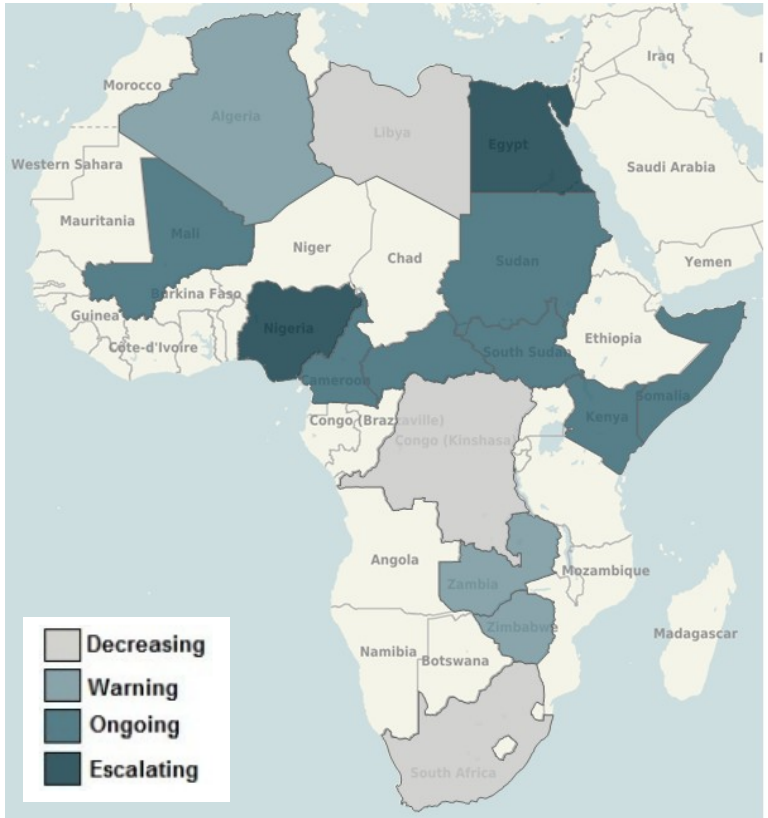


Welcome to the February issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published through our research partners at [Climate Change and African Political Stability \(CCAPS\)](#) and also on the [ACLED website](#).

This month’s issue focuses on heightened protest activity in **Algeria** against the government’s proposal to extract shale gas, clashes between Boko Haram and the **Cameroon** military, **Central African Republic**, violence surrounding the 25th January uprising anniversary in **Egypt**, volatile activity by Al Shabaab in **Somalia**, and **South Sudan**. A special focus topic reviews types and scales of **sources** in conflict monitoring.

Elsewhere on the continent, the intensity of conflict escalated in **Nigeria** with a dramatic rise in fatalities following deadly attacks by Boko Haram militants in Borno State, while events dropped in **Democratic Republic of Congo** as well as in **Libya**, after a partial ceasefire was agreed between warring militia groups.



Conflict Trajectory, February 2015.

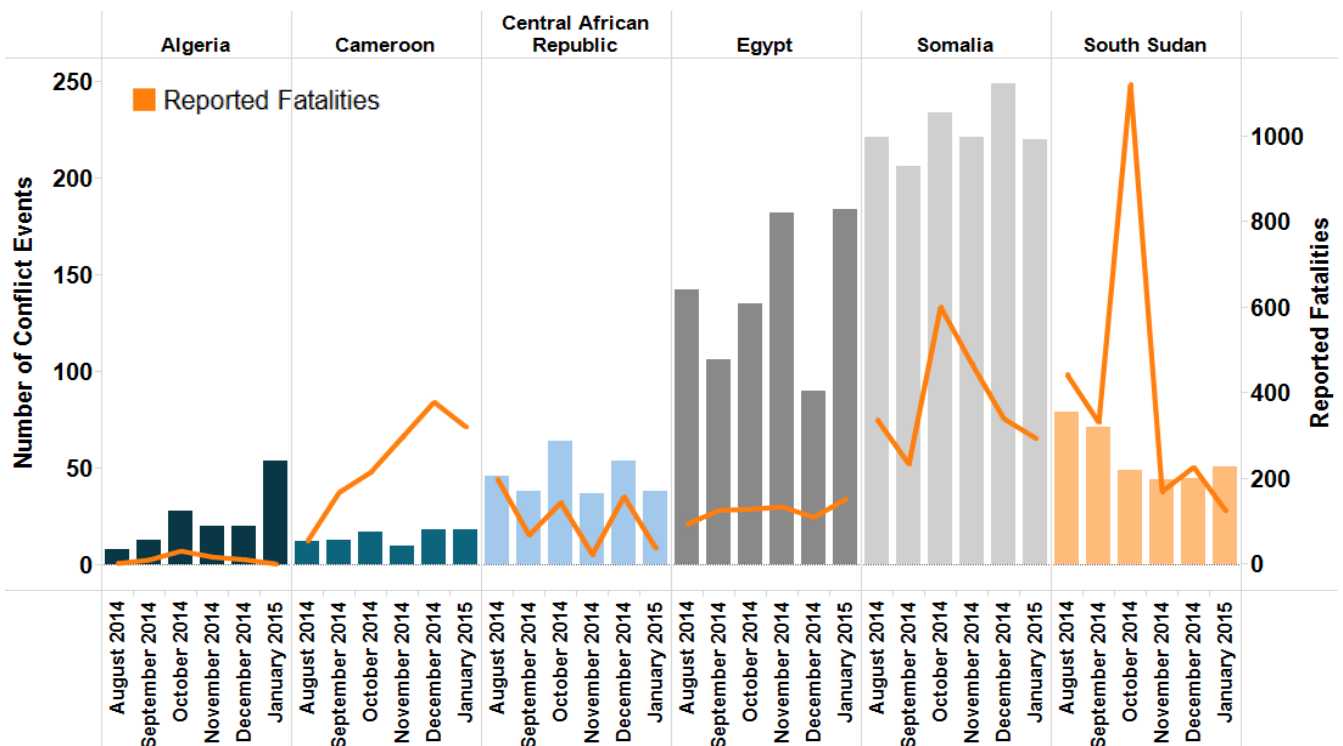


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, from August 2014 - January 2015.

Algeria

The lull in political conflict that Algeria has witnessed since May 2014 eventually terminated in January. Last month, the country saw the number of political conflict events triple the levels of the previous period (see Figure 2). Riots and protests have rapidly spread across the country, involving rural, isolated areas in the south as well as the coastal regions and the capital city (see Figure 3). The government’s decision to go ahead with the exploitation of shale gas in the Ahnet basin sparked a wave of unrest in the wilaya (province) of Tamanghasset, a desert region in southern Algeria.

The epicentre of the protests was the oasis town of In Salah, where demonstrations and sit-ins have occurred almost on a daily basis since the end of December. Shortly after, the unrest spread to the towns of Tamanrasset, Adrar, Oran, Ouargla and Algiers, where people took to the streets to express solidarity with the inhabitants of In Salah (Tamlali, 2015). Although the protests unfolded peacefully and without major incidents, Algerian authorities have been worried about the possible escalation of the uprising. In the face of the mounting pressure, the government-owned company in charge of the drillings, Sonatrach, promised to put \$70 billion of investment over a 20-year period and to create 50,000 new jobs (Rondeleux, 2015). On January 27th, President Bouteflika confirmed that the exploitation of shale gas is a national priority, but that drillings are not yet on the agenda (Algeria Press Service, 2015). However, these reassuranc-

es did not convince the local population and demonstrations in Southern Algeria continued.

The Algerian government sees the exploitation of shale gas as part of a long-term energy security strategy to cope with the decline in oil and gas reserves. A recent report published by the [United States Energy Information Administration \(2013\)](#) indicates that Algeria has the third-largest recoverable shale gas reserves in the world, accounting for almost one-tenth of the global estimated resources. According to these estimates, Algerian largest shale gas basins are located in the southern regions of Tindouf, Adrar, Tamanghasset and Illizi. As the national oil reserves are due to drain away by 2037, the government will likely go ahead with fracking despite the scepticism of its population ([Jeune Afrique, 2015a](#)).

But behind the demonstrations against fracking lies a more complex reality. The protests reflect the negative sentiment that permeates Algerian society, which faces rampaging corruption and a difficult socio-economic situation, especially in the rural and peripheral areas. Given this widespread malaise, the government’s decision to exploit shale gas reserves in the Tamanghasset province exacerbated pre-existing tensions and sparked a wave of unrest that spread quickly to other areas.

Nevertheless, the peaceful and disciplined unfolding of the protests seems to indicate a popular preference for radical but non-violent reform rather than full-scale revolution. Although a large-scale uprising is unlikely to

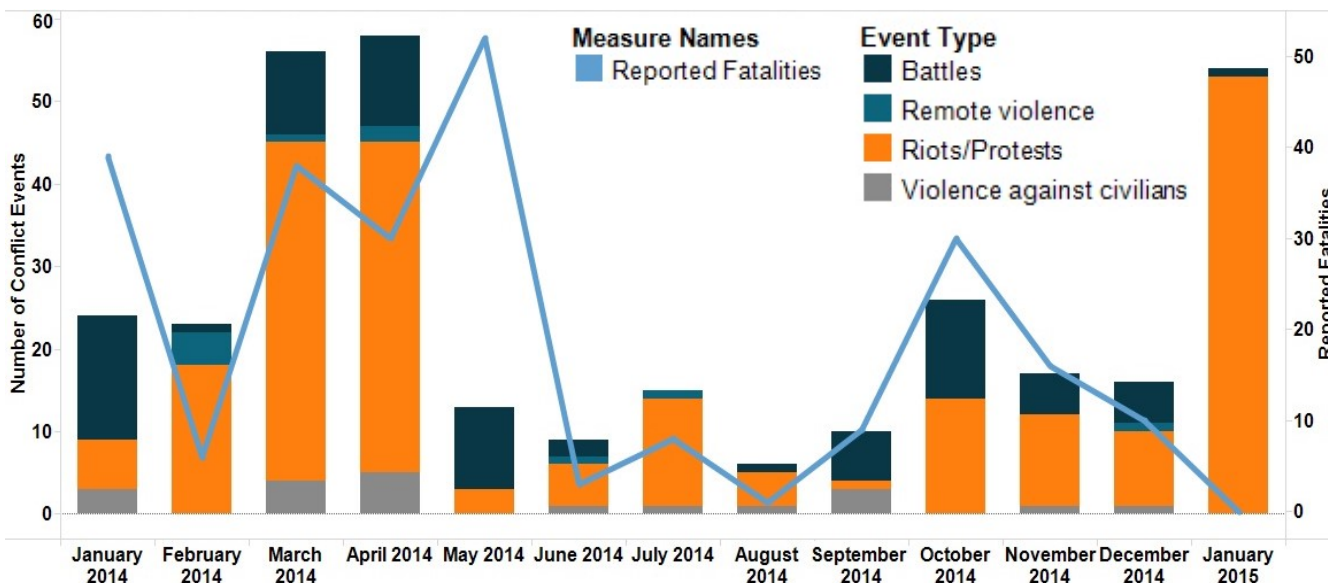


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Algeria, from January 2014 -January 2015.

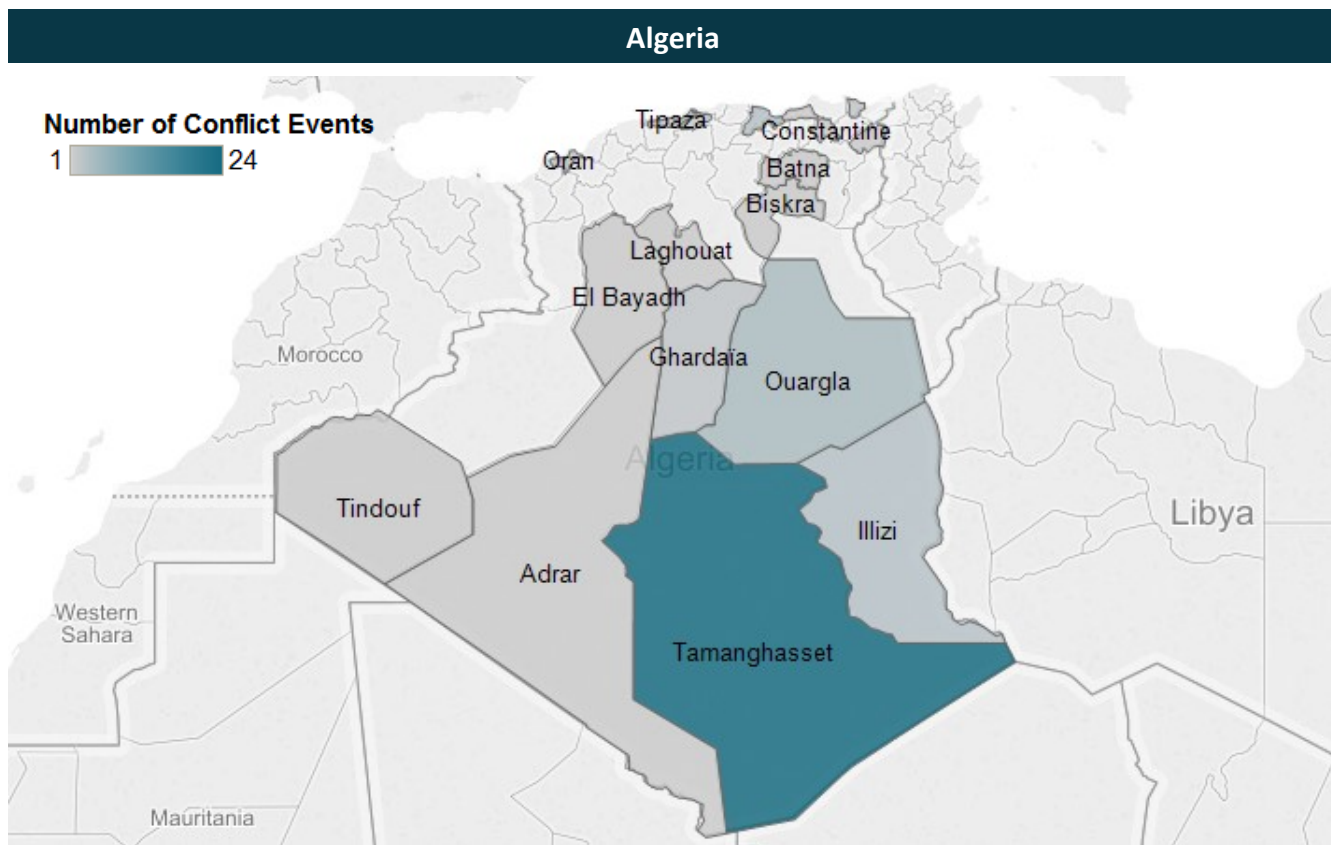


Figure 3: Number of Riots and Protests by Province in Algeria, January 2015.

emerge in Algeria soon, abrupt political changes, such as an aggravation of President Bouteflika’s health problems, may precipitate the situation.

In addition to the upsurge in protesting over the last month, Algeria has recently witnessed a rise in the number of armed clashes between Islamist militants and security forces. Between September and December, ACLED recorded 28 battles involving militant groups and military units across the country, with almost 50 related fatalities (see Figure 3). Since September, more than 3,000 soldiers have been deployed in Northern Algeria to track down the militants that kidnapped and beheaded a French hiker in the Kabylie region (Jeune Afrique, 2015b).

The assassination was carried out by *Jund al-Khilafah* (“The Soldiers of the Caliphate”), a former faction of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) that in September pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). These developments notwithstanding, claims that the caliphate “is at the gates of North Africa” appear to be overrated (Lefèvre, 2014): since the beginning of the military offensive in the North, the army has killed the head of *Jund al-Khilafah*, Abdelmalek Gouri, and inflicted

heavy losses on militant groups, severely restricting their operational capacities (Africa Research Bulletin 2015).

Additionally, the security forces recently conducted anti-smuggling operations along the borders with Mali and Libya in order to prevent arms from penetrating on the Algerian territory. In November, a senior AQIM militant was arrested and ten combatants killed in two military operations near Bordj Badji Mokhtar, on the border with Mali (Xinhua, 2014a, 2014b). In January alone, the army arrested some 50 smugglers in the country’s south, seizing all-terrain vehicles, fuel and arms (AllAfrica, 2015a, 2015b). Algerian authorities have long been aware of the potential dangers of arms smuggling in the Saharan region and have therefore enhanced the repressive activity (Strazzari and Tholens, 2014).

Although the claims that a caliphate is on the rise in North Africa — and that Algeria is on the verge of a major uprising — do not reflect reality, the evolution of political violence domestically deserves attention. The infiltration of militant groups across the borders with Mali and Libya and the deterioration of the socio-political situation may have negative effects on the country’s fragile stability.

Cameroon

Cameroon has seen a rising trend in fatalities since July 2014, following a significant spike in violence in June 2014. Although this trend did not start out as particularly noteworthy, it has since led into the most violent period captured so far by the ACLED dataset in Cameroon. Between October to January 2014 over 1,100 fatalities were recorded, with this total including a drop in discrete events in November (see Figure 4).

The majority of these fatalities occurred within battles between the Cameroonian military and Boko Haram. This period of violence is marked by a considerable asymmetry: Boko Haram fighters represent the overwhelming majority of these fatalities, with the Cameroonian military usually reporting only a few casualties. In most cases these numbers cannot be independently verified, and Boko Haram does not report its own figures. In almost all cases, Cameroonian military forces take fewer than 10% of the fatalities compared to those of Boko Haram.

During an attack on the border town of Amchide in northern Cameroon, as many as 180 Boko Haram fighters were killed, with no casualties reported on the Cameroonian side. Amchide is notable for having more than double the fatalities of any other location in Cameroon between October and January 2014 (see Figure 5).

High fatality events, like that seen in Amchide, have taken place almost exclusively in the region northwest of Maroua, the capital of Cameroon's Far North region, and between the towns of Amchide and Ashigashiya, both

situated on the border with Nigeria (see Figure 5). The only exception to this was the intense fighting around Fotokol on the border with Nigeria near Lake Chad in early September, where 100 Boko Haram fighters were reported killed by Cameroonian military sources on September 6th ([Al Jazeera, September 8, 2014](#)).

The overall asymmetry is evident not only in the balance of fatalities, but also in tactics and weapons employed by both sides. In terms of tactics, while the Cameroonian military has reported significant victories against Boko Haram since October, the number of coordinated attacks on multiple locations by Boko Haram resulting in high civilian fatalities (more than ten) have also increased. Three major offensives have occurred during the October to January 2014 period, including a dual attack on Limani and Amchide between October 15th-16th which caused more than twenty civilian fatalities ([The Telegraph, October 18, 2014](#)); an attempted offensive against six villages on November 9th ([Vanguard, November 20, 2014](#)); and an offensive where Boko Haram attacked six villages and killed at least thirty civilians. This latter event led to the capture of the Ashigashiya military base for a short period, between December 26th-28th ([Wall Street Journal, December 29, 2014](#)).

The December 26th-28th offensive exhibited some of the most intense sustained battles between Boko Haram and the Cameroonian military since violence between these groups began. The elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) - recognized as Cameroon's frontline troops in the fighting

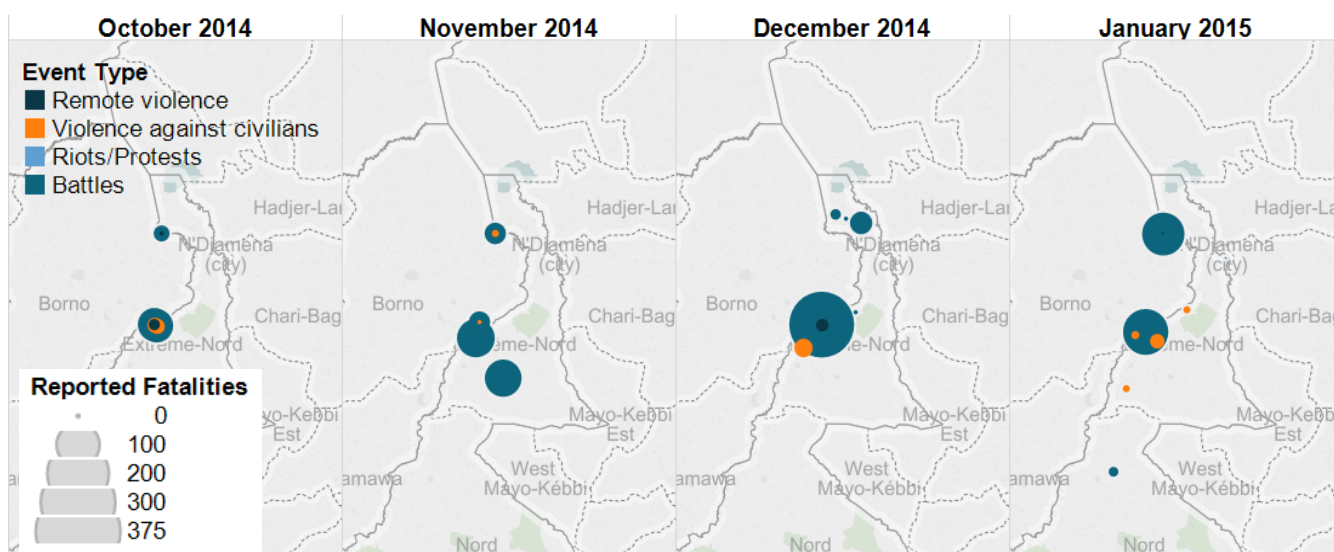


Figure 4: Number of Reported Fatalities in Cameroon's Far North Region, October 2014-January 2015.

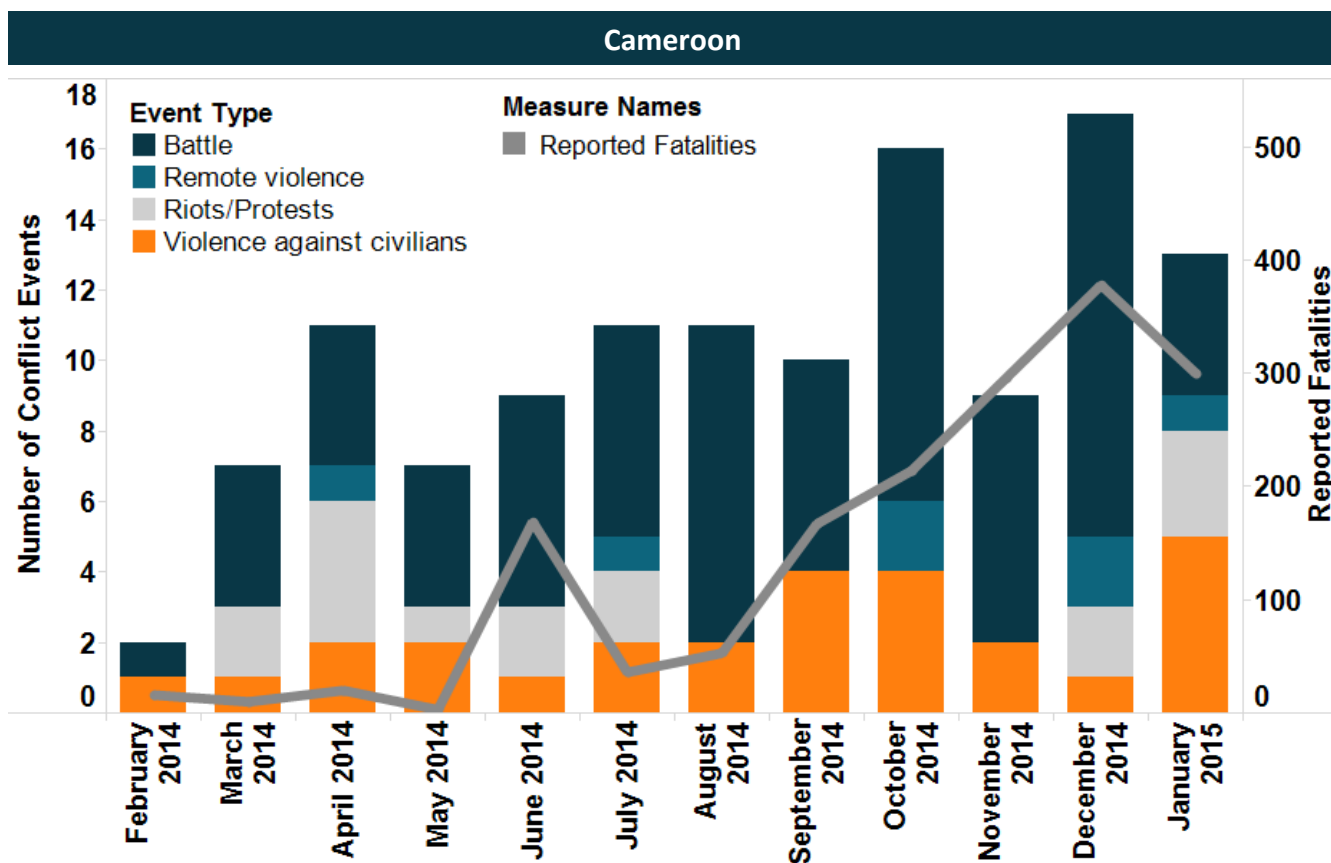


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Cameroon, from February 2014-January 2015.

against Boko Haram - featured prominently in these events ([Reuters, December 22, 2014](#)). The offensive itself is remarkable due to Boko Haram's success in forcing a withdrawal by Cameroonian military forces from their base. However, during their successful recapture of the Ashigashiya military base, Cameroonian forces engaged in their first airstrikes of the conflict. Although it seems unlikely airstrikes will become a regular part of future battles, the deployment of this type of weapon reinforces the asymmetry of this conflict.

Boko Haram has also been expanding its use of remote violence (see Figure 4), arguably in response to the success of Cameroonian military forces in direct combat. One aspect of this has been rocket attacks, such as the one carried out by Boko Haram on Amchide from the Nigerian side of the border on October 6th, which killed at least eight civilians in a crowded market ([Vanguard, October 6, 2014](#)). Boko Haram has also begun using roadside bombs, with a significant increase noted since December. At least ten Cameroonian soldiers, including two members of the BIR, were killed by this type of explosive device in December alone.

The violence of the past four months has also seen the rise of further trends which can be seen as indirectly related to the increasingly asymmetric nature of this conflict. For example, Boko Haram kidnapped as many as eighty people from villages in Mayo-Tsanagara in Cameroon's Far North ([Reuters, January 18, 2015](#)). This could represent an evolution of Boko Haram's tactics in this theatre to more closely mirror their kidnapping activities in Nigeria, potentially motivated by their high fatality rate during combat with the Cameroonian military.

Increasing multilateral support for Cameroon and other countries fighting Boko Haram is another such trend, and was demonstrated by Chad's large military deployment on January 17th, where as many as 400 vehicles and a contingent of helicopters were offered to assist Cameroonian military forces in the North ([Reuters, January 18, 2015](#)). In addition, on January 31st the African Union announced that it would be putting together a force of 7,500 troops to assist the countries fighting Boko Haram ([The Guardian, January 31, 2015](#)). These forces will further strengthen Cameroon's position in the Far North, and encourage an optimistic outlook for northern Cameroon.

Central African Republic

The government rejected a new ceasefire deal signed by factions of rival militias (Ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka militias) of the Central African Republic last week, suggesting that conflict in the country might not be nearing an end ([Reuters, 2015](#)). Conflict in CAR has raged since 2013, resulting in thousands of deaths, primarily a result of violence involving the Anti-Balaka and mainly Muslim Ex-Séléka (formerly referred to as Séléka) militias (see Figure 6).

The ceasefire deal signed last week called for amnesty for those responsible for violence, as well as a transitional government to be appointed to replace the current interim president Catherine Samba-Panza, CAR's first female leader, she replaced Michel Djotodia, leader of the Séléka rebel coalition, last year after he stepped down following "mounting international criticism over his inability to control his [Séléka] fighters and stem the violence" ([The Guardian, 2014](#)). The government rejected the agreement last week, as the state was not associated with the negotiations, hence viewing the deal as "a series of grievances" ([Reuters, 2015](#)). While battles in December 2014 involving the Anti-Balaka pitted them against the Ex-Séléka militia or against Muslim militias, most of the battles they were involved in last month consisted of in-fighting amongst various factions of the Anti-Balaka. The Anti-Balaka have also been involved in a number of clash-

es with UN forces during these months ([UN News Service, 2014](#)). Civilian targeting by the group remains persistent.

Meanwhile, while the Ex-Séléka militia was involved in a number of battles against the Anti-Balaka in December, the group has reportedly not been involved in battles against their rivals last month; the only reported battles involving the group pitted them against Operation Sangaris (the French Mission in CAR in support of the AU's MISCA). While involved in fewer battles, the Ex-Séléka militia continues targeting civilians, responsible for 22 civilian deaths so far this year.

CAR was one of the most violent countries in Africa last year, nearly doubling its rate and proportion of violent conflict on the continent – largely a function of the doubling of the number of battles and instances of violence against civilians from 2013 to 2014 (primarily involving the Anti-Balaka and Ex-Séléka militias). While conflict in CAR has been generally decreasing since the spike in violence seen early last year, this trend has not been smooth: April, October, and December all saw increases in the number of conflict events following decreases the month before. Hence, while conflict events last month saw a decrease from the reported conflict in December, only time will tell if violence will continue to decrease. For more on CAR, see ACLED's latest [country report](#).

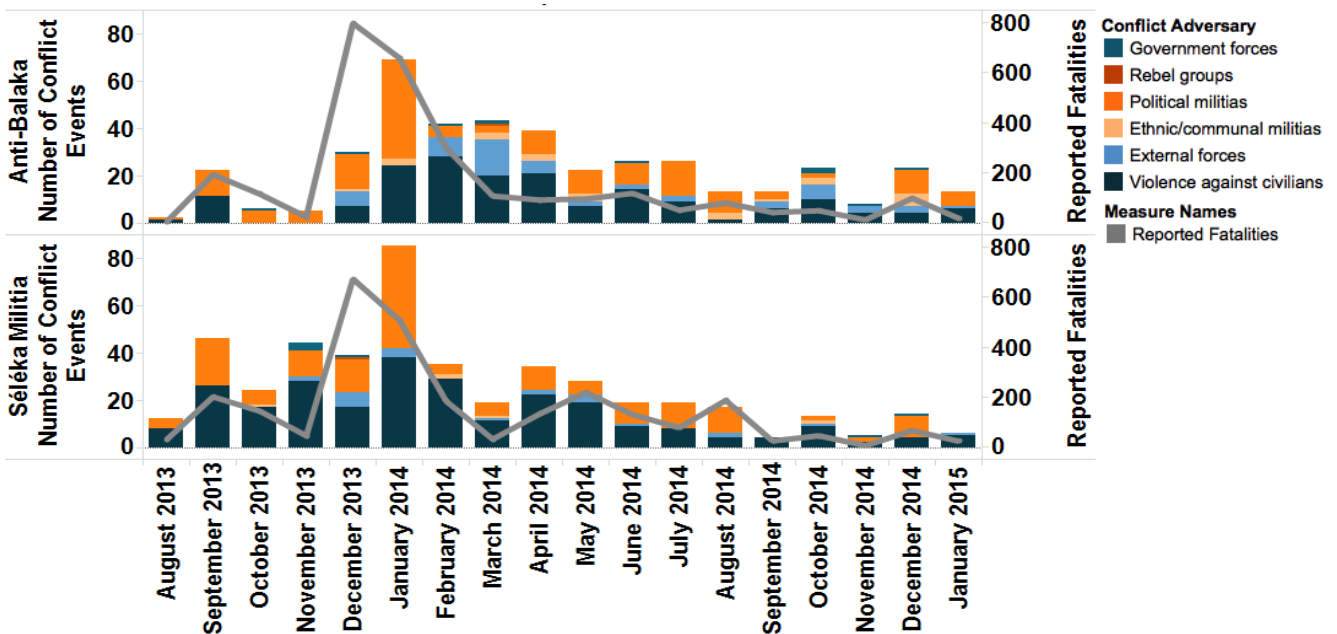


Figure 6: Conflict involving the Anti-Balaka and Séléka Militias in Central African Republic, from August 2013 - January 2015.

Egypt

January saw heightened conflict activity in Egypt; a pattern that is evident in both 2013 and 2014. The overwhelming majority of these events can be understood as a resurgence of protests as demonstrators take to the streets during the week of the 25th January, the anniversary of the Arab Spring uprising. January 2015 was no exception, with the highest political violence levels recorded since Abdul Fattah al-Sisi assumed office in June 2014 (see Figure 7). In fact, last week was the most violent period in Egypt’s transition since similar protests in January 2014.

The events that unfold each year throughout the week of the 25th January can be explained by the incompatible “universes” that continue to occupy Egyptian political space. These are the “universes of transition” and the “universe of revolution” (Sallam, 10 February 2012). The first of these can broadly be defined by the attempt to subvert and channel the goals of the Egyptian revolution into organised institutional politics by the military leviathan. The universe of revolution on the other hand is representative of the civilian movements – NGOs, activists, and social movements – that continue to seek real transformation and a departure from limited reform within a framework of governance dictated by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Whilst the jump in riots and protests emanates from the

centrifugal processes dividing Egypt’s domestic political sphere, several other dynamics were also witnessed throughout the month. A comparative analysis of the 25th January protests reveals some interesting developments in the dynamics of political violence in Egypt. Firstly, fewer riots and protests were witnessed in January 2015 compared to 2014, although higher than in 2013. Second, a higher proportion of the violence involved remote violence (over a quarter of all conflict events from January 24th-31st), with energy infrastructure, train stations, security services and government buildings targeted nationwide.

The Islamist militant group Afnan Misr had previously claimed responsibility for a number of similar IED events to exact revenge for police repression of civilians, but the identity of attackers this month was largely unreported, despite the Egyptian government hastening to attribute blame to the Muslim Brotherhood (NYT, 31 January 2015). Some cases were attributed to cells operating in the Lower Egypt region. Whichever political actors were responsible, the attacks are indicative of measures taken by militants to display their capacity to informally organise and challenge the strength of the state despite the limits placed on their operations – following concerted efforts by the government to create a buffer zone in the border region of the Sinai and the revised protest law.

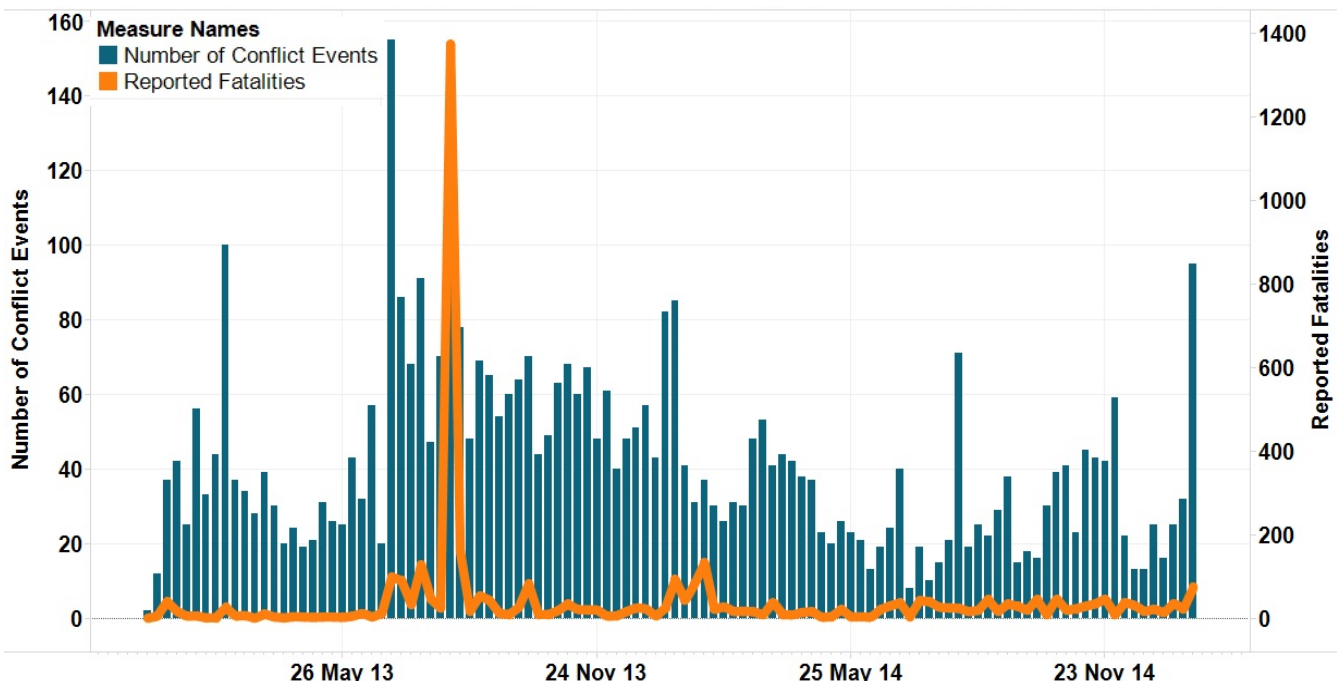


Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Egypt, from January 2013 - January 2015.

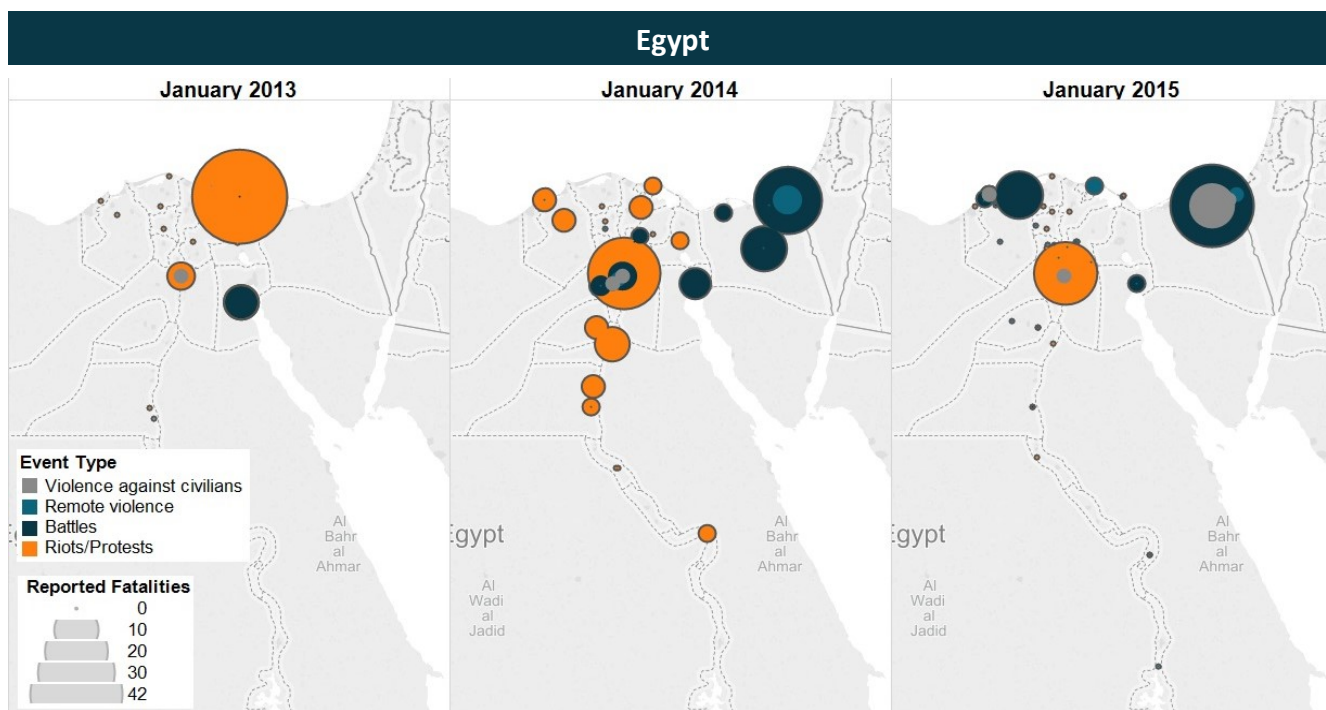


Figure 8: Reported Fatalities in Egypt’s Lower Valley and Nile Delta Region, from 24th-31st January 2013/14/15.

Thirdly, notwithstanding the fact that riots and protests accounted for over 46% of all conflict events from 25th-31st January, the highest number of fatalities were sustained through battles (approx. 44 recorded deaths) between state security forces and political militia groups. Furthermore, whilst protests diffused across many cities in the Lower Egypt region (see Figure 8), overall fatality levels from the protest events were lower than in 2013 and 2014. The bloodiest clashes occurred in Matariya district of Cairo, known for being a Muslim Brotherhood stronghold.

The crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood is not purely a campaign against the role of political Islam or anti-Islamist sentiment, as Egypt’s largest Salafist party, the Al-Nour Party, supported al-Sisi’s presidential campaign. Despite functioning as a religious-based party (which runs counter to article 74 within the revised Egyptian constitution) with ultraconservative belief systems, the party not only seized the window of opportunity left by the Brotherhood’s marginalisation to enter mainstream politics, but its members have not been subject to such large-scale repression ([Ahram Online, 25 November 2014](#); [Washington Post, 1 June 2014](#)). This stands in direct contrast to the fate of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was officially dissolved in August 2014, ruling out its participation in upcoming parliamentary elections in March.

However, the party suffers from internal rifts after initially backing the Muslim Brotherhood and then later supporting the push for their relegation with the ousting of Morsi in 2013. The party will have to ally with al-Sisi’s military-backed government to counter negative perceptions of Islamist currents, retain its influence, and guarantee the spoils of electoral privilege. But this will necessitate the party becoming more compromising on its ultraconservative policies. How long the Al-Nour party can continue this balancing act with rising challenges from Egypt’s secular parties may influence the political landscape in the coming months.

A more useful interpretation of al-Sisi’s continued campaign to crush the Muslim Brotherhood support base is that it is a reaction to the rising power the Islamist movement enjoyed during the formation of a Constituent Assembly in the post-Mubarak period. With Morsi as incumbent, he undertook a “purging of the governance networks loyal to the former regime” (Slaughter and Isakhan, 2014: 157). Whilst critics of Morsi immediately accused this of being a strategy to secure outright power, it may well have been the case that he was attempting to fortify his position as President to carry out reforms, against the gaze of the threatened SCAF. All this points to need to examine the regime politics of Egypt, with two competing blocs, the army and the Muslim Brotherhood, locked in a political game for dominance.

Somalia

Conflict event levels and reported fatalities fell slightly in Somalia in January. While violence overall has witnessed a gradual decline since a peak in July 2013, this has been punctuated by upswings in violence, and a concomitant increase in reported fatalities, suggesting an intensification of violent conflict (see Figure 9). In January 2013, there were approximately 1.2 reported fatalities per violent event in Somalia, a ratio which remained relatively stable until May 2014 (1.7), June 2014 (2.7) and October 2014 (2.7).

Most of the volatility and the gradual increase in fatality numbers can be attributed to an escalation in high-intensity attacks by Al Shabaab. In spite of the considerable ground gained by the Federal Government and allied forces since the major offensive of August 2011 ([BBC News, 20 January 2012](#)). Al Shabaab has been responsible for a relatively stable share (approximately one-quarter) of violence in Somalia annually, ranging between a low of 21.1% in 2013, to 26.6% the following year.

The intensity and nature of that violence, and the environment in which it is carried out, however, has transformed

dramatically. First, Al Shabaab has escalated its use of violence against civilians. 2013 and 2014 saw sustained growth in the absolute levels of both anti-civilian violence (including the use of remote violence), and associated fatalities. This escalation is reflected in the fact that Al Shabaab is responsible for an increasing share of all anti-civilian violence: in January 2014, Al Shabaab violence against civilians accounted for 16.2% of all civilian targeting; a year later, it more than doubled its share, accounting for over one-third (36%). While the share of violence targeted at civilians overall has remained relatively stable in the Somali context, Al Shabaab's share has increased, suggesting the declining use of this strategy by other actors, and the increasing emphasis Al Shabaab has placed on this engagement with non-combatants.

There has also been a significant shift in the locations of anti-civilian violence attributed to Al Shabaab. Incidents of anti-civilian violence have increased both in frequency, and in their geographic spread: in the first months of 2014, anti-civilian violence was carried out in a relatively limited number of locations, with a proliferation of sites of

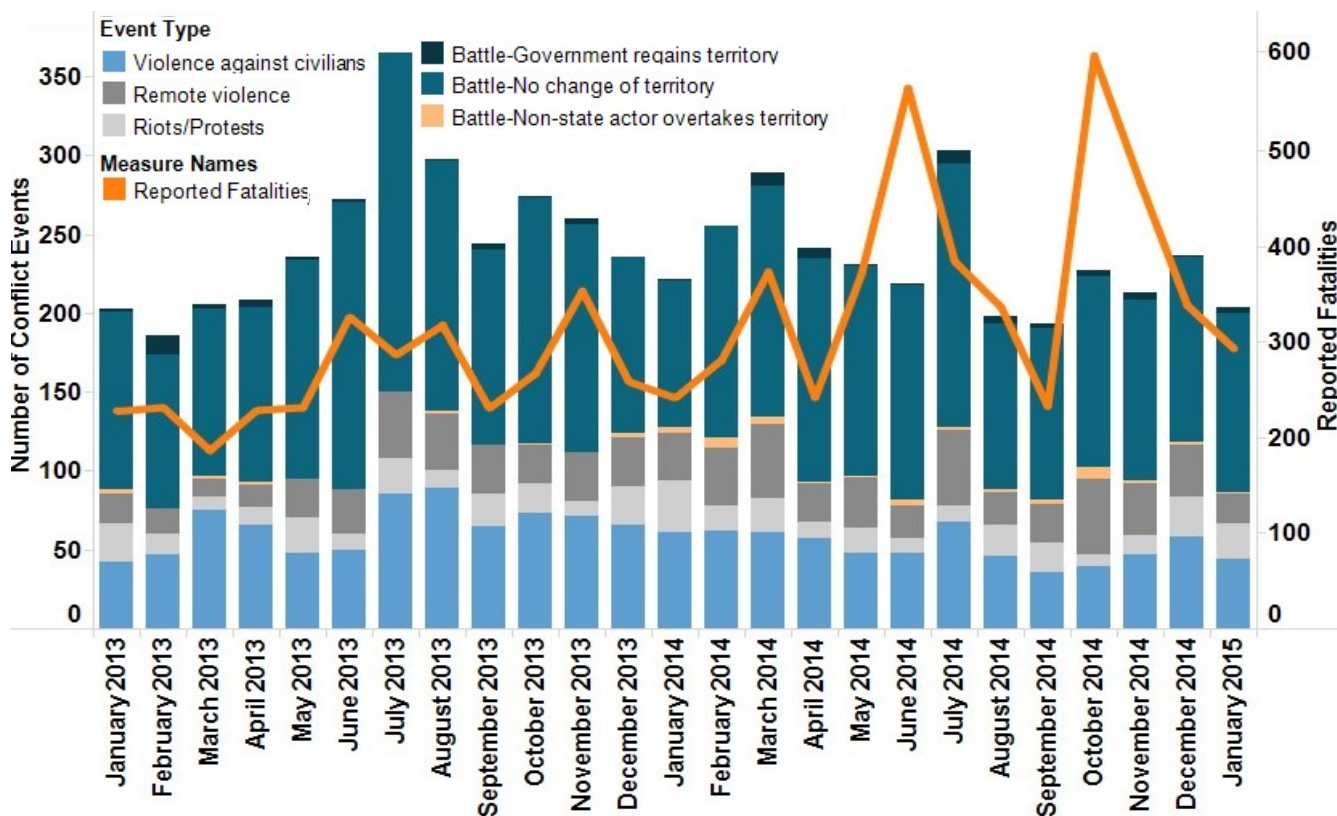


Figure 9: Conflict Event Levels by Type and Reported Fatalities in Somalia, from January 2013 to January 2015.

Somalia

civilian targeting over time, with a move away from the concentration of violence in select locations.

There are some parallels between these patterns and Al Shabaab’s strategy more broadly: there has been an overarching increase in the sites and frequency of violence by the group (including in clashes with other armed actors), with less violence concentrated in previous strongholds, and more violence, but less repetitive cycles of violence, in new sites. Nevertheless, there are several locations in which violence against civilians and battles do not overlap: this indicates that the group are not targeting civilians exclusively in contexts of contest with other armed actors, and that deliberate targeting of civilians is an active strategy, particularly in the regions of Lower Juba, Hiiraan and Gedo, where there is the least overlap between sites of battles and anti-civilian violence.

The nature and targets of anti-civilian violence by Al Shabaab have been diverse and varied, with political figures and clan elders both within and outside of territory of their control being targeted, as well as seemingly opportunistic violence associated with predatory attacks and looting of communities and vehicles. Two prominent forms of violence centre around the transfer of territory, however, including:

Targeted attacks on civilians accused of espionage: Al Shabaab continues to detain, beat and in some cases pub-

licly execute non-combatants accused of espionage or collaboration with the Federal Government and allied forces ([BBC News, 7 January 2015](#)). This kind of violence has long been a characteristic of the ways in which Al Shabaab has sought to control and police its population, but there is evidence to suggest that it escalates when the group is under territorial pressure.

Indiscriminate attacks on civilians in high-intensity bombings: In areas re-seized from Al Shabaab, the group has used indiscriminate violence against civilians, for instance in crowded marketplaces or tea shops, as a way of destabilising areas nominally outside their control, but in which they still retain operating capacity, and the ability to destabilise the regime.

These dynamics point to the fact that anti-civilian violence does not occur in a vacuum: beyond the direct impact battles between armed groups may have on civilians’ welfare, dynamics of wider instability can also fuel anti-civilian violence. Figure 10 highlights the correlation between battles between Al Shabaab and other forces in which territory is exchanged, and subsequent spikes in violence against civilians (excluding remote violence) in five key regions. Although battles over territory do not precede, and therefore cannot explain, all anti-civilian violence by the group in these regions, spikes in battles over territory are typically followed by subsequent spikes in violence against civilians.

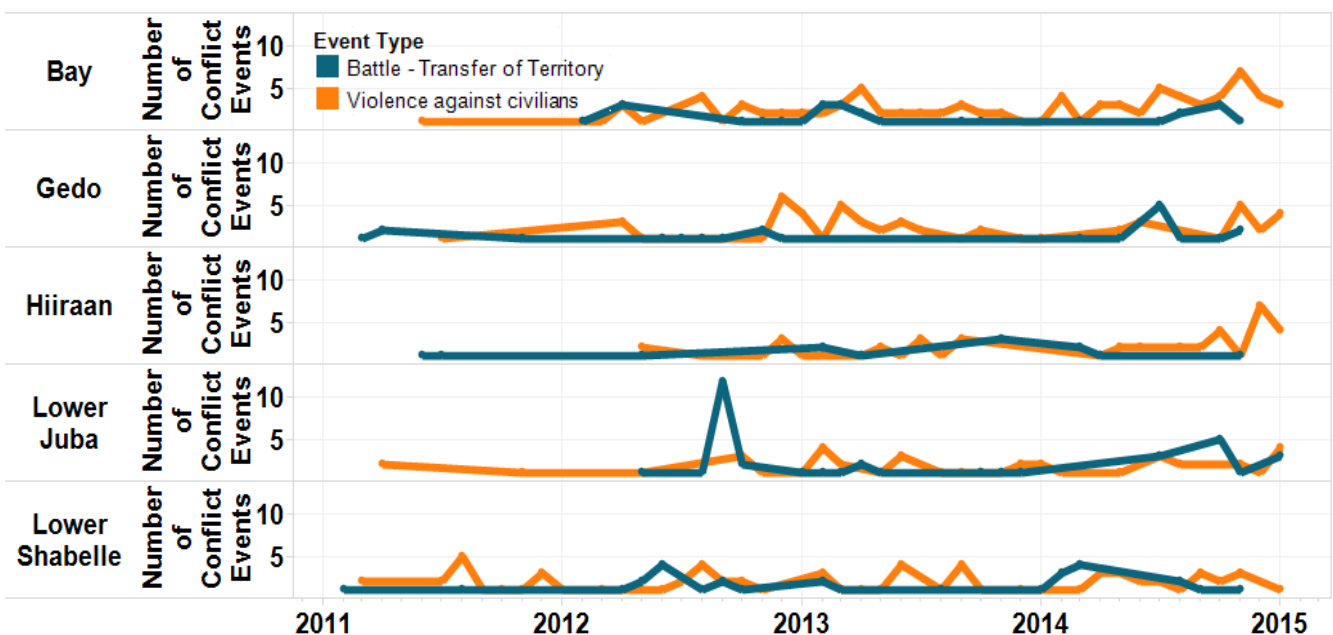


Figure 10: Conflict Event Levels by Type, Al Shabaab, from January 2010 - January 2015.

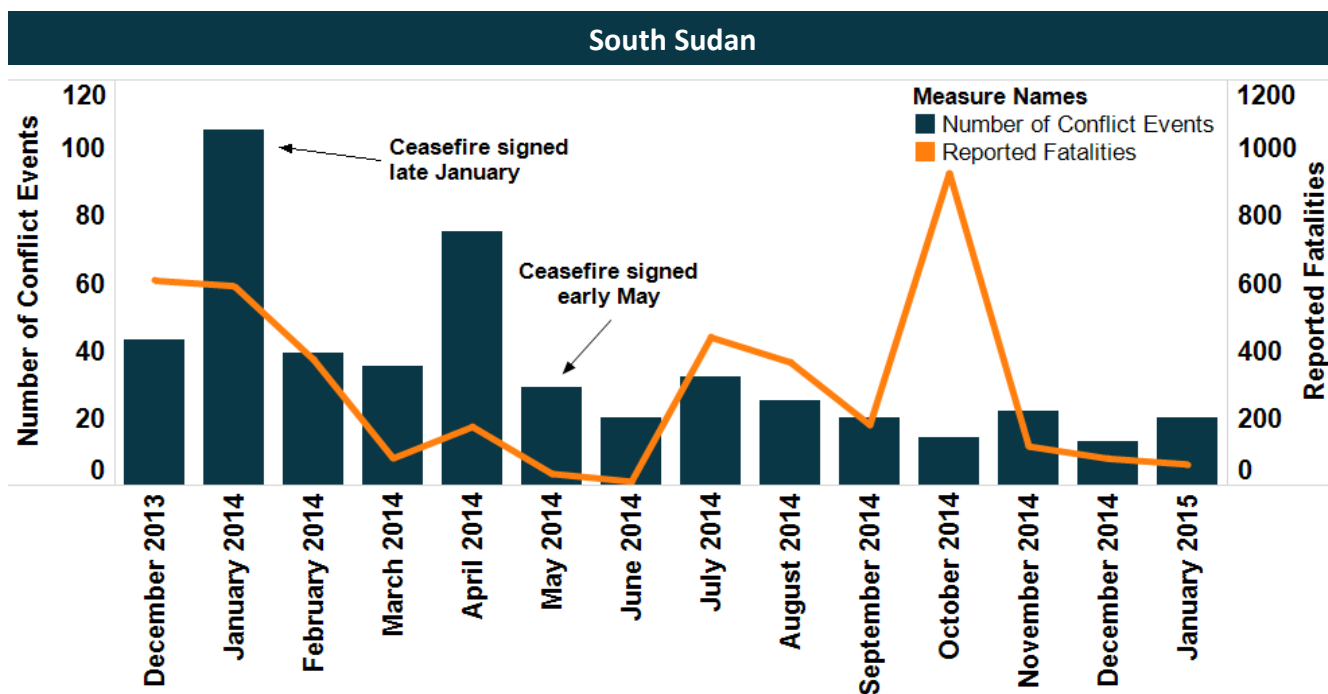


Figure 11: Battles between Government and Rebel Forces in South Sudan, from December 2013 - January 2015.

Earlier this week, a new ceasefire agreement was signed by South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and SPLA-M/IO rebel commander (and former Vice President) Riek Machar in efforts to end the civil war in South Sudan ([The Sudan Tribune, 2015](#)). Under this new deal, Kiir will remain president in a new government and a vice president from the rebel side will be nominated, though rebels have said more details will need to be finalized in order to ensure a ‘power-sharing agreement’ ([Al Jazeera, 2015](#)). These talks will resume later this month with the continued mediation of the East African IGAD bloc. Ideally, talks will be finalized by March, and a new transitional government will take effect by April (and will be in place before July, which marks the end of Kiir’s presidential term) ([Reuters, 2015](#)).

During the course of the 15-month long civil war, there have been other ceasefire agreements, though all have been violated with renewed fighting (see Figure 11). The first was signed in late January 2014 after fighting first broke out in late 2013 ([The Sudan Tribune, 2014](#)), though the agreement was broken shortly thereafter ([Agence France Presse, 2014](#)). Despite no ‘ceasefire,’ the number of conflict events between the warring parties did decrease the following months, though these then spiked in April 2014.

A new ceasefire agreement was subsequently signed in

early May 2014 ([The Guardian, 2014](#)), though this agreement too was short-lived ([New York Times, 2014](#)). While the number of conflict events decreased in May and June, violence increased in July with a stark increase in reported civil war battle fatalities.

While there were talks of yet another ceasefire agreement in late August ([Al Jazeera, 2014](#)), the rebels refused to sign, citing discontent with Kiir continuing to serve as president ([Voice of America, 2014](#)). Subsequent fighting between the warring parties led to a spike in fatalities in October, reaching the highest level seen during the civil war. While violence between the groups has decreased since October, fighting persists. These battles continue to be fought almost exclusively in the Greater Upper Nile region of the country – the region responsible for the vast majority of South Sudan’s oil production.

Given the numerous agreements signed between the groups – and the subsequent dissolving of each agreement with the onset of new fighting – one should be careful about expecting much change following this week’s newest agreement. This is especially true as there is quite a lot of discontent amongst the many allied militias with both Kiir and Machar, as it seems the agreement was formed only when the spoils of the conflict benefited the two leaders most, with no clear way of resolving the tensions for the other violent agents and civilians.

Special Focus Topic: ACLED Sources and Bias

ACLED currently consists of over 100,000 individual coded events informed by a range of sources including newspapers, online journals and reports by humanitarian organisations. The growth of mass communication networks, global media and online publishing has enabled the formation of datasets that, through monitoring reports from multiple sources in multiple countries, disaggregate conflicts into spatially and temporarily discrete events.

However, datasets relying on external sources are subject to the biases of their sources. Sources can introduce bias through both selective reporting and omission, posing a serious risk to the validity of the data. Publications are subject to the pressure of creating content that will interest the publication’s desired audience, meaning that publications of different types (newspapers, NGO reports, etc.) and scales (local, national and international) are subject to potential selection bias.

A review of ACLED sources finds that different types and scales of sources do show a propensity to report on different types of event.

Events involving violence against civilians accounted for 75.3% of events reported by NGO and civil society sources (such as Amnesty International, Zimbabwe Peace Project) and 56.2% of events reported by intergovernmental sources (such as United Nations publications) (see Figure 12). This bias is unsurprising given that the mission state-

ment of many civil society organisations is to resolve humanitarian emergencies and issues of social justice.

In contrast, events coded using media sources, when grouped across all scales, exhibit no clear pattern of preference for reporting on particular types of event. Violence against civilians, battles and riots/protests account for 28.6, 36.4% and 27.1%, respectively. This lack of consistent preference is advantageous as 76.3% of ACLED events are coded using media sources.

National sources were more likely to report on riots and protests than international sources (35% and 24.6% respectively), and latter scaled source favoured battle reporting (44.1%). This discrepancy is likely the result of two factors: firstly, a demonstration may have a direct impact on a localised readership but may be of no interest to a global audience; and secondly, violence itself has ‘news-value’ and the fact both belligerents are armed increases the likelihood of an event resulting in a high number of fatalities ([Barranco and Wisler, 1999](#)).

Selection bias is not just affected by the *type* of event that takes place but also *where* it takes place. [Kalyvas \(2004\)](#) has argued that urban bias is inherent in conflict reporting due to the constraints imposed upon journalists by security concerns. [Woolley \(2000\)](#) argues that infrastructural constraints, such as the location of wire offices, limits and distorts the reporting of conflict events, especially in rural

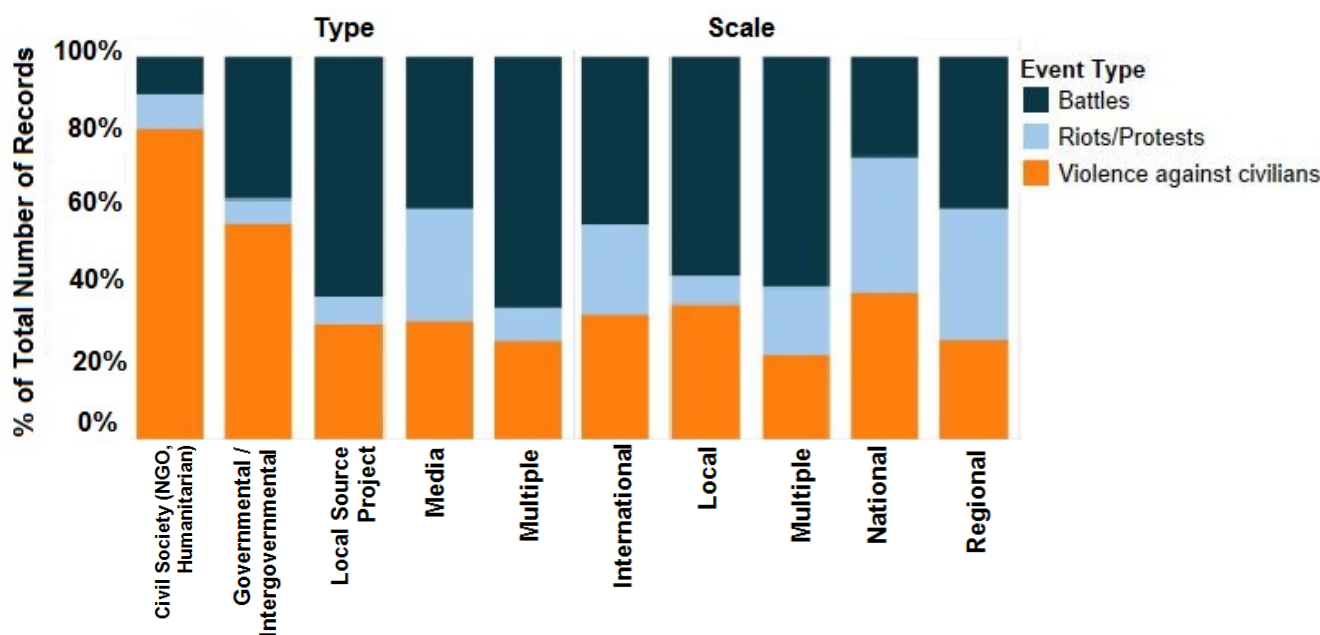


Figure 12: Reporting of Event Type by Source Type and Scale in Africa, from 1 January 1997 - 16 August 2014.

Special Focus Topic: ACLED Sources and Bias

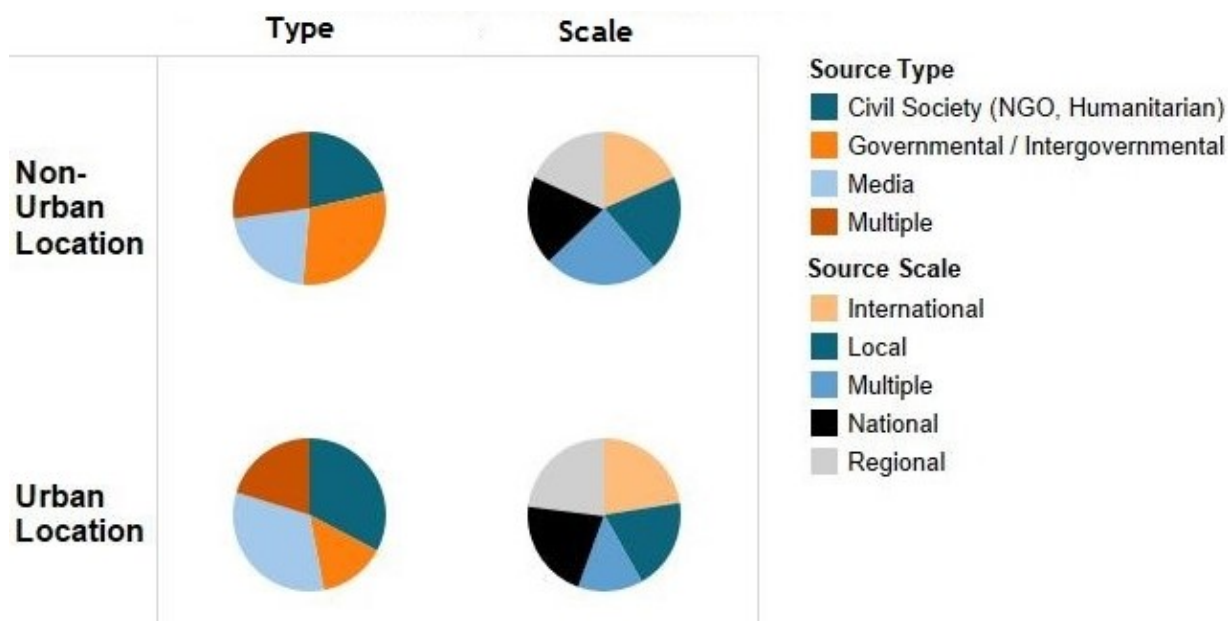


Figure 13: Urban Bias by Source Type and Scale in Africa, from 1 January 1997 - 16 August 2014.

areas. Previous studies have found that publications focus on events near their base of operations and editorial offices ([Barranco and Wisler, 1999](#)).

In contrast to the arguments of Kalyvas and Woolley, 63.2% of the events within the ACLED dataset occur within non-urban locations with a population of 99,999 or below. Publications across a range of scales and types code a similar ratio of urban to non-urban events (see Figure 13). Non-urban events make up 55.9%, 62% and 57.9% of the events coded by international, local and national sources respectively while 59% of events coded using media sources and civil society sources take place in non-urban locations.

The lack of variance according to source scale could reflect an interdependence between different scales of sources. Larger scale publications may be reliant on information from publications which are closer to the event itself, with international media relying on national publications for information and national sources procuring their

information from local sources.

The exceptions to this general pattern are events coded using multiple sources and events coded using governmental and intergovernmental sources with non-urban events accounting for 73.1% and 82.2% of reported events. International governmental institutions and national governments often have access to armed escorts and other resources which can mitigate the risk of collecting information within a conflict zone. Studies evaluating the accuracy of data gathered from publication monitoring advocate the ‘triangulation’ of data using multiple sources to increase the accuracy and granularity of the data ([Earl et al., 2004](#); [Weidmann, 2013](#)). Accessing multiple accounts of the same event will likely lead to better location specific information. An alternative explanation might be that it is a case of reverse causation, where multiple sources are not needed to overcome urban bias, but are in fact required to locate peripheral non-urban locations.

Support

This material is based upon work supported by, or in part by, the U.S. Army Research Office grant number W911NF-09-1-0077 under the Minerva Initiative of the U.S. Department of Defense. European Commission Grant no. 283755 supported the work of Prof. Clionadh Raleigh and Caitriona Dowd.

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](#).