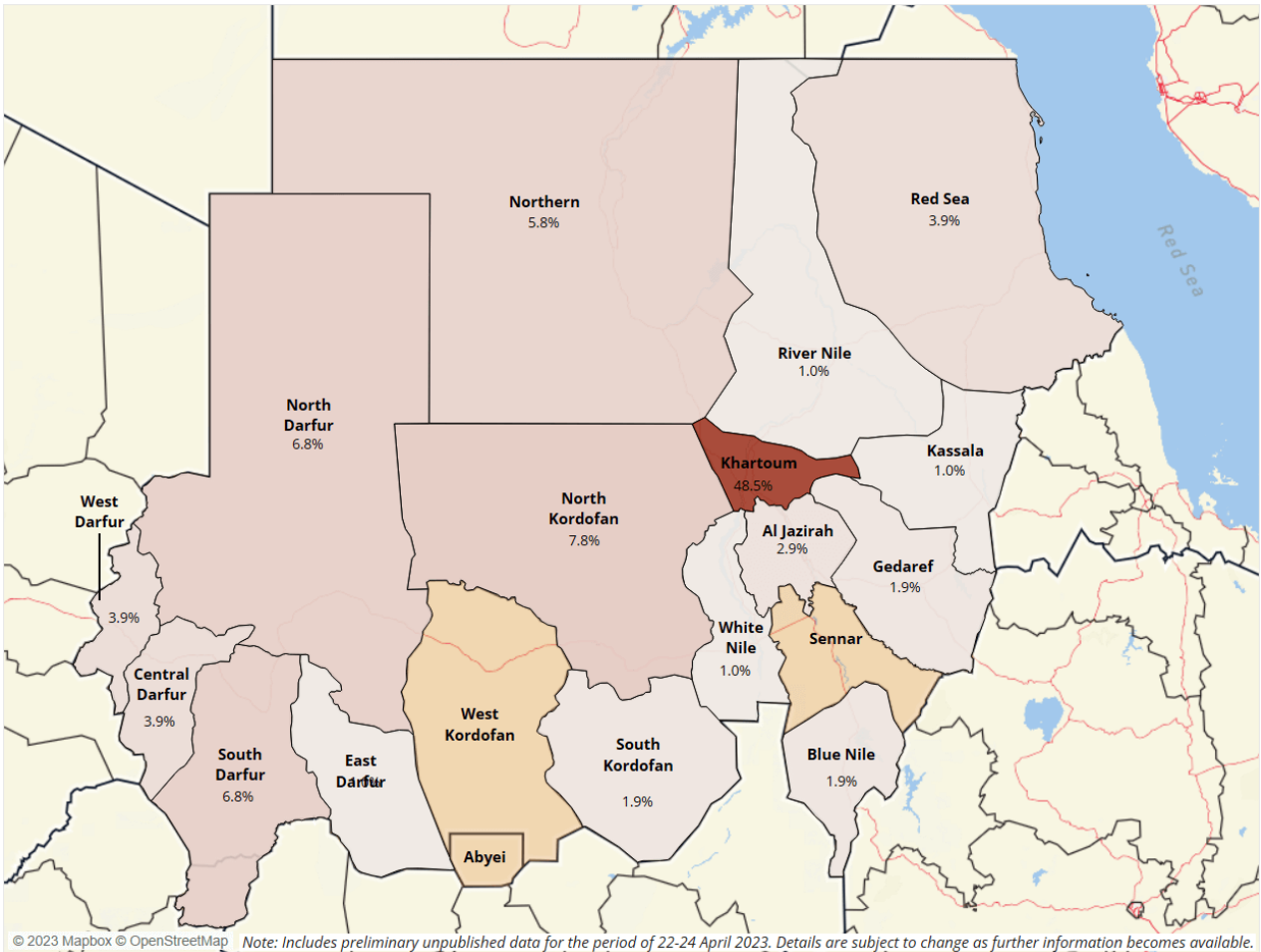
as active in the fighting, these fighters may be operating within the ranks of the SAF or RSF. As the conflict escalates, heightened RSF and SAF engagement outside Khartoum may also exacerbate fighting between local armed groups around the country.

Distribution of Political Violence Events in Sudan

14 April 2022 - 14 April 2023



15 April - 24 April 2023



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Visuals in this fact sheet were produced by **Ana Marco**.

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