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Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Welcome to the April 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.

This month's issue focuses on the scope and scale of operations conducted by the Kamwina Nsapu militia across the Kasai region of the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, banditry attacks and retaliatory communal violence in **Madagascar**, the surge of violence in **Mali** following the recent merger between Islamist groups into the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (AQM) group and reduced rebel group activity in **Sudan** after a period of concessions following the ceasefire agreement.

Elsewhere on the continent, riots and protests over austerity measures continue to fall in **Algeria** with Bejaia, Bouira, Ouargla and Tizi Ouzou experiencing the sharpest drop-off in activity, **Ethiopia** is experiencing a qualitative shift in the form of violence as battles involving Oromia militias have replaced riots and protests, and ethnic violence around land issues rose in **Kenya**.
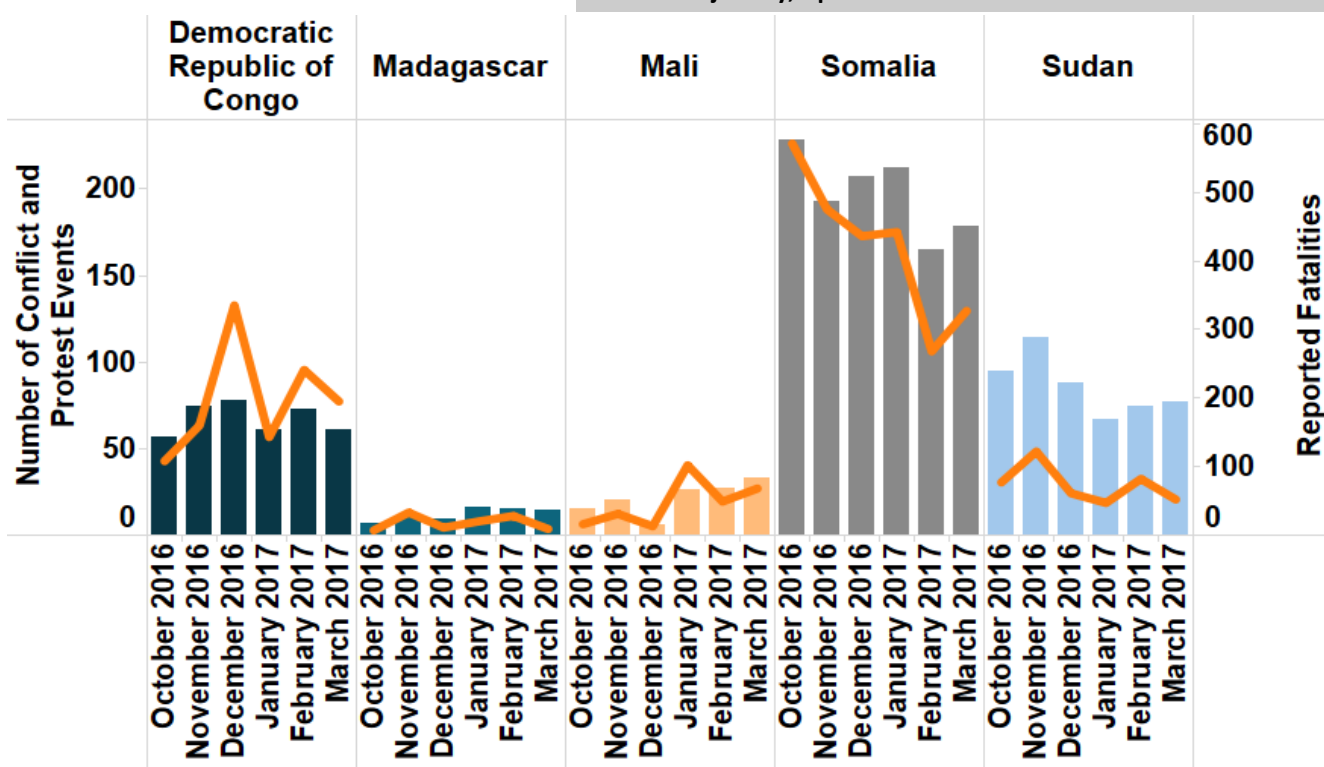

Decreasing
Warning
Ongoing
Escalating

Conflict Trajectory, April 2017

Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, from October 2016 - March 2017.

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Democratic Republic of Congo: Kamwina Nsapu Activity

The growing conflict with the Kamwina Nsapu (KN) militia in DR-Congo's Kasai region has come to dominate international headlines, despite continued insecurity in DR-Congo's Eastern provinces, and the threat of serious political instability following the collapse of the transition deal negotiated between Kabila's government and the political opposition. Following the release of a video appearing to show Congolese security forces involved in mass killings of suspected members of the KN militia captured during operations against the group (**Al Jazeera, 14 February 2017**), international outrage and calls for an investigation drew considerable attention to the conflict. More recently, the beheading of more than 40 police by KN militia fighters during an ambush near Tshikapa (**BBC, 27 March 2017**), reports of as many as 23 mass graves being found by the UN across the Kasai region since August 2016 (**BBC, 4 April 2017**), and the killing of 2 UN Group of Experts members studying the conflict (**New York Times, 28 March 2017**) has only further drawn attention to the growing instability caused by the fighting. The question addressed here is what insights the data gathered so far can offer about the operations and aims of the KN militia and what this conflict might mean for the country going forward.

Unlike many of the smaller militia groups in the DR-Congo, the background for the KN militia is fairly well-understood. The group was initially created by Kamwina Nsapu (previously Jean-Pierre Pangi), who inherited a chieftancy in the Dibaya area from his father, over grievances with the central government. Although their operations allegedly go back as far as June 2016, their first ma-

jor attack was carried out on August 8, 2016 in Tshimbulu, during which 9 people were killed and a number of symbols of government authority were burned, including police stations and a local electoral commission office. However, following this attack Kamwina Nsapu was killed during a clash with police on August 12, 2016, leading to a short lull in activity followed by a steep escalation in late September 2016 (*see* Figure 2). This included a major attack on Kananga, the capital of Kasai-Central, and the brief takeover of its airport by the militia before they were driven off by security forces (**BBC, 24 September 2016**). They also briefly occupied the town of Dimbelenge allegedly without a fight, burning police stations and a number of administrative buildings while also causing significant displacement of the population (**Radio Okapi, 28 September 2016**). Over the following months engagements continued between the militia and the security forces, including renewed assaults on Kananga and significant clashes around Tshikapa and Kabeya-Lumbu (*see* Figure 3), with a notable uptick in violence in December (*see* Figure 2).

In 2017, steady engagement between security forces and the KN militia has been reported weekly, with many of the most notable ones mentioned above, as well as high fatality engagements in Dibaya in early February and in Mwene Ditu in early March. Most recently a clash with security forces in the Kambamba area on March 28, 2017 left 18 militia fighters dead (**Radio Okapi, 29 March 2017**), while KN fighters killed at least 8 people, including police, during their capture of Luebo in Kasai Central (**Radio Okapi, 1 April 2017**).
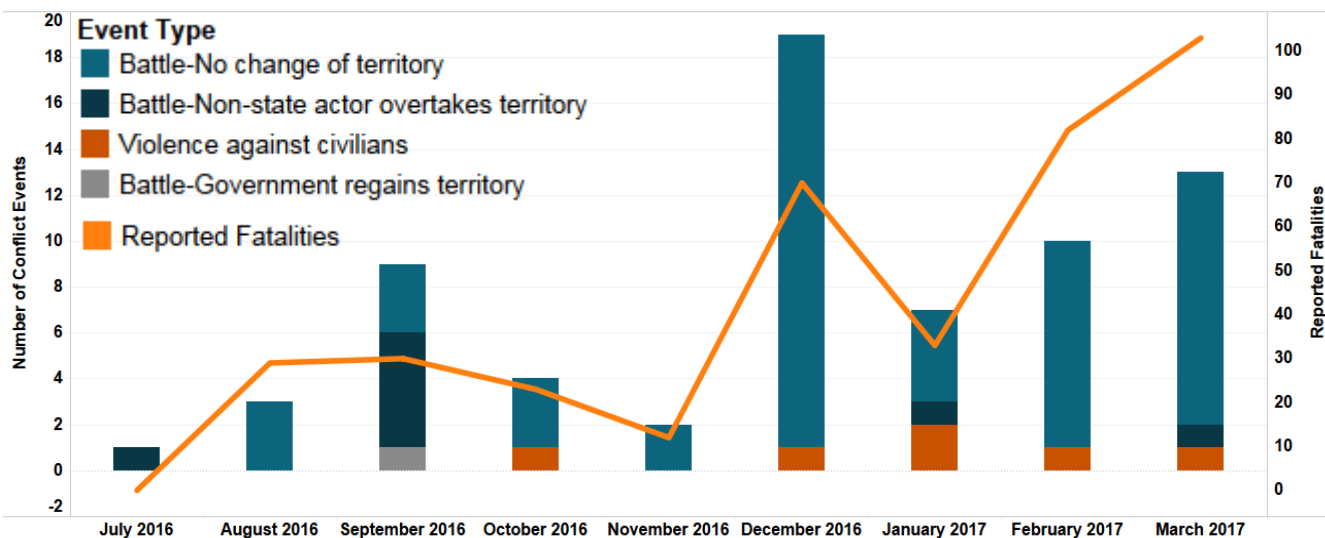

Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events Involving the Kamwina Nsapu Militia, from July 2016 - March 2017.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Kamwina Nsapu Activity

With this context in mind, there are a number of things that make the KN militia unique compared to similar local armed groups, including the multitude of Mayi Mayi militias active in DR-Congo's East. The first is the scope and scale of their operations, which have been reported across the Kasai region as well as in Lomani (*see* Figure 3) and have involved a number of successful captures of towns and cities (although they do not seem to be occupying territory) and the killing of large number of security officials. Another unique aspect is the focus and consistency of attacks against security forces compared to the relative lack of violence against civilians (*see* Figure 2), which is in line with the militia's stated aim of achieving independence from the central government. There have also been reports of militia fighters attacking Catholic-run schools (**Radio Okapi, 26 February 2017**) in order to "free" the children studying there (**News.va, 1 February 2017**).

In terms of membership, the militia seems to have a large base of support, given that a number of its larger attacks, such as those targeting Kananga, were reported to have involved hundreds of fighters (**Newsweek, 15 February 2017**), despite repeated claims by security forces of large numbers of fighters killed or captured (**French.China.org, 25 September 2016**). These fighters also appear to be fairly young, as the UN has also accused the militia of using child soldiers (**UN News Centre, 11 February 2017**) and sources have been backing this finding since the early days of the militia's operations (**RFI, 14 August 2016**).

Looking to Figure 2, it is clear that the conflict with the KN militia has markedly escalated over time, with December 2016 noting a drastic increase in both the number of events and reported fatalities. Over the last two months, events and fatalities increased. The fatality counts from February and March in Figure 2 also do not include a number of alleged civilian fatalities related to the security forces' crackdown on the KN militia in Kasai.

With the recent mediated talks between Kabila's government and the opposition having recently broken down following the collapse of the transition deal (**Catholic News Service, 28 March 2017**), the rising violence in the Kasai region is particularly troubling. Recent claims that Congolese security forces are engaging in atrocities in their operations against the KN militia could exacerbate political instability in the country, while a distracted central government may allow the security forces to take a hardline in quelling the uprising in Kasai, leading to further abuses and growing tensions.

Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events Involving the Kamwina Nsapu Militia by Location in DR-Congo, from July 2016 - March 2017.

Madagascar

The number of conflict events in Madagascar has risen sharply since the start of 2017. While conflict levels are generally low compared to other African nations of similar geographic and population sizes, the overall increase in violent events should be viewed with concern. The increase in violence highlights not only growing insecurity, especially in rural areas, but also illustrates the state's inability to deal with and control disorder. Two factors have contributed to this increase in violence in Madagascar: the increase in violent raids and attacks perpetrated by 'bandits', often referred to as the Dahalo (Malagasy for bandits), and the related increase in local community mob justice against suspected criminals.

Banditry attacks are most often perpetrated through the attack on rural villages and cattle rustling, and have long been a common feature in rural Madagascan society (**IRIN News 18 July 2012**). However, the frequency of bandit attacks has increased in recent months, and concentrated in remote rural areas far from the reach of the state apparatus (**Allegra Laboratory, 21 November 2016**). Figure 4 displays activity from January 2016 and outlines the increase in bandit/Dahalo attacks. While the government as establishing special task forces and implementing a number of counter-measures to diminish such attacks, little difference has been made in curbing the threat of banditry. Insufficient resources, remote and underdeveloped

rural terrain, as well as allegations that government officials are working with bandits hinder its ability to the reduce the frequency of attacks (**Madagascar Tribune, 18 June 2016**; **Allegra Laboratory, 21 November 2016**).

Linked to the government's inability to ensure security is the increase of vigilante and mob attacks. The *vindicate populaire* or popular anger and subsequent attacks *vis-à-vis* suspected criminals largely stems from the Madagascans lack of trust in the police, armed forces and judicial systems. According to the FFKM (Malagasy Council of Churches), lack of confidence in the criminal justice system as well as perceived levels of corruption has been a major cause of increased in vigilante violence (**Madagascar Tribune, 27 March 2017**). Data gathered by Afrobarometer in 2014 supports this argument as more than half of the sampled population have "little" to "no" trust in the police (63%), military forces (56%) and the Courts of Law (71%) in Madagascar. Levels of mistrust are higher than previous data collection periods, suggesting that popular confidence in the judicial and security systems are declining. The lack of confidence in state institutions would appear to entice local communities to become the unofficial distributors of justice, taking the law into their own hands, hence the rise of vigilante attacks against suspected criminals.
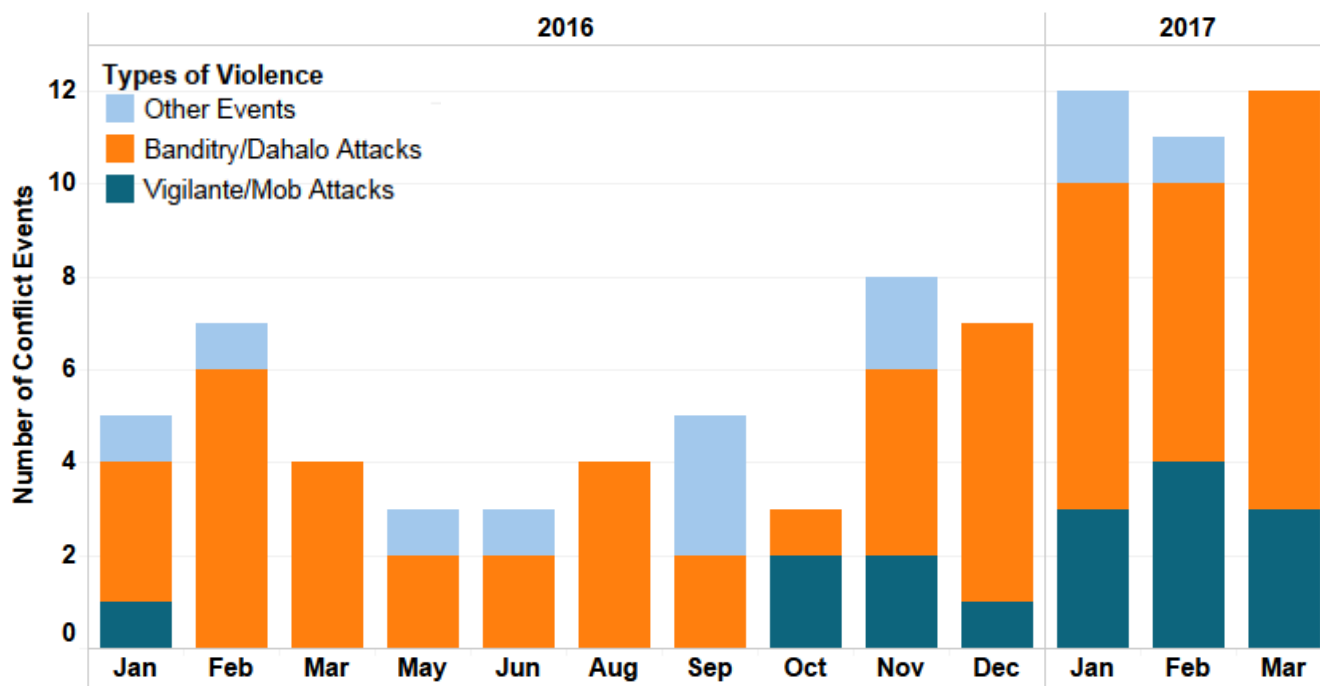

Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Actor in Madagascar, from January 2016 - March 2017.

Mali

In terms of number of events, March 2017 was the most violent month in Mali since early 2013, when France began Operation Serval against Islamist rebel groups in the north of the country.

The surge in violence is due to the activity of the newly formed Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, otherwise known as Al Qaeda in Mali (AQM) (**Bryson, 2017**). The group is the result of a merger between Ansar Dine, Al-Murabitoun, Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) with Iyad Ag-Ghali, the head of Ansar Dine, appointed as the group's leader.

The merger represents a dangerous development to peace in Mali for several reasons. Firstly, co-operation between the various Islamist factions of Mali has previously led to the groups improving their ability to launch large-scale attacks far from their assumed spheres of influence. Increased cooperation and the sharing of resources between AQIM and Al-Murabitoun enabled the large-scale attacks on hotels in Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Bamako (**Weiss, 2017**). The merger of these groups will not just increase their resources but will give AQIM a foothold in a wider swathe of territory. The inclusion of the MLF has given Islamist rebels increased access to the more southern regions of Segou and Mopti, while retaining the traditional strongholds of Kidal and Timbuktu (*ibid.*). In this sense, the merger has been successful as a great percentage of conflict in 2017 is taking place away from the far north and in Mopti/Segou (*see* Figure 5).

A second issue is that this merger capitalises on Fulani grievances to unify ethnic politics with anti-state Islamist ideologies through the inclusion of the mainly Fulani MLF. The Fulani number approximately 20 million and are spread across nearly 20 countries in Western and Central Africa; they are frequently embroiled in herder-farmer conflicts and vilified as violent strangers in the states they inhabit (**Fulton and Nickels, 2017**; **McGregor, 2017**). Some Fulani joined the Tuareg-led Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa's (MUJAO) rebellion in 2012. Since France's Operation Serval expelled most Islamists from the middle-region, the Fulani have suffered from repeated abuses from the Malian security services (**McGregor, 2017**). The Fulani have also clashed with the majority Bambara ethnic group over grazing disputes (**Reuters, 13 February 2017**; **Reuters, 20 November 2016**). The MLF allied with Ansar Dine in 2016 yet Tuareg-Fulani tensions undermined the strength of the merger (**McGregor, 2017**). Violence from state forces and rival groups seems to have enabled other Islamist groups to secure a more stable merger with the MLF and Fulani fighters, curated by Al Mourabitoun and AQIM.

By targeting this group in the creation of AQM, Mali's Islamist militants can further their reach dramatically and expand Mali's conflict far beyond its borders.
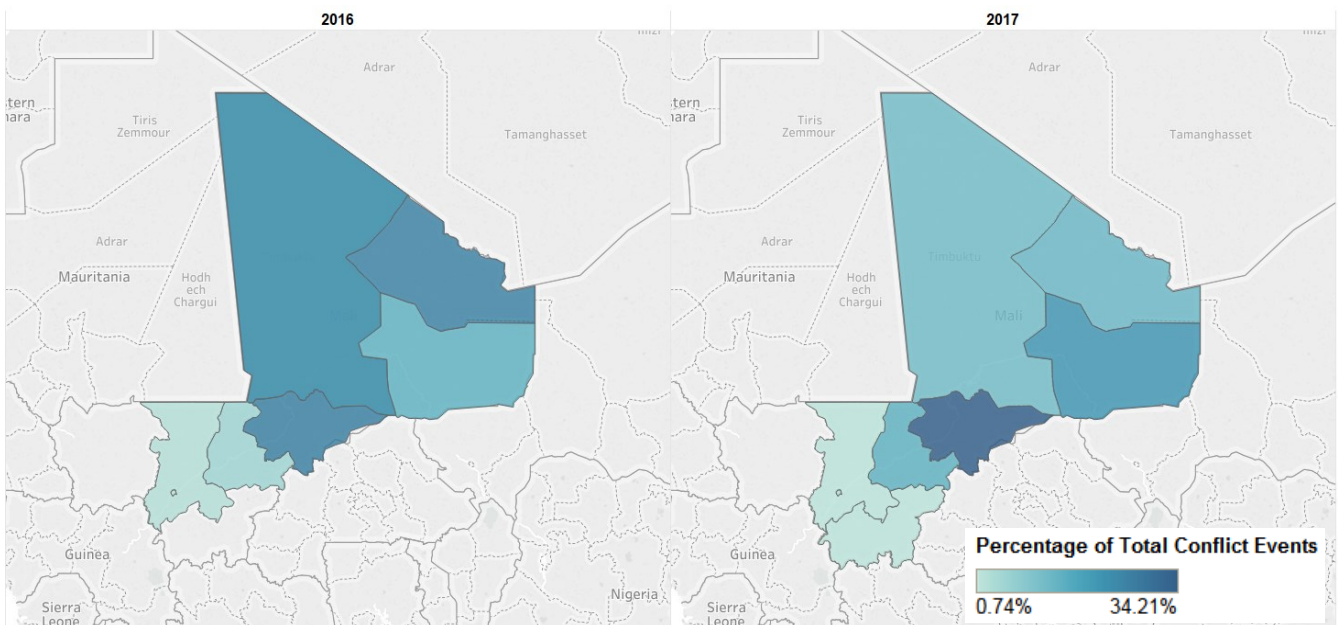

Figure 5: Percentage of Conflict Events by Region in Mali, from 2016 - March 2017.

Sudan

Sudan witnessed a decrease in violent political conflict in March which marked a continuation of falling levels of political violence in the country. The decrease in political violence seems to be related to the resilience of the ongoing ceasefire which encompasses a large number, but not all, of the active rebel groups. As a result, rebel activity has remained low since the start of the year (*see* Figure 6).

In October 2016, the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) extended a ceasefire for 6 months in Oct 2016. A ceasefire had first been declared in October 2015 and was then extended in April 2016 (**Sudan Tribune, 31 October 2016**). The October 2015 ceasefire failed to contain the violence as government forces engaged in a concerted bombing campaign targeting the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid's (SLA-AW) territory in the Jebel Marra area of Darfur. It was during this campaign that chemical weapons used resulted in large civilian casualties (**Amnesty International, September 2016**). A similar large-scale offensive was launched in the SPLM-N's territory of South Kordofan in March and April 2016.

In spite of past failures, the October 2016 ceasefire appears to have been adhered to by government and rebel forces, with March 2017 representing the first month without violent activity involving rebel groups since the latest ceasefire was announced.

Over the past month, both the government and rebel groups have given concessions in what appears to be a concerted effort to build trust between long-standing adversaries. In early March, the SPLM-N released 127 detainees, including 109 government soldiers (**Nuba Reports, 6 March 2017**). By mid-March, President Omar al-Bashir had issued a decree to drop the death sentences against 66 convicts from Darfurian rebel movements and pardon 193 others (**Sudan Tribune, 17 March 2017**).

In spite of these gestures, there are potential stumbling blocks. The most dangerous is the emerging factionalism in the SPLM-N. Last month, the group's deputy chairman, Abdel-Aziz Hilu, resigned and accused Secretary General Yasir Arman of refusing to include the right of **self-determination** in the agenda of the peace talks with the Sudanese government (**Nuba Reports, 31 March 2017**). The Nuba Mountains Liberation Council (NMLC) endorsed Hilu's demand for self-determination and decided to freeze the peace process (**Radio Dabanga, 3 April 2017**). SPLM-N Chairman Malik Agar decided to overrule the NMLC's decision and create a temporary committee to force a consensus between the factions.

The rift within the SPLM-N does not just represent a threat to the peace process but also raises the possibility of inter-rebel violence. During the Second Sudanese Civil War, the government took advantage of factionalism within the rebel SPLA, leading to a south-on-south conflict which helped lay the foundations for South Sudan's current civil war.
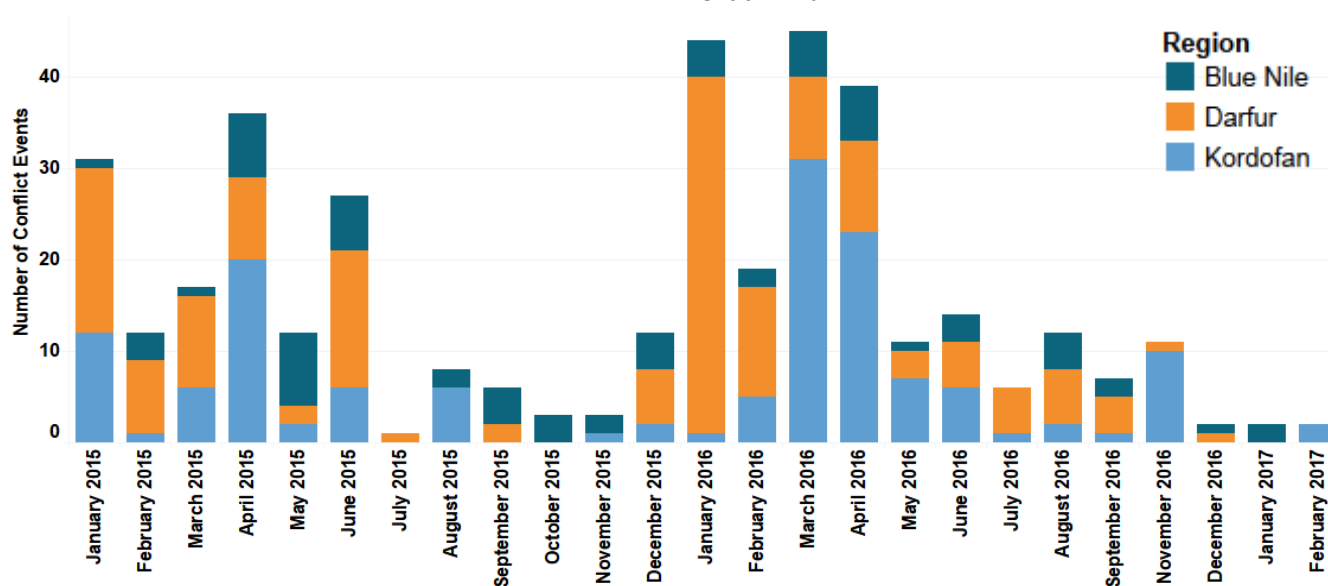

Figure 6: Rebel Activity by Region in Sudan, from January 2015 - March 2017.

The Links between Food Crises & Violence in East, South and West Africa: An ACLED briefing note

The 2017 Food crisis during 2017 will directly affect 70 million people across 45 countries[1]. Emergency conditions began to appear in 2016, and the crisis appeared to strike East Africa and the Sahel particularly badly.

Food stresses often occur in isolated pockets, largely due to changing weather patterns, poor harvests, inconsistent

seasons, malfunctioning markets, or lingering effects of previous disasters. But severe emergencies – such as those affecting large parts of Africa at present- are often man made. There are several reasons that current countries with emergency and famine are in such positions; these include conflict, mismanagement, and insufficient
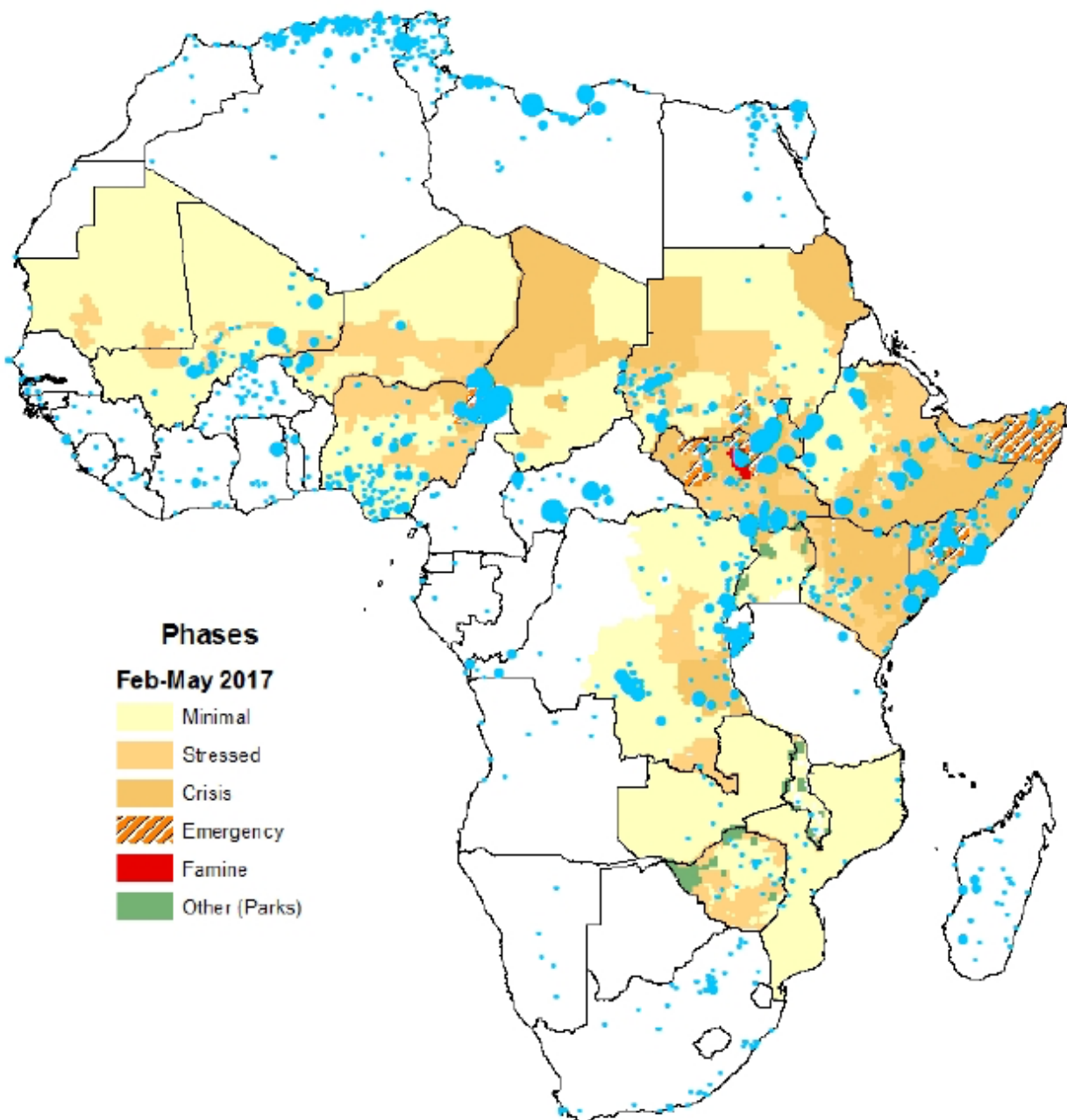
Figure 7: FewsNet Short Term Food Crisis Map with ACLED Data (blue), from January - March 2017.

The Links between Food Crises & Violence in East, South and West Africa: An ACLED briefing note

responses to previous disasters. As noted in a recent FewsNet report, the four states of Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen are most concerning. All are beset by conflict, yet not all are equally incapacitated to deal with food pressures because of violence.

As displayed in Figures 7 and 9, the majority of areas in Eastern, Southern and Western Africa are under "minimal" stress, while a third of that proportion are "stressed" or in "crisis". A small proportion of the overall area is in "emergency" and "famine" conditions. Only South Sudan registers as having "famine" conditions, and within South Sudan, this is largely isolated to Unity State.

But the average conflict rates (in red, based on averages since 2010) and the most recent quarter (in blue, based on activity since January 1st 2017) suggest that conflict is lower than expected in "minimal" and "stressed" areas, proportional in "crisis" areas, and is over-proportional per-km in emergency and famine areas. This has only intensified since the crisis began, there is an approximate 75% increase in recorded violence in "emergency" areas and a threefold increase in "famine" areas.

The affected states and their conflict forms and rates suggest three key features:

South Sudan's and Nigeria's emergency and famine conditions are largely due to violence. In both cases, the areas of most concern are isolated in active conflict areas, where food prices are high, market activity is hindered and livelihoods negatively affected by conflict over the long term
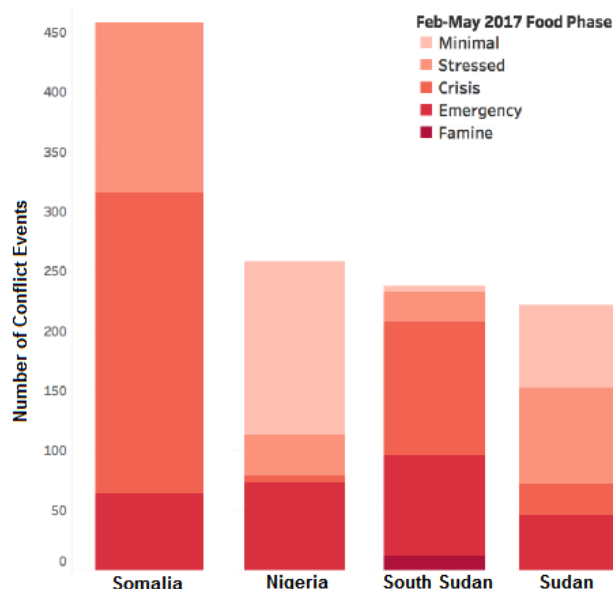

Figure 8: High Risk Areas.

As demonstrated in Figure 8, Somalia has the highest rate of recent violence across the four heavily conflicted states, yet Somalia does not have more areas with emergency or famine risk. Somalia has an emergency area that is similar in size to Sudan's, and below both Nigeria and South Sudan. Nigeria's emergency is the most isolated, as a much higher proportion of the state is under minimal stress.

	Coverage	Conflict Average 2010-2016	Conflict Rates Since 2017
Minimal	59%	42%	30%
Stressed	17%	27%	22%
Crisis	21%	22%	28%
Emergency	3%	9%	16%
Famine	.15%	.23%	.71%
Total	33789 Grid Sqs.	100%	100%

Table 1: Summary Statistics on Food Risk and Violence.

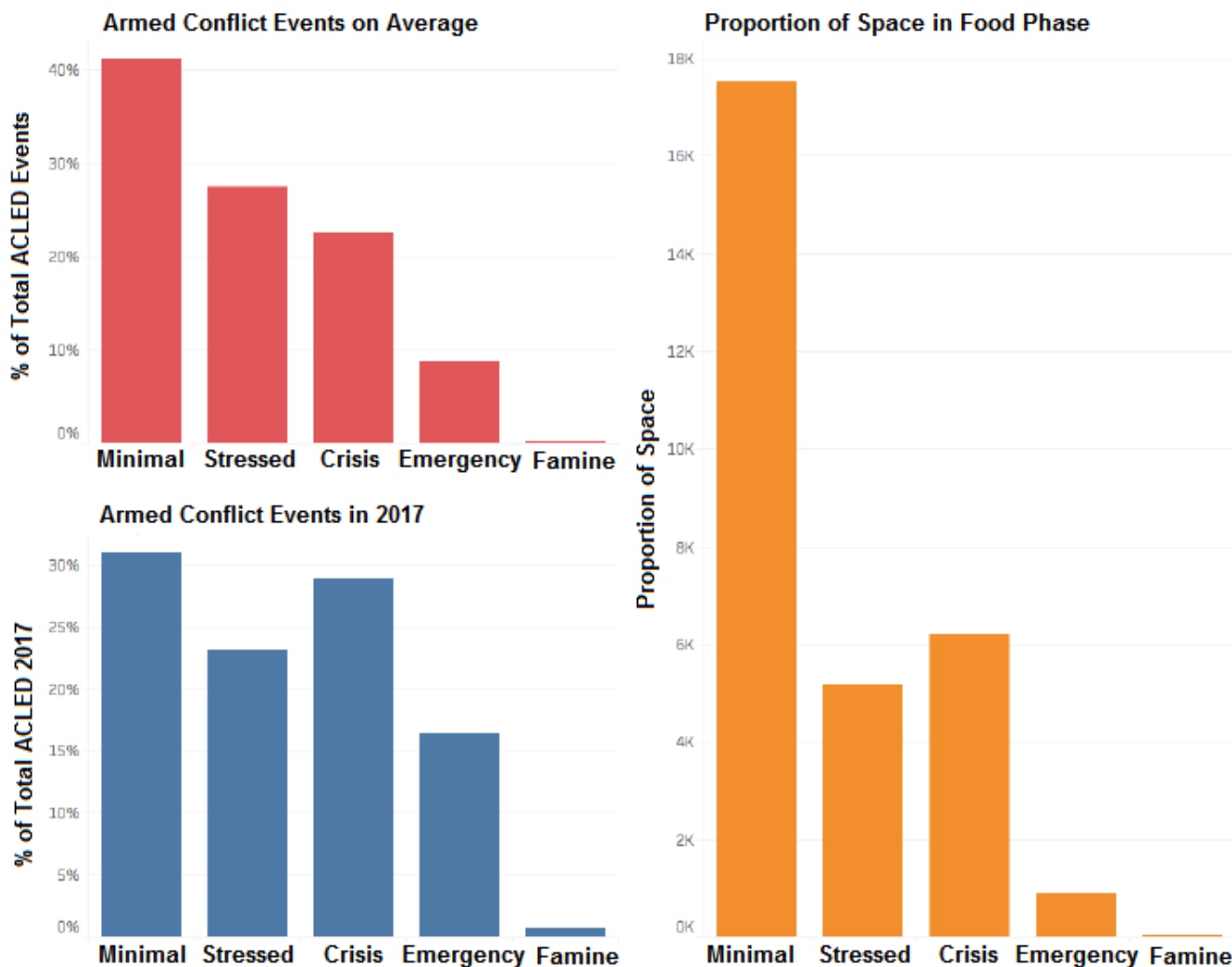**The Links between Food Crises & Violence in East, South and West Africa: An ACLED briefing note**

Figure 9: Violence and Food Phase Risk.

South Sudan's case is particularly acute: Famine is very likely in Unity state. This suggests that the government is largely at fault for the famine that will affect South Sudanese citizens. Unity state is an important home/base area for the opposition (SPLA-IO) who has not recently conducted much activity against civilians or other armed groups in this space. The State has been active in both battles and attacks on civilians in Unity state. This results in famine risk being largely isolated in Nuer areas.

Most concerning about the South Sudan risk is its clustering. As demonstrated in Figure 10, in the short term, the risk is mainly found in Unity State, and mainly in areas populated with the Nuer people, which are associated with Riek Machar's SPLA-IO organization. The SPLA (state

military) are the main active group in Unity state where they engage in battles with the rebels and a high degree of violence against civilians. As the emergency and famine conditions spread in recent months, it will enter into areas where allies of the President have recently begun large-scale battles.

There is also no immediate reason to suspect that the underlying reasons for food emergency or famine conditions deviate from conflict. For example, neither conflict nor risk co-vary with distributed wealth, nor does conflict or risk cluster around resource areas.

In Nigeria, there is a very clear-cut case of a conflict emergency borne of entrenched conflict and its legacy on de-

The Links between Food Crises & Violence in East, South and West Africa: An ACLED briefing note
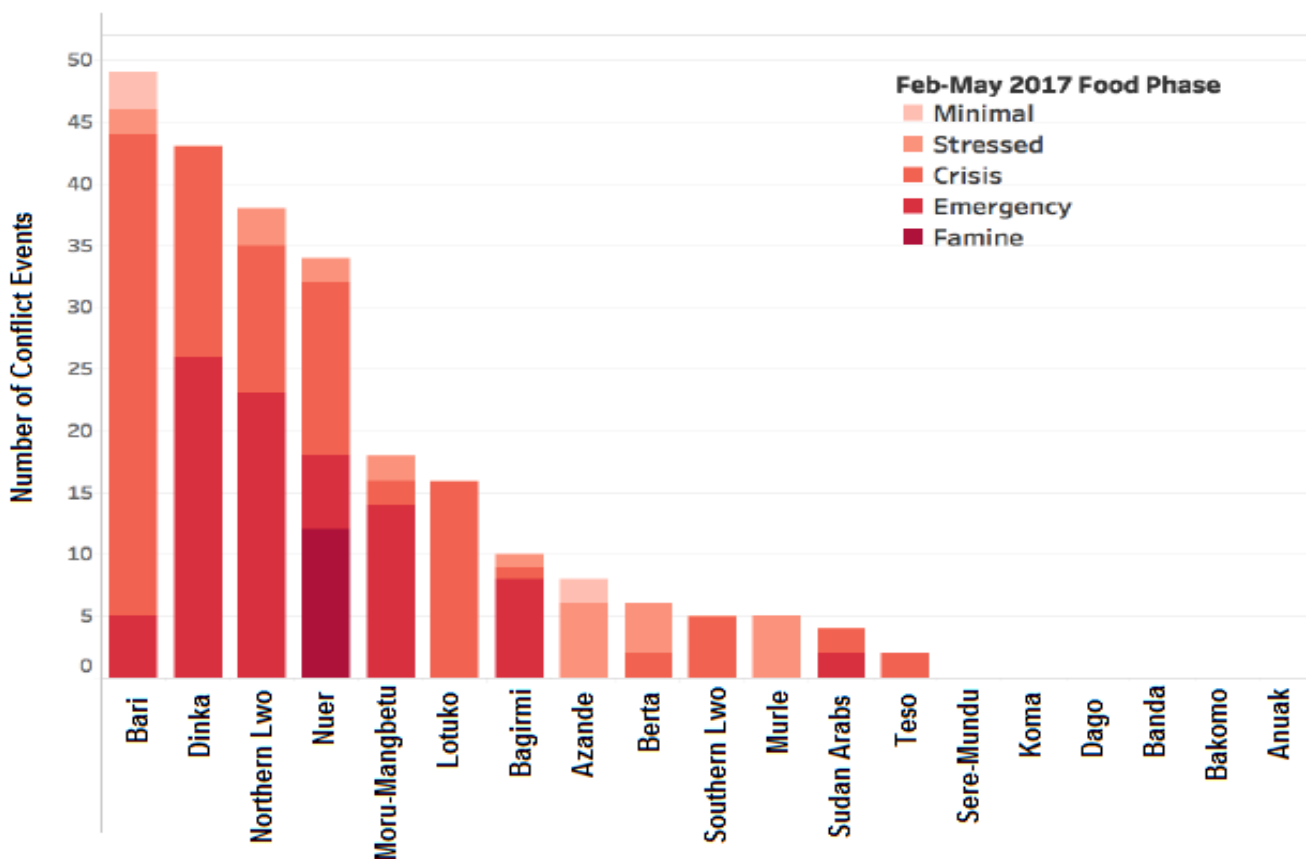

Figure 10: Who is at Risk in South Sudan?

velopment, livelihoods and resilience of populations.

There is a clustering in the Northern area and groups that occupy that space, including the Kanuri and Shoa-Arabs (*see* Figure 11 and 12).

Other zones of emergency (e.g. Zimbabwe and Malawi) are affected because of high food prices and general mismanagement. Command agriculture in Zimbabwe has had negative repercussions since it was phased in during 2016; whereas Malawi – despite good rains this year- struggles with the legacy of two disasters in the 2015 floods and the donor funding crisis that followed a corruption scandal of 2013-4. The variation in food crisis phases and coverage is noted on the ACLED crisis blog.

In summary, there is no singular, standard explanation for the variety of risk we see throughout East Africa and the Sahel. This crisis demands a reassessment of the links between famine, climate and conflict. There is little reason to believe that violence is higher in areas that are more vulnerable to climate change, relative to other areas with-

in and across countries. There is little to suggest an increase of violence is clustered in 'resource' scarcity or abundant areas – such as waterholes and pre-crisis wealthy or poor zones. There are also cases of 'missing conflict famines'- if conflict was the determinant to famine or emergency conditions, then Somalia, Sudan and the Middle Belt of Nigeria should see substantial famine conditions, while Zimbabwe and Malawi should be free of emergency conditions.

Method

The FewsNet map for 'future crisis' created using FewsNet Shapefiles for East, South and Western Africa for the period of Nov-Jan 2017 and Feb-May 2017. All data are available on the FewsNet website. Each map was joined and then grafted onto a grid of 33789 squares for localized analysis. Conflict data are from ACLED data at acleddata.com. Riots and protests are removed from the analysis.

[1] http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/Food_assistance_needs_2017.pdf

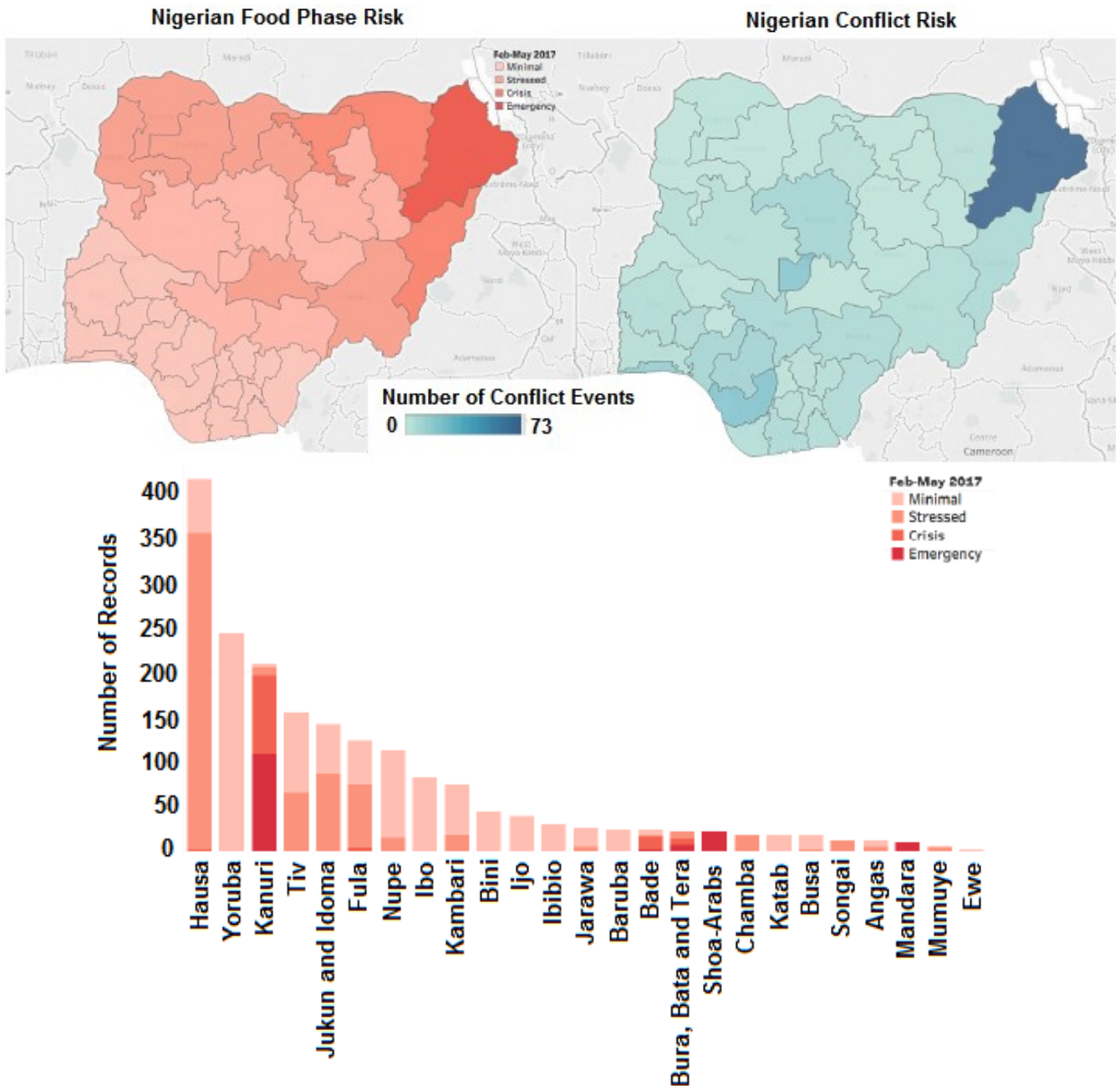### The Links between Food Crises & Violence in East, South and West Africa: An ACLED briefing note

Figure 11 and 12: Risk and Violence in Nigeria (top) and Nigerian Ethnic Communities and Food Phase Risk (bottom).

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**.