

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 5):

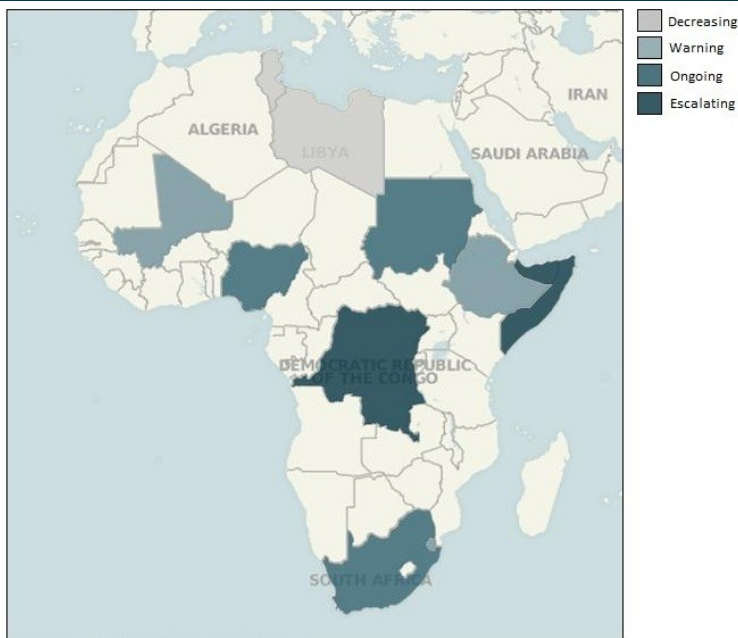
REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, AUGUST 2012

This month's *Conflict Trends* report is the fifth in a series of publications by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset which report and analyse real-time conflict data from across the African continent.

This issue will focus on developments in **Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia** and **Sudan**. Realtime data for the month of July is presented for each of these countries, and compared with historical trends to identify profiles and patterns in the geography, agents and modalities of violence in each case.

As in previous months, Somalia witnessed the highest number of violent events in July, followed by the DR-Congo and Sudan. Nigeria once again experienced extremely high fatality levels, while a spike in violence in Ethiopia drew attention to ethnic and religious cleavages within the country. Conflict levels in Mali have remained relatively stable since April, although pressure continued to mount over the course of the month for regional intervention in its troubled north.

Southern Africa continued to be affected by strikes and protests in **Swaziland** and **South Africa**, while conflict events have dropped in **Libya** and **Tunisia** over the past few weeks.



Conflict trajectory, July 2012

This issue also contains the first in a series of thematic focuses, exploring the role of **Unidentified Armed Groups (UAGs)** in conflict. The ACLED dataset codes violent political activity by unknown or unidentified groups, providing a unique opportunity to analyse their role in conflict. Far from isolated events, our analysis shows that the actions of UAGs are highly significant and strategic.

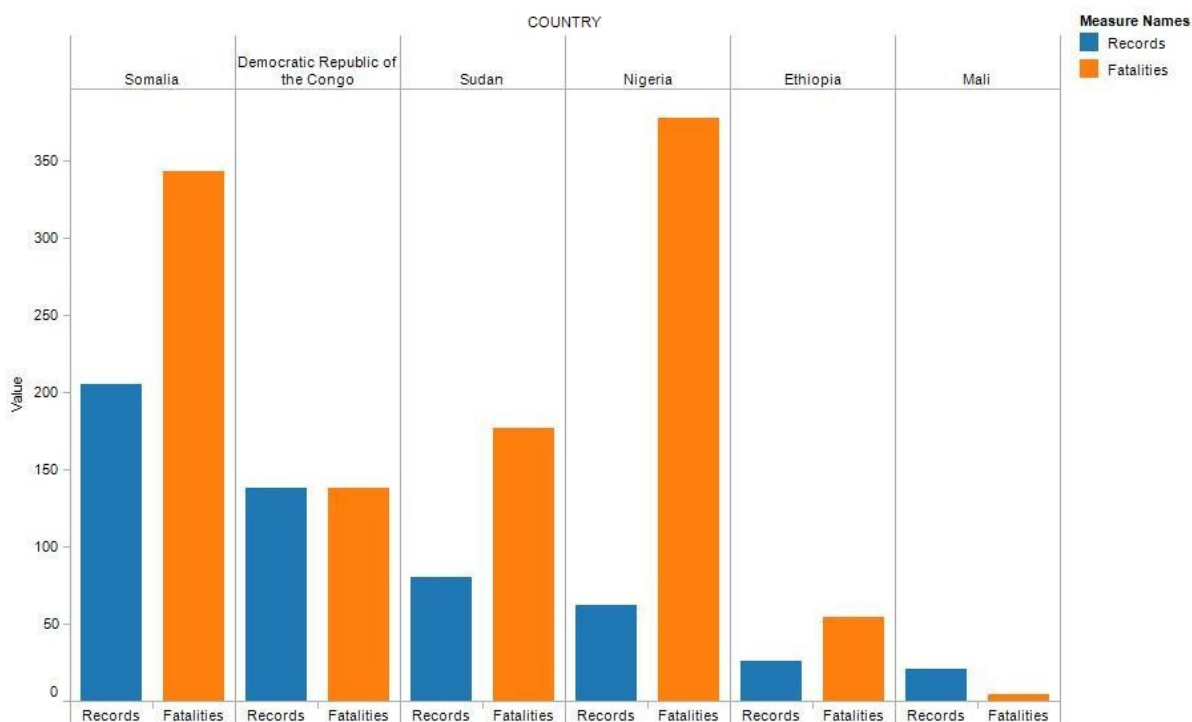


Figure 1: Conflict events and fatalities by country, July 2012

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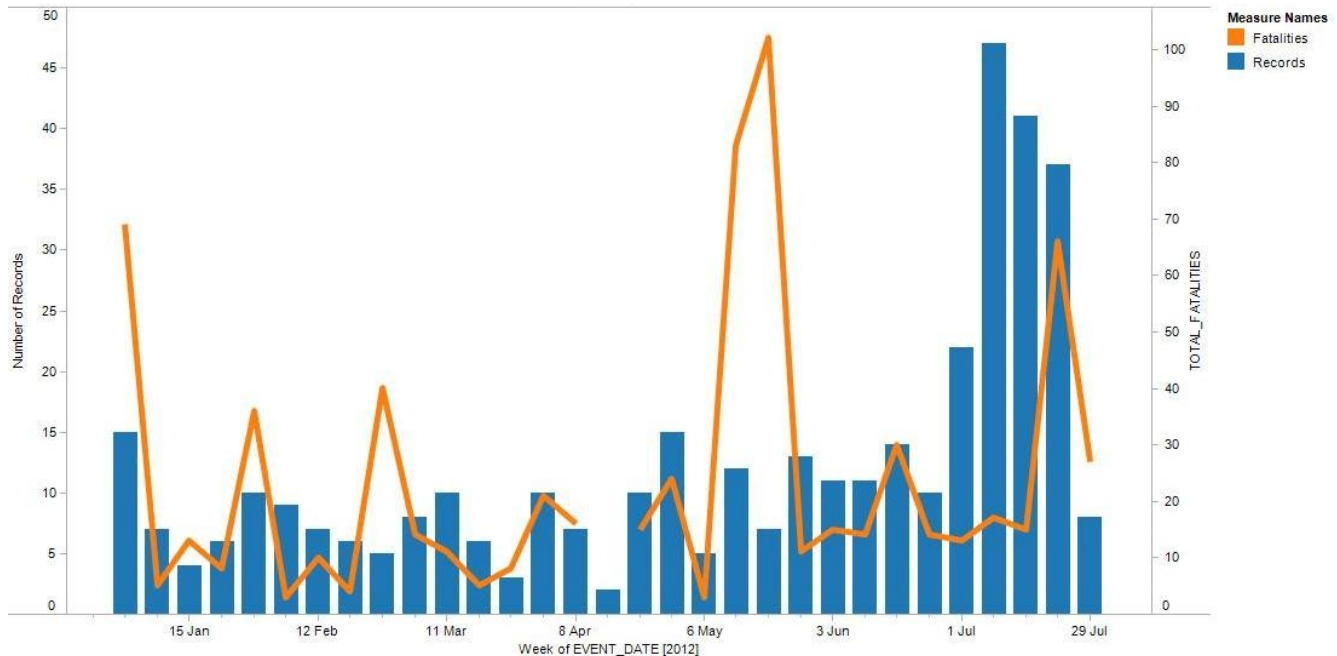


Figure 2: Conflict events and fatality levels, DR-Congo, Jan - Jul 2012.

**DR-Congo**

July witnessed a very significant increase in violence levels in DR-Congo over previous months, alongside a sharp spike in fatality numbers late in the month (see Figure 2). The conflict has been at the centre of international attention over the past few weeks as allegations continued to be exchanged over Rwandan support for the recently-established M23 movement in the east of the country.

A series of announcements from donors delaying or cancelling aid payments to Rwanda over the controversy was topped by Stephen Rapp of the US suggesting Kagame and other Rwandan officials could face charges of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity (*Guardian*, 25 July 2012). The State Department appeared to quickly act to water down Ambassador Rapp’s statement, emphasising that the comments were made with regards to general principals rather than calling for specific action in a particular case (US State Dep’t Press Briefing, 26 July 2012). Nevertheless, the incident has underscored a general turning of the tide with regards to the Rwandan regime and may indicate that more significant changes are in store.

Within the DR-Congo, the M23 group increased activity significantly in the month of July, and although the government regained more territory than it had previously done since the beginning of the crisis, the rebel group fought back and secured a considerable number of locations themselves. The breakdown of battle activity reflects the back-and-forth nature of the conflict in parts of the eastern region (see Figure 3).

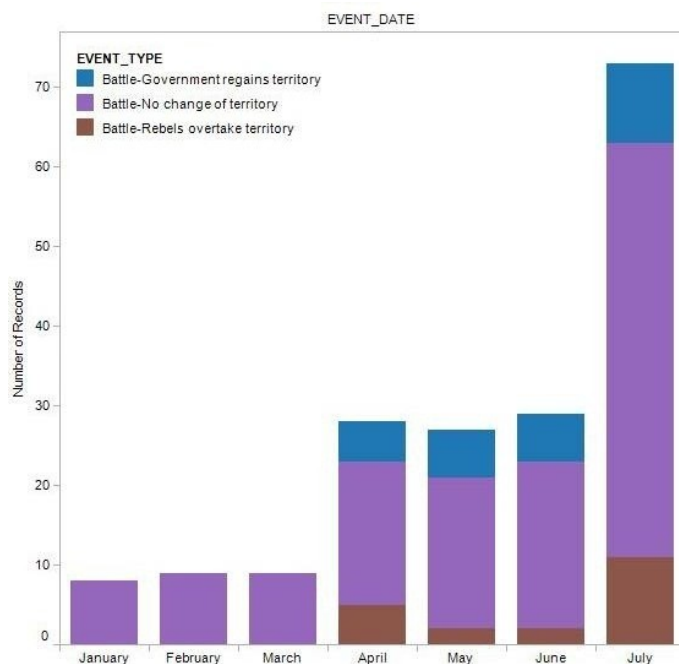


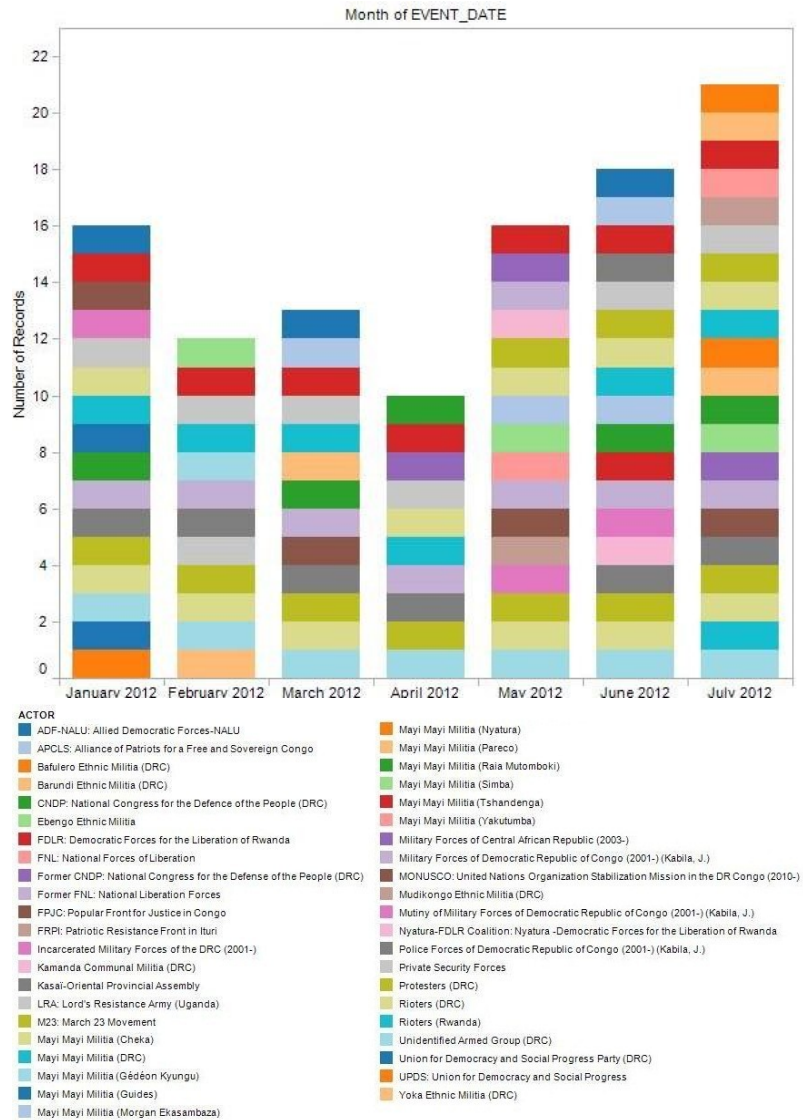
Figure 3: Battle events by type, DR-Congo, Jan - Jul 2012..

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The group’s success has been spurred by defections, which were reported to continue apace over the course of the month, as the UN Envoy to the DRC was reported to have briefed diplomats that “[FARDC] Government troops are running out of ammunition and just leaving villages to the M23.” (*RNW*, 31 July 2012).

Quite apart from the issue of international linkages and sponsorship, the sustained appeal of the M23 movement speaks to a deeper tension within the peace-building process in DR-Congo. Conditions for most military troops in the country have long been a focus of discontent, with waves of defections and minor mutinies long-preceding the emergence of the M23 group. By contrast, the perceived rewards for defectors predictably hold considerable appeal. One possible outcome of negotiations with the M23 group may be reintegration under improved conditions and with increased autonomy for former CNDP forces. Such concessions to defectors are likely to fuel further discontent among units which already see the former CNDP troops as privileged. More fundamentally, as long as the incentives to make war outweigh the incentives to build peace, meaningful security sector reform in the region seems unlikely.

A second, and significant dimension to the conflict in DR-Congo is its multi-faceted nature: as international attention focused on the M23 movement in July, several smaller militant units engaged in violence against civilians and even territorial takeover. The proliferation of Mayi-Mayi militias in the region, most significantly at the present time, the Raia Mutomboki unit, has been eclipsed by M23 activity, but remains an important dimension in the crisis and in the lived experience of populations on the ground. Figure 4 charts the increase in the discrete number of non-state engaged in conflict in the country: from 16 in January, to a low of 10 active non-state groups in April, to 21 in July.



**Figure 4: Count of discrete non-state actors, DR-Congo, Jan - Jul 2012.**

**Ethiopia**

An Ethiopian government spokesperson finally confirmed that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was “getting better,” having never officially confirmed he was ill, following the declaration in July by independent Ethiopian media that he had died in hospital. Putting paid to any potential speculation of a leadership crisis, the spokesperson insisted: “The status quo is maintained - there is no change and there will be no change in the near future.” (*BBC News*, 1 August 2012).

July also witnessed a sharp increase in conflict events over previous months in the country. 2012 opened with relatively little activity in January, building slowly to a peak in the past few weeks which shed light on enduring religious and ethnic tensions within the country.

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July saw the escalation of protests by Muslim groups which have been building for some time, some of which involved violent clashes with police. Demonstrations were concentrated in Oromia and Addis Ababa. As usual, conflicting reports were issued as to the nature and scale of the disturbances: the government claimed protesters were demonstrating against Islamic extremism in local mosques, and attempted to downplay violent altercations between rioters and police. Elsewhere it was reported that groups were protesting perceived Muslim marginalisation in the government alongside government interference in religious affairs. Predictably, widespread arrests were made, which initially sparked further protest against, though activity appeared to have died down shortly thereafter.

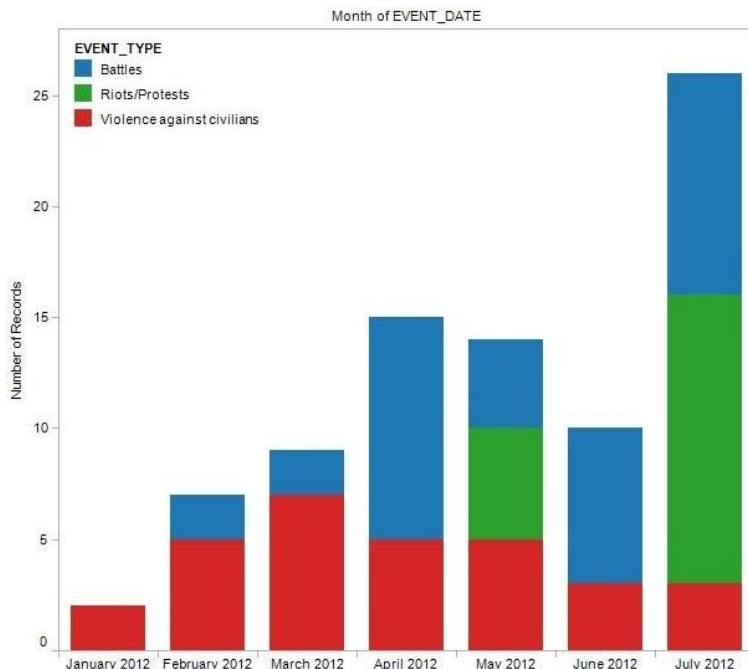


Figure 5: Conflict events by type, Ethiopia, Jan - Jul 2012.

Further south, only a few miles from the Kenyan border, other fault lines were at play when clashes between Borana and Garri ethnic groups led to at least 18 deaths, 12 reported injuries, and significant displacement across the border into Kenya. The clashes resulted from what the Ethiopian government has referred to as competing “administrative claims” (AJ, 31 July 2012) linked to land in the semi-arid region.

In general, Ethiopia’s conflict profile is characterised by sharp peaks and deep troughs in activity, in addition to extremely high levels of reported fatalities (see Figure 6). Most fatalities are the result of government - rebel clashes, and spikes in fatalities and events in 1999, 2002 and 2010 can be attributed to escalations in actions against the government by the OLF, ONLF or both. 2012 to date has already seen higher levels of violence than in 2011 in total, and the highest rates of protest since 2005 / 2006. If the government finds itself with a leadership crisis and mounting unrest, the result may have deeply destabilising effects in the region.

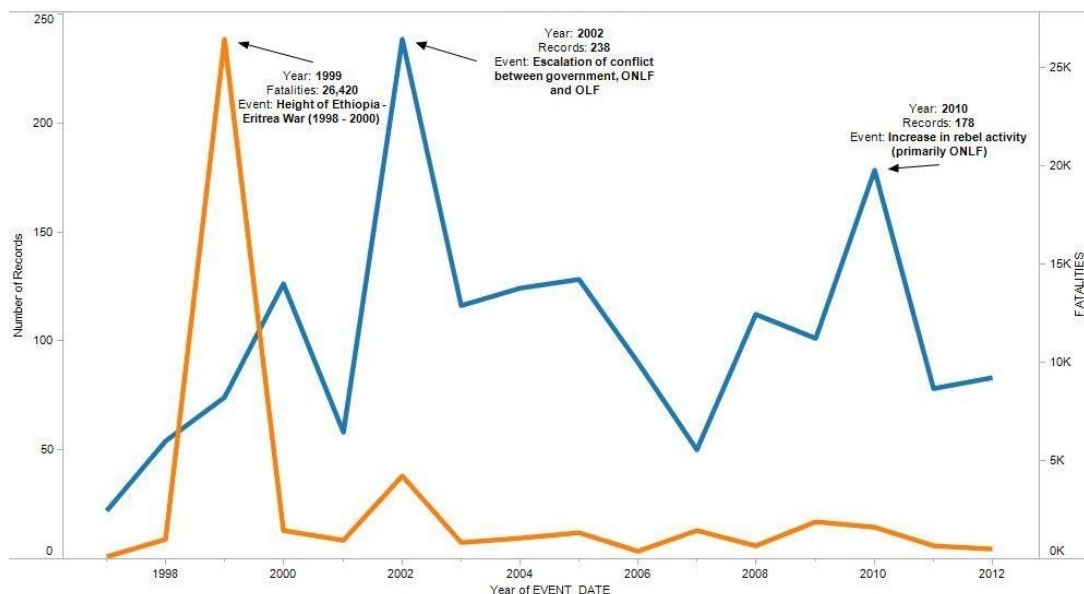


Figure 6: Conflict events and fatalities, annotated, Ethiopia, 1997 - 2012.

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Mali

Event levels in Mali have remained roughly stable since April, and fatality levels actually dropped in July over previous months. Nevertheless, the country, the surrounding region, and the international community observing both remain wary. July saw the return to Bamako after a lengthy recovery of the interim President, who has been keen to assert his authority over the interim regime and attempt to reinstate international confidence in the once-favoured country. Nevertheless, ECOWAS pressure continued to build to approve a regional intervention in the restive north, a move about which President Traoré has remained relatively circumspect.

He is right to exercise caution: the success of a regional intervention force will depend to a great extent on the depth and nature of the reported, though murky, linkages between Ansar Dine - the home-grown Tuareg Islamist hardliners - and the more international AQIM. Success will also depend on how its terms are defined: a regional intervention may be best suited to securing some key towns, but may struggle to effectively rout an insurgency which may choose to engage in hit-and-run or suicide attacks, in the style of the other African Al Qaeda affiliate, Al Shabaab.

Much has been made of the supposed inappropriateness of superimposing hardline Islamist practices on the traditionally moderate Malian population, but while protests have continued in Timbuktu and Gao, they remain sporadic and isolated - rather than coordinated - expressions of opposition. AQIM might be dismissed by President Traoré as “invaders” (*BBC News*, 30 July 2012), but Iyad ag Ghali, at the helm of Ansar Dine, is a shrewd political operator with a long history of leading Tuareg rebellion and positioning himself between the local population and the government. His connections to the locality have done little to temper treatment of the population, however: while

Ansar Dine initially emerged as something of a foil to the more unruly MNLA, their involvement in violence against civilians has increased sharply over the last month (see Figure 7).

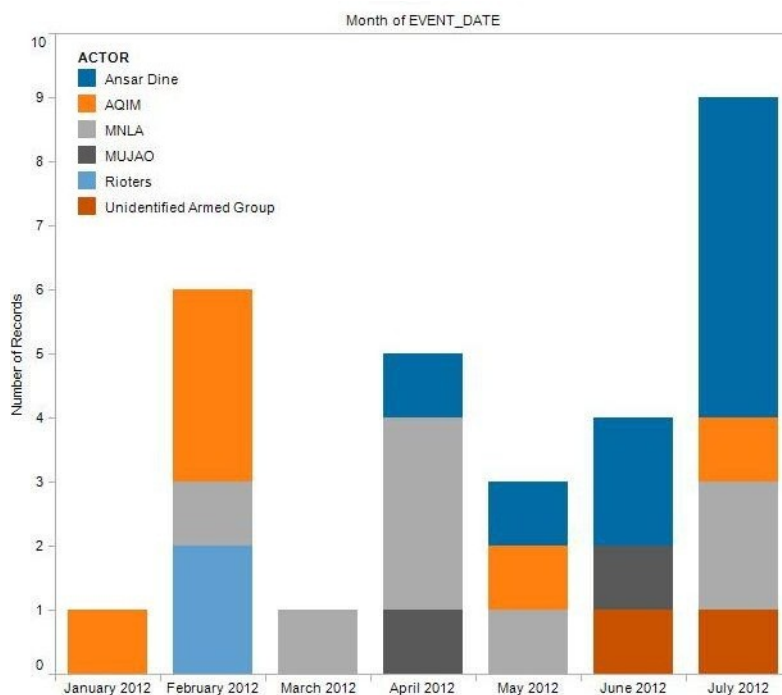


Figure 7: Violence against civilians by actor, Mali, Jan - Jul 2012.

Nigeria

July saw a slight drop in activity levels in Nigeria over previous months, but an increase in fatalities as the security crisis in the north of the country deepens. There was an increase in Boko Haram activity, as well as escalation of ethnic tensions as Fulani ethnic militias engaged in several attacks on civilians. The latter resulted in very high numbers of fatalities, and were concentrated primarily in Plateau State, where overlapping, ethnic, religious and livelihood identities contribute to trigger conflict. This recent increase only adds to the already acute vulnerability of the civilian population in Nigeria: after some fluctuation over the course of the year to date, militia violence against civilians once again constitutes the single largest share of violence in the country. As with violence against civilians more generally, Nigeria follows only Somalia in continental rankings. In Nigeria, militia violence against civilians followed at a distance (in July, at least) by government - militia clashes (see Figure 8).

The month also saw some activity by MASSOB, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, which had been inactive to date this year, in which individual members were involved in small-scale attacks on civilians. Another group, however, has been at the

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centre of speculation surrounding a potential resurgence of militant activity in the south-east of the country (*BBC News*, 1 August 2012). Nigeria's relative peace in the south-east is nothing if not precarious, and the intensification of the Boko Haram threat may well awaken rivalries with the South-East, particularly if costly amnesty payments to former militants come under threat.

**Somalia**

Somalia saw an increase in July in both events and fatality levels over the previous month, with a particularly sharp increase in Mogadishu. Diplomacy, however, is telling a different story: July was the month the UK reported non-combat troops on the ground in Mogadishu, and a string of international figures visited the capital and reinforce the narrative of stability in which the international community would like to welcome the country's new constitution. Having boots on the ground - even in a non-combat role - is something of a Rubicon in Somali policy, and while the general exodus from Gigiri is likely to proceed at a trickle rather than a flood, there is an undoubted sense that Somalia is safer.

How does this hold up in the data? In the short-term, July appears to be a poor test case, as it witnessed a sharp increase in activity over much of the rest of the year to date (see Figure 9). Diffuse attacks by unidentified assailants on government and affiliated targets were particularly common over the past month. Fatalities are quite closely matched to event levels in 2012, indicating that the capital is typically characterised by concomitant increases in low-grade attacks and overall fatality figures, as opposed to a scenario in which isolated but spectacular attacks are directed at a large number of casualty targets.

Turning to a longer-term view of the data, this average rate of fatalities per event has been declining pretty steadily since January 2010

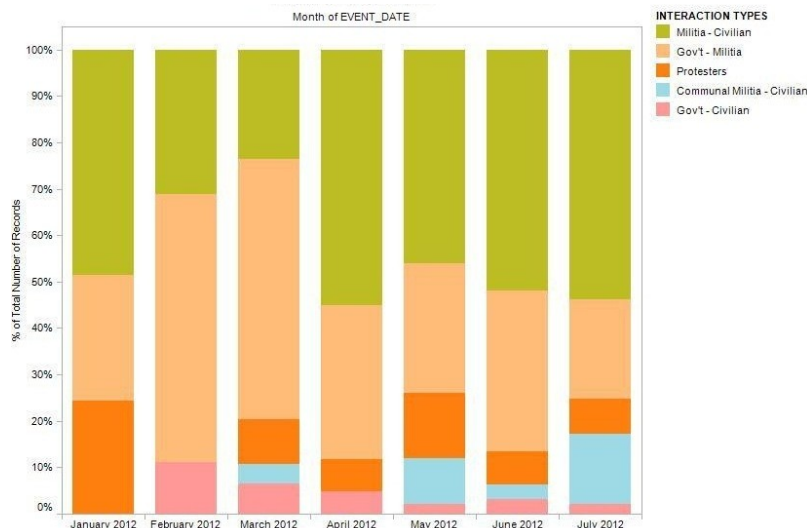


Figure 8: Violence by most common interaction, Nigeria, Jan - Jul 2012.

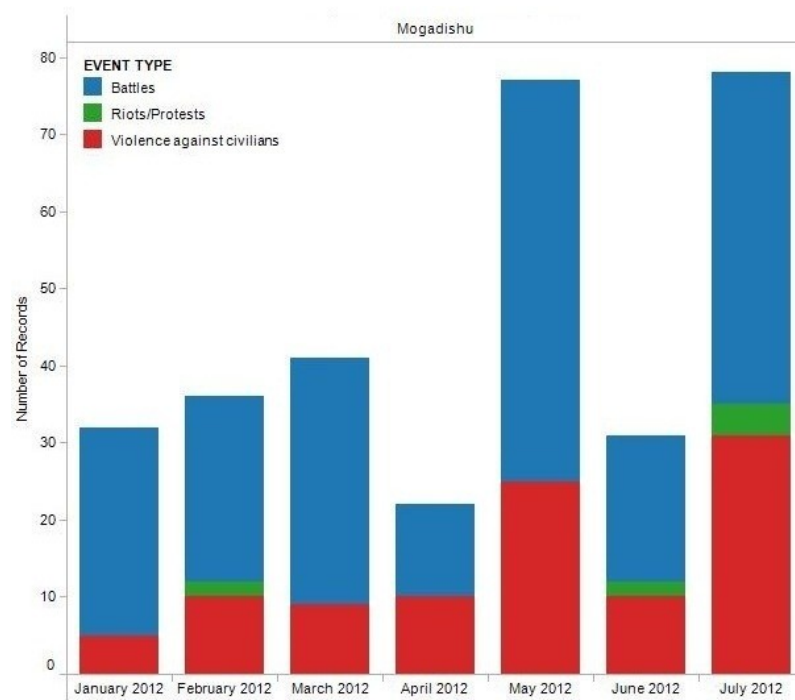


Figure 9: Events by type, Mogadishu, Somalia, Jan - Jul 2012.

(see Figure 10). The exception to this is a spike in 2011 associated with a high-casualty attack by Al Shabaab on a compound of government ministries in October of that year. In spite of this incident, the trend of average fatality numbers per event in the capital is steadily declining, from 4.32 in January 2010, to 0.77 in July 2012. Also declining is the proportion of events which result in casualties at all, as Figure 11 shows. ACLED data allows users to analyse not only the number of casualties resulting from an event, but also the proportion of events which are fatal, a measure which serves as an additional check for

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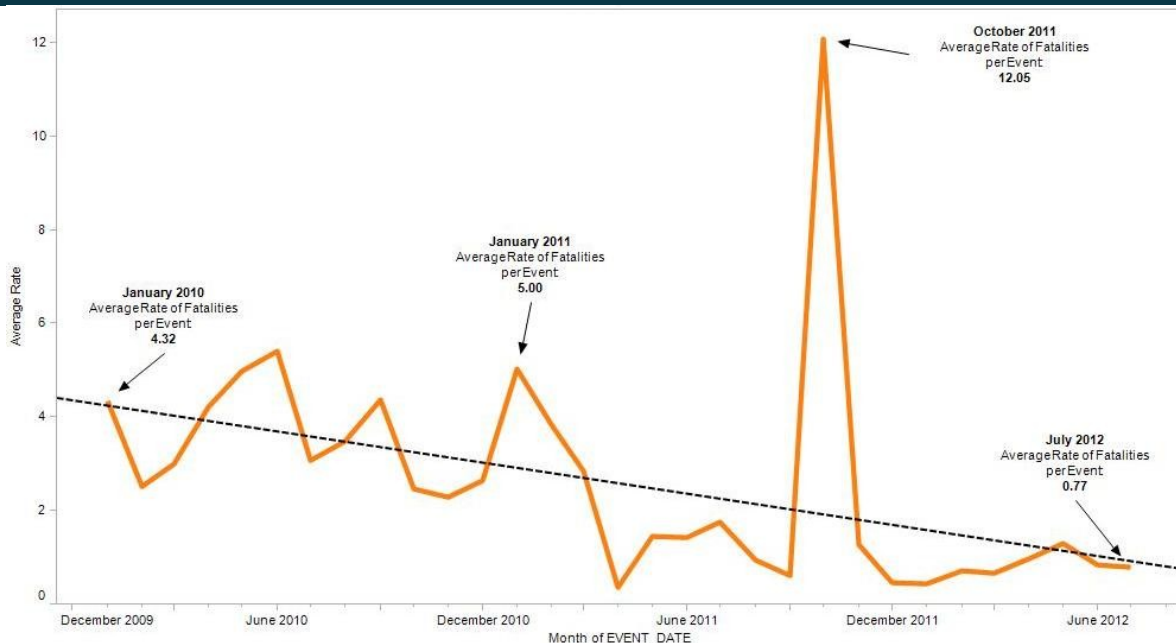


Figure 10: Average fatalities per event, Mogadishu, Somalia, Jan 2010 - Jul 2012.

intensity of conflict.

When we turn to actors involved in conflict in Mogadishu, we see that the TFG is mostly engaged with militia and unidentified armed group violence. Many of the latter may be Al Shabaab agents who are not identified, or may be loosely associated operatives working with

relative independence. What is important is that these militia groups and unidentified actors continue to have a critical and destabilising impact on conflict and security in the capital. The secondary focus of TFG activity is rebel groups, exclusively Al Shabaab in this circumstance. Strikingly, in July, the TFG spent almost as much time involved in in-fighting (government - government violence) between various factions within ranks as it did battling Al Shabaab.

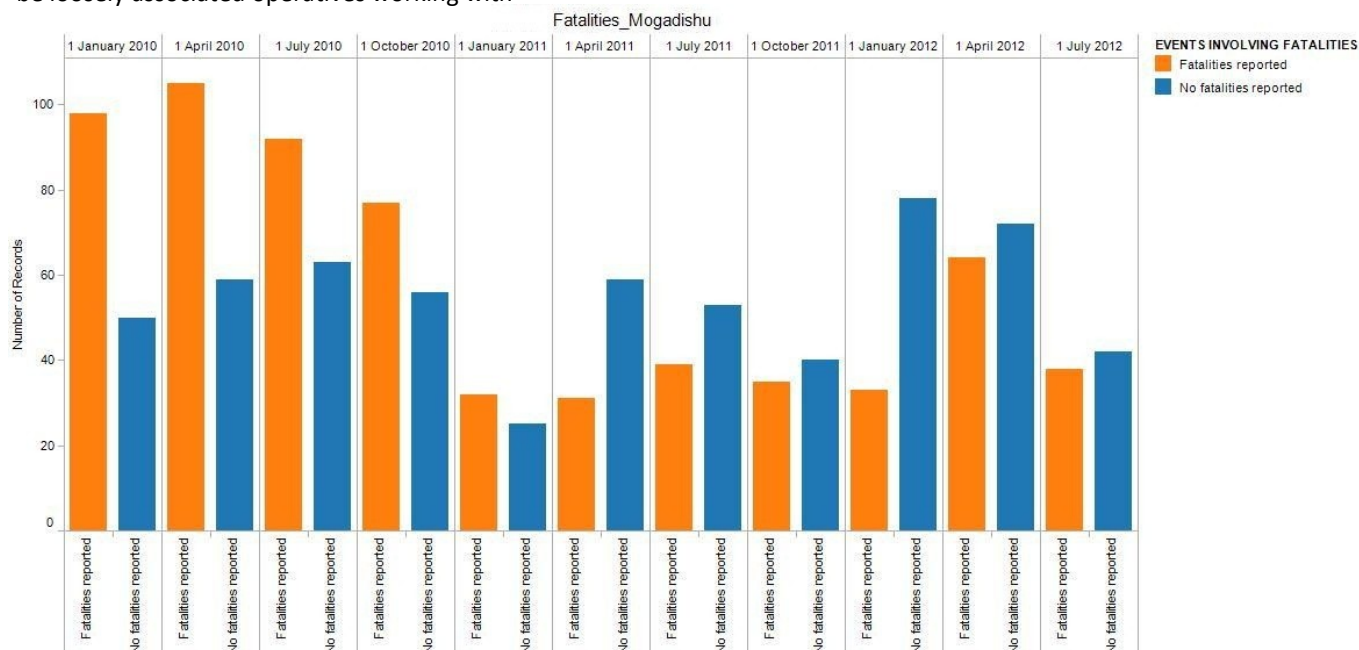


Figure 11: Events resulting in one or more fatalities, Mogadishu, Somalia, Jan 2010 - Jul 2012.

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Outside Mogadishu, battles between Al Shabaab and the TFG and allied forces continued. The number of events in which territory was recaptured by the TFG and allied forces dropped in July from a higher rate in June, although this is disaggregated by event, rather than the size of the territory regained. There were, significantly, fewer events in which Al Shabaab captured or regained territory, after some minor successes in May and June which were reportedly linked to a lack of cohesion between Ethiopian and ASWJ forces in the field.

Geographically, increased fighting was witnessed in Lower Shabelle in July, while conflict in Gedo, Bakool and Middle Shabelle remained at comparable levels. As the TFG and allied forces continue to advance, the most significant target in their battle against Al Shabaab remains the port city of Kismayo, from which the group draws considerable revenue and strategic advantage. Al Shabaab has heretofore withdrawn from some of its other strongholds with relatively little resistance, with a preference for conducting scattered, hit-and-run style attacks on targets in the aftermath rather than battling to hold territory. This tactic has proved destabilising and effective, however, particularly when a lack of coordination between factions of the same alliance can be exploited. It may be the case, however, that the anticipated battle for Kismayo bears a closer resemblance to the entrenched struggle for ground in Mogadishu in 2010 and 2011, in which civilian casualty numbers were extremely high due to persistent and sometimes in discriminate shelling.

**Sudan**

July witnessed a drop in overall event levels in Sudan, after an extremely busy June in which protests dominated the agenda (see Figure 12). However, this month saw an increase in fatalities on previous months.

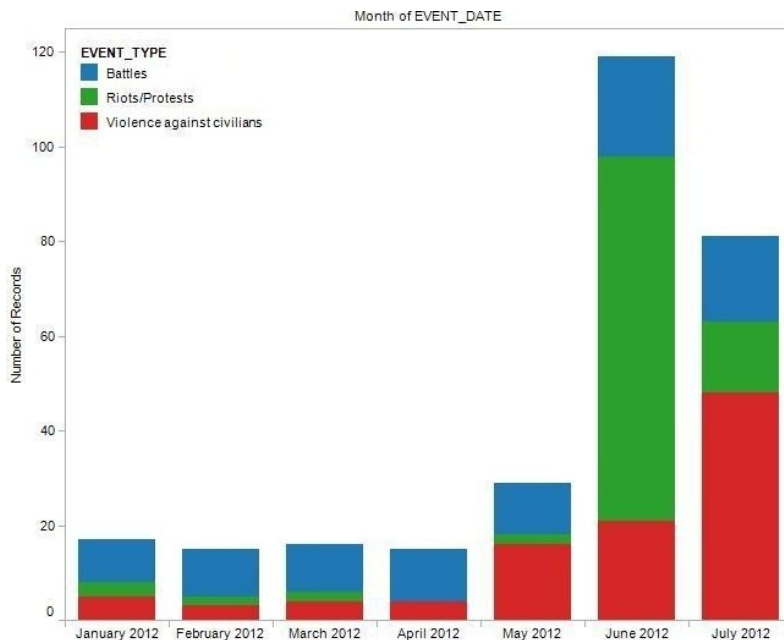


Figure 12: Events by type, Sudan, Jan - Jul 2012.

Conflict de-escalated between Sudan and its neighbour once more in July, and a deal between the two states on the transport of oil through Sudan’s territory was finally near completion at the time of writing. However, Sudan’s internal conflicts have persisted, as reports of shelling in Southern Kordofan were received early in the month, alongside reported bombardments in East Jebel Marra. Darfur was once more the focus of attention when price protests, hitherto largely confined to the capital city, spread to Nyala, and clashes with police led to a reported 12 deaths. Criticism of the regime’s heavy-handedness and use of live rounds to control crowds swiftly followed.

In a move seemingly aimed at highlighting how everything changes, and yet stays exactly the same, the new head of the AU reiterated the organisations’ commitment to oppose the ICC case against the country’s president. Dlamini-Zuma announced that the arrest of President Bashir would be detrimental on the ground that he is central to securing peace in Darfur. There may have been a time when this position, while still condemned in many camps, would have been more credible; namely as international attention turned away from the crisis in Darfur and the South voted for and declared independence in (initially) relatively peaceful conditions. This month, it seems particularly ill-timed.

Even with the beginnings of a resolution with its southern neighbour in the works, the Bashir regime is under fire from a multiplicity of opponents within its own territory.



Special Focus: Unidentified Armed Groups

The ACLED dataset includes actors listed as ‘unidentified armed groups’ (UAGs) when the identity of the group involved in the event is unknown or is not reported. UAGs constitute a large share of violent actors in the dataset (11.8% of violent actors) and warrant greater attention in light of their significant presence (see Figure 14). UAGs are defined as groups whose names or political affiliations are either unknown or unreported. There are many possible reasons for the identity of armed groups being unknown or unreported:

Reporters may lack access to conflict-affected areas or may not have accurate information on groups in complex and shifting conflict scenarios. Additionally, reporters may feel that in highly complex conflicts, the specific identity of a group is irrelevant to intended audiences, focusing instead on the broader conflict. This may be particularly significant in the reporting of ethnic conflict in which reporters may not include details of the specific group identities in a context of multiple and complex ethnic affiliations.

**Unidentified armed groups constitute 11.8% of violent actors in the ACLED dataset, and evidence indicates they are both significant and strategic actors in conflict.**

Small, fragmented or less formalised violent groups may be unknown or their identities unreported because they seek to capitalise on an insecure environment which protects their anonymity. This same logic may also apply to newly formed groups which are yet to assert their identity. The highly volatile and dynamic setting of the DR-Congo might host this kind of unidentified armed group, as the large number of competing actors witnesses new formations and transformations of armed actors and groups in flux. This same logic may also apply to factions of larger, well-known groups which act with relative independence in certain circumstances, and are thereby categorised as ‘unidentified’ as they act with minimal reference to a central authority.

A third reason groups are unidentified or unknown is that they are operating on behalf of larger groups or interests which seek to distance themselves from their actions because of the nature of the violence. Peaks in unidentified armed group activity in line with electoral cycles in Kenya and Nigeria, where

formally unidentified groups engage in violence against opponents on behalf, or in the interests of, organised political parties, reflect this third logic of violence. As later discussed, violence against civilians constitutes a large share of the violence perpetrated by unidentified groups.

This suggests there may be strategic reasons groups such as rebels, militias or governments make use of unidentifiable groups, including engaging in activity from which they seek to distance themselves or their regimes.

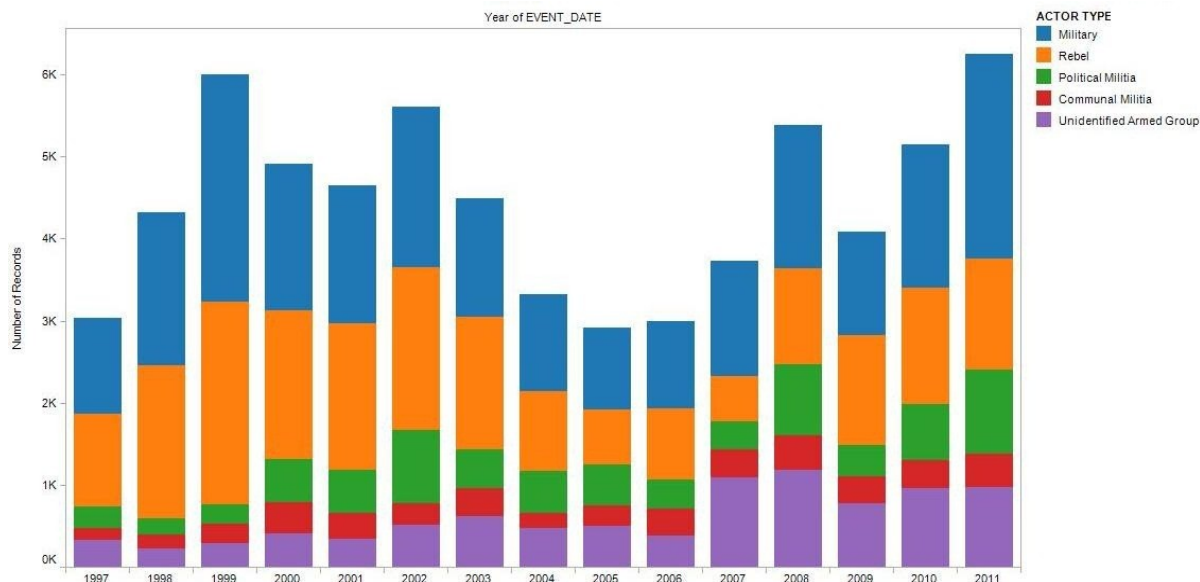


Figure 13: Events by actor type, all countries, 1997 - 2011.

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Special Focus: Unidentified Armed Groups

Different countries experience not only different levels of activity by unidentified armed groups, but the actions of these groups also differ depending on the political and military context in the country. Across all countries, unidentified armed groups constitute 11.8% of violent actors. This proportion ranges from 32% of violent actors in Somalia, to 1.1% in Sierra Leone. Following Somalia in order of highest proportion of unidentified actors are Nigeria, Gambia, Tanzania, Cameroon, Kenya, Botswana, Rwanda, Lesotho and Guinea.

Whether or not a country has experienced civil war during the period in question is a significant variable in determining both the level and nature of unidentified armed group activity. In most countries, violence against civilians normally constitutes more than 60% of unidentified armed group activity. The countries in which violence against civilians and battles constitute approximately equal levels of unidentified group activity are notable for the presence of several states which have or continue to experience civil war over the period of ACLED data (1997 – 2011).

Among those countries in which unidentified armed groups engage in higher levels of VAC, Burundi and Uganda are notable outliers as countries which experienced civil war during the period of the dataset. However, when the data is broken down further by year, and countries are analysed in pre- and post-civil war periods, it is clear that there has been an

increase (from 63% to 73.6%) in the level of VAC in which unidentified groups engage in Uganda. This largely fits with the overall pattern of higher levels of unidentified group violence against civilians in non-civil war states, than in those experiencing civil wars. Burundi is an unusual case, in that VAC by unidentified groups constituted 65% of unidentified violent activity, during civil war (1997 – 2005); but 47.7% post-civil war (2006 – 2011). This may be a reflection of a low level of reporting interest or coverage of the Burundian civil war, relative to the other cases.

This trend points to the significance of unidentified armed groups in the perpetration of violence against civilians. As Figure 14 indicates, unidentified armed groups are now the single largest actor in violence against civilians across the ACLED dataset. The strategic advantages of utilising nominally unaffiliated actors to intimidate, brutalise or discipline civilians, make this type of actor an increasingly important actor in complex and chronically violent scenarios.

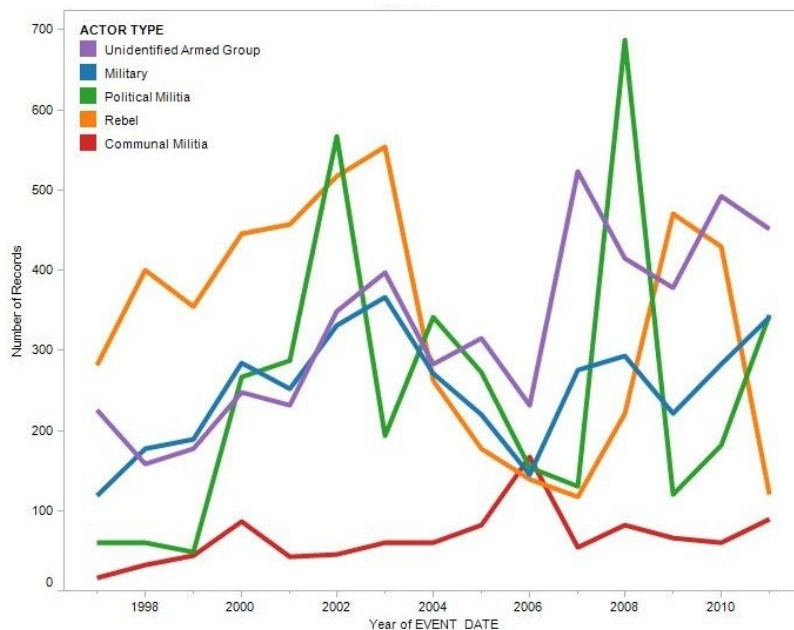


Figure 14: Violence against civilians by actor type, 1997 - 2012.

Forthcoming special topics

Forthcoming issues of ACLED *Conflict Trends* will include thematic topics of interest, including: Islamist Threats across the Continent; Rioting and Protesting Growing; Sources of Conflict Data and Hidden Conflict; Election Violence.

Sources

The information in this issue of ACLED *Conflict Trends* was compiled from a variety of sources, including ACLED data, compiled from local, regional, national and continental news reports; NGO reports, and Africa-focused news reports to supplement daily media reporting. Additional sources include reports from the NGO Safety Programme (NSP), specifically concerning Somalia. Further information on sources, coding procedures and data can be found online at [www.acleddata.com/data](http://www.acleddata.com/data).