

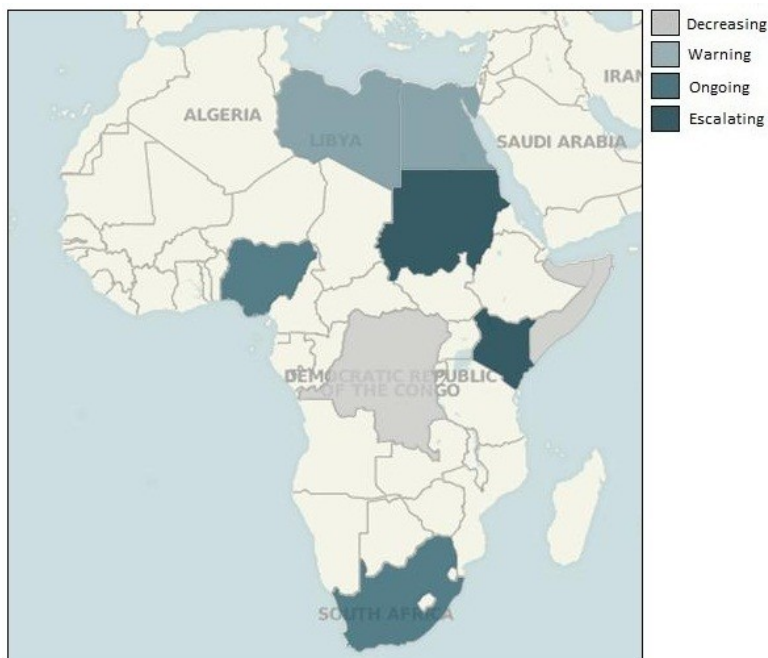
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 7):

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, OCTOBER 2012

This month's *Conflict Trends* report is the seventh monthly publication by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED) publishing and analysing realtime disaggregated data on political conflict on the African continent. This issue will focus on developments in **DR-Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia** and **South Africa**. We also present a thematic focus on **violent Islamist groups** across the African continent in the third of our special focus features.

September witnessed a significantly lower conflict event total than immediately preceding months, although an increased fatality total across the continent. On average, each conflict event led to 2.46 fatalities, compared to an August ratio of 1.2, and July ratio of 1.25, both very violent months. The decrease in event number is not due to a decrease in active countries; 41 countries across Africa experienced some number of events, while the total was 29 in August and 33 in July.

The reduction in events is largely due to decreases in DR-Congo and Somalia, and smaller decreases in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa; although **Sudan's** concurrent conflicts continued, **Madagascar** and **Central African Republic** had sharp increases and **North African** states continued to experience intermittently instability. Increased fatalities are largely due to persistent civilian attacks in Somalia, DR-Congo, Nigeria, and Sudan and new deadly contests in Kenya and Madagascar (see Figure 1).



Conflict trajectory, September 2012

A considerable proportion of the increases in September were due to contests involving communal and political militias. Disaggregated conflict data for recent years in Africa display patterns wherein protests, militia violence, violence against civilians, and traditional rebel-government contests constitute the most frequent acts of 'political violence' (see Figure 2). September 2012 was not an exception: protests, riots, military and militia attacks on civilians, and battles between rebels, militias and governments dominated the conflict profile of the continent.

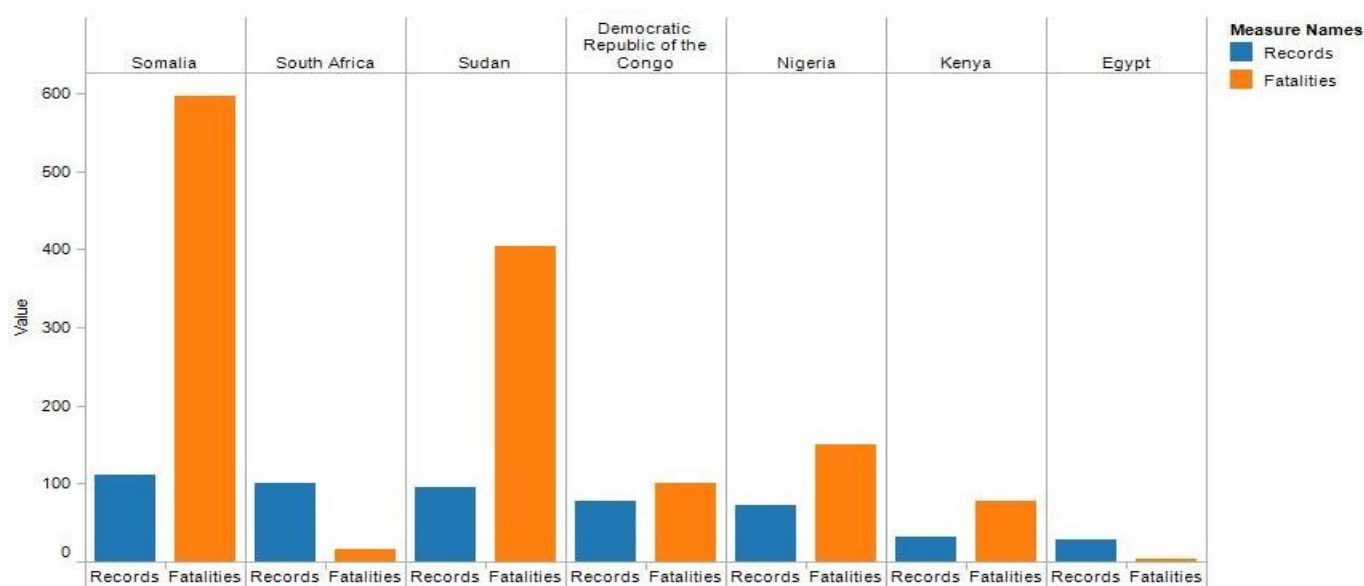


Figure 1: Conflict events and reported fatalities by country, September 2012.

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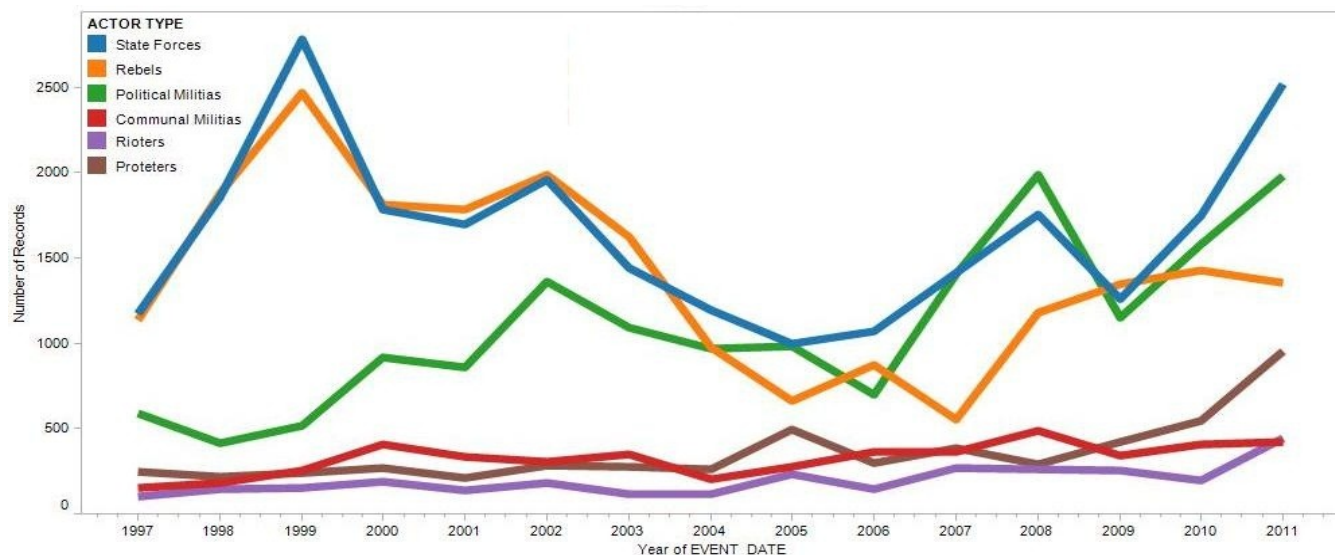


Figure 2: Agents of political violence by actor type, all countries, 1997 - 2011.

There is at least one ‘high risk’ state in each region of the continent:

Southern Africa’s violence is led by **South Africa**; Central Africa continues to be beset with **DR-Congo** contests; East Africa’s violence totals have been inflated due to a – now decreasing – war within **Somalia**; the Sahel’s violence is anchored by **Sudan** and **South Sudan**; the West by **Nigeria**; and the North by persistent violence in both **Egypt** and **Libya**.

These highly active states have similar overall rates of conflict (barring Egypt), yet the violence profile is very different: riots and protests constitute the bulk of activity in both Southern and North African states, whereas battles and attacks on civilians dominate the large, unwieldy conflicts in DR-Congo, Nigeria and Somalia. Yet, in all three states, public protest is becoming more common (See Figure 3).

Another measure of violence and volatility is how many active ‘agents’ of violence are at work within states. Figure 4 compares these totals for the same high violence states. The results are indicative of several potential patterns: although September has seen a decrease in agents overall, this is largely due a drop in activity levels in Nigeria and Somalia.

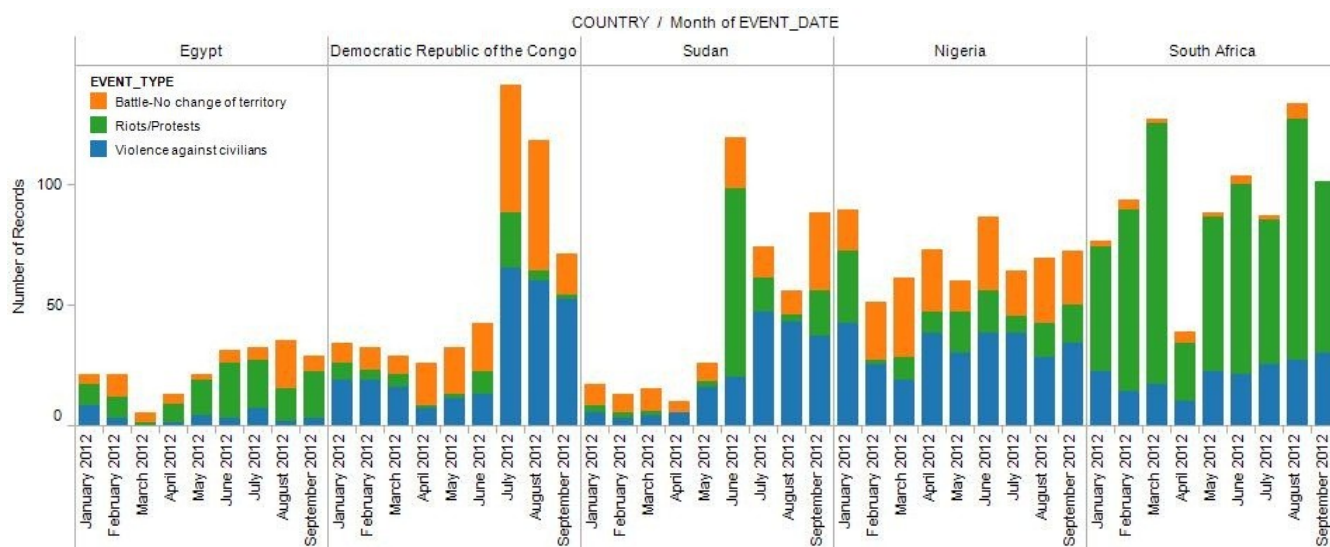


Figure 3: Violent conflict events by type, Egypt, DR-Congo, Sudan, Nigeria, South Africa, January - September 2012.

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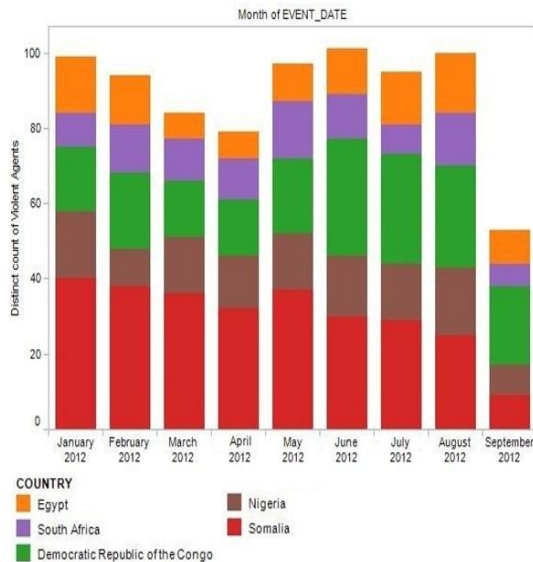


Figure 4: Distinct count of violent agents, Egypt, South Africa, DR-Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, January - September 2012.

Indeed, the number of violent agents in Somalia has been falling steadily since January, and has decreased dramatically in the past month.

This may be an indication that the various militia groups typically active across the country are regrouping as they prepare for the local power contests likely to emerge as a consequence of Al-Shabab’s departure and probable subsequent power vacuum.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram continues to dominate the security situation, leading to far fewer events from the myriad of political militias typically active across the country. DR-Congo’s agent count has been high and stable since the summer witnessed a considerable increase in rebel and militia activity. As international attention focuses on the M23 threat, it is worth noting that the eastern region alone continues to host around 18 distinct politically violent groups.

ACLED data for the entire continent reveal that across Africa, an average of 20 rebel groups, 45 political militias and 35 communal militias are active each month.

DR-Congo

As Ugandan-led regional conciliatory efforts continue, violence fell in Eastern DR-Congo for the third month in a row. A tentative cease fire between M23 rebels and government forces appears to be holding, but this break from fighting has also given the rebel group an opportunity to regroup. September witnessed the denunciation by the UN of the group’s establishment of a ‘de facto administration’ in the territory it controls. An M23 spokesperson hit back at the claim, declaring ‘We did not set up a parallel administration. When you wage war, when you occupy a territory, you have to administrate it, control it, and secure it.’ (AP, 22 September 2012).

However, what continued violence there was in September has remained well above the rate for the first half of the year, and continued to be heavily borne by civilians. ACLED data is categorized according to interactions between distinct actor types. Using these categories, we can see that over the course of the year, rebel - civilian violence has constituted the single highest interaction category, followed by government - communal militias and government - rebel conflict (see Figure 5).

Geographically, four spaces which were heretofore relatively peaceful - Manono, Tshela, Bafwende, Kamambere - experienced violence over the course of September. The most conflict-affected spaces in the country continued to be Masisi, Rutshuru, and Kalehe.

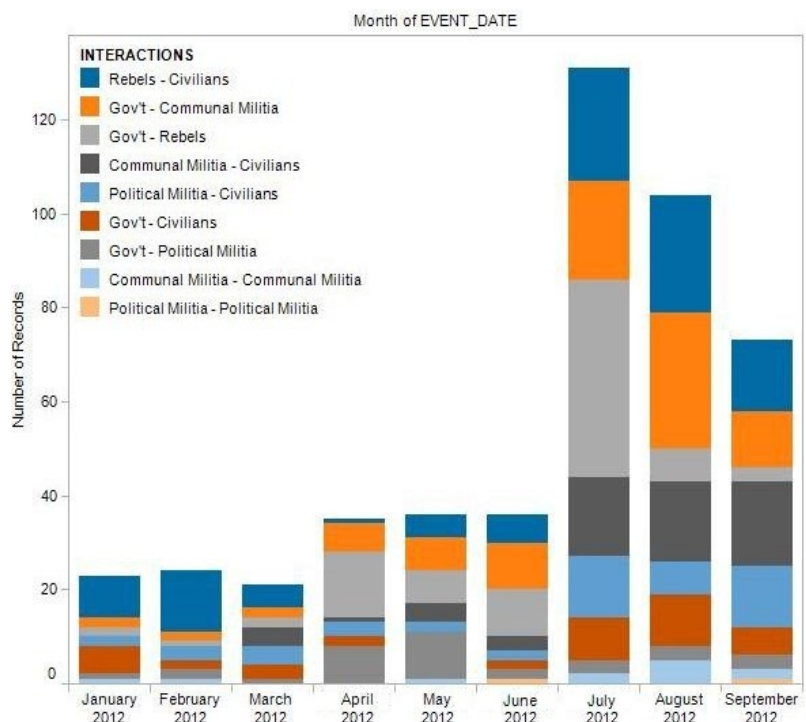


Figure 5: Conflict by agent interaction, DR-Congo, Jan - Sept 2012.

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Kenya

Conflict events in Kenya remained elevated again in September, with violence against civilians constituting a higher absolute and proportional level of violence than any month in 2012 to date. Communal militias have sharply overtaken political militias as the main instigators of one-sided violence in the country, as Figure 6 shows.

The coastal region was the main flashpoint for violent conflict in September, playing host to multiple, overlapping crises. Conflict in the Tana Delta made international headlines when clashes erupted in August, but the discovery of two mass graves in the region mid-month, indicated the death toll from six weeks of cyclical attacks may have been considerably higher than even the 113 already recorded. Communal violence is not uncommon in Kenya, but the attacks which have taken place in the Tana Delta region are unusual, both for their high fatality count, and the reports of use of highly organized and systematic attacks. As one news report cited a witness as stating, ‘They attacked us with so much precision and in so little time. These were trained people.’ (AFP, 14 September 2012). The government responded by deploying the General Service Unit, a paramilitary wing, which was quickly linked to abuses and razing of villages by the Kenya Red Cross (Al Jazeera, 21 September 2012).

Elsewhere in the coastal region, Mombasa remained restive, with an upsurge in activity in the surrounding area by armed actors linked to the recently legalized Mombasa Republican Council. Clashes between suspected separatists and police led to at least one fatality in the Kilifi area, while tensions mounted over the separatist agenda with an

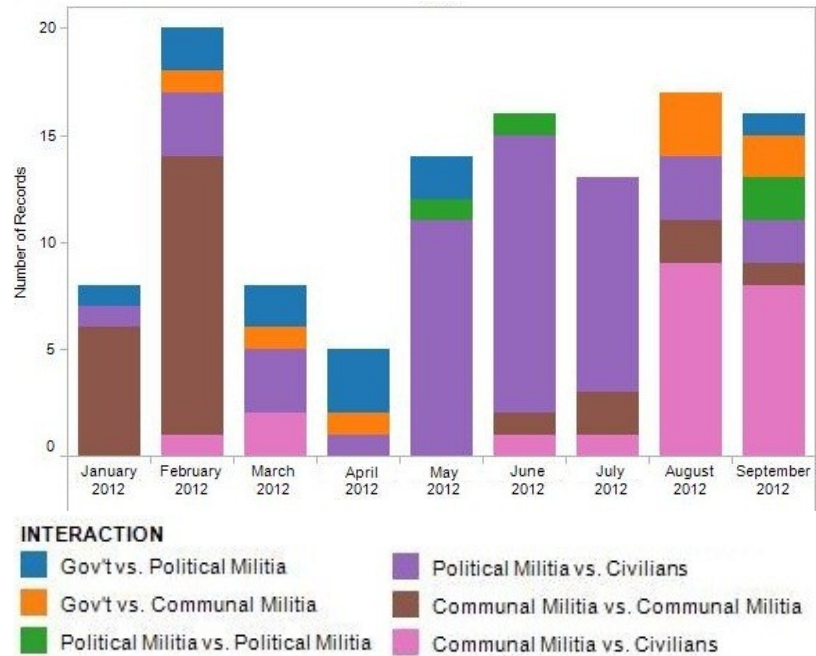


Figure 6: Conflict events by interaction, Kenya, Jan - Sept 2012.

historic charge brought against a man for distributing leaflets calling for coastal separation (*The Standard*, 4 October 2012). Links between separatist radicals and the Islamist violence recently witnessed in Mombasa are not clear, but escalating tensions over the coast’s perceived marginalization may well help to forge these.

This regional violence is taking place against a national backdrop of ongoing devolution of Kenya’s political institutions (and associated resources and power) to county level, and in the shadow of the upcoming 2013 elections. Both processes raise the stakes for local elite competition, factions of which may seek to use informal militia groups to alter the make up of constituencies or territories.

A number of commentators have already issued warnings that this violence is beginning to resemble the pre-election violence in 2007. An analysis of ACLED data comparing 2012 to 2007 events reveals that while agent patterns may be similar, the geography of violence is not. The coast was not a major flashpoint in 2007. At that time, conflict was concentrated across the Rift Valley, including areas between

Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities; in northern pastoral areas; and in the south-western Eldoret region. The current unrest we are witnessing may signal the formation of new and dangerous fault lines.

Comparing pre-election 2007 violence data with current communal and political unrest in Kenya reveals that while agent patterns may be similar, the geography of violence is not.

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Nigeria

Conflict events increased slightly in Nigeria over the preceding month, but Boko Haram activity in particular increased for the fifth month in a row. September set a new standard for the militant group as their most active month to date in 2012 (see Figure 6). They were active for 21 days of the month. Seventeen events produced fatalities, at an average of almost 8 fatalities per event.

Boko Haram’s activities made up a full 31% of all violence across the state, while the military and police contributed to 20% of all activity. The government response was consistent: almost half of all Boko Haram activates are against government forces. Despite this, of the 34 locations, which experienced Boko Haram activity in the past month, only Damaturu and Maidiguiru are locations where Boko Haram engaged with government forces and attacked civilians. In the remaining 17 locations where Boko Haram attacked civilians, no government response was forthcoming. The 15 locations in which Boko Haram and government forces battled were not sites of direct violence against civilians.

This indicates that the government may be able to protect civilians where they have an active presence, but Boko Haram is far more able to quickly diffuse its instability, fostering a scenario in which the government appears to be playing ‘catch-up’ with the group.

Somalia

September in Somalia was hailed as something of a new dawn for the world’s most famous failed state, with the election of a new President in a country most often described as ‘without an effective central government.’ September also witnessed a significant reduction in the number of violent events overall (see Figure 7), although the high-profile campaign

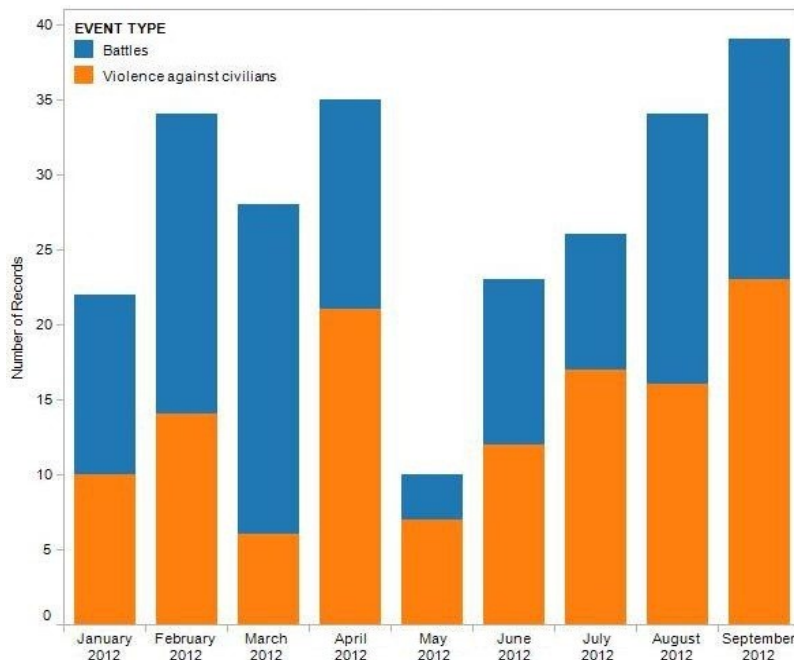


Figure 6: Boko Haram conflict events by type, Nigeria, Jan - Sept 2012.

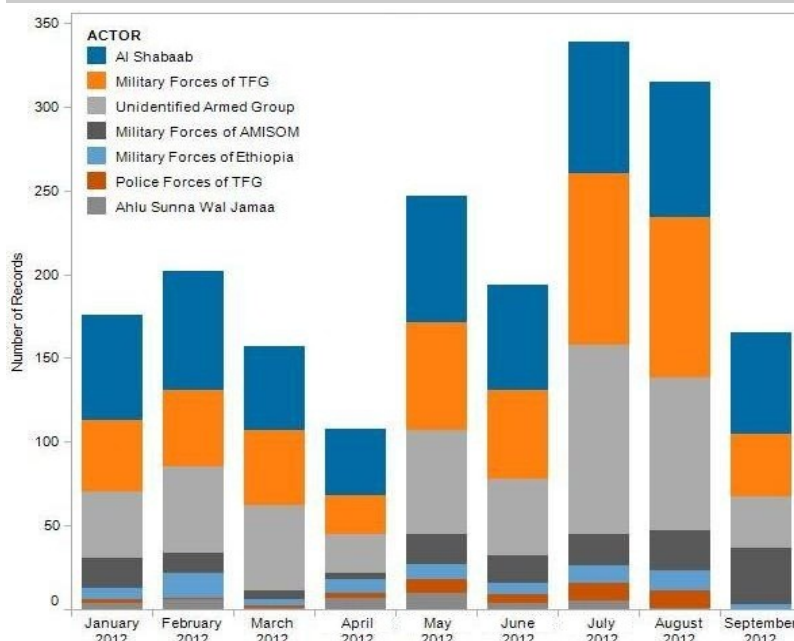


Figure 7: Conflict events by actor, Somalia, Jan - Sept 2012.

against Al Shabaab in South-Central Somalia kept the conflict in the headlines.

September witnessed a number of milestone events: it was the month in which the fractured alliance of Hizbul Islam and Al Shabaab finally came to an end, with the former announcing that while it still wishes to see African Union troops leave Somalia, it welcomes the election of the

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new president as a ‘positive development.’ (BBC News, 24 September 2012).

In the same month, the long-anticipated battle for the Al Shabaab-held port town of Kismayo occurred in September, but AMISOM’s seizure of the town was swifter and smoother (initially) than expected. Al Shabaab abandoned numerous towns with limited contest over the past few months, but it was widely believed it would hold out in Kismayo in a repeat of its entrenched battle to hold its ground in Mogadishu. Instead, as it was ultimately to do in Mogadishu, Al Shabaab engaged in a tactical retreat, and proceeded to launch several hit and run style attacks on the African Union forces which held the town.

Events on the whole fell in Somalia this month, in spite of these significant milestones. However, the challenge AMISOM and the TFG have faced in much of South-Central Somalia to date has been to seize territory. Holding it in the face of mounting, and destabilising insurgent attacks by a diffuse Al Shabaab, in addition to managing the multiple conflicts which are likely to arise as clans elites compete for power in newly opened up territory is likely to be an equal if not greater challenge.

Groups such as ASWJ, the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Hizbul Islam - which are now allied to greater or lesser degrees to the TFG - are just the most prominent of the armed factions which we can expect to push for power in newly seized territories in the coming months. Added to this are emerging reports of attacks on Somali civilians by AMISOM forces in the countryside (BBC News, 24 September 2012), and the stability of the TFG is far from secured.

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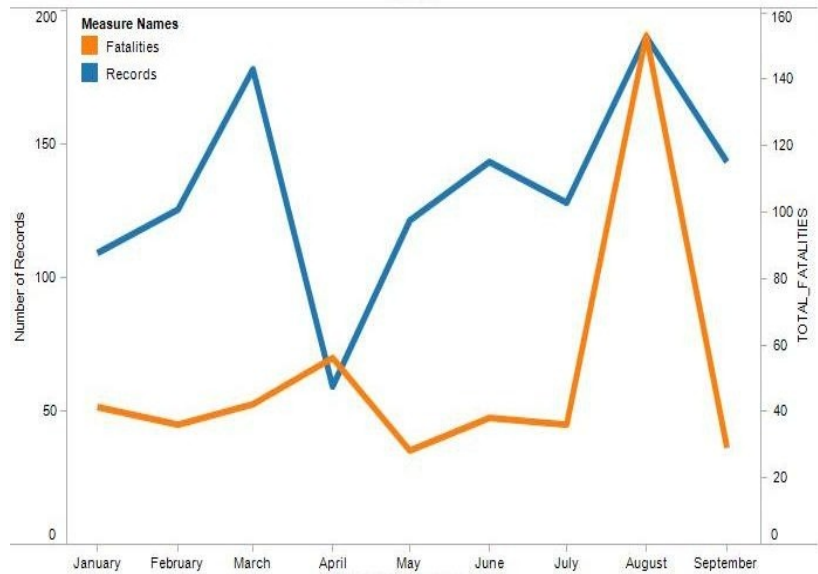


Figure 8: Conflict events and fatalities, South Africa, Jan - Sept 2012.

South Africa

Following an extremely volatile month, conflict events fell slightly in South Africa in September, and fatalities dropped sharply to a level in line with their 2012 average. Tensions remained high, however, as labour unrest continued throughout the month. In addition, several developments surrounding controversial politician Julius Malema drew attention to the mounting instability in the country. After declaring at the end of August that South Africans “are worse [off than] during the time of Apartheid” (Daily Maverick, 31 August 2012), in mid-September the military was placed on ‘high alert’ as the firebrand politician prepared to address disgruntled soldiers near Johannesburg (BBC News, 12 September 2012). Later in the month, charges brought against the former ANC youth leader gave ample opportunity to his supporters to claim he was being targeted by the regime for his outspoken opposition.

South Africa’s conflict profile in general is characterised by a high level of diffuse and disparate events.

These are primarily riots and protests, alongside a considerable number of vigilante mob attacks. Rather than facing a single, concerted and coordinated opposition, South Africa experiences some of the highest levels of political conflict on the continent, without a clear or coordinated opposition. As violence levels remained elevated in September, it remains to be seen whether the country will normalise or see a transformation of these diffuse movements in the coming months.

Special Focus: Islamist Militias and Rebel Groups across Africa

The recent escalation of violent conflict in Nigeria, Somalia and Mali, in addition to the suspected role of Islamist militia groups in anti-US protests which were witnessed across the continent in September, has drawn attention to the role of Islamist groups in violence across the African continent. This special focus explores this phenomenon by analysing disaggregated data on violent Islamist activity.

Given the sensitive nature of attributing religious association with political violent behaviour, and the multiple types of groups claiming some relationship to Islam as a motivation, the following qualifications should be noted: in this analysis, ‘Islamism’ and related activities refer to the proactive promotion or enforcement of Islamic ideologies, laws, policies or customs. Islamist activity is manifest across various disciplines and traditions within Islam, encompassing a range of political, social and religious activity. Islamist militias and – though less common, rebel groups – are the subject of this special focus, and are distinguished from other Islamist groups by their utilisation of violence in the pursuit of such goals. Elsewhere (International Crisis Group, 2 March 2005, p. i), such groups are referred to as *Jihadi* Islamists. Examples of violent Islamist groups include Somalia’s Al Shabaab, Nigeria’s Boko Haram, Mali’s Ansar Dine, and Algeria’s AQIM.

This analysis does not attempt to explore the activity of Muslim, but not Islamist, violent groups. Such groups are treated in ACLED data as communal groups, which are active in areas where local violent groups mobilise under such an identity, and are normally involved in violence against other groups or civilians of a different identity group. Such groups are distinguished from Islamist groups as they do not have an explicit agenda of promoting or enforcing Islamic laws, policies or customs in specific territories or across communities.

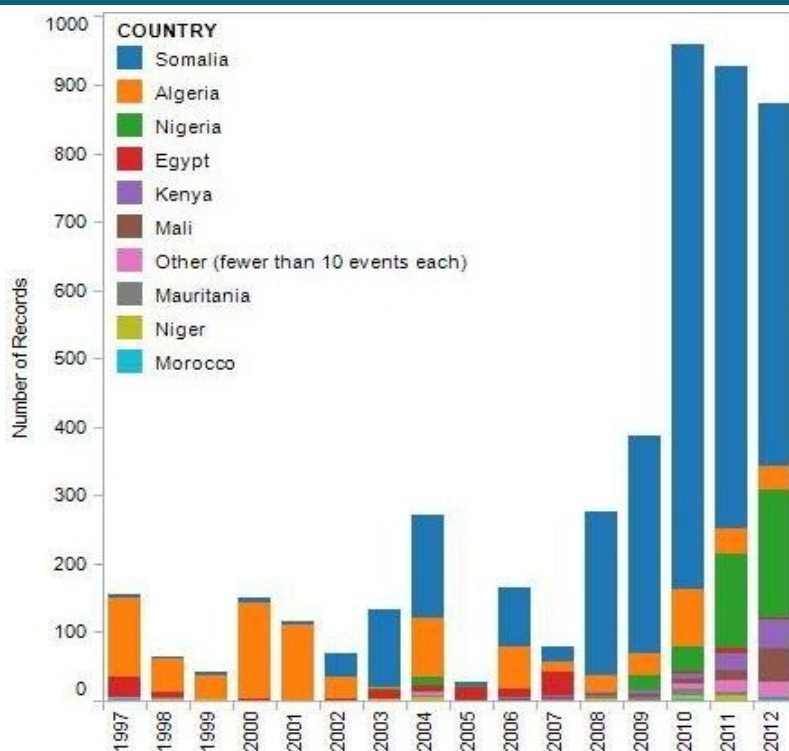


Figure 9: Violent Islamist activity by country, 1997 - July 2012.*

Analysis of the data on violent Islamist groups provides two key conclusions: the first, is that violent Islamist activity on the African continent has increased sharply in recent years, both in absolute terms, and as a proportion of overall political conflict events.

The second, is that this increase in violence has coincided with an expansion of the countries in which operatives are active. While a considerable share of the increase in violent Islamist activity can be attributed to an intensification of violence in a small number of key countries (Somalia and Nigeria, notably), there has been a concomitant increase in violent Islamist activity in new spaces, with a discernible spread south - and east-ward on the continent.

Overall, violent Islamist activity has increased significantly in the past 15 years, with a particular sharp increase witnessed from 2010 onwards (see Figure 9). This increase holds for both absolute numbers of events and a proportional increase in violent Islamist activity as a share of overall violent conflict on the continent. Reported fatality levels resulting from violent Islamist activity have also increased significantly in recent years, although these levels peaked in 1997 at the height of the Algerian Civil War.

*Ongoing quality review of some high violence areas represented may lead to changes in event frequency.

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Much of the growth in violent activity in recent years, however, has been concentrated in Somalia and Nigeria, while the most significant drop in Islamist activity since 1997 has occurred in Algeria. While these countries present unique cases for analysis in their own right, their specificity also means it is interesting to exclude them in order to more clearly see where new geographies of violent Islamist activity are emerging (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 clearly shows increased level of activity in Kenya and Mali, alongside a comparable drop in violent Islamist operations in Egypt over the past 15 years. A further feature highlighted in Figure 6 is the spread of low-level violent Islamist activity to a wider range of countries than those in which Islamist militias and rebel groups were operating in 1997. Among the countries which had fewer than 10 recorded events involving violent Islamist groups are Chad, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Morocco, Tanzania and Senegal. Combined, these countries have witnessed a particularly sharp increase in the first half of 2012, indicating they may be future hotspots of violent Islamist operations.

When viewed spatially, there is a clear trend for the spread of violent Islamist activity south- and eastward on the continent (see Figure 11). This trend is significant for multiple reasons. In the first instance, it may reflect the strength of diffusion – the physical dispersal of operatives and weaponry – as Islamist violence spreads from historical hotspots such as Algeria and Somalia with the movement of operatives and ideological leaders across borders. While there is some evidence to suggest

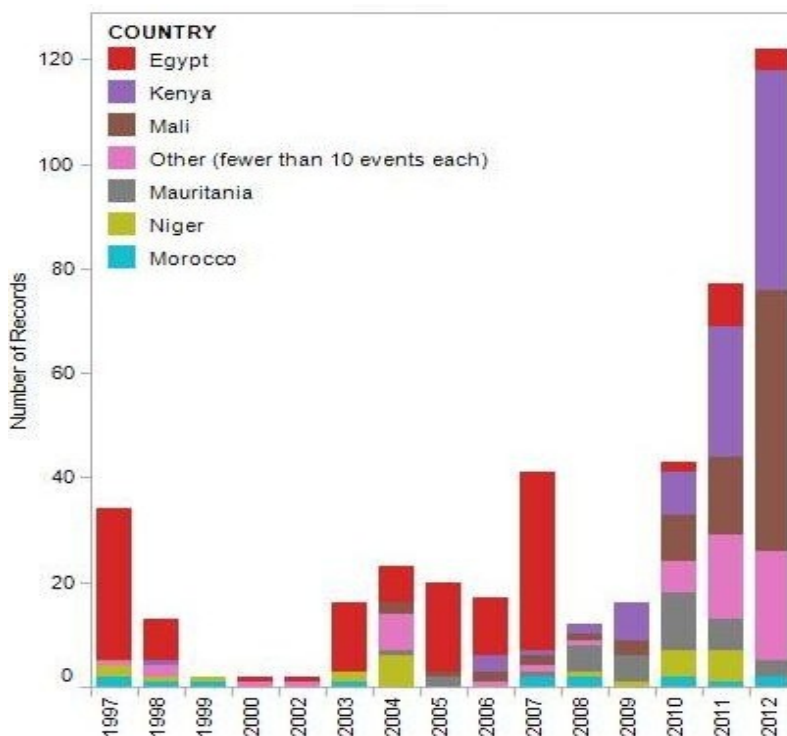


Figure 10: Violent Islamist activity by country, excluding Somalia, Nigeria and Algeria, 1997 - July 2012.

that Algerian and Somali militants are active in neighbouring countries over the course of the dataset’s coverage, this diffusion model alone cannot explain the growth in local violent Islamist activity. Other explanatory factors must be considered, including transnational organisational linkages which see localised militant groups ‘brand’ themselves in particular terms in order to benefit from larger international networks. An example of this can be found in Mali, which has recently witnessed the growth of a domestic, Tuareg-populated Islamist movement in Ansar Dine. The group is affiliated with the broader Al Qaeda movement, though gains local traction through its roots in the community. Similarly, growth in violent Islamist activity in Kenya is increasingly driven by recruitment of Swahili-speaking Kenyan nationals, as investigations into the al-Hijra centre in Mombasa have indicated (UN Security Council on Somalia and Eritrea, 25 July 2012).

The spread of militant Islamist activity to these new spaces reveals the significance and fluidity of the Islamist mantle as a mobilising identity.

Special Focus: Islamist Militias and Rebel Groups across Africa

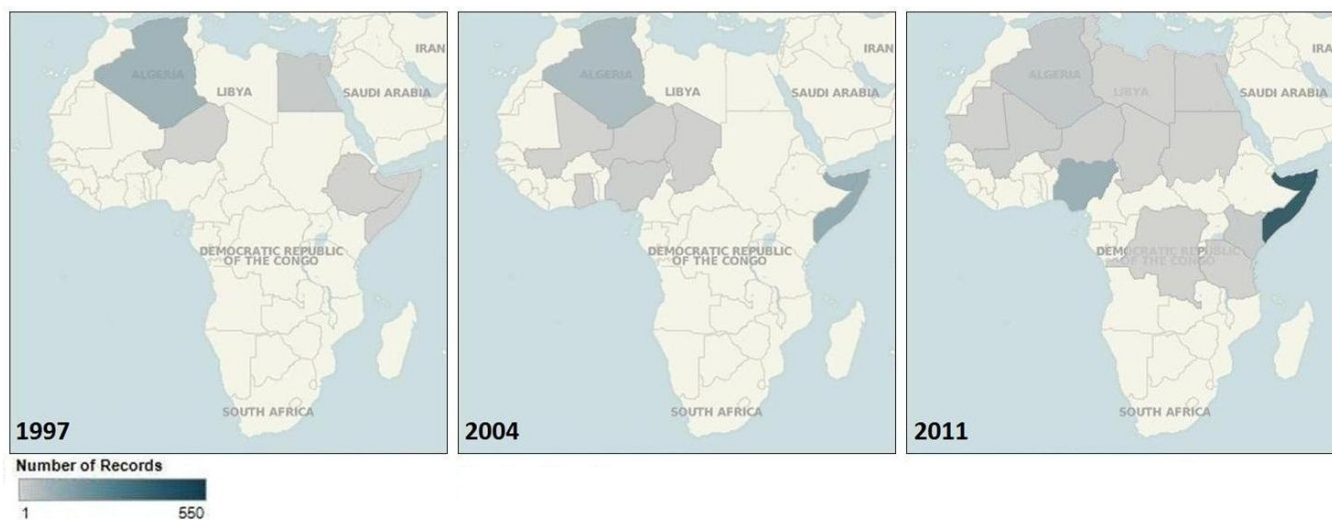


Figure 11: Violent Islamist by country, 1997, 2004 and 2011.

This appears particularly relevant in Kenya, where the combination of a large Muslim population and the near-exhaustion of pre-existing ethno-regional affiliations may have combined to create a particularly fecund environment for recruitment and activity. Viewed in this context, the growth of violent Islamist activity can be partially explained as the strategic use of a mantle which has proven useful for conflict actors seeking to establish an identity in a crowded conflict landscape, with the ability of the group to take root being shaped by domestic contexts.

There are also important variations within and across violent Islamist groups, among the most prominent of which is that the vast majority of violent Islamist groups recorded in the dataset are political militias, as opposed to rebel groups. While rebel groups constitute the largest share of overall activity, this is shaped by Somalia and Algeria’s dominant roles in the data, where rebel groups with a specifically articulated agenda to overthrow the national regime have operated. By contrast, most violent Islamist groups are focused on regional or localised goals, often lacking the capacity to mount a large-scale threat to the national

regime, or the desire to establish an alternative regime in its place. This is not to diminish the destabilising impact of violent Islamist militias, but rather to refine our understanding of the threat they pose: militia groups may be in a position to operate with a greater degree of impunity than rebel groups, owing to the fact that they do not seek to establish a regime in the long-term. This may render them less reliant on popular support, and thereby less concerned with the implications of civilian casualties. Further, militia groups are typically associated with particular national or local elites as a source of funding and support: this may have broader implications for the politics of patronage within states.

There are also differences in the activity of different groups, seen in the number of violent events and reported fatalities with which each group is associated. Analysis of reported fatalities reveals that Ansar Dine has the lowest number of average fatalities per event, at 0.29; while Boko Haram has the highest, at 6.2. In between are Al Shabaab (2.72); AQIM (3.67) and MUJAO (5.25). A similar pattern emerges when we analyse the proportion of events in which each group is involved which results in reported fatalities.

Just under 70% of Boko Haram events result in reported fatalities, followed closely by AQIM at 63.4%, MUJAO at 50%, Al Shabaab at 45.9%, and Ansar Dine at a distant 19.1%. However, these discrepancies in fatality levels and proportions are less attributable to contextual considerations, resulting to a greater extent from the distinct modalities of violence each group employs (see Figure 11). Although associated with lower fatality levels and proportions, Ansar Dine engages in the highest

Special Focus: Islamist Militias and Rebel Groups across Africa

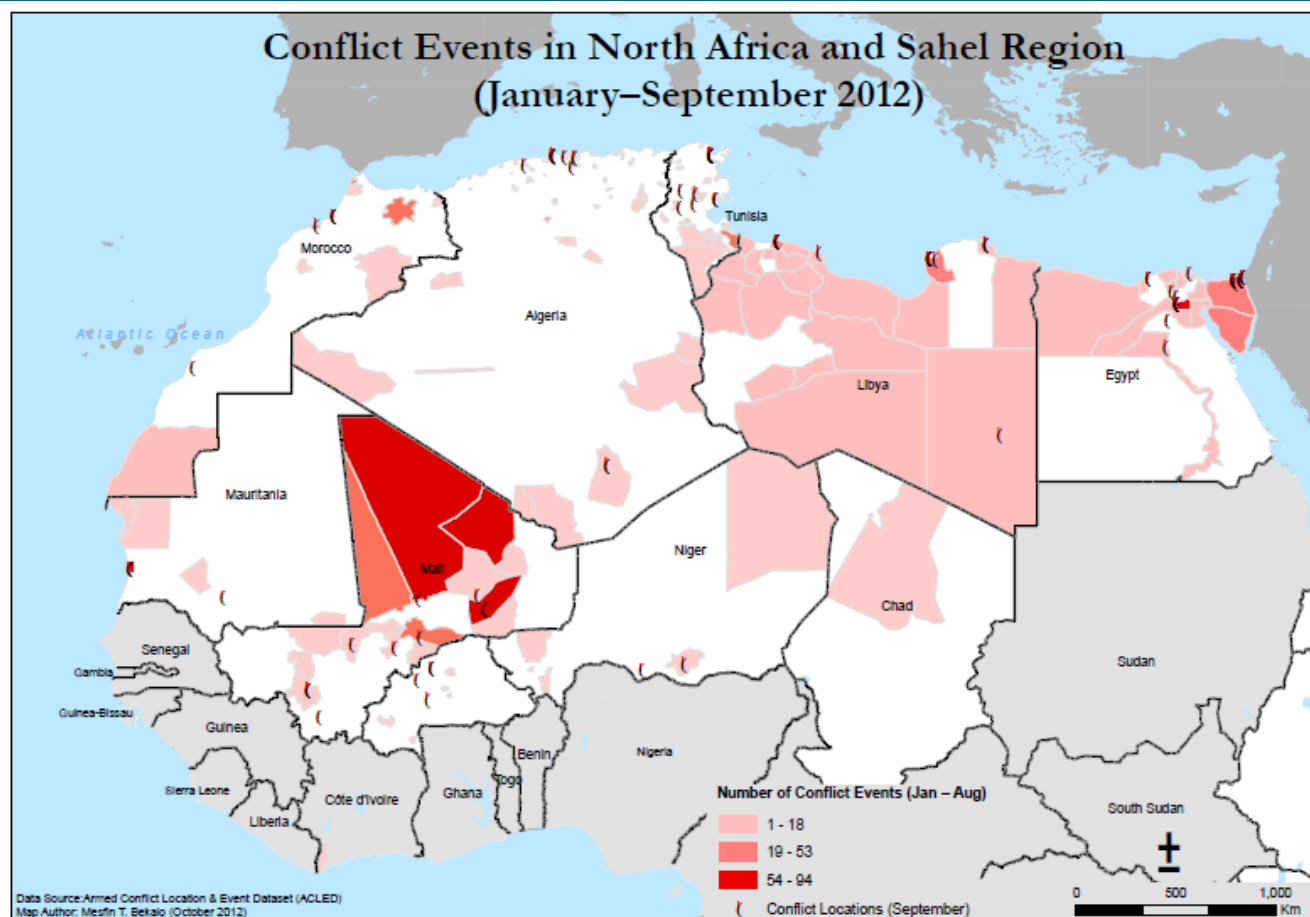


Figure 11: Violent Islamist activity at sub-national level, North Africa and the Sahel, January - September 2012.

(proportional) rate of violence against civilians, at 52.4% of recorded activity; followed by Boko Haram (at 49.5%); MUJAO (at 37.5%); AQIM (at 22.9%); and Al Shabaab (at 17.2%).

From these patterns, one clear conclusion is that there is no single explanation or analysis which can account for the recent rise in violent Islamist militias and rebel groups in Africa. Islamist violence has fallen in some key states such as Algeria and Egypt, as it has arisen in new spaces, including those in East and West Africa. The different contexts in which violent Islamist groups are active suggest several possible country-specific explanations. The spread of militancy from neighbouring countries – either physically through the dispersal of

operatives and weaponry, or less directly through creeping instability – may explain the emergence of violent Islamist groups in states neighbouring Algeria and Somalia.

However, even in these neighbouring states, it is clear additional forces are at play: violent Islamist activity in Mali would not have been possible without the interaction of local militant groups and transnational Islamist networks, both of which benefit from the association.

Sources

The information in this issue of ACLED *Conflict Trends* was compiled from a variety of sources, including ACLED data, compiled from news reports; NGO reports, and Africa-focused news reports.

Citations refer to African Confidential (*AfCon*); Associated Press (*AP*); Agence France Presse (*AFP*); International Crisis Group; and BBC News. Further information can be found online at www.acleddata.com/data.