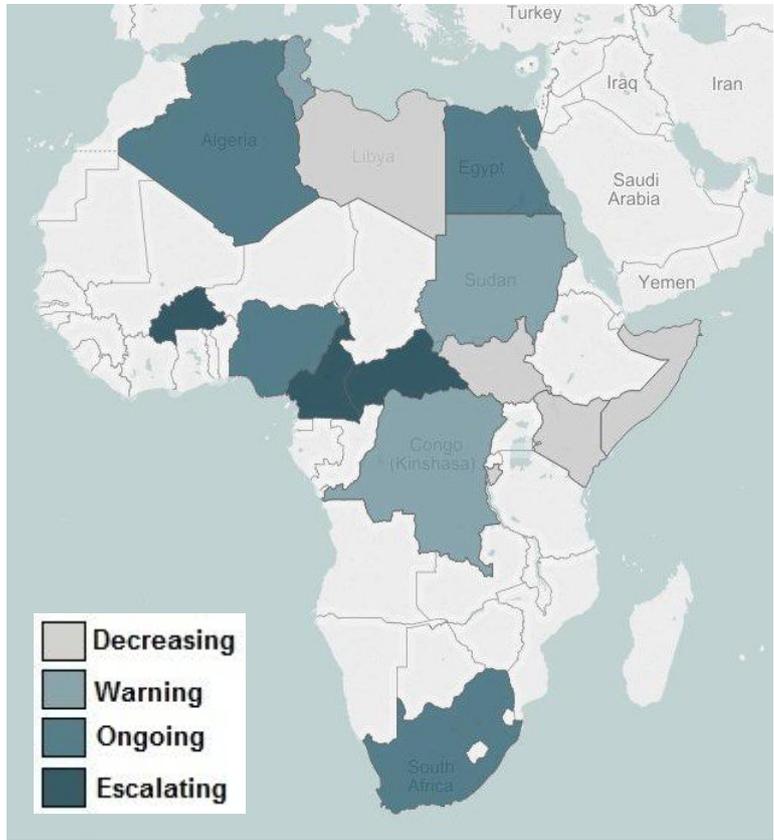


Welcome to the October issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published on the [ACLED website](#),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

This month’s issue focuses on the recent coup attempt and popular mobilisation in **Burkina Faso**, one-sided violence and strategic power-sharing in **Burundi**, the geography of rebellion in **Democratic Republic of Congo**, political dialogue and military power play in **Libya** and by-election violence and UPND incited riots in **Zambia**. Two Special Reports explore the potential for **electoral violence in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic and Ivory Coast** in October and the **role of Pro-Government Militias in competitive, institutionalised power structures**.

Elsewhere on the continent, **Algeria** remains fraught with socio-political insecurity as protests continue, public sector protests were the dominant form of dissent in **Nigeria**, and **Sudan** experienced a sustained reduction in violence levels.



Conflict Trajectory, October 2015

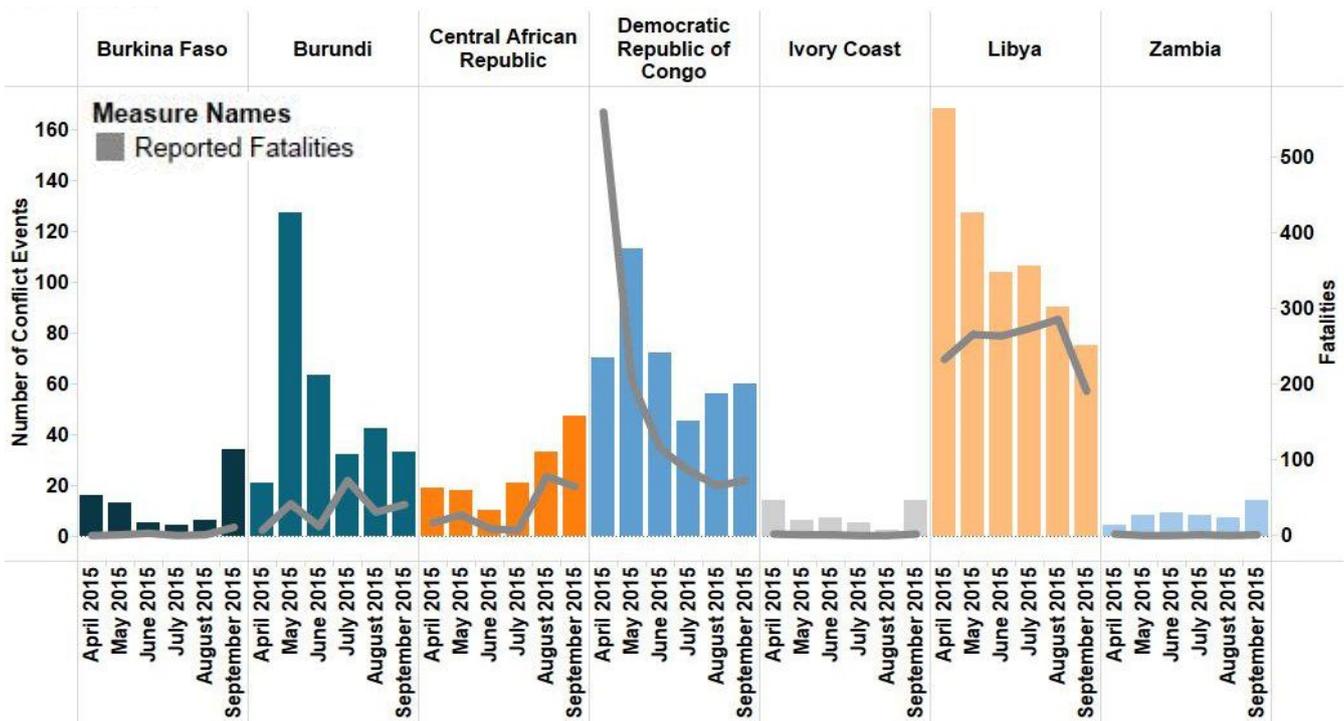


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, April - September 2015.

Burkina Faso

On the 16 September, the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP), an elite unit within the Burkinabé army, staged a coup dissolving the transitional government that had been in power since November 2014, when a wave of popular unrest ended Blaise Compaoré’s 27-year rule. In a televised speech, the RSP announced the creation of a military junta known as National Council of Democracy (CND) led by General Gilbert Diendéré, RSP’s leader and staunch ally of Compaoré, while transitional President Michel Kafando and Prime Minister Isaac Zida were being held hostage in Ouagadougou ([African Arguments, 18 September 2015](#)).

After one week of protests throughout the country and negotiations within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), General Diendéré stepped aside, offering his apologies for the coup attempt ([Agence France Presse, 23 September 2015](#)). In turn, the reinstated President Kafando vowed to dissolve the RSP and to guide the country towards the elections scheduled on the 11 October. As the regular army assaulted RSP’s barracks in the capital city and the coup leader sought protection in the Vatican Embassy, General Diendéré was arrested on 1 October along with other prominent political figures that had been sympathetic to the short-lived junta, including former presidential candidate Djibril Bassolé ([Jeune Afrique, 26 September 2015](#); [30 September 2015](#)).

Behind this coup attempt lie a number of strategic calculations. Tensions between the transitional government and the RSP had been mounting over the past few months, when the unit led by Diendéré accused the executive of violating previous agreements regarding the RSP’s special

status. Additionally, the newly-introduced Electoral Code banned several members of Compaoré’s ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), from running in the forthcoming elections, fuelling fears that the RSP could soon be disbanded ([Africa Confidential, 25 September 2015](#)). Facing the prospects of being reintegrated within the army and stripped of the long-standing privileges obtained during Compaoré’s era, the RSP resorted to a desperate move that in the end turned out to be unsuccessful.

As in the case of the uprisings that ousted Blaise Compaoré in 2014, popular mobilisation was instrumental in putting down the coup. Protesters defied the imposition of the curfew by the RSP and responded to calls from trade unions and civil society organisations by taking to the streets, marching in protest and erecting barricades in Ouagadougou and elsewhere in the country. The RSP’s initial willingness to quell protests in the capital city, where confrontations between RSP and demonstrators resulted in several civilian deaths, eventually influenced the forms of collective action nationwide ([Bertrand, 21 September 2015](#)). Instead of gathering in large numbers as during the 2014 uprisings, protesters opted for more diffuse and small-scale mobilisation, which in several towns did not face any repression given the RSP’s limited outreach outside Ouagadougou (see [Figure 2](#)).

However, the foiled coup attempt reflected the enduring legacy of Blaise Compaoré and his allies on Burkina Faso’s political and economic life, revealing the several challenges that await the country’s political class.

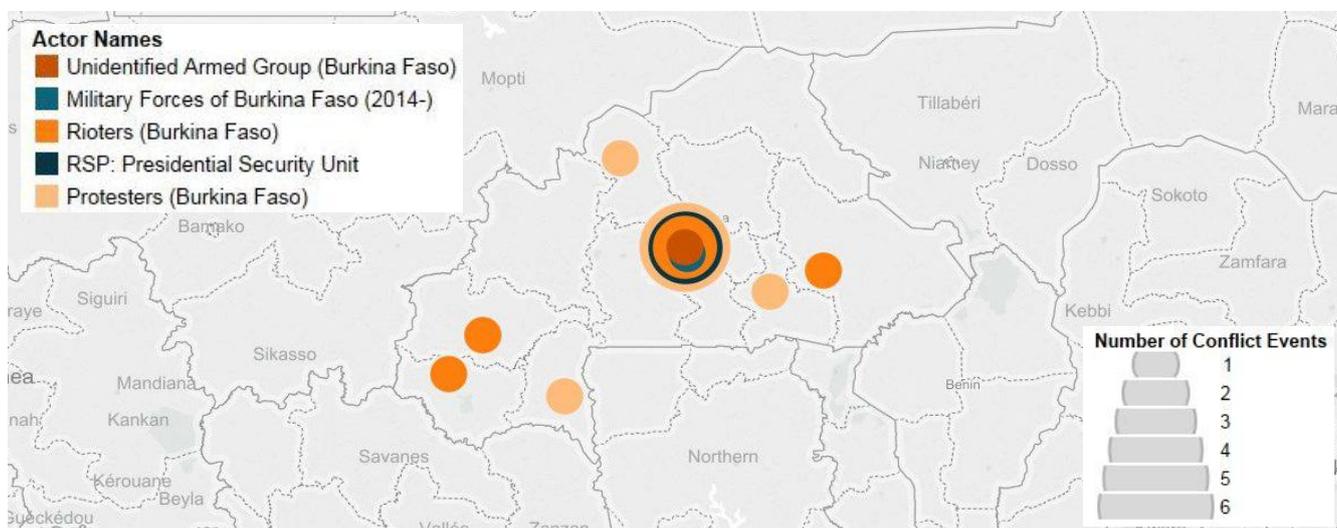


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events in Burkina Faso by Location, from 16 - 30 September 2015.

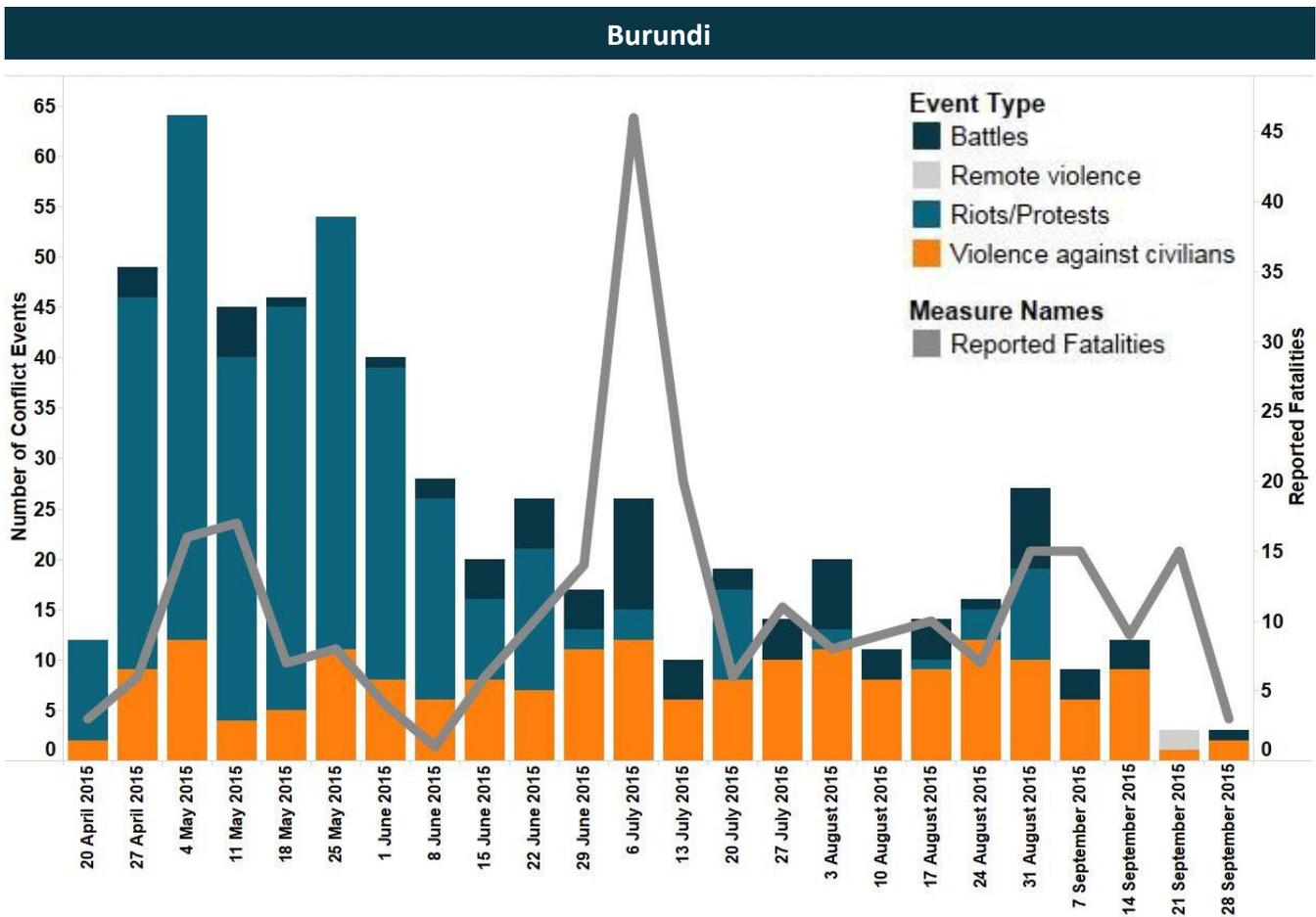


Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Event Type in Burundi, from April - October 2015.

The number of conflict events and fatalities has continued to decrease in Burundi since its high point in mid-July, but the political conflict engulfing the country is far from resolved (see Figure 3). The main source of contention within Burundi is a conflict between those who support Nkurunziza’s third term and those that oppose it. Supporters point to Article 96 of the constitution, which says the president is elected by universal suffrage and can renew his/her contestation once, and the fact that Nkurunziza was first elected by parliament. Opponents point to the Arusha Accords, which ended the decade-long civil war, which stipulates that no leader can stand for more than two terms.

Those opposed to Nkurunziza’s third term did not just include opposition parties and civil society activists but former insiders within Nkurunziza’s regime. The attempted coup against the government in May was launched by Major General Godefroid Niyombare and Leonard Ngendakumana, both senior figures within Nkurunziza’s security apparatus who were dismissed in February 2015 after

opposing the president’s attempt to run for a third term ([Iaccino, 13 May 2015](#); [Justice, 10 July 2015](#)). Fatalities dramatically spiked in July after defecting soldiers loyal to these two figures engaged the Burundian army in the far north of the country. There is suspicion that these forces are receiving support and sanctuary from Kigali ([Africa Confidential, 20 August 2015](#)).

In spite of this instability, Nkurunziza won his third term with 69.4% of the vote in late July, helped by a large-scale boycott by other parties opposed to the third-term mandate ([Al Jazeera, 25 July 2015](#)). Nkurunziza’s new government is composed mainly of his hard-line supporters from within his party. The only opposition included within the new government belong to the National Liberation Forces (FNL) and include its leader, Agathon Rwaswa ([Africa Confidential, 20 August 2015](#)). This may be because the FNL has time and again proved its willingness to use arms. The group continued fighting Nkurunziza’s government until 2009, and Rwaswa has previously threatened a return to armed conflict ([Human Rights Watch, 14 August 2014](#)).

Burundi

Rwasa and FNL did not boycott the elections and secured 18.9% of the vote ([Al Jazeera, 25 July 2015](#)).

However, Rwasa’s participation in the new government has split the FNL; his collaboration with Nkurunziza may not lead to a decrease in violence or enhance the president’s political support. Former colleagues have labelled Rwasa a traitor and dissident FNL members are allegedly gathering at the Burundi-Rwanda border with armed militants of the opposition Movement for Solidarity and Development (MSD) ([Africa Confidential, 20 August 2015](#)).

Since Nkurunziza’s electoral victory, violence against civilians continues to be the most common form of political violence. The primary perpetrator of violence against civilians since mid-June has been ‘unidentified’ armed groups. The political affiliations of the victims are unknown in the vast majority of cases (85%). However, in the cases where the victim’s affiliation is known, supporters of the ruling party, including the Imbonerakure youth militia and off-duty military and police personnel, are disproportionately represented (*see Figure 4*).

Prominent victims include former head of the intelligence agency Adolphe Nshimirimana, widely suspected to be the real force in the CNDD-FDD and the leader of the Imbonerakure ([Africa Confidential, 20 August 2015](#)). In many cases, including the killing of Nshimirimana, assassins have used military hardware or have been in military/police uniforms (*ibid.*). This suggests that the attacks against pro-Nkurunziza figures are linked to either soldiers that defected during the May coup attempt, or factions still present within the military.

Another potentially disruptive factor is the government’s expressed intent to revise Article 129 of the Constitution, which sets the quota of Hutus and Tutsis in government ([Africa Confidential, 20 August 2015](#)). The current crisis has not yet politicised ethnicity or used it as a mobilisation factor, as support and opposition for Nkurunziza has so far crossed ethnic boundaries. However, should Nkurunziza attempt to renegotiate the ethnic balancing that has so far prevented a return to the ethnicocides of the Civil War, the pro and anti-regime camps may become ethnically defined.

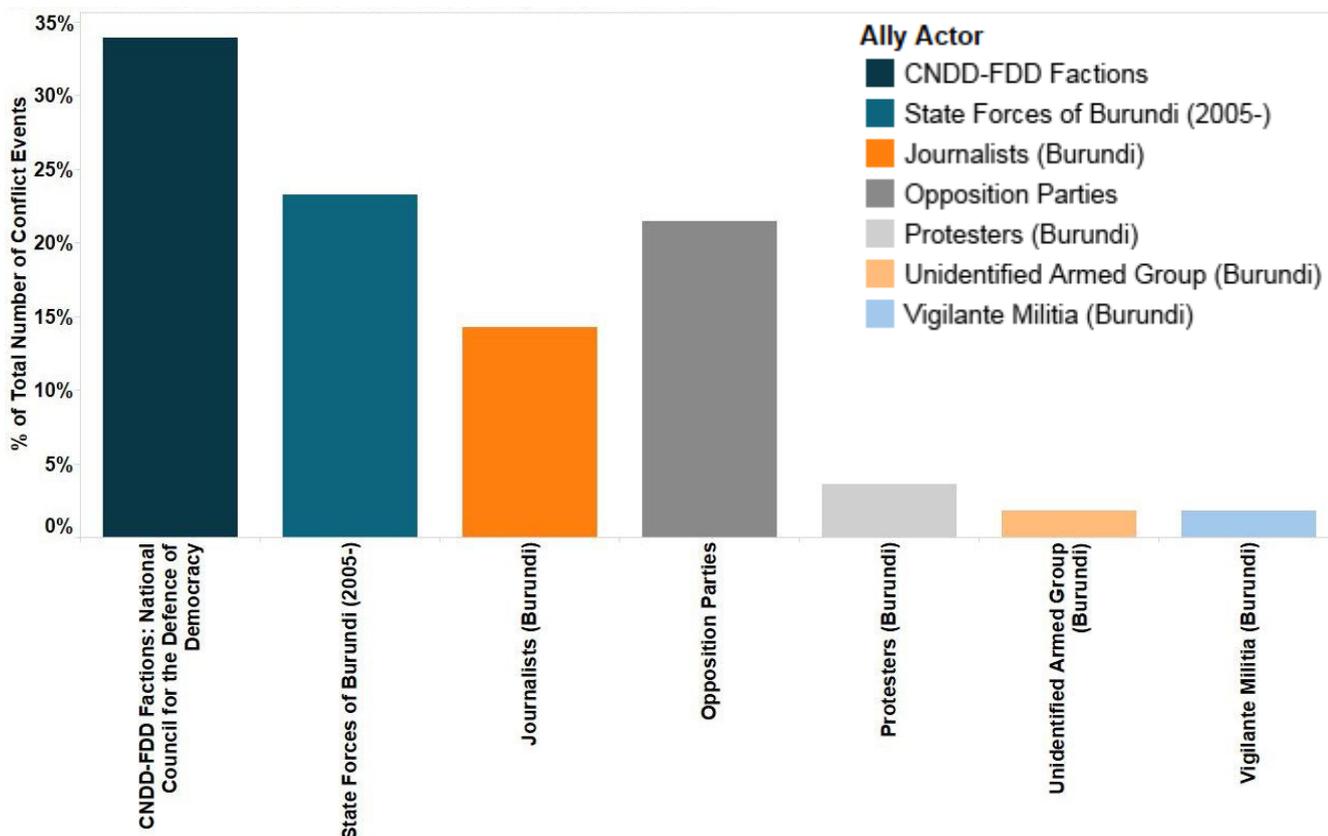


Figure 4: Violence against Civilians by Victim’s Affiliation in Burundi, from April - October 2015.

Democratic Republic of Congo

ACLED tracks a wide variety of non-governmental conflict actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over the past year, the most dynamic among these conflict actors have seen significant fluctuations in their respective levels of activity. These include the APCLS, ADF-NALU, FDLR, various FRPI factions, the LRA, various Mayi Mayi militia factions, and various NDC factions. The Congolese military (FARDC) have engaged in offensives against many of these groups, specifically the ADF, APCLS, FDLR and FRPI sporadically over the last few months. Launched in February 2015, Operation Sokola 2 has been the most dramatic contest by FARDC forces against the FDLR ([Radio Okapi, 28 February 2015](#)).

In the renewed Operation Sokola 1 offensive against the ADF in March 2015 and the offensive against the FRPI in the Walendu Bindi area in May 2015, ADF and FRPI activity stayed relatively low at first. This suggests a strategy of evasion, followed by an increase over the following months (see [Figure 5](#)). In contrast, Operation Sokola 2 targets the FDLR, and saw an immediate and dramatic rise in activity by the FDLR due to increased clashes with FARDC forces (see [Figure 5](#)), as well as some cases of reprisals against civilians in the following months.

These divergent tactical responses hold key insights into the geographical and political organisation of the rebel groups. Because the FDLR have deeper roots in their areas of operation—including settled dependents in the area—

and suffer from internal divisions ([IRIN, 31 October 2013](#)) they are relatively less tactically flexible and mobile. This makes it easier for FARDC forces to engage them. In contrast, the ADF are much more willing and able to move, as their primary concerns in the DR-Congo are opportunistic, making use of gold mining and logging to support their activities, and have a better command and control structure which makes strategic withdrawals a more accessible tactical option ([IRIN, 27 January 2014](#)).

The most notable trend however is the significant fall in activity of the various Mayi Mayi factions (see [Figure 5](#)). The high number of events involving these groups in October 2014 was characterised by another dynamic, attributable to significant conflict between opposing Raia Mutomboki Mayi Mayi militias that played out by the beginning of 2015. The activity during this period also included a number of attacks against civilians, which elicited responses from FARDC forces, leading to increased clashes with Mayi Mayi militias between October and December 2014.

Due to the number of different factions, it can be difficult to determine the cause of increased activity by Mayi Mayi militias. Some groups - such as the Bakata Katanga group - have since disappeared from the conflict scene; while the Raia Mutomboki subset of the Mayi Mayi militias continue to engage in a significant number of events, and many actions involve direct confrontations with the government.

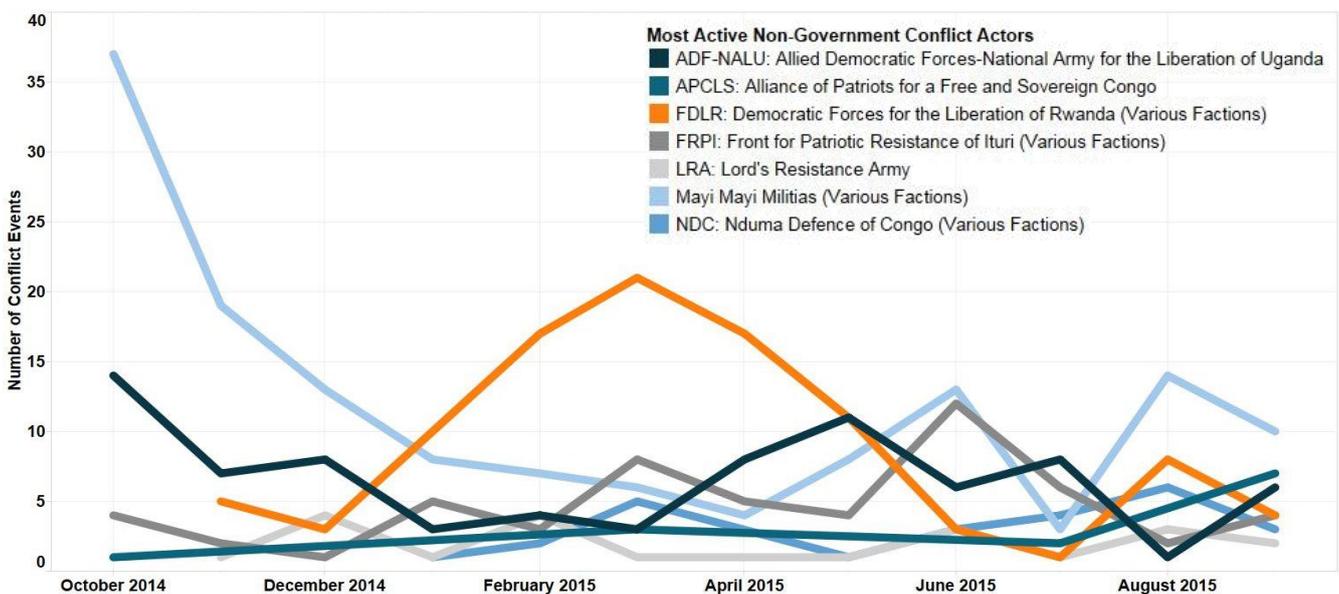


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Most Active Non-State Conflict Actors in Democratic Republic of Congo, from October 2014 - September 2015.

Libya

Episodes of political confrontation continued to fall throughout September, yet cause for celebration is a far cry for most Libyans (see Figure 6). The intensity of attacks to the West and South of Tripoli have scaled down over the last few months, however this should not mask the polemical nature of Libya’s conflict and potential for escalation.

The 20 October marks the expiry of the House of Representatives’ (HoR) mandate and the proposed power-sharing agreement has resulted in a number of unilateral moves that could aggravate the conflict. The fall in conflict events is no more indicative of a Libya that is closer to peaceful settlement than the presence of stalling mediation attempts by the United Nations. In fact, Libya appeared to be set on a collision course towards the expiry of the House of Representatives mandate on 20 October, until the HoR unilaterally declared amendments to the 2011 Constitutional Declaration to extend its term ([Libya Herald, 5 October 2015](#)), complicating further the future of a country whose immediate fate already hangs in the balance.

That balance is less between rival parliaments and more in the hands of General Khalifah Haftar, who has capitalised on the absence of a centralised state and is likely to bene-

fit from the failure of the Tripoli and Tobruk-based parliaments to reach consensus for a unity government. Talk of Haftar forming a military council to rule Libya increases the risk of his spoiler activity in the coming weeks, where he has already been accused of preventing a peaceful transition. Haftar launch the latest offensive in Benghazi on 19 September, dubbed ‘Operation Doom’, one day before the UN agreement was set to be signed. This is not an isolated incident; Haftar has also bombed Mitiga airport in Tripoli before delegates from the GNC were due to travel to peace talks.

Even if the HoR’s mandate extension is recognised, Haftar will want to establish some daylight between his forces and the government he has represented for over a year to position himself for a military takeover, should a signed agreement fail to materialise. This looks increasingly likely as the two central points of impasse concern the composition and binding powers of the State Council (comprised predominantly of GNC figures) and Gen. Haftar’s role in the security apparatus — the GNC stands in ardent opposition to Haftar as army chief. Signs of tension between Haftar and the Tobruk government continue to emerge as Haftar assumes the role of both the protagonist for the HoR as well as its antagonist. Discussions over the appointment of a defence minister reportedly turned sour

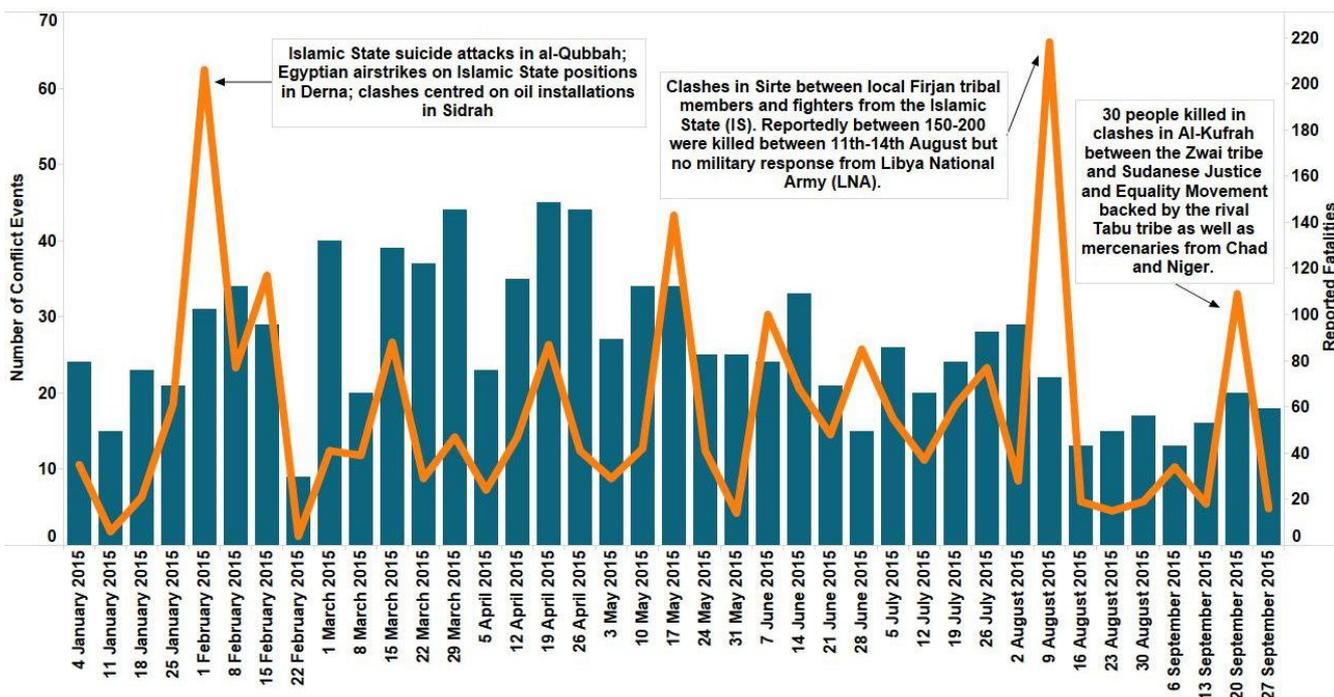


Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Week in Libya, from January - October 2015.

Libya

leading to Haftar asserting his capability by instructing his affiliated militias to forcibly block the HoR Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani from boarding a plane to Malta ([The Digital Journal, 16 September 2015](#)).

Haftar further compounds the prospects of settlement by abjectly refusing to engage in negotiations with rival groups and Islamists affiliated with the GNC, a stance that sits uneasily when viewed with his ambiguous policy towards Islamic State militants (see **Figure 7**). Brutal Islamic State attacks on local Firjan populations in Sirte were virtually ignored by central command in mid-August. That most of these fighters were Salafist and the bulwark of Haftar’s strongest fighters are ultraconservative Salafists ([New York Times, 1 October 2015](#)) highlights how Haftar privileges his own power over building a cohesive national military, and ensuring security.

This week, the patchwork of territorial control and effective breakdown of warring blocs has meant forces that were allied in the not so distant past have turned on each other. Haftar’s actions continue to polarise, with federalist leader Ibrahim Jathran the latest to react. Jathran’s forces — the Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) — clashed with Islamic State militants last week after the oil port in Sidrah they were guarding was attacked. Tobruk failed to publicly criticise or coordinate a response to this and following Jathran’s accusations that the head of the air force ordered an airstrike on his convoy ([Libya Observer, 10 Octo-](#)

[ber 2015](#)), Jathran has unequivocally withdrawn support for Haftar. The spokesperson for Jathran said “we see both the General Command represented by Haftar and the terrorist IS group represented by Abu Bakr Al-Bagdadi as two sides of the same coin” ([Libya Observer, 4 October 2015](#)).

Small bouts of fighting also erupted between battalions once united under the Operation Libya Dawn alliance. The role of Misrata in active fighting has subsided in recent months but ill-discipline is causing in-fighting between individual militia members. As the Libya Dawn alliance breaks down, a new coalition announced itself in late September as revolutionary brigades from Tobruk and Al-Bayda mobilized under the Shura Council of Derna Mujahideen, offering support to the Abu Salim Martyrs’ Brigade fighting Islamic State militants in areas around Derna and Al-Fatayah. This mobilization illustrates the extent to which the Libya National Army is failing to address IS expansion and how local populations and communal groups are transforming into sites of power and resistance.

The Ali Hassan Al-Jabar Brigade joined the assault against IS only to find a week later that Haftar-aligned militias raided their Al-Bayda headquarters, seizing control ([Libya Herald, 28 September 2015](#)). The irony is that as Haftar pursues the international community to lift the arms embargo in order to adequately equip his forces to tackle ‘extremism’, his obstruction to local community mobilization and deliberate targeting of militias fighting IS maintains his cause and allows IS to, at least temporarily, remain.

All eyes rest on 20 October and how internal and external players interpret the Constitutional amendment and legitimacy of the HoR. The absence of an agreement looks increasingly likely which after 20 October could gift the GNC more legitimacy in the eyes of international powers, even if only symbolically. The uncertainty this brings to Haftar’s future position is likely to galvanize his bullish approach to peace and the prospects for a full breakdown in negotiations looms close. Libya is in a catch-22: demote Haftar from his commanding position and expect progress in reaching a mutual position in the UN Peace Agreement. Haftar and his forces are likely to resist this violently and Libya may struggle to appoint a substitute commander-in-chief that can integrate such complex networks of fighters into formal military structures. Alternatively, leaving him in place eliminates any prospect of accordance, and increases the risk of sedition on multiple fronts from blocs that oppose his legitimacy.

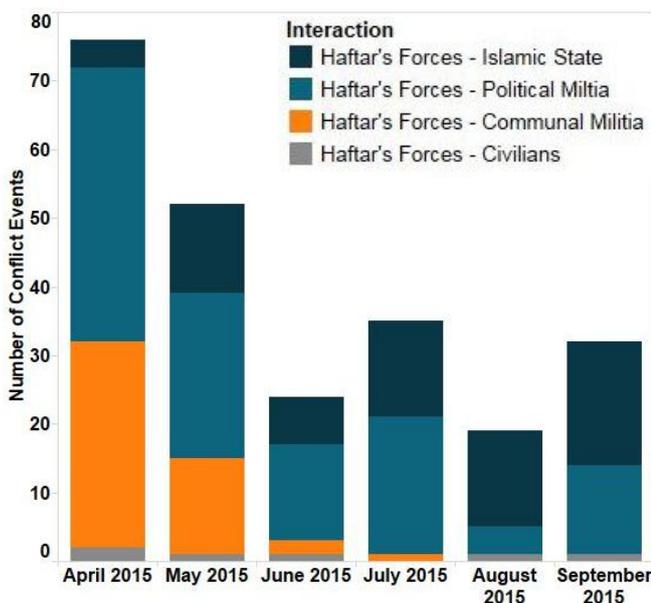


Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events by Gen. Khalifah Haftar’s Forces in Libya, from April - September 2015.

Zambia

Zambia recently experienced a record number of riots, suggesting that the political instability that occurred in January has not been resolved, and the politics of succession are not entirely peaceful (see **Figure 8**). Recent riots were sparked by parliamentary by-elections in Solwezi and Lubansenshi ([Lusaka Times, 25 September 2015](#)), revealing a continued rivalry between the two main political parties, Patriotic Front (PF) and United Party for National Development (UPND).

The most recent incident of violence occurred on 23 September, in the northwestern region of Kalumbila. UPND cadres demanded to hold a rally on the eve of by-elections, stoning security forces and leaving two policemen with head injuries. On 21 September, UPND and PF cadres exchanged gunfire in Luwingu, injuring one. The following day, PF cadres open fired and destroyed UPND camps in Lubansenshi. PF cadres reportedly fired indiscriminately in Solwezi and Mutanda during the week of 21 September, to warn residents against voting for UPND. September's riots are reminiscent of conflict events in January, when presidential elections resulted in nine events involving violence against civilians, five events involving protesters, and five events involving rioters (see **Figure 8**). Elections were held following the death of President Michael Sata in October 2014. PF candidate Edgar Lungu narrowly defeated UPND frontrunner Hakainde Hichilema with a margin of 27,000 votes ([African Arguments, 29 January 2015](#)).

UPND is accused of creating skirmishes in districts where election races are particularly close ([Zambia Reports, 23 September 2015](#)). On 1 January, in the lead-up to presidential elections, UPND cadres attacked PF supporters in Kasama. During June's by-elections in the southern district

of Mulobezi, a UPND member of parliament attacked PF Secretary General Davies Chama. Also in Mulobezi, on 30 June, clashes between PF and UPND left several injured from gunshot wounds ([Zambia Reports, 30 June 2015](#)). UPND's 'Mapatizya Formula' is a system meant to curb electoral fraud through active participation, but is often viewed as a cover-up for violent behaviour ([Zambia Reports, 10 January 2015](#)). However, instigation of violence can be attributed to both sides, possibly indicating that political capital resides in the mobilization of the people. On 2 January, PF cadres attacked a UPND campaign team in Shiwa Ngandu. On 21 February, PF cadres killed a UPND member in Mtendere East near the capital city, Lusaka.

Despite last month's increase in riots, violence against civilians decreased since the start of 2015. Civilians were the main victims in January, compared to September (see **Figure 8**). But a steady number of protests — six in May — are a sign that political tensions are constant. PF came to power under Sata in 2011, buoyed by support for infrastructure development programs in rural areas ([African Arguments, 29 January 2015](#)). Copperbelt and Lusaka Districts are typically supportive of PF. However, some 2015 protests have been linked to criticism of the government's suspension of mines and load-shedding at dam projects, made in effort to reduce the nation's dependency on copper and hydropower ([Zambian Watchdog, 21 September 2015](#)). As a result, UPND has been able to gain increased support in various areas. The parties split September's parliamentary elections, with UPND's Teddy Kasonso winning Solwezi West, and PF's George Mwamba winning Lubansenshi. Lungu will continue to serve the remainder of Sata's term, facing general elections in September 2016.

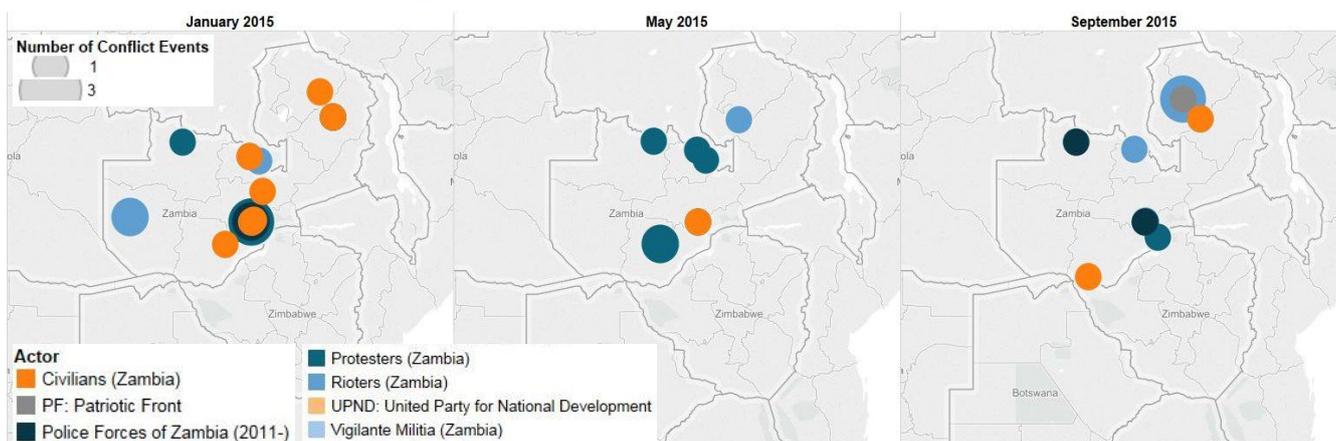


Figure 8: Number of Conflict Events by Actor in Zambia, in January, May and September 2015.

Special Focus Topic: Elections

In mid-October 2015, Central African Republic (CAR), Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso will each hold elections. As **Figure 9** shows, levels of violence during electoral periods are high in Ivory Coast: for example, the general elections in November 2010 resulted in a six-month civil war between militias of former President Laurent Gbagbo and the contested winner Alassane Ouattara. By contrast, CAR and Burkina Faso do not typically experience high violence around elections.

However, violent unrest led to the ousting of Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré following his attempt to amend the constitution in order to run for a third term ([Africa Confidential, 1 November 2014](#)). In CAR, intercommunal violence and clashes between Seleka and Anti-Balaka militias have led to an ongoing civil war, potentially jeopardizing the electoral process. Electoral campaigns in all three countries, therefore, have been beset by tensions. In Burkina Faso, the transitional government, Conseil National de Transition (CNT) has established a new electoral code, which forbids anyone who supported Compaoré’s mandate extension from running for office ([Africa Confidential, 1 May 2015](#)). Furthermore, the presidential guard, Regime de Sécurité Présidentiel (RSP), which has remained a key player, has been under pressure to reform by the CNT. Possible reforms may include the RSP’s reintegration into the regular army, and other moves likely to foster dissatisfaction among its ranks ([International Crisis Group, 24 June 2015](#)).

Following the 2011 conflict in Ivory Coast, Gbagbo’s trial for crimes against humanity has weakened the opposition.

Fears of violence from pro-Gbagbo supporters remain high, especially in the west of the country. Moreover, internal dissension within the ruling party, due to attempts by former rebel leader Guillaume Kigbafori Soro to take control, raise concerns for stability ([Africa Confidential, 12 June 2015](#)).

In CAR, the October election has been criticised for being held to hastily. The electoral registration system appears to exclude refugees and populations where Seleka remains active, with registration concentrated in the capital city ([Africa Confidential, 10 September 2015](#)). Furthermore, ongoing insecurity and underlying intercommunal tensions is likely to affect the environment within which the elections take place ([International Crisis Group, 21 September 2015](#)). Recent developments suggest that concerns about the peaceful conduct of elections are valid. Throughout September in Ivory Coast, riots and protests in Abidjan concerned the legitimacy of Ouattara as a candidate ([Voice of America, 11 September 2015](#)). In CAR, violence at the end of August in Bambari - a region with recurring conflict between Seleka and Anti-Balaka and a site of inter-communal violence - demonstrates the sustained capacity of armed groups to disrupt elections ([African Arguments, 2 September 2015](#)). Finally, in Burkina Faso, the RSF’s coup attempt in early September has confirmed fears about the force’s disruptive role. Although the situation seems to have stabilized with the return of the transitional President and the resignation of RSF’s head, associated factions may still disrupt the electoral process.

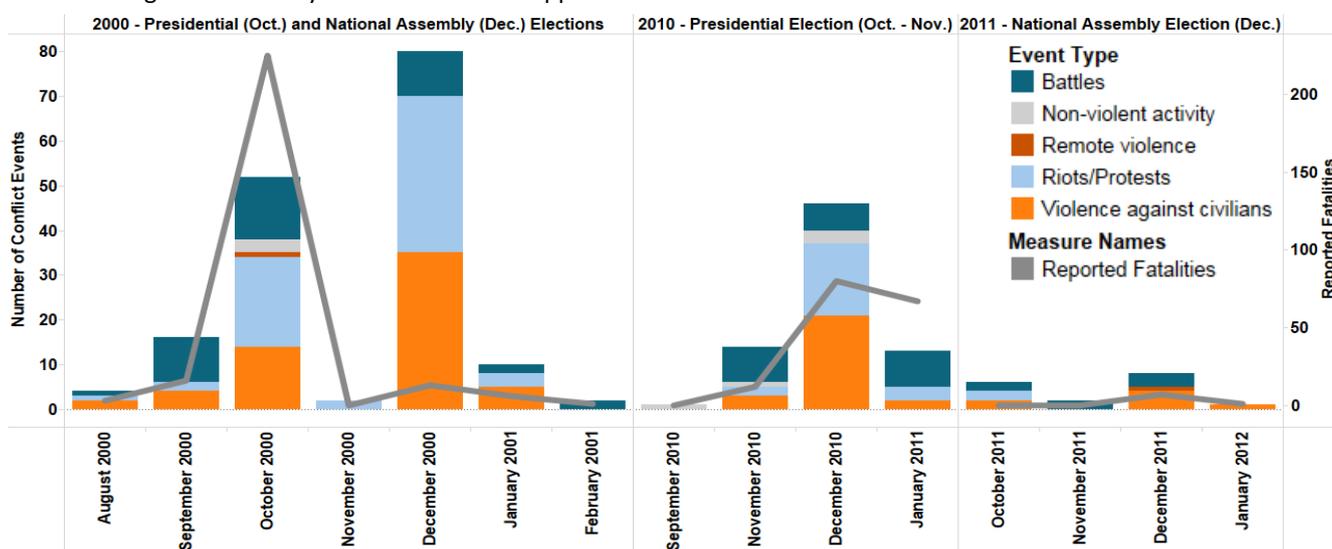


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Election Period in Ivory Coast, in 2000, 2010 and 2011.

Special Focus Topic: The Conflict Patterns and Role of Pro-Government Militias

Pro-government militias (hereafter PGMs) are a growing risk to the safety of civilians and stability of developing states. Of all active militias operating on behalf of political elites (e.g. rebel leaders, politicians, political parties, warlords, military, government officials, etc.), those associated with the state have the most pervasive and negative impact on civilians.

Why do states with active military forces create and support militias? Much of the literature points to delegation explanations, where militaries and states delegate some or most of their activities to these more informal allied forces for two reasons: (1) a government lacks the capacity for violence in a specific area or larger spaces and hence uses these groups in those specific areas, and/or (2)

governments do not want to be accountable for the activities that are undertaken by militias, and hence using these groups allows them plausible deniability.

In line with the capacity argument, PGMs ought to operate as replacement forces where the state is not active, and are tasked with carrying out violence on behalf of the state. Therefore, the comparative patterns of activity between state and PGM forces ought to be similar, but conducted in different spaces and locations. However, capacity theory does not account for why PGMs are seen in spaces in which the state itself is also active (see **Figure 10**): in Sudan or Zimbabwe, militias operate alongside strong and able militaries, often conducting similar activity. For states with less military capacity — including DR-

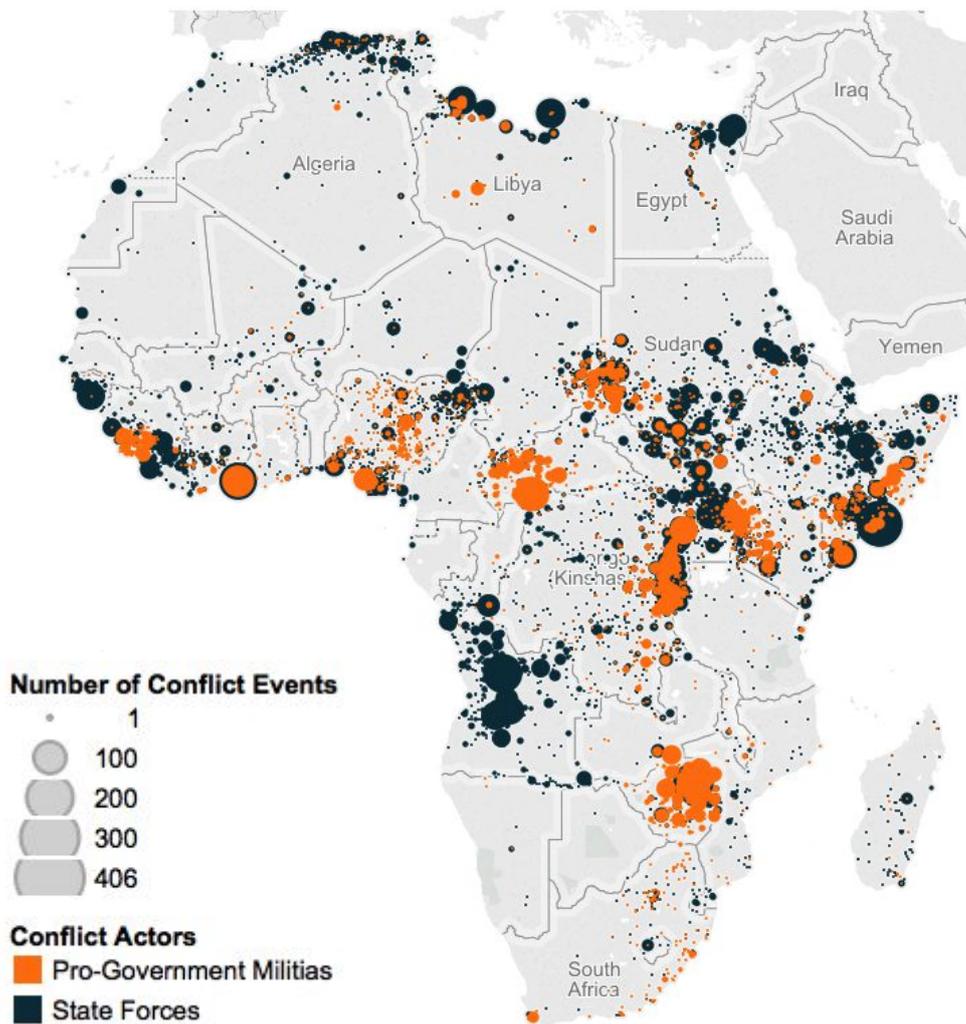


Figure 10: Organised Armed Conflict Involving Pro-Government Militias and State Forces in Africa, from 1997 - 2014. 10

Special Focus Topic: The Conflict Patterns and Role of Pro-Government Militias

Congo, Somalia, and Nigeria — PGMs supplement, rather than replace, state forces. In particular, they may emerge to combat similar opposition organizations or engage with opposition supporters while the military and police engage with other distinct, but similarly situated threats. Why then are these groups — active in the same areas, using the same tactics, and combatting the same opposition — kept distinct from state military forces?

The accountability argument suggests that PGMs conduct offenses that governments cannot or do not want to be deemed accountable for (see: [Ron, 2002](#); [Alvarez, 2006](#); [Staniland, 2012](#); [Mitchell, Carey, and Butler, 2014](#); [Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell, 2015](#)). States may choose to do this to avoid high domestic or international scrutiny ([Carey et al., 2015](#)) that may affect international standing, stability, aid, or neighbouring relations. The implications for this argument are that PGM activity profiles differ from state forces in observable and crucial ways including engaging with civilian targets, activities with high fatality counts, sexual political violence, urban campaigns, etc. Further, while actions by militias and state forces can occur concurrently and within the same spaces, PGMs should be primarily or exclusively involved in violence that the state is not partaking in, such as civilian targeting. However, when examining conflict in Africa between 1997 and 2014, the most lethal instances of violence against civilians are not carried out by PGMs. In fact, on average, instances in which the state has targeted civilians have been deadlier than instances in which PGMs have carried out this violence, suggesting that the state does not in fact delegate high intensity activity to PGMs in order to absolve itself (see [Figure 11](#)).

Observed patterns of activity across African states suggest that ‘delegation’ does not adequately explain the creation, function, and actions of PGMs. In a new [working paper](#), Kishi and Raleigh argue for an alternative interpretation for the use of PGMs, suggesting that these groups are a consequence of the structures of governance supporting developing states, and function as a critical component in upholding power structures. This interpretation of indirect rule and competition — or violence ‘management’ — emphasizes that informal, private armed groups are a necessary component of modern governance where political competition is lethal, positions on government hierarchies are determined by coercive potential and force, and the state is actually a collection of often competing interests

and agendas (see [De Waal, 2009](#)). PGMs are an equal and separate component of purposefully decentralized and overlapping forces, and are used for a specific purpose therein. While there are multiple official agencies who — to a greater or lesser degree — can deal with threats to the state (e.g. rebel forces), PGMs are used by governing political elites to combat personal, party, and departmental competition. This would imply that a state leader (s) uses PGMs when his/her personal power or position is compromised by alternative political contenders.

Introducing a newly-created dataset on PGMs and their conflict activity — spanning the entirety of the African continent from 1997 to 2014, and expanding the definition of pro-government affiliations — Kishi and Raleigh find that the prevalence of conflict activity involving PGMs is highest in states with high levels of institutional competition — measured as high ethno-political heterogeneity; periods of heightened political competition; and the number of armed, active, named opposition groups contesting the state. These findings support the argument that PGMs are used to carry out competition amongst elites who vie for increased institutional power.

Across Africa, PGMs represent an informal structure of force that mirrors the formal security structure in states. These groups are critical for several reasons: they represent an important and growing fixture of modern conflict; they are most active outside of civil war periods, in the poorly-defined and under-researched ‘domestic instability’ sphere; they allow governments to perpetuate intense and fatal violence without direct attribution or sanction; they have become central to the ‘normalized’ political violence that affects developing states; and militias generally are the main modality of violence through which ‘inclusive’ political violence — or elite competition — is experienced. PGMs operate as supplements to particular branches and elites in governments, as the internal fractures within developing countries’ institutional structures are often significant and exert a far greater threat to the stability of the state than external threats. Indeed, these internal feuds and the mistrust within branches of government are often a more serious challenge than from outside the regime, typically represented as rebels or insurgents. Internal government threats have been a greater concern to African leaders — in the form of coups, purges, putsches, and mutinies — than civil wars, which are still relatively uncommon phenomena ([Roessler, 2011](#)).

Special Focus Topic: The Conflict Patterns and Role of Pro-Government Militias

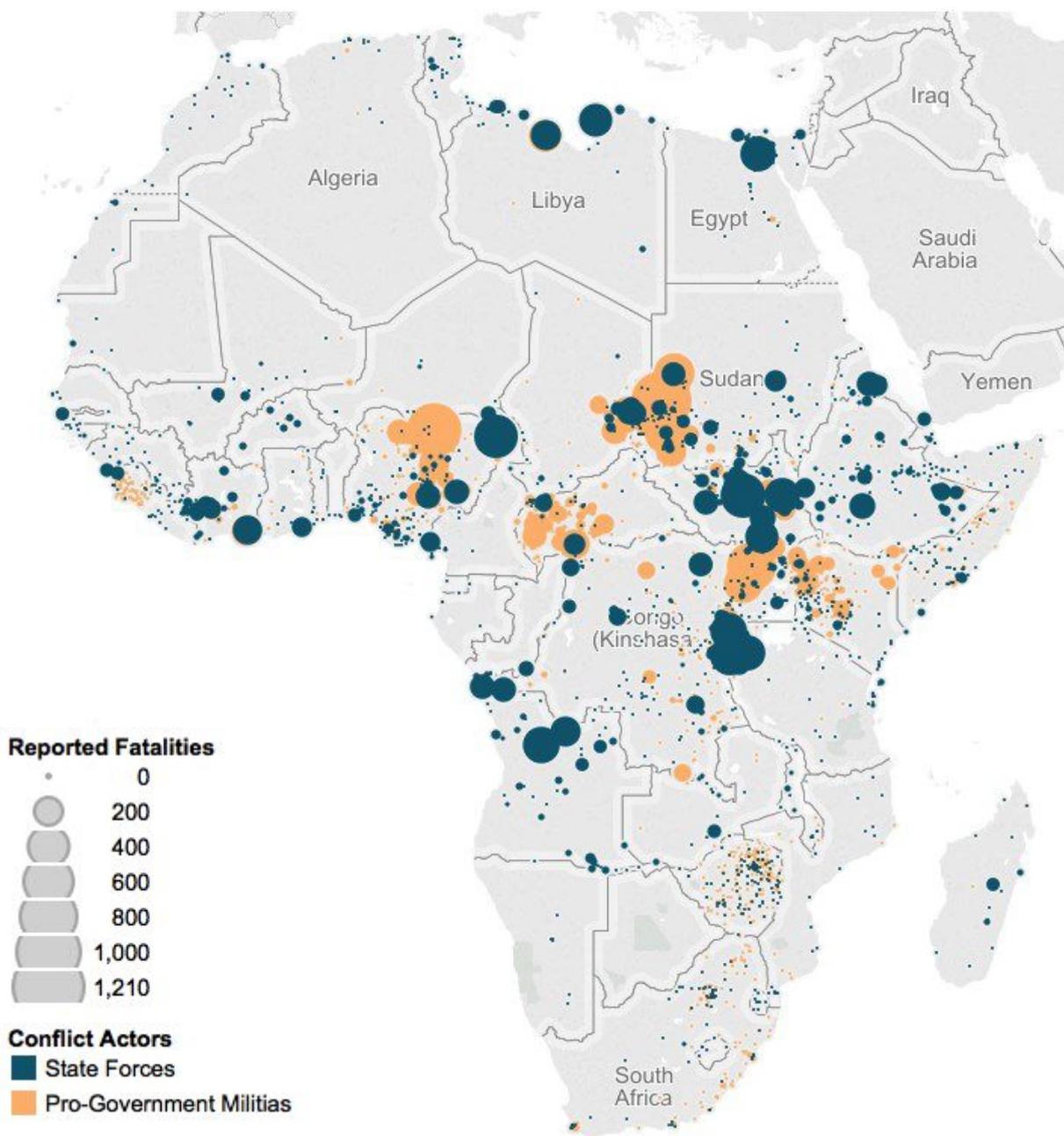


Figure 11: Civilian Fatalities Perpetrated by Pro-Government Militias and State Forces in Africa, from 1997 - 2014.

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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](http://www.acleddata.com).