

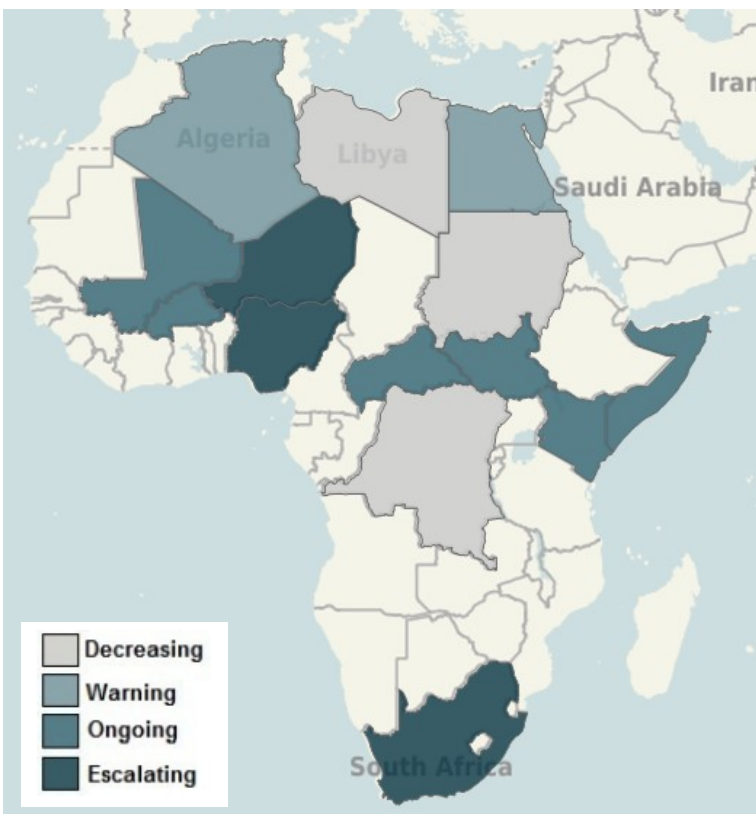
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 35)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, MARCH 2015

Welcome to the March 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 continued violence against civilians in **Democratic Republic of Congo**, political alliances and localised conflict in **Libya** amidst UN-brokered negotiations, heightened activity by transnational actors against Boko Haram in **Nigeria**, the endurance of violence across Africa despite **peace agreements**, the temporary de-escalation of conflict events in **South Sudan** and the diffusion and sharp rise in protest activity across Southern **Tunisia**. A special focus topic explores **rape as a weapon of political violence** across Africa.

Elsewhere on the continent, conflict events escalated in **South Africa** but dropped in **Somalia** throughout February. **Egypt** remains volatile as IED attacks continue to target state forces.



Conflict Trajectory, March 2015.

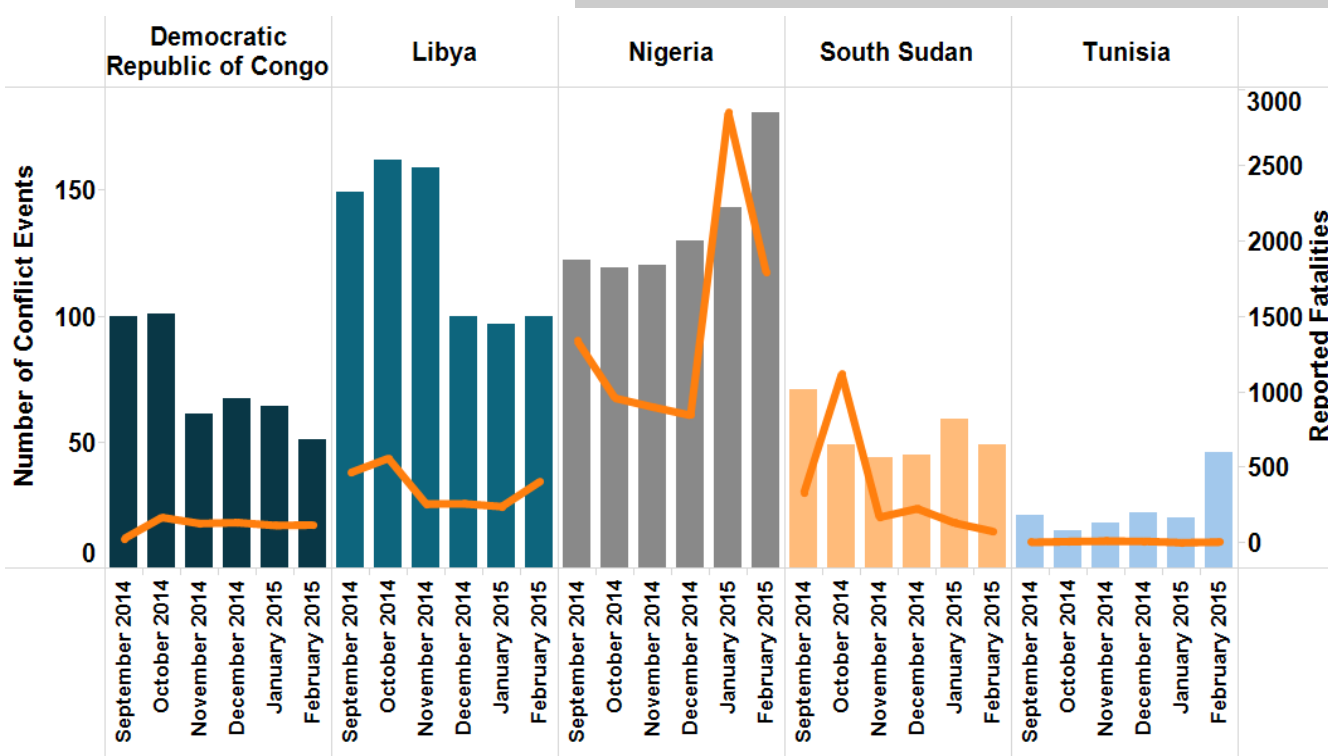


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, from September 2014 - February 2015.

Democratic Republic of Congo

The beginning of 2015 has brought mixed blessings for President Kabila's government. Controversial changes to the electoral law led to deadly protests in January; violence against civilians by various armed groups in the East continues; and the highly anticipated start of the offensive against the FDLR was marred by the UN's withdrawal of support following a refusal by the Congolese government to remove two generals accused of human rights abuses from command of the operation. However, while the government has faced some difficulties, both domestically and internationally, an offensive in January by the FARDC supported by MONUSCO against the ADF and the ongoing offensive against the FDLR in both North and South Kivu (see **Figure 2**) have both succeeded in taking back several strategic areas from the respective militant groups.

In January, deadly protests broke out in Kinshasa, Goma, Bukavu, and smaller outlying towns such as Ngaliema and Masina, following the passage of an electoral law through the lower house of Parliament. The controversy surrounding the law was focused on the requirement of a national census before the next presidential election. Critics noted this would allow the president to extend his term. The protests occurred between January 19th-23rd when the Senate passed an amended version of the bill with the controversial provision struck from it ([Voice of America, January 22, 2015](#)), although one further event occurred on January 23rd when UPDS members gathered in front of

their headquarters to protest against Kabila's rule but were quickly dispersed by police. Over 40 people were killed in the violence, primarily between January 19th-21st (see **Figure 3**).

Almost all fatalities are registered in Kinshasa, with the rest occurring in the outlying areas or in related protest events in Goma (see **Figure 2**). During the unrest, internet and SMS services were disrupted in Kinshasa and other areas ([Biztech Africa, January 26, 2015](#)). The violent response by security forces and disruption of communication technologies show how seriously the protests were taken by the Kabila government.

Violence against civilians continued in Eastern Congo (see **Figure 3**), including attacks by ADF rebels, the FRPI and Mayi Mayi militias, and renewed kidnappings by the LRA. Although the violence has mostly taken place in many areas across North Kivu, the Bunia area of Ituri has seen the most significant concentration of these attacks, including activity by the LRA, FRPI and Mayi Mayi militiamen (see **Figure 2**). The most notable specific incident is an attack on February 3rd allegedly perpetrated by the ADF in the Virunga National Park, during which twenty one people were killed with machetes. Reports of ADF attacks often mention machetes, which are believed to be their weapon of choice. This attack was particularly significant as it followed gains made by a FARDC offensive in the area supported by MONUSCO in January ([Radio Okapi, January 17, 2015](#)).

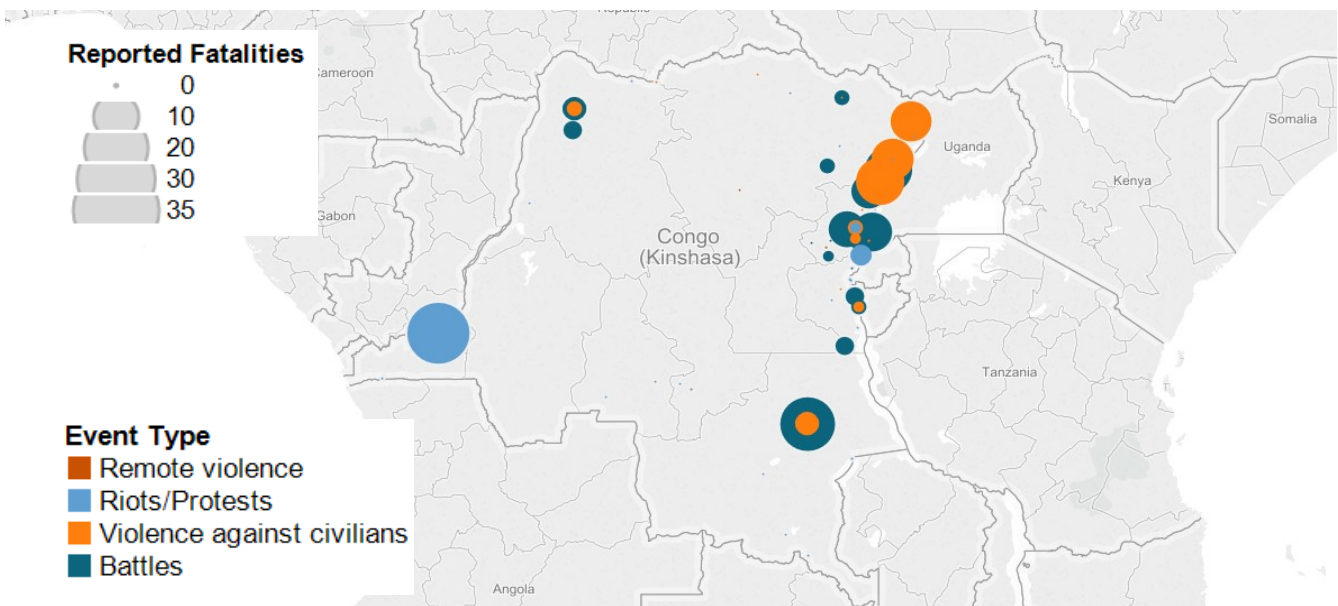


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in 2015.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Several positions in Virunga National Park were retaken by government forces, as well as the town of Mavume, near Beni, which is considered an important position for the ADF. Following heavy fighting, more than 15 rebels were reportedly killed. However, the February 3rd attack shows the continued capacity of the ADF to engage in significant violence against civilians similar to that seen in late 2014. There remain [open questions](#) about whether the ADF is perpetrating attacks in and around Beni.

The beginning of the much anticipated offensive against the FDLR, following the passing of a deadline for disarmament set by the UN on January 2nd ([Al Jazeera, January 18, 2015](#)), was marred by the withdrawal of MONUSCO's support. This came following an ultimatum given by the UN demanding the dismissal of two generals playing key roles in the operation (named Sukola II), one in direct command and the other in charge of the Goma military region, due to their record of human rights abuses. This has resulted in public fallout between Kinshasa and the UN and consequently obstructed joint FARDC-MONUSCO operations ([AllAfrica, March 2, 2015](#)). Despite the difficulties this presents for operations against the FDLR, numerous engagements between FARDC and the rebels have been reported since the official beginning of the offensive on February 24th, which began in North Kivu but has expanded into the South Kivu region, and includes the recapture of territory in the Tongo and Mulenge areas of Rutshuru (see Figure 2).

Overall, the majority of battles in this period have been with the FDLR, with the balance of casualties largely falling on the rebels. Other notable FARDC successes in this period include the recapture of several areas in Walikale from the Cheka Mayi Mayi militia and the ousting of FNL rebels from a number of locations on the Uvira plateau in South Kivu, and specifically around Ruhoha.

The result of these disparate dynamics has been mixed. On the one hand, the government saw major pushback by the population during violent protest in late January and violence against civilians has continued despite offensives launched against two major militant groups in the East. Increasing in violence against civilians after attacks of the [FDLR were anticipated](#). Yet, these offensives, as well as lesser operations against other militant groups, have seen considerable success in terms of recaptured territory, and incidents of protest against the government have also dropped off considerably since the end of January.

This means that while violence has remained roughly stable (see Figure 3), the overall balance of violence is shifting and is likely to increase in the East, particularly as the offensives against the ADF, FDLR and other groups continue. Whether this leads to a decrease in violence against civilians, or an increase in violence between non-state groups, as was seen on February 17th between the NDC and FDLR ([Xinhua, February 26, 2015](#)), remains to be seen.

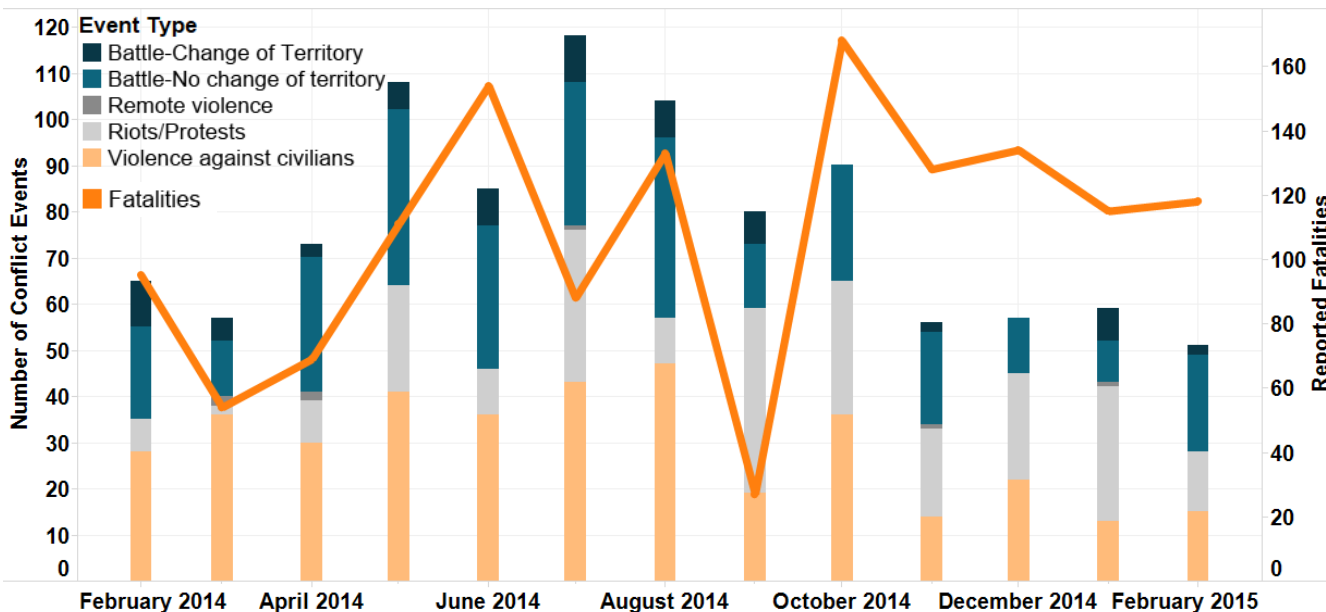


Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in DR-Congo, from February 2014 - February 2015.

Libya

Libya was the fifth most active country in the ACLED dataset in February 2015 with an average of 4 fatalities incurred for every conflict event (see Figure 4). The recent wave of attacks by Islamic State groups has prompted widespread discussion of the role of Islamist groups such as the Shura Council of Islamic Youth, Ansar al-Sharia, Islamic State of Tripoli and the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade in the political negotiation process mediated through the UN.

Critical to understanding their role is the historically localised nature of political contest in Libya. From this angle, current conflict dynamics and interpretations of the recent mobilisation of violent Islamist groups should not override the importance of domestic power brokerage that reflects a delicate regional distribution of power. This report highlights a case of the local contest for power between rival, co-existent Islamist groups in Derna and discusses how the shadow of ISIS in Libya, coupled with the push for a negotiated settlement, could act to preserve Misrata's advantage.

Large-scale violent attacks and resultant casualties became more pronounced in February (see Figure 4) following the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians, and a concerted drive to gain control of institutions in Sirte. However, groups acting under the remit of the Islamic State are not necessarily new emergent groups but nascent groups competing for recognition of power. Acting under the auspices of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi enables groups to channel resources and build up their own capacities with the goal of solidifying local dominance.

Nowhere has this been more pronounced than in the eastern city of Derna. Whilst frequently cited as being under the control of Islamic State militants, the situation on the ground appears to be more complex, reflecting intergroup tensions that are a microcosm of Libyan society at present. Following the breakdown of the Qaddafi regime, the various revolutionary, Islamist and criminal brigades that had formed in the uprising, assumed control of a number of regions. Ansar al-Sharia took de facto control of Derna.

Similarly, the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, a local Salafi group (Wehrey, July 12, 2012) established a security presence in the city throughout 2012 but has rejected support to ISIS; this inflamed relations with the Islamic Youth Shura Council (SCIY) who have openly declared their loyalty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS. As "the SCIY's decision to join the caliphate is probably an attempt to obtain

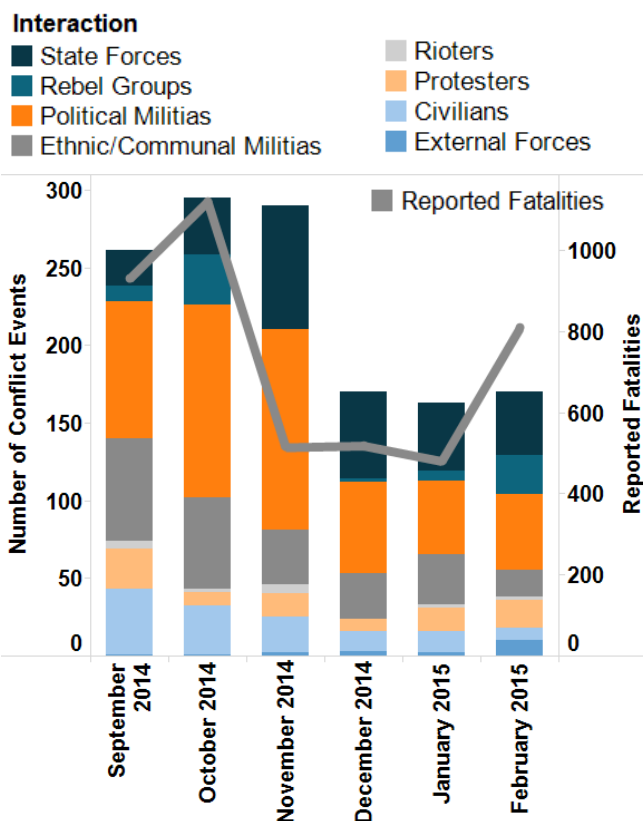


Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events & Reported Fatalities by Interaction in Libya, from September 2014 - February 2015.

religious credibility as well as funding and military tactical assistance from Islamic State...to secure full control of Derna" (IHS Janes 360, October 6, 2014) the highly localised geography of violence in Libya is key to understanding the role of ISIS.

Having addressed political forces in Derna, loose alliance-building by Libya Dawn may well come to a standstill in the coming weeks. Previously, they built coalitions with any group opposed to Haftar's forces in the east. The initial attack by Libya Dawn on Tripoli International airport was spearheaded by three battalions from Misrata, who have acted as the dominant coordinating force since (McQuinn, 2014). The willingness of Libya Dawn to coalesce with multifarious armed groups against General Khalifa Haftar since May 2014 has enabled them to mount a significant military challenge; however, this appears to be undermining the support and position of Misrata as a city-state if it is to be included in any future political settlement.

Libya

Fissures have widened between Islamists in the GNC and those deriving their political legitimacy from it – Libya Dawn. Some are weary of the threat of ISIS to regional and local interests, as seen by the deployment of Misrata’s 166 Battalion to Sirte, whilst others are willing to cooperate with ISIS forces to defeat Haftar ([Kadlec and Morajea, 11 February 2015](#)).

[Some analysis](#) indicates the potential for a paradigm shift in the Misratan camp to abandon the anti-Qaddafi rhetoric and to re-direct their might against regional Islamist groups that threaten localised interests. Since May 2014, in the lack of any centralised authority, groups have attempted to redefine the political landscape through an inclusive political bargain, incorporating influential forces into one broad-based coalition or another. However, Libya is on the cusp of a critical juncture in which a gradual splintering of the fluid alliances is ready to unfold if neither Dawn nor Dignity perceive they have the resources for an outright military win. Figure 5 illustrates the declining role of political and ethnic militias since November 2014. In the coming weeks, attention should be paid to the direction of violence by Libya Dawn groups to analyse whether they engage less with Dignity forces and target violent Islamist groups, thus indicating their opportunistic detachment from short-term alliances.

This may create opportunities for a negotiated settlement that would see ISIS forces and other regional Islamist actors such as Ansar al-Sharia (Derna) excluded from politi-

cal negotiations. At least in the short-term this would leave the Libya Dawn coalition exposed to attacks by Haftar. But owing to Misrata’s economic and political importance, the ball may well be in Misratan’s court to determine the course of the peace negotiations if they deem it appropriate to pursue a process of balancing. Having established relative autonomy from central government by holding municipal elections in February 2012 ([The Guardian, 10 June, 2012](#)), the city boasts a well-developed business elite, industrial production and a commercial port.

Why would they pursue a negotiated settlement? Because of Misrata’s strategic and political influence-- closer alignment with ISIS-leaning factions almost certainly prompt escalated discussions for international intervention that would favour the House of Representatives (HoR) whilst eroding that of Misrata. Should the Libya Dawn faction distance itself from more regional radical Islamist groups, a negotiated settlement of this nature would act to re-establish Misrata as a central powerbroker in the future of Libyan governance.

The issue is discerning the driving motive of individual groups within and across each coalition. With the highly localised competition in Derna between rival Islamist groups and the willingness of Misrata to lend support to groups opposed to Haftar, distinguishing between ‘moderate Islamist’, ‘extreme Islamist’, ‘expansionist Islamist’, ‘anti-Islamist’, ‘revolutionary’, ‘tribal’, ‘local’ and other such conflict drivers is a highly sensitive task.

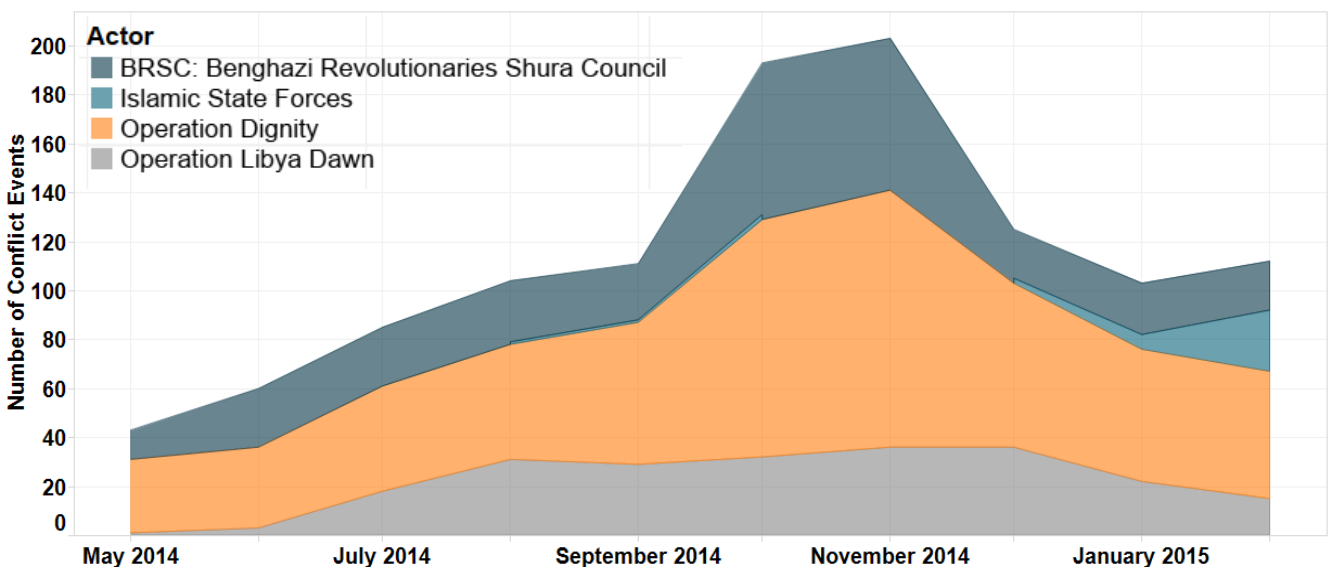


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Libya, from May 2014 - February 2015.

Nigeria

In the month in which President Goodluck Jonathan announced a postponement of scheduled elections due to insecurity, Nigeria witnessed an increase in political violence events, but a fall in conflict-related reported fatalities. In spite of this apparent drop, however, both reported fatalities and conflict events remain 130-150% above their 14-month average, calculated from January of 2014. While the overall context is one of continuing high violence, several features of the Nigerian conflict changed in February.

First, there was an increase in battles through which the government regained territory: federal forces regained territory in Yobe and Adamawa States, and in a cluster around Maiduguri in Borno State (see Figure 6).

While Nigerian forces engaged in a record number of battles with the group (19 discrete events) in which they retook locations, February was the first month since June 2014 that there were no reported battles over territory won by Boko Haram. A second significant shift in February was the increased activity of transnational actors: both January and February saw increased activity by the Chadian military in the North-East, and discussions are ongoing about the shape and nature of a regional force pending approval by the African Union at the time of writing. Generally, neighbouring militaries have made greater gains against Boko Haram than Nigerian forces at home, suggesting that although Jonathan's goal of re-establishing security before the re-scheduled elections for the 28th of

March is ambitious, a regional force may hold the key to more significant gains than have been seen to date.

Nevertheless, in spite of these signs that the tide may be turning, these dynamics mask serious challenges. Even though a regional force may have a stronger military advantage, it remains unclear quite what its scope and remit will be, and seems likely that the Nigerian forces will remain the leading force within much of the North-East. This is a force hounded by persistent reports of low morale, defections, failures to act on intelligence in advance of attacks, and a track record of abuses in its campaign against Boko Haram which further damage its relationship with populations ([Amnesty International, 5 August 2014](#)). Furthermore, issues of distrust and challenges of cooperation have previously hampered efforts at coordination between Nigeria's forces and external powers ([New York Times, 31 December 2014](#)), and are threatening to do so again, as tensions mount between Niger and Nigeria ([BBC News, 3 March 2015](#)) and Chad ([This Day Live, 4 March 2015](#)).

Finally, while many signs point to the tide turning against Boko Haram, civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of the insurgency aggression: February saw 33 discrete Boko Haram attacks against civilians (the joint highest recorded in the group's history, tied with levels in July 2014), suggesting that for hundreds of thousands of people in northern Nigeria, and many more who have been displaced, there is a very long road ahead to peace.

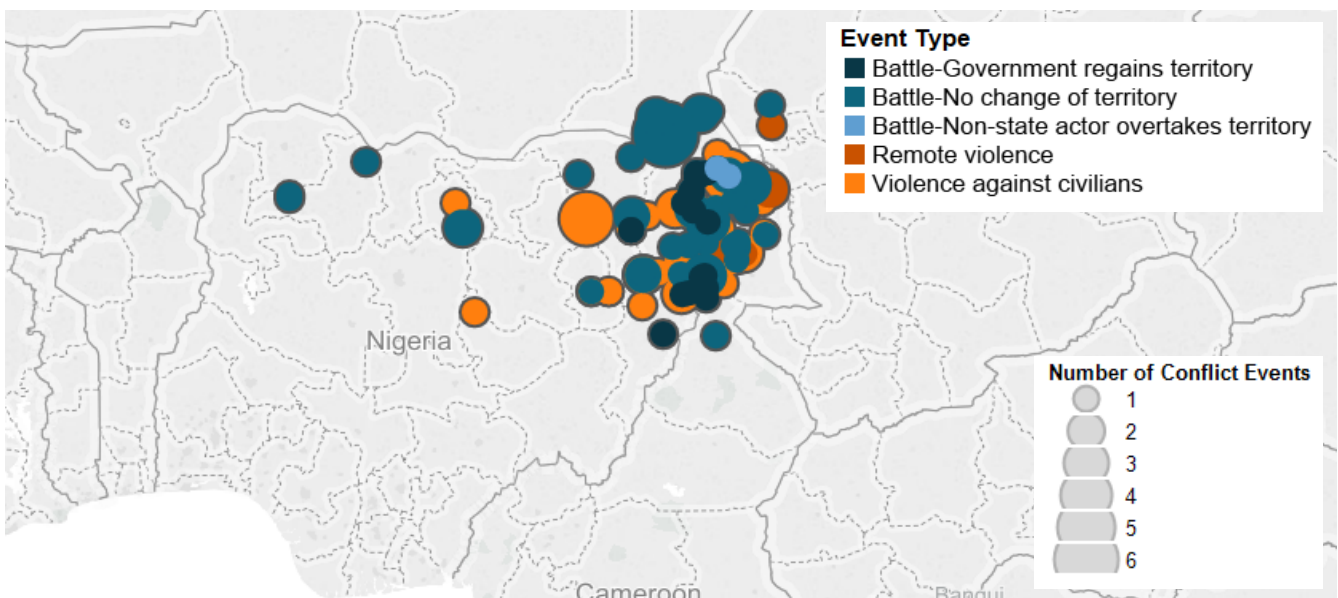


Figure 6: Boko Haram Conflict Events by Type, from January - February 2015.

Peace Agreements

In the past half-decade, multiple peace agreements and ceasefires have been implemented in various African countries to solve ongoing political conflicts on the continent. The most notable examples during this period are Mali, Central African Republic and South Sudan. In spite of direct engagement from the international community as mediators, and often-willing participation in negotiations by the belligerents of the conflict, political violence often endures in these countries.

Some have argued that ceasefires can be detrimental to the political resolution of conflict, as they enable the warring sides to solicit aid and logistics, enabling them to be more militarily effective in the next wave of attacks [\(Stevenson, 17 February 2014\)](#).

Figure 7 shows that while violence is rarely eliminated in the aftermath of a ceasefire, an increase in overall violence is not a foregone conclusion. In Mali, violence spiked after Ansar Dine agreed to a ceasefire agreement with the government in late 2012, only to renege on the agreement in early 2013 [\(BBC, 12 March 2013\)](#). However, this was largely due to the involvement of French forces in dislodging Islamist rebel groups from the area. Furthermore, the nationalist National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) signed ceasefire agreements with the government in June 2013 and May 2014. Although

both ceasefires were broken, MNLA activity declined in aggregate terms from 72 conflict events in 2012 to 28 conflict events in 2014. Similarly, while the multiple ceasefire agreements in South Sudan have failed to ensure a lasting peace, neither have they resulted in an overall increase in violence. Instead, violence continues to decrease in the aftermath of a ceasefire before spiking again. Nevertheless, violence is decreasing in the long term.

In contrast, the Central African Republic witnessed a huge spike in violence months after the rebel Seleka coalition signed a ceasefire agreement with the incumbent ruler Francois Bozize [\(VOA, 2013\)](#). The rebels accused Bozize of not honouring the agreement and ousted Bozize from Bangui in March 2013. However, levels of violence remained comparatively low in the immediate aftermath of the breaking of the ceasefire, but increased significantly after rebel leader Michel Djotodia dissolved Seleka [\(BBC News, 25 February 2015\)](#).

The highly active Anti-Balaka militia emerged around this time, suggesting that the problem is not related to the failure of the ceasefire but rather the problems faced in demobilising the armed elements of Seleka and the attempts by the Kwa Na Kwa party to regain control.

The need for repeated ceasefires in many African conflicts may be due to the fluctuating bargaining position of each

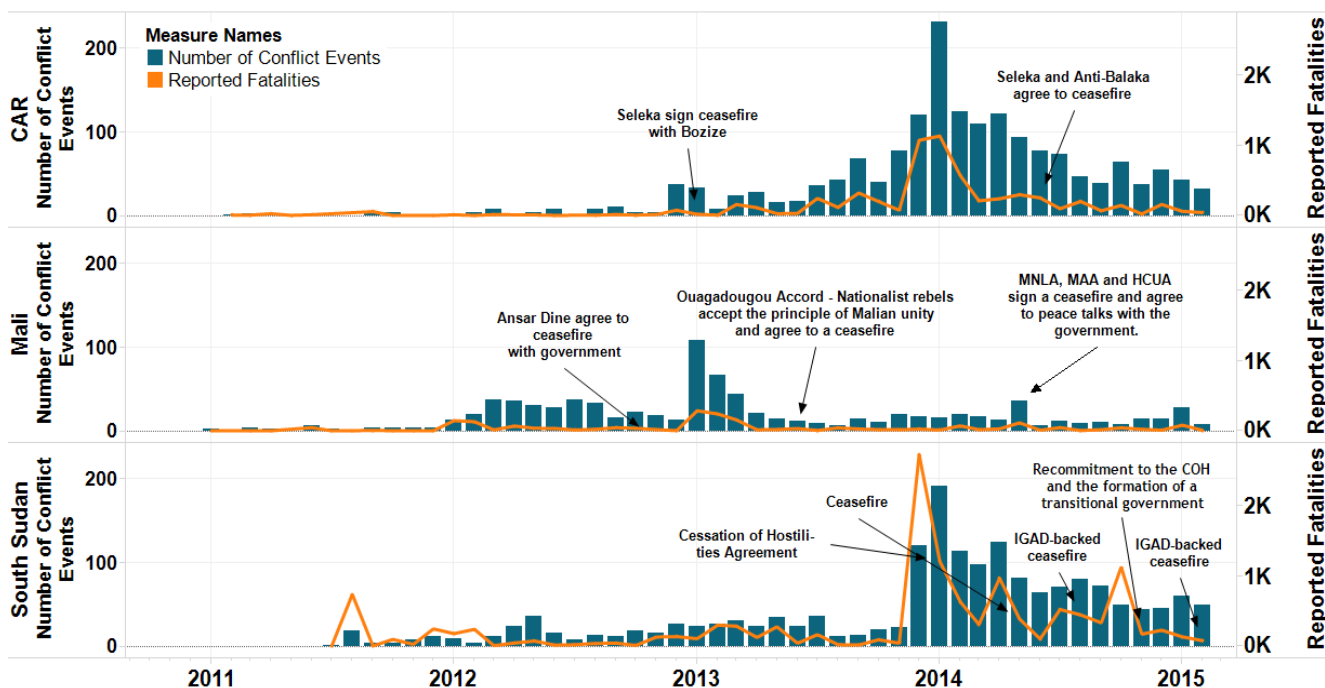


Figure 7: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in CAR, Mali & South Sudan, from January 2011 - February 2015.

Peace Agreements

side. Fighting is not determinative, and this provides each side with an incentive to renege on ceasefires and make new demands when its position is comparatively strong.

De Waal (2009) argues that political violence in Africa often serves as a means to bargain their access to political power and economic resources. Mehler (2007) similarly argues that factions will use violence, or the threat of violence, to extract value from the incumbent regime as a type of ‘violence rent’. Through this interpretation, ceasefires and peace agreements can be conceived as a means through which central governments assess the strength of potential challengers and offer rewards accordingly. Figure 8 shows the number of battles by month in Central African Republic and Mali. The events are distinguished by whether there were territorial victors during the time period. If one side acquiring territory is interpreted as a shift in their relative bargaining position, ceasefires may not hold if there is either a decisive shift in territory or continual territorial volatility.

The Seleka coalition, prior to the December 2012 ceasefire, were in a very strong bargaining position. The rebels had ousted government forces from vast swathes of territory and were within 100 kilometres of Bangui. Given this position, the Seleka coalition could confidently restart hostilities when Bozize reportedly failed to adhere to the stipulations of ceasefire (VOA, 2013). In South Sudan, ceasefires were broken in February 2014, May 2014, July 2014, November 2014 and February 2015. This consistent breaking of agreements has been accompanied by a territorial conflict in which both sides have consistently gained and lost territory. Bentiu, the site of much of South Sudan's oil reserves, has changed hands between govern-

ment and opposition forces several times since fighting began (D'Urso, 8 August 2014). This has resulted in the continual fluctuation of each side's bargaining position. During the Ouagadougou Accords, the nationalist Tuareg rebels accepted that Mali should remain a unitary state. However, after seizing Kidal from the army in May 2014, the rebels began to push for a peace settlement involving federalism and a higher degree of separation between Azawad and the rest of Mali (Africa Confidential, 24 October 2014).

There are additional factors contributing to the fragility of ceasefires and peace agreements in Africa: representatives and leaders of active groups are often unable to exercise complete control over their forces. In Central African Republic, in spite of the ceasefire, Anti-Balaka commanders have not been able to exercise control over their armed followers (African Arguments, 14 August 2014). Similarly, in South Sudan, the violation of ceasefire agreements has been attributed to aligned, but autonomous militias such as the White Army (The Guardian, 12 May 2014). This lack of control extends into the internal politics of these groups. The Seleka coalition is split between two factions, one led by Djotodia and the other led by Zoudecko (African Arguments, 14 August 2014). Zoudecko rejected the July ceasefire, arguing that the Seleka signatories had not right to sign on his behalf. The Anti-Balaka is similarly split between a moderate wing open to negotiation and a minority group, aligned with Bozize, which has continued the fight (Welz, 2014). Ceasefires and peace agreements often seek to enforce stasis on situations in which the balance of power is consistently shifting. Because of this, it is likely that ceasefires in these volatile conflicts will continue to be broken.

Event Type

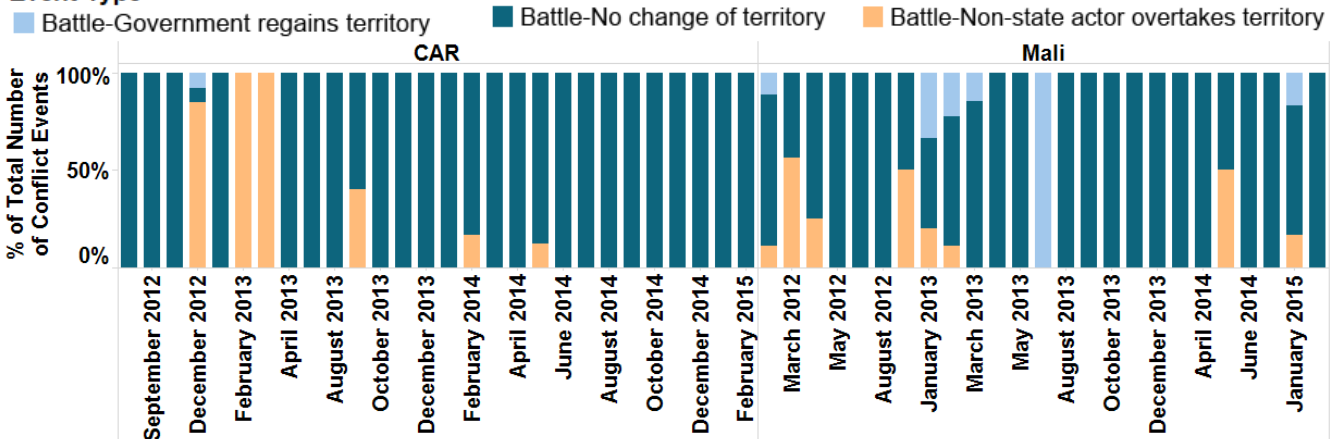


Figure 8: Battles by Territorial Exchange in CAR and Mali, from February 2012 - February 2015.

South Sudan

The quest to reach and sign a ceasefire agreement between the warring parties of the South Sudanese civil war continues. Former South Sudan political detainees struck a deal with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir late last month, in line with the Arusha agreement from January. The two principals of the warring parties, former Vice President Machar and President Kiir, however, have continued to spar, unable to agree on a power-sharing pact. In previous rounds of peace talks, final talks were scheduled for March, with aims of a new transitional unity government in place by July 9 ([Government of Ethiopia, 2015](#)). The continuing tensions between South Sudan’s rival factions risk plunging the country into further violence ([UN News Service, 2015](#)), and UN officials have stated they will impose consequences on the parties if necessary ([UN, 2015](#)). ‘Significant progress’ in the mediated talks between the warring factions is reported by the host ([Government of Ethiopia](#)).

In the meantime, both the number of conflict events and reported fatalities have fallen to lower than average levels (see Figure 9). Last week, South Sudan’s Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Bashir Gbandi said an agreement to de-escalate and withdraw forces from the frontlines in order to prevent further confrontations between the rival forces has been agreed ([Government of Ethiopia, 2015](#)). President Kiir also issued an amnesty pardoning all those

who took up arms against the government, and gave an executive order cancelling a previous order dismissing senior party members. By extending them an amnesty SPLA-M/IO leader Machar “welcomed the presidential order revoking his decision to dismiss party colleagues, describing it as a positive step forward” ([Government of Ethiopia, 2015](#)).

Under the terms of a power-sharing proposal drafted by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (the lead international mediator), Machar and Kiir must reach a final peace deal by Thursday (5th March) or risk facing possible sanctions by the international community ([Voice of America, 2015](#)). Further talks between the parties are anticipated this week. The main points remaining to be discussed are “the structure of the government, particularly the top level ... the power-sharing ratios in the cabinet and the National Assembly ... and the status of forces -- do they want one army during the transition, two armies and so on” ([Voice of America, 2015](#)).

During the course of the civil war that began in December 2013, there have been other ceasefire agreements, though all have been violated with renewed fighting ([ACLED, 2015](#)). Hence, one should be wary of expecting new (potential) agreements to hold despite last week’s decrease in conflict.

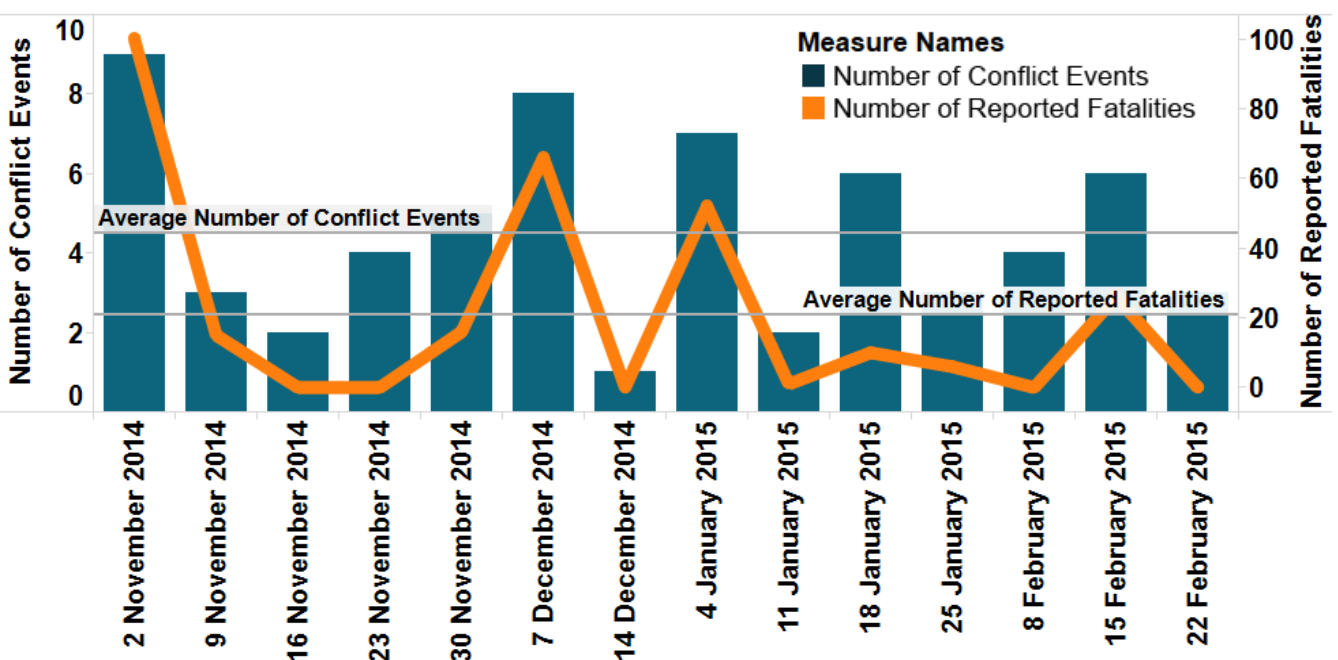


Figure 9: Battles between Government and Rebel Forces in South Sudan, from November 2014 - February 2015.

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 35)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, MARCH 2015

Tunisia

A few weeks after the formation of a new coalition government led by Habib Essid, the south of Tunisia was hit by a wave of unrest that provoked one death and several injuries among protesters and police forces. The remote towns of Dehiba and Ben Guerdane, located near the border with Libya, were the epicentre of a series of protest events that upset the regions of Tataouine and Médenine ([Al Jazeera, 10 February 2015](#)). Local population started to demonstrate from early February, following the introduction of a thirty-dinar tax on foreign travellers that would have hurt cross-border trade. Protests remained non-violent until February 8th, when clashes broke out between demonstrators and security forces after that seizure of a shipment of contraband fuel in Dehiba. This episode fuelled anger among locals, who assaulted the local border post, while the National Guard officers reacted by firing real bullets and teargas. During these clashes, a man died after inhaling teargas.

The escalation was followed by the diffusion of the protests. Demonstrations against the excessive use of force by the police were held in the towns of Médenine, Bir Lahmar and Ghomrassen, spreading across the southern governorates of Tunisia. Although protests were not new in these regions ([Menas, 18 August 2010](#)), they had never

reached levels as high as they did in February. Given its unprecedented nature, this sharp rise in the number of protest events in Southern Tunisia (*see* Figure 10) has prompted an immediate reaction of the authorities. Facing growing resentment against security forces, the government rolled back on the introduction of the contested tax and decided to open an investigation on the alleged abuses committed by the police.

This recent rise in protest events reflects the difficult socio-economic predicament of Southern Tunisia. While the imposition of the cross-border tax catalysed the protests, the demonstrators lamented the high unemployment rates, growing regional disparities and a lack of attention from national authorities. In this context, the recent closures of the border passages near Dehiba and Ben Guerdane and the introduction of the border duty negatively affected the region’s economy, which relies significantly on legal and illegal cross-border trade. According to recent estimates, around 20 per cent of Ben Guerdane’s active population lives off smuggling. Trafficked goods include primarily livestock, ceramics, fuel, foodstuffs, clothes, cigarettes, drugs and vehicles ([ICG, 2013: 12](#)). In a recent report on contraband on Tunisia’s borders, the International Crisis Group assessed that “[i]nformal cross-

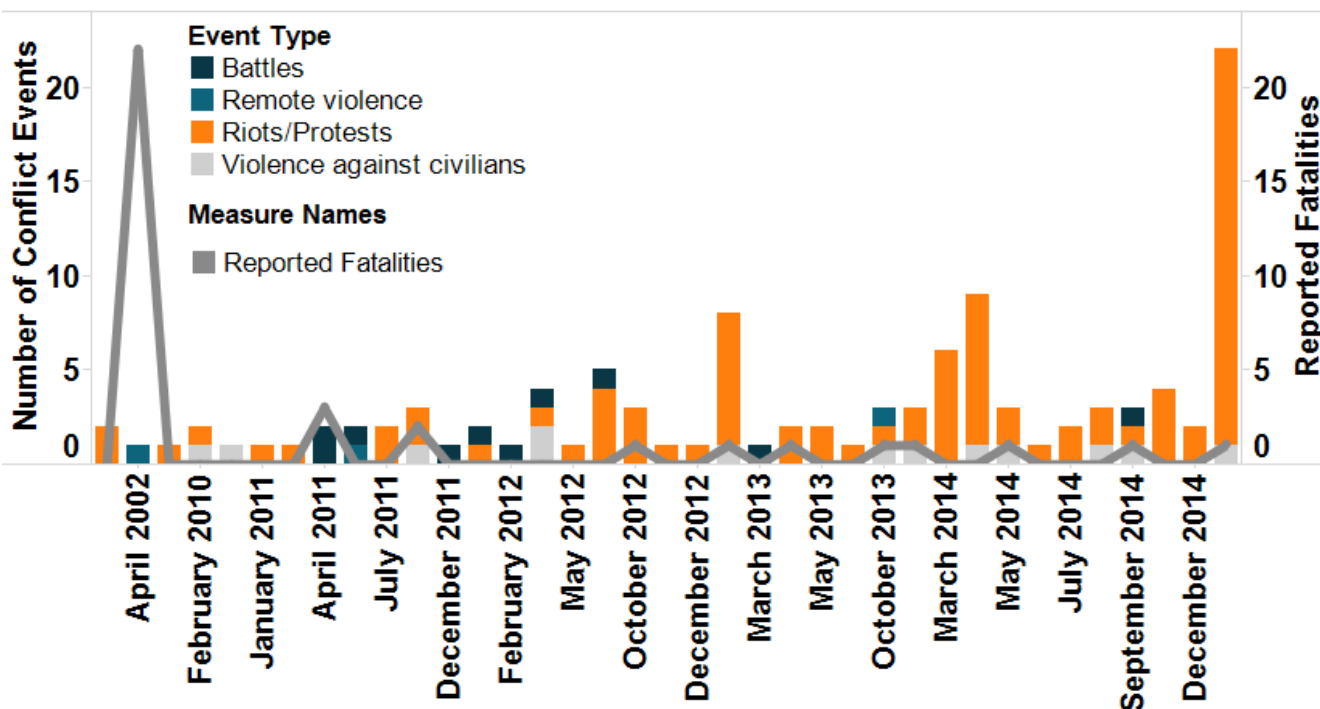


Figure 10: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Médenine and Tataouine governorates, from 1998-2015.

Tunisia

border trade acts as a safety valve, helping to maintain social peace in regions that are neglected by the authorities” (ICG, 2013: 8). This “safety valve” exploded with the introduction of the border tax, which generated tensions and resentment in an already suffering region.

This renewed unrest in Southern Tunisia may also have further implications at the national level. The electoral period, concluded with the victory of the secular Nidaa Tounes party and the designation of a coalition government, was characterised by lower levels of civil society activity. As Figure 11 illustrates, riots and protests declined significantly between September and January, in conjunction with the two rounds of parliamentary and presidential elections. These conflict trends seem to reflect those of 2011, when protesting activity witnessed a sharp rise in the immediate post-election period (ACLED, 8 October 2014). While this conflict activity will unlikely derail the Tunisia’s democratic consolidation, it points to a widespread popular disaffection against mainstream political parties, especially in the remote inner areas.

While southern Tunisia faced an increase in rioting and protesting in February, western regions continued to grapple with on-going militant activity. On February 18th, four National Guard agents were killed in an ambush near a

mountainous area in the Kasserine region. The attack was claimed by Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade, an ISIS-linked militant group responsible of several raids on security forces in the past few months (Reuters, 18 February 2015). Another incursion was foiled on February 28th near a border village in Jendouba province, where police forces exchanged fire with unidentified militants (AllAfrica, 28 February 2015). In order to cope with the rise of militant groups, Tunisian authorities have stepped up security measures and increased cooperation with Algeria (Al Arabiya, 27 February 2015; Amara, 24 February 2015).

These trends confirm the escalation of the conflict cycle in Tunisia, with organised violence that has increased significantly as a proportion of total conflict events since 2011. Despite the regionally-circumscribed rise in February, the levels of protesting activity have decreased since 2012. By contrast, battles and IED attacks witnessed a regular increase over the past two years.

In other words, the escalation of violence coexisted with at least partial demobilisation in the social movement sector. Should these trends continue and militant groups keep on engaging in violent activity in 2015, Tunisia may have to face a further deterioration of domestic security.

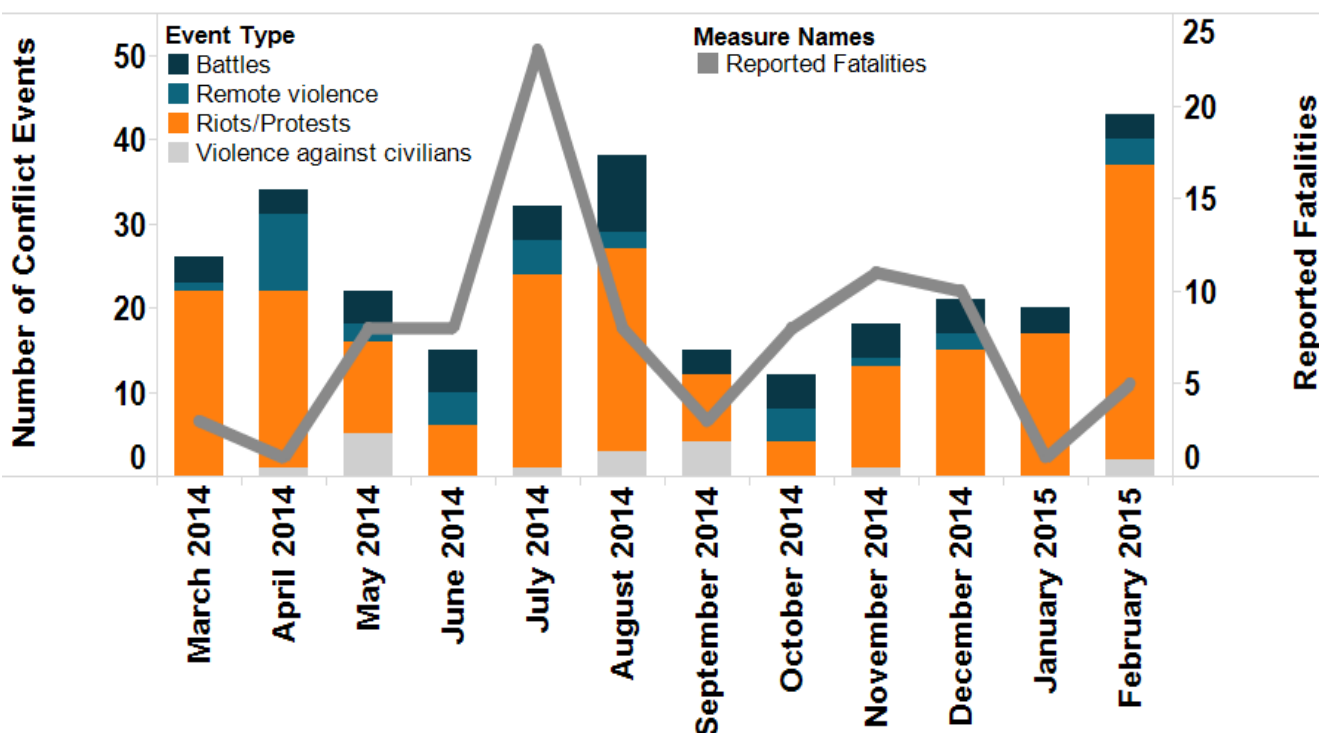


Figure 11: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Tunisia, from March 2014 - February 2015.

Special Focus Topic: Rape as a Weapon of Political Violence

The ways in which political violence information is defined and collected can have significant ramifications for what is considered ‘valid’ political violence. In turn, these decisions construct interpretations about what the typical experiences of conflict are within unstable environments. In light of this, ACLED does not narrow its collection of political violence to only events that surpass a certain fatality threshold, as the alternative can bias results. “From a gender perspective, quantifying armed conflict on the basis of battle-related deaths is biased towards men’s experiences of armed conflict to the detriment of those of women and girls. Whilst more men tend to get killed on the battlefield, women and children are often disproportionately targeted with other forms of potentially lethal violence during conflict [e.g., sexual violence]...Defining armed conflict by reference to ‘battle-related deaths’ reinforces a gendered hierarchy, whereby the various causes of death and suffering affecting men during conflict are elevated in importance compared to those affecting women and girls” (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz, 2007).

An advantage of a broader definition of political violence is that under-researched and under-reported events types – such as sexual violence – are collected as systematically as possible. Yet, sexual violence is likely underreported in and out of conflict areas, as it is in developed states. With that caveat in mind, conflict events related to sexual violence within the ACLED dataset ‘notes’ category exhibit some patterns on when and where it is used.

Sexual violence as a weapon of political conflict affects millions of people (primarily women and girls) with grave health implications, both physical and psychological. It is frequently a conscious strategy employed by armed groups to torture and humiliate opponents; terrify individuals and destroy societies, especially to incite flight from a territory; and to reaffirm aggression and brutality, specifically through an expression of domination (Bastick et al., 2007; UN, 2015). Sexual violence can be used to gain control over victims, in an effort to ensure compliance (Clooney, Prendergast, and Kumar, 2015). This can in turn serve to punish or humiliate an enemy. “When committed against women and girls, sexual violence is often intended to humiliate their families and communities, wherein women and girls are ‘bearers of honour’, and men are shamed for failing to protect ‘their’ women. It is used as a means of destroying family and community structures, most overtly when armed groups commit public rapes in front of the community, force family members to witness each other’s rape, or even force people to commit acts of sexual violence against their own family members” (Bastick et al., 2007). When conducted on a large-scale within a specific area- where the objective is to terrorize a population, sexual violence can incite flight from the given territory. Above all, “rape is not an aggressive expression of sexuality, but a sexual expression of aggression...a manifestation of anger, violence and domination” (Seifert, 1992). “Sexual violence can serve to affirm

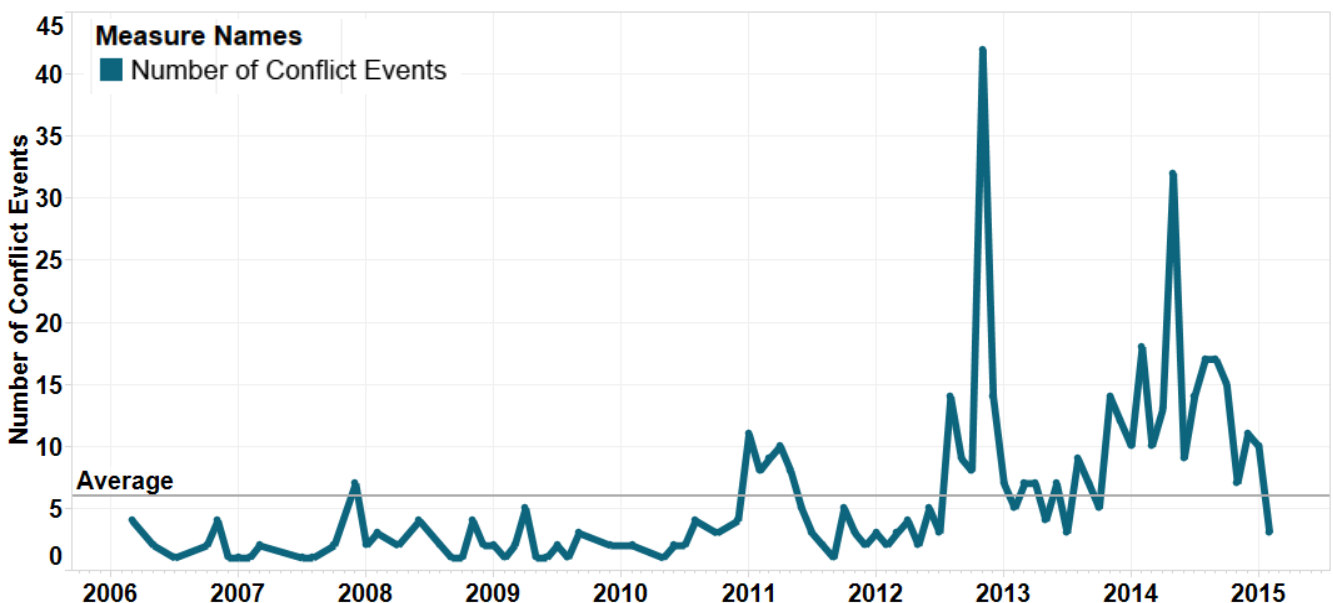


Figure 12: Rape as a Weapon of Political Violence in Africa, from January 2006 - February 2015.

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aggression and brutality in armed forces and groups,” at times encouraged or tolerated as a ‘morale booster’ or a ‘reward for bravery’ ([Bastick et al., 2007](#)).

In addition to its use during times of conflict, sexual violence can have further negative ramifications in post-conflict situations. “Sexual violence has serious social consequences for survivors, their families and communities. In most (if not all) societies, the victims are severely stigmatized” ([Bastick et al., 2007](#)). During peace processes, and especially when amnesty is granted to former combatants, “impunity for acts of sexual violence committed during the conflict might perpetuate a tolerance of such abuse against women and girls, has a long-lasting legacy of conflict” ([Bastick et al., 2007](#)).

ACLED data suggest that rape as a weapon of political violence has notably increased in recent years (see Figure 12). Sexual violence conflict profiles are now found throughout the continent (see Figure 13). Given the stigma that can be associated with being a survivor of rape, underreporting is assumed.

The increasing trend is largely driven by spikes in the use of rape in political conflict situations in DR-Congo in 2012 and 2014, as well as the growing trend of this violence tactic in Sudan since 2012. These two countries see the majority of instances in which rape is used as a weapon of political violence in Africa. Increased use of this tactic is also reported in the Central African Republic as well as South Sudan in recent years.

DR-Congo is referred to by the UN as the “rape capital of

the world” ([BBC, 2010](#)) – a result of the prevalence of sexual violence in the country, especially in eastern DR-Congo ([Washington Post, 2007](#)) (see Figure 14). Research from the *American Journal of Public Health* says that a total of 12% of the female population of DR-Congo has been raped at least once ([Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp, 2011](#)). The Congolese army (FARDC) is a large perpetrator of this offense, responsible for numerous instances of rape as a weapon of violence. [Human Rights Watch \(2009\)](#) states, “FARDC soldiers have committed gang rapes, rapes leading to injury and death, and abductions of girls and women. Their crimes are serious violations of international humanitarian law. Commanders have frequently failed to stop sexual violence and may themselves be guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity as a consequence.” Rape is used by the army to affirm aggression and brutality, especially when used as a ‘morale booster’ or as a reward. Soldiers are told to ‘go and rape women’ by commanders, and report ‘feeling free’ after the deed ([The Independent, 2014](#)); given the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, soldiers can continue to reaffirm dominance through the use of this tactic ([Human Rights Watch, 2014](#)). “Sexual violence in conflict is used by the military as a way of weakening opposition;” instances of rape in which objects (e.g., sticks, bottles, rifle butts, bayonets) are used are especially about “an experience of horror and power,” used to humiliate opposition ([The Independent, 2014](#)).

Based on ACLED data, the M23 and the FDLR groups in DR-Congo are the primary rebel instigators of rape as a

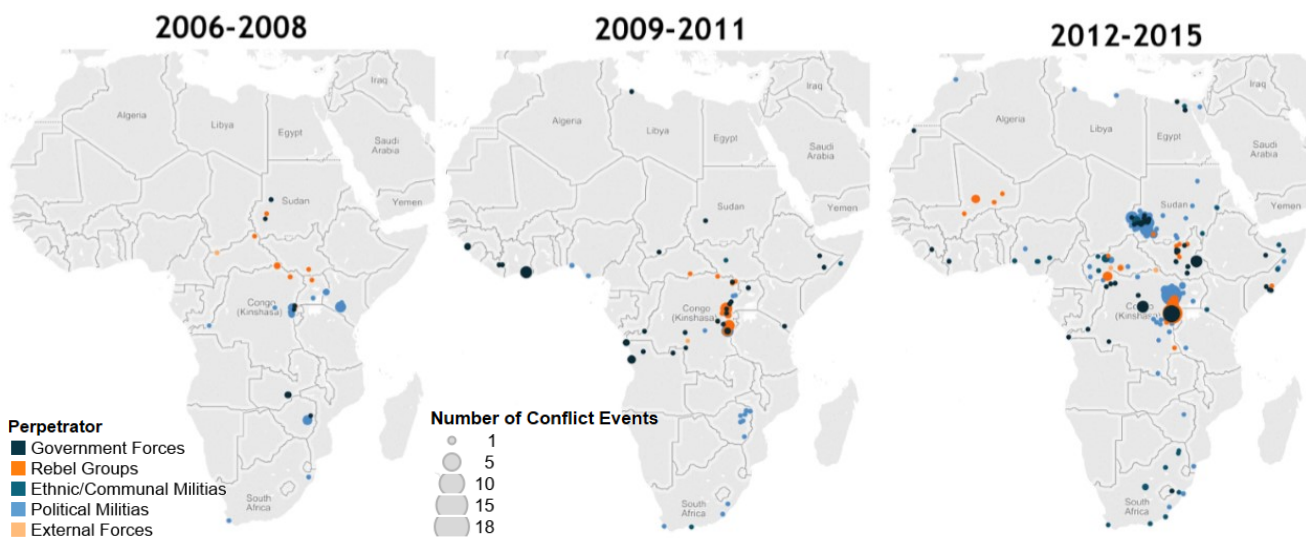


Figure 13: Rape as a Weapon of Political Violence by Perpetrator in Africa, from 2006 - 2015.

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weapon of political conflict. The M23 was a militant rebel group formed as a mutiny of armed Congolese forces in 2012; this may suggest one reason why M23 engaged in similar violence tactics. Numerous instances of rape involving the group are reported in 2012, possibly related to expressions of domination in an effort to gain notoriety, especially in the nascent stages of the movement. The FDLR, meanwhile, are guilty of numerous rapes in 2014. [Johnson and Schlindwein \(2014\)](#) suggest that these instances are largely “punitive operations”, enacted to exact revenge and to humiliate their opponent. Though the UN has plans to support a military operation against the group, doubts were raised in January given that DR-Congo named a General accused of rape to head the offensive ([Reuters, 2015](#)), suggesting that a focus on targeting perpetrators of rape may not end up at the forefront of the operation.

Mayi Mayi militias – multiple community-based militias found in Eastern DR-Congo – often use rape as a violent tactic to incite flight from a territory. In a USIP report in which Mayi Mayi soldiers were interviewed, [Kelly \(2010\)](#) suggests that these groups cite rape as motivation to fight, and may see civilians as a resource that can be exploited.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend in the use of rape as a weapon of war in Sudan, especially in the Darfur region (see Figure 15). These acts are largely perpetrated by political militias (e.g. pro-government militias, the Rapid Support Forces, the Janjaweed). Reports of con-

flict rape are confined almost exclusively to Darfur, and this tactic is used primarily as a means of instilling terror in individuals in the region. In recent years, internally displaced persons and refugees are at an increasingly high risk of being targeted. The Sudanese military is also responsible for the use of this tactic. Last month, [Human Rights Watch \(2015\)](#) reported that at least 221 women and girls were raped in the north Darfur town of Tabit in a 36-hour period last October. “Tabit is largely ethnic Fur and has been under the control of rebel armed groups in recent years” ([Human Rights Watch, 2015](#)) so the events were likely a result of seeking to punish and weaken opposition. The “torture rapes” reported in the region point to how grave conditions with devastating human consequences continue to occur in Darfur ([Clooney et al., 2015](#)).

Since 2013, the use of rape in conflict situations in the Central African Republic and South Sudan has been markedly high. 2014 was an especially dangerous year for individuals with higher than average reported instances of rape used as a weapon of political violence. In CAR during 2013, most rape instances were attributed to the Séléka coalition, especially during the time leading up to and in the aftermath of the coup that ousted President François Bozizé ([Human Rights Watch, 2013](#)). These groups have been responsible for mass rapes, and have been accused of demanding bribes from or killing those who refuse to have sex with militants ([The Guardian, 2013](#)). Forced marriage, mutilations, and other egregious acts of sexual violence against women and children are also reported ([UN, 2013](#)). In 2014, the Anti-Balaka, as well as the Fulani ethnic militias, began to engage in high rates of rape. Fighters from all of the various militias take advantage of the conflict environment in the region, raping women at gunpoint, often following looting ([The Sydney Morning Herald, 2015](#)). Continued fighting and displacement has left individuals extremely vulnerable, and recent commitments from governments, UN agencies, and NGOs to prioritize protecting women and girls from sexual violence remain underfunded ([IRIN News, 2014](#)), as the crisis in CAR remains largely ignored by the international community ([The Guardian, 2013](#)).

South Sudan too has experienced high rates of rape as a weapon of political conflict in recent years, especially at the hands of government and rebel forces. The UN’s envoy for sexual violence in conflict (Zainab Bangura) recently said she has not witnessed a situation worse than South Sudan in her 30 years’ experience, citing impunity as a main reason for the extreme sexual violence in DR-Congo,

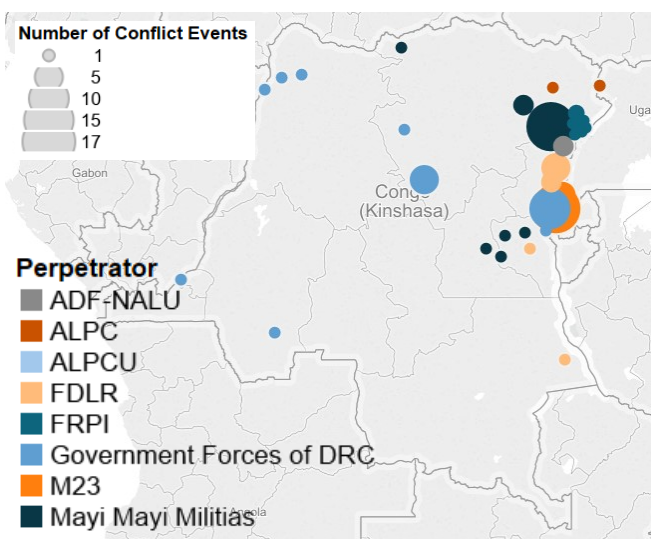


Figure 14: Rape as a Weapon of Political Violence in Democratic Republic of Congo, from 2012 - 2015.

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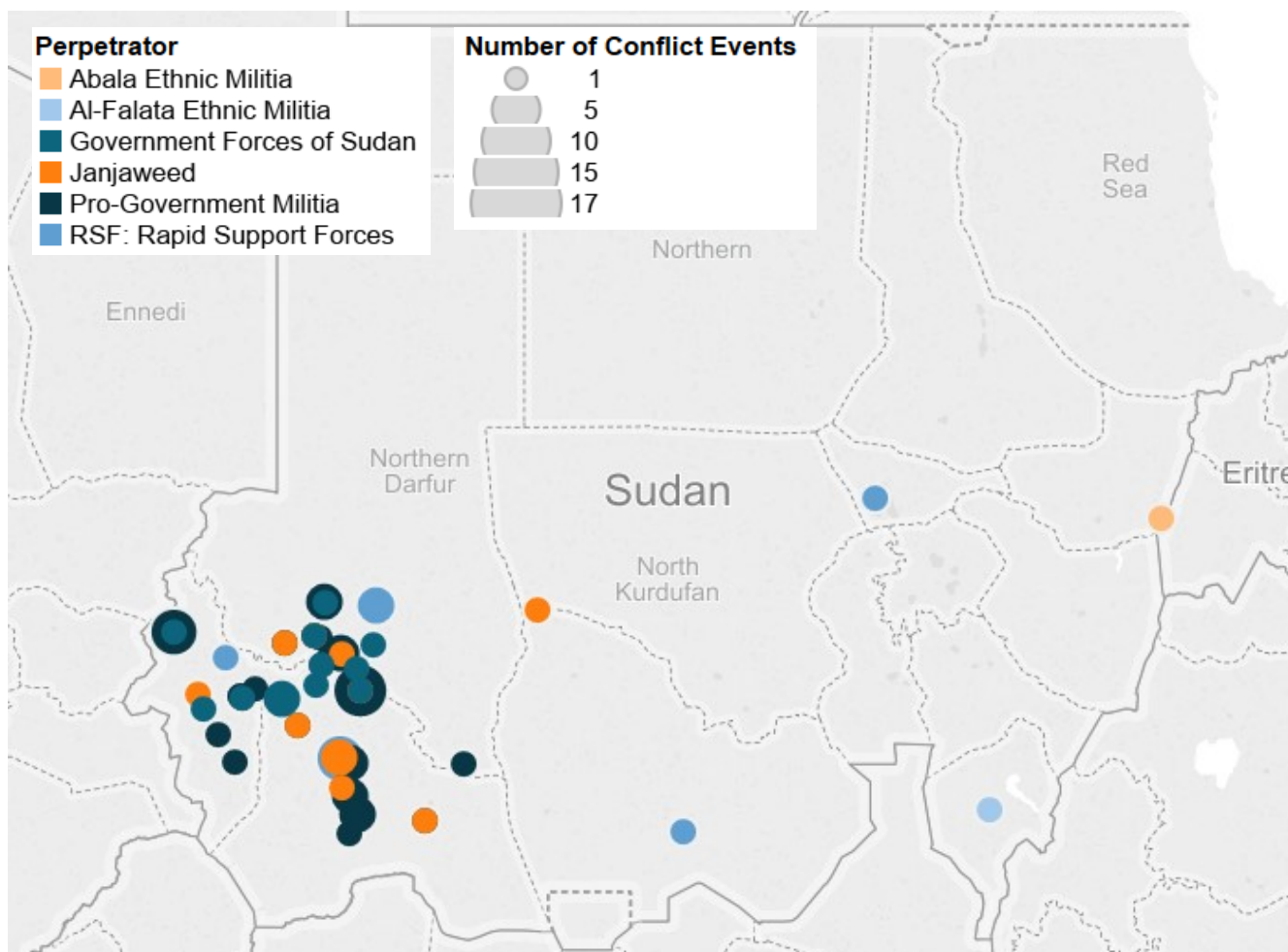


Figure 15: Rape as a Weapon of Political Violence in Sudan, from 2012 - 2015.

CAR, and Bosnia, where “women’s bodies were weapons in the frontlines of conflict” (Pillay, 2015). The UN reports that victims as young as two have been raped in South Sudan (Reuters, 2014) in what can only be viewed as an effort to punish and humiliate one’s enemy within a civil war setting. Numerous instances of sexual violence in ethnically-motivated attacks against ethnic Dinka, Nuer, and other communities have been reported (Amnesty International, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2014), likely in

efforts to instill terror in populations.

Given the ‘effectiveness’ of rape as a weapon of political violence in demoralizing opposition, instilling fear in populations, and reaffirming aggression and domination – and frequent impunity for this crime, with often no consequences faced by perpetrators – rape will likely continue to be an effective tactic as long as incentives exist to engage in brutality.

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Sources

Conflict Trends reports are compiled from ACLED data and draw on news sources, civil society reports, and academic and policy analyses. Full details of sources and coding processes are available online on the ACLED website.