

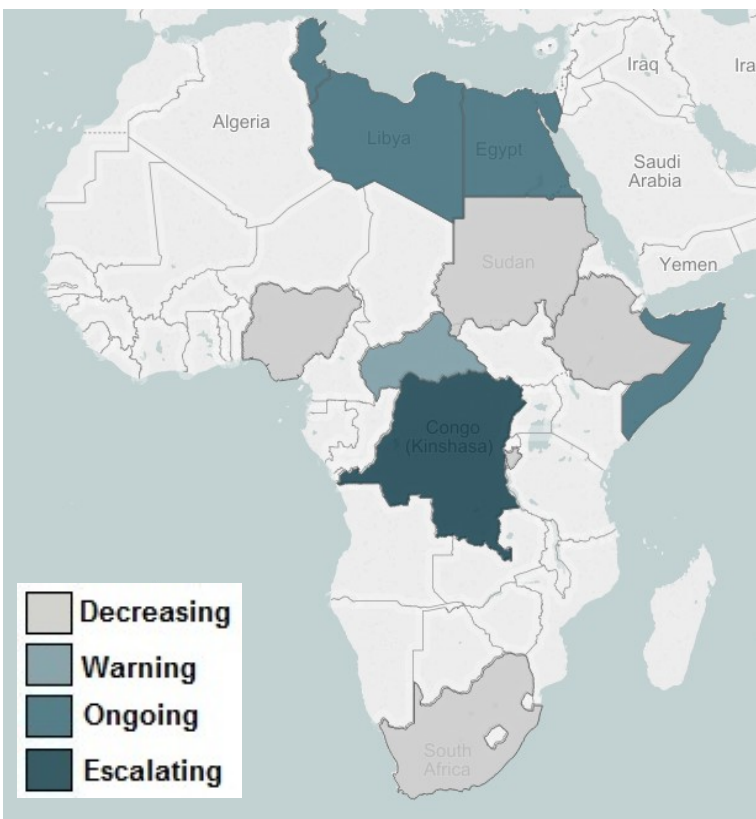
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 49)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, JUNE 2016

Welcome to the June 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](#), and are also available through our research partners at [Climate Change and African Political Stability \(CCAPS\)](#).

This month’s issue focuses on a stabilisation in the conflict environment in **Libya**, armed offensives and escalating protests in Eastern **Democratic Republic of Congo**, a geographical shift in clashes between SPLA/M-IO and military forces in **South Sudan**, the impact of the rainy season in **Sudan** on restricting political violence in in South Kordofan, increasing conflict activity in south-eastern **Tunisia** and the threat of Islamic State. A Special Report focuses on local conflict and violence monitors.

Elsewhere on the continent, violence against civilians is witnessing a slight drop in **Burundi** in May, rival armed groups clashed in the Kouï and Bocaranga areas of **Central African Republic**, and protest activity continued to fall in **Ethiopia**.



Conflict Trajectory, June 2016

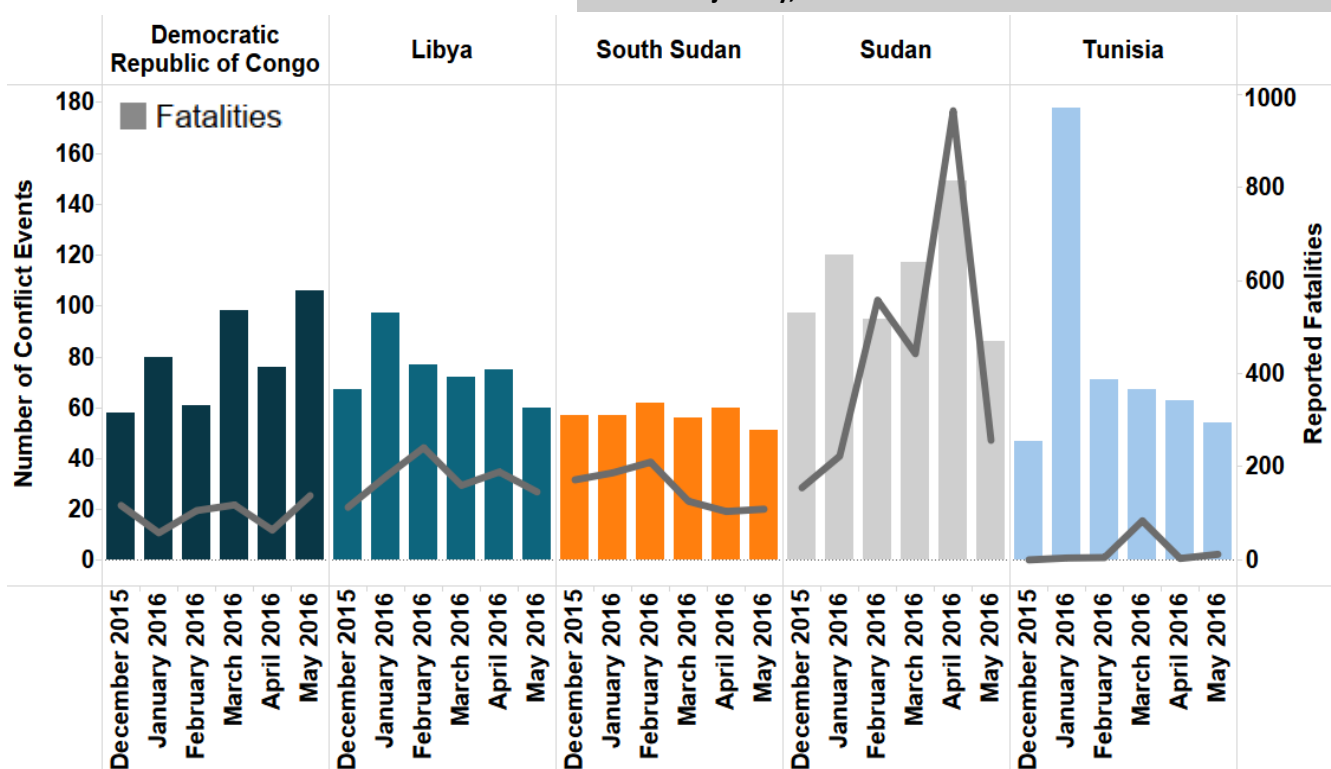


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, December 2015 - May 2016.

Conflict Stabilisation in Libya

Recent analyses on Libya point to the potentially destabilising effects of a possible international intervention led by France, the United Kingdom, Italy and other regional powers. The race to liberate Sirte, seized by the Islamic State in February 2015, pits the rival domestic administrations and their respective fighting factions based in Tobruk and Tripoli. Official UN reports and media coverage has provided extensive evidence of external interference on both sides, reflecting the wider regional implications of the Libyan conflict ([Reuters, 24 February 2016](#); [United Nations Security Council, 9 March 2016](#); ; [The Guardian, 1 June 2016](#)).

A general overview of Libyan conflict dynamics since the outbreak of war in May 2014 reveals a pattern of relative stability over the past year (see Figure 2). Whilst government forces have regained control of an increasing number of locations in 2016, these shifts have not translated into dramatic changes in the level of overall political violence and related fatalities. Upon closer examination, agents of political violence up to May 2016 suggest that Libya is entering into a transition stage in which splintered political groups are beginning to coalesce, shifting the balance of power back towards a bipolar conflict system.

Two recent developments in Libya support the hypothesis of stabilisation: the first is the increase in the number of discrete military forces and successful battles in which

territory has been ceded to government forces, the second is the increase in low-level political militia activity contained within Tripoli, suggesting an attempt by armed brigades to be ‘bought in’ to the emerging political settlement. Taken together, these dynamics reveal – contrary to speculation – that political forces on the ground have taken steps to mitigate against further fragmentation in the coming months.

New Military Operations to Regain Territory

The defeat of IS and the liberation of Sirte is a major source of competition between General Khalifa Haftar’s Libya National Army (LNA) forces and militias from Misrata (the latter now operating under the new umbrella of the General National Accord, or GNA): who takes Sirte first will take spoils and symbolic legitimacy ([The Economist, 14 May 2016](#)). Commentators have argued that this internal competition could lead to further fragmentation of the already-unstable political alliances that currently exist, which would undermine the functioning of the Tripoli-based unity government ([The Big Story, 6 May 2016](#)). Without ignoring the potential for escalation that the offensive in Sirte against Islamic State militants poses, Figure 3 shows the percent change in the number of discrete actors operating in Libya.

Two trends are clear: first, in the period from March –

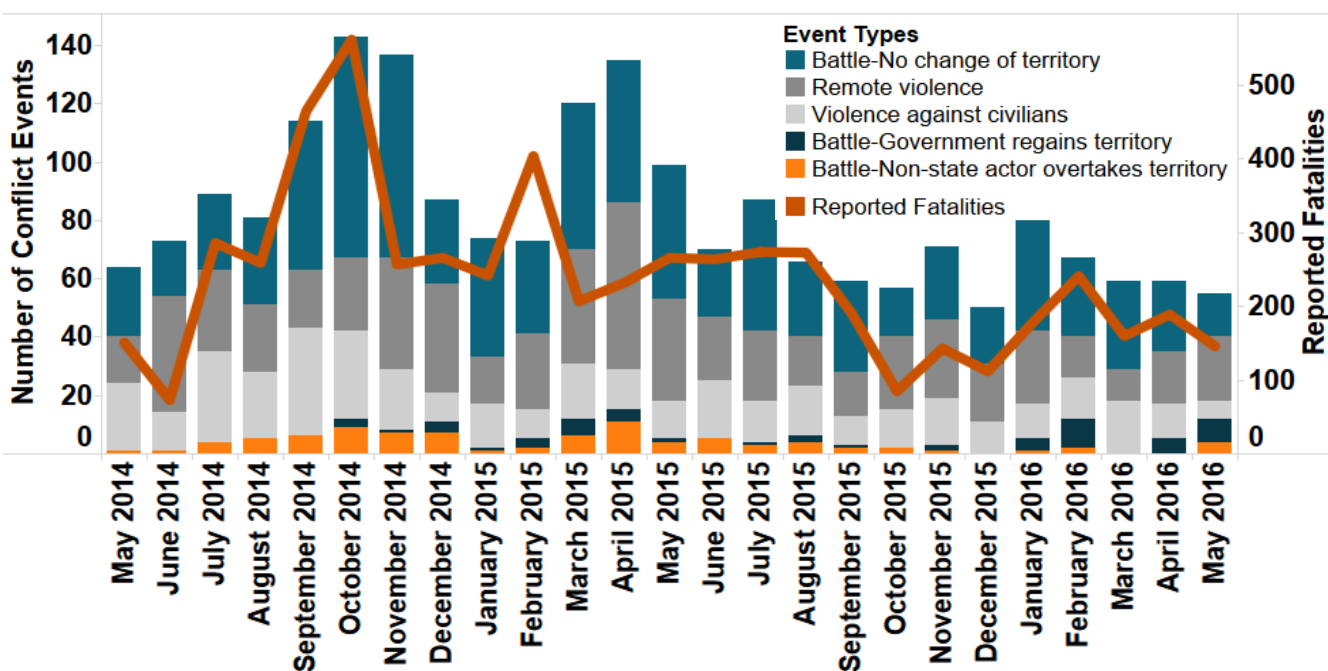


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in Libya, from May 2014 - May 2016.

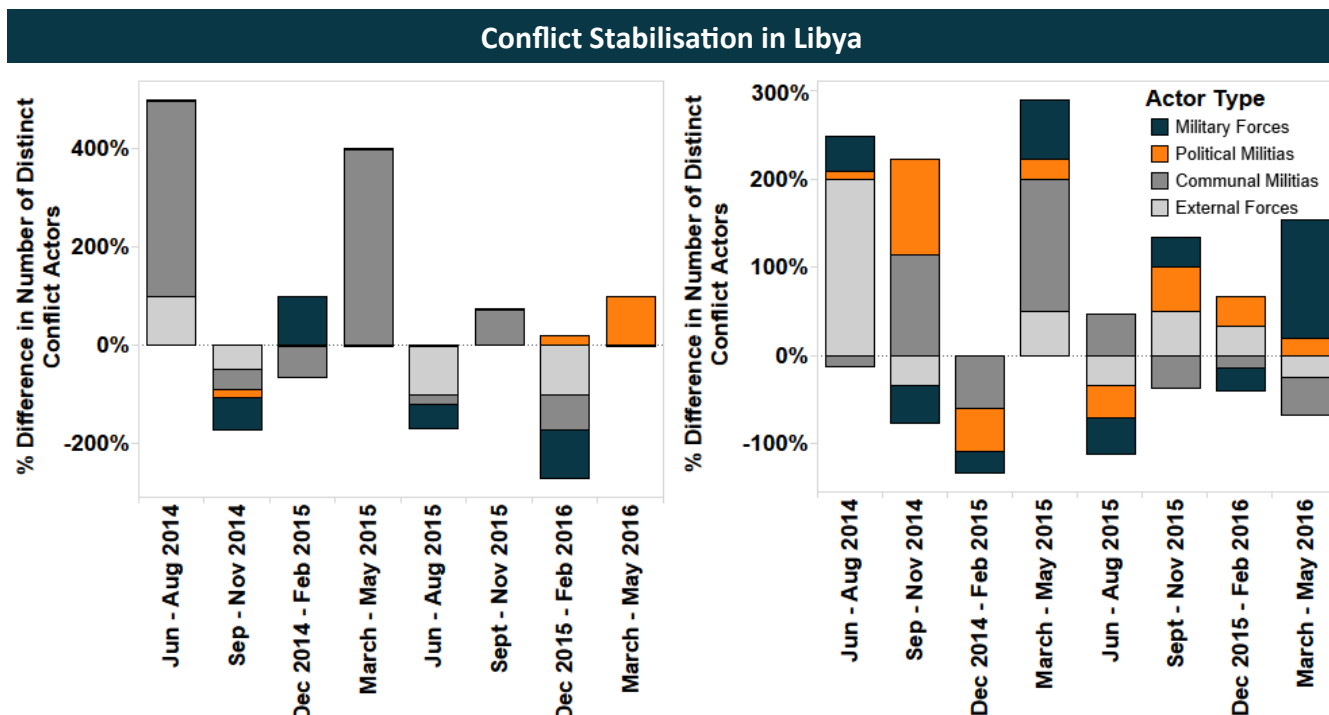


Figure 3: Change in Number of Actors in Tripoli (left) and Libya (right) by Actor Type, from June 2014 – May 2016.

May 2016, new military formations were created across the whole of the Libyan territory, reflecting the push by the GNA government to consolidate power into a formalised army structure. This attempted consolidation led to the creation of a Presidential Guard, tasked with securing vital institutions for the GNA as it installed itself in Tripoli. Second, this consolidation led to the establishment of the Operations Room Bunyan Marsous (Solid Structure) resulting in a dramatic increase in successful territorial confrontations in May 2016 as the forces supporting the unity government carried out a military assault to liberate Sirte from Islamic State control. Whilst operating as a de facto military force, the fighting groups that support the GNA are comprised of militias predominantly from Misrata and Al-Jufra who are further supported by — but not integrated with — the Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) commanded by Ibrahim Jadhraan ([Financial Times, 6 April 2016](#)). By contrast, the rate at which new political militias engaged in the conflict between March – May 2016 was lower than the two periods from September 2015 – February 2016 (see Figure 3). This evidence might suggest that local militias’ interests are moving away from the control of power in peripheral territories and towards Tripoli as the major centre of power.

Political Militias in Tripoli

The second trend is the increase in the number of political militia groups activating in the capital, Tripoli, following

the signing of the Libyan Peace Agreement (LPA) on 17 December 2015 (see Figure 3). The LPA paved the way for the formation of the UN-backed national unity government, headed by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. The number of militia groups from December 2015 – February 2016 increased by 20%, followed by a further 100% increase from March – May 2016. This second escalation of militia activity is particularly pertinent given that it coincides with the arrival of the Presidency Council in Tripoli on 30 March.

This emerging conflict pattern is largely localised to Tripoli and has been characterised by street battles between rival militia groups and increased rates of kidnappings and murders. Perpetrators of the violence include the Bab al-Tajoura Brigade, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, the Abu Salim Brigade and the National Mobile Forces. Militia violence may indicate the desire of these armed groups to be included in the latest political settlement: as al-Sarraj works to build a unified military force and international powers vote to lift the arms embargo, these flash episodes of conflict signal to the necessity of their inclusion for enduring stability. The defeat of the Islamic State, as well as the preservation of Libya’s territorial unity, thus hinge on the emergence of an inclusive political settlement orientated to reconciling the several warring factions and avoiding the mistakes made under the political arrangement of 2012-2014.

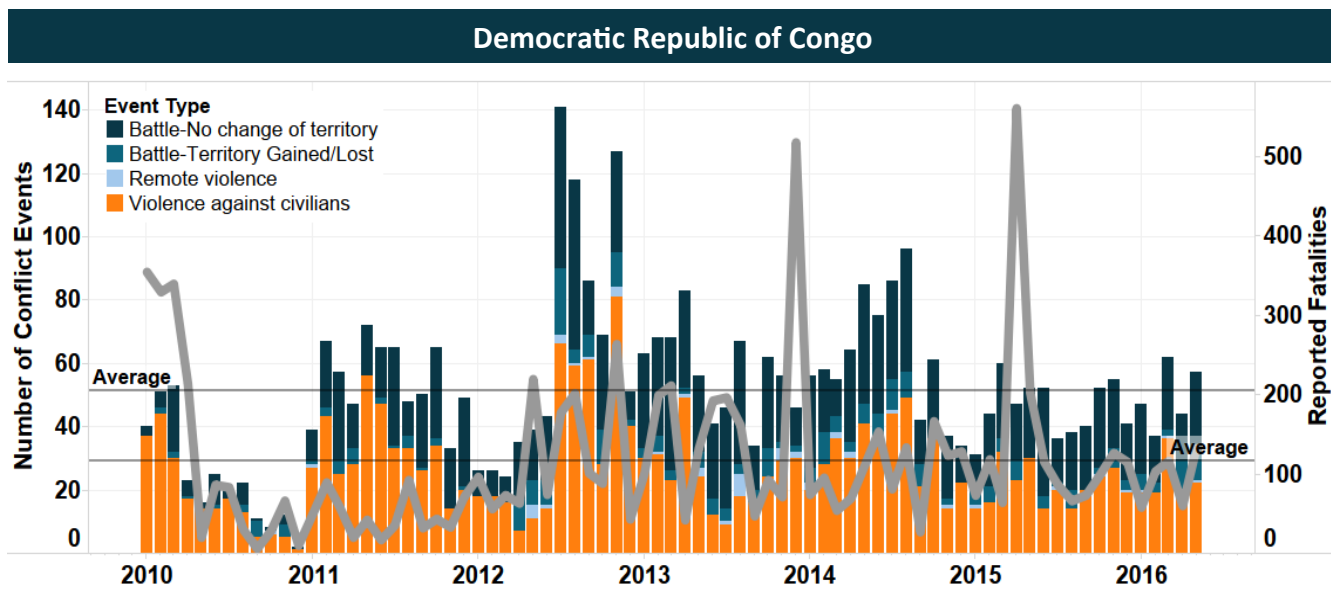


Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in DR-Congo, from 2010 - May 2016.

Over the past few months, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR-Congo) has witnessed the consolidation of several trends going back as far as early 2015. These include offensives against armed groups in the East, frustration by civilians at the military's inability to provide security to recaptured territories, and growing tensions related to the expectation that the upcoming elections will be delayed.

Insecurity in the Eastern DR-Congo has remained relatively stable with both the number of events and fatalities over the last 6 months comparable to the average over the past 5 years (see Figure 4). This is despite continued military offensives, such as renewed efforts by FARDC and MONUSCO to root out ADF bases in Beni territory ([Radio Okapi, 23 May 2016](#)). Although this cooperation has produced victories for the military forces, ADF rebels continue to show their ability to carry out high fatality attacks on civilians, with at least 30 killed in early May by the group ([AFP, 11 May 2016](#)). Similarly, offensives against the FDLR, APCLS and Raia Mutomboki militias have all produced modest gains, notably in terms of recovered territory, but have failed to produce decisive victories or lasting results.

One particularly notable example of this is the Congolese military's inability to hold recaptured areas. For example, an operation in the Bashali-Mokoto grouping in March succeeded in taking back territory from the Nyatura-FDLR coalition ([Radio Okapi, 17 May 2016](#)) but as FARDC soldiers withdrew to focus on other areas, this armed group simply reoccupied the areas as they were vacated ([Radio Okapi, 31 May 2016](#)). This trading of territory has characterised operations in the East, especially given non-state

actors' recognition of the military's limitations ([Oxfam, 6 March 2015](#)). Clashes have contributed to the ongoing insecurity of the civilian population, with the return of militias leading to significant displacement as well. Because of this, frustration has continued to mount among residents of these areas, as portrayed by regular "dead city" protest strikes against insecurity, most recently on 5 May and 18 May ([Radio Okapi, 18 May 2016](#)).

The DR-Congo has also seen a number of large-scale protest events over the past few months related to uncertainty surrounding the elections which are constitutionally mandated to occur in November 2016. However, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) has signalled that electoral delays are likely ([AllAfrica, 14 March 2016](#)) and the Constitutional Court ruled that President Kabila may continue his term in office during these delays ([France24, 12 May 2016](#)). Together, these have provided the motivation behind a number of large and almost universally banned protests which occurred on 26 May in a number of Congolese cities ([Al Jazeera, 26 May 2016](#)). Of these protests, casualties were reported in Bunia, Goma, Kananga and Kinshasa, including at least one fatality in Goma. More recently, a large rally in support of President Kabila was held by his People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) on his birthday, where a party notable suggested that a referendum should be held to extend the President's rule. If this comes to pass, planned protest actions are likely to result with the potential for DR-Congo to experience election-related violence on a similar scale to that seen in similar referenda in Burkina Faso and Burundi.

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South Sudan

In May 2016, the number of battles and conflict events in South Sudan fell to the lowest level in the past 12 months (see Figure 5). The decrease in total events and battles is due, in part, to the formation of a transitional government and the reinstatement of opposition leader Riek Machar as First Vice President on 26 April. In hopes of ending a civil war that began in December 2013, South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir and Machar’s Sudanese People’s Liberation Army/Movement-In Opposition (SPLA/M-IO) signed a peace agreement on 26 August 2015, with a provision calling for a transitional government to be formed within 90 days. Despite an overall decline in armed confrontations, a number of discernible trends are apparent. First, the geography of battles has shifted west to areas previously unaffected by conflict, riots and protests increased throughout May, and civilian-targeted violence persisted.

From June through November 2015, conflict events involving military troops (predominantly of the Dinka ethnic group) and SPLM/A-IO forces (predominantly Nuer) primarily took place in the oil-rich states of Unity and Upper Nile (see Figure 6). However, since December, the geography of conflict has shifted further west, with clashes taking place in the previously uncontested areas of Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal, including battles throughout Wau and Raga Counties in May (see Figure 6).

Despite a decrease in battles and remote violence, May saw the highest number of riots and protests since August 2015 (see Figure 5). On 28 May, Dinka youth protested in Juba, calling for the resignation of an archbishop who had invited Machar (an ethnic Nuer) to attend church services. While Machar urged church members to reconcile the bloodshed of the past, Dinka protesters later accused church leadership of “inviting the enemy” ([Radio Tamazuj, 24 May 2016](#); [Sudan Tribune, 30 May 2016](#)). Violence against civilians also continued at a steady rate in South Sudan, with 22 such incidences in May (see Figure 5). The majority of events targeting civilians are committed by unidentified armed groups, Murle ethnic militia (restricted to Jonglei State), and military forces.

The initial decrease in conflict events, particularly battles, following the creation of the transitional government may be short-lived. The country experienced a similar decrease in conflict events and battles in September 2015 following the signing of the peace agreement, only to see a spike in violence against civilians and reported fatalities in October (see Figure 5). Some news outlets report that violence is continuing at a steady rate despite Machar’s return to Juba. However, such reports consider criminal behaviour to be a chief source of violent activity, including armed elements “interfering” with World Food Programme aid convoys ([Radio France Internationale, 1 June 2016](#)).

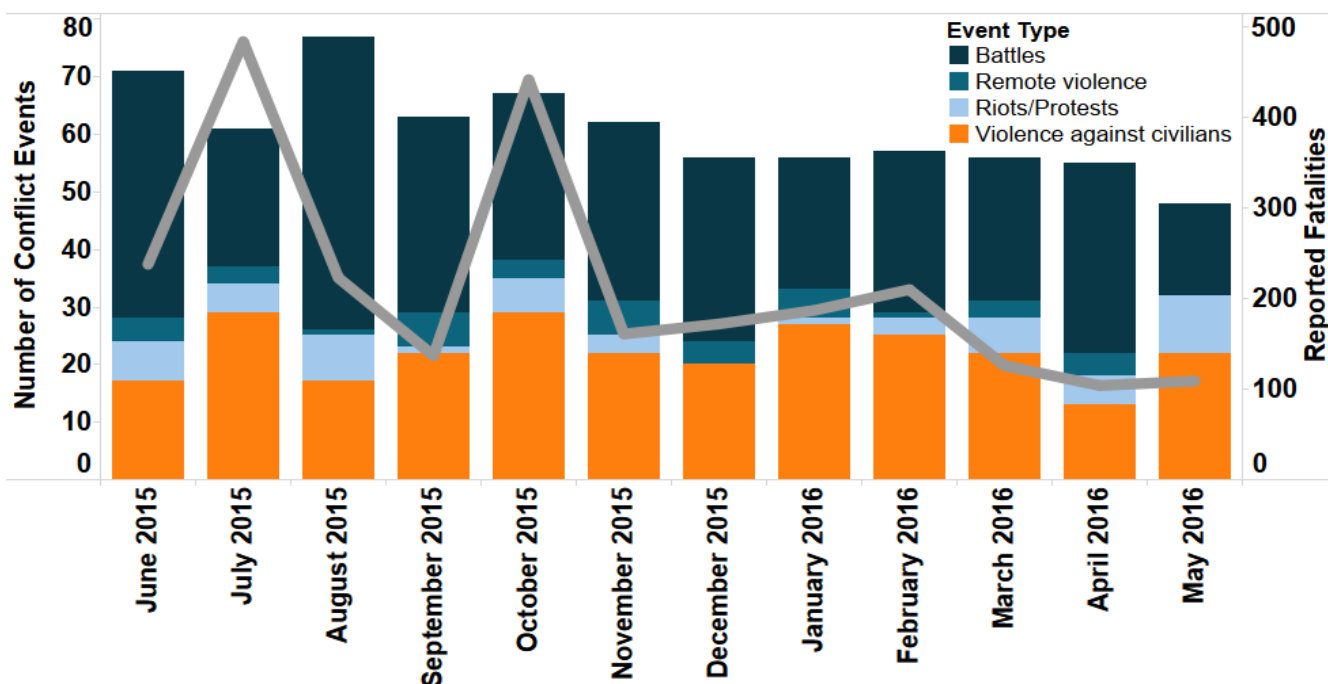


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Fatalities in South Sudan, from June 2015 - May 2016.

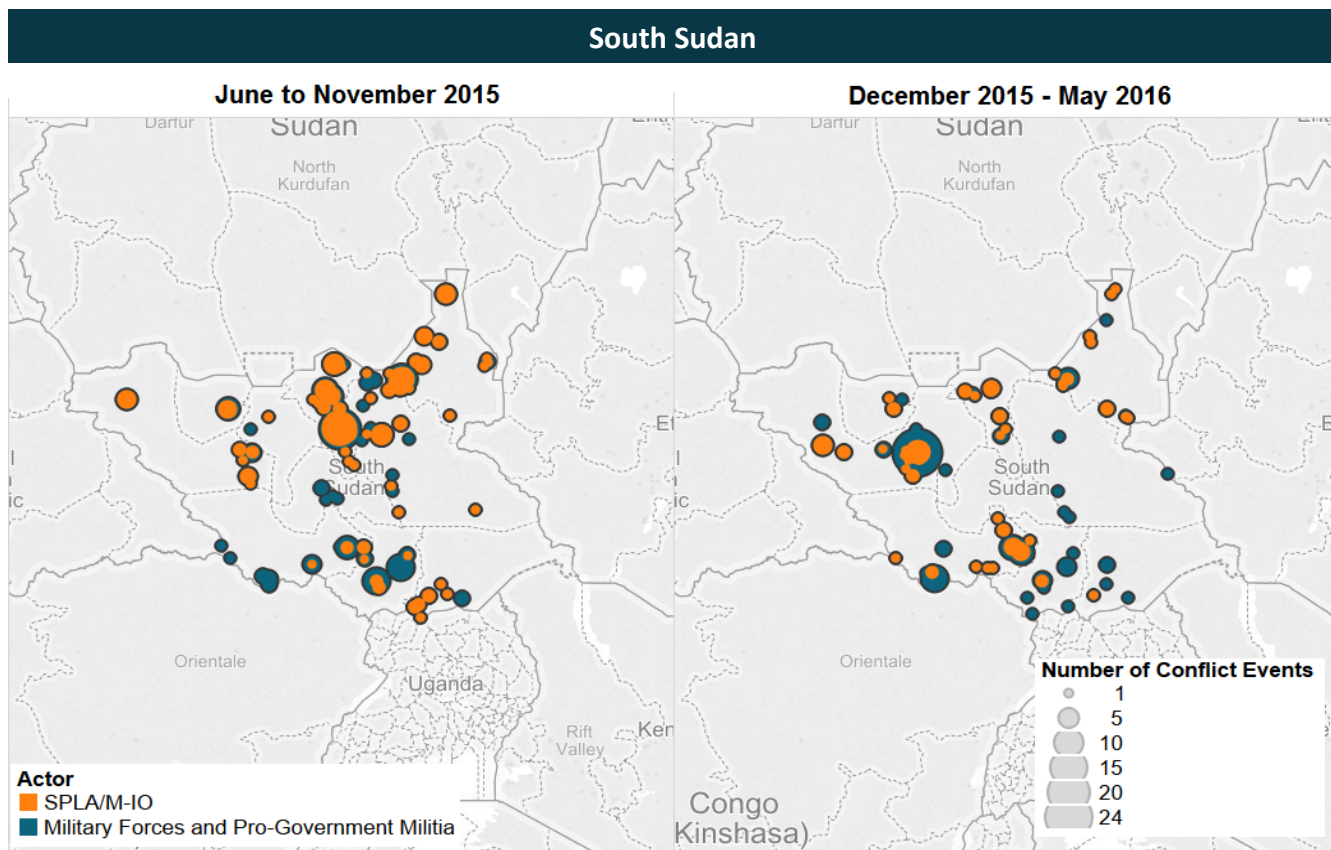


Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events Involving Military Forces and SPLA/M-IO by Location in South Sudan, from June 2015 - May 2016.

A key issue to be addressed by the newly formed transitional government is Kiir’s proposal to create 28 states from the existing 10 states. The unilateral decree was announced in October 2015, and new governors appointed in December. Kiir recently agreed to allow a committee to review the borders of the 28 new states, but not to consider a reversal of the decree ([Radio Tamazuj, 2 June 2016](#)). August’s peace agreement is based on a proposed system of power-sharing of the existing 10 states, not 28 ethnically-divided states. Therefore, the success of the new transitional government critically depends upon how many states will be governed. Governors suspected of supporting rebel groups are dismissed or suspended ([Human Rights Watch, 6 March 2016](#)). A failure to resolve the issue of state boundaries will potentially lead to continued fighting between government and opposition forces, despite the reunification in Juba.

Machar’s willingness to reunite with the government has also led to divisions with those once loyal to the opposition, notably including General Peter Gadet. Splits in the opposition may lead to battles between reunified military troops and opposition factions that are angered by

Machar’s growing relationship with the government. As Kiir and Machar rebuild an effective working relationship, the success of the transitional government also depends upon its ability to manage bureaucratic tasks, such as tax collection and paved roads. The world’s youngest country has “long been driven by personalities, not policies” ([New York Times, 30 May 2016](#)). But the government now needs to address issues of infrastructure and economy in order to prevent societal grievances from bubbling up into riots and violence. Therefore, the political reconciliation of Kiir and Machar must not only trickle down into an ethnic reconciliation within society. It must also catalyse a stable economy that is not controlled by internal power struggles within the government ([New York Times, 30 May 2016](#)).

With a lot on the shared plate for Kiir and Machar, it will be seen in the coming months whether the return of South Sudan’s “original political odd couple” will bring about a return to peace and stability in South Sudan – politically, ethnically, and economically ([World Politics Review, 9 May 2016](#)).

Sudan

Levels of political violence dropped to the lowest levels witnessed this year since reaching a high point in April 2016 (see Figure 7).

The spike in conflict in March and April was driven by the escalation of the conflict in South Kordofan between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N). Peace talks between the government and the rebels failed in December after the SPLM-N accused state forces of attacking their positions during the negotiations ([Nuba Reports, 5 December 2015](#)). The two parties disagreed over the nature of the dialogue, with the government maintaining that the objective of the talks is to settle the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, while the SPLM-N has called for a more holistic approach to resolve the multiple conflicts Khartoum has with its peripheral regions ([Sudan Tribune, 30 April 2016](#)). In response, the government launched a heavy offensive on the rebel-held areas of Um Sediba, Al-Maradis, El Lipo, Kutna, Ugab, Karkakaia, and El-Bir in March, though reports differ over whether the offensive resulted in the government securing territory (see Figure 8) ([Sudan Tribune, 30 April 2016](#)).

However, May witnessed a dramatic drop primarily in South Kordofan. This may be because Sudan is beginning

to enter the wet season where mobility is severely reduced, limiting the ability of armed actors to move the weapons and vehicles necessary for an armed campaign. Sudan has witnessed similar slumps in levels of political violence from early summer to December, typically after a spike in violence (see Figure 7). In the run up to the rainy season the government and the rebels typically intensify their operations in order to secure key areas before the rain makes movement difficult ([Strategy Page, 2016](#)).

The rains do not only affect ground operations but also limit the government’s aerial bombing campaign ([Nuba Reports, 4 November 2013](#)). The use of barrel bombs against rebel-held areas is a key pillar in the government’s fight against the SPLM-N with instances of remote violence accounting for between 36% and 59% of violent conflict events since February 2016. Aerial bombing event frequency halved between April and May, potentially and additionally due to Sudan’s current thawing of relations with the West, particularly the European Union which perceives Khartoum as a key ally in stemming the current migrant crisis ([Africa Confidential, 4 December 2015](#)). However, the government’s bombing campaign has threatened to destabilise this rapprochement with the high profile killing of six children in Heiban by a govern-

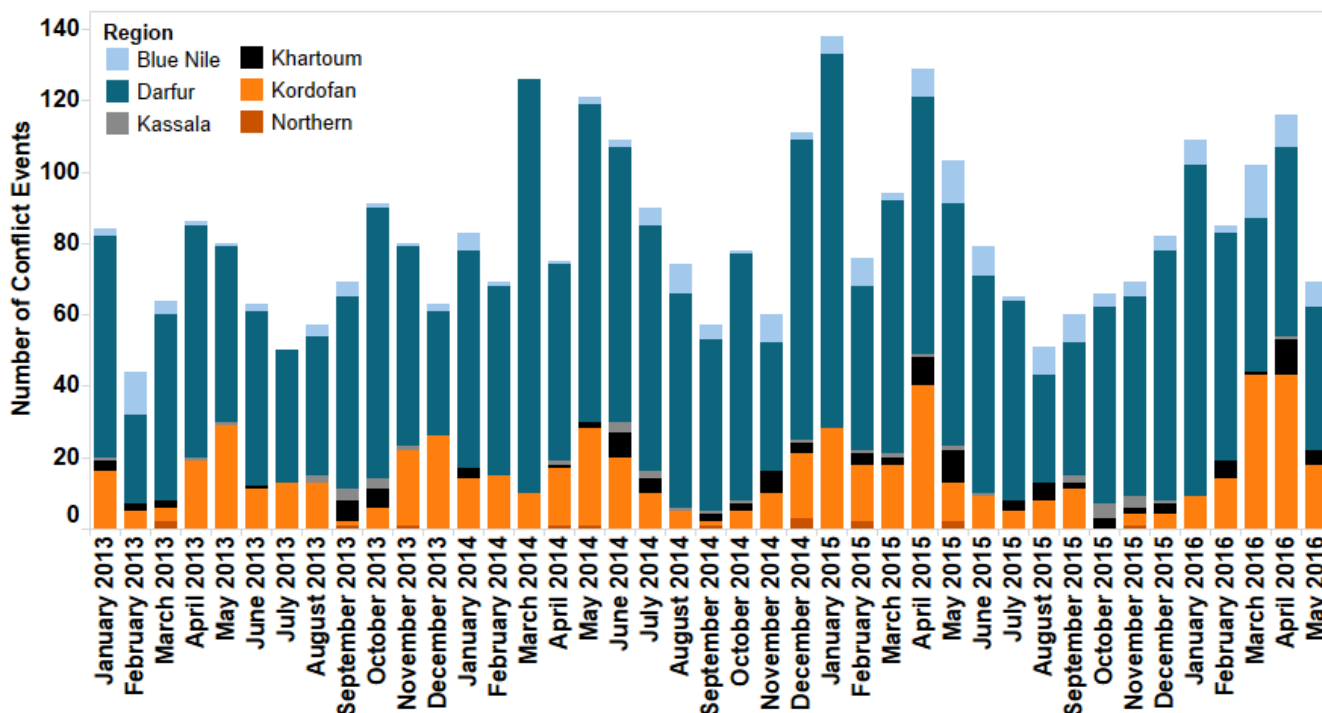


Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events by Region in Sudan, from January 2013 - May 2016.

Sudan

ment bomber at the very beginning of May. The act drew widespread condemnation from the ‘Troika’ (Norway, the United Kingdom and United States) ([Radio Dabanga, 29 May 2016](#)). With the onset of the rains limiting the danger of the SPLM-N, the government may use the next few months as a key moment to ease its bombing campaign in order to ease aid its relationship with Europe.

Lastly, the SPLM-N along with the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) offered a ceasefire in late April in order to facilitate negotiations ([Radio Dabanga, 29 April 2016](#)). This combination of factors has created a situation in which the main belligerents of the conflict have reduced their means for perpetuating conflict and have a vested interest to reducing hostilities.

In contrast, the Darfur region has seen a consistent decrease in conflict since January 2016 (see Figure 7). In spite of the presence of government-backed ceasefire, January witnessed high levels of political violence in the form of battles between the military and the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdel Wahid al Nur (SLM-AW) ([Sudan Tribune, 16 January 2016](#)). These battles, along with a campaign of aerial bombardments, have been primarily concentrated in the rebel group’s stronghold in Jebel Marra in the centre of the Darfur region (see Figure 8). While the government initiated ceasefire proved to be

ineffective in limiting the clashes between itself and the SLM-AW and SPLM-N, the rebel-initiated ceasefire has proven to be successful in dramatically reducing violence.

The reduced violence in Darfur and comparatively secure ceasefire may be due to the Darfur referendum which took place on 11 April. The referendum is the supposed conclusion of the Doha Peace Process which started in 2011; it concerned whether Darfur would remain five separate states or a single unified region, and resulted in 97% of voters voting in favour of the status quo ([BBC News, 23 April 2016](#)). The main rebel groups all boycotted the referendum on the basis that unrest in the region, combined the high population of internally-displaced persons (IDPs), meant that many people will not get to vote ([Middle East Eye, 9 April 2016](#)). Both the SLM-MM and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) stressed the importance of returning Darfur’s 2.5 million IDPs back to their villages (*ibid.*). It may also be the case that the decrease in rebel activity since January, in spite of their opposition to the timing of the referendum, is due to an attempt by the rebels to minimise unrest in the hopes of creating a more permissive voting environment.

The landslide victory and the unresolved issue of IDP resettlement means that it is highly unlikely that the referendum marks an end to the conflict in Darfur.

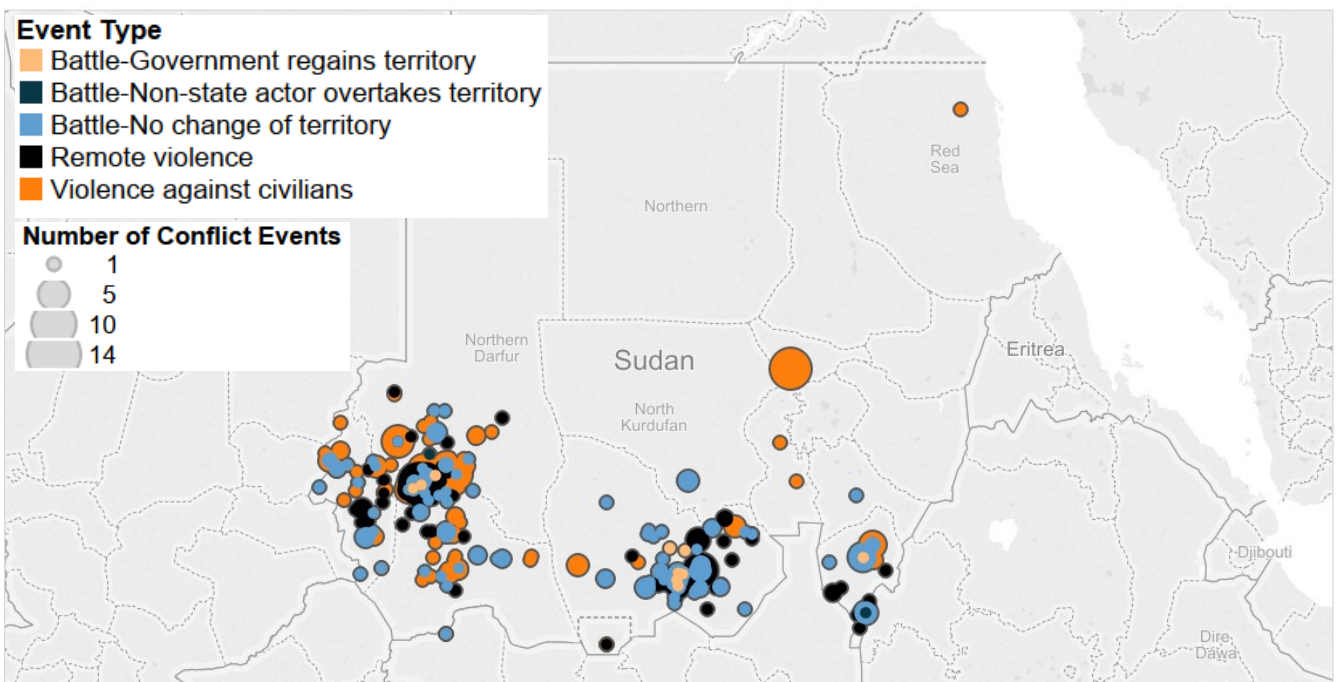


Figure 8: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location in Sudan, from January 2016 - May 2016.

Tunisia

In 2016, Tunisia is experiencing increasing conflict activity in the southeast of the country. Figure 9 shows the distribution of political violence incidents across the Tunisian territory over the past twelve months, revealing how armed conflict has spread to the regions near the Libyan border. Whilst most conflict events are located around the western town of Kasserine, security concerns have extended to the province of Medenine and to its neighbouring regions since the March attack on Ben Gardane.

On March 7, the Islamic State (IS) launched a coordinated attack designed to overtake the town of Ben Gardane to establish an ‘emirate’ across the Tunisian-Libyan border. After shooting a local military officer outside his house at dawn, the IS command assaulted the local police stations and military barracks and engaged in a one-day battle with the security forces that left 53 people dead, including 35 militants, 11 soldiers and 7 civilians ([International Business Time, 7 March 2016](#)). The failed raid on Ben Gardane has not wiped out the threat posed by IS in Tunisia.

On May 11, two alleged Islamist militants were killed and 16 people were arrested during a security operation in a suburb northeast of Tunis ([Al Jazeera, 12 May 2016](#)). The same day, four police officers died near Tataouine when a militant detonated an explosive belt while trying to escape arrest ([Jeune Afrique, 11 May 2016](#)).

These episodes carry wider implications for Tunisia’s security prospects. The Ben Gardane attack point to the IS’ improved military capabilities. While last year’s attacks on Bardo National Museum in Tunis and on tourist resorts in Sousse were carried out by “lone wolves” or small militant cells, in Ben Gardane IS militants aimed at overtaking the town attacking the military facilities while simultaneously inciting a popular insurrection ([Crisis Group, 9 March 2016](#)). Despite the eventual failure of the strategy, the episode marks a radical shift in the IS’ tactics in Tunisia.

In addition, the IS’ increasing presence on the Tunisian territory shows the growing concerns over the spill over of violence from Libya. Earlier this year, Tunisian authorities erected a 200-km barrier along the frontier with Libya in the attempt of securing the border and combat weapons smuggling. However, it is unclear how effective the barrier was in containing the spread of violence. Commentators have recently linked the attack on Ben Gardane with a previous US air strike in north-western Libya, after which several Tunisian Islamist fighters have slipped across the border and returned to their home country ([International Business Time, 8 March 2016](#)).

While Libya has become a training ground for hundreds of young Tunisians who have joined Islamist organisations since 2011, Islamist militants exploit illegal trade routes to cross the border and smuggle weapons into Tunisia ([Reuters, 24 May 2016](#)). Given how the local economy relies on cross-border trafficking, collaboration with the local population is crucial to secure the Tunisian-Libyan border and contrast IS recruitment in the region.

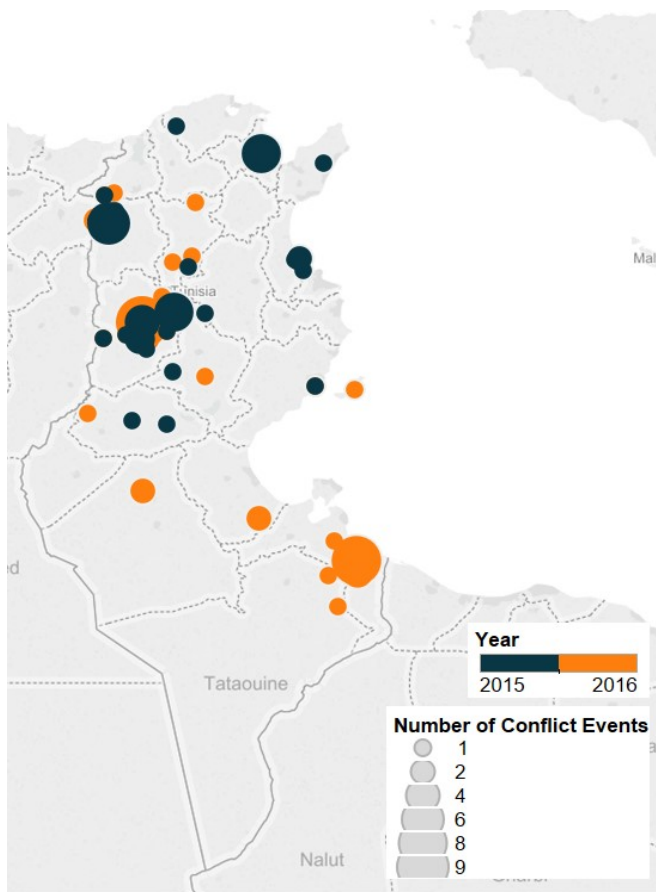


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events by Location and Year in Tunisia, from June 2015 - May 2016.

Special Focus Topic: Local Violence Monitoring

We are often asked about our sources and source methodology that underlies our conflict data, analysis, and mapping. In this special focus, we discuss our local violence monitoring choices, decisions, and trajectories. Information about sourcing in general is provided in a separate paper from 2015 available [here](#). ACLED sources conflict data from multiple sources: it is “part of a growing number of research projects in social science to use the current benefits of global online media and information to disaggregate and track social phenomena. Through monitoring reports from multiple sources in multiple countries, datasets such as ACLED can move beyond the highly aggregated binary approach of classifying political violence seen in earlier studies and breakdown conflicts into a series of spatially and temporally discrete events ([Gleditsch et al., 2013](#))” ([Wigmore-Shepherd, 2015](#)). In addition to media, ACLED relies on a range of other sources as well to capture conflict and protest events, including local newspapers, online journals, and reports by humanitarian organizations.

Relying on media monitoring, however, raises challenges. Datasets relying on external sources are subject to the biases of their sources. Sources can introduce bias through both (1) selective reporting – e.g. choosing to report only certain types of events, or only reporting events involving certain actors – and/or through (2) omission – e.g. lacking the capacity to report events occurring in certain areas or regions. These biases can pose a serious risk to the validity of data.

Complementing information from online media with reports from local conflict and violence monitors on the

ground within countries can have advantages. Certain types of violence – especially those types that are often not captured at the macro-level by online media – can be captured by local sourcing initiatives. Local sourcing can also be especially helpful during periods or environments of media blackout where information from global online media might be limited. Local sourcing is especially important and useful in: areas where the access of the international community is restricted (e.g. Somalia); countries with closed media environments (e.g. Ethiopia, Eritrea); countries with areas that are difficult to access (e.g. FATA area of Pakistan); and conflicts in which many small-scale events (instead of large-scale events) comprise the crisis, as media sources at the macro-level often do not report on such events (e.g. Burundi).

In Burundi, where there is a ‘media blackout’ ([International Media Support, 2015](#); [Nkengurutse, 2015](#)), and “persecution of the media has been constant” since early 2015 ([Reporters Without Borders, 2016](#)) following the failed coup attempt in response to President Nkurunziza’s decision to seek a third-term, reports from global online media are limited. Further, the Burundi Crisis has increasingly been comprised of smaller scale events (such as arrests, home searches, and border stoppings), and it has diffused away from the capital Bujumbura as the crisis has continued, which has meant that local conflict monitoring has been especially advantageous in coverage of the Burundi Crisis (see: [ACLED’s Burundi Crisis Local-Level Dataset](#)).

Figure 10 depicts the differences in the types of events captured by online media sources versus local sources

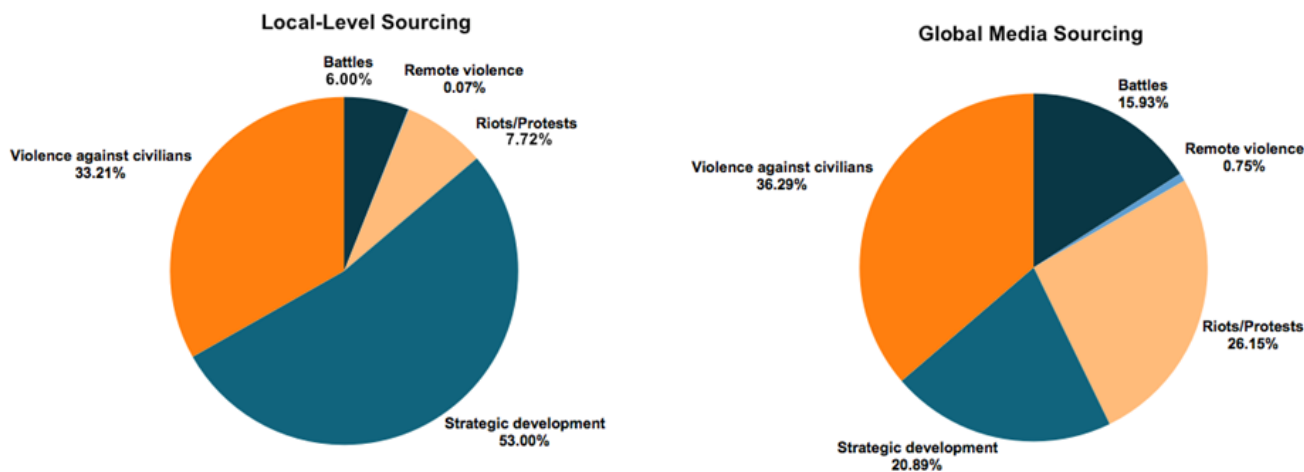


Figure 10: Data Source Differences, Burundi Crisis by Event Type, 26 April 2015 – 25 April 2016.

Special Focus Topic: Local Violence Monitoring

during the course of the first year of the Burundi Crisis. Local-level sourcing identifies large rates of ‘strategic developments’, which are largely arrests (arbitrary or otherwise), home searches, and (at times, violent) border stoppings, which have become fixtures of the current conflict dynamics (see: [ACLED, 2016](#)). These types of ‘small scale’ events are not often captured by global online media sources at the macro scale.

Figure 11 depicts the differences in the regional coverage of events captured by global online media sources versus local sources during the course of the first year of the Burundi Crisis. While online media sources capture events occurring in and around the capital of Bujumbura, the capacity of these sources to report in more remote areas is more limited. Local sources are able to shed light on conflict trends occurring in other regions of the country.

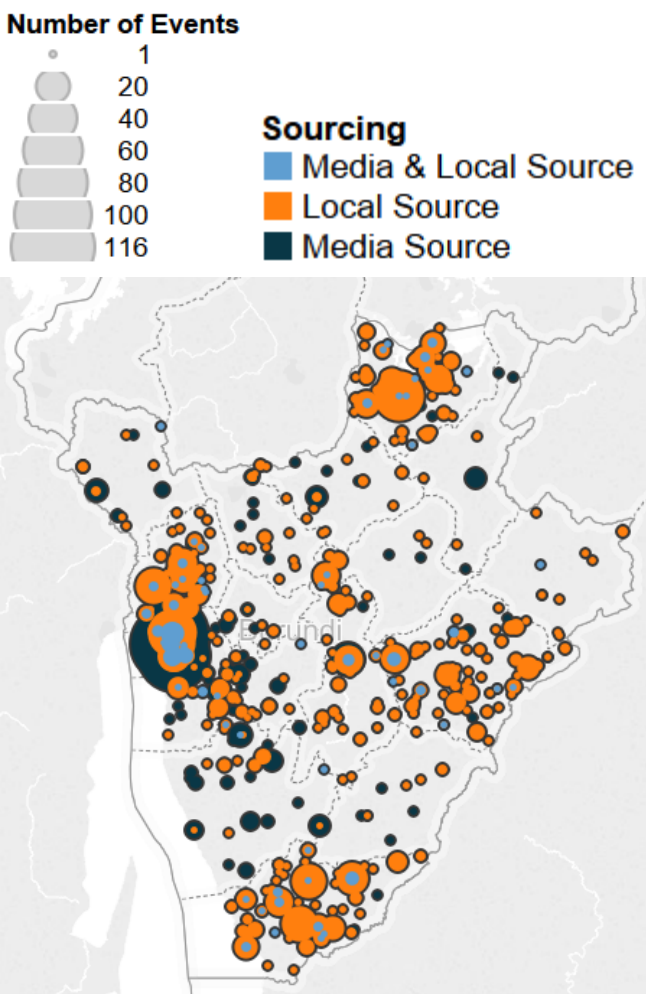


Figure 12 depicts the differences in the coverage of events captured by online media sources versus local sources during the course of the first year of the Burundi Crisis. While global online media sources were able to cover a great deal of activity near the start of the crisis in early 2015, as the crisis has continued, local sourcing has played an increasingly larger role as a result of: (1) the media blackout, and the fact that the access of the international community has been severely curtailed as the crisis has progressed; (2) the diffusion of events away from the capital to more remote parts of the country; and (3) while the crisis began with large-scale demonstrations and repression, which were covered more readily by online media, the crisis has largely become comprised of smaller scale events (such as arbitrary arrests, home searches, and border stoppings), which online media sources often do not and are unable to capture.

There are a number of ways in which datasets can incorporate local sources, especially as projects may differ with respect to coverage of regions, issues, etc. Local incident monitoring projects within countries – such as ‘crowdsourcing’ efforts, where local, trained citizen journalists report incidents directly (for example, see: [Van der Windt and Humphreys, 2014](#)) – already exist within many countries. These organizations may establish partnerships to supply on the ground data. Information from local newspapers could also be integrated into coding schema, to complement information from online media sources. Crowdsourcing – such as relying on local populations to report incidents via texts/SMS, tweets, etc. – could also be used, though it is less reliable than the former two strategies given the lack of oversight involved. In many of the countries on which ACLED reports, local-level information has been sought to complement online media reports through reliance on local media (such as local newspapers and radio) and the establishment of partnerships with local conflict monitors. As a preference, ACLED partners with local organizations that have incident monitoring in place already, as is the case in ACLED’s current [Burundi Crisis Local-Level Dataset](#) initiative.

However, while local sourcing offers an important and distinct view of what may be happening at the local-level, local sourcing comes with its own inherent challenges. This includes needing to: account for biases, determine the sustainability of local projects, implement triangulation methods, and address ethical concerns.

Figure 11: Data Source Differences, Burundi Crisis by Event Location, 26 April 2015 – 25 April 2016.

Special Focus Topic: Local Violence Monitoring

ACLED’s goal is to create an effective and useful cross-country, cross-conflict data system. Establishing partnerships with local organizations in which standardization is prioritized is crucial in this endeavor. In order to be able to make cross-country and cross-conflict comparisons, it is important that local-level information that is reported can fit into the framework for what ACLED has established for cross-country, cross-conflict monitoring. Having clear definitions of what constitutes separate events is crucial in order to recognize what comprises political risk and violence according to data providers. Parsimony is key, and identifying what can be committed to being recorded systematically is imperative. When partnering with local monitoring initiatives, ACLED identifies and isolates which reported events can be standardized for cross-country, cross-conflict contexts; only these events are integrated, as only they can subsequently be used for effective comparisons across contexts.

While local sourcing may offer many benefits, not all con-

flict environments require or need to rely on a local-level view in order to capture conflict trends occurring on the ground. While local sourcing may offer benefits, the value-added may not necessarily always justify the resources needed to establish and sustain these types of partnerships. Countries with open media environments can often produce sufficient, reliable, and multi-sourced information that limits the added value of a local-level incident monitoring system (e.g. Nigeria). Countries with robust radio systems specifically designed to monitor and alert about political issues and violence can often be an effective alternative to incident monitoring as well, such as DR-Congo’s Radio Okapi, Sudan’s Radio Dbanga, or the Central African Republic’s Radio Ndeke Luka.

For more on ACLED’s coverage of the Burundi Crisis using information obtained through a partnership with a local conflict monitoring initiative, see [ACLED’s Crisis Blog](#). New local-level conflict and protest data are available there weekly.

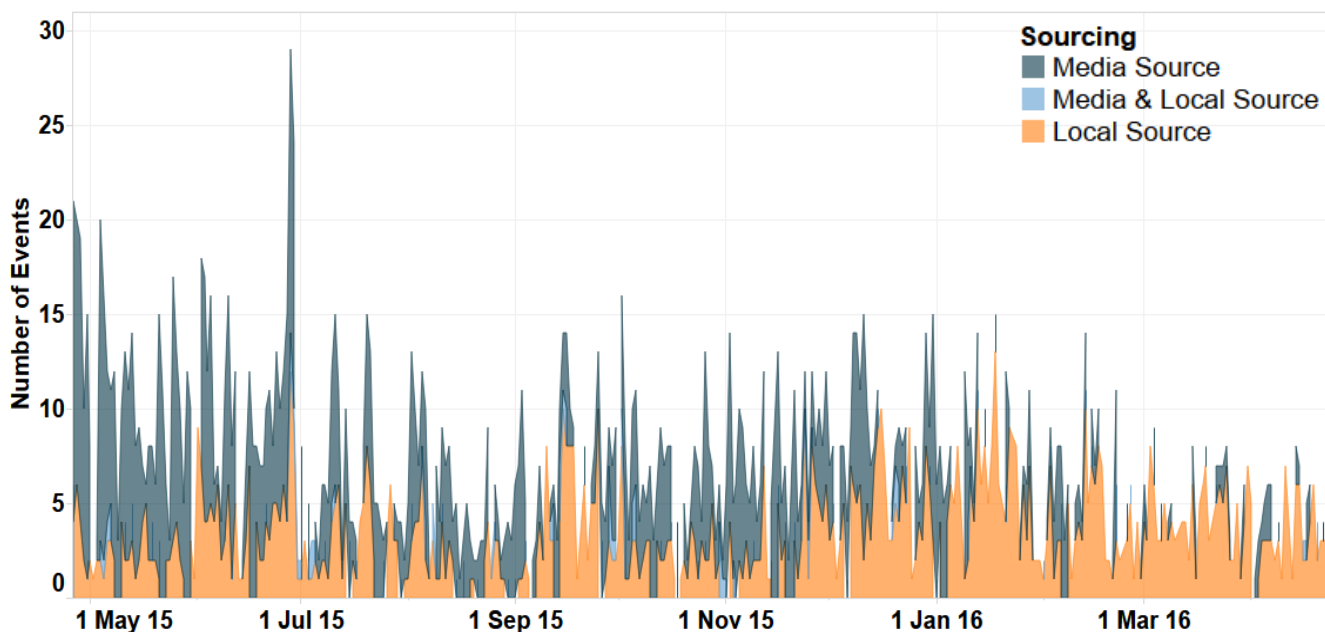


Figure 12: Data Source Differences, Burundi Crisis Temporal Trends, 26 April 2015 – 25 April 2016.

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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](#).