

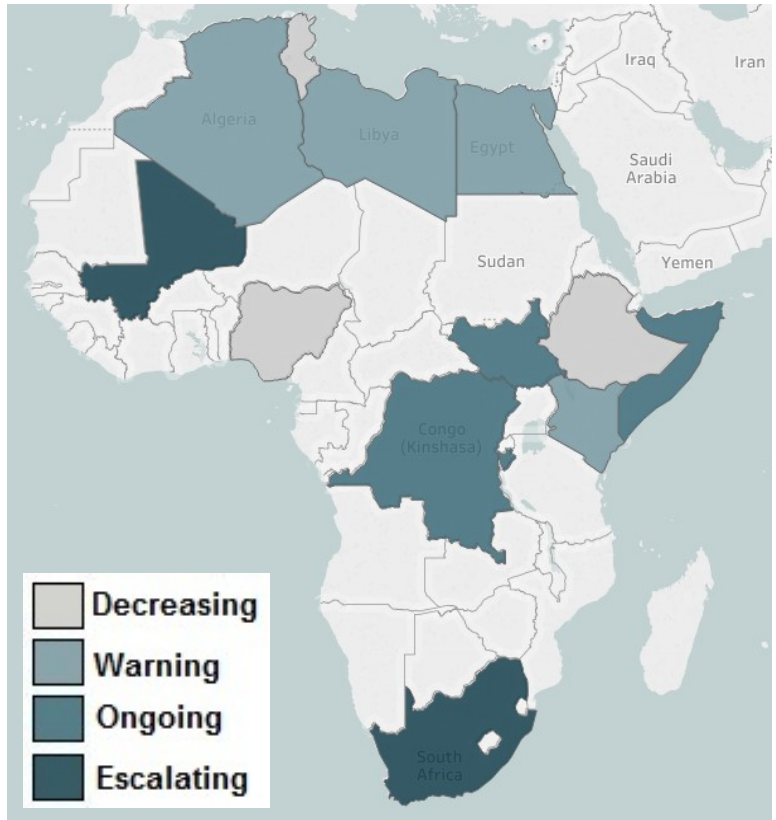
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 56)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, MARCH 2017

Welcome to the March 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).

This month’s issue focuses on President el-Sisi’s securitisation of **Egypt** to remove the opportunity for protest, union-led protests in **Guinea**, a decrease in political violence in **Ivory Coast** following mutiny in January, increasing xenophobic violence & riots and protests across **South Africa**, a review of conflict dynamics in **South Sudan** after violence re-erupted between the government and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO) in July 2016. A Special Report focuses on insecurity in the **Liptako-Gourma** region.

Elsewhere on the continent, overall violence declined in **Ethiopia** but battles between Oromia militias and regional Somali police forces escalated, high protest rates continued in **Algeria**, and violence against civilians remained above the continental six-month average in **Burundi**, **DR-Congo**, **Nigeria**, **Somalia** and **Sudan & South Sudan**.



Conflict Trajectory, March 2017

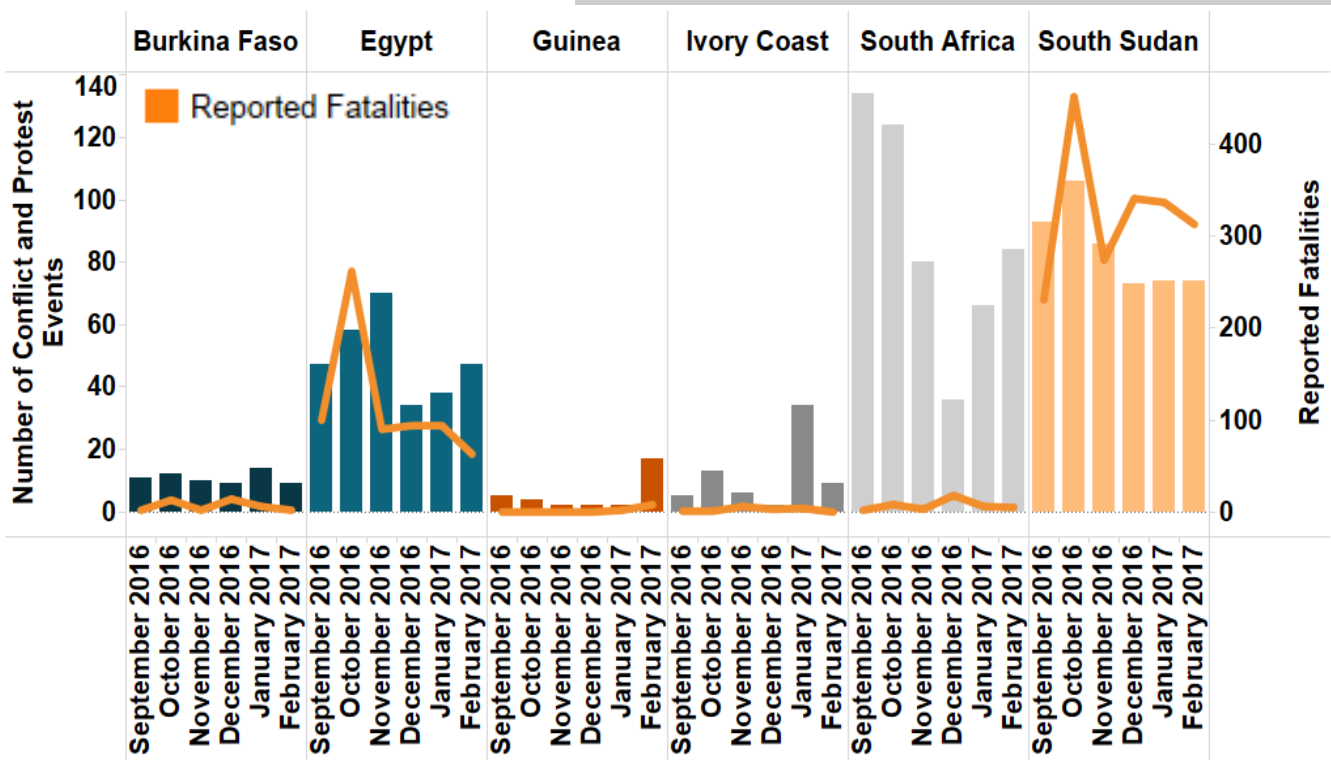


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, September 2016 - February 2017.

Egypt

February saw a shift in the strategy of the Sinai Province militant group as attacks on Coptic Christian civilians and a resumption of aggression towards Israel replaced attacks against police officers and roadside bombings that had occurred since 2013. Seven Coptic Christian deaths at the hands of Islamist militants in one week led to civilians fleeing out of North Sinai to avoid further sectarian targeting. This escalation in North Sinai is occurring while military efforts to quash the Sinai Province group over the past few months is scaling down (see Figure 2).

Political analysts interpret attacks against Copts in two ways: as a means to weaken and attack the Egyptian regime, and a retaliatory measure against previous operations carried out in Al-Arish, Rafah and Sheikh Zuweyid by the army ([Watani, 1 March 2017](#)). But the Egyptian government's role in the proliferation and maintenance of this violence is overlooked in these analyses. The continuation of a remote insurgency, in a historically marginalised and underrepresented region of the state, serves to justify repressive measures in more central regions of Egypt. This is in order to provide ballast against wider pockets of social unrest and contestation with the regime. In other words, nonviolent social and political mobilisation in areas with the capacity for political organisation continues to

erode as the insurgency endures.

Popular protest has been declining in Egypt, although labour protest has continued (see Figure 3). The Egyptian army's counter-insurgency operations have over the past two to three years consistently led to backlash ([Fielding and Shortland, 2005](#)), leading to the Sinai Province group to adjust its strategy, switching between targeting military and police outposts, to a re-engagement with civilian-targeting, particularly Coptic Christian groups and firing missiles towards Eilat to stoke tensions with Israel. The oscillating nature of the conflict serves to bolster President el-Sisi's national political agenda by de-legitimising uprisings from below and challenges to the state from wider societal groups. This effect is not limited to Muslim Brotherhood protests, which now are almost non-existent, but extend to a variety of organised groups including health industry and factory workers, Nubian ethnic groups, and sporting clubs.

Counter-insurgency against the Sinai Province group has failed to produce the desired outcome purported by el-Sisi. The Interior Ministry regularly reports on its operations, publishing militant or police fatality figures that are often difficult to corroborate. Estimates of the Sinai Province militant group size is between 1,000 – 1,500 ([BBC, 12](#)

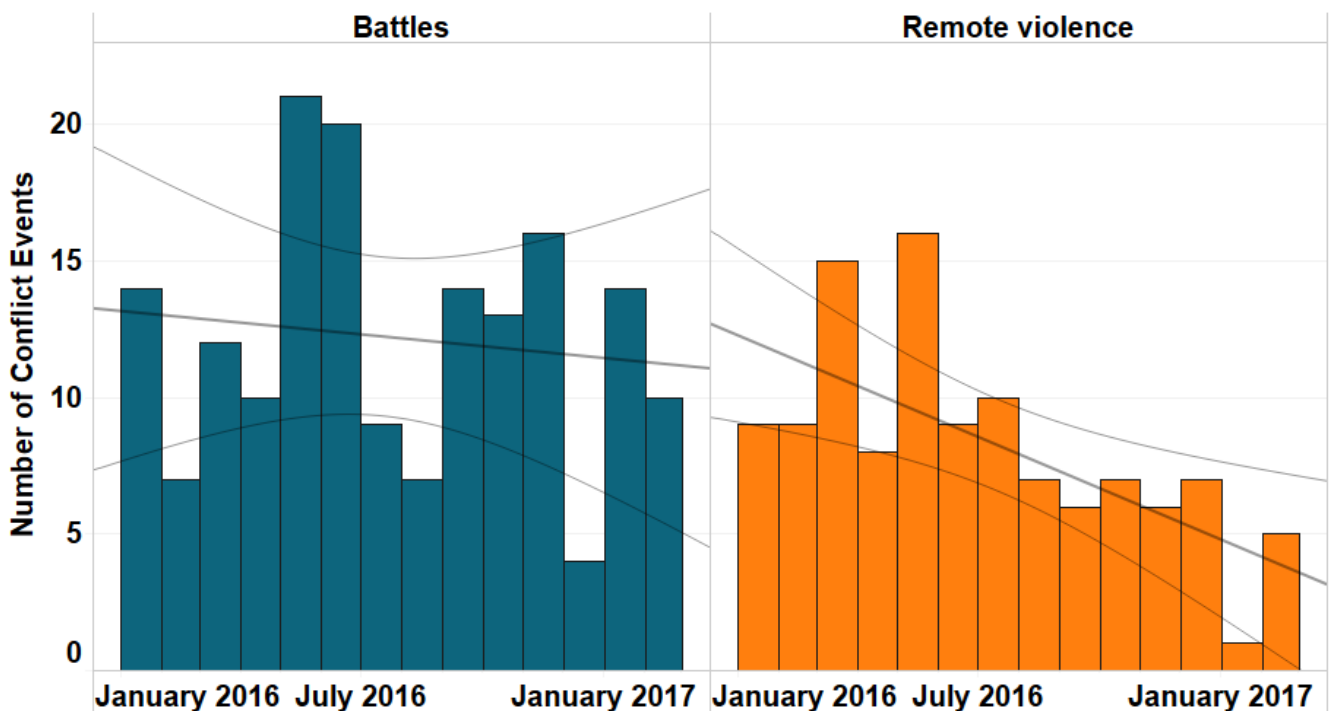


Figure 2: Number of Battles and Remote Violence Events by State Forces in North Sinai, from 2016 - February 2017.

Egypt

[May 2016](#)). ACLED has recorded at least 1,467 fatalities in sweeping operations from 2015 – 4 March 2017 suggesting either the media blackout in Sinai is making researchers underestimate the size and capacity of the group, or the Interior Ministry is fabricating reports. Clearly the second of these scenarios is more likely, given Egypt’s state-controlled media machines pumping out false reports, proclivity towards obstruction of the truth and tainted human rights record.

Added together, the decline in protest and sustained insurgency (see Figure 4) illustrates how el-Sisi manipulates citizen fear of instability to side-line malcontent within the broader population – a popular repertoire utilised by strongmen under authoritarian contexts ([Malik, 2017](#)). Evidence for this is only further strengthened when considering the active facilitation of social mixing in Torah Prison between known ‘extremists’ and young, non-radicalised popular demonstrators who have often been arbitrarily arrested. This strategy enables el-Sisi to paint all state-defined dissidents as potential radicals, justifying a comprehensive contraction of political space with which to express grievances or push for change. This lends more support to the theory that the Egyptian government has an interest in prolonging antagonisms in its peripheral counter-insurgency operations. This concern is only further compounded when the question of why the Egyptian regime has failed to quash this geographically isolated

group is raised.

The political space left for opposition parties, civil society, and everyday citizens to express grievances has shrunk to such a low-level that current mobilisation that does occur in Egypt is contained, controlled and even ideologically supportive (even if indirectly) of the Egyptian regime’s interests. Take for example the One Nation Foundation’s statement in the wake of Coptic Christians fleeing North Sinai from persecution. The statement was accompanied by a number of signatories calling for a protest outside parliament against militant activity. According to [Al Ahram](#), “organisers have said they will seek interior ministry permission for the protest, as is required under Egyptian law.” During the Red Sea island protests and following the introduction of the protest law, civil society expressed its frustration at the closing of representation and freedom of assembly. Following recent developments, the Egyptian people have seemingly, and perhaps only temporarily, decided to overlook the authoritarian tendencies of the regime elite in favour of national stability.

What does this all mean for political stability in Egypt? [Afrobarometer](#) find that citizen satisfaction with democracy in Egypt doubled in the period from 2013-2015. This perception coexists with a small reduction in some indicators of personal political freedoms, suggesting a conflation of democracy, or at least el-Sisi’s performance and policies, with stability. This supports the idea that citizens

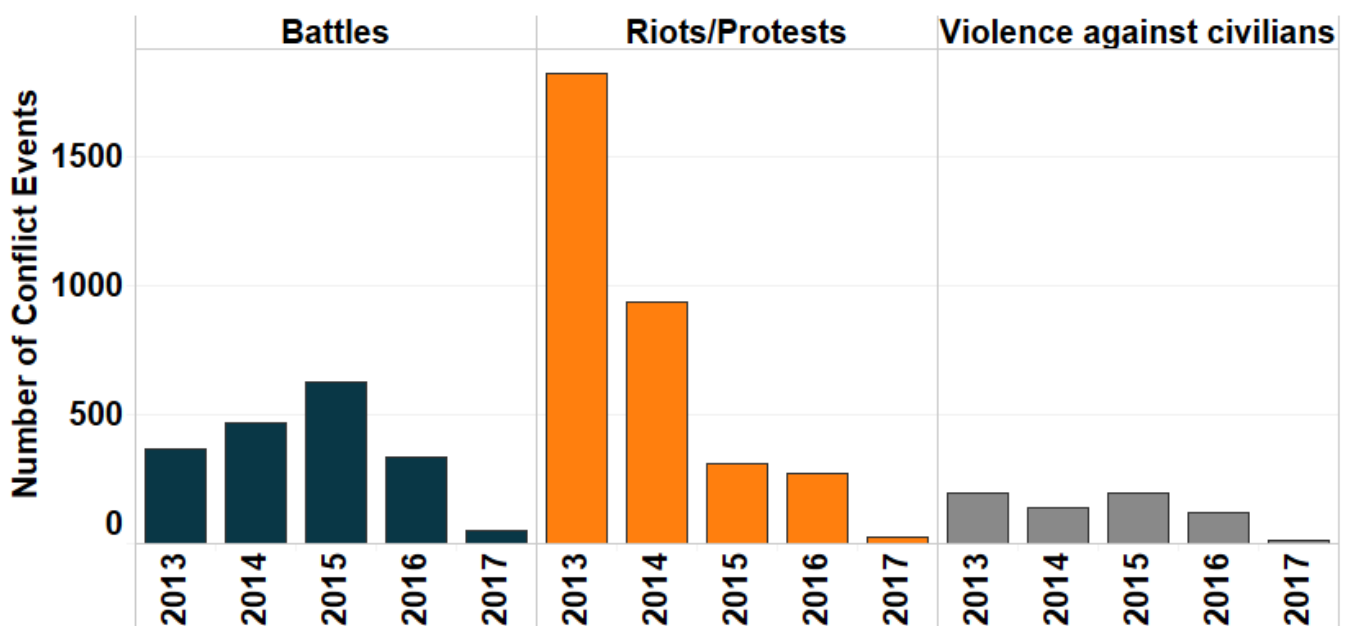


Figure 3: Number of Conflict and Protest Events by Type in Egypt, from 2013 - February 2017.

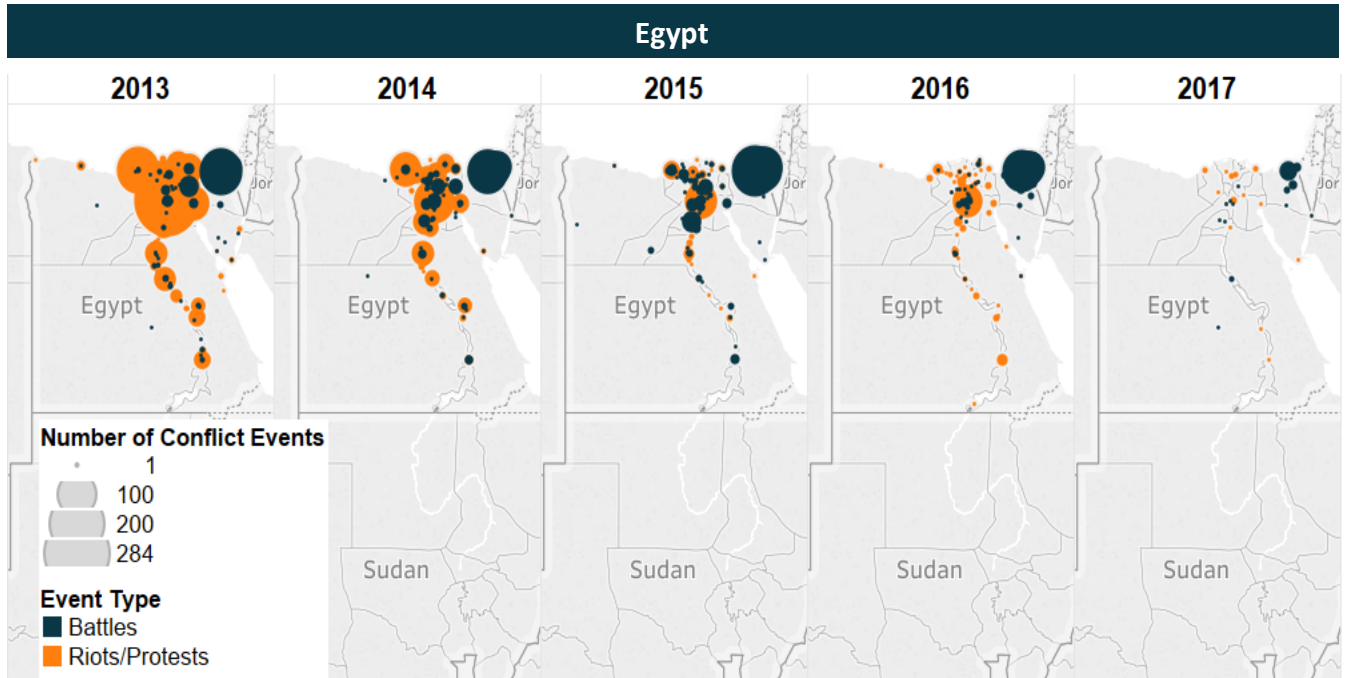


Figure 4: Number of Battles and Riots/Protests by Location in Egypt, from 2013 - February 2017.

within Egypt have shifted their demands from democratisation and an opening of the political space to demands for securitisation from 2013 to 2015.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the invisible hand of the military and intelligence services may well have had a lasting influence on the President's strategic manoeuvring to position himself as an island of stability. He appears to have achieved this through three measures that reinforce military dominance and prowess: counter-insurgency, isolating and reprimanding the police forces, and creating an impotent parliament. First, and most importantly, through sustaining a peripheral violent Islamist insurgency, the Egyptian state can suspend its citizenry in constant fear and pursue an aggressive strategy of securitisation of the state, removing any opportunities to threaten its survival. Second, widespread police abuses across Egypt against traders, drivers, vendors, and other individuals has threatened to spark mass unrest as seen in Tunisia in 2011 and more recently in Morocco with the death of a fishmonger in October 2016. At first, el-Sisi failed to systematically investigate police abuses, arguing that these were the actions of a few individuals. As the issue became more pertinent and widespread, the perpetrators of this violence have been publicly prosecuted, making an example of the police serving to bolster the integrity of the military. Thirdly, the Egyptian parliament is, in the eyes of Egyptians, a surrogate institution to rub-

berstamp decisions tightly and secretly controlled and executed by a backroom elite ([The Arabist, 7 February 2017](#)). Lacking a traditional support base founded upon a political party structure, power is diffuse within institutionalised channels leading to a fractured formal political landscape dominated by individual candidates and not cohesive blocs ([Al Jazeera, 12 January 2016](#)).

As a result, the opportunity for routinized street demonstrations against the state's political mismanagement has been reduced, as evidenced by the absence of public outcry to a suggested extension to the Presidency term limits from four to six years in late February ([Egypt Independent, 27 February 2017](#)). Whilst this litmus test has demonstrated that Egyptians are not currently as constitutionally-minded in their activism, protests over immediate economic conditions remain ([Egypt Independent, 8 March 2017](#)). Therefore, the possibility for riots and protests over a deteriorating standard of living may characterise patterns of protest in the coming months as state-society relations move away from the right to representation to the right to economic security. Should these protests remain ad hoc, sporadic, and non-organised, then the regime is likely to avoid responding with repression and protest will remain contained, following a geographical logic of economic grievance. If protests begin to demonstrate links to organised groups and start to diffuse nationally, then patterns of protest will be characterised by state violence.

Guinea

In February, Guinea witnessed the highest levels of political violence and protest since the presidential elections in October 2015 (see Figure 5). Over the past month, Guinea suffered a nationwide strike which spiralled into violence leaving eight people dead, infrastructure destroyed and left the capital city, Conakry, paralysed. The strike was incited by Guinea’s main teacher’s union on February 1st after a government decision to dismiss and cut the salaries of many junior teachers ([Al Jazeera, 20 February 2017](#)). As the strike progressed, more unions joined and teachers demanded a pay rise of 7.5-10.3%, and a resumption of work for contracted teachers. Pupils of the striking teachers demonstrated in the streets in a show of solidarity and demanded the resignation of the Minister of Education ([Al Jazeera, 20 February 2017](#); [Philipps, 27 February 2017](#)).

The most violent episode occurred after the unions and the government had formed an agreement over pay. On February 19th, both sides agreed to delegate salary decisions to a technical commission at the end of March ([Philipps, 27 February 2017](#)). The following day, clashes between demonstrators and police claimed seven lives, demonstrating a divide between the union leadership and grassroots. To further placate the rioters, President Alpha Conde fired his education minister, along with the civil service and environment ministers, and appointed a former teacher and union activity to the education portfolio ([Agence France Presse, 28 February](#)).

Strikes have a precedent of enforcing political change in Guinea. In January 2007, the United Trade Union of Guinean Workers (USTG) called a strike and demanded the resignation of then President Lasana Conte ([Global Nonviolent Action Database](#)). This strike was related to Conte’s decision to pardon two prominent businessmen convicted of corruption. In spite of mass state violence resulting in the deaths of over 50 protesters, continued strikes forced Conte to appoint a new Prime Minister to the vacant post. When the initial nominee was deemed too close to Conte, pressure from unions and protesters forced the president to choose a new prime minister from a list approved by union leaders.

Given the union’s past successes in forcing the hands of the state, it is understandable that union-led strikes can organise political demands across ethnic and regional divides. This would explain why the protests in Conakry touched neighbourhoods that have typically avoided protests and sided with the government ([Philipps, 27 February 2017](#)). Nevertheless, the recent strikes, though much lower in fatalities, indicate a worrying separation between the demonstrators on the street and the union leadership negotiating with the government, with some leaders distancing themselves from the destructive acts of the rioters. For the moment, the protests have calmed but the widening divide between representative and protester may hamper the effectiveness of union strikes in the future.

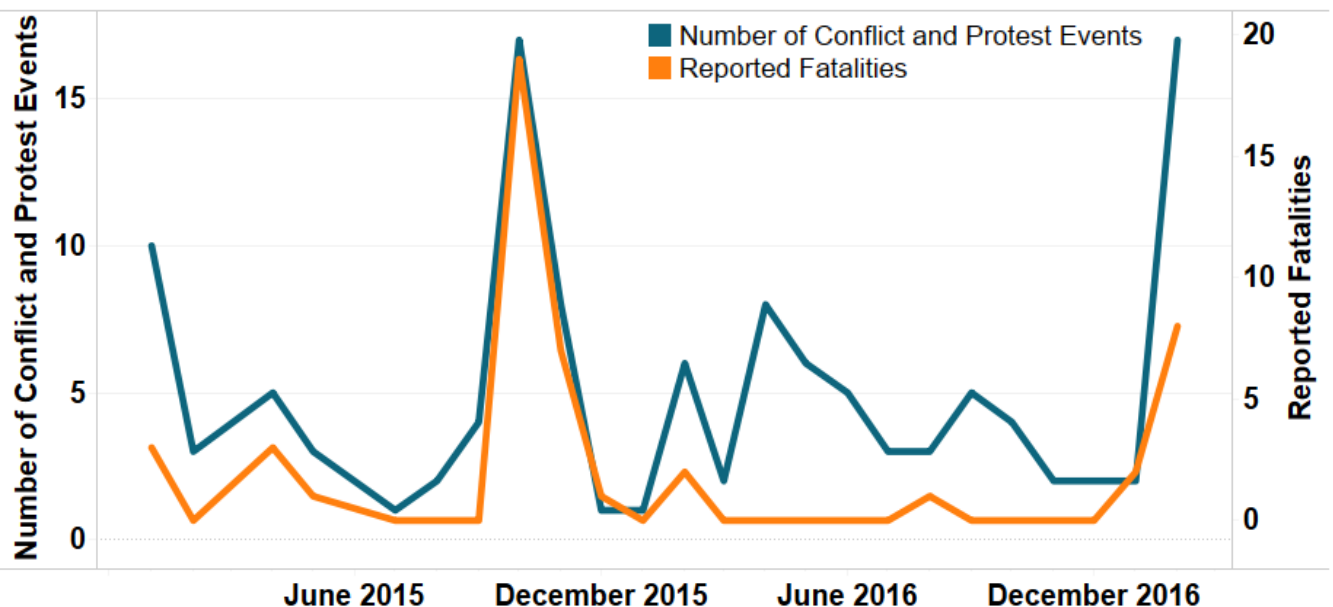


Figure 5: Number of Conflict and Protest Events and Reported Fatalities in Guinea, from January 2015 - February 2017.

Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast witnessed a dramatic decrease in political conflict in February due to the apparent resolution of two mutinies which destabilised the country in January. The mutinies represent the biggest episode of political instability since the 2011 political crisis and exposed deep weaknesses in a country that has been lauded as a model of post-conflict reconstruction. The initial mutiny started in when soldiers took control of Bouake and demanded a pay rise and a lump sum of cash ([The Economist, 14 January 2017](#)). The mutiny then spread to Daloa, Korhogo, Daoukro and Man and finally the mutineers took over the army headquarters in Abidjan (see Figure 6).

The roots of the initial mutiny stretch back to Ivory Coast’s two civil wars. The starting point of the mutiny, Bouake, was the former capital of the rebel New Forces (FN) during the First Ivorian Civil War and the initial mutineers claim that their demands are based on promises made during the war against former President Gbagbo ([The Economist, 14 January 2017](#)). The mutineers further demonstrated their power by holding the Minister of Defence hostage ([BBC News, 14 January 2017](#)). In spite of the use of gunfire to intimidate government negotiators, the initial mutiny resulted in no fatalities and was resolved when President Ouattara pledged \$19,300 to 8000 soldiers and dismissed the heads of the army, police and paramilitary gendarmes ([BBC News, 9 January 2017](#)).

Less than a week later, gendarmes mutinied in Yamoussoukro and clashed with military officers and the elite Republican Guard. The gendarmes had not been included in the financial bonuses given to the initial group of mutineers; they demonstrated to emphasize that they too suffered from sporadic pay and poor conditions ([Daily Nation, 18 January 2017](#)). In early February, Special Forces troops also seized the down of Adiake, again demanding the payment of bonuses ([VOA, 7 February 2017](#)). The government adopted a less conciliatory tone during the copycat mutinies, condemning the actions of the Special Forces and killing a number of the rebelling gendarmes in a gun battle in Yamassoukro ([New24, 9 February 2017](#)).

In spite of the harder line taken by the government, the military continues to exercise leverage over the Ivorian government. Though Ouattara was advised to reduce the size of the military after coming to power, the country has seen its military budget balloon from \$350million in 2011 to \$750million last year, with the mutiny adding another \$64million to the bill ([Africa Confidential, 3 February 2017](#); [Reuters, 19 January 2017](#)). This is due to large sections of the military being loyal to former FN commanders rather than the president. It has been speculated that former rebel leader Guillaume Soro may be behind the mutinies, designed as a means to consolidate his position as Speaker of the Parliament and position himself favourably in the race to succeed Ouattara in the 2020 elections ([Africa Confidential, 3 February 2017](#)).

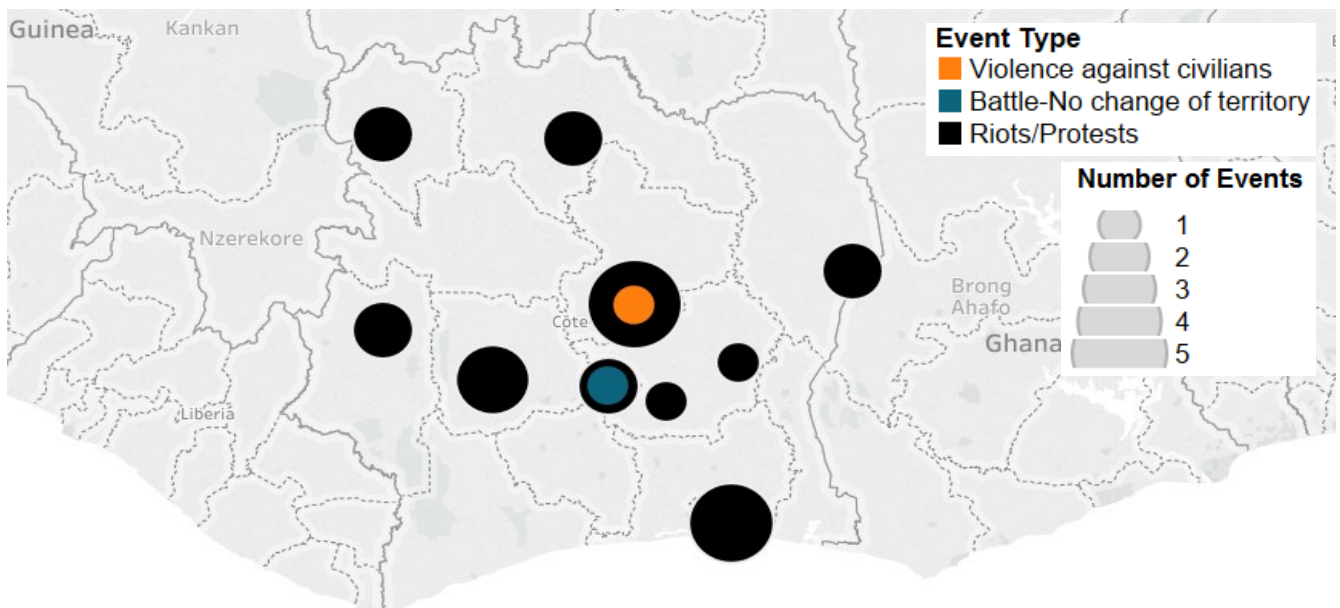


Figure 6: Mutiny Events by Event Type in Ivory Coast, from January - February 2017.

South Africa: Student Funding Demonstrations Continue, and a Rise in Xenophobia

Riots and protests continue to comprise the majority of events in South Africa. Last week saw some of the highest rates of demonstrations reported thus far in 2017 - well above the average number seen in other weeks (see Figure 7).

Demonstrations by students concerning funding continue (see also: [Conflict Trend Reports from December 2016](#); [October 2016](#); and [May 2016](#)). Protests surrounding the issue occurred sporadically throughout much of last year; they spiked in September and October with the Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande’s announcement of an 8% fee increase for 2017 (see [Conflict Trend Report, December 2016](#)). While student protest action was more peaceful than not during 2016 ([Conflict Trend Report, December 2016](#) and [October 2016](#)), state and private security forces nevertheless dealt with said protests with a heavy hand during 2016 – more than 800 students were arrested last year ([African News Agency, 28 October 2016](#)). As such, it is unsurprising that students may resort to more violent forms of protests this year given the increased securitization of campuses and heavy-handedness of security forces. For example, on February 22 in Pietermaritzburg, students at the Durban University of Technology barricaded the road with burning tires to protest the funding problems; the police used teargas to disperse them.

The leader of the #FeesMustFall campaign - student activist Bonginkosi Education Khanyile - was arrested in late September 2016 for allegedly taking part in public violence, illegal gathering, and inciting violence ([Times Live, 8 January 2017](#)). Students marched on February 24 in Durban to protest for the freedom of Khanyile, as he had been held in prison for 150 days. On March 1, hundreds of Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) supporters gathered outside the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg in support of Khanyile. He was finally freed from prison on March 2 following a Constitutional Court ruling ([SABC, 2 March 2017](#)).

Late February saw an increase in xenophobic demonstrations as well, with 5 riots taking place the week of February 19. However, “the xenophobic attacks are not new, nor are they the most serious of recent years. Predating the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment in parts of Europe and the U.S., the protests are just the latest spasm of xenophobia to grip South Africa” ([CNN, 24 February 2017](#)). In Atteridgeville, shops belonging to immigrants were looted

on multiple days; a group of demonstrators clashed with panga-wielding immigrants from Somalia before police broke up the clash using rubber bullets and water cannons. In Mamelodi, a group of people stormed and looted 3 Somali-run tuck shops; police attempted to disperse an anti-immigrant march in the same area several days later. In Duduza, rioters blockaded a road with burning tires and vandalized shops to demonstrate against a company that has been hiring foreign nationals; the police arrested 10 people. Last week, a shop belonging to a member of the Nigerian community was looted in the latest xenophobic attack at Jeppestown, Johannesburg.

As reported: “rampant unemployment and high crime rates have stoked the anger of South Africans against foreign migrants ... the unemployment rate in South Africa was over 26% in 2016, according to some estimates” ([CNN, 24 February 2017](#); see also, [NY Times, 24 February 2017](#)). [Amnesty International \(2017\)](#) believes that “longstanding police and criminal justice failures, including a failure to address toxic populist rhetoric that blames and scapegoats refugees and migrants for crime, unemployment and other social problems” have been contributing to fueling the latest tension.

While the rise in xenophobia and related demonstrations and attacks is disheartening, there have also been instances of support for immigrants in South Africa. On March 4, just over 100 people joined a march through the Cape Town city center, carrying placards that read: “We stand united against xenophobia” and “Refugees and immigrants need to be protected.”

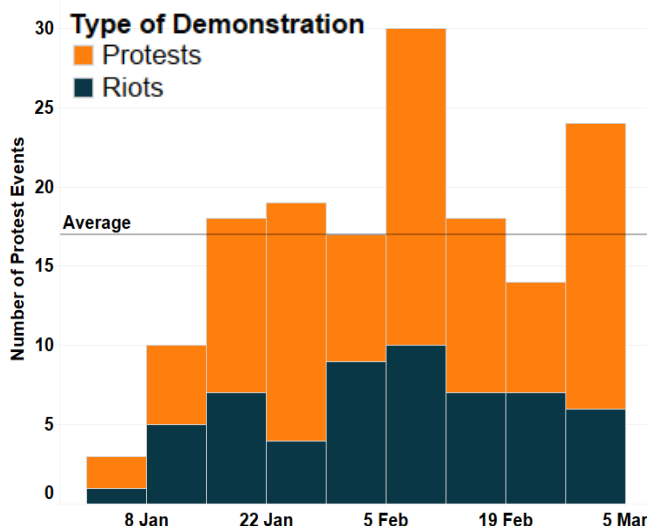


Figure 7: Number of Riots and Protests in South Africa from January - 4 March 2017.

South Sudan

Higher levels of violence have rocked South Sudan since July 2016, when battles re-erupted between the government and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO) in the capital Juba. Between July and October, the spread of the conflict remained localized in Greater Equatoria (ACLED, November 2016), but since November, this trend has shifted, with violence instead regaining grounds in other parts of the country, particularly in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei states. These shifts are due to continued insurgencies against the regime of president Salva Kiir and inter-communal fighting.

Rebellion

Government and SPLA-IO forces have fought in all South Sudanese states since November (see Figure 8). Despite the reported mobilization of additional militias and troops to support government offensives in Greater Equatoria (HRC, 14 December 2016), violence in the region has reduced by half since November. Notwithstanding, heavy battles were reported through to February, with SPLA-IO forces claiming to have gained a number of territories in Yei, Morobo and Magwi counties (Radio Tamazuj, 2 December 2016; Sudan Tribune, 2 October 2016), and insecurity persisting in Yambio and Kajo-Keji (Radio Tamazuj, 22 January 2017; Radio Tamazuj, 10 November 2016).

In parallel, battles occurred in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei, all long standing sites of rebellion. But the recent

trends mark a return to the onset patterns of the civil war in 2013. In oil-rich Upper Nile state, government forces sought to recapture a number of strategic positions along the Nile from SPLA-IO, notably in Nasir (Radio Tamazuj, 9 January 2017), and areas in and around Malakal, where violence flashpoints have appeared between Dinka and Shilluk communities since the division of states by president Kiir in 2015 (UNMISS, 16 February 2017; Radio Tamazuj, 26 January 2017; ISS, 12 January 2017). In Unity, movement of SPLA-IO forces led by Taban Deng Gai to the north during mid-November led to clashes with Machar’s SPLA-IO forces in Rubkona’s Nhialdiu, creating fear and destabilization in the area. Machar forces lost control of Dablual in Mayendit county to SPLA at the end of November (Protection Cluster, February 2017). Fighting significantly subsided until February, when a man-made famine occurred in two Unity counties, prompting president Kiir to announce major offensives to remove SPLA-IO forces (Sudan Tribune, 4 March 2017). Finally, conflict between government and opposition forces has flared up in Jonglei since February, when SPLA dislodged the White Army (allied to Machar) from its base in Yuai and subsequently clashed with SPLA-IO forces in various other areas (Radio Tamazuj, 17 February 2017; Radio Tamazuj, 1 March 2017).

Battles since November have hinted at the level of support each side receives from allied forces. Agwelek, as

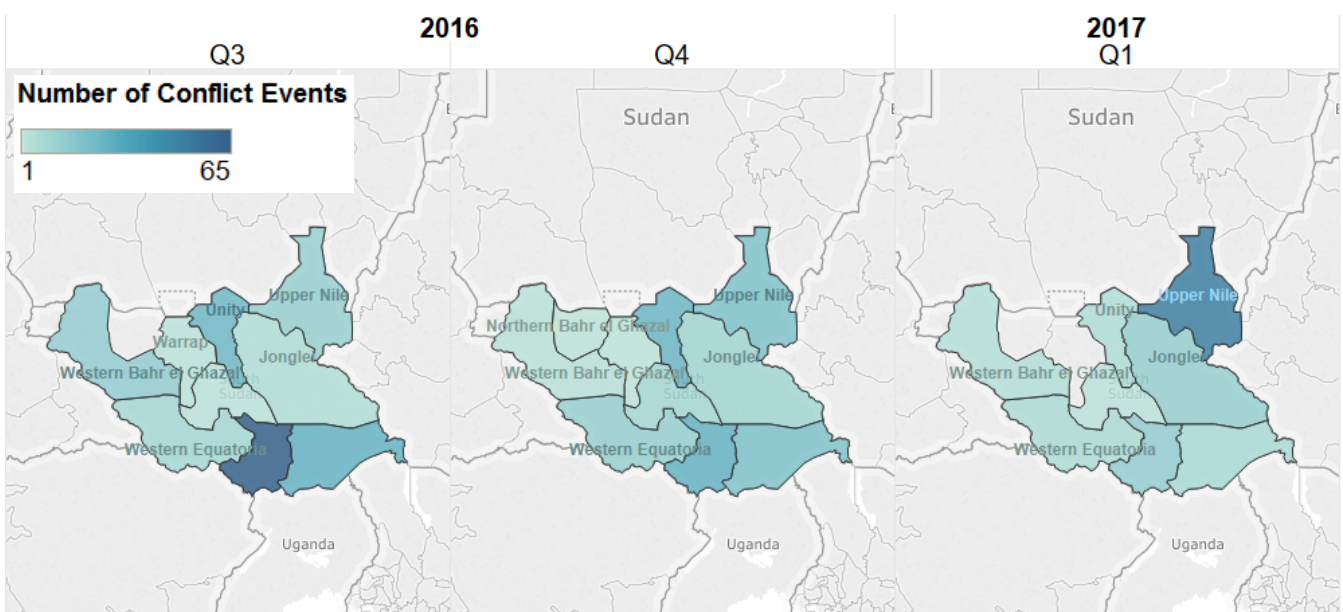


Figure 8: Number of Battles and Remote Violence Events by Quarter and Location in South Sudan, from July 2016 - February 2017.

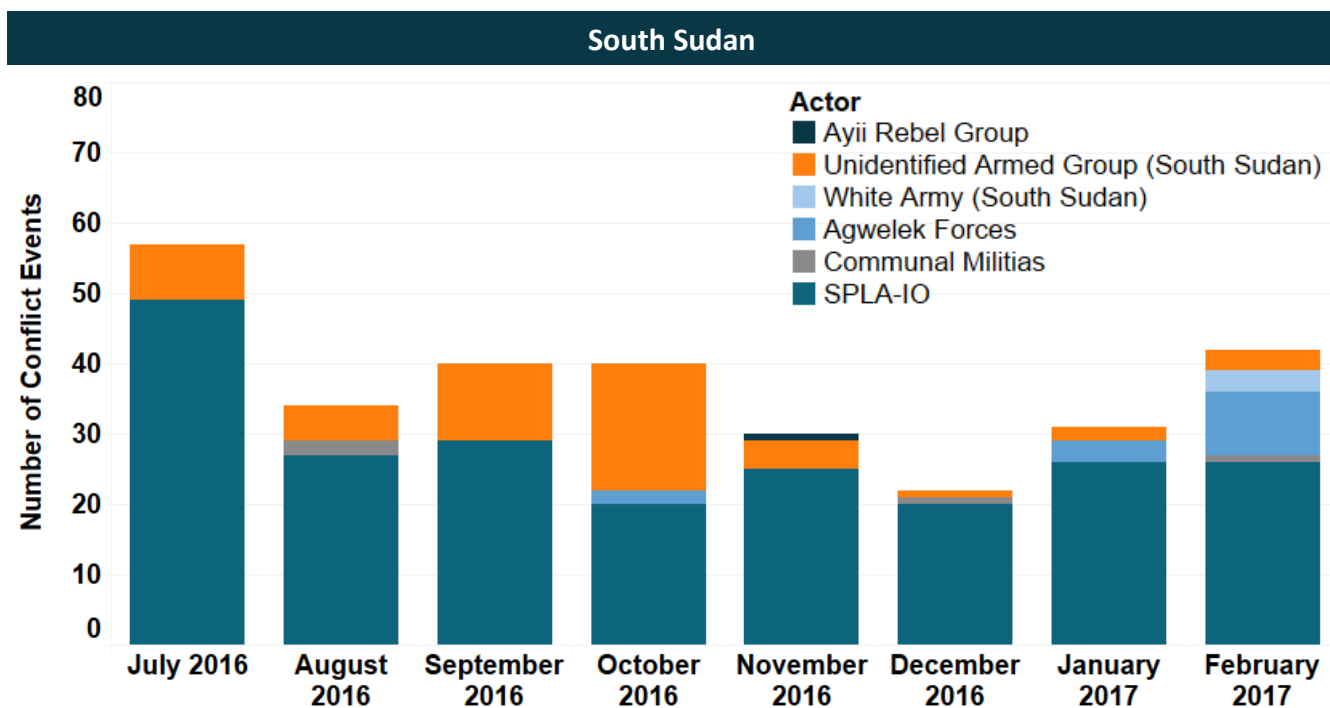


Figure 9: Main Opponents of Government Forces in Battles in South Sudan, from July 2016 - February 2017.

well as White Army militias, fought government forces in their respective areas (i.e. in Upper Nile and Jonglei), reaffirming their support to Machar’s opposition movement. Battles between unknown armed groups and government forces reduced, which might signify a consolidation of Machar’s support base (see Figure 9). Government forces, for their part, are supported by Dinka militias, including the Mathiang Anyoor, which attacked SPLA-IO in Central and Eastern Equatoria in February and March ([Sudan Tribune, 5 March 2017](#)), and allegedly by Sudanese rebels and Egyptian forces in recent battles in Upper Nile, which, if verified, could cause significant regional destabilization ([SSNA, 3 February 2017](#)).

Developments, however, also revealed the fragility of each front. The absence of a strong and unified opposition movement to the regime can be seen in clashes between Machar forces and Lam Akol’s National Democratic Movement (NDM) on several occasions in Upper Nile, as well as in the many reported defections from Machar’s movement to the government or to NDM, and the creation of new rebellions and parties, most recently the New Salvation Front ([Radio Tamazuj, January 2017](#); [Sudan Tribune, 6 March 2017](#)). On the other hand, resignations by dozens of senior SPLA and government officials; defections of hundreds of SPLA soldiers between December and February criticizing the government’s failure to implement the August 2015 peace deal; and accusations of government

crimes, corruption and ethnic bias, show a lack of support for president Kiir’s policies and the regime’s tackling of the current crisis ([Xinhua, February 2017](#); [Sudan Tribune, 2 December 2016](#)). Kiir’s dismissal of a number of officials demonstrating a lack of support for his policies or any link with the Machar opposition (such as the Imatong State Governor in Eastern Equatoria in February), has led to clashes and underlines Kiir’s own lack of interest in a sustainable resolution of the conflict ([Radio Tamazuj, 10 February 2017](#)).

Divisive policies by president Kiir carry the potential to further spread dissidence across the country, notably along ethnic lines as resentment grows against Dinka domination. Violence against non-Dinka civilians by state forces --and the culture of impunity surrounding these acts-- reinforces grievances towards those forces meant to protect populations. While state violence against civilians decreased since October, incidents of killing, rape, abduction, looting and property destruction have continued, particularly in areas where clashes with the opposition occurred. This points to an unceasing crackdown on dissent. SPLA forces were reportedly responsible for 18 cases of killings, torture, rape and beatings following clashes in Western Equatoria between December 2016 and January 2017, for instance ([Commission on Human Rights, 6 March 2017](#)). More recently, at the end of February, SPLA forces also allegedly arrested and killed a

South Sudan

group of 31 civilians accused of supporting the opposition following clashes in Jonglei’s Canal state ([Radio Tamazuj, 2 March 2017](#)). In reaction, armed attacks against Dinka civilians by unknown groups have proliferated (see Figure 10), particularly along roads in Equatoria, where Machar is said to have built a strong support base. Because many of these armed groups are local and their military arrangements informal, they are not included in security arrangements or peace dialogues – which could ultimately derail the implementation of any peace agreement in South Sudan ([ISS, 12 January 2017](#)).

Inter-communal violence

Between October 2016 and January 2017, corresponding to the beginning of the dry season, there was also an increase in violence by communal and ethnic militias in Jonglei, Lakes and Bahr el Ghazal states, mainly in the context of armed cattle raids or revenge killings (see Figure 10). While cattle raiding is widespread in South Sudan,

these areas are particular violence flashpoints since the division of states by president Kiir in 2015, which exacerbated ethnic conflict and hardened the positions of communities that previously shared resources ([ISS, 12 January 2017](#)). In Jonglei for instance, Murle tribesmen have been responsible for the killing and abduction of dozens of civilians from the Dinka tribe in armed cattle raids across Pochalla, Bor, Twic East and Uror counties. Despite the two tribes reaching a peace agreement in December, criminality persists ([Africans Press, 20 December 2016](#); [Sudan Tribune, 7 March 2017](#)). In Bahr el Ghazal in January, Tonj state herders repeatedly attacked farmers and communities of Jur River county and near Wau town over a cattle dispute. Over five days at the end of January, they reportedly killed 22 civilians and burnt down houses in or around Wath-lelo, Atido and Maleng areas of Jur River County, forcing thousands of people to flee to Wau town ([Sudan Tribune, 1 February 2017](#)).

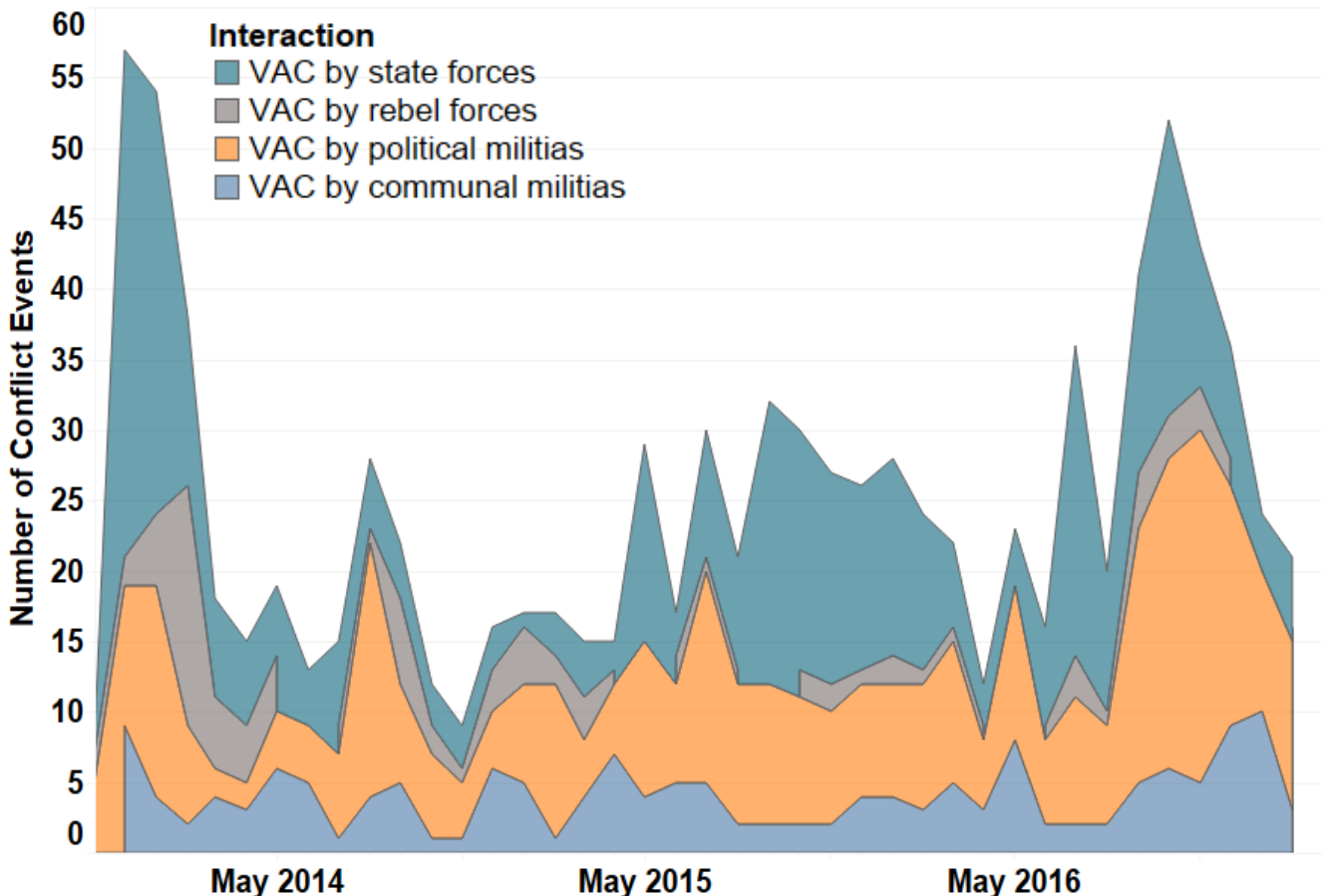
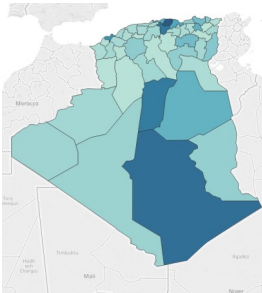


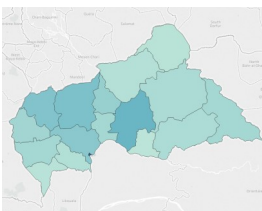
Figure 10: Perpetrators of Violence against Civilians (VAC) in South Sudan, from November 2013 - February 2017.

Conflict Trends Summaries



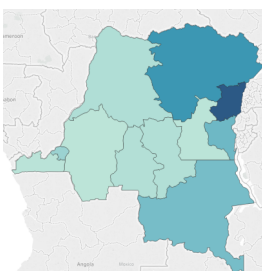
Algeria

The month of February saw a spike in conflict activity in Algeria, as conflict-related fatalities reached their highest monthly count since May last year. Clashes between security forces and armed Islamist groups reportedly claimed the lives of at least seven soldiers and twenty-six militants in February only, revealing the ability of the Algerian army in neutralising the different militant organisations operating in Algeria. Despite limited military and recruitment capabilities, armed militants are active in Kabylie, a mountainous region east of Algiers, where security forces often engage in counterterrorism operations targeting groups linked to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI). An Algerian branch of the Islamic State – commonly known as Jund Al Khilafa (Soldiers of the Caliphate) – has also claimed responsibility for several attacks, including a recent suicide incursion on a police station in Constantine. Nevertheless, there are doubts about the actual presence of an Islamic State organisation in Algeria, which may rather seek visibility by claiming responsibility for attacks carried out by local militant cells ([Tout sur l'Algerie, 2 March 2017](#)). While the weakened armed groups in the north-east of the country do not seem to constitute more than a local challenge, the frequent discoveries of arms caches in southern Algeria points to the transnational nature of the armed groups active in the Sahel, which can easily move across the borders with Mali, Niger and Libya to smuggle arms and launch attacks despite the increasing pressure from the regular armies.



Central African Republic

From November 2016, one of the most significant dynamics driving violence in the Central African Republic has been the ongoing infighting among former Seleka factions, most notably between the UPC and the FPRC-MPC coalition. In early February, clashes between the two groups led to a number of casualties and saw several areas change hands between the two sides. By mid-February, the FPRC had announced it would begin an offensive against Bambari, the UPC's main stronghold and the residence of its leader Ali Darassa. This prompted MINUSCA to declare attacking Bambari – a large population centre which hosts a significant number of IDPs and acting as a main hub for the distribution of humanitarian aid – a red line. Since then MINUSCA airstrikes have thwarted at least two attempts by FPRC-led fighters to march on Bambari on 11 and 26 February, with the second attempt occurring despite the departure of Ali Darassa from the town on 22 February. These airstrikes represent stop-gap measures as FPRC-MPC forces continue to occupy the nearby town of Ippy. The airstrikes have also created the appearance that the MINUSCA peacekeeping force is protecting the UPC, an allegation the FPRC has already made, which could lead to a renewal of instability if the peacekeepers become embroiled in the conflict between these former Seleka groups.



Democratic Republic of Congo

The DR-Congo is currently wracked by a number of localized conflicts, both new and old. The fight with the Kamwina Nsapu militia continues to bring insecurity and instability to the Kasai region, which had seen minimal violence over the past few years. Most recently, DR-Congo has been under fire internationally for the alleged massacre of between 100-150 militia members during fighting around the Kananga and Nzanga areas in Kasai-Central. Indiscriminate violence by FARDC soldiers resulted in unarmed civilians being caught up in violence ([UNOHCHR, 14 February 2017](#)), prompting the outcry. Elsewhere, a number of clashes have been reported since the beginning of 2017 between Congolese security forces and the Bundu Dia Kongo (BDK) political-religious group based in Bas-Congo province. The group was banned in March 2008 following clashes the year before, during which the police had been accused by the UN of using excessive force. The most recent clashes over the past two months have resulted in dozens killed, primarily BDK members, culminating in the arrest of their leader on 3 March. Finally, new fighting with former M23 rebels is reported since mid-January 2017, following their escape from custody in Uganda and return to the Kivu region. Military officials have reported that at least 20 former rebels and 2 soldiers have been killed in clashes since the start of February.

NB: Darker shading in the country maps indicates a higher number of relative conflict and protest events in the administrative region from 2014 - 2017.

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On 24 January, the leaders Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger met in Niamey under the auspices of the Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA). The goal of this sub-regional organization is to allow these three countries to coordinate the development of the Liptako-Gourma region ([Sahel Standard, 24 January 2017](#)), which includes, in whole or in part, nineteen provinces of Burkina Faso, four administrative regions of Mali, and two departments and an urban community in Niger. This 370,000-km² area is characterised by particularly porous borders and the region has become of increasing concern to the governments making up the LGA in the context of rising insecurity across the Sahel.

In an attempt to meet this growing threat, the leaders of the three countries announced at the Niamey meeting that they would be setting up a Joint Task Force (JTF) to combat “terrorism” in the Liptako-Gourma region ([Africa News, 25 January 2017](#)). According to the President of Niger, this force will be set up along similar lines to the multinational force created to combat Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. As with the Lake Chad basin, the attacks in the Liptako-Gourma region often involve border crossings by militants before and/or after the attacks are carried out. The groups involved include the so-called Islamic State, AQIM and their various affiliates, among others.

Some of the most recent attacks include an assault by an Islamic State-affiliate on a military post in Niger on 22 February which killed 16 soldiers ([Xinhua, 26 February 2017](#)) and coordinated attacks on police stations in Baraboule and Tongomayel in Burkina Faso on 27 February by Ansarul Islam, an AQIM-affiliate ([Xinhua, 28 February 2017](#)).

Although the Liptako-Gourma region has been the site of considerable violence since the beginning of the conflict in Northern Mali, the key shift in the period leading up to the creation of the new JTF was the growing spread of violence into Burkina Faso and Niger since the summer of 2015 (see Figure 11 and 12). This geographic shift has created a transnational issue presenting an increasingly difficult challenge to any individual government to solve. Furthermore, despite international deployment through Operation Barkhane and French jurisdiction within all three of these countries ([BBC News, 14 July 2014](#)), its operational presence is limited when forces are spread across an area three times the size of France ([MENA Analysis, 7 January 2016](#)).

By creating the JTF, the members of the LGA are recognizing that by removing the obstacle to cooperation presented by borders, solutions to the growing incidence of cross-border attacks in the region can be found. This is a clear

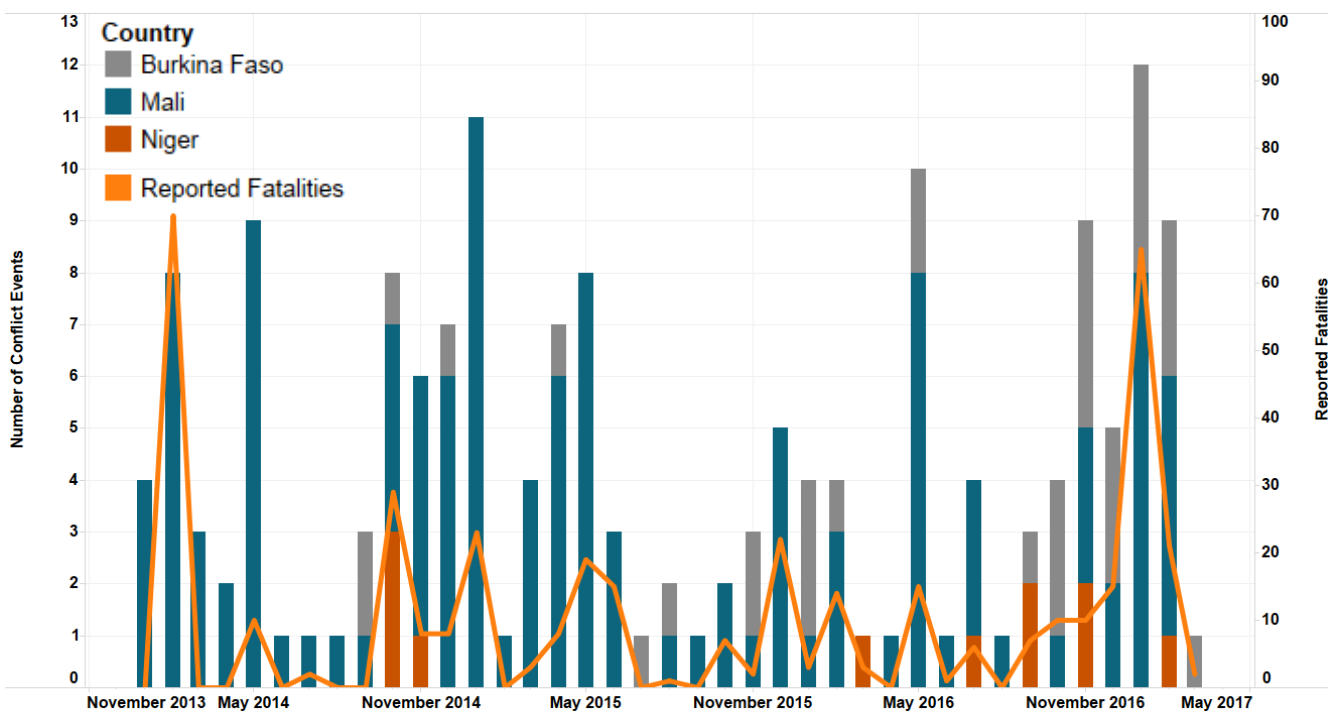


Figure 11: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country in the Border Areas of Liptako-Gourma Region, from 2014 - February 2017.

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example of how strategies adopted within the conflict with Boko Haram are spreading across the broader Sahel region. Niger in particular has gained considerable experience over the past few years by partnering with foreign militaries to deal with cross-border militancy. Besides its participation in the fight within Nigeria, Niger has also allowed Chadian military forces to be deployed in concert

with its own in its eastern Diffa area since 2015, which has been the government’s primary site of conflict with Boko Haram. In both Nigeria and Niger, collaborating with neighbouring militaries has played a key role in limiting the advantages that borders present to militant groups. It now remains to be seen whether the LGA’s new JTF can provide the same benefits for the Liptako-Gourma region.

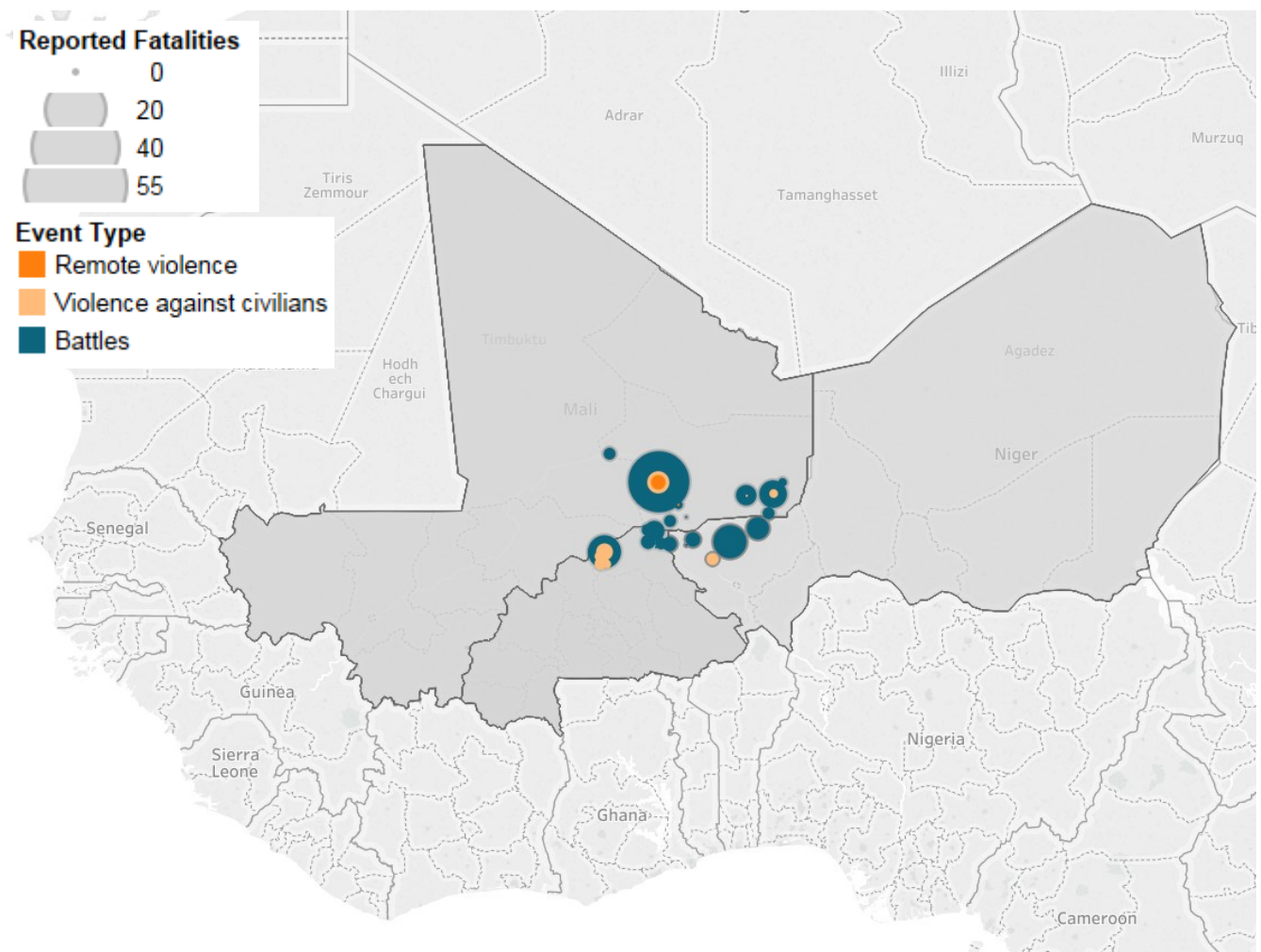


Figure 12: Number of Reported Fatalities by Event Type in the Border Areas of Liptako-Gourma Region, from 2016 - February 2017.

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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](http://www.acleddata.com).