

Welcome to the February 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 on the [ACLED website](http://www.acleddata.com).

Last month, ACLED launched Version 7: a fully revised and updated conflict and protest event dataset containing records of all political violence and protest in Africa from 1997 through 2016 inclusive. Several supplements to previous years' data have been made, including Somalia 2005-08, North Africa December 2010-December 2011 excl. Libya, and Sudan 1997-2003. Targeted reviews were

conducted for LRA activity in Sudan, Central African Republic and DR-Congo and the protests in Oromia region of Ethiopia in 2014-2015 along with more specific events across the continent. This month’s report is an overview of conflict in 2016 and profiles trends in violence in six key focus countries: **Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Republic of Congo, Somalia** and **Tunisia** (see pages 7-8). In-depth reports outline how reduction in riot and protest activity in **Ethiopia** have been replaced by sustained battles between state forces and OLF and ONLA rebel groups; decreasing Boko Haram activity and sustained violence by Fulani herders in central **Nigeria**, and several conflict scenarios for the coming months in violence between rival military factions and non-state groups in **Libya**.

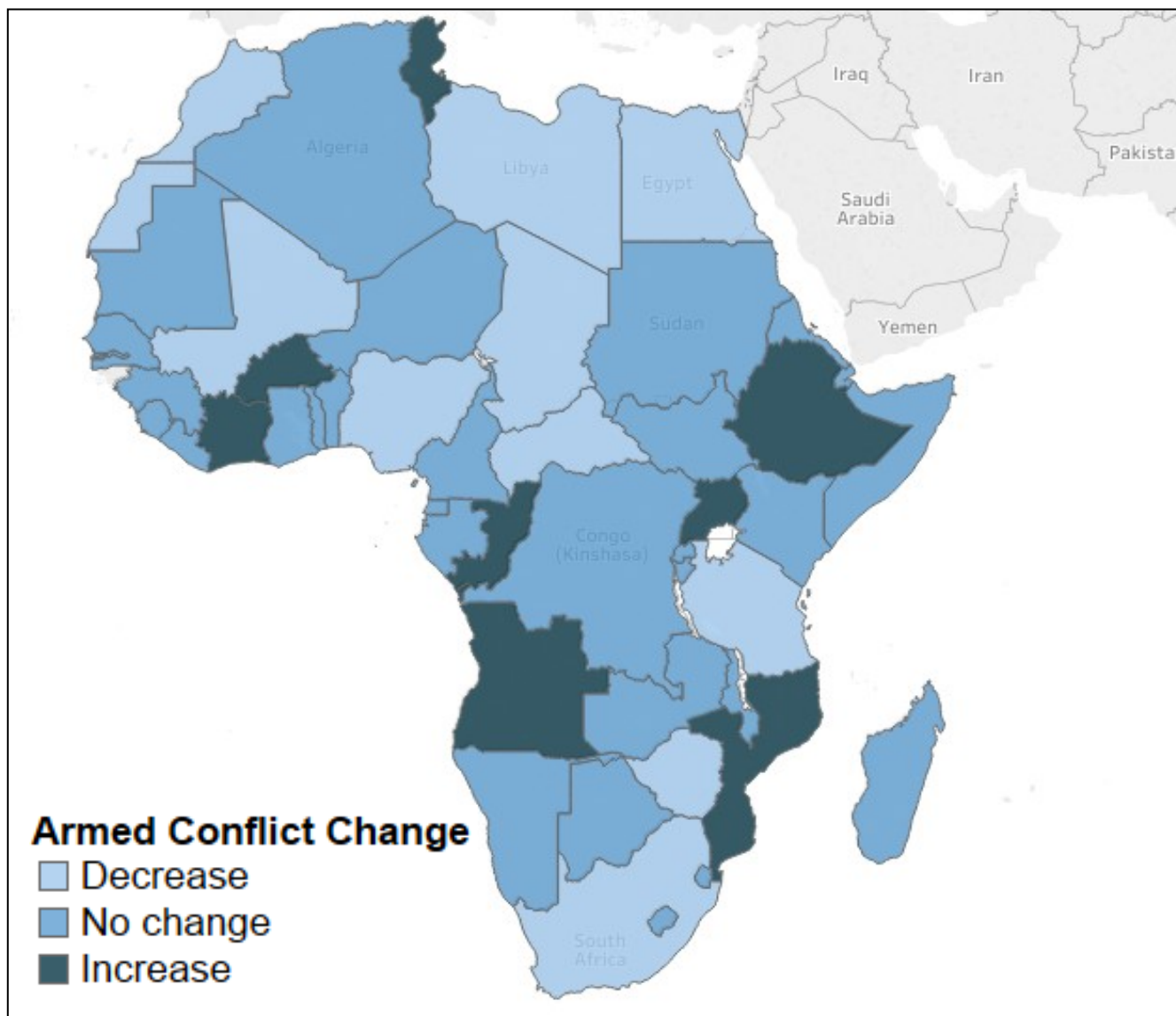


Figure 1: Conflict Increase, Decrease and No Change across Africa from 2015 - 2016.

Overview of Continental Trends

African states experienced high rates of both political violence and protest in 2016 (see Figure 2). The aggregated totals are remarkably similar to those of 2015, which indicates three important lessons going forward:

The crisis points on the continent- Libya, South Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria- continue to produce significant violence, with substantial harm to civilians and the political process of peace. But under-reported crises constitute a large proportion of violence across African states, including the ‘not quite civil war’ in Burundi, and the ongoing wars occurring in Sudan, Ethiopia’s protesting and conflict, and the increasing violence activity throughout Mozambique. Finally, the continent contains a multitude of different means to oppose, challenge and enforce governments and government policy, and a ‘one size fits all’ approach to analysis will produce poor results.

But the overall patterns are clear: battles and large scale wars are on the decline, as they have been for quite some time. In their place are multiple, co-existing agents who engage in a variety of strategies to make their place within the political landscape: local militias, pro-government militias, political militias working at the behest of politicians and political parties, civil society organizations forming protest movements, external groups seeking local partners (e.g. ISIS), and more occasionally, rebel groups seeking to overtake the government. These groups may use similar forms of violence — including attacking civilians, bombing, clashing with security forces, rioting — but they are distinct in their goals. Their separate and combined effect on life across Africa is distinguished by the levels and periods of violence they produce.

The conflicts affecting African states are not unique, and

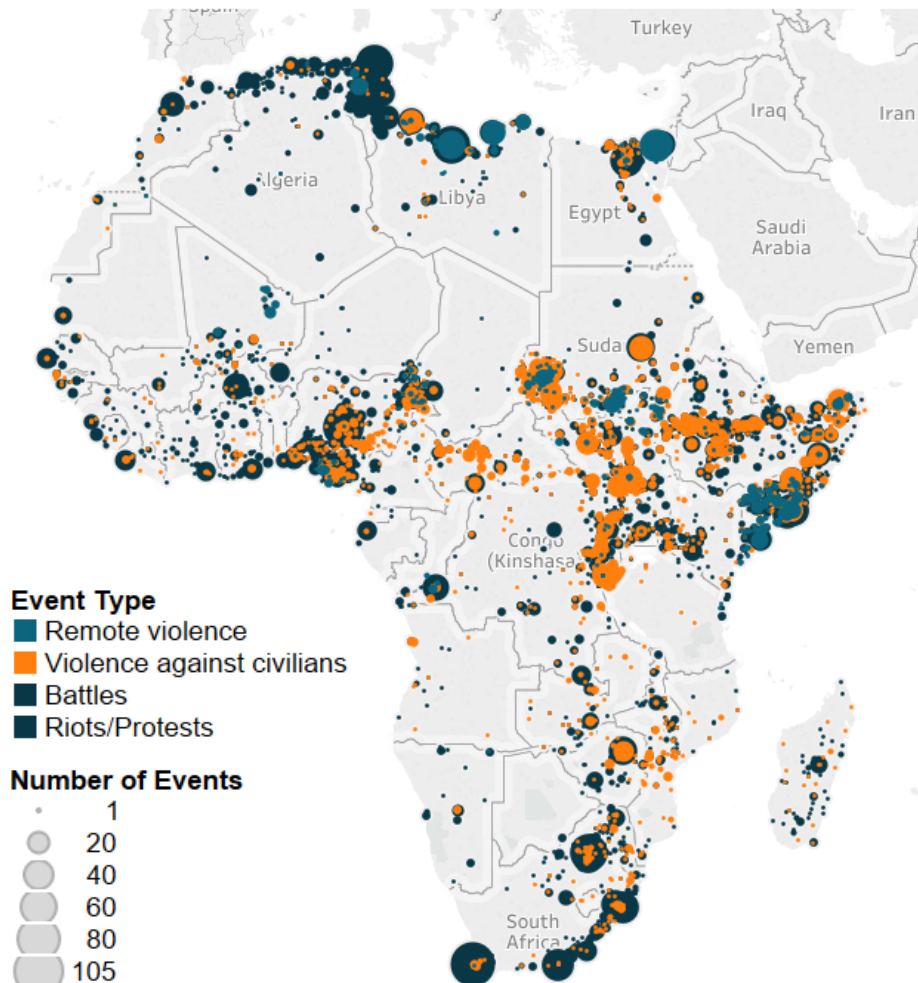


Figure 2: Political Violence and Protest in Africa, 2016.



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their experiences are instructive to the rest of the world: in a time when pitched battles decrease, a rise in overall insecurity is gripping developing and developed states. Across Africa, governments and citizens have lived in states of disorder that reflect the political dynamics of the moment. State governments are forcefully demonstrating their hold of the means of violence within and across borders, and actions that involve state forces continue to rise — 24% of all actions in 2016 involved state forces, a proportion close to other recent high points of 2011-2012. When combined with the acts of militia groups who are often producing violence at the behest of powerful local, regional or party political leaders, the conclusion is that politics is causing political violence, and the strongest are using violence to enforce their will on others.

The events across the combined large-scale crises in Africa include Libya, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria comprise 33% of all violent conflict that occurred across Africa in 2016; this total represents a decrease from 35% in 2015, and 40% in 2014. But 55% of all fatalities attributed to political violence occur in these states, down from 58% in 2015. There are significant differences between the overall conflict profile of the continent, and the combined conflict patterns across these crises: there are far more clashes with security forces and other armed agents at 45% of the total activity (compared to a 30% continental average), and attacks on civilians are similar, but fatality risks are 5% higher than in non-crisis areas. These totals suggest that the likelihood of experiencing a pitched battle are significantly higher in crisis areas, but violence against civilians is more widespread across the continent.

Of those crises, Somalia remains the most active, followed by Nigeria, South Sudan and Libya, respectively. Somalia has almost three times the violence of the other states, who each have approximately 740 armed, organized events in 2016. In effect, Somalia's violence is equal to the combined violence of Libya, South Sudan and Nigeria. Yet the fatality ratios suggest a different story: while Somalia has the highest total number of reported fatalities, Nigeria has the highest ratio at over 6 fatalities per event, compared to 2.5 per event in Somalia, 4.5 for South Sudan and close to 4 per event in Libya. Other striking differences underscore how these crises are distinct: fatalities in Nigeria are overwhelmingly against civilians compared to battles between armed agents, and fatalities when the state retakes territory are also markedly higher than in other crisis contexts. Libyan conflict appears to avoid direct targeting of civilians.

The heterogeneity of agents is an important indicator of how manageable a crisis is, as a low number of actors means that parties can coordinate to end violence and cooperate in a transformed political system. Unfortunately, the four crisis states suggest a very diverse environment: Libya's distinct armed, organized agent total in 2016 is 66, more than double the number in 2012-2013. Despite Nigeria's decreasing violence, the number of violent agents has increased from 53 to 93; yet both Somalia's agents (156) and South Sudan's (69) have decreased in small numbers from last year. The increase in Nigeria is entirely attributed to communal, local groups; typically increases in such groups suggest that sectarian violence is increasing as 'identity politics' resumes a primary divider of communities; and also confirms that law enforcement and trust in security forces is low at the local level. Groups that take violence into their own hands to address local political issues bypass the state and state laws to do so, often without recourse from the government. In particular, the Nigerian state has been active in other realms, which may suggest another reason why local groups are using an 'unsupervised' moment to engage in violence, or taking advantage of other internal crises to resume and reframe long running local conflicts. These small groups — across Nigeria and Somalia primarily — frequently appear but do not persistently engage in conflict; instead small flare ups are common. However, campaigns like the Fulani in the Middle Belt of Nigeria surpass a local skirmish and indicate far wider problems for governance and rule of law in the region.

There are few indications that the violence in these four countries will decline in 2017 — barring Libya's minor decrease, all have sustained similar levels or grown, in Somalia's case. But they represent very different conflict forms, and the intensity and form of their violence cannot be overstated. Somalia is now well into a competition between the government and a revived Al Shabaab; unwelcome new members — including ISIS — make headline news, but the majority of violence continues to be due to Al Shabaab's attempts to dismantle any sign of functioning central or regional governance. Over a hundred small clan groups create local violence that has long substituted for a security system. Libya is torn between three governments with unequal legitimacy and capacity; Nigeria has successfully stopped Boko Haram's domestic advances, but the group remains, along with a host of additional security vacuums that emerged during the Jonathan Presidency. Finally, the South Sudan war persists and diffuses (in all

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likelihood, southward in 2017), with no end to the destruction in sight, and no capable political leader on the horizon.

Underreported Conflict and Riots/Protests

Political violence is not limited to countries experiencing civil wars or large-scale insurgencies. Despite lesser media coverage, a number of countries across the continent witnessed lower yet sustained rates of armed conflict, as state and non-state actors continue to use violence to influence political dynamics or consolidate their position *vis à vis* other competitors. The political nature of these low-level conflicts is such that, unless a political solution to the crises is found, violence is likely to persist or to escalate in the near future. This situation is common in several African states, but particularly intense in Burundi and Mozambique.

In Burundi, battles between armed groups declined markedly in 2016 compared to the previous year (ACLED, May 2016). This pattern suggests that rebel groups have largely renounced armed confrontations with state forces as the government managed to retain control of its territory. However, data show a sustained increase in civilian targeting, reflecting the changing nature of the Burundi crisis and its persistent lethality. Rather than seeking direct confrontation, government forces and armed militias widely

resorted to violence against unarmed civilians and targeted political assassinations to either consolidate the grip on power or manifest their strength. While the government has been successful in fending off the insurgency started in 2015, this has not stopped the violence, which will likely continue to affect the country in the coming months.

A low-level armed conflict also continued to endanger the fragile peace between ruling FRELIMO and the former rebels of RENAMO in Mozambique (ACLED, 7 October 2016; ACLED, 8 April 2016). Intermittent truces between the two parties have failed to stop the violence, which has increased from 19 conflict events in 2015 to 92 in 2016. The largest increase involved violence against civilians, which constitute the vast majority of events and are the largest contributor to conflict-related fatalities. The two parties, who accuse each other of violating short-lived ceasefires, are battling over the control of profitable trade routes and local governance in the northern RENAMO strongholds. Despite their mutual commitment to resuming the peace process, these trends suggest that both FRELIMO and RENAMO target non-combatants in the attempt of enhancing their bargaining position.

Opposition to governments across Africa has also taken different forms, as several African states continued to witness high rates of protest activity (see Figure 3). The number of events involving protesters and rioters increased by 4.8% from 2015, with major increases recorded in Ethiopia, Chad and Tunisia. South Africa and Ethiopia make up approximately one third of total protest events, with this share increasing to 50% when including Tunisia and Nigeria.

The poor performance of governments was the most common driver of protest, with citizens all across the continent demonstrating against ailing service delivery, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and increasing physical insecurity. In many countries, protests were linked to the election cycle, to contest or influence the outcome of the vote – as in Gabon or Uganda – or to demand new elections – as in the case of the postponed elections in Democratic Republic of Congo. A third common motive of protest was the absence of political liberties and government repression, which sparked most protest events in Ethiopia and Chad.

These trends reveal that popular protests present a serious challenge for the stability of African governments.

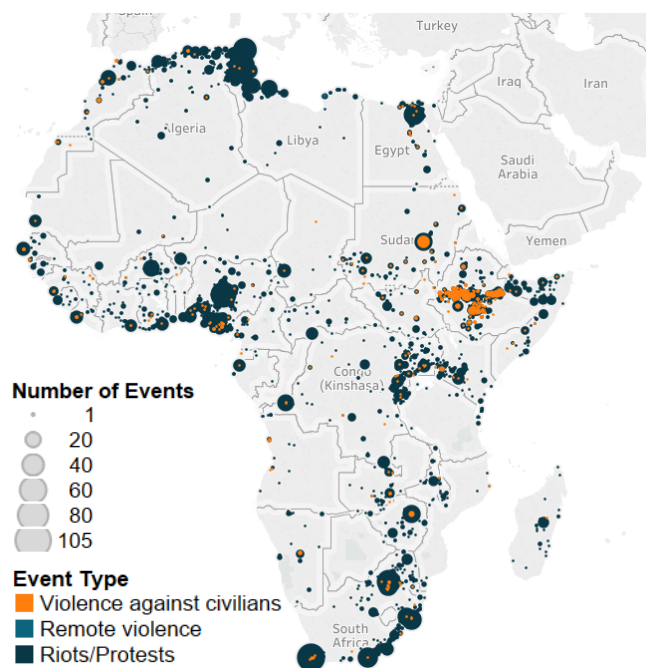


Figure 3: Number of Events Involving Rioters and Protesters by Event Type in Africa, 2016.

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Protests are not only widespread within and across states, but in some cases – the most notable being the Arab uprisings in 2011 – they have proved successful in bringing about far-reaching political changes. As such, both democratic and (semi-)authoritarian governments have developed a variety of strategies to cope with dissent, ranging from tolerance and accommodation – as during the recent wave of protest in Morocco – to outright repression – as in Ethiopia and Sudan.

An overview of regions shows the multifaceted geography of riots and protests across the continent. In North Africa, all states witnessed high rates of protest activity in 2016, confirming the longer trend started in 2011. In Algeria and Tunisia, the number of protest events was higher than in 2011, raising concerns that local grievances may give rise again to wider collective actions. Despite a relative decrease from the previous year, protest movements in Egypt, Morocco and Libya have also called attention to the multiple weaknesses of these states.

South Africa experienced the highest level of protests and rioting in 2016. Violent riots marred the run-up to the municipal elections in August and the student-led #FeesMustFall campaign, revealing widespread dissatisfaction with the policies of the African National Congress (ACLED, 9 December 2016). Police often resorted to violent means in the attempt of curbing protests, but this repression ended up feeding more disorder. With new general elections scheduled in 2019 and growing infighting within the ruling party, violence is likely to feature prominently over the coming months in South Africa.

Despite the frequent use of violence by both protesters and police, protest activity has largely remained peaceful in South Africa. By contrast, the greatest share of violently repressed protests was found in Ethiopia, where security forces reportedly killed 486 protesters and hundreds of other civilians as a wave of popular mobilisation spread across the country (Insight on Conflict, 2 November 2016). While it is unclear if the state repression has been successful in stifling dissent or inhibiting media reporting, the new year may tell if the government will face an insurgency or alternative forms of mobilisation arising from the ashes of the Oromo protest movement.

Conflict Agents

In the past two decades, the primary perpetrators of organized, armed political violence on the African continent

changed from rebel groups to political militias (see Raleigh, 2014) and government forces. Figure 4 maps the most active agent in each African country in 2016. In the majority of countries, either state forces or political militias are the most active agent in conflict.

In 2016, political militias were responsible for 30% of all organized armed conflict in Africa. These groups use violence as a means to shape and influence the existing political system, but do not seek to overthrow national regimes. They instead operate as ‘armed gangs’ for different political elites – including politicians, governments, opposition groups, etc. Of named political militias, the Imbonerakure of Burundi (the militant youth wing of the CNDD-FDD) was by far the most active, whose involvement nearly doubled from 138 conflict events in 2015 to 202 conflict events in 2016 in conjunction with the Burundi Crisis.¹

Government forces are responsible for 34% of all conflict in Africa during 2016. This is an increase in their rate of involvement for the second year in a row as they seek to forcefully demonstrate their hold of the means of violence within and across borders. Government forces are the only group to have increased their rate of involvement in conflict from 2015 to 2016 (from 31.7% to 33.7%). The most active state forces in 2016 are the militaries of Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and South Sudan – with especially

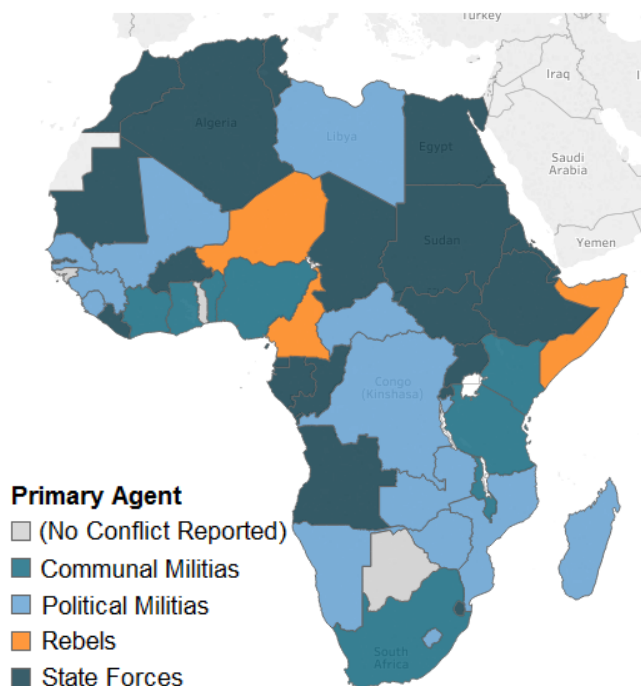


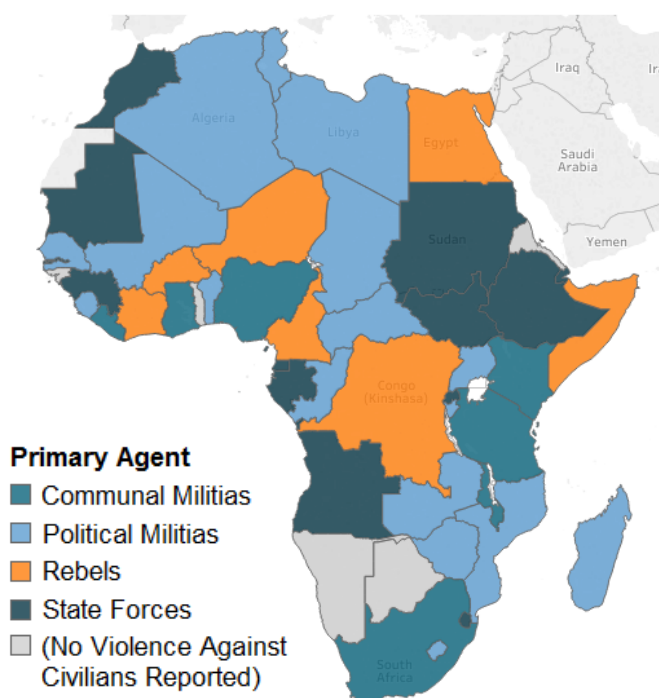
Figure 4: Most Active Conflict Agent by Country in Africa, 2016.

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stark increases in the rate of activity of the militaries of Sudan from 332 to 460 events between 2015 and 2016; and Ethiopia, whose involvement nearly tripled from 155 conflict events in 2015 to 448 in 2016. [Conflict spiked in Sudan](#) in the first half of the year, primarily driven by battles opposing government and rebel forces, which reached their highest levels since 1997. These clashes have occurred against a backdrop of limited advances on the political stage, with ceasefires proving difficult to hold as a result. The increase in state conflict involvement in Ethiopia in 2016 is driven almost entirely by the [uprisings in the Oromia region](#), where in its strenuous efforts to contain a wave of protest unseen for decades, the government has launched a violent crackdown that is estimated to have killed more than one thousand people over one year.

For more on agents of conflict in Africa in 2016, see [ACLED’s recent trend assessment](#).

Political militias, government forces, and communal militias are the primary perpetrators responsible for reported civilian fatalities across the African continent; all three of these groups increased their rate of civilian fatalities from 2015 to 2016. Figure 5 maps the most lethal agents of civilian targeting in each African country in 2016.



Increases in reported civilian fatalities at the hands of communal militias is largely driven by the lethality of the Fulani ethnic militia in Nigeria, which is responsible for a reported 884 civilian fatalities in 2016 (up from 546 in 2015), as well as the Murle ethnic militia in Sudan, whose targeting multiplied over six times (responsible for 246 reported civilian fatalities in 2016). The increase in the rate of involvement in violence against civilians by state forces is largely driven by the military forces of Ethiopia, in conjunction with the uprisings in the Oromia region, and Sudan with the increase in violence combatting opposition. Unidentified armed groups (UAGs) continue to be lead perpetrators of civilian targeting, often used because of their anonymous status; UAGs in Burundi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Sudan continue to be highly active and lethal. (For more on the strategic use of UAGs in conflict zones, see the [ACLED blog post on the topic](#).)

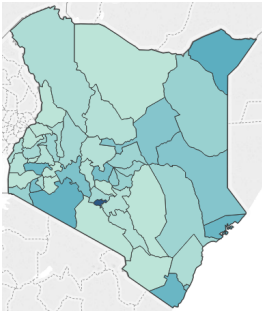
Rebel group presence continues to be lethal for civilians, these groups are responsible for a reported 1,684 civilian fatalities in 2016, but this represents a dramatic decrease from a reported 7,285 civilian fatalities by rebels in 2015. This decrease is largely a result of the decrease in reported civilian deaths at the hands of Boko Haram (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyah) – which is in large part due to a loss of territorial control following large-scale military operations in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa State. Regardless of this decrease, however, Boko Haram remains one of the top three largest threats to civilians in Africa – responsible for 790 reported civilian fatalities in 2016.

For more on violent conflict actors in Africa in 2016, see [ACLED’s recent trend assessment](#).

¹ACLED classifies unidentified armed groups (UAGs) with the same interaction code as political militias as [these groups have many similarities to political militias](#), especially in that they can often act as ‘mercenaries’ and do the violent bidding of elites. These political elites (governors, political party leaders, etc.) are similar to governments in that they do not want to take open responsibility for their violent actions by name. [Unidentified armed groups \(UAGs\)](#) constitute a large share of violent actors in the ACLED dataset; nearly 20% of organized armed conflict carried out by violent actors last year in Africa involve UAGs.

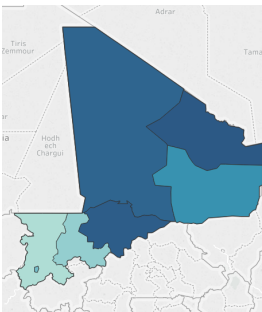
Figure 5: Primary Perpetrator of Civilian Fatalities by Country in Africa, 2016.

Conflict Trends Summaries



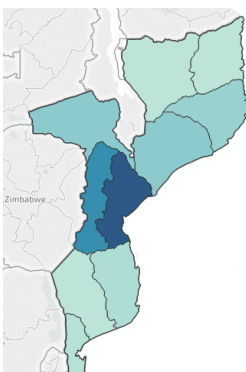
Kenya

Kenya saw a decrease in political violence and reported fatalities in 2016. The vast majority of fatalities in 2016 still came from Al Shabaab activity. The country also saw a spike in demonstrations in June over whether the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) should be reformed before the general elections of August 2017 ([Africa Confidential, 10 June 2016](#)). The opposition holds the IEBC as responsible for its electoral defeat in 2013, and in June opposition supporters demonstrated in the opposition strongholds of Nairobi and Nyanza. The state response was notably violent resulting in multiple deaths. A similar polemic did not arise for the rest of the year; subsequent riot and protest events involved localised grievances over development, police conduct and payment. Nevertheless, with Kenya’s elections on the horizon, and with concerns over voter registration and institutional impartiality, there is ample risk for political tensions to turn into political violence.



Mali

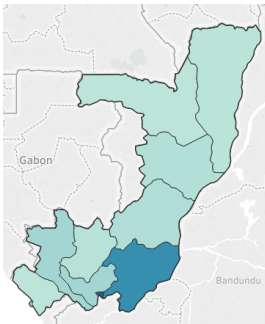
Mali saw a fluctuating amount of low-level violence in 2016. While groups like AQIM, Ansar Dine and other Islamist militias continue to target state forces, peacekeepers and civilians with remote explosives, ambushes, and kidnappings, secular groups such as the National Alliance for the Protection of the Fulani Identity and the Restoration of Justice (ANSIPRJ) and the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad (CMA) also staged several notable attacks in 2016. Periodic clashes between the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense group (GATIA), a pro-government militia, and the CMA, a coalition of secular rebel groups, also signal continued difficulties in the peace process between the central government in Bamako and the Tuaregs in the North.



Mozambique

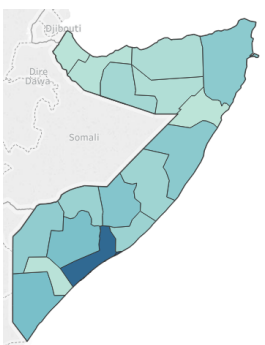
Mozambique suffered a dramatic increase in political violence in 2016 with an almost doubling of reported fatalities and almost triple 2015’s rate of conflict events. The majority of fatalities and activity came from clashes between the Mozambican government and fighters of the opposition Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). These clashes have been ongoing since late 2013 and have intensified since the disputed elections in 2014. In early 2016, RENAMO demanded the right to set up an autonomous government in the provinces where it won a majority in the 2014 elections by the end of March ([Cummings, 22 June 2016](#)). RENAMO’s demands were not met by the government and the following April was the most lethal month of 2016 in terms of fatalities. Most of these fatalities come from clashes between RENAMO and government forces in Manica and Sofala provinces. In April, an alleged mass grave was uncovered. The government quickly denied the presence of the mass grave although some bodies have allegedly be confirmed ([Daily Maverick, 4 May 2016](#); [France24, 5 May 2016](#)). In spite of a violent year, RENAMO and the government agreed to a short-term ceasefire at the end of 2016. This was later extended to a two-month ceasefire which will come to an end in March.

Conflict Trends Summaries



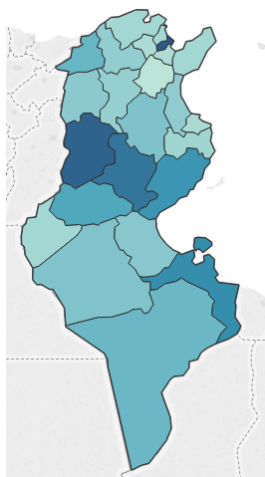
Republic of Congo

The biggest event of 2016 for the Republic of Congo was the presidential election on 20 March, which saw incumbent Sassou Nguesso retain the presidency despite international criticism. On 4 April, suspected members of the Ninja militia, which was officially disbanded by their leader Frederic Bintsamou (also known as Pastor Ntumi) in 2008, were reported to have set alight several police stations and other administrative buildings in the capital during clashes with security forces, allegedly over the outcome of the election. Following these incidents, a heavily-armed government offensive targeted the Pool region, the support base for the Ninja militia during their conflicts with the government in the 1990s and early 2000s. This offensive seems to have backfired however, as attacks by alleged Ninja militiamen on government forces and civilians began across the Pool region for the first time since 2009, before dying back down after the last reported incident on 26 November 2016.



Somalia

Somalia in 2016 witnessed an increase in both conflict events and reported fatalities over the previous year. Increased deaths are largely due to lethal clashes between insurgent group Al Shabaab and state forces, or external militaries active in Somalia. The number of fatalities resulting from clashes between Al Shabaab and external forces – including forces from the African Union Mission In Somalia (AMISOM) and the militaries of Kenya and the United States – increased by 48% in 2016. High profile and high impact attacks by Al Shabaab include the attack on Ethiopian/AMISOM forces at a base at Halgan in June and a battle with Kenyan forces in October which resulted in 140 casualties. Clashes between state and rebel forces resulted in a fatality spike of 41% in 2016. Al Shabaab’s continued attacks on government troops and external stabilisation forces reflects the group’s vow to disrupt the parliamentary election process ([United Nations, 27 January 2017](#)). This raises the question of whether violence will continue to increase in early 2017, when the presidential elections are scheduled to take place.



Tunisia

Concerns over an increasingly precarious economy and widespread dissatisfaction towards the political class are driving a renewed wave of protests across Tunisia. In 2016, the levels of protest activity registered by ACLED in Tunisia reached a record high in the last twenty years and were among the highest in Africa. Protests were more frequent and showed a higher risk of turning violent in the capital’s region and in the southern governorates of Sidi Bouzid, Sfax, Kasserine and Medenine. The motivations are reported as unresolved socio-economic problems, coupled with increasing insecurity due to the entrenched presence of armed Islamists and the return of foreign fighters from abroad. These trends are unlikely to change substantially in 2017, unless the new unity government headed by the young secular Youssef Chahed is able to tackle the country’s multiple challenges and restore citizen confidence.

NB: Darker shading in the country maps indicates a higher number of relative conflict and protest events in the administrative region during 2016, except Republic of Congo which maps conflict and protest events from 1997-2016.

Ethiopia

The nearly 3,000 fatalities reported between November 2015 and January 2017 rocked Ethiopia and the international community. Unprecedented waves of popular mobilization in the country mainly drove these trends. Since November 2016 however, the number of riots and protests significantly reduced, giving way to a political violence landscape now dominated by battles and violence against civilians (see Figure 6). Conflict levels came close to those of 2002, when heavy clashes occurred between government forces and a number of rebel movements across the country, particularly the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Army (ONLA).

Protests since November 2015

Mass protests first swept across the Oromia region in November 2015, reflecting widespread discontent with a

large-scale development plan promoted by the Ethiopian government, which, Oromos feared, would marginalize and deprive farmers from their ancestral lands. Although the plan was suspended in January 2016, mobilization continued and spread across the region, revealing widespread mistrust and discontent over authoritarian rule, the wrongful use of lethal force by security forces, and corruption among local and national elites (ACLED, May 2016). Although protests remained largely peaceful, the increasing lethality and indiscriminate nature of state repression to control the protests contributed to escalate and diffuse the tensions, with more incidents of riots since mid-2016, and protests erupting in Amhara and in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s region (Africa Confidential, 22 July 2016; ACLED, November 2016). The government’s violent crackdown on protests is

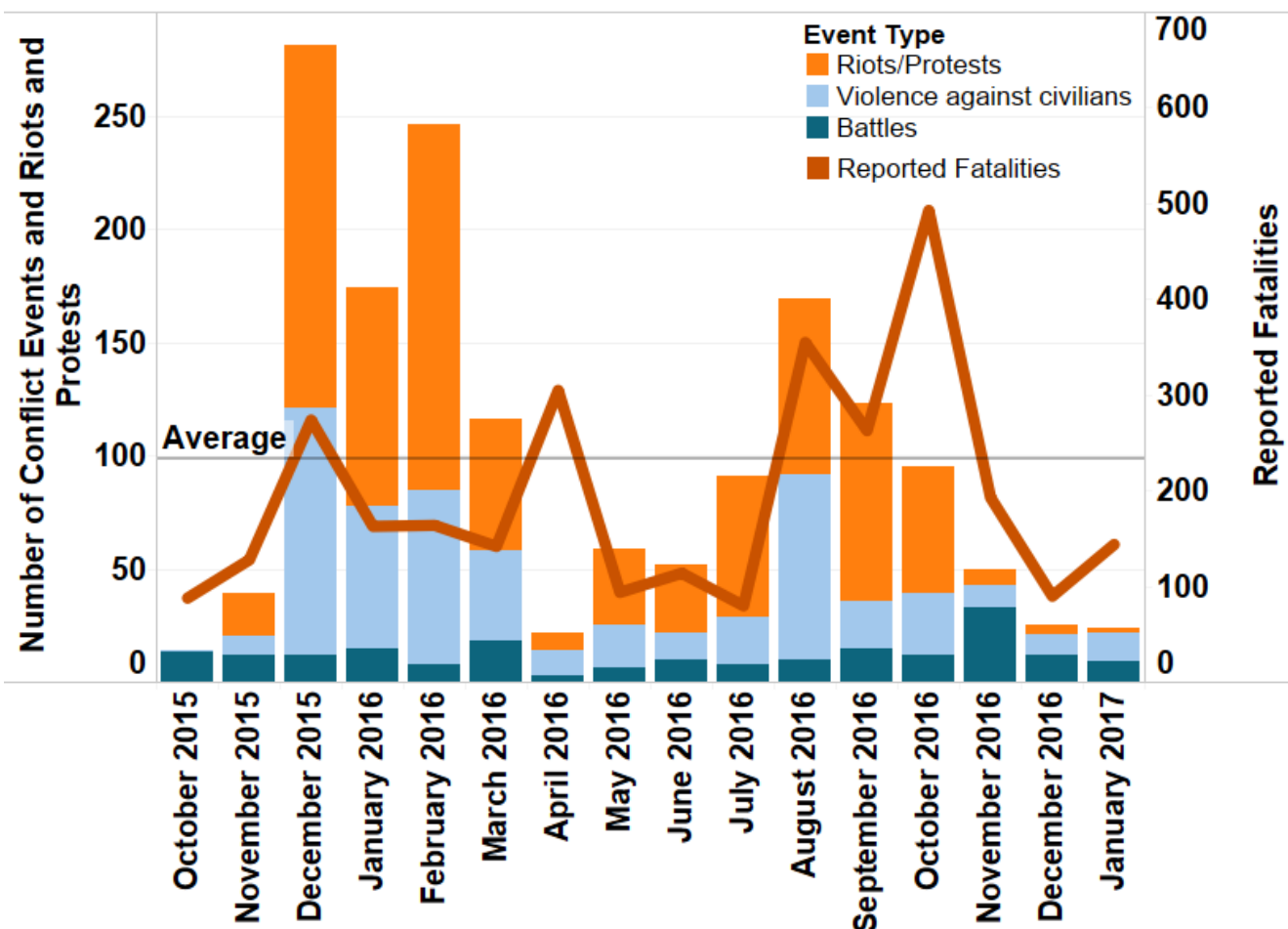


Figure 6: Number of Conflict and Riot and Protest Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in Ethiopia, from October 2015 - January 2017.



Ethiopia

believed to have killed more than a thousand people over one year and led to the arrest and detention of thousands of people, including prominent opposition leaders and journalists.

Violence flared up after heavy casualties at a religious festival in Oromia on October 2nd, which the opposition blamed on government forces. In its response to the violence, the government proved unable to mitigate its repressive measures by declaring a six-months country-wide state of emergency for the first time in 25 years ([ACLED, November 2016](#); [BBC, 17 October 2016](#); [HRW, 31 October 2016](#)). Within two months, at least 24,000 people were arrested and detained for their alleged participation in anti-government protests, and sent to camps for “training” ([African Arguments, 26 January 2017](#); [HRW, 22 December 2016](#)). This includes one of the highest-profile Oromo activists, Merera Gudina, arrested on 30 November for denouncing the government crackdown on protests at a European Parliament hearing in Brussels ([Africa News, 27 January 2017](#)). This also includes Oromo and Amhara police officers arrested and detained by Tigray federal forces, highlighting their control over politics and security in the country ([ESAT News, 1 December 2016](#)). Cases of killings, torture and abuse in prisons across the country were reported on several occasions, such as the alleged killing of 85 prisoners at Tolay military camp in Jimma after protesting harsh punishments early November ([ESAT News, 5 December 2016](#); OMN, November 2016).

Since November, protests and riots largely dissipated across Ethiopia, most likely as a result of the restrictions imposed by the state of emergency and the accompanying repression. From 56 in October, reported riot and protest events dropped to 7, 4 and 2 between November and January 2017 respectively (see Figure 6). The government’s limited response to calls for deep structural reforms by protesters seems unlikely to have satisfied the opposition. For instance, despite a departure from tradition through the appointment of technocrats to senior positions as opposed to political loyalists alone, changes introduced in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet seem to suggest only minimal ideological repositioning, not least because no changes were brought to security forces’ Tigray-dominated leadership ([Africa Confidential, 2 December 2016](#)). Analysts are also pessimistic about the ability of the opposition to make any gains in the next local and national elections, despite the government’s willingness to renew the electoral system. Further, the likelihood that

any major player will be affected by a ramping up of corruption prosecutions in the next few months ([Africa Confidential, 20 January 2017](#)) is negligible. This could lead to a re-energisation of protests once the state of emergency is lifted in April, or urge some protesters to assert their demands through different means.

New trends since November 2016

Overall levels of conflict, rioting and protesting reduced by half between October and November, and by another half between November and December, reaching pre-Oromo protest levels. The significant reduction in riots and protests was counterweighed by sustained levels of battles engaging government forces with regularly operating rebel groups like the OLF and ONLA, and other political and ethnic militias (see Figure 7). This might point to an escalation of the protest movements from a largely peaceful unrest to an armed struggle taken up by local armed militias and rebel movements united in their aim to remove the current regime.

Ethnic and political militias have been particularly active since November with a number of attacks targeting government officials and structures. Indigenous people and farmer militias clashed with security forces on several occasions in Oromia (OMN, November 2016; [ESAT, 10 November 2016](#)). In Amhara, several armed militias also announced their reorganization to fight oppression of all Ethiopians by the regime in collaboration with groups with similar aims ([ESAT, 30 November 2016](#); [ESAT, 23 November 2016](#)). A few weeks later in January, seven bomb attacks by unknown groups in the space of two weeks targeted hotels where officials were meeting or businesses that they support in Amhara’s Gonder ([ESAT News, 4 January 2017](#)).

Unprecedented joint battles between security forces and foreign-based groups – namely the Ethiopian People’s Patriotic Front (EPPF) and the Patriotic Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM) – were also reported in November in Amhara and Tigray, resulting in heavy casualties and territorial gains ([Zehabesha, 23 November 2016](#)). AGUDM fought government forces independently in Amhara, Oromia and Tigray regions later in the month, leading to further casualties ([ESAT, 24 November 2016](#)), and announced that it was now operating from northern Ethiopia and training dozens of defectors who joined their movement, including government soldiers and Church leaders who had previously participated in the organization of protests in Amhara ([ESAT, 8 December 2016](#)),

Ethiopia

Clashes also resumed in the Benshangul-Gumaz region between the government and the Benishangul Peoples Liberation Movement since end December ([ESAT, 6 January 2017](#)), while the Afar Revolutionary Front condemned the state of emergency as a way to legalise the government’s militarized response to the uprisings, and vowed to continue resistance ([ESAT, 22 December 2016](#)).

As a result of these clashes, the government detained a number of people accused of supporting rebel militias

fighting them and allegedly looted and burned down their properties and crops ([ESAT, 27 December 2016](#); [ESAT, 9 December 2016](#)). Rising cross-border attacks have also been carried out by the Somali region special police forces into Oromia since December, resulting in the reported killing of at least 47 people (OMN, 14 January 2017), and further pointing to the heavy repercussions of insurgencies for civilians.

Actor

- Government forces
- OLF: Oromo Liberation Front
- ONLA: Ogaden National Liberation Army
- Benishangul Peoples Liberation Movement

- EPPF: Ethiopian Peoples Patriotic Front
- AGUDM: Patriotic Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement
- Ethnic Militias (Ethiopia)
- Political Militias (Ethiopia)

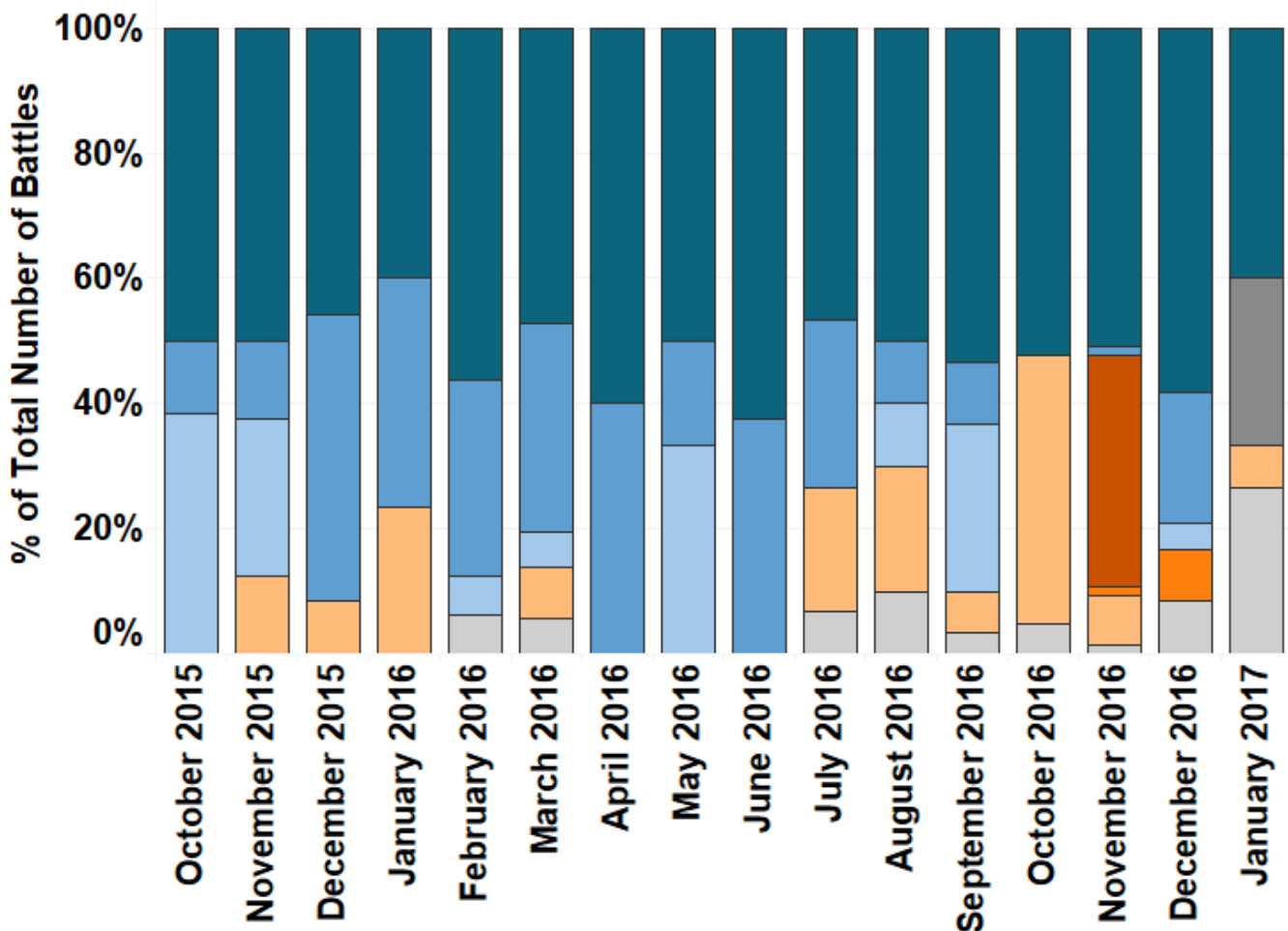


Figure 7: Percentage of Battles by Actor in Ethiopia, from October 2015 - January 2017.

Nigeria

Over the course of 2016, Nigeria witnessed a general downward trend in violence starting in March 2016. However, a significant spike of over 900 fatalities recorded in February preceded this downward trend, which was almost 550 more than the month before (see Figure 8). Out of the total fatalities recorded in February, 358 were reported during clashes between state forces and Boko Haram, another 60 were the result of a Boko Haram suicide bombing that targeted an IDP camp in Borno, while 300 were caused by Fulani militias which staged a day-long coordinated assault on several Agatu communities. Together these three dynamics can be seen as a microcosm of the conflict landscape in Nigeria over 2016 while their diminishing but significant impact over the year can offer important insights looking ahead to 2017.

The battle against Boko Haram in 2016 turned decisively in the state's favour during the period from February to April 2016 (see Figure 8). State forces killed or captured a large number of Boko Haram fighters in February, which

paved the way for them to secure significant amounts of territory from the insurgent group in March and April (see Figure 8). This trend would continue throughout the year, albeit at lower levels, and culminate in the important strategic and symbolic victory of clearing Boko Haram out of the Sambisa Forest, their primary stronghold, in mid-December 2016 ([Vanguard, 26 December 2016](#)). During this operation, the military reported that over 1,880 civilians had been rescued and hundreds of Boko Haram insurgents captured, dealing a serious blow to the group ([Newsweek, 22 December 2016](#)). These military successes translated into a clear reduction in recorded conflict-related fatalities in Nigeria, which in the last few months of 2016 were at their lowest levels since February 2013. This prompted Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari to declare victory against the group ([Signal, 24 December 2016](#)). However, despite the considerable territorial losses Boko Haram has suffered in 2016 (see Figure 8), the group is believed to still possess bases within Nigeria's neighbours' territories across the Lake Chad basin ([Al Jazeera, 27 December 2016](#)).

But despite losing its major strongholds in Nigeria, Boko Haram continues to possess the capability to successfully attack soft targets in the country, with the most recent example being a suicide bombing of Maiduguri University on 16 January 2017 which killed at least 4 people, including two bombers ([Al Jazeera, 16 January 2017](#)). Across 2016, ACLED recorded 51 events of violence against civilians by Boko Haram which resulted in at least 550 fatalities. This represents an average of 10.8 fatalities per event. In comparison, Al-Shabaab's civilian fatality count over the same period was 378, with an average of only 1.9 fatalities per event. This comparison is particularly notable as ACLED recorded a total of 275 violent events involving Boko Haram in Nigeria, which was only about a quarter of the 1,089 violent events involving Al-Shabaab in Somalia, a group which continues to control a relatively large amount of territory compared to Boko Haram. Based on this data, it is likely that as Boko Haram continues to lose ground on the military front, the number of attacks against civilians by the group will likely remain high going into 2017. However, the existence of Boko Haram's Barnawi faction, which has explicitly stated it is moving away from attacks that target Muslim civilians ([Mail & Guardian – Africa, 28 September 2016](#)), may moderate this trend.

Other dynamics represented by February's spike in vio-

Event Type

- Battle-Government regains territory
- Battle-No change of territory
- Remote violence
- Riots/Protests
- Violence against civilians

Reported Fatalities

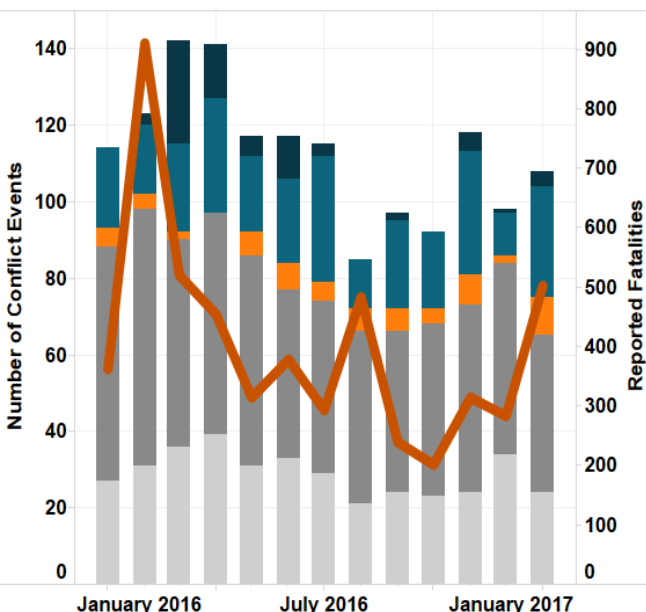


Figure 8: Number of Conflict & Protest Events and Reported Fatalities in Nigeria, from January 2016 - January 2017.

Nigeria

lence is the ongoing conflict between largely Fulani herders and non-Fulani farmers in central Nigeria (see Figure 9). The primary group driving this violence are Fulani ethnic militias, which were involved in twice as many events in 2016 as all other ethnic militia groups recorded by ACLED in Nigeria combined and were responsible for four times as many fatalities. Although events involving Fulani ethnic militias included several battles, the vast majority of these events were violence against civilians which resulted in 884 fatalities, representing an average of 11.8 fatalities per event, even higher than Boko Haram over the same time period. Many of these attacks, which were most prevalent during 2016 in the states of Benue, Kaduna, and Taraba (see Figure 9), have also resulted in large displacements of people and often involved the burning down of homes and villages ([BBC News, 5 May 2016](#)), which could amount to ethnic cleansing. The disputes behind the violence allegedly focus on the use of resources such as farmlands, grazing areas, and water, with both sides claiming grievances against the other. Looking forward, a report by the Famine Early War System Network (FEWS-NET) predicts a credible risk of severe food insecurity in Nigeria ([Premium Times, 26 January 2017](#)). Within this context, serious outside intervention will likely be

necessary to avoid rising violence between herders and farmers and a humanitarian crisis in central Nigeria over the course of 2017.

Although violence overall decreased in Nigeria in 2016, each of these dynamics remain volatile, with the possibility of inter-play between them offering an extra dimension of concern going forward. The potential for significant resource competition and displacement due to drought and famine could lead to greater instability across Nigeria's central and northern areas, which could in turn put greater pressure on Nigerian security services and offer new opportunities for Boko Haram to press over-extended state forces ([Reuters, 13 January 2017](#)), while also providing new recruitment opportunities among disaffected populations ([Mercy Corps, February 2016](#)). Dynamics not focused on here, such as the renewal of conflict in the Niger Delta ([The Economist, 17 June 2016](#)), could also put pressure on the state both militarily and financially as infrastructure continues to be targeted in that region. While the overall trend of decreasing violence in Nigeria is evident, this outcome will remain fragile if further action is not taken by the government to bolster resilience and deal with the underlying issues behind Nigeria's conflicts.

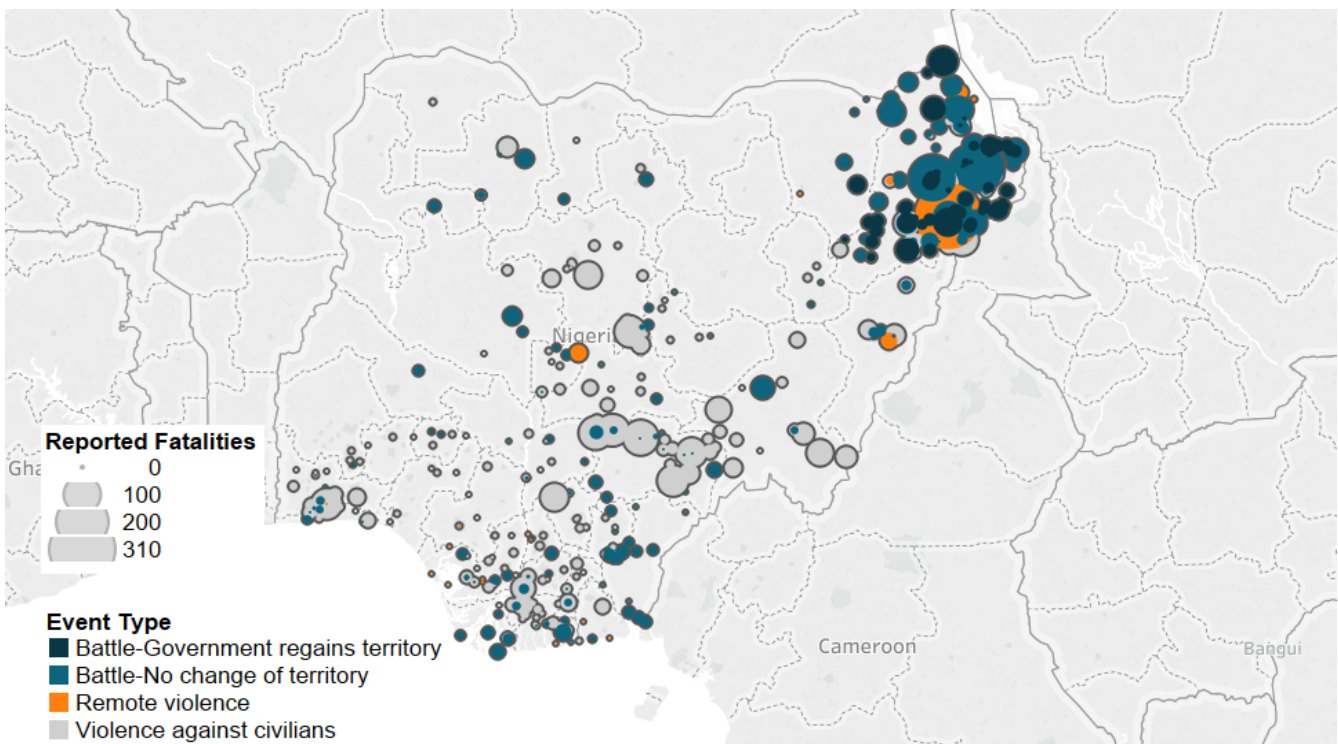


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location and Reported Fatalities by Location in Nigeria, in 2016.

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Conflict and political violence events in January 2017 dropped to their lowest recorded levels since September 2013 (see Figure 10). Conflict-related fatalities were subject to an artificial spike in December 2016 after UN-backed Government of National Accord forces in Sirte reported the discovery of over 250 militant bodies during clean-up operations following the announcement that they had liberated the town from Islamic State control ([The New Arab, 5 December 2016](#)).

This apparently low event count hides political manoeuvring below the surface which is likely to shape the nature and intensity of military engagements in Libya in the next few months. These are: 1) the relatively synchronous military successes in Sirte and Benghazi’s Ganfouda district; 2) military action between armed forces under Khalifa Haftar and the Misratan Third Force and Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi in the southern Libyan region of Fezzan that risk turning into a war of attrition; and 3) a temporary lull in inter-brigade fighting in the capital, Tripoli.

Each of these developments indicates a significant risk of escalation each with the potential to shift the rules of the political game in Libya, promoting the political weight of one faction over the other. However, given current dynamics, low-level tit-for-tat attacks are likely to characterise the conflict landscape.

Military Success in Sirte & Benghazi

The Government of National Accord (GNA) appeared to have its legitimacy boosted in early December 2016 as Operation Bunyan Marsous (Solid Structure) forces, aligned with the Tripoli-based government, succeeded in wresting back control of Sirte from Islamic State control. At least rhetorically, officials have been careful not to underplay the continued threat posed by Islamic State militants who may have relocated to other areas including Sabratha ([BBC News, 19 February 2016](#)). Nevertheless, serious questions have been posed about the militant groups organisational capacity after the military victory, as well as uncertainty that has been cast over predictions that the destabilising influence of the group will spread like contagion to sub-Saharan Africa ([Global Trends Annexes, 2017](#)).

However, this much-needed boost to Fayez al-Sarraj and the UN-backed government was short lived as on 25 January 2017 the Libya National Army (LNA) forces in the Ganfouda district of Benghazi – one of the last enclaves of Ansar al-Sharia and militants under the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) – announced significant advances into and full control of the area. Later reports suggest that some areas of Ganfouda district, particularly around the Busnaib area, remain volatile with militant

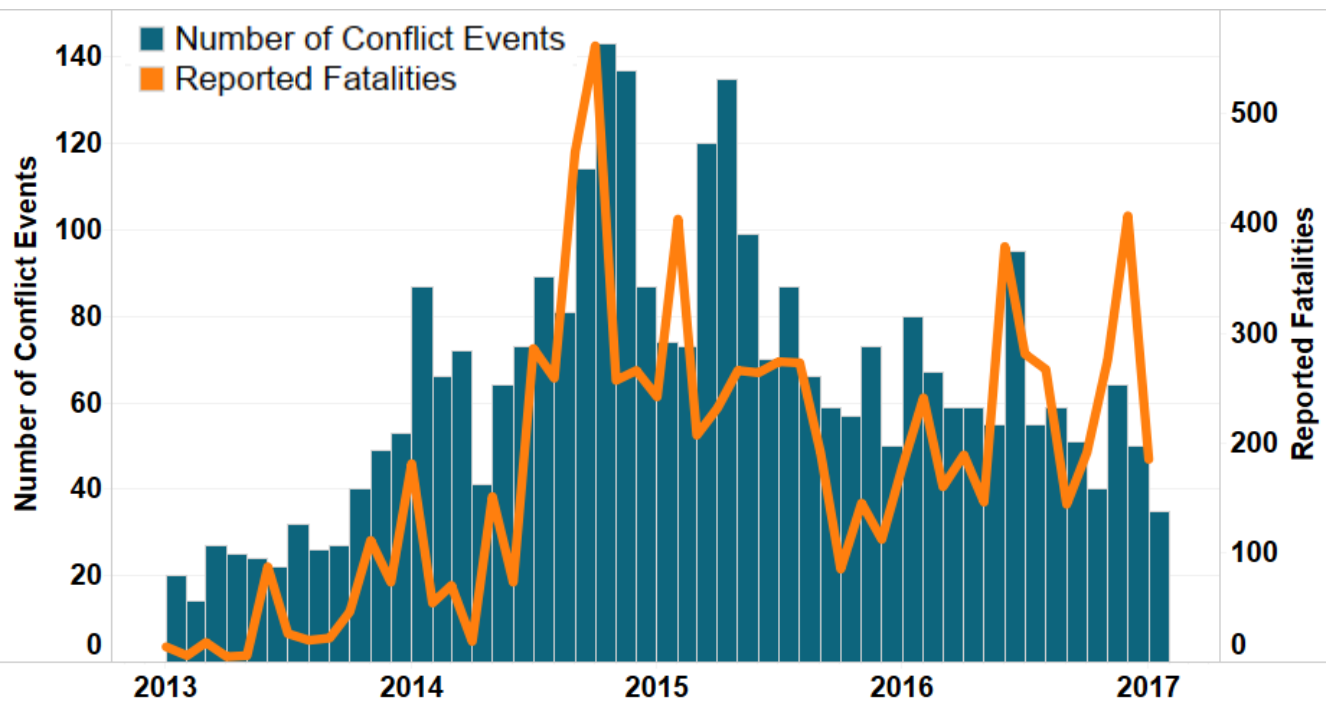


Figure 10: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Libya, from January 2013 - January 2017. 14

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activity (see Figure 11). Having cultivated outside support from Egypt’s el-Sisi, Russia, and the U.S. during the offensive in Benghazi, Gen. Khalifa Haftar and the House of Representatives government appear to be the strongest political players in the on-going negotiations (VOA, 13 January 2017). This position has only further entrenched by the success in Ganfouda in January.

GNA vs. LNA

As the two most prominent battlefronts are overcome and the Islamic State and BRSC no longer dominate the attention of the competing military and parliamentary groups (see Figure 12), their focus is beginning to turn towards each other. At least in the short-term, the geography of conflict is concentrating in the southern Fezzan region. Secondary to the rebel violence in Sirte and Benghazi, the eruption of violence in the south and central region of Libya has been characterised by militia brigades clashing with Haftar’s LNA. In December 2016, the Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi (BDB) – nominally aligned with al-Qaeda-affiliated Ansar al-Sharia and BRSC militants in Benghazi (TRAC, 2017; Long War Journal, 22 July 2016) – launched attacks on three towns in the Sirte oil crescent including Bin Jawad, Nawfaliyah and al-Sidra in an apparent move to disrupt or control the oil terminal region. The LNA beat off these attacks and launched airstrikes against the group in late December further south in al-Jufrah.

Some analysts establish that the BDB lacks strength to confront Haftar’s LNA itself and is leveraging the power of other powerful brigades to ‘carry out its bidding’. From this stance, it is seen to be dragging Misrata into the fight;

the urgency with which it will want to do this now has heightened given the recapturing and clearance of Ganfouda of BRSC militants by the LNA, tipping the power balance in Haftar’s favour (War is Boring, 11 January 2017). This geographical relocation in confrontations represents a resumption of the dominant cleavage between the competing power bases in the east and west of Libya and provides new opportunities for temporary alliances to form. This in turn creates the potential for new conflict agents and identities to emerge and activate, especially as long-standing, localised ethnic grievances are played off of one another.

Nascent attacks also emerged more prominently between the LNA and the Misratan Third Force around the southern region of Sebha for control of the Tamanhint airbase. This flashpoint appears to be a strategic move by Haftar to divide the operational capacity of Misrata. The Third Force are stationed in the southern city of Sebha and have been since 2014 after the Libya Dawn coalition sent them to secure and provide stability (Libya Security Monitor, 5 November 2015). Intermittent clashes between the Third Force and the LNA have occurred since, notably in March and April 2015 with the aim of gaining control of the Brak al-Shati and Tamanhint airbases where the Misratan forces were based. Haftar appears to be using the BDB and Misratan Third Force as strawmen in order to discredit any potential opposition to him consolidating power. The Third Force has come under heavy criticism recently in two areas it has had an operational presence. After Sirte was liberated by the Bunyan Marsous operation comprising mainly of Misratan forces – local elders accused these soldiers of deliberately stealing power, creating blockades, looting, and seizing property (Libya Herald, 26 January 2017). Furthermore, the Brak al-Shati mayor accused the Third Force of blocking aid delivery to the south (Libya Herald, 24 January 2017), though this was vigorously denied by the Misratans.

Whether or not this has been orchestrated by Haftar to stir animosity and to discredit Misrata’s governance abilities or security provision remains unknown. What is certain though is that before this move, the Third Force answered to the Misratan Military Council and remained outside the Bunyan Marsous structure, unlike other Misratan brigades. Since renewed clashes between the Third Force and the LNA, Ahmed Maetig, the Deputy Prime Minister in the Presidency Council and a prominent Misratan,

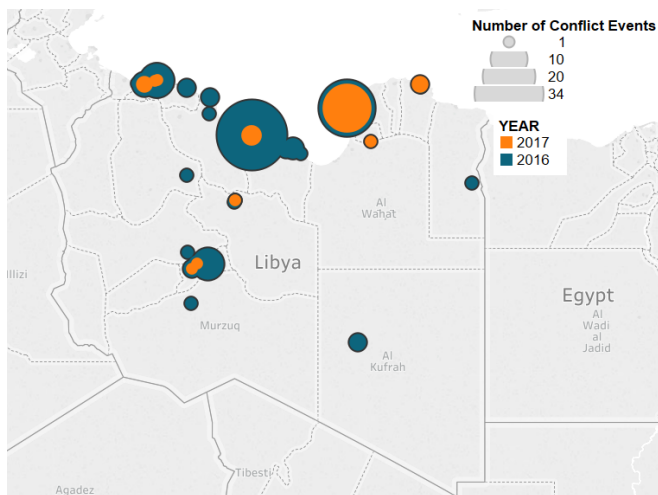


Figure 11: Comparison of Conflict Event Location in Libya, between Oct, Nov, Dec 2016 and January 2017.

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has announced a concerted effort to create a unified ‘western’ Libyan army that will unite the various militias currently operating in accordance with the GNA ([Libya Herald, 30 January 2017](#)). The Misratan Military Council back this move, despite being traditionally more hardline in their approach to Libyan politics and will incorporate the Third Force. This may be a pre-emptive move to prevent further complex, temporary coalition building between the many prolific brigades operating inside Libya that threaten to divide Misrata. The Third Force has already built alliances with ethnic militias in and around Sebha that has acted to renew and stoke further clashes between the Awlad Sulaiman and Qaddadfa tribes. Whether or not this was the intention, it indicates that significant developments in fighting are likely to revolve around direct confrontations between LNA and consolidated GNA forces around road networks, rather than the disparate and semi-autonomous militias that have dominated up until this point.

Insecurity in Tripoli

Frustration has grown over the lack of security in Tripoli as free-roaming, unaccountable militia activity has disrupted

electricity power and kidnappings continue to undermine the safety of residents. ACLED reported the most substantial Tripoli-based militia competition in December 2016 where militia attacks accounted for 13.9% of conflict activity with events falling to 2.8% of activity in January 2017 (see Figure 13). In the greater Tripoli region as well as to the west in Zawiya, the distinction between political and criminal violence has proven difficult to untangle as instability created through oil and fuel pipeline shutdowns has been characterised by quasi-criminal groups and smugglers with close ties to prominent families within Zawiya. It is unclear as to whether this is localised posturing to secure control over lucrative smuggling networks and livelihoods or whether it feeds into the wider, national-level conflict.

Two trajectories present themselves for conflict in Tripoli. First, inter-militia fighting may decrease following the military success of the LNA in Benghazi. As the threat of an LNA offensive on the capital grows, a shift in coalition-building dynamics may occur where the consolidation of pro-government militias takes predominance over competition between them. If Haftar’s stance towards the GNA

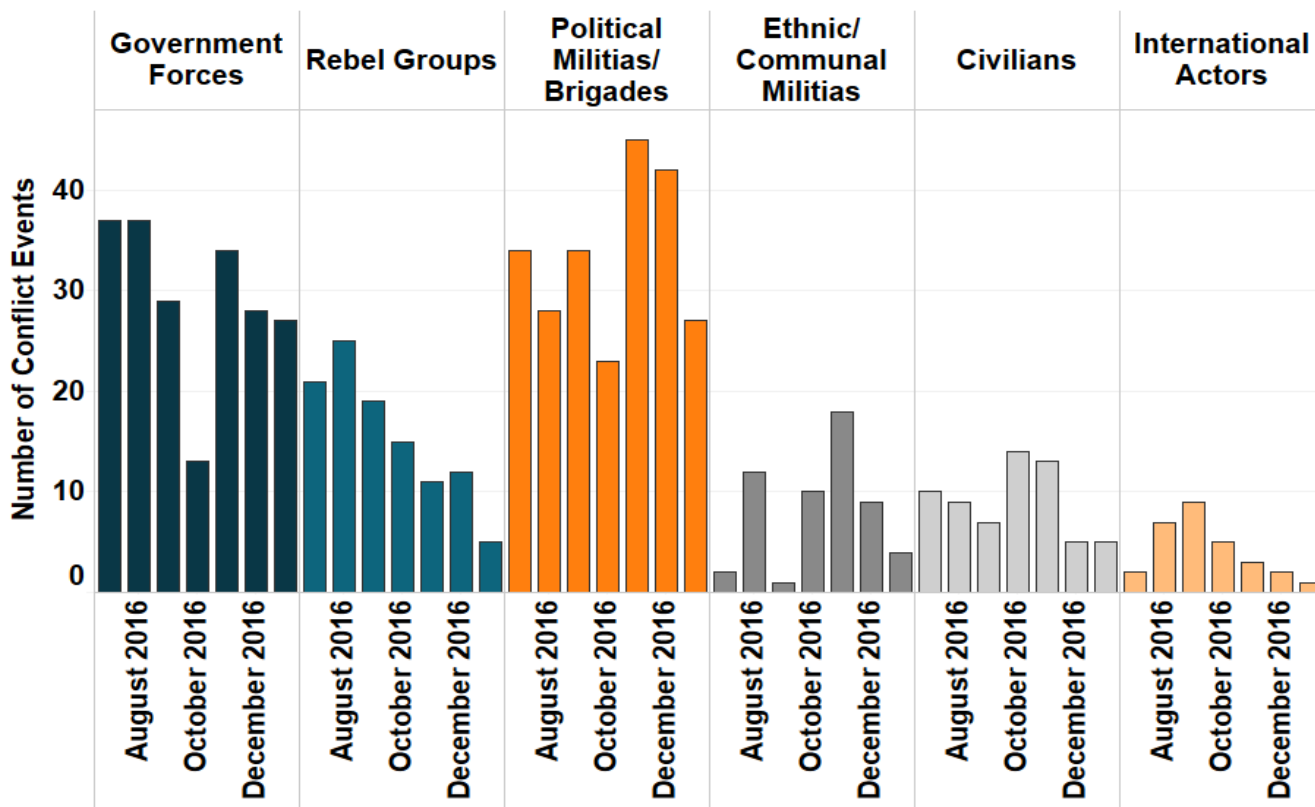


Figure 12: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Libya, from August 2016 - January 2017.

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grows more aggressive, militias will need to act as a bulwark against an LNA attack or exit the political-military landscape. Second, in the short-term, as the south becomes the most recent geographically situated expression of a continuing dynamic in which neither the LNA or GNA-affiliated militias and military units make substantial progress, militias in Tripoli may continue to compete for influence and involvement in the transitional environment ([Global Observatory, 29 June 2016](#)).

Khalifa al-Ghwell's attempted coup in Tripoli in October 2016, described as a 'miniature coup' ([VOA, 13 January 2017](#)) was followed by a further 'coup' in early December marked by street clashes and limited takeover of ministry

buildings. This lukewarm flare-up of violence signals the lack of support for a full-scale coup and demonstrates the current logic of violence that paralyses the whole of Libya. Political developments across the country mirror military developments as localised pockets of fighting and resistance continue with stalemates playing out. A lack of military hardware, soldiers stretched across multiple battlefronts and insufficient capacity to dominate or monopolise create recurrent and oscillating shifts in the target of violence with one side failing to capitalise on an advantage and consolidate a strengthened position. Until one side seizes advantage – currently Haftar is the most likely contender – armed confrontations where attrition is the mechanism will continue like business as usual.

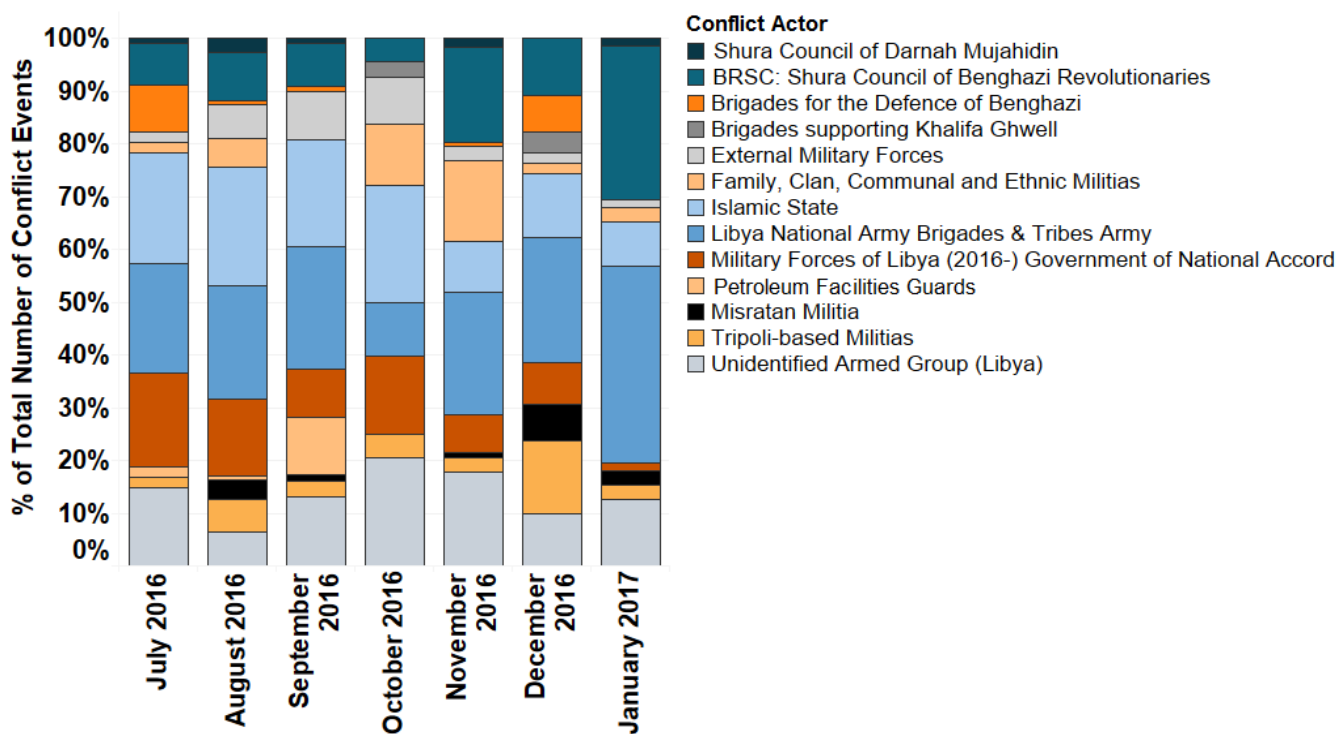


Figure 13: Percentage of Conflict Events by Actor in Libya, from July 2016 - January 2017.

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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](#).