ACLED
Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Welcome to the December 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 on the **ACLED website**, and are also available through our research partners at **Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS)**.

This month's issue focuses on Boko Haram violence and general elections in **Nigeria**, xenophobic riots and tuition fee protests in universities in **South Africa**, the trajectory of conflict in **South Sudan** as it enters its third year of civil war, an increase in ethnic and communal violence as pro-government militias scaled down attacks in **Sudan**, and riot and protest activity and strategic shifts in Islamist violence in **Tunisia.** A special report highlights **Political Developments and Unexpected Trends across Africa** in 2015.

Elsewhere on the continent, socio-economic protests escalated in **Algeria**, anti-government protests transformed into armed resistance in **Burundi**, Islamic State militants ramped up attacks on Ajdabiya in **Libya,** and battles declined in **Somalia.**
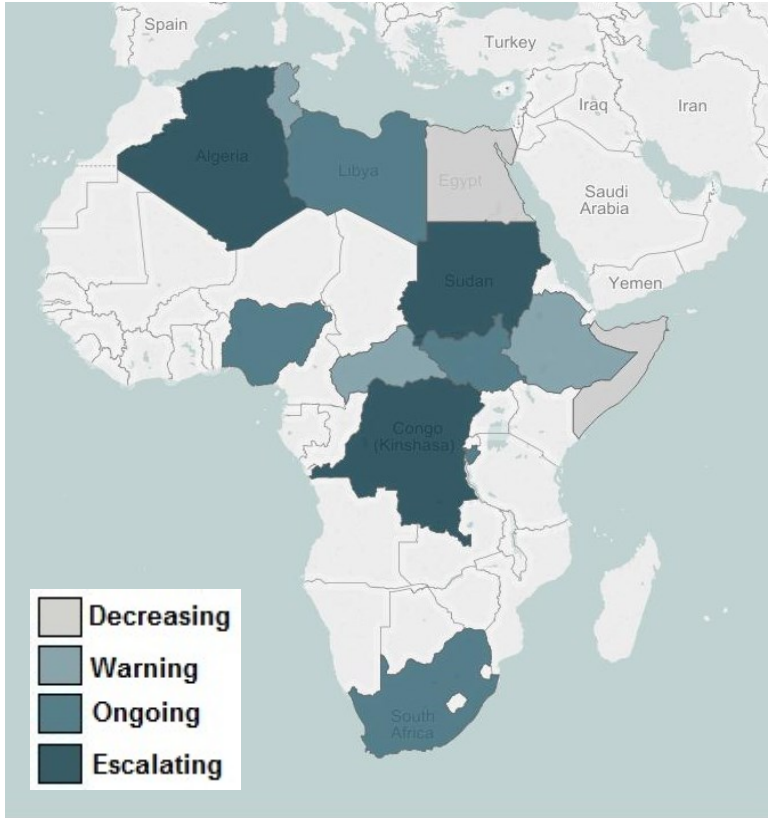
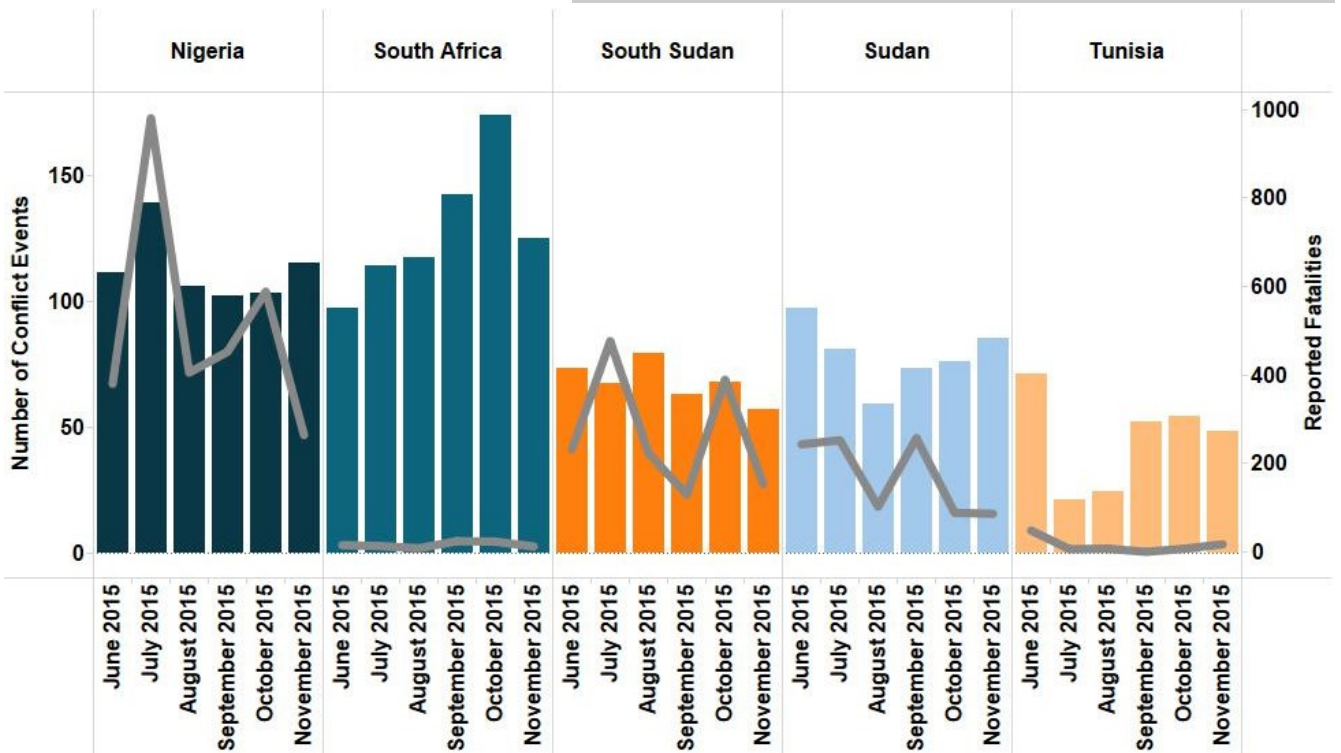**Conflict Trajectory, December 2015**

Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, June - November 2015.

Nigeria

Nigeria was the second most active country in the ACLED dataset in 2015. The first few months of 2015 witnessed a front-loading of violence, with both a climax in conflict with Boko Haram and the Nigerian general elections. These events made the first quarter of 2015 the most violent in Nigeria in terms of both number of events and casualties since ACLED's monitoring of the country began in 1997. Although the majority of this violence has focused on the conflict with Boko Haram, there have been considerable violent and non-violent (protests) from civilians throughout the year, and in March in particular (*see* Figure 2).

The interconnectedness of the 2015 general election with Boko Haram's conflict with the Nigerian government is of particular note for Nigeria. Starting in late 2014, Boko Haram's ability to take and hold territory led to increasing attacks throughout Nigeria, although the preponderance of these incidents occurred in Borno State and the three northeastern states of Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe (*see* Figure 3). The militant group also staged attacks in the neighbouring states of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. However, Boko Haram's single most dramatic attack was the January 2015 Baga massacre, which is believed to have resulted in as many as 2,000 fatalities (*see* Figure 3). Besides the extraordinary number of fatalities, the attack was particularly audacious as Baga was the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force which was made up of troops from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria (**BBC News - Africa, 2 February 2015**). Furthermore, President

Goodluck Jonathan had just made a pledge to defeat Boko Haram in his new year's address (**BBC News - Africa, 1 January 2015**).

This attack played a major role in catalysing a joint offensive agreed to by Nigeria, which saw the intervention of Chadian and Nigerien, and later Cameroonian, troops into the conflict (**Daily Post, 23 January 2015**). The multinational offensive began in mid-February and until May the multinational forces managed to take back a considerable amount of territory from Boko Haram (*see* Figure 2), successfully isolating them to a relatively small area surrounding the Sambisa Forest (**The Nigerian Observer, 2 June 2015**). Despite their early successes however, a lower level of fighting has continued since April. On the other hand, violence against civilians has seen a consistent downward trend since the height of the conflict with Boko Haram in March (*see* Figure 2), while instances of remote violence have stayed relatively consistent.

Amidst the struggle against Boko Haram militants, Nigeria also held its general election, which was significant affected by the ongoing conflict. Most notably, the election was postponed from February 14 to March 28 in order to allow the government's offensive time to secure the northeastern states to enable effective participation in the voting (**The Guardian, 7 February 2015**). On March 27, one day before the election, the military declared that virtually all territory held by Boko Haram had been recaptured (**BBC News - Africa, 27 March 2015**). Whilst voting was largely able to go ahead in the northeast, Jonathan Good-
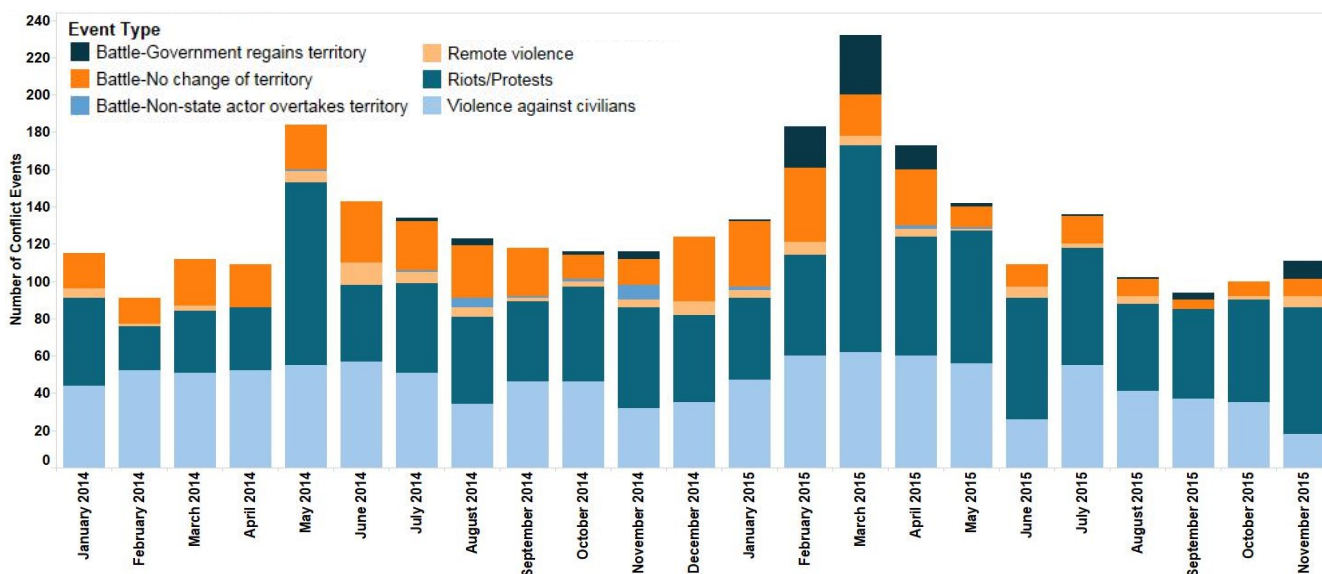

Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events by Type in Nigeria, from January 2014 - November 2015.

Nigeria

luck's PDP government was still defeated in the polls by Muhammadu Buhari's APC party.

Although the largely peaceful handover of power from President Goodluck to Buhari was historic for Nigeria, the election itself was marred by considerable violence. This took various forms, including Boko Haram attacks both before and during the election, political parties rioting and engaging in violence against civilians, and others involved in incidents of violence conducted at polling stations and/or related to the general election more broadly. Combined with those leading up to the election, these events played a role in making the number of riots and protests recorded in March significantly high in Nigeria's recent history (*see* Figure 2).

Despite the Nigerian military's continued conflict with Boko Haram and the militant group's sustained violence against civilians, by September Nigeria had seen an overall drop in violence. Violence decreased to levels not seen since February 2014, with around 94 violent incidents as compared to the high of 232 in March 2015 (*see* Figure 2). Even more dramatically, by November 2015 the fatality

levels recorded by ACLED had dropped to a low not seen since February 2013, with around 230 fatalities recorded compared to a high of over 3,000 in January 2015.

Looking forward to 2016, there are a few key trends to monitor. The first is the prospect of a continued decrease in overall violence. Boko Haram was the single most violent conflict agent in 2015, but as the military continues to be largely successful in its battle with Boko Haram (**IBT, 20 September 2015**), its role may diminish. However, the militant group has continued to carry out sporadic suicide bombings and other violence against civilians (**Daily Mail, 6 December 2015**). A second trend to watch out for is the increasing number of protests by groups espousing Biafran independence (**IBT, 17 November 2015**). During the election, the potential for renewed instability in the Niger Delta was a concern raised by various groups (**The Guardian, 11 March 2015**), and more recently organizations such as the International Crisis Group have warned that it may "erupt into violence again" due to "long-simmering grievances" (**Premium Times, 7 October 2015**). If it does, this longstanding issue could become the newest driver of conflict in Nigeria.
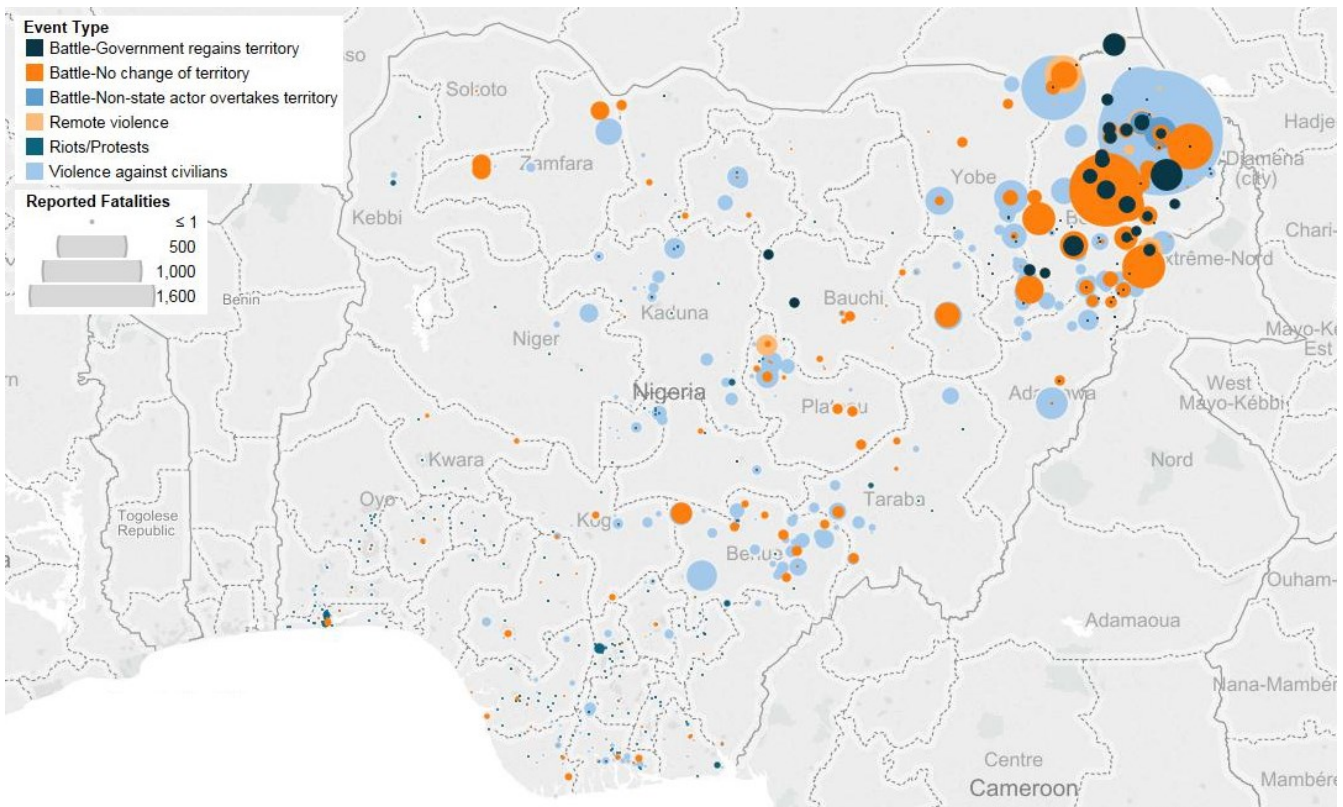

Figure 3: Number of Reported Fatalities by Event Type and Location in Nigeria, from January - 5 December 2015.

South Africa

2015 has so far been the most active year for South Africa in the ACLED dataset, with over 1,400 individual political violence and protest events taking place since the beginning of January. This represents a 33% increase over 2014. In spite of this change in aggregate events, the instability profile for South Africa remained similar to that of previous years. Riots and protests remained the most common form of reported political disturbance event, accounting for 84.5% of all events in 2015.

Three major events in South Africa are responsible for the increase in political instability: the protests over social transformation at multiple universities in South Africa in March, the xenophobic riots in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in April, and the recent demonstrations over university fees.

Protests over 'transformation' laid bare the culturally based frustrations of the so-called 'Born Free' generation. In March, students began to demonstrate against the enduring presence of colonial and Apartheid-era cultural relics on university campuses. The most famous of these demonstrations was at the University of Cape Town where students demanded that the statue of Cecil Rhodes, the British Imperialist who donated land to the university, be removed from campus (**Rhodes Must Fall, 2015**). Similar demonstrations took place in Stellenbosch University where students demanded that English replace

Afrikaans as the language of instruction (**Shabangu, 28 August 2015**).

There were two major outbursts of xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2015. The first took place in Soweto in January after a Somali shopkeeper shot a South African teenager allegedly attempting to steal from his shop. The second larger outbreak took place in April after the Zulu monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini, made a speech demanding that migrants and foreigners leave South Africa (**Times Live, 16 April 2015**). Within a matter of days the violence spread to Gauteng with Johannesburg being particularly hard hit. The lethality of this second outbreak meant that April had the highest number of instability related deaths and the highest level of violence against civilians in 2015 (*see* Figure 4).

Xenophobic attitudes are prevalent in parts of South Africa. A survey of over 27,000 individuals in Gauteng, the epicentre of anti-foreigner violence during 2015 and 2008, finding that 35% of respondents believed that all foreigners should be sent home (**SAPA, 14 August 2015**). However, during the 2008 violence local community leaders allegedly capitalised on anti-foreigner sentiment to shore up local support and enhance their chances of being elected to lucrative local government positions (**Landau and Misago, 2009**).
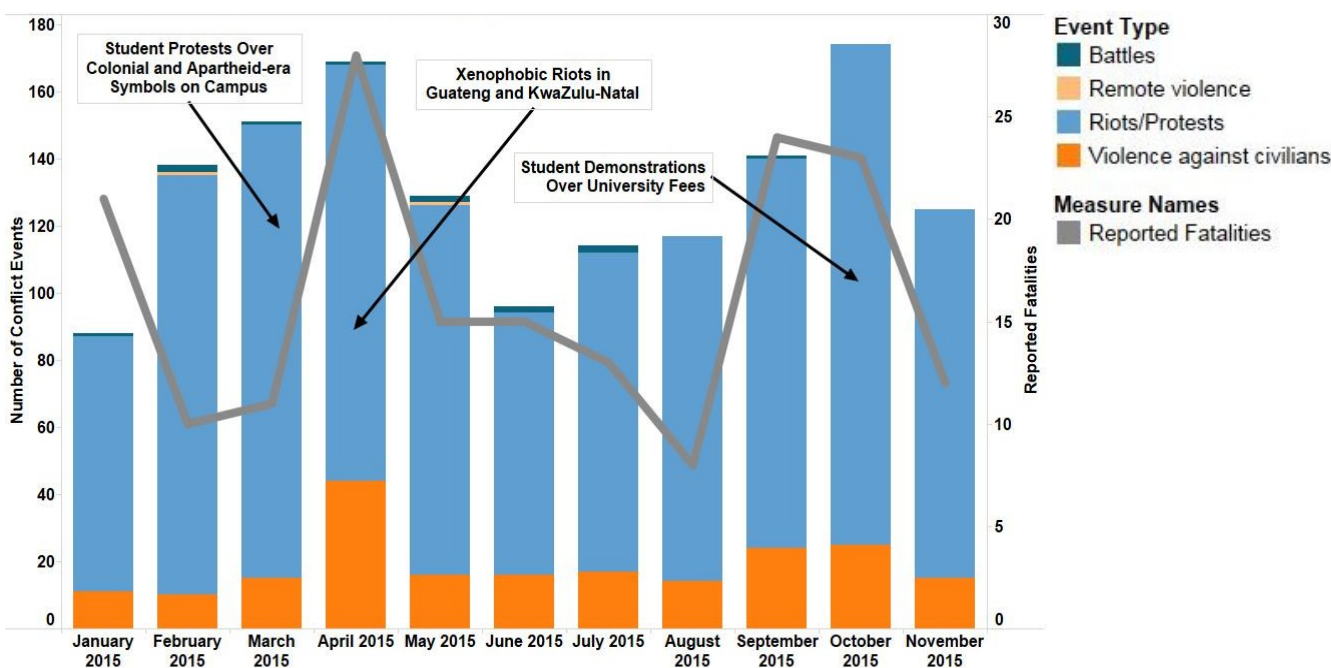

Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in South Africa, from January - November 2015.

South Africa

In the aftermath of the violence, the government launched Operation Feila. Nominally an operation to fight crime, it has resulted in the repatriation of over 15,000 undocumented migrants leading to accusations of state-sponsored xenophobia (**Maromo, 7 September 2015**). However, South Africa only suffered from minor outbreaks of xenophobic violence after April. It is unclear whether this is due to Operation Feila or due to other factors such as an exodus of foreign-nationals from violence hotspots.

October was the most active unstable month of 2015. This is due to nation-wide demonstrations by students over increasing tuition fees. The recent demonstrations were sparked after some universities announced that they were increasing their fees by 10%, double the rate of inflation.

Actor

■ State Forces
■ Rebel Forces
■ Political Militias
■ Ethnic/Communal Militias
■ Rioters
■ Protesters
■ Civilians
■ Private/External Forces

Figure 5: Percentage of Conflict Events by Actor in South Africa, from 2008 - 2015.

The issue was compounded by the fact that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme announced that it lacked the funds to provide assistance to all qualifying students (**Hall, 29 October 2015**).

Of the main upheavals in South Africa, the nationwide demonstrations over university funding garnered the most conciliatory reaction from the government. The ruling ANC vocally condemned the violence of the xenophobic riots and later clashed with the Rhodes Must Fall movement (**Bernardo, 31 August 2015**; **Agence France Presse, 15 April 2015**). However, the government attempted to negotiate with the fee demonstrators. Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande initially offered a 6% cap of fee increases and President Zuma eventually capitulated to the student's demands and announced that there would be no fee increases for the next year (**BBC News, 23 October 2015**).

The government's willingness to negotiate with students over fees may be due to how widespread the demonstrations were compared to the comparatively contained protests over transformation at the universities.

All three of these issues are likely to resurface during next year's municipal elections. The role local community leaders have played in facilitating xenophobic violence in the past raises the possibility that local party representatives may again encourage anti-foreigner violence to shore up support. Similarly, the economic and cultural issues faced by South African students are again likely to be key issues. The two major opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters, both claimed to support the anti-fee demonstrations. It may be the case that students again use riots or protests to remind the ANC of their numerical strength and their vital importance as a constituency in the forthcoming elections.

Over the past few years, there has been a relative decrease in peaceful protests in South Africa. Events involving peaceful protesters accounted for 40% of events in 2013, 32.9% of events in 2014 and 30% of events in 2015. This has been matched by a relative increase in events involving violent rioters, which have accounted for 25.3%, 28.7% and 36.4% of events in 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively (*see* Figure 5). This shows that violent demonstration is becoming a more acceptable means to vocalise political discontent. Given the importance of the municipal elections and the virulence of the main political events in 2015, violent demonstration may become even more prevalent and widespread next year.
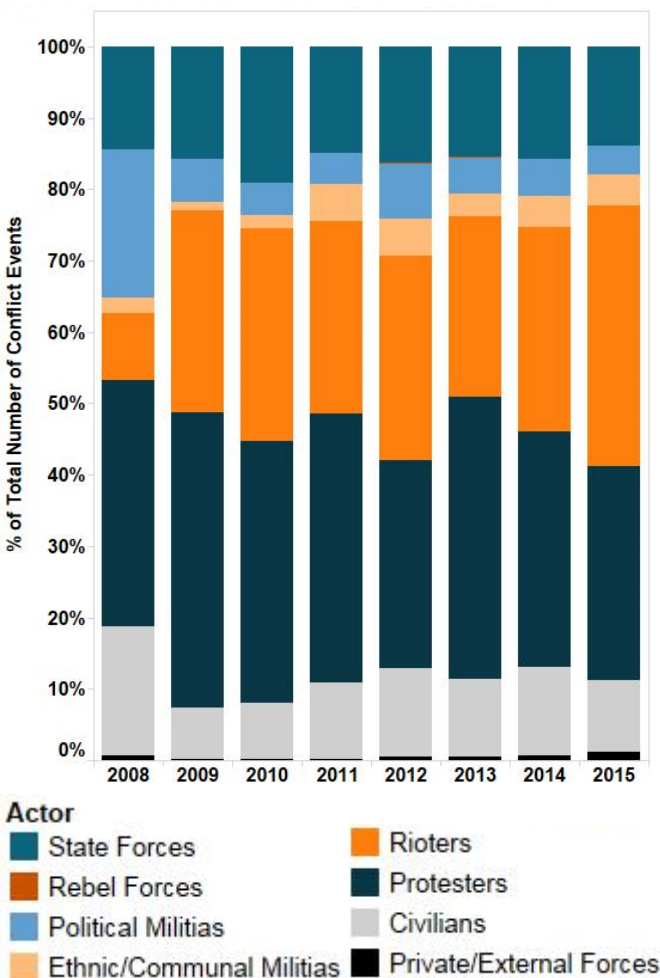
South Sudan and Sudan

In 2015, both Sudan and South Sudan experimented with peace talks and peace agreements with their respective opposition groups, with varying effects on conflict events in each country. Despite stalled talks and ceasefires in Sudan, the number of conflict events in the country decreased in the second half of 2015 (*see* Figure 6). In late November, an African Union mediation team announced the suspension of a tenth round of peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). Talks also stalled between the government, the Justice and Equality Movement, and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Minnawi Faction. Regardless, a drop in military and pro-government militia activity is responsible for the overall decrease in conflict events. Such actors were 83 percent less active in November compared to January (*see* Figure 6). Government militia activity peaked in January, as Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 'cleansed' villages and water resources throughout North Darfur. Military activity was also prevalent at the start of the year, as the Sudanese Air Force carried out bombing raids in villages in South Darfur and South Kordofan. Military, RSF and pro-government militias continued to be the most dominant actors in Sudan until mid-2015 (*see* Figure 6).

In April, the International Crisis Group predicted that the military's continued reliance on militias would lead to increased communal violence, particularly in Darfur (**International Crisis Group, 22 April 2015**). Since July, ethnic and communal violence has indeed increased with

39 conflict events in October and November (*see* Figure 6). This represents a delayed effect of RSF attacks on civilians throughout 2014 and 2015, which forced Darfuri farmers to flee to El Salam camp. The South Darfur authorities then distributed farmlands from the Rizaygat tribe to Abala camel herders (**Radio Dabanga, 1 December 2015**). Over the past two months, Abala tribesmen have whipped farmers and torched homes in numerous villages in North Darfur to prevent displaced farmers from reclaiming their lands. Ethnic violence has also occurred between Salamat and Misseriya militias in Central Darfur, resulting in seven fatalities in October.

Despite an increase in ethnic and communal violence, Sudan has experienced a decrease in rebel fighting as the year draws to a close. This is partly due to a decline in conflict events involving SPLM-N, active predominantly in the southern states of Kordofan and Blue Nile. SPLM-N was involved in only two battles in November compared to ten in June (*see* Figure 7). However, early December brought reports of troop movement and a replenishment of vehicles and ammunition to military bases in Kurmuk in Blue Nile (**Radio Dabanga, 1 December 2015**). SPLM-N forces are also likely taking advantage of the lull in fighting to rearm and replenish food supplies. SPLM-N activity peaked in April during presidential elections that saw Omar al-Bashir reelected with less than half of registered voters going to the polls (*see* Figure 6). The opposition group shelled villages, polling stations and military bases in South Kordofan during the elections, killing 80 people.
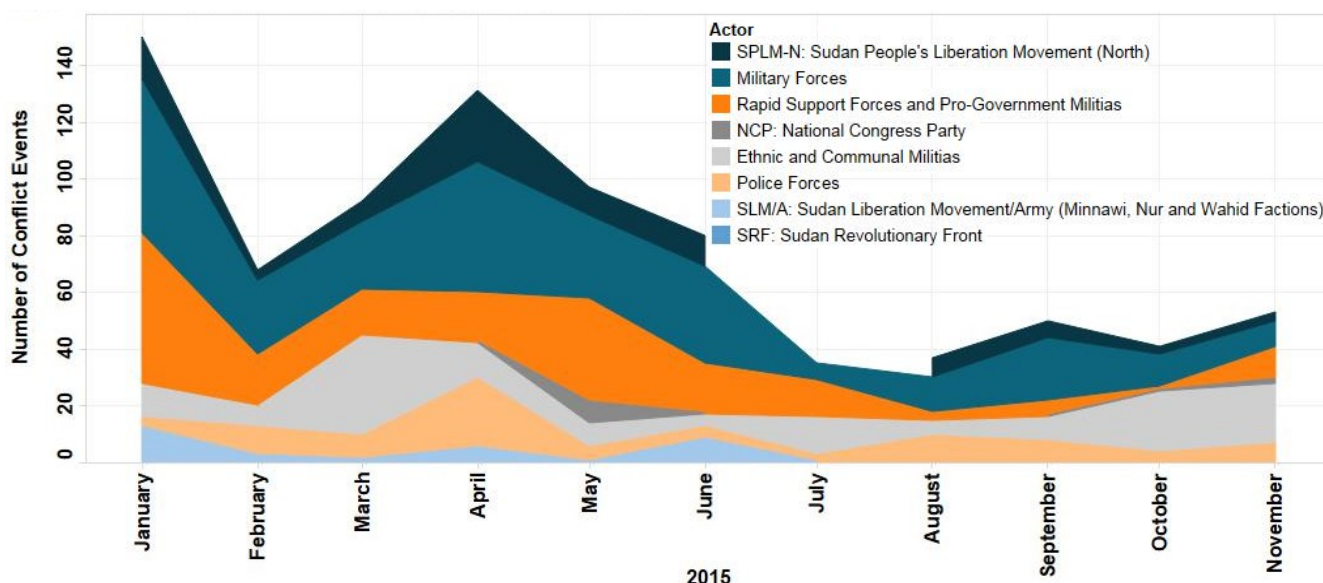

Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Sudan, January - November 2015.

South Sudan and Sudan

A complete cessation of hostilities between the military and all rebel groups seems far off, as multiple parties feel excluded from the negotiating process. Three rebel groups in Darfur recently demanded to join peace talks in Addis Ababa: Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Second Revolution, New Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement, and Sudan Liberation Movement for Justice (**Sudan Tribune, 1 December 2015**). All three groups want a distinct peace process to negotiate the Darfur conflict separately from other national issues. Adding to tensions between progovernment groups and Darfuri groups is October's small but troublesome reemergence of violence against Darfuri university students. On 13 October, students of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), backed by National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), attacked Darfuri students with machetes and guns during a protest at Holy Koran University in Omdurman. Similar violence erupted in late April, when 150 NCP students attacked a Darfur Students' Association meeting at Sharg el Nil University in Khartoum. At the height of such violence in May, NCP and NISS injured or detained at least 70 people on various campuses and abducted eight students from the University of Dongola (**Radio Dabanga, 19 May 2015**). Such violence brings fears of a new forum for ethnic cleansing where members of Darfuri tribes not only face threats and acts of violence at home, but also in urban cities throughout the country.

On 15 December 2015, South Sudan will enter its third year of civil war. Despite the longevity of the conflict, November 2015 saw the lowest number of conflict events (57) since February 2015 (*see* Figure 8). This decrease may be a product of the government's decision earlier in the year to postpone June's scheduled elections in the interest of ongoing peace negotiations; parliament since extended President Salva Kiir's term until 2017 (**Reuters, 14 February 2015**). On 26 August, the government and former Vice President Riek Machar's Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement-In Opposition (SPLA/M-IO) signed a peace agreement (**Al Jazeera, 27 August 2015**). In the days between the signing and the implementation of a ceasefire, clashes briefly escalated between SPLA/M-IO and military forces in the oil-rich states of Unity and Upper Nile bordering Sudan. Throughout the year, as control over northeastern cities of Malakal and Nyal changed hands multiple times, SPLA/M-IO activity also stretched into western and southern areas of the country (*see* Figure 7). In November, SPLA/M-IO battles occurred throughout Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western Equatoria and Eastern Equatoria, as the military attacked rebel camps in Magwi and Opari.
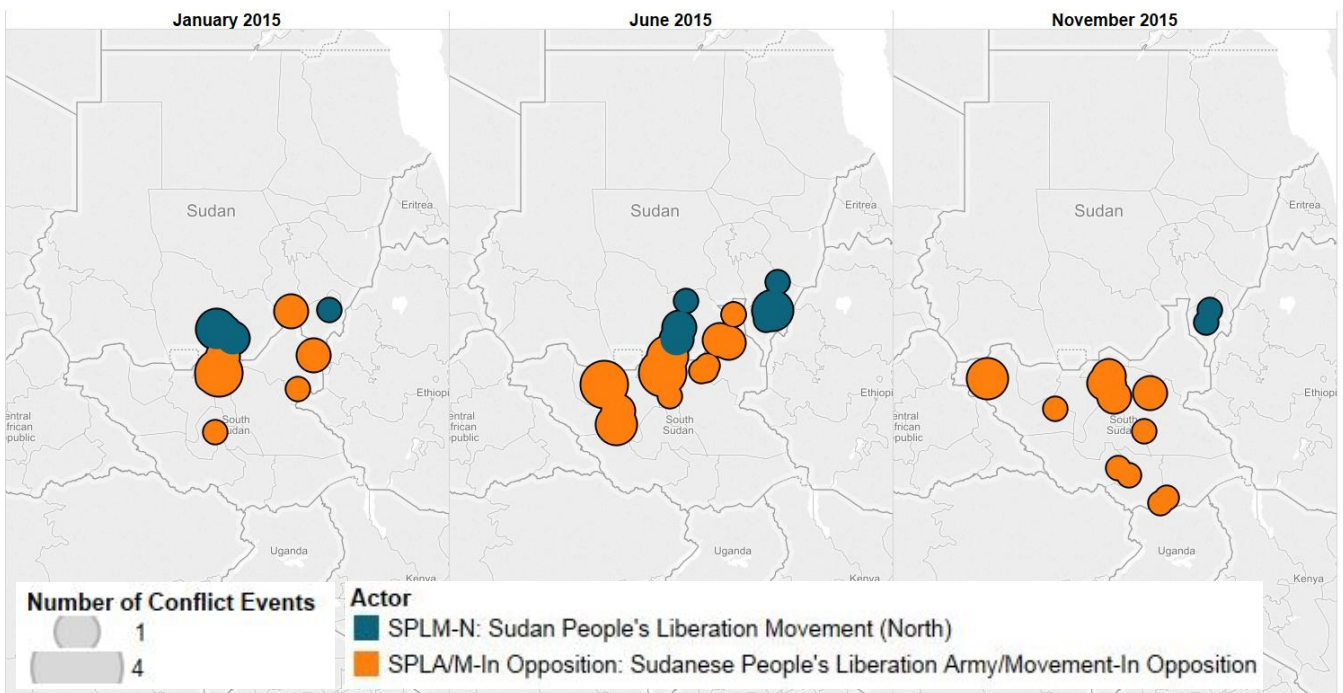

Figure 7: Battles Involving SPLM-N and SPLA/M-In Opposition in Sudan and South Sudan, in January, June and November 2015.

South Sudan and Sudan

The first month of the conflict is one of only three months (*see* April 2014 and July 2015) in which incidences of violence against civilians caused more fatalities than did battles (December 2013 reported 2,108 fatalities from violence against civilians) (*see* Figure 8). However, civilian casualties still occur on battlegrounds in South Sudan. Clashes in Adok and Thonyor villages on 29 August resulted in the deaths of 56 civilians from the Nuer ethnic group. Rebels claim that soldiers raped women in Mayendit, Koch and Leer. Tensions between soldiers and local citizens also escalated earlier in the year in Mundri, when heavily armed Dinka herders moved their cattle onto Western Equatoria farmland (**Al Jazeera, 21 November 2015**). The move sparked back-and-forth revenge clashes between soldiers siding with the Dinka herders and local groups protecting their lands. Continuing tensions in the area could inhibit the implementation of a peace agreement, as many armed youths do not want to disarm and receive amnesty promised by the government: "Many refuse to [disarm], demanding that Dinka elements of the army they hold responsible for killing civilians be replaced by local forces" (**Al Jazeera, 21 November 2015**).

Another hurdle to implementing the recently signed peace deal will be the outcome of a unilateral presidential order – approved by parliament – to divide South Sudan's ten existing states into 28 states. The proposed divisions are largely ethnic-based, for instance, separating Dinka and Nuer tribes in Upper Nile State. SPLA/M-IO has called on international organisations, such as the United Nations, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and Troika, to reverse the decree. Machar's spokesperson James Gatdet Dak contends that a transitional government must address the designation of new states through the creation of a new constitution (**Sudan Tribune, 26 November 2015**). The controversial order has already led to the formation of new rebel groups. In protest of the 28-states plan, military defectors of the Shilluk ethnic group formed the Tiger Faction New Forces (TFNF). In Eastern Equatoria, the South Sudan Armed Forces (SSAF), led by Anthony Ongwaja and consisting predominantly of Latuka ethnic group members, say that the government "has lost [its] historical vision for the people" (**Sudan Tribune, 5 December 2015**). The rapid formation of new and splintered groups adds to the already complex array of rebel factions, defections and mergers that are sure to complicate the implementation of South Sudan's existing peace agreement.
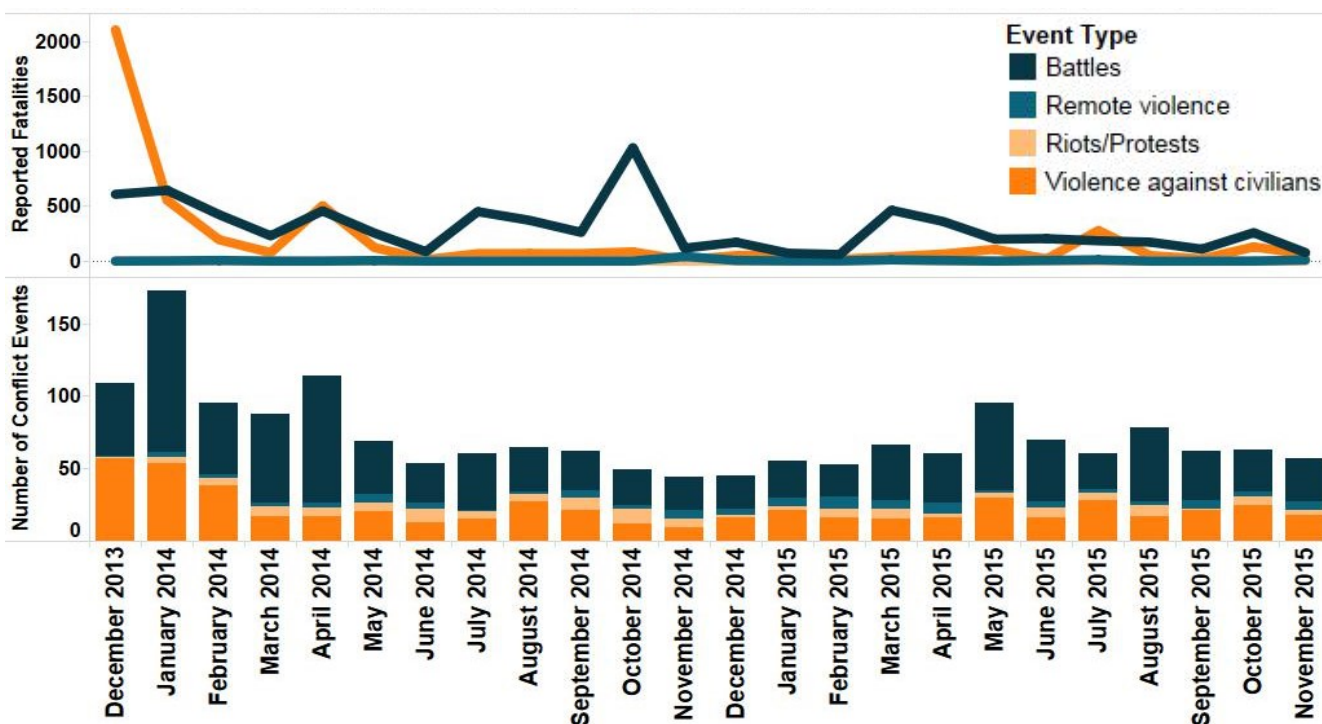

Figure 8: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities During South Sudan Civil War, 15 December, 2013 - November 2015.

Tunisia

In 2015, Tunisia has seen a substantial increase in conflict activity across the country, as conflict events and reported fatalities reached their highest levels since the 2010-2011 uprisings. Twelve months after the parliamentary and presidential elections that marked the end of the democratic transition, the Tunisian government grapples with widespread socio-economic malaise and an escalation of Islamist violence on its territory.

Figure 9 shows the evolution of conflict patterns throughout 2015, highlighting some of the key developments witnessed over the year. On the one hand, riots and protests account for the vast majority of reported events and saw the largest increase in both absolute and relative terms compared to 2014, reflecting the growing discontent in Tunisian society. On the other hand, whilst organised violence diminished as a proportion of total conflict events, the rise in the number of reported fatalities points to an ongoing escalation of violence. Additionally, as Islamist militias intensified their activity on Tunisian territory, the number of civilian fatalities has increased by four times in 2015.

The two armed assaults on Bardo National Museum and

on a tourist resort in Sousse, and the recent suicide attack on board of a bus of the Presidential Security Guard in central Tunis, suggest that Islamist militias have significantly scaled up their tactics. While in previous years armed Islamists mainly targeted secular politicians and engaged in clashes with state forces in the country's west, violence against foreign nationals has been instrumental in undermining the country's profitable tourism industry and gaining wider resonance worldwide.

These events reflect the different strategies pursued by Islamist militias in Tunisia. The dissolution of the former Salafi organisation Ansar Al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) in 2013 led to the emergence of a number of small militant groups and cells throughout the country (**Libération, 18 March 2015**). In western Tunisia, the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade has established a "pocket of resistance" in the remote and mountainous areas near the Algerian border. An offshoot of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI), the group has engaged in several clashes with the army and in sporadic raids on civilian population, while controlling smuggling routes across the Algerian border (**International Crisis Group, 21 October 2014**). However, members of the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade claimed responsibility for the raid on
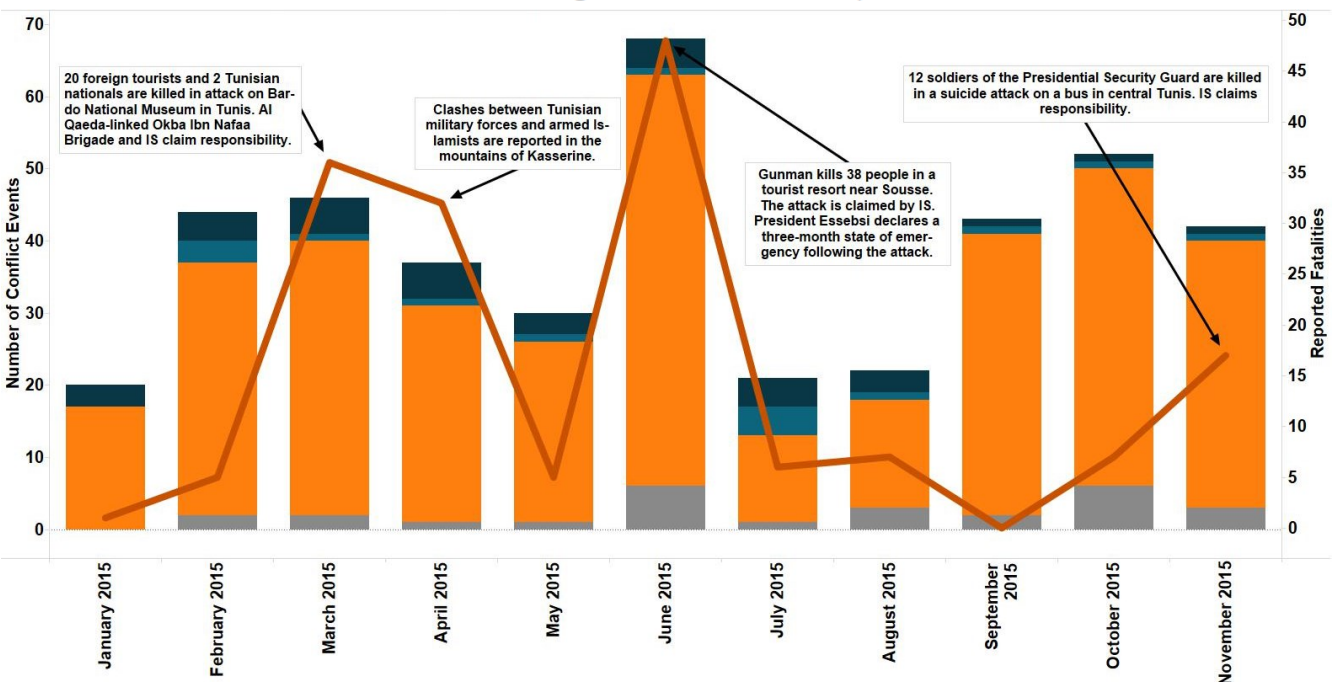
Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Tunisia, from January - November 2015.

Tunisia

Bardo national museum, suggesting either a change in the group's strategies or the emergence of a splinter sympathetic towards the Islamic State (IS) organisation.

IS has not yet established a permanent base in the country. While thousands of young Tunisian fighters have joined the Islamist ranks in the Syrian civil war, IS is believed to have sponsored the attacks against foreign tourists earlier this year. According to intelligence reports, some of the gunmen who carried out the murders in Tunis and Sousse had received military training in Islamist camps in Libya (**The Guardian, 30 June 2015**; **Radio France Internationale, 26 November 2015**). At the core of IS' strategy is the belief that derailing the democratisation process and provoking a security clampdown would further alienate Tunisia's youth and promote radicalisation.

The unprecedented sequence of attacks against civilians

Figure 10: Number of Riots and Protests by Actor Type and Location in Tunisia, from January - 5 December 2015.

and armed forces prompted the government's immediate response. Following the June attack in Sousse, state authorities introduced a three-month state of emergency along with a series of draconian measures, including the dismissal of around twenty imams across the country. The state of emergency, lifted in early October, resulted in a considerably diminished conflict activity (*see* Figure 9). However, these exceptional measures met widespread resistance and generated protests across the country. In Sfax, demonstrations against the dismissal of the imam in the city's *Grande Mosquée* disrupted the Friday prayer for several weeks. In the country's south, the closure of the Libyan border provoked popular resentment among the population in Medenine and Tataouine, where the local economy relies heavily on cross-border smuggling. Similarly, in August, the violent repression of teachers' protests in Sidi Bouzid sparked a wave of unrest in several provinces (**ACLED Trends Report, September 2015**).

The escalation of violence witnessed in 2015 revealed the structural weakness of Tunisia's democratic institutions. On the one hand, the existence of major flaws in the security apparatus has led the government to rely frequently on emergency laws (**International Crisis Group, 23 July 2015**; **Agence Tunis Afrique Presse, 25 November 2015**). On the other hand, the increasing insecurity has unveiled the weak outreach of state institutions in the peripheral western provinces. A striking example is the recent killing of a Kasserine-born teenage shepherd accused of spying for the government, which disclosed the state of neglect of these areas to public opinion and fostered frustration among local populations. The higher incidence of violent demonstrations recorded in south-western Tunisia (*see* Figure 10) also points to the widespread discontent with the current socio-economic situation.

As many observers have noted, these security challenges require measures other than repression alone (**Le Monde, 2 December 2015**). Tunisia's authorities need to concentrate their efforts into reducing the distance between institutions and citizens, promoting a human-rights-based security sector reform and addressing the country's socio-economic disparities. However, the recent divisions within the ruling party Nidaa Tounes, as well as within the coalition government, are unlikely to defuse social and political tensions and promote the formulation of cohesive and comprehensive security policies in the short term (**Jeune Afrique, 30 November 2015**). Thus failing to provide an adequate response may eventually risk undermining domestic stability and the country's democratic institutions.
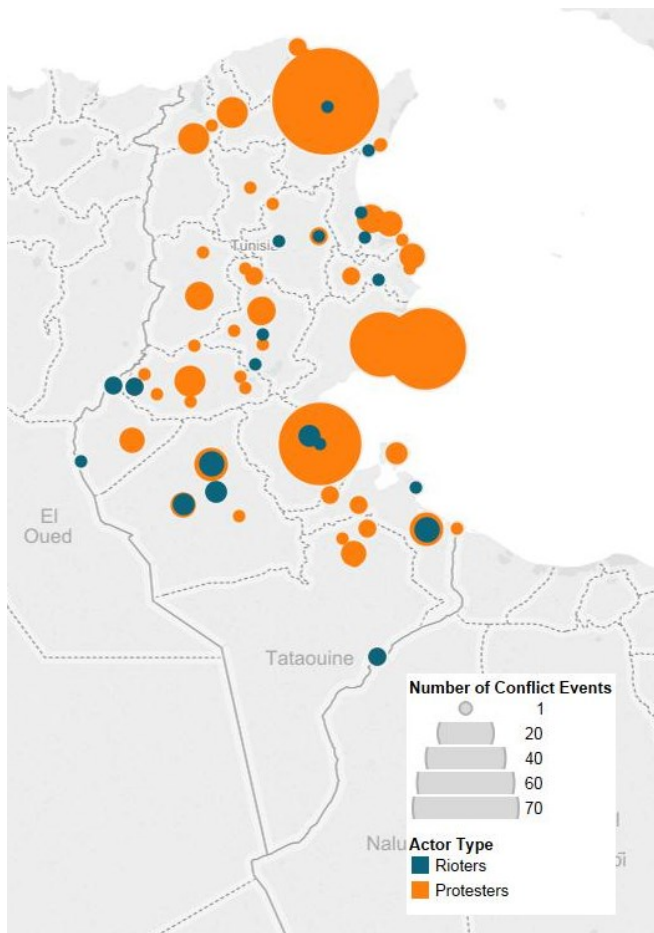
Special Focus Topic: Trends and Unexpected Developments in Africa 2015

A look back at political conflict across the African continent this past year yields a number of trends and unexpected developments. Leaders have sought to extend constitutional term limits to remain in power – leading to demonstrations and conflict within states. Relatedly, coups d'état – or attempts thereof – have occurred, in large part as a response to leaders who have sought to remain in power. And refugees continue to be an issue on the continent and on a global scale.

Term Limit Extensions

While numerous African countries with constitutional term limits have contemplated the removal of these limits in the past two decades (**African Leadership Centre, 2015**), this past year has seen a number of these attempts play out (**Mail and Guardian, 18 July 2015**). Many confronted with backlash. In April, President Nkurunziza of Burundi announced his bid for a third term as president, despite the constitution explicitly stating that a president can serve only two terms (**BBC, 25 April 2015**). This move was met with hundreds of protests and much opposition (**The Guardian, 26 April 2015**). Elections have since been held (though were disputed, and boycotted by opposition groups), and Nkurunziza remains president (**Al Jazeera, 25 July 2015**). Opposition however ensues and has been met with much violence. While riots and protests dominated political conflict in Burundi in the months following

April, political violence has since shifted to battles between the police and opposition groups wielding weapons as well as instances of violence against civilians; unsurprisingly, this shift in conflict dynamics has also been accompanied by a higher rate of reported fatalities (**ACLED Crisis Blog, 8 December 2015**). In recent months, many activists and human rights leaders have been targeted, and a crackdown on media has hindered much of the ability to receive timely reports of the violence on the ground (*see* **ACLED Crisis Blog, 1 December 2015**). Figure 11 depicts local-level conflict in Burundi, using both media reports as well as relying on crowd-sourced information to gain a clearer picture of what is occurring on the ground.

Other leaders have sought extensions to their terms as well. In Rwanda, the effort met with almost no opposition – 99% of Rwandan lawmakers voted for changes to the constitution to allow President Kagame to extend his 15 years in power (**Mail and Guardian Africa, 14 July 2015**). Yet, in the Republic of Congo, there was significant resistance. In September, President Nguesso of the Congo announced that a constitutional referendum would take place in order to allow for him to seek re-election (**Daily Nation, 6 October 2015**). In response, October became one of the most violent months in the Congo in over a decade (*see* **ACLED Crisis Blog, 5 November 2015**). Figure 12 depicts trends in conflict in Congo-Brazzaville since
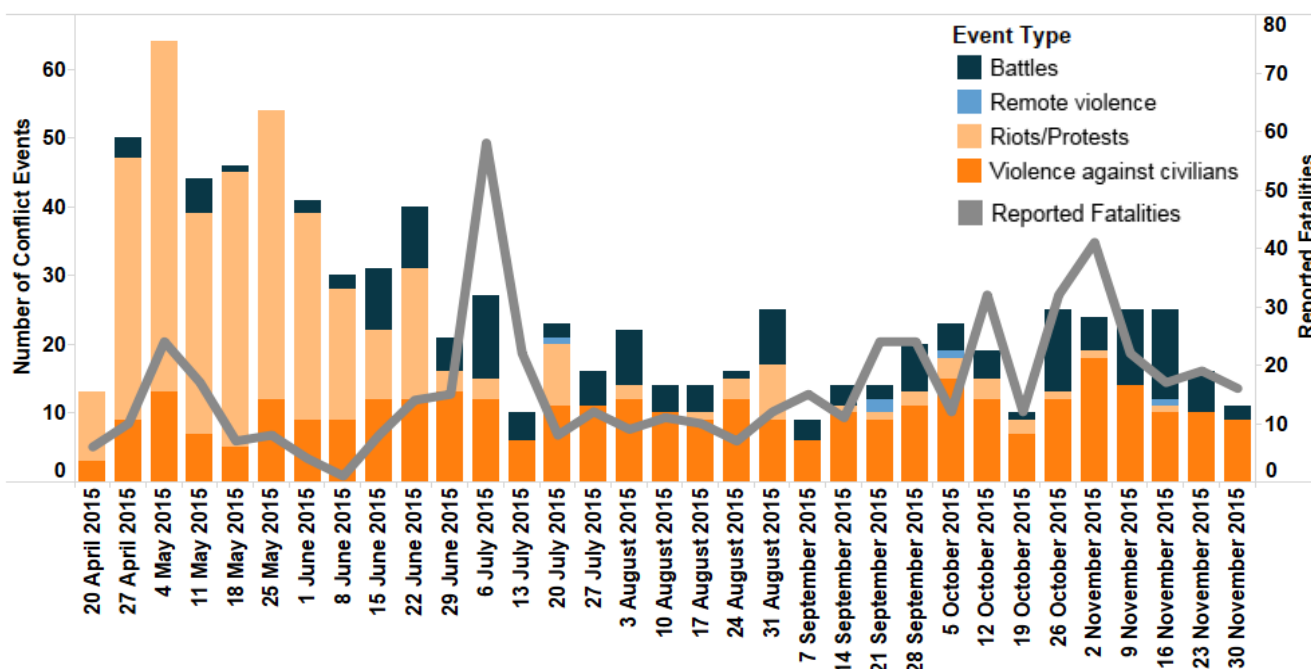

Figure 11: Local Conflict Data Surrounding Recent Unrest in Burundi, from 26 April - 5 December 2015.   11

Special Focus Topic: Trends and Unexpected Developments in Africa 2015

2002.

Whether President Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will step down at the end of his second term this month, or whether he will seek to alter the constitution like so many of his African peers in order to extend his time in power (**Foreign Policy, 28 July 2015**), is still to be seen. His attempts at delaying the upcoming elections, however, raise worry (**Allaire and Titeca, 3 December 2015**).

Coups d'Etat

Relatedly, coups d'état have been attempted, especially in response to efforts at extending presidential term limits. In May, General Niyombare led an attempted military coup in Burundi in opposition to the president's seeking an additional term in office (**BBC, 13 May 2015**). The attempt was subsequently foiled (**CNN, 19 May 2015**), and has ultimately exacerbated government crackdown in response to opposition to Nkurunziza's bid (**BBC, 16 May 2015**).

Late last year, then-President Compaoré of Burkina Faso sought to alter the constitution in order to extend his already 27-year rule (**Opalo, 28 October 2014**); Compaoré became president in 1987 after leading a successful coup d'état during which then-President Sankara was killed. Unsurprisingly, Compaoré's attempts at extending his time in office were met with opposition, demonstrations, and violence, including the parliament building being set on fire (**Brookings, 30 October 2014**). As a result, a transitional government came into power in November 2014.

In September 2015, shortly before elections were set to occur, the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP), an elite unit within the Burkinabé army, led by General Diendéré, staged a coup to dissolve this transitional government, holding the transitional president and prime minister hostage (**ACLED Crisis Blog, 9 October 2015**). After a week in power, Diendéré stepped aside, and transitional-President Kafando was reinstated. Some argue that "the proximate cause for the upheaval … [was] presidential power and term limits [as] Mr. Diendéré is a close ally of the former president, Blaise Compaoré," who sought to extend his term limit in late 2014 (**The Economist, 18 September 2015**). The close relationship between Diendéré and Compaoré was further highlighted earlier this week with Diendéré being charged with complicity in the killing of ex-President Sankara in 1987 during the coup that resulted in Compaoré's becoming president (**Associated Press, 6, December 2015**). More recently, President Kaboré has suc-

ceeded transitional-President Kafando in office; he was elected late last month as the country's first new president in decades (**Al Jazeera, 29 November 2015**).

Refugee Crises

Refugees continue to be a pressing issue across the continent. The UNHCR announced earlier this year that continued conflict in South Sudan has pushed the numbers of refugee and internally displaced people (IDPs) ever higher (**UNHCR, 7 July 2015**), with reportedly over 2.2 million displaced people (**CNN, 29 October 2015**). The civil war in South Sudan began in December 2013, pitting the opposition forces of former Vice President Machar against President Kiir's government forces. Despite numerous peace talks and negotiations – as well as international mediation attempts and a number of failed ceasefire agreements – the conflict has continued. Mass graves, rape and sexual violence, as well as forced cannibalism are among the atrocities reported as a result of the crisis (**Al Jazeera, 28 October 2015**). Figure 13 depicts this ongoing conflict since December 2013. While there have been reports that the influx of South Sudanese refugees to Ethiopia has declined (**UNHCR, 16 November 2015**), President Kiir states that South Sudan is struggling to resettle thousands of refugees and IDPs (**Reuters, 18 November 2015**).
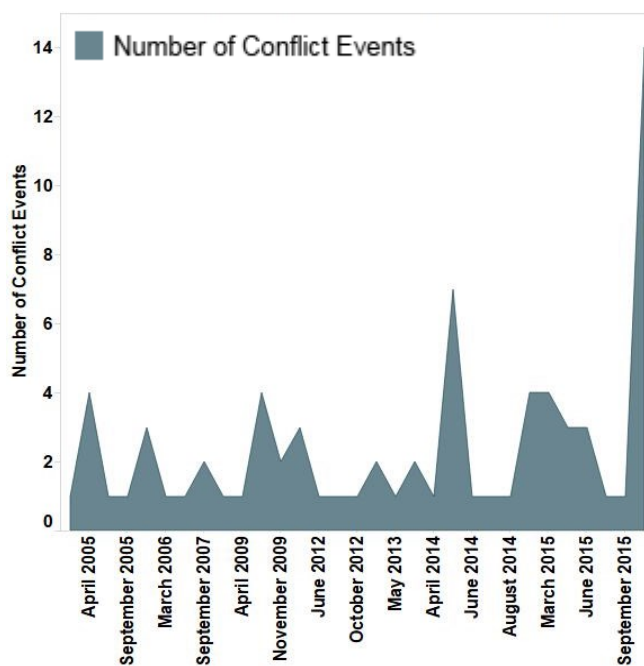

Figure 12: Number of Conflict Events in Republic of Congo, from 2002 - 2015.

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The refugee crisis has spanned beyond African borders as well. While the largest groups seeking refuge in Europe this year, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean, have been Syrians and Afghans, the third largest group has been Eritreans (**Amnesty International, 2 December 2015**). "Tens of thousands of Eritreans have arrived at Europe's shores in recent years seeking asylum" (**Council on Foreign Relations, 11 November 2015**). Eritrea's refugee population totals to about half a million people, with approximately 5,000 people leaving the country each month (**Council on Foreign Relations, 11 November 2015**). For a country of only about 4.5 million people, this number is especially large, making Eritrea "one of the world's fastest-emptying nations" (**Wall Street Journal, 20 October 2015**).

Eritrea is accused of being a secretive dictatorship. There is no current independent media in Eritrea and a complete lack of freedom of the press, resulting in Eritrea topping the list of most censored countries (**Committee to Protect Journalists, 10 April 2015**). There is neither a functioning legislature nor any civil society organizations, resulting in a "dismal human rights situation" (**Human Rights Watch,**

2015). The UN has accused the government of extrajudicial executions and torture amongst other human rights abuses (**The Guardian, 8 June 2015**).

Many (especially young adults) are seeking asylum outside of Eritrea in order to flee national service. While officials claim that conscription would be limited to 18 months, "national service continues to be indefinite, often lasting for decades. Conscripts include boys and girls as young as 16 as well as the elderly and conscription often amounts to forced labour" (**Amnesty International, 1 December 2015**). Eritrea claims it has "no other choice" but to continue with the conscriptions "given the threat from long-standing enemy Ethiopia" (**Agence France Presse, 2 December 2015**).

As 2015 comes to a close, it remains unseen if and how these crises will see resolution or if these trends will continue in the coming year, though given the scale and nature of many of these crises, they are likely to continue. Despite the unexpected nature of some of these developments, the occurrence of similar trends elsewhere on the continent is telling of how similar institutions and mechanisms can yield analogous results across countries.
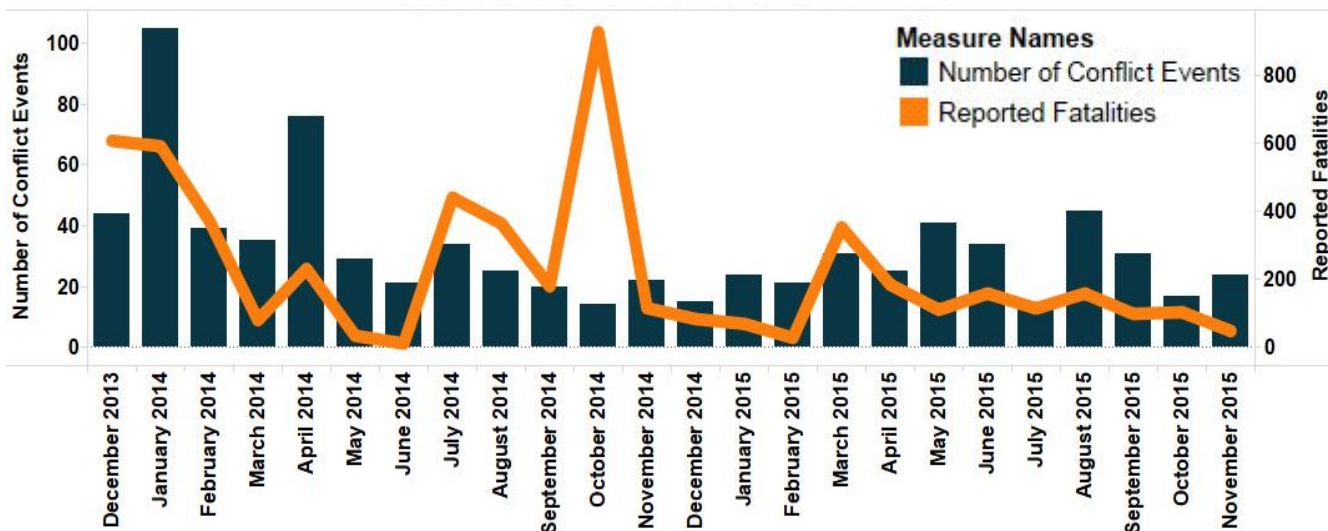

Figure 13: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in South Sudan, from December 2015 - November 2015.

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**.