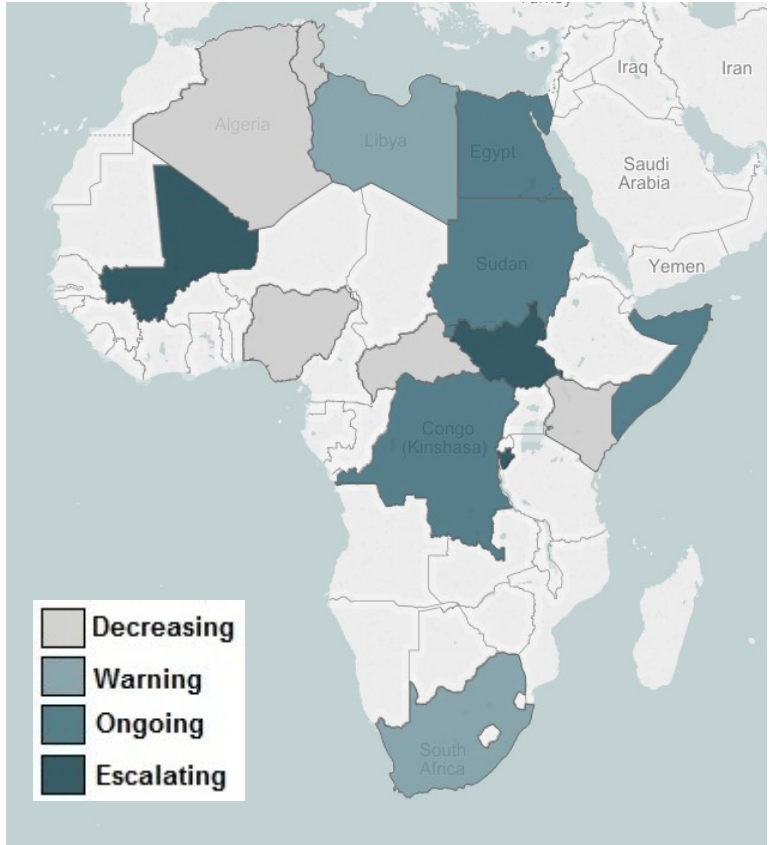


Welcome to the June issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published through our research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

This month’s issue focuses on civilian-targeted violence in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the continued encroachment of Islamic State (IS) affiliate groups in **Libya**, xenophobic violence in **South Africa**, violent Islamist-related activity in **Tanzania**, **LRA and ADF** patterns of activity in **Uganda** and the surrounding Central African region and political factionalism and electoral violence in **Zimbabwe**. A special focus topic explores **machine, human and crowdsourcing practices** of conflict data collection.

Elsewhere on the continent, **Burundi** experienced unprecedented levels of riots and protests in reaction to President Nkurunziza’s third term bid, territorial clashes between the SPLA and rebel forces continued in **South Sudan** and conflict levels declined for a second month in **Nigeria**.



Conflict Trajectory, June 2015

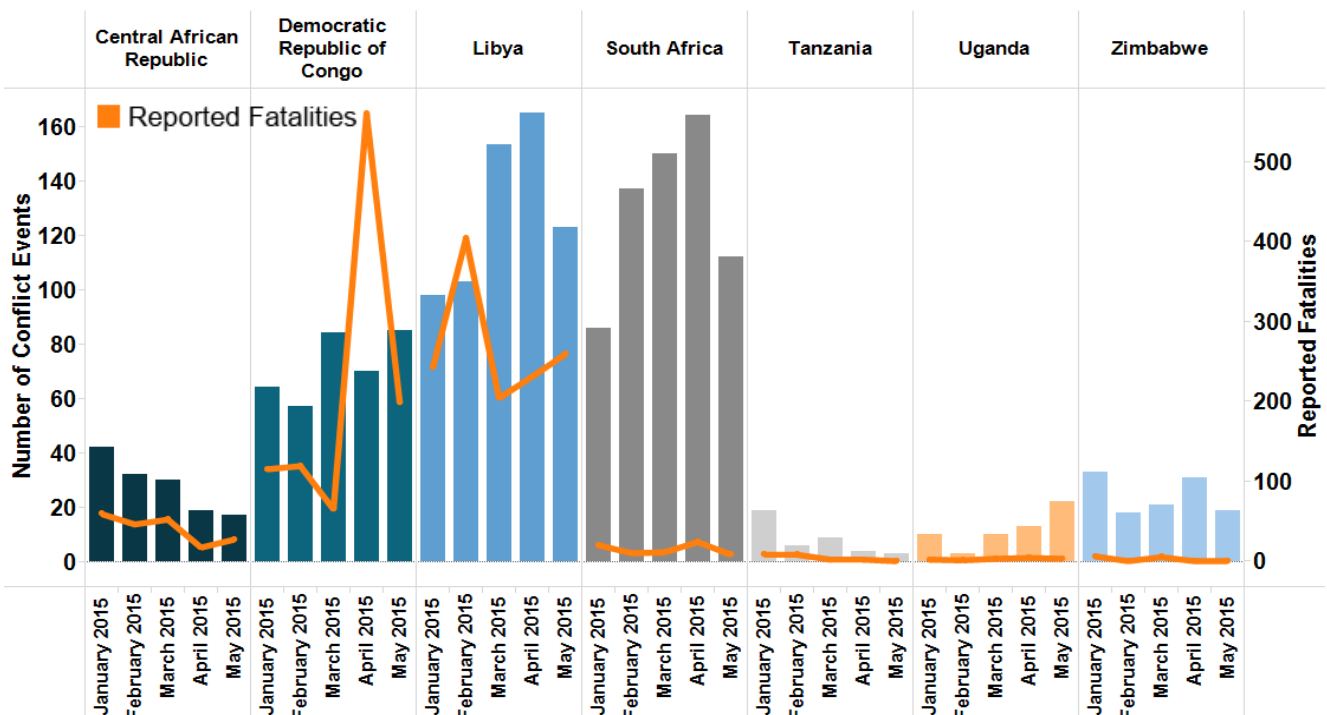


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, January - May 2015

Democratic Republic of Congo

Since the beginning of 2015, numerous offensives have been launched by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC). These include operations against Rwandan FDLR rebels in North and South Kivu and Katanga, Ugandan ADF rebels in the areas north of the town of Beni (which has been the site of frequent attacks on civilians), the FNL around the Uvira plateaus, FRPI militiamen in the territory of Walendu Bindi, and the APCLS in the Lukweti area. However, despite these operations, many of which are still ongoing (see Figure 2), violence against civilians and between the various militant non-state actors continues in these regions, with new trends emerging, such as inter-communal violence between ethnic militias in the Manono area and surrounding locales.

The number of battles in the eastern region of the DR-Congo, including Orientale, Katanga, and the Kivus, rose in February and have stayed high relative to preceding months. However, although fatalities from battles fell in March following claims of successes in February, such as

territory reclaimed from the FDLR, and later from the ADF in March, fatalities have been rising since, from a low of 22 to a high of 72 fatalities from battle events in May.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, events of violence against civilians spiked in March, which saw the beginning of FARDC's offensive against the ADF and followed the launch of an offensive against the FDLR in February.

The number of fatalities arising from violence against civilians dropped slightly between February-March, but has risen dramatically since then (with a sharp spike associated with the discovery of a mass grave in the Kinshasa area in April), but remaining nevertheless far above the annual average, at 125 deaths in May (see Figure 2). Although civilian targeting is not limited to the groups targeted by ongoing military operations, such as the FDLR and ADF, both groups are the primary named culprits of violence against civilians: since the beginning of 2015, the ADF have been responsible for 18% of all reported civilian fatalities; and the FDLR for just under 10% (see Figure 3).

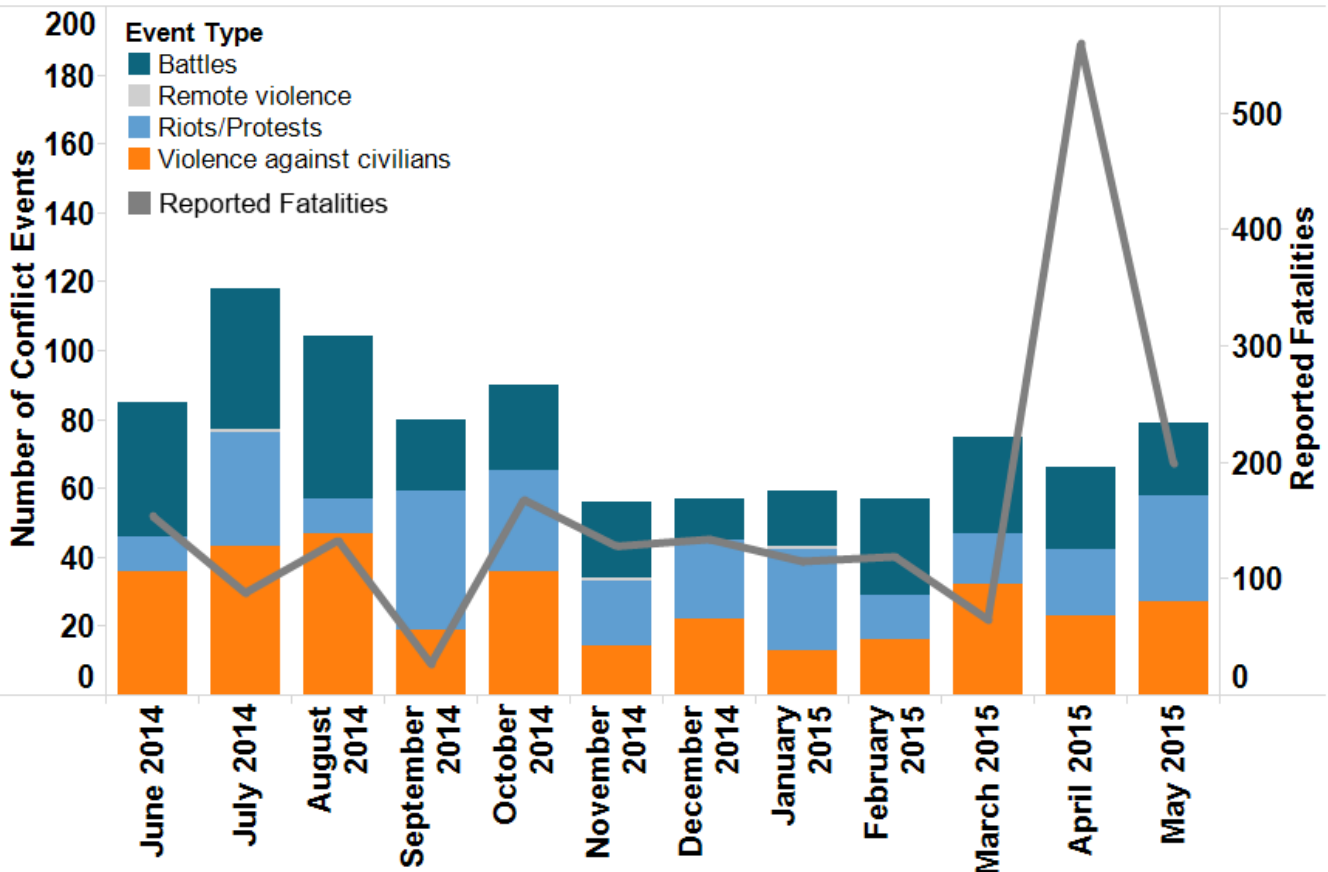


Figure 2: Violent Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in DR-Congo, from June 2014 - May 2015.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Unidentified armed groups, under whose mantle multiple factions and organisations may operate, remain, however, the most active perpetrators of anti-civilian violence, and responsible for the largest share of associated reported fatalities (63% as of January 2015).

There is concern that military offensives might lead to blowback on the civilian populations in contested areas, acknowledged during the launch of military operations (IRIN, December 16, 2014). Not only has this rise in conflict been confirmed in the rising numbers of attacks on civilians and resulting fatalities, but the potential cover

which could have been provided for civilians by the UN's MONUSCO force was undermined by the withdrawal of support which occurred following concerns over the human rights records of the generals put in charge of the FARDC operations (Africa Review, March 11, 2015). Although it appears that MONUSCO may resume support to FARDC operations following a recent attack by suspected ADF rebels in which two Tanzanian peacekeepers died in early May (Deutsche Welle, May 6, 2015), it is likely that violence against civilians will continue to be used by armed groups in the eastern DR-Congo as a tool of intimidation and deterrence (RFI, March 9, 2015).

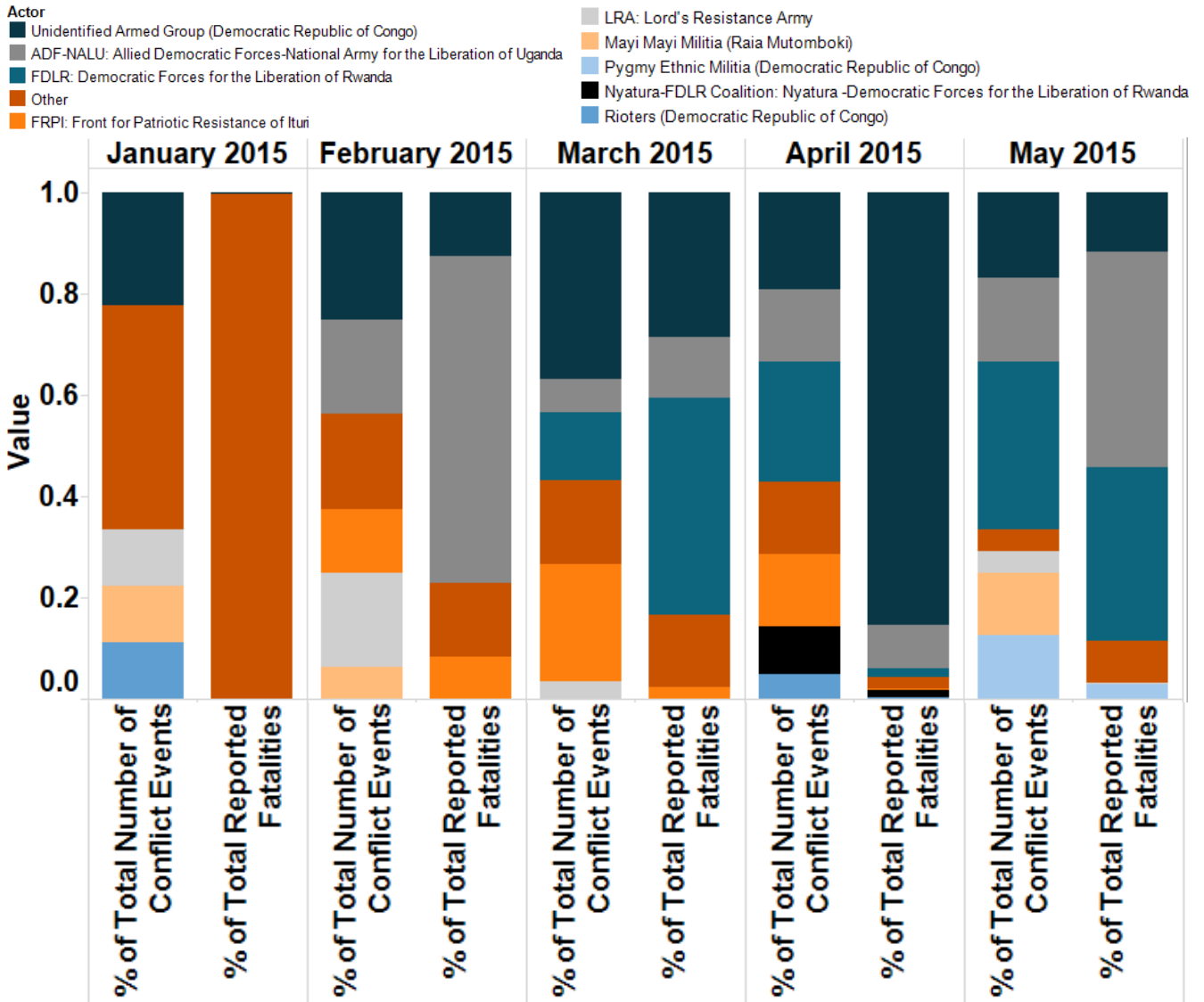


Figure 3: Share of Violence against Civilians Events and Reported Fatalities by Non-State Actor, by Month, in DR-Congo, from January 2015 - May 2015.

Libya

From December 2014 to February 2015, there was a significant lull in violence on all fronts in Libya. This is concurrent with a dramatic decrease in Libya Dawn (Fajr Libya) activity, especially from the Misratan battalions (see Figure 4).

Whilst tensions were stoked at the beginning of May between Libya Dawn forces and Operation Dignity in the West of Libya, the second half of May witnessed a shift in the locality of violence, predominantly concentrated in the central city of Sirte and eastern city of Benghazi. Consequently, the Libyan Dawn alliance played a lesser role in violent conflict throughout May, reflected through several reconciliatory efforts and prisoner swaps between groups in Zintan, Misrata and Gharyan. Counterintuitively, the agents driving these peaceful exchanges are the revolutionary brigades themselves, rather than the respective parliaments and legislatures to which they are aligned. The General National Congress expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of coordination between the fighting groups, municipalities and the legislative authorities in reaching the terms of agreement ([The Libya Observer, 23 May 2015](#)). Militia groups continue to hold significant power over their respective allied governments, taking their own

course of action as the UNSMIL political process drags on with little progress made.

Similar sentiment was further expressed by the House of Representatives (HoR) that declared that any political-business arrangements established currently would be invalid under the transitional government. However, the negative reception towards the UN & Bernardino Leon’s third draft peace agreement – which would almost certainly curtail the influence of Islamist groups under Libya Dawn – has created a further impasse in reaching a resolution.

Dynamics on the ground largely reflect this wider stalemate within Libya, as the Libya National Army (LNA) continues to battle Ansar al-Sharia and groups under the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) who are largely concentrated in the districts of Leithi, Sabri and Garyounis. Despite aerial bombardment by the Libya National Army on Ansar positions, throughout May the Islamist groups appeared to have gained the upper hand with a substantially higher proportion of casualties reported from the army side. On the 12 May 2015, groups affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) appeared to have crept

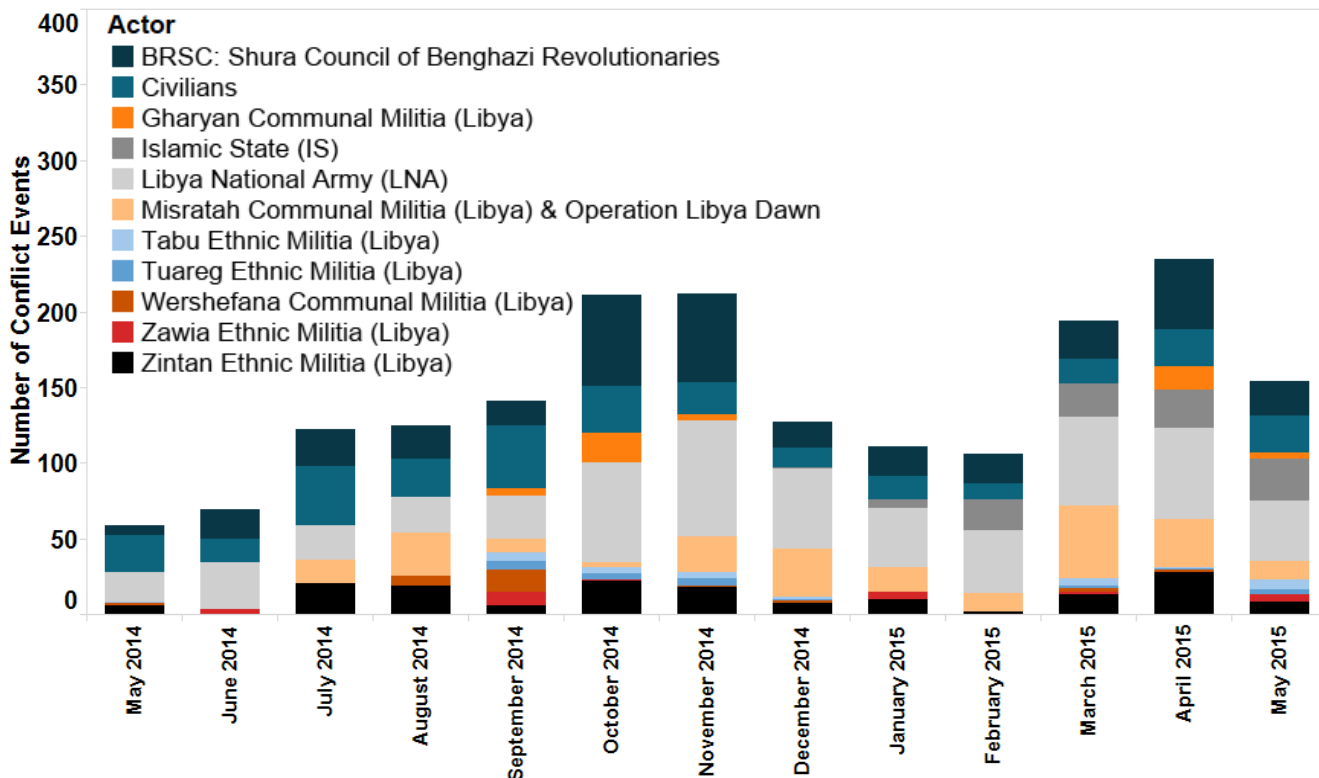


Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events by Actor in Libya, from May 2014 - May 2015.

Libya

into Benghazi, joining the fight against the Libya National Army and General Khalifah Haftar's forces. Whether they are fighting alongside Ansar al-Sharia militants is unclear, however the humanitarian impact on the civilian populations within Benghazi is turning catastrophic (see Figure 6). Libyan citizens who have remained within the city have been exposed to heightened rocket and RPG attacks and reports from residents suggests that certain districts have started to be deliberately targeted after refusing to back the fighting Islamist groups under the BRSC ([Libya Herald, 26 April 2015](#)). Whether the Islamic State redoubles its efforts in Benghazi remains to be seen, but for the next few weeks it is likely to solidify its presence in Sirte and Derna where it has established control over government institutions, most recently the Gardabiya airbase and the Great Man-Made River Project to the east of Sirte.

The growing manifestation of IS and the spiralling complexity it is adding to the Libyan situation (see Figure 5)

could prove to be the pivotal mechanism for more concrete collaboration between the divided forces in Libya. On the 21 May 2015 for the first time since fighting began in May 2014, a joint security operation was conducted by Misrata's 166 Battalion and forces of the internationally recognised parliament against the Islamic State in Sirte. To date, the Misratan bloc has been the most active group in confrontations with IS militants, where Islamic State advances on Misratan positions have seen clashes erupt in the town of Nawfaliyah and suicide attacks on the outskirts of Misrata itself. If sustained cooperation between Misrata and the Libyan National Army to combat the IS threat were carved out, it would pull the Misratan bloc further away from the ideologically hardline GNC, who are reluctant to concede power in the UN Resolution.

This would act to destabilise relations between fighting groups and the GNC camp. How this forecast plays out in the coming weeks is yet to be seen, but intentions to pro-

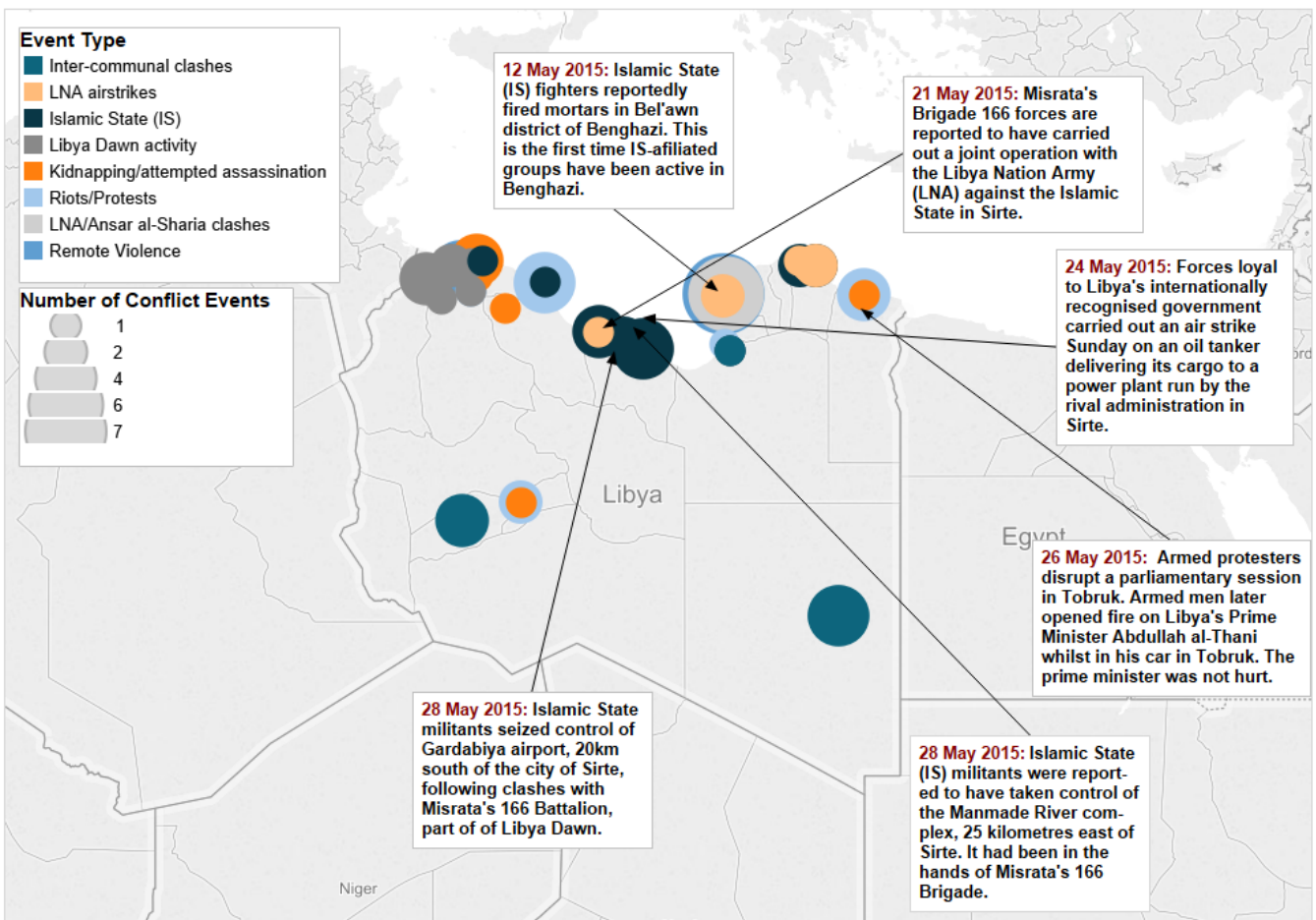


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location in Libya, in May 2015.

Libya

tect the economic and [political prowess](#) held by the city of Misrata is likely to be a guiding factor in this decision. Steps towards this outcome are already underway where recent weeks of fighting have reportedly left the Misratan forces stretched thin, divided between multiple battlefronts in both the east, west and central Libya.

Misratan forces have stepped down in confrontations with the Libyan Army, and taken decisive steps towards forging an agreement with Wersheffana to withdraw from Zawia and Janzour ([Mozayix, 28 April 2015](#)), with other groups under the Libya Dawn umbrella taking a more active role in early May. Furthermore, Operation Sunrise forces withdrew from fighting in Bin Jawad to secure oil installations and agreed a ceasefire with the Petroleum Facilities Guards aligned with the Tobruk-based government in order to redeploy troops for an offensive against IS around Sirte.

Grounds for stability could be forged through this battlefield alliance although the resilience of this brokered partnership to combat a common enemy may be harder to translate into a long-term transitional solution through

institutional means. This is especially the case once the threat subsides and old tensions return to the fore. The GNC administrations unease at these political settlements highlights this potential fault line.

As Misrata moves from the weapon to the mouthpiece of the GNC – a move unwelcomed by GNC members- it is the response of the opposition that may uncover the real underlying dynamics in the Libyan conflict. In any case, the response of General Khalifah Haftar is worthy of attention, who has staunchly refused to recognise the camp as anything other than a radical Islamist coalition. The House of Representatives has also had to contend with its own political infighting this month, when armed protesters surrounded a parliament session in Tobruk demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Abdullah Al-Thinni, and an “attempted assassination” attempt on Al-Thinni the same day. Whilst uncertainty surrounds these events, it has been speculated that Haftar orchestrated the event to undermine the legitimacy of the PM, in tandem with business and media elites.

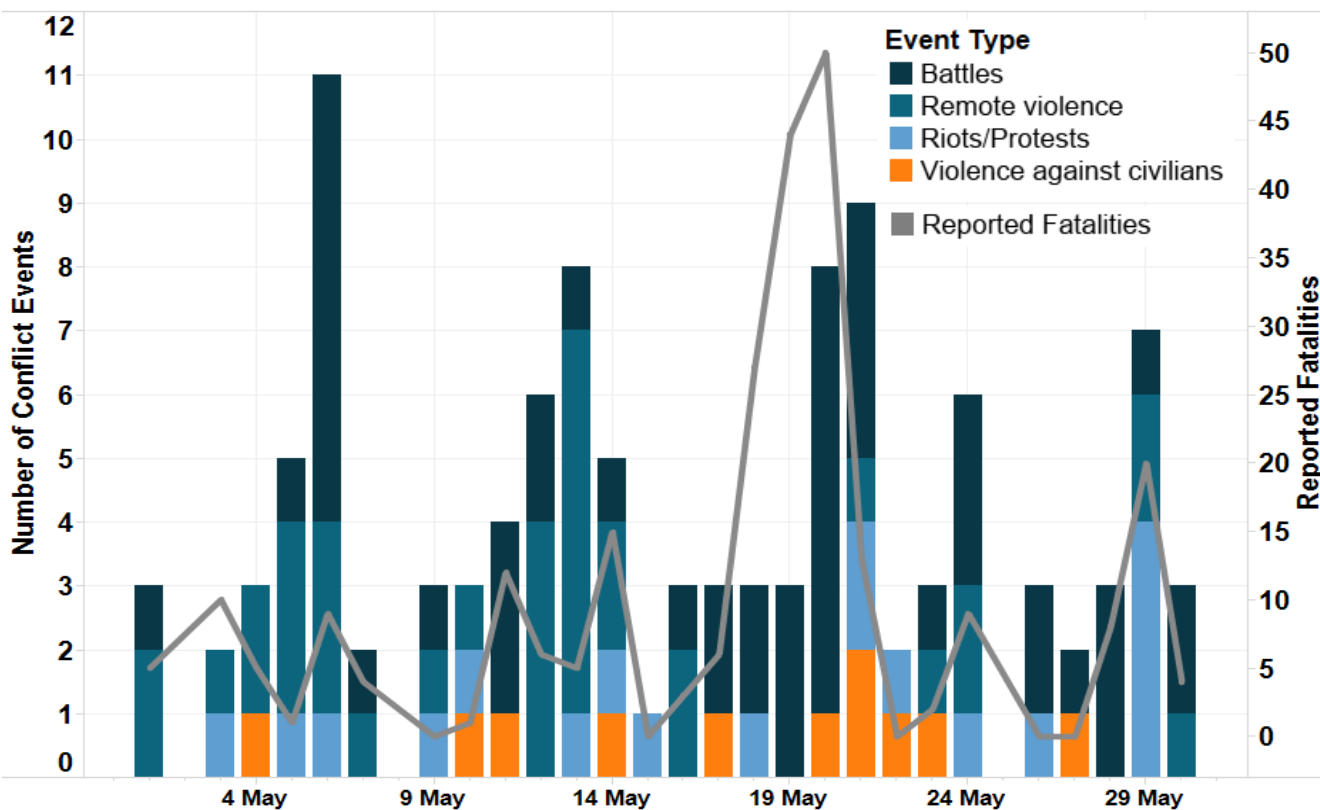


Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Event Type in Libya, from 1st May - 31st May 2015.

South Africa

Conflict levels fell dramatically in May 2015 after South Africa suffered a wave of xenophobic and anti-foreigner violence in April. The scale of the violence surpassed the anti-foreigner riots that hit Soweto in January 2015 after an alleged robber was shot by a Somali shopkeeper, prompting South African residents to loot foreign-owned shops. The violence resulted in multiple fatalities and resulted in over 8,000 foreign-born residents inhabiting camps for these internally displaced (Westcott, 2015). The rapidity with which the violence spread and the ferocity of the anti-foreigner sentiment exhibited by the riots has prompted analysts to examine the roots causes of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

Immediate blame has been placed upon Zulu monarch Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu for a public proclamation made in late March demanding that foreigners should be deported to reduce competition for employment (Ndou, 2015). The blame is not without reason as KwaZulu-Natal, where the king’s authority holds most cultural influence, was the epicentre of violence and accounts for 47.6% of all violent xenophobic incidents in April and there have been reports of rioters using the king’s words to justify their actions (Ngubane, 2015).

However, there has been a great deal of attention in investigating the root causes of the violence. Though unemployment has commonly been cited as a reason for violent xenophobia, the fact that the 2008 violence took place

during a year of exceptionally low unemployment and that migrants only constitute 4% of the working population, both provide counter-evidence to this narrative (Anyadike, 2015; Trading Economics, 2015). Instead, there is evidence that foreigners function as scapegoats for larger government failures such as service delivery and job creation, with protests against state performance often accompanied by the looting of foreign-owned shops (Anyadike, 2015). This interpretation is supported by the data. In the run up to the April 2015 violence, service delivery demonstrations were increasingly marred by episodes of xenophobia with anti-foreigner incidents present in over half of service-related protests in March 2015 (see Figure 7).

Only a single xenophobic incident took place in May 2015, representing a marked contrast to the preceding months. This decrease may partly be driven by the surge in public anti-xenophobia sentiment by influential political actors including the ruling ANC, rival Economic Freedom Fighters and Democratic Alliance parties, and numerous student organisations. These protests have informed the perpetrators of xenophobic violence that the migrant status of their victims does not mean that their crimes are condoned or ignored by the public or the political elite. This has eliminated the culture of impunity concerning xenophobic violence that has prevailed in South Africa since the 2008 violence resulted in only 79 convictions (Rabkin, 2015).

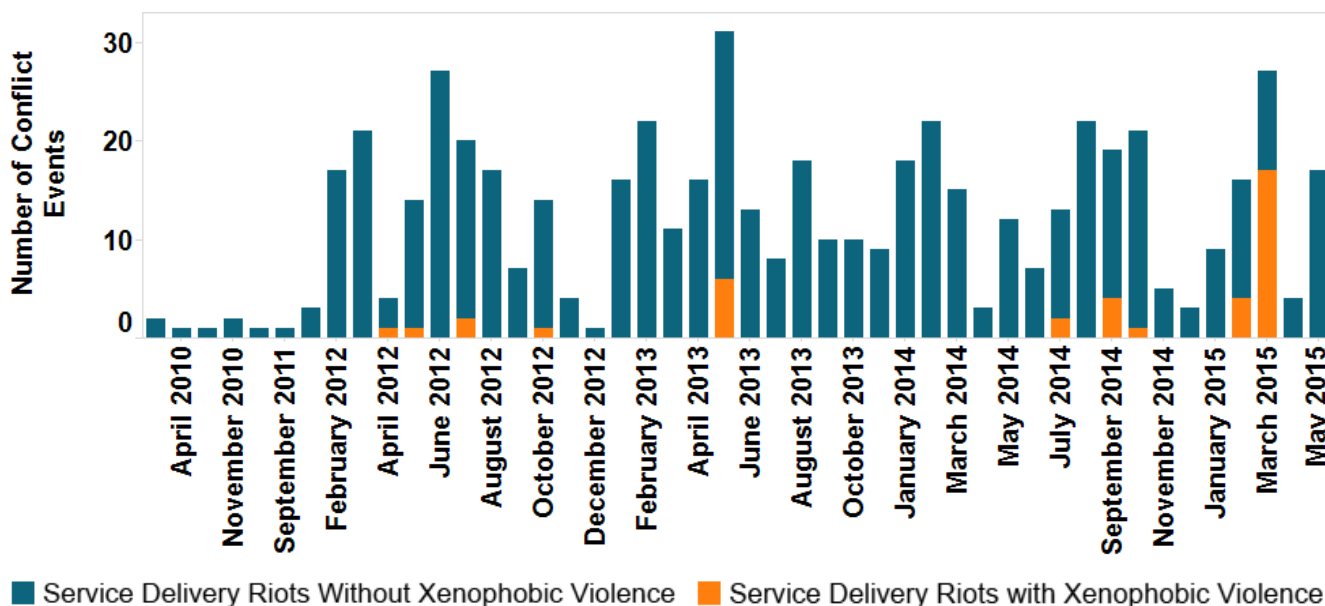


Figure 7: Service Delivery Demonstrations and Xenophobic Violence in South Africa, from March 2010 - May 2015.

Tanzania

Although Tanzania holds a reputation for peace and stability, the country has experienced an increase in violent Islamist-related activity in 2015. The most recent attack occurred on the 14th of April in the eastern Morogoro Region (see Figure 8), when a suspected Al Shabaab militant attacked a police officer with a machete. The policeman survived, but a vigilante militia later killed the suspect.

The incident was sparked when police arrested ten terror suspects emerging from a mosque in Nyandero, carrying explosives, bomb detonators, and an Al Shabaab flag ([The Citizen, April 16, 2015](#)). In the first four months of 2015, Al Shabaab militants were directly involved in five battles with Tanzanian security forces, resulting in the deaths of eight policemen and soldiers. Al Shabaab’s increased presence in early 2015 comes after no such direct involvement was recorded in all of 2014, although July attacks on moderate Muslim clerics and foreign tourists in Arusha were thought to be committed in retaliation of terrorist arrests in the county ([Tanzania Daily News, July 5, 2014](#)).

Al Shabaab-related attacks in 2015 have been concentrated in the eastern regions of Morogoro, Pwani, and Tanga. An Al Shabaab group led by Abu Qays bin Abdullah claimed responsibility for two attacks on the 15th of January – one on a police station in Kilombero in Morogoro and the other on Ushirombo police post in the northern Shinyanga Region. On the 21st of January, Al Shabaab killed two police officers in Ikwiriri in Pwani Region, west of Dar es Salaam. These attacks contributed to January 2015 having the highest number of conflict events (seventeen) and highest number of fatalities (eight) in the country over the past twelve months. Although just six conflict events occurred in February, eight fatalities were recorded, including a soldier killed in an exchange of fire with suspected Al Shabaab militants on the 8th of February ([The Citizen, February 15, 2015](#)). The battle occurred during a joint military and police operation to recover weapons hidden in the Amboni caves in Tanga.

Fatality counts fell in March and April, with four deaths reported in two months. And May saw just three events,

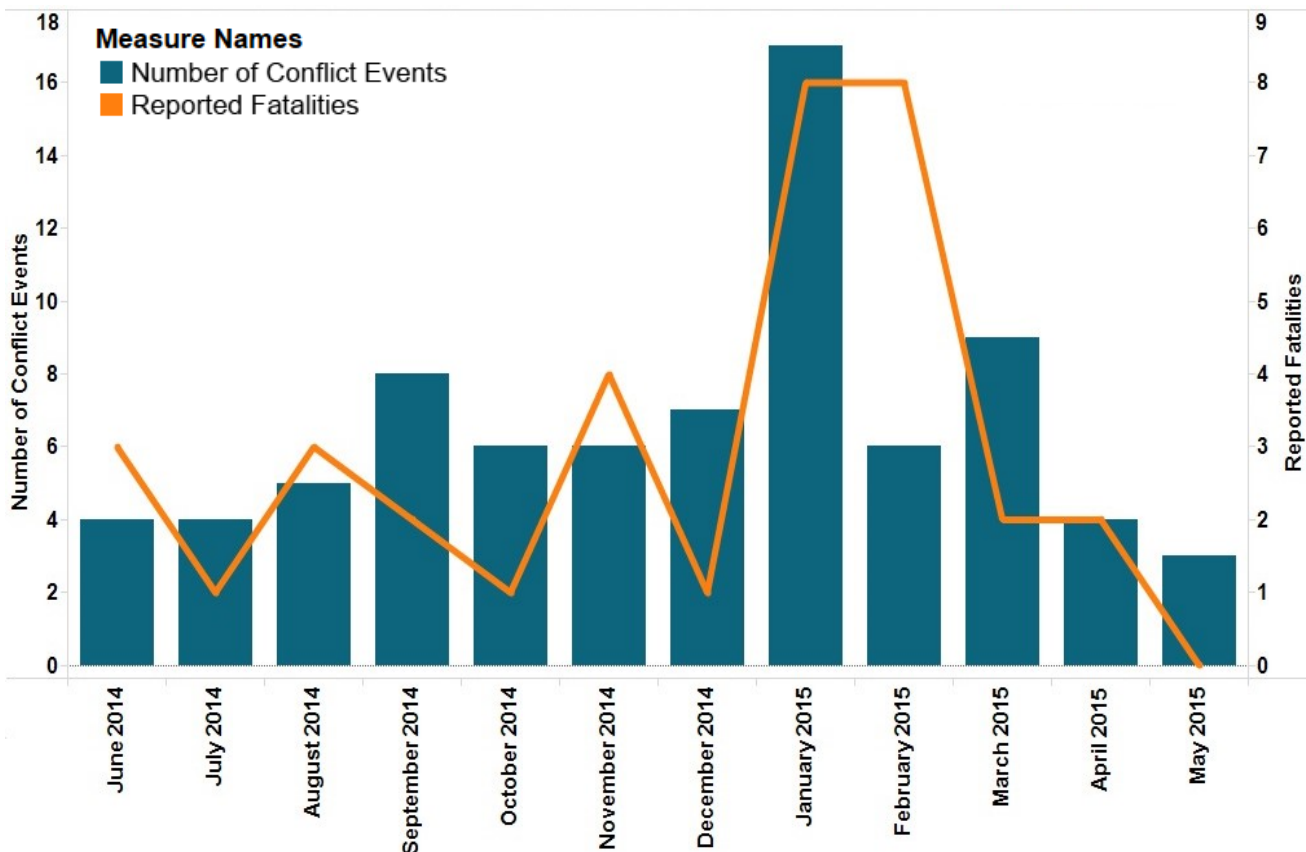


Figure 8: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Tanzania, from 1st June 2014 - 25th May 2015.

Tanzania

with no battles or fatalities. However, there is reason to remain concerned about potential violent Islamist threats, particularly given the trajectory of increasing Al Shabaab-attributed attacks over the past year (see Figure 9).

While Tanzania has traditionally been considered resistant to the emergence of this form of violence (LeSage, 2014), Al Shabaab’s activity in neighbouring countries proves that the group can gain a foothold and capitalise on internal divisions for their own gain. September 2013’s Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi killed 67 people, and July 2010’s suicide bombings in Kampala killed 74. Even if the direct threat of Al Shabaab in the region has diminished following the United States’ September 2014 killing of Al Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane in Somalia, sympathetic organisations and aligned militants may still be able to bring about considerable instability in the region, as the group struggles to retain its control in regions of South-Central Somalia.

Areas where political and religious tensions exist in Tanzania are particularly susceptible to increased violence involving violent Islamist groups. The island of Zanzibar is home to a political opposition party Civic United Front (CUF) and a majority Muslim population that has long sought independence from Tanzania and President Jakaya Kikwete’s ruling Party of the Revolution (CCM). Since

2005, Kikwete has seen the country through a period of economic growth sparked by oil and gas discovery. But his administration has also endured allegations of corruption, police brutality, and attacks on press freedom (African Arguments, July 16, 2013; US Department of State, April 8, 2011), as well as the threat of domestic militant training camps.

In October 2013, police were reported to have rescued 54 children and 32 women from an Al Shabaab indoctrination camp in Lwandai in Tanga (Sabahi, November 15, 2013). Furthermore, a limited number of violent incidents bearing the hallmarks of violent Islamist mobilization have already been recorded in the region: for instance, in September 2013, acid attacks occurred against priests and foreigners in Stone Town, Zanzibar (LeSage, 2014).

For now, Tanzania has only a dispersed structure of groups linked to Al Shabaab in Somalia or to Al Hijra in Kenya; Ansar Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC) in Tanga is one such group. However, Islamist militants could develop more sophisticated and sustained operations over time (LeSage, 2014), particularly as domestic militants seek to manipulate internal divisions and grievances among the wider population.

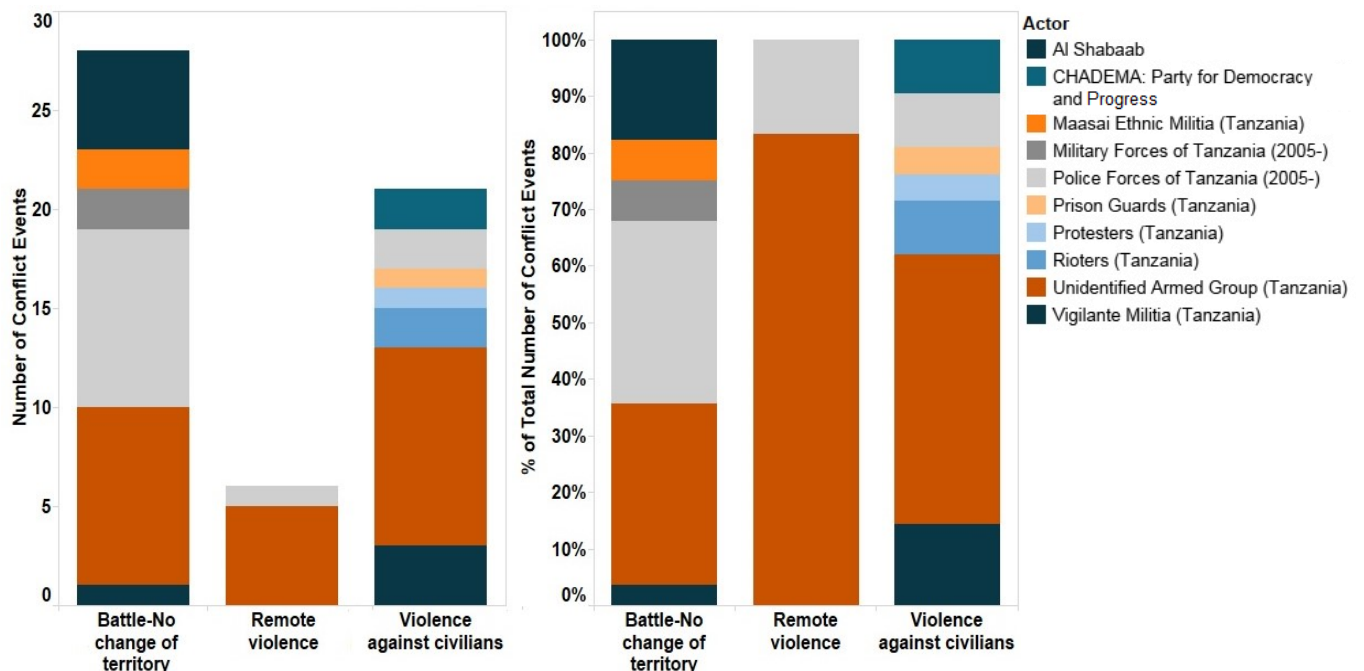


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Tanzania, from June 2014 - May 2015.

Uganda and Regional Dynamics

In the past few weeks, the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF, formerly the Alliance of Democratic Forces - National Army for the Liberation of Uganda, ADF-NALU) has experienced several setbacks. Dozens of its soldiers have been killed or captured, including senior personnel, while its leader, Jamil Mukulu, was arrested in Tanzania at the end of April ([Wall Street Journal, 2015](#)). These developments draw attention to the dynamics of armed Ugandan non-state actors in the wider Central African region.

Numerous rebel groups have been active in Uganda over the past twenty years. Among the different groups, ADF-NALU and the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) are the most prominent. In considering the history of these groups, the late 1990s represents the most intense period of conflict on record involving ADF-NALU (with an average of 92 events per year on average between 1997-2000), while the subsequent 2002-2007 represents the most intense period of conflict involving the LRA (with an average of 362 events per year on average). In response, these groups

have been targeted by several international operations, which have attempted to reduce the threat they pose. The 2005 Congolese-UN's North Night Final operation weakened the ADF-NALU alliance, before several NALU leaders and combatants surrendered in 2007 ([International Crisis Group, 2012](#)). By contrast, the 2008 multilateral Operation Lightning Thunder failed to defeat LRA in Garamba National Park-DR-Congo, and the group continued to engage in violence in DR-Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. The LRA have not been active in Uganda since early 2007 ([International Crisis Group, 2010](#)). While the security situation has progressively improved in Uganda, the effect of this has been to export violence and instability to neighbouring countries.

As Figure 10 illustrates, despite their defeat in Uganda, the LRA and ADF have not been neutralised. Instead, they have continued to engage in violence in neighbouring areas, mainly in north-eastern DR-Congo and, in the case of the LRA, in south-eastern CAR. Furthermore, they are not

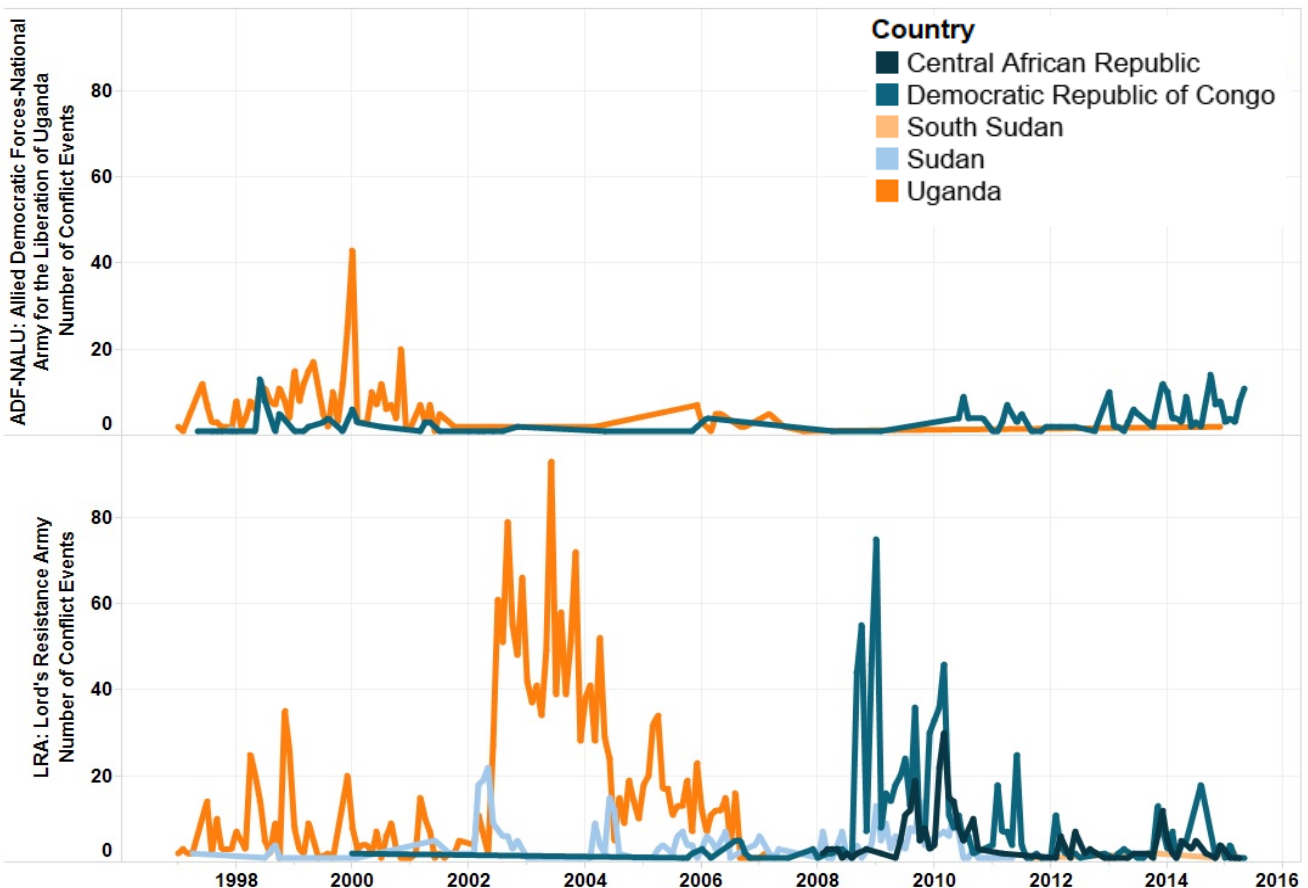


Figure 10: Violent Events involving the ADF-NALU and LRA, by Country and Month, 1997 - May 2015

Uganda and Regional Dynamics

only sheltering or hiding in these wider regional arenas: the number of events in which they are engaged remains significant. While levels of violence involving the LRA have declined significantly since 2009-2010, the years 2013 and 2014 both represented periods of spikes in violence levels. Moreover, ADF forces have actually increased their general activity level since 2007, suggesting a different trajectory for the group.

Furthermore, both groups retain considerable operational capacity, with particular implications for the security and vulnerability of civilians in conflict areas: for instance, in December 2013, suspected ADF rebels killed 21 villagers in Beni, North-Kivu ([Jeune Afrique, 2013](#)), while the LRA continues to carry out raids and abductions throughout the province ([UNHCR, 2015](#)). This illustrates a broader trend in violence dynamics among these two groups, reflected in their strategic use of violence against specific targets. For instance, while 42% of LRA violence in Uganda was targeted against civilians, in DR-Congo, anti-civilian violence constitutes more than two-thirds (69%) of all recorded activity. Meanwhile, while levels of violence against civilians involving the ADF have fallen slightly in its

move from Uganda to DR-Congo (from 37% of activity to 33%), the proportion of fatalities resulting from anti-civilian violence has increased (from 40 to 43%) suggesting an intensification of anti-civilian violence by the group. When neighbouring regional countries are combined into a single category, the evolution is even more stark (see Figure 11).

These patterns reveal two dynamics: first, both groups are increasingly regionalized: in spite of their original bases of operation being in Uganda, both groups remain primarily active in DR-Congo; while several LRA sub-groups are operating in CAR and South Sudan. One could explain this shift by arguing that both these groups no longer have clear national political incentives and therefore aim to operate regionally merely to survive ([Scorgie, 2011](#)). Second, this regionalization has been accompanied by a shift in the levels, intensity and targeting of violence by both groups. While both exhibit a high degree of volatility in their activity, and a general decline since the peak of their violence several years ago, they remain active on a scale that has grave implications for stability and civilian protection in the region.

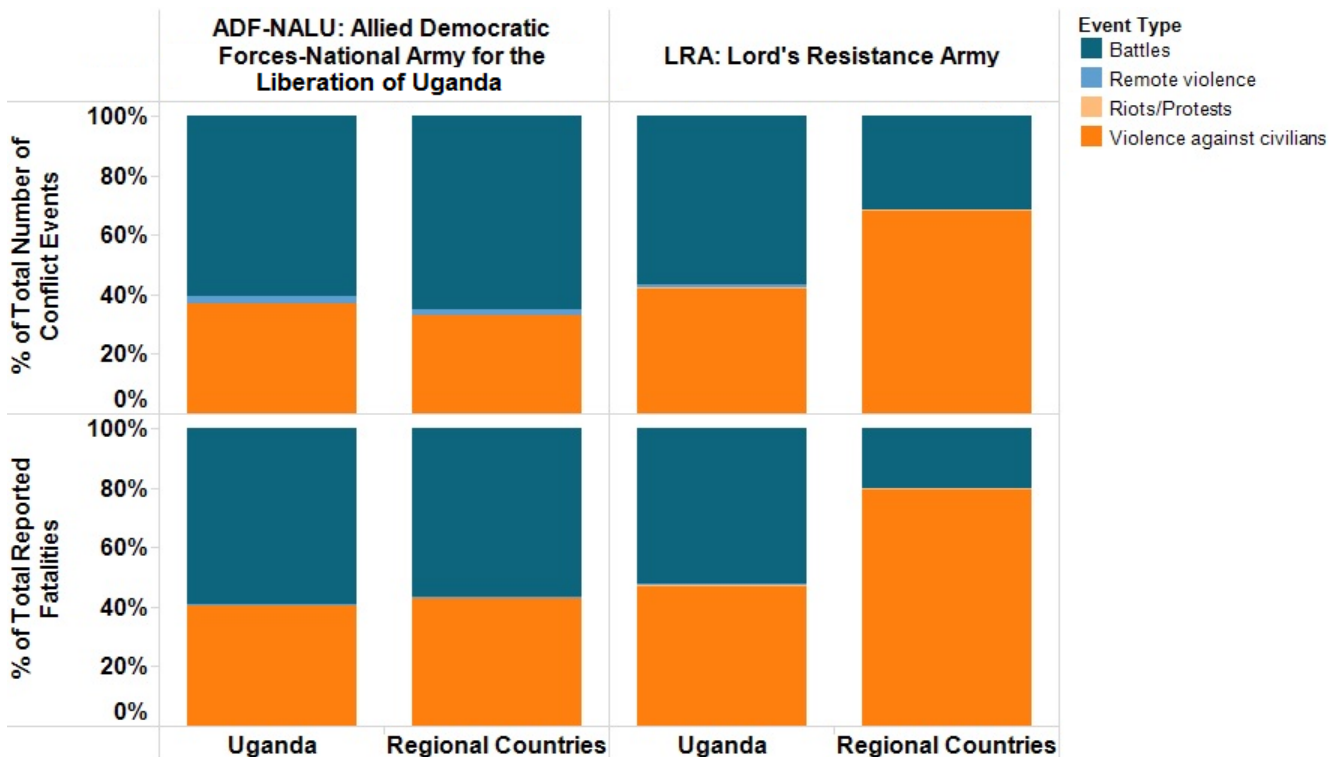


Figure 11: Proportion of Violent Events and Reported Fatalities by Type, ADF-NALU and LRA, in Uganda and the Wider Region, 1997 - May 2015.

Zimbabwe

Conflict levels decreased to below average levels in May. This decline follows a spike in violence in April which saw levels of political violence not witnessed since the expulsion of Joice Mujuru and her supporters from the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in December and January. The cause of the spike in violence in April is the upcoming by-elections due to take place on the 10th of June. Seats have been left vacant due to factionalism in Morgan Tsvangirai’s Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T). In March, after writing to the Speaker of the National Assembly and President of the Senate, Tsvangirai had 21 legislators expelled from parliament for aligning with the rival Movement for Democratic Change Renewal faction (MDC-R) (Langa, 2015).

The resulting electoral contest has been the cause of significant political violence. However, because of the MDC-T’s policy of not contesting elections until the party’s demanded electoral reforms are implemented, political violence has been primarily between different factions internal to both MDC and ZANU-PF, and between current and former insiders in the two parties.

Outside of Harare, Mashonaland West has had the highest level of activity (see Figure 12). High incidence of violence against civilians is due to the by-election due to take place in constituency of Hurungwe West which is currently contested between ZANU-PF and Temba Mliswa, the former ZANU-PF provincial chairman who was ousted during the anti-Mujuru purge, who is running as an independent.

ZANU-PF youth have been active in the area and the use of violence has been instrumental in motivating the population to vote for the ZANU-PF candidate Keith Guzah (Zimbabwe News, 2015). Traditional authority figures accused of supporting Mliswa have been abducted and tortured by ZANU-PF activists.

The incidence of political violence has also been high in Harare. The prior dominance of the various MDC factions in the capital means that many of wards in Harare are vacant and open for contest, motivating the continued harassment of political opponents by ZANU-PF cadres. The high level of activity cannot be entirely attributed to the by-elections as the disappearance of pro-democracy activist Itai Dzamara and unrest among prisoners in Chikurubi prison has led to a high rate of riots and protests in Harare (Waza Online, 2015; Nehanda Radio, 2015), which in turn has provoked a violent response by the security services.

The issue of the by-elections has also driven a split within the MDC-T. Tsvangirai remains adamant about boycotting the by-elections while his deputy Thokozani Khupe is allegedly pushing for MDC-T to electorally contest (Chidza, 2015). This schism has resulted in incidences of intra-MDC-T violence with MDC-T youth aligned with Khupe and Tsvangirai clashing in Bulawayo and Pelandaba.

The drop in political violence between April and May could be due to the consolidation of ZANU-PF control in contested regions, yet this decline could be reversed on June the 10th when the electorate cast their vote.

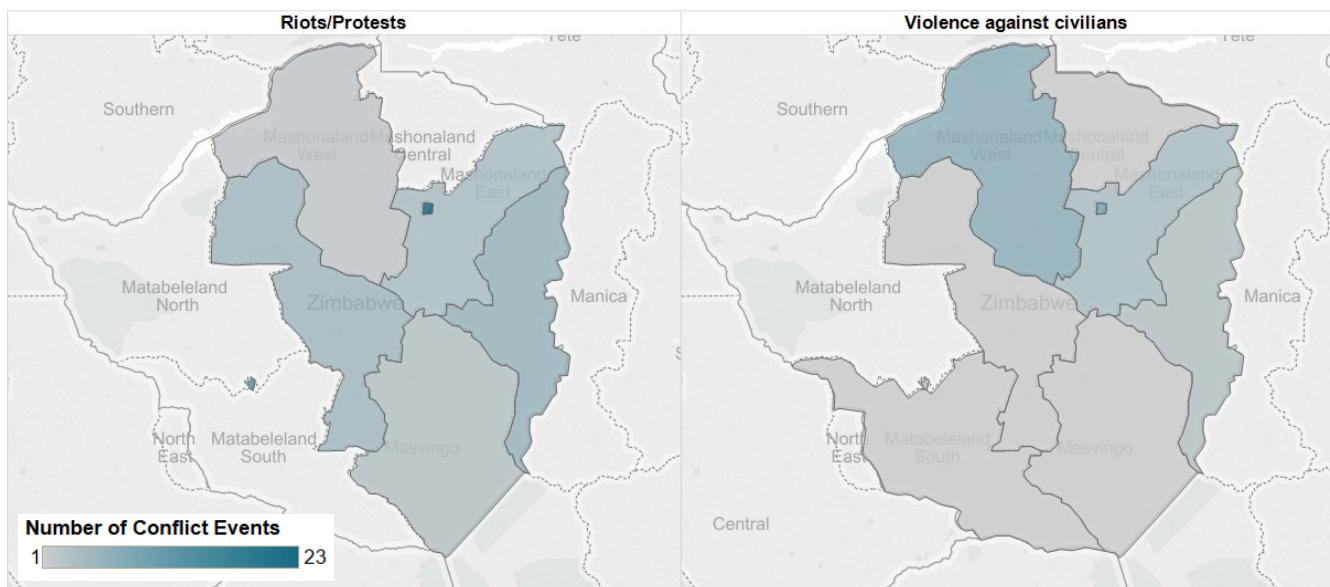


Figure 12: Number of Conflict Events by Province in Zimbabwe, from February 2015 - May 2015.

Special Focus Topic: Conflict Data Collection Practices: ACLED versus Others

With so many different forms of data collection on conflict and violence types and locations, it is often difficult to know how these various data compare and to what extent they describe and record the same events.

On one end of the spectrum lie data initiatives that rely on crowdsourcing, in which individuals at the local-level recount firsthand information through reporting conflict that they witness. This is done through formats such as text messaging or tweets; these means of reporting are in turn able to provide the geographical location of the reporting individual, and hence the proposed conflict event. These types of data capitalize on the ability of numerous individuals to report on conflict and violence at once and in real-time – essentially providing countless conflict ‘reporters’ who relay information on conflict events as they happen.

Some disadvantages exist with this type of reporting including whether political violence outside of urban areas is accurately collected; political violence outside of ‘high interest’ periods is consistently recorded; and the verifiability of the information collected. The last is of critical importance: given the ability of everyone to contribute information via texts or tweets, there does not exist any type of verification to determine the accuracy of events

(e.g., their existence, intensity, location, type, etc.). Additionally, in instances where such ‘reporters’ are to recount the violence type (i.e., riot, protest, clash, violence against civilians, etc.), different individuals may account for the same event differently. Hence, for example, even though in reality a single riot may have occurred, one person may ‘code’ this as a riot, while another as a protest, and even another as a clash. In that case, this may result in the illusion of more than one event happening at a specific time and place. Finally, in states with significant press freedom and multiple outlets for reporting, crowd-sourced or crowd-seeded data can produce little additional information.

On the other end of the spectrum lie data initiatives that make use of machines aggregating published reports on conflict and violence, and use information within these reports to determine conflict and violence types and locations. These types of data capitalize on the ability of machines to peruse numerous reports – including recently reported and posted ones – in a short period of time, resulting in near-up-to-date reporting. With this type of reporting, machines glean geographical, temporal, etc. information from reports in an effort to provide further information about conflict events.

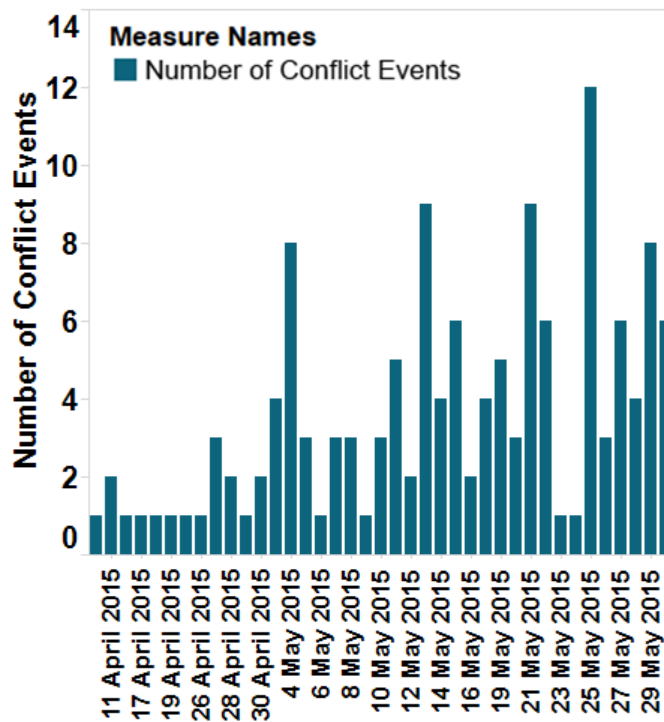
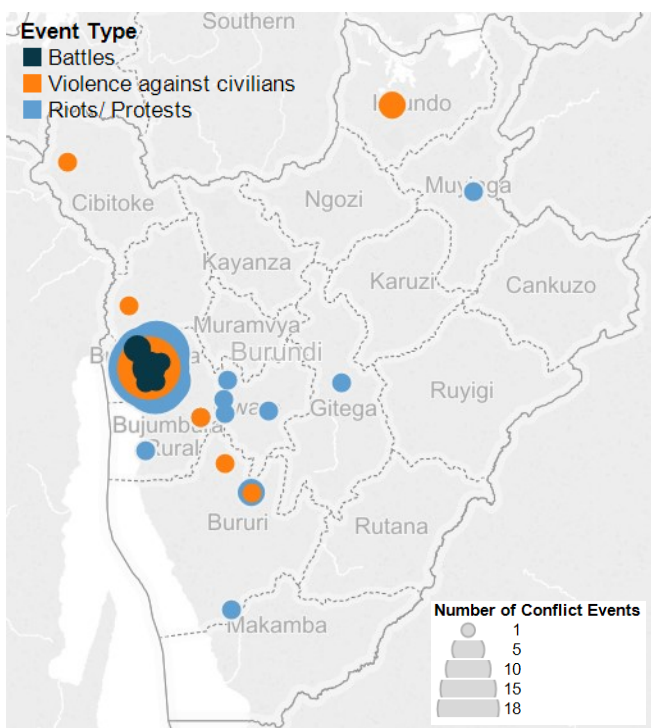


Figure 13: Conflict Events in Burundi, from April - May 2015, via ACLED.

Special Focus Topic: Conflict Data Collection Practices: ACLED versus Others

However, despite the advantage of machines collecting a larger number of reports than human coders, machines have disadvantages relative to more curated forms of collection. Machine coding is often unable to attribute whether reports refer to the same conflict event. As a result, the same conflict event information published in multiple outlets can often be recorded as discrete events, creating the illusion of more than one event happening at a certain time and place.

Highly curated – and often manually coded data, such as ACLED information – falls somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. There are several areas where careful attention by researchers to information results in more valid, verifiable, thorough and ultimately more ‘usable’ conflict information. These include reporting depth, breadth, bias, and comprehensiveness.

While ACLED does not currently make use of individual-level reporting (e.g., texts and tweets) as crowdsourcing initiatives do, it does use reports from local news agencies to harness available information on violence to code conflict events, with hopes that further local-level sourcing will soon be more largely relied upon. ACLED draws from sources at the international, regional, national, local, and aggregate levels. This ensures that media biases related to reporting at a certain geographical level do not impact coding. From a review of these sources, some of the classic pitfalls of conflict coding – including urban biases, insufficient attention to non-fatal events, or an inability to capture conflict events as they occur in real-time and in localities – are countered through effective sourcing in

ACLED ([ACLED, 26 November 2014](#)).

Relying on published reports instead of texts/tweets from individuals allows for a meticulous verification and triangulation process by each coder. Further, in order to ensure the most accurate data are cleaned and analysis-ready, ACLED implements a series of cleaning and checking. ACLED data go through checks of inter-coder, intra-coder, and inter-code reliability every week before the release of its weekly real-time conflict data. After a team of coders goes through the various media sources and systematically records conflict events that have occurred during the week, information goes through an extensive *inter-code reliability* test where codes are checked for correct numbering, event types, locations, etc. Next, all information is subjected to an *intra-code reliability* test where each submission by coders are compared to each other, and to original source materials to ensure accuracy. Coding is reviewed for *inter-conflict reliability* where notes relating to each conflict match the conflict event itself and whether the event should ultimately be included within the dataset (i.e., is the event an example of political violence). These various levels of cleaning and testing ensure that the weekly release of data continues at a high standard despite the quick turnaround time.

Using a coding system with numerous rounds of verification instead of crowdsourcing, like ACLED, can be seen in Figure 13 depicting political violence (both violence and riots and protests) since April 2015 based on ACLED data. While a crowdsourced map may show more nuanced data within the capital Bujumbura, ACLED data better account

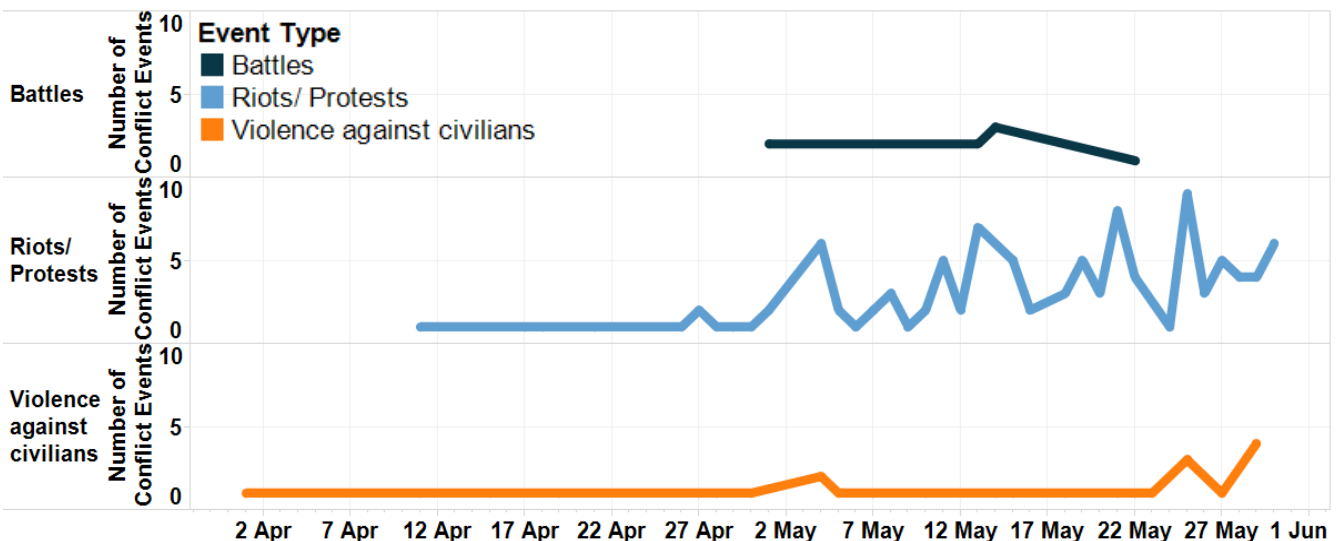


Figure 14: Number of Conflict Events by Type in Burundi, from April - May 2015, via ACLED.

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for increased instability in Burundi in recent weeks. Further, as ACLED data can be separated by conflict event type, it is possible to track what has been shaping changes in conflict dynamics in the country. Figure 14 depicts this disaggregation and shows that increases primarily in riots and protests, as well as civilian targeting, are what is driving this conflict trend in Burundi. Furthermore, as ACLED data provide information on who the conflict actors are specifically, it is able to further disaggregate these trends within riots and protests; Figure 15 depicts that while violent rioting peaked in late May, these types of actions are decreasing while more peaceful protests are increasing in number in Burundi. These further nuances in real-time conflict reporting are not available via other sources. Through an intensive process of engagement with local sources in Burundi, ACLED intends to harness the most thorough information on instability.

Manual coders are better able to make decisions regarding whether two reports refer to the same conflict event. ACLED is able to capitalize on the benefits of multiple source reporting on the same event by using triangulation techniques to ensure the most information about each conflict event is gleaned and coded (Weidmann and Rød, 2015). For example, fatality counts are an attribute of

conflict that is open to much variation (for example, see Anyadike, 2015) for a comparison of fatality counts related to Boko Haram’s conflict activity amongst ACLED, IRIN News, and Nigeria Watch). In an effort to not over-count fatalities, ACLED codes the most conservative reports of fatality counts, as reported in the most relevant and up-to-date reports. Overcounting deaths is an issue given the incentives to misrepresent death counts by the “systematic violence bias in mainstream news reports” (Day, Pinckney, and Chenoweth, 2015).

ACLED’s coders are also able to distinguish conflict parties more accurately – a problem for automated coders. Weller and McCubbins (2014), for example, describe how GDELT – a large-scale event and tone dataset relying on automated coding – misses one or both conflict actors in large proportions of its coding, as it can be difficult for a computer to determine these parties. Manual coders are able to account for subjective variation in reports, such as tone or biases, and ensure that only the relevant, objective information is coded.

For further reading on ACLED conflict reporting practices, and how they compare to other conflict coding methods and initiatives, see the ACLED Methodology page (ACLED, 2015).

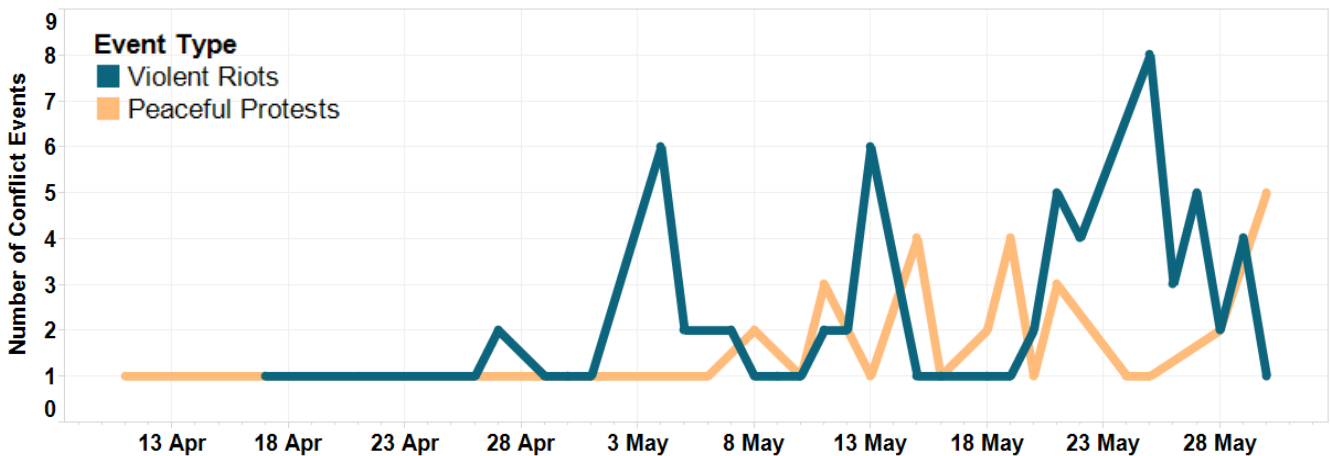


Figure 15: Riots and Protests by Type in Burundi, from April - May 2015, via ACLED.

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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.