



Introduction:

The Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset (ACLED) consists of over 100,000 individual coded events informed by a range of sources including newspapers, online journals and reports by humanitarian organisations.

ACLED is part of a growing number of research projects in social science to use the current benefits of global online media and information to disaggregate and track social phenomena. Through monitoring reports from multiple sources in multiple countries, datasets such as ACLED can move beyond the highly aggregated binary approach of classifying political violence seen in earlier studies and breakdown conflicts into a series of spatially and temporally discrete events (Gleditsch et al., 2013).

However, the adoption of media monitoring brings new challenges. Datasets relying on external sources are subject to the biases of their sources. Sources can introduce bias through both selective reporting and omission, posing a serious risk to the validity of the data. A detailed investigation and analysis of ACLED data is an important means through which to test the robustness of data against these biases and identify potential areas requiring improvement.

Previous research has identified several key areas of bias in reporting, which may affect conflict event data. Publications have been found to prioritise events that will engage their audience and fit with their political beliefs (Bocquier and Maupeau, 2005). Multiple studies have also found that media publications exhibit a geographical bias with international publications focussing on events close to well-connected urban areas and smaller-scale regional publications exhibiting a strong bias towards covering local events (Woolley, 2000; Barranco and Wisler, 1999; Kalyvas, 2004). Studies have also analysed the practice of self-censorship by reporters, often in response to pressure from the government (Campagna, 1999).

This working paper will investigate the sources used by ACLED, review the issues identified in conflict monitoring literature and examine whether any of these issues previously identified affect ACLED.

The paper is in three sections:

Section 1 investigates whether certain types and scale of publication exhibit a bias towards reporting on particular types of event. This section also compares the sources reporting on two conflicts, Zimbabwe in 2008 and Libya in 2011. These conflicts differ markedly in terms of dominant event type and conflict actors. Crucially, the two conflicts differ in how well they fit the global news agenda.

Section 2 looks at issues of urban bias in conflict monitoring and examines whether such issues are present within ACLED.

Section 3 examines whether the particular form of a state's government (democracy, autocracy, anocracy, etc.) affects the composition of sources reporting on events within that country. This section also looks at whether state repression of the media has a direct impact on the

number of events recorded within that country and examines the methods by which state obstruction can enforce limitations of conflict monitoring.

The paper's analysis finds that different scales and different types of publications show a propensity to cover different types of events but that the individual biases of publications, or types of publication, are overcome by the use of a diverse range of sources in ACLED. This paper further finds that ACLED does not exhibit a bias for coding events that occur within urban areas. Lastly, the analysis finds that do-

mestic restrictions on press freedoms within the states under consideration do not negatively impact the number of events coded for that particular country. However, an in-depth investigation of the case of Algeria shows that the validity of ACLED data can be negatively affected if states purposely limit or distort the information available to journalists and investigators.

The paper concludes that ACLED is robust against many of weaknesses identified in previous studies on the issues of monitoring and cataloguing social phenomena, but argues that, in light of the evidence of Algeria, consistent in-depth review of past conflicts is necessary to ensure the data's validity.

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Classification and Terminology

To conduct the analysis in this paper, sources in the dataset were classified by scale and type.

Below is a brief description of the different classifications.

Type	Description
Analysis	Publications written by specialists aimed at informing policy or furthering academic knowledge. Examples include <i>Africa Confidential</i> , <i>IHS Global Insight</i> and <i>Africa Research Bulletin</i> .
Civil Society	Publications written by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), humanitarian agencies and locally based civil society organisations such as trade unions, political parties and religious institutions. Examples include reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Peace Net Kenya.
Governmental/ Intergovernmental	Publications written by national governments or supra-national governing bodies such as the African Union and United Nations.
Local Source Project	ACLED is connected with several local organisations that provide information directly to ACLED staff. Particular names will not be mentioned to protect anonymity.
Media	This category encompasses newspapers, magazines and television transcripts.
Other	This category is used when the publication used to inform the coding of an event does not match any of the categories identified above. Examples include <i>Lloyds Information Casualty Report</i> .
Multiple	This category is used when any single event is informed by multiple sources which fit into more than one of the categories identified above.

Table I: Type of Source

Scale	Description
International	Publications written by organisations that are present outside of Africa and have a global editorial focus. Examples include <i>Reuters</i> , <i>New York Times</i> and publications by the United Nations.
Regional	Publications which have an editorial focus on Africa or a particular region within the African continent (e.g. the Maghreb). Examples include <i>Magharebia</i> and <i>Africa News Bulletin</i> .
National	Publications which are domestic to a particular African country and have a national editorial focus. Examples include <i>The Daily Monitor</i> of Uganda and the <i>Algerian Press Service</i> .
Local	Publications which are focussed on reporting on events within a particular sub-region of a country. Examples include <i>Radio Voice of Mudug</i> and <i>Radio Dabanga</i> which focus on events within the Mudug region of Somalia and the Darfur region of Sudan respectively.
Aggregator	These publications primarily host content from other publications. For example <i>BBC Monitoring</i> .
Multiple	This category is used when any single event is informed by multiple sources which fit into more than one of the categories identified above.

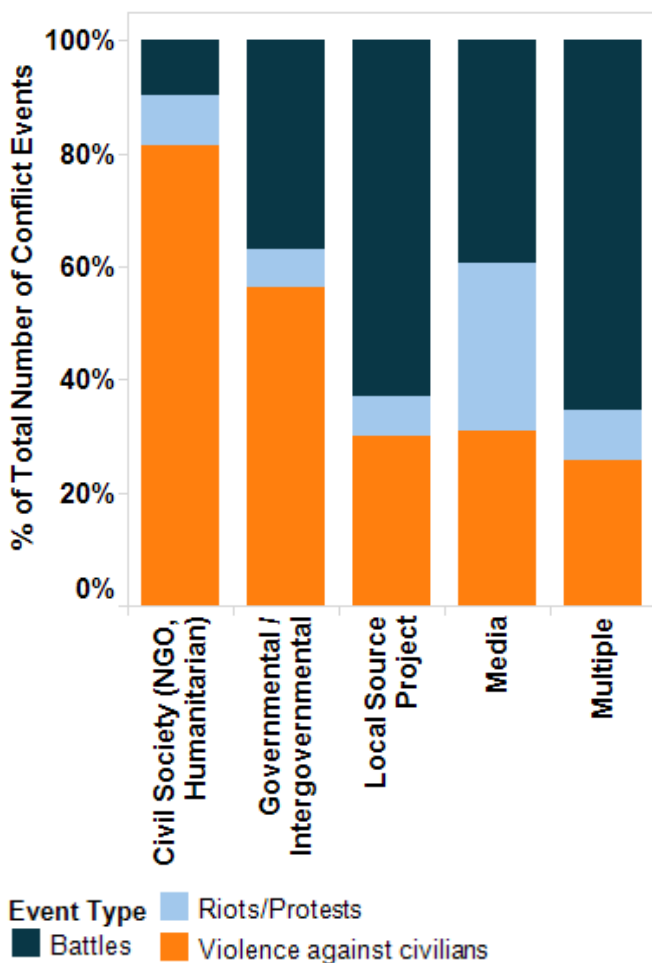
Table II: Scale of Source

Discrepancies in Reporting by Source, Scale and Type

All publications are subject to editorial concerns over content and whether the content that is included will interest the publication’s desired audience. This means that the events reported by different scales and types of publication are subject to potential selection bias (Earl et al., 2004). Selection bias refers to a systematic preference for reporting on a certain type of event, often defined by location, actors and motivations. For example, newspapers in Kenya prioritise reporting of violent events involving more than two deaths, while assigning minimal column space to deaths resulting from vigilante violence, reflecting the Kenyan public’s tolerance of vigilante behaviour and intolerance of criminals (Bocquier and Maupeau, 2005).

The high degree of geographic bias found by Barranco and Wisler (1999) in the Zurich-based newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) is a function of selection bias. Barranco and Wisler found that NZZ underreported events within Geneva, a city which is geographically distant and linguistically distinct from Zurich (*ibid.*). The geographical and cultural distance means that NZZ probably has a small readership in Geneva, and so devotes its limited resources to covering events that concern its larger readership in Zurich.

If the ACLED database is overly reliant on a particular type of source that exhibits a strong selection bias for particular types of event or events within a specific location, ACLED runs the risk of underreporting events that do not conform to those biases, limiting its validity and utility as a means to study conflict dynamics.



Event Type Bias by Source Type

Selection bias may affect the nature and type of violence reported by sources. Figure 1 shows that different types of publication exhibit a preference for reporting different types of event. 75.3% of all events coded from ‘Civil society’ publications concern violence against civilians. This bias is unsurprising given that the mission statements of civil society groups and NGOs often include addressing humanitarian emergencies and issues of social justice. Violence against civilians also constitutes over half of all events coded from governmental and intergovernmental sources. This bias is probably due to the fact that international bodies such as the United Nations and African Union function as enforcers of international law. As a result, international organisations have an editorial incentive to focus on transgressions of international law in political conflicts, such as the targeting of non-combatants.

More than half of the events reported by sources from the analysis, multiple and other categories are battles. ‘Analysis’ sources (not shown in Figure 1) include research journals and specialist publications aimed at informing policy. This editorial focus may give analysis sources a bias towards battles because the outcome of such events has a victor and loser, enabling speculation on future patterns of conflict and the capacity of the belligerents to engage in political violence.

74.4% of events coded using sources belonging to the ‘Other’ category (not shown in Figure 1) are battles. The dominant publication within the ‘Other’ category is the

Figure 1: Reporting of Event Types by Source Type, Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

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Lloyds Information Casualty Report, which reports on maritime security and accounts for 26% of events within the category. Events coded using ‘Media’ sources exhibit no clear pattern of preference for reporting on particular types of event, possibly because of the very broad range of sources contained within this single category. Violence against civilians, battles and riots/protests account for 28.6%, 36.4% and 27.1% respectively.

This lack of an obvious pattern of preference is advantageous as media sources are used to code over three-quarters (76.3%) of events within ACLED. This does not necessarily mean that media sources as a group are unbiased. It may be the case that violence against civilians occurs much more regularly than battles throughout Africa, in which case the relatively even ratio between differ-

ent types of events coded using media sources would be indicative of bias. However, because of the lack of data on unreported events, it is impossible to test the existence of this potential bias. Nevertheless, the lack of a clear pattern of preference may indicate a lack of bias.

62.5% of events coded by ‘Multiple’ types of sources are battles. A high proportion of battles may be coded using multiple sources because battles, as has already been shown, fit the editorial focus of a wide range of source types, excluding perhaps civil society reports.

Event Type Bias by Source Scale

Scale partially affects selection bias because international, national or local audiences are interested in different types of news and information, and these differences inform the editorial focus of publications.

Studies on the reporting of demonstrations by newspapers have found that local newspapers have a smaller bias towards large and violent protests than larger scale newspapers (Earl et al., 2004). Similarly, Figure 2 shows that national sources are more likely to report on riots/protests than international or aggregated sources. This is because a demonstration may have a direct impact on a localised readership but may be of no interest to a global audience.

International and aggregated sources primarily report on battles, which constitute 40.6% and 42.5% of reported events respectively. This may be due to the fact that battles, as a rule, include violence between two or more armed actors and violence intrinsically has news value (Barranco and Wisler, 1999). Furthermore, the outcome of a battle has the potential to alter future patterns of conflict and define which actor is territorially dominant. This information has news value: international sources were used to code almost half (47%) of battles in which there was an exchange of territory, as opposed to 34.6% of battles which did not result in one side gaining territory.

Local sources report only slightly more on battles (with 51.8% of the events reported by this source scale falling into this category) than international or aggregate sources. This result may be due to the fact that ACLED’s use of localised sources is primarily concentrated in countries with high levels of political violence, such as Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

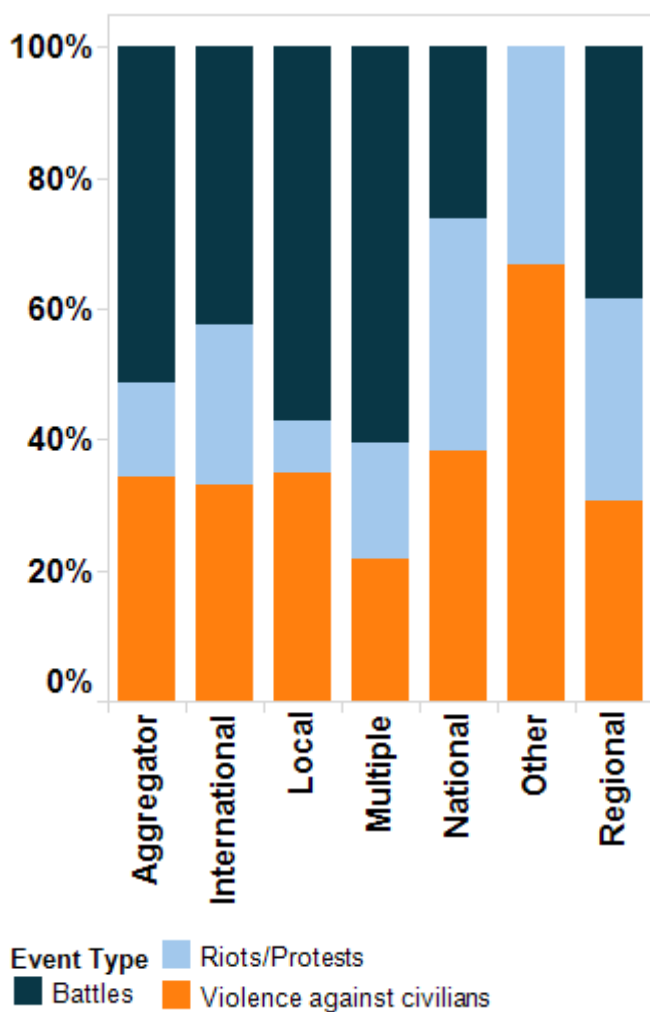
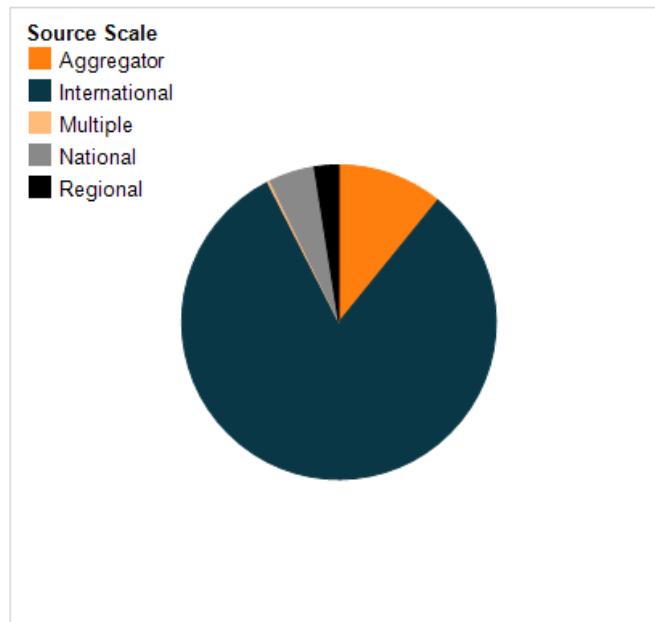
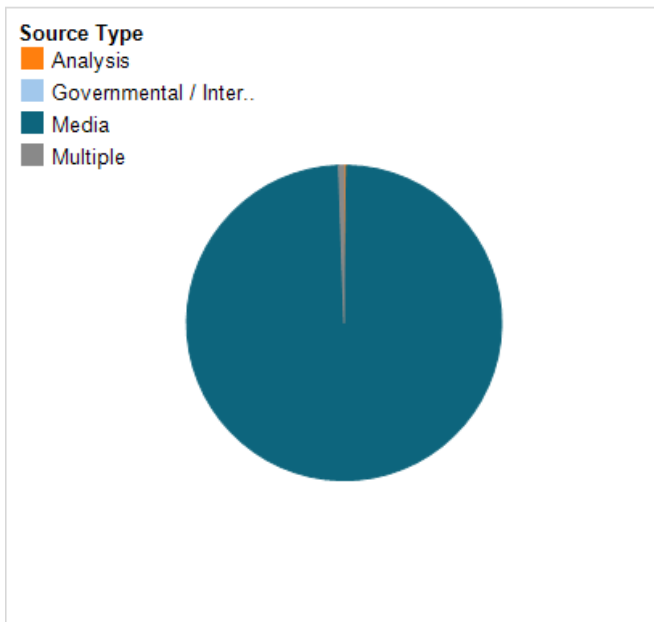


Figure 2: Reporting of Event Types by Source Scale, Africa, 1997 - August 2014.



Figures 3 & 4: Number of Event by Source Type (Left) and Source Scale (Right), Libya, 2011.

Comparisons between Reporting on Two Conflicts

Reporting bias across source type and scale can be illustrated by comparing two conflicts that differ both in the types of actors involved in the conflict and the types of violence employed by the actors. The two periods of conflict under comparison are the Libyan War of 2011, which toppled Gaddafi, and the violence which accompanied the 2008 Zimbabwean general elections.

The 2011 Libyan War primarily consisted of battles between armed pro- and anti-Gaddafi forces. Battles account for 72.7% of the events recorded during the time of study. In accordance with the international bias towards battles, international sources informed over 80% of the recorded events (see Figure 3 & 4). The media accounted for over 99% of the recorded events. The dominance of the international media is likely due to the period in which the war took place. The international press was focussed on the Arab Spring and the ousting of numerous long-standing North African and Middle Eastern autocrats. An armed uprising against one of Africa’s most enduring dictators fed into the international news issue-attention agenda (Downs, 1972).

In contrast, the violence that occurred during the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe primarily took the form of violence against civilians by government-backed militias. Violence against civilians accounts for 92.6% of events recorded during this period. As a result, NGO and civil society

sources informed 79.7% of the recorded events (Figure 5). The period is also noticeable for the high proportion (88%) of events recorded by national sources (see Figure 6). This is due to the presence of nationally focussed NGOs such as the Zimbabwe Peace Project and Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, in addition to reports by opposition parties trying to turn international attention to the repression they were suffering under the Mugabe regime.

It should also be noted, that in addition to the two conflicts differing in terms of the dominant type of political violence employed, the two countries differ in terms of dominant language. Many national Libyan publications are published in Arabic, albeit not exclusively. In contrast, the majority of Zimbabwean publications are in English. This difference may also explain the difference in the number of international and national publications used to monitor Libya in 2011 and Zimbabwe in 2008. Nevertheless, the difference in the source profile of these two conflicts illustrates the importance of having a diverse range of sources across different types and scales. The biases shown above by different sources prove that retaining a diverse portfolio of sources is critical to avoiding the underreporting of particular conflicts.

Previous studies on the use of media in monitoring social phenomena have argued that triangulation, the use of multiple sources when analysing conflicts and conflict events, reduces the impact of selection bias (Day et al.,

2014; Earl et al., 2004). The importance of triangulation relates to the role editorial focus and responsibility play in determining bias. Relying on a larger pool of media publications will reduce the chance of bias in a dataset. Each publication’s bias provides focus on a particular geographic area, actor or type of event, but the distorting effect these biases have on the overall dataset is reduced when a publication is part of a large pool of sources, each possessing different and contrasting biases.

The above analysis shows that diversification of the pool of sources, by title, type and scale, aids triangulation and undermines the negative effect of bias. While the Zimbabwean elections did gain coverage in the global media, the conflict is not as suited to appealing to the biases of the international media as the 2011 Libyan Civil War. Firstly, the conflict was highly localised with no transnational conflict actors.

Secondly, the violence resulted in very few conflict-related fatalities. Multiple studies have found that violence itself has ‘news value’, and that this news value is increased if the violence results in a high number of fatalities (Bocquier and Maupeau, 2005; Barranco and Wisler, 1999). Lastly, Mugabe had already gained notoriety during the controversial Zimbabwean land reforms, and accusations of electoral violence and rigging had accompanied the 2000 parliamentary elections (BBC News, 23 June 2000). These three factors would position the 2008 Zimbabwean elections lower in the ‘issue attention cycle’ than the Libyan conflict (Downs, 1972).

Furthermore, by 2011, the Libyan Civil War was just starting and provoked a ‘do something’ response from the media, whereas the 2008 Zimbabwean elections had entered a post-problem’ stage in the ‘issue-attention cycle’ and relied on specialist entities to monitor the situation rather than media interest (Downs, 1972). The use of a diverse range of source types and scales enables ACLED to monitor conflicts that have entered a post-problem stage which is no longer capturing the attention of the international media.

Urban Bias in Media Reporting

In addition to reporting bias determined by the source type and scale, previous studies of media monitoring have found that selectivity often results in a geographical bias, with publications focussing on events near their base of operations and editorial offices (Barranco and Wisler, 1999). Similarly, in global reporting, reporting may be limited to where there are wire offices and the infrastructure to send information effectively (Woolley, 2000). Both of these dynamics have the potential to introduce a strong ‘urban bias’ into conflict reporting.

Kalyvas (2004) argues that urban bias is inherent in conflict reporting because security concerns compel observers to cluster within the confines of the main cities. The difficulty of gaining access to non-urban conflict zones is compounded by the fact that access to these areas is often contingent on perceived loyalty to the incumbent or

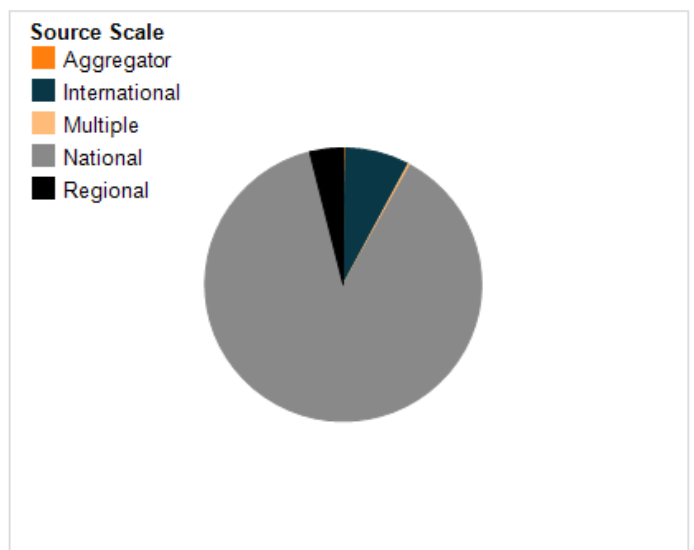
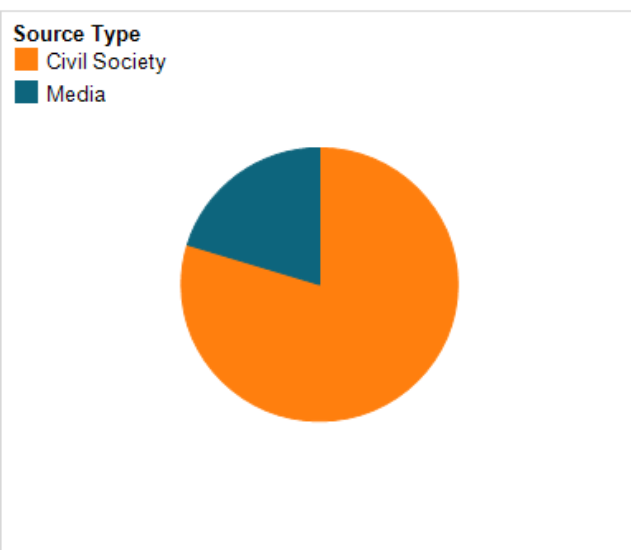


Figure 5 & 6: Number of Event by Source Type (Left) and Source Scale (Right), Zimbabwe, 2008.

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insurgent forces which control the territory (Kalyvas, 2004). Political violence in certain countries certainly exhibits a pattern of urban concentration: for example, 25.1% of all conflict events in Somalia took place within the capital, Mogadishu. By contrast, other conflicts appear to be primarily rural in nature, with over three quarters of events in Sudan (81.9%) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (76.7%) take place in non-urban locations.

In order to explore this relationship further, a review of ACLED events was conducted to determine if there is evidence of urban bias in the data, and whether urban bias affects specific scales and types of publication. This was done by comparing the data in the location and municipal location columns of each event to a GeoNames dataset of all urban areas with a population of 100,000 or over (Geonames, 2014) and coding matches with a 1 and non-matches with a 0. Events with a GeoPrecision code higher than 1 (indicating a greater degree of uncertainty as to their exact location) were excluded, ensuring that only events with exact locations were included in the analysis.

Figure 7 compares the percentage of urban and non-urban events reported by different types of publication. An unexpected finding is that NGO reports do not have a significantly higher proportion of non-urban events (59%) than media sources (59%), given that NGO reporters are often subject to different limitations on their operations than media actors for a number of reasons. NGO reports on political violence often take the form of interviews and in-depth investigations that take place after the conflict in

question - for example Human Rights Watch's post-hoc [report](#) on 2002 sectarian riots in Kaduna Nigeria (Tersakian, 2003) - meaning that NGO reporters should have easier access to the location of the conflict than journalists, who are usually compelled to report on the conflict as it is ongoing. The reduced security risk may also limit a government's ability to legitimately obstruct investigators from gaining access to the sites of conflict.

Reports published by the national government or international governmental organisations, such as the United Nations and African Union, have the highest percentage of non-urban events coded. This is probably due to the extra resources these organisations have at their disposal, such as armed escorts and guarded outposts in the middle of more rural conflict zones such as Eastern DRC and Darfur.

Figure 8 shows how different scales of publications compare on the proportion of urban and non-urban events reported. International, regional, national and local sources show little variation in the proportion of urban and non-urban events coded. Non-urban events make up 55.9% and 57.9% of the events coded by international and national sources respectively, while 62% of events coded by local sources take place in non-urban locations. This lack of variance could possibly reflect an interdependence between the different scales of publication, with international media relying on national publications for information and national sources procuring their information from local sources.

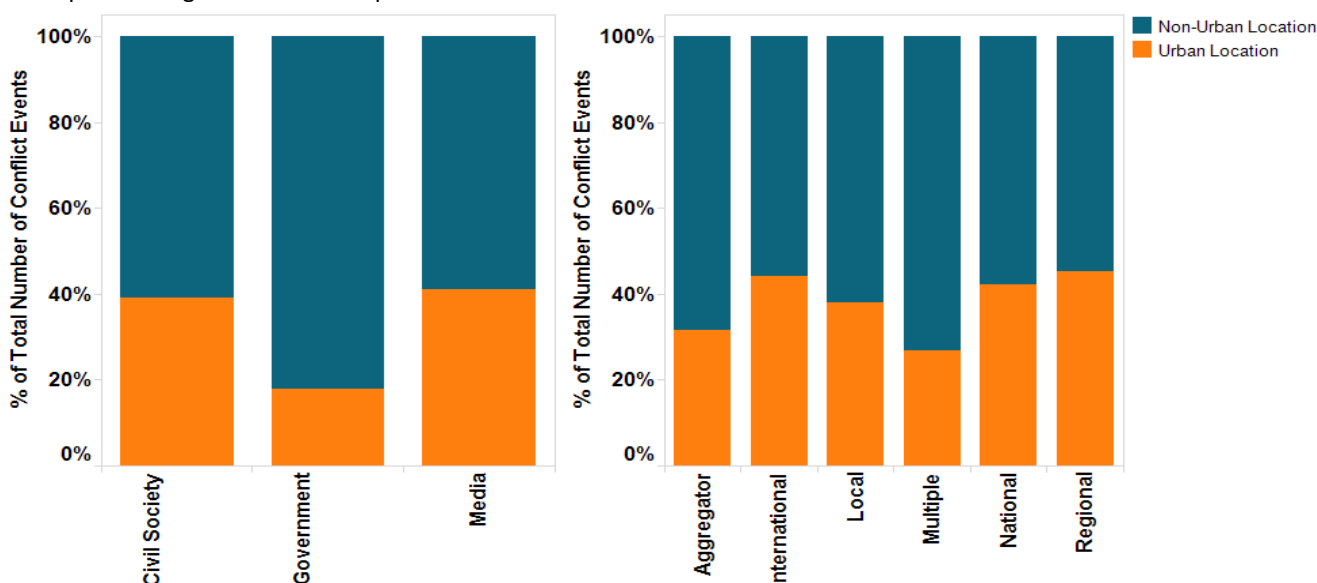


Figure 7 & 8: Urban Bias by Source Type (Left) and Scale (Right), Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

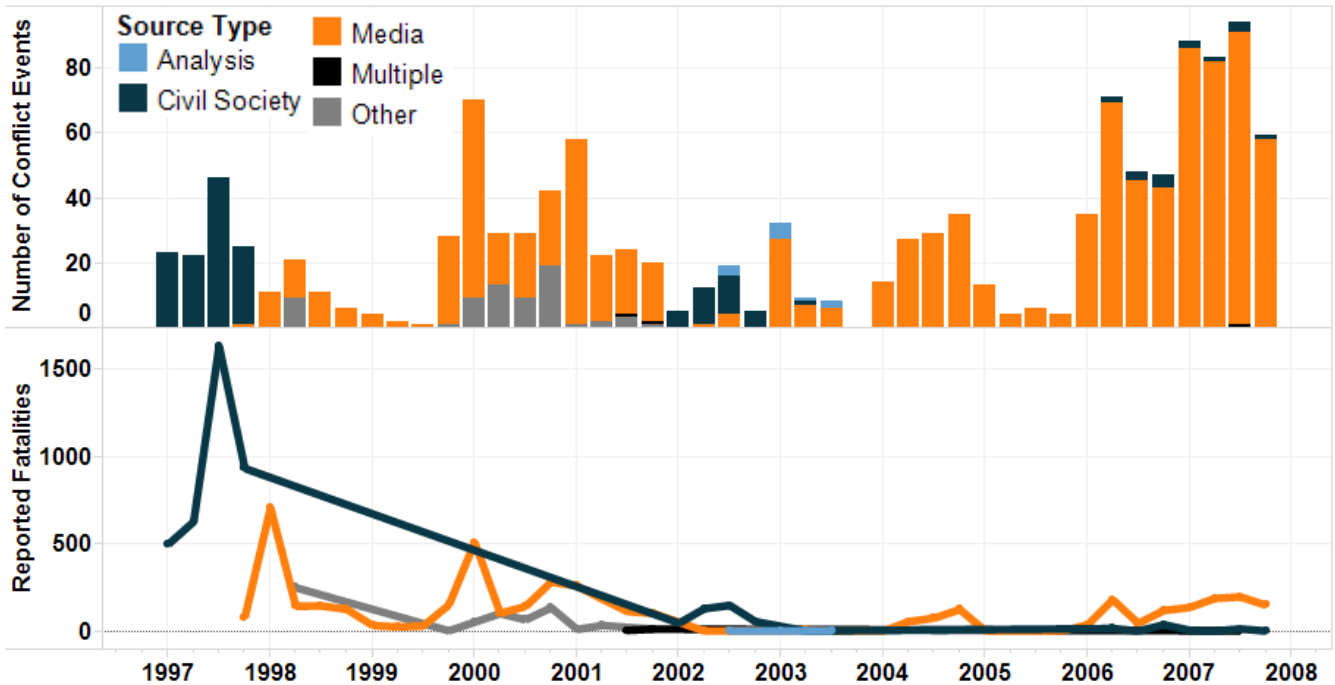


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Source Type, Algeria, 1997 - 2007.

Multiple sourced events show the highest percentage of non-urban events (73.2%). As noted above, studies evaluating the accuracy of data gathered from publication monitoring advocate the ‘triangulation’ of data using multiple sources to increase the accuracy and granularity of the data (Earl et al., 2004; Weidmann, 2013). Accessing multiple accounts of the same event is likely to lead to better information concerning the exact location. An alternative explanation might be that it is a case of reverse causation, where multiple sources are not needed to overcome urban bias, but are in fact required to locate peripheral non-urban locations.

Forms of Governance, Number of Reports and Composition of Sources

ACLED shows little evidence of the geographical biases identified in previous academic studies, yet is still subject to the limitations imposed upon its sources. Governments may purposely repress or limit the information available to NGOs, media outlets and academics to prevent state forces or policies from being portrayed in a negative light. Conflict and civil war increase the incentives for controlling information relating to political violence. Reports of human rights abuses by state forces or sympathetic actions by anti-government actors can sap public support

and reports on troop movements and counter-insurgency policies present security risks.

State Repression and Limitations on Conflict Monitoring

During the Algerian Civil War (1991-2002) the Algerian government established tight control over the reporting of the conflict and heavily repressed the local media in order to ensure all published reports conformed to the official government line on the conflict. The government established control of the paper supply and printing industry in order to gain leverage over the domestic press (Campagna, 1999). This leverage was used to force month-long closures of two leading dailies, *El Watan* and *Le Matin*. State control over the infrastructure necessary for media reporting incentivised editors to censor coverage of human rights abuses by state supported militias and the use of torture by state forces (*ibid.*).

The international press faced similar issues. International interest in the Algerian Civil War peaked during a series of massacres in the countryside surrounding Algiers in 1997. The government refused to allow an international investigation and foreign journalists who travelled to Algeria were subject to harassment by security officials (*ibid.*). There were also reports of officials providing journalists

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Figure 9 shows ACLED is largely dependent on civil society and NGO reports for coding events in the late 1990s in Algeria. The use of media sources increases from the early 2000s onwards. Campagna (1999) asserts that by 1999 journalists were better able to report with more freedom and criticise government policy, but still continued to be restricted by the threat of criminal prosecution. Furthermore, in spite of the war officially ending in 2002, Algeria saw more recorded conflict events (albeit with much lower numbers of fatalities) in 2007. The majority of these events were coded using media sources. This increase implies an easing of restrictions against press and that the earlier restrictions on reporting may have led to multiple conflict occurrences being clustered into a smaller number of recorded events.

Press Freedom, Polity Scores and Extent of Coverage

Does the example of Algeria indicate a larger trend of the effect of state repression on conflict monitoring? To assess the openness of a particular state, scores of political competitiveness (PARCOMP) from the Polity IV dataset were appended to each event by country and year

(Marshal and Jagers, 2014). PARCOMP classifies countries as repressed, suppressed, factional, transitional or competitive (Marshal, Gurr and Jagers, 2014). In addition to these classifications the Polity IV dataset also outlines whether a country is under foreign occupation or undergoing a period of anarchy in which no single actor holds executive power.

Figures 10 & 11 show that the number of recorded conflict events for politically repressed countries is far lower than for politically suppressed, factional or transitional states. This may reflect some of the issues highlighted by the Algerian case study, but there are other interacting factors affecting the outcome. First, the level of democratisation has been shown to have a non-linear interaction with levels of political violence, with complete democracies and autocracies exhibiting the lowest levels of conflict (Hegre et al., 2001).

Similarly, studies have found that the PARCOMP variable in the Polity Dataset is particularly useful as an independent variable in regression models geared towards predicting the onset of conflict (Goldstone et al. 2010). Goldstone et al (2010) found that factional regimes were 30 times more unstable than full autocracies, meaning that the discrepancies in the aggregate number of events

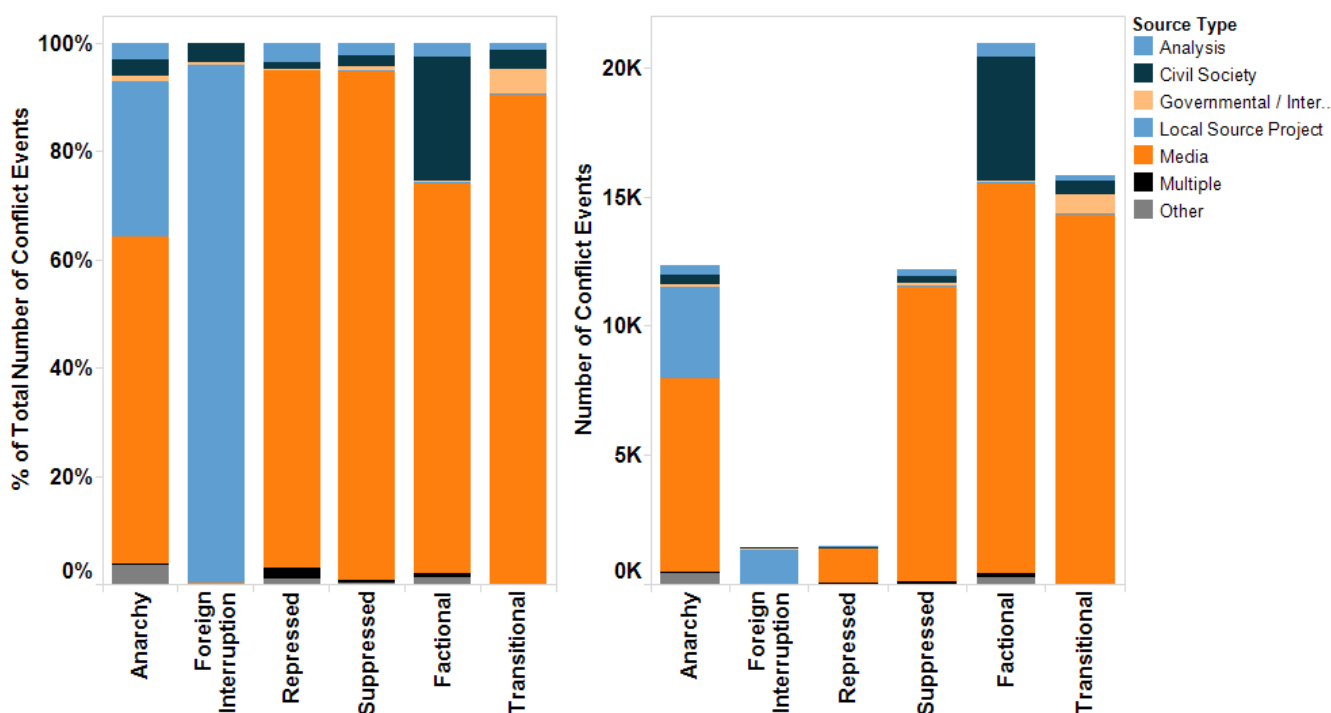


Figure 10 & 11: Conflict Events as Percentage (Left) and Total Count (Right) by Source Type and Polity Competition Score, Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

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shown in Figures 10 & 11 could be interpreted as indicative of a social phenomenon, rather than a distortion stemming from ACLED collection and coding methods.

To minimise issues of endogeneity, each country-year dyad in ACLED was merged with a corresponding 'Freedom of Press' score supplied by Freedom House (Freedom House, 2014a). Figure 14 shows a scatterplot of each country-year dyad against the number of recorded events. The relationship between repression and the number of recorded conflict events disappears when ACLED is merged with metrics that focus entirely on the repression of the press and media. Figure 15 shows that a clear relationship does not emerge even if the number of records is limited to national publications.

However, the issue of the government purposefully repressing reports of abuses by state or pro-state forces remains. Figure 16 shows the instances of violence against civilians, segmented by the actor type of the perpetrator, for Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan for 2013. Each of these countries had a high score for press repression, 68 for Egypt and 81 for Ethiopia and Sudan.

Yet for each of these countries, state forces perpetrate a significant portion of violence against civilians. In the case of Ethiopia, a country noted for its restrictions against the press, government forces are the primary perpetrator of violence against civilians (Freedom House, 2014b). In the case of Egypt and Sudan, government forces are the second most common perpetrator of violence against civilians. The above graphs show that while ACLED is not immune to the issues highlighted in the Algerian case, the data is robust against the potentially distorting factor of state repression.

Non-media based sources such as governmental or inter-governmental reports, NGO investigations and academic research will often report on prolonged periods of violence long after the incident in question.

This means that the writers will often not be subject to the limitations imposed upon journalists reporting on the event as it happens. ACLED regularly uses such sources to conduct in-depth reviews of past episodes of political violence in order to increase the accuracy of the data.

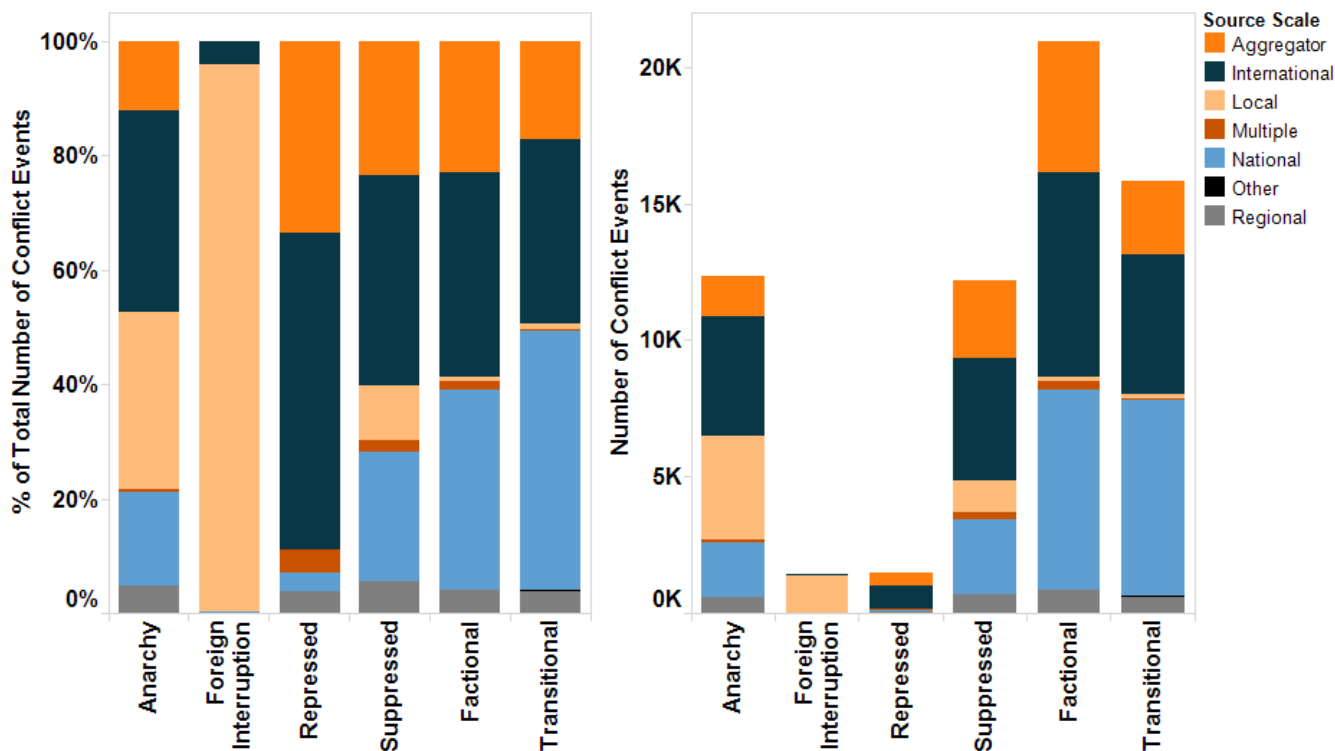


Figure 12 & 13: Conflict Events as Percentage (Left) and Total Count (Right) by Source Scale and Polity Competition Score, Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

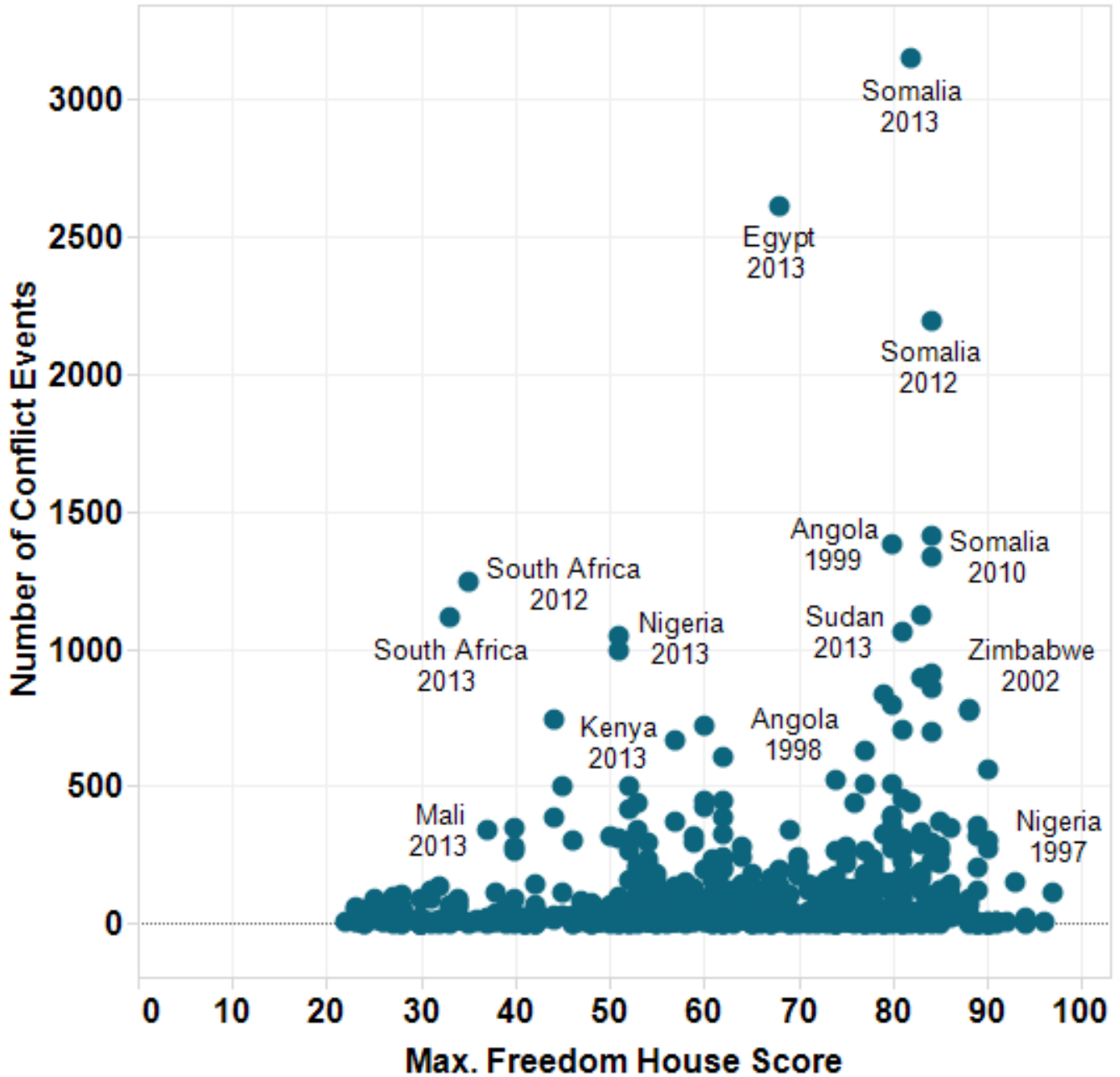


Figure 14: Country-Year Dyads by Number of Records and Freedom House Scores, Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

Polity Scores and Makeup of Sources

Variations in the PARCOMP score correspond to variances in the type and scale of sources used in the data (see Figures 10 - 13).

Repressed Countries

Politically repressed countries have the second lowest proportion of events coded using national sources (3.5%). Events are primarily reported by media coverage from the

international press or aggregators. This indicates either an absence of national media sources or the prevention of the national media from reporting on conflict events due to official censorship. The absence governmental/inter-governmental and civil society sources also suggests that governments in such countries severely limit the access of international organisations or NGOs to the locations of conflict. A potential reason for this is that the independence of these sources could undercut the government's

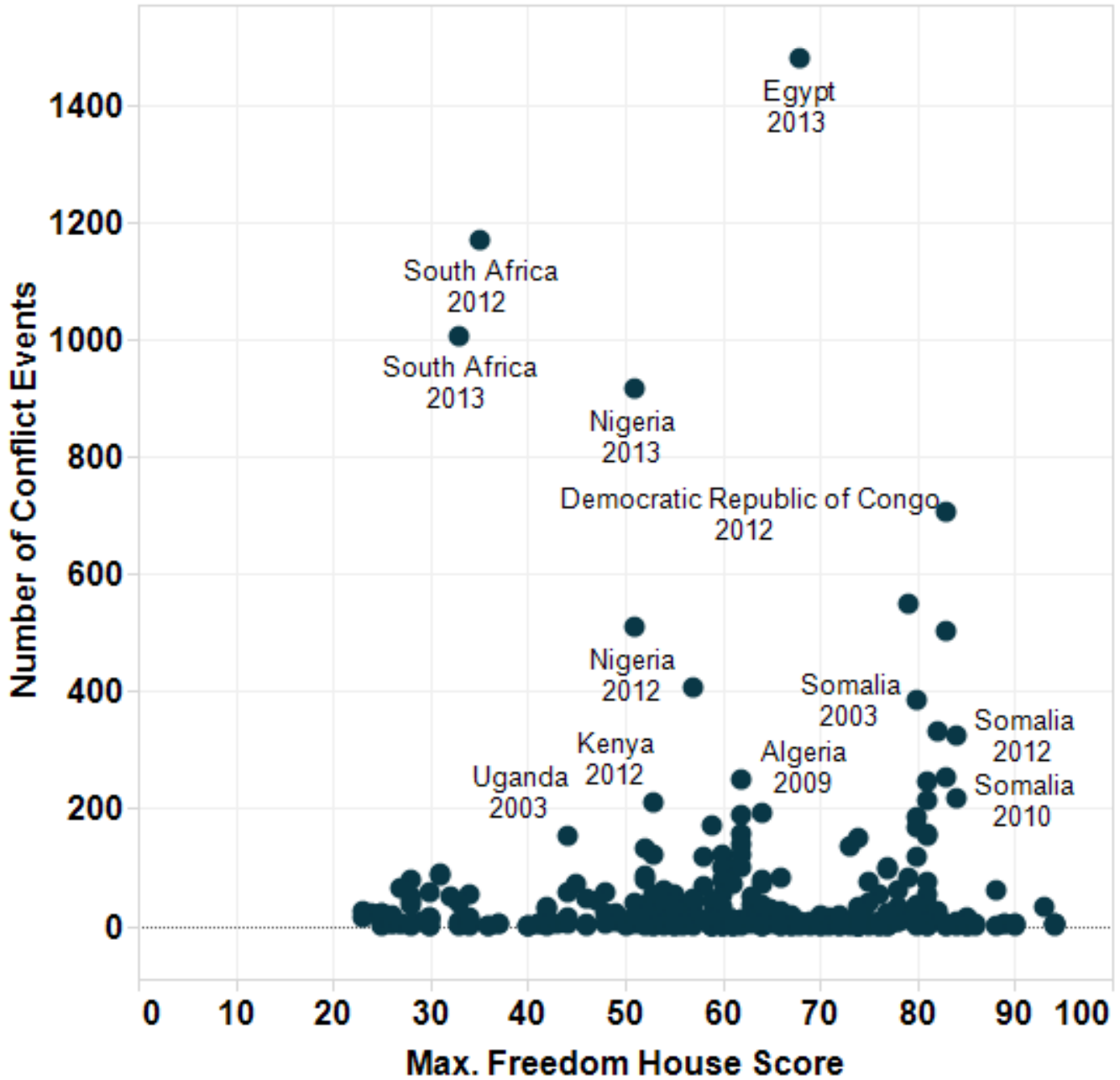


Figure 15: Country-Year Dyads by Number of Records and Freedom House Scores (Media), Africa, 1997 - August 2014.

line on issues such as security, political rights and state legitimacy.

Suppressed Countries

Suppressed countries have a substantially higher number of total events than repressed countries, as well as a wider variety of source scales. This finding seems to support the view that there is more conflict in countries that are neither fully fledged autocracies nor complete democra-

cies (Hegre et al., 2001). The increase in scale diversity could be reflective of the higher levels of autonomy granted to local and national publications. Nevertheless, coding of events within suppressed nations is still dominated by a reliance on media sources, again potentially indicating that international organisations and NGOs have limited access to these states.

Factional and Transitional

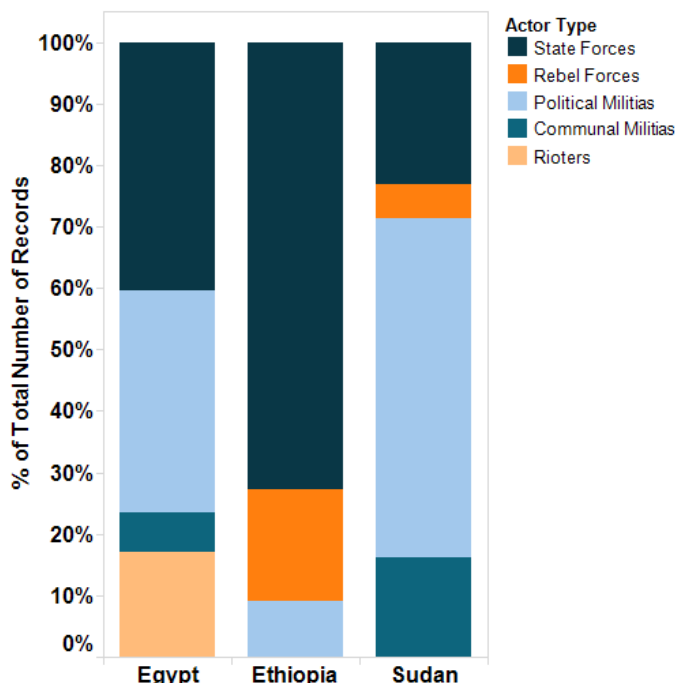


Figure 16: Violence against Civilians by Actor Type, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, 1997 - August 2014.

Factional and transitional countries have the highest number of events, in absolute and relative terms, coded by national sources, constituting 34.9% and 45.57% respectively. It is possible that this is because in a more competitive and open political environment, national information and media networks can be used as tools to leverage public opinion and gain political power.

Factional countries are defined by the presence of antagonistic political organisations - often defined by ethnic, religious or political affiliation - which push exclusive political agendas at the national level which fail to accommodate or compromise across identity boundaries (Marshal, Gurr and Jagers, 2014). For example, Zimbabwe would be an example of a factional state defined by political party affiliation.

Transitional states combine this form of governance with secular agendas. This diversity of publicly expressed opinion combined with lower levels of hegemonic state repression could explain why national sources inform a large percentage of coded events.

In spite of the dominance of national sources in transitional and factional countries, international and aggregated sources combined still inform a significant amount of coded events. This may be because the higher levels of volatility and conflict in these types of state, indicated by the high number of aggregate events, ensure that such states remain within the issue-attention cycle (Downs, 1972).

Factional countries have the highest number of events coded from civil society and NGO publications (22.8%). A reason for this may be that factional countries experience sufficient levels of political violence to attract humanitarian interest, while lacking the barriers to entry seen in other types of country, such as the government in repressed/suppressed countries and insecurity in anarchic states.

Anarchy and Foreign Intervention

ACLED's use of local sources is confined to countries undergoing anarchic periods or foreign occupation. The percentage of events coded using local sources was 95% for countries undergoing foreign occupation and 29% for countries categorized as being in a state of anarchy. The use of local sources and contacts enable ACLED to monitor conflict levels in nations where national information and media infrastructure may be disrupted. In particular, occupying forces may choose to exercise control over national publications and the information available to international sources to prevent the leaking of information that may turn national and international opinion against their occupation.

The use of local sources and networks enable ACLED to monitor conflict levels in nations where national information and media infrastructure may be disrupted.

Anarchic states differ from occupied countries in that the majority of events (60.6%) are reported by media sources. However, a relatively minor proportion of events are coded using national sources (16.3%) meaning that most events are coded by international media publications and aggregators. This dominance may again relate to the 'issue-attention cycle' (Downs, 1972). 'Failed states' have been described as incubators and exporters of terrorism,

a topic that has dominated the international news agenda (Rotberg, 2002).



Conclusion

The diversity of sources in the ACLED database allows the dataset to avoid most of the issues of bias identified by past studies on the difficulties of monitoring social phenomena. By grouping sources by type and scale, it was shown that different sources exhibit preferences for covering particular types of event. By using a variety of sources across a range of scales and types, ACLED prevents the biases of different publications from negatively impacting the data. The comparison of the source components in the monitoring of the 2008 Zimbabwe elections and 2011 Libyan Civil War demonstrates this process.

The issue of urban bias did not seem to affect ACLED. There was little differentiation in the reporting of urban and non-urban events across most source scales. A possible explanation for this similarity is that higher-scale sources, such as international publications, rely on information provided by local, national or regional sources.

Many of the studies cited which identified geographical and urban bias as an issue took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, before the large-scale adoption of the internet by print publications and the growth of online publications, while ACLED was first published in 2010. The growth of online sources has increased the access of journalists and content producers to national and local sources, enabling the interdependence postulated above.

The effect of various forms of governance did not seem to have a disruptive effect on the data. The discrepancies in the number of events recorded in repressive, suppressive, factional and transitional states mirrored patterns identified in previous studies on governance and political violence. A further investigation into press freedom and recorded events found that a restrictive press did not result in fewer reported events. This remained the case when the investigation was restricted to events coded by national media publications. Furthermore, the examples of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia show that ACLED coding is robust against the potential distortion of events by the government, even within states which heavily restrict the media.

However, the example of ACLED data on the Algerian Civil War shows that an obstructive government has the ability to distort the reporting of a conflict. In this specific example, the Algerian government managed to successfully hide any atrocities it may have engaged in or condoned to

the civil society groups and NGOs that reported on the conflict. Such a limitation is not unique to ACLED but applicable to any monitoring dataset that relies on secondary sources.

Materials recording covered up events are likely to be published long after the conflict ended, often through reconciliation programmes, post-hoc reports by humanitarian organisations and international governing bodies. ACLED's current practice of targeted review is a procedure in which certain periods and locations are revisited and recoded or

updated using materials that have become available after the event itself, usually in-depth investigations by NGOs and intergovernmental bodies. This is an important step to rectifying such issues and taking advantage of retrospective material.

The diversity of sources in the ACLED database allows the dataset to avoid most of the issues of bias identified by past studies on the difficulties of monitoring social phenomena.



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Further information, maps, data, publications and sources can be found at www.acleddata.com or info.africa@acleddata.com and @ACLEDinfo