ACLED

Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset

Welcome to the January 2014 issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) *Conflict Trends*. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Real-time conflict event data is published through our research partners at **Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS)** where it is updated monthly.

In addition, the full version of the dataset is updated annually, and this month marks the release of Version 4 of the ACLED dataset, covering political violence in Africa from January 1997 - December 2013 inclusive.

Figure 1 shows the countries in which the number of politically violent events increased, decreased and saw no change from 2012 to 2013. This issue of *Conflict Trends* will provide an overview of 2013 as captured in Version 4 of the ACLED dataset, before profiling dynamics in **North Africa**, **Central African Republic**, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, **Nigeria**, **Somalia** and **South Sudan**, with an emphasis on countries which have persistently experienced instability over the course of the past few years, and those which have witnessed increased volatility in the last 12 months.
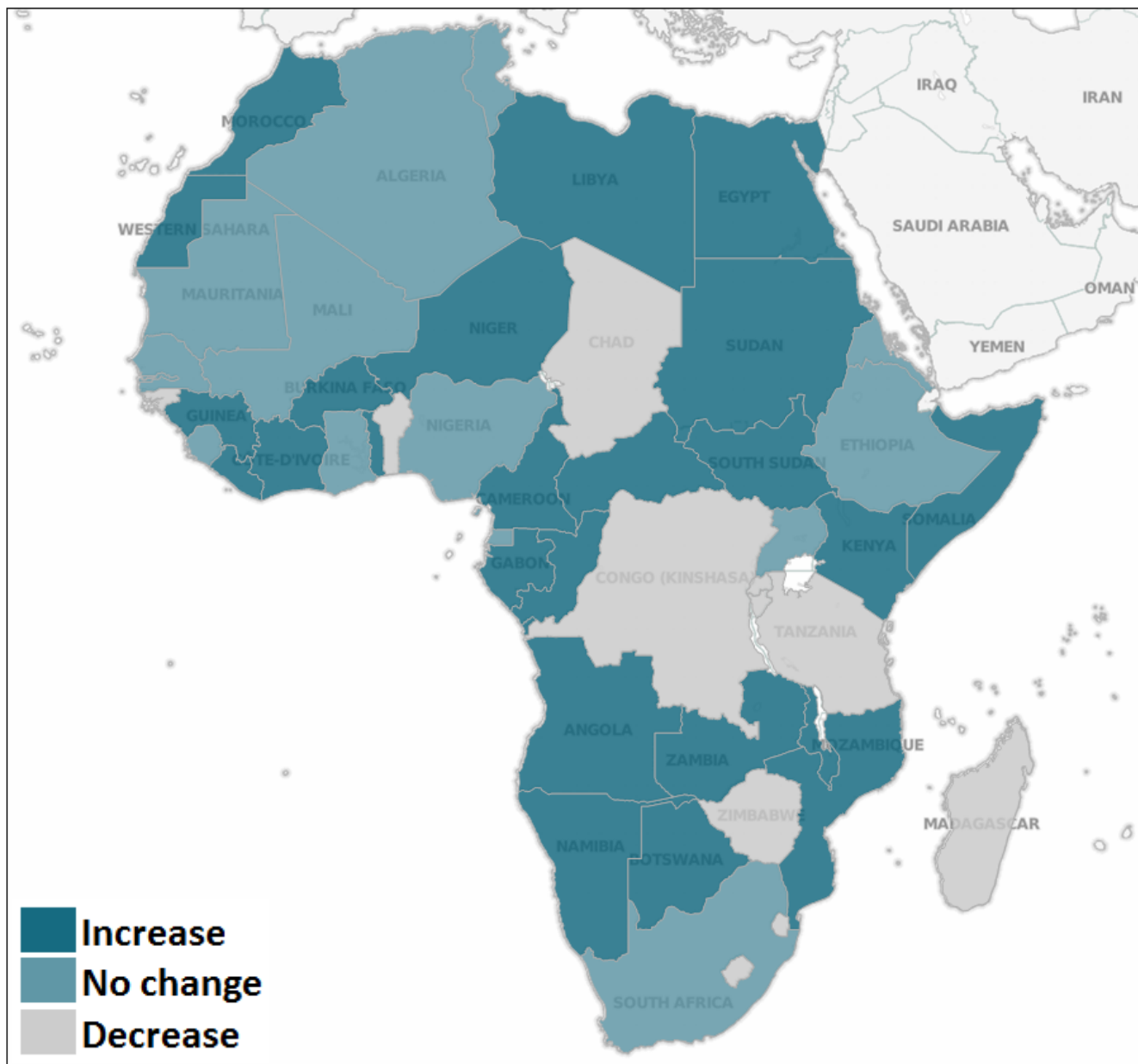

Figure 1: Conflict Increase, Decrease and No Change across Africa from 2012 - 2013.

African Overview

ACLED recorded a total of 13,504 violent conflict events in Africa for 2013, compared to just over 9,000 events for 2012. While the absolute increase in conflict events can at least in part be influenced by on-going improvements in the reporting and coverage of violent conflict, as well as improvements to data collection techniques within the project, the nature, location and magnitudes of this increase are instructive. On a continental scale, 32.8% of events involved battles between armed groups; 39.7% involved rioting or protesting; and 27.4% involved violence against civilians.

Riots and protests saw the largest overall increase (of over 60%), driven largely by events in North Africa - Egypt in particular - over the past year as the fallout from the Arab Spring continue to be felt across that region. By contrast, while absolute levels of violence against civilians remain high, the proportion of continental violence which involves civilian targeting actually fell in 2013, the fifth consecutive year in which it has done so, and the third consecutive year in which civilian fatalities have fallen as a proportion of reported conflict deaths.

> **An increase in absolute levels of violence across the continent**
>
> **A proportional decline in the levels of civilian targeting, with significant exceptions (CAR, South Sudan, Kenya and Nigeria)**
>
> **Increasing prominence of political militias - rather than rebel groups - in the conflict landscape**

This trend, while welcome, masks important regional discrepancies: among high violence states, civilian targeting made up more than half of the reported conflict events in 2013 in Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, South Sudan and Sudan, and an extremely high rate of reported conflict-related fatalities in Kenya (61.5%), South Sudan (57.7%) and Nigeria (45.5%).

In terms of conflict actors, while all categories of violent group increased activity in 2013, the activity of rebel groups on the continent showed the smallest rate of increase (at 11%), underscoring the on-going eclipse of civil wars on the continent by elite-sponsored militia activity which does not seek to overthrow national regimes, but has rather found means to shape the existing political system through the programmatic use of violence. This last trend should raise concerns for the durability of transitional and democratic regimes where the systematic use of violence and intimidation has become part of the political landscape.
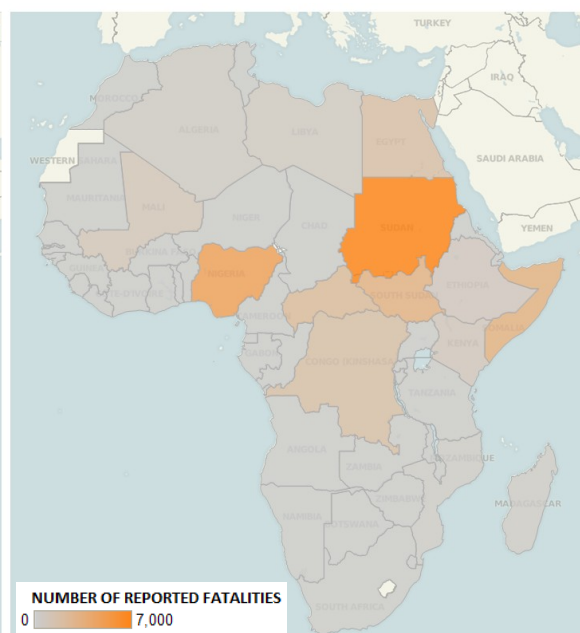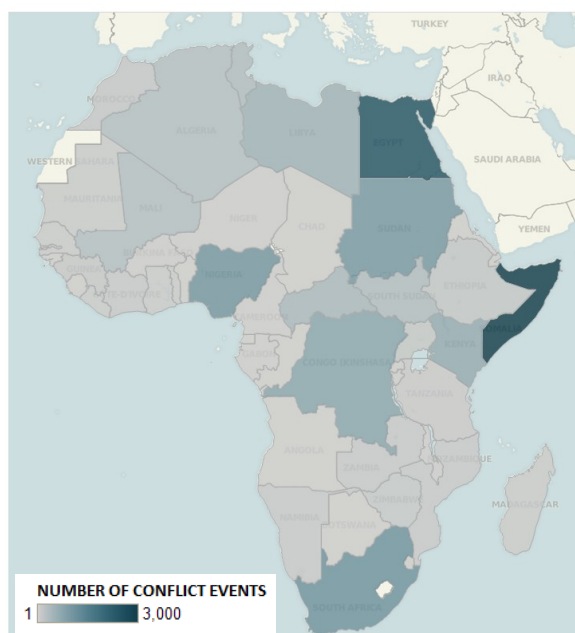

Figure 2: Conflict Events (Left) and Reported Fatalities (Right) by Country, 2013.

Central African Republic

Central African Republic had the ninth highest levels of conflict events in Africa in 2013, and one of the largest proportional increases in activity levels in the dataset year-on-year at over 500% (*see* Figure 3).

It is anyone's guess is what may define the next period for the Central African Republic. As of last week, transitional President Michel Djotodia resigned at the order of surrounding states, and fled to Benin.

The country's new interim leader - Alexandre Nguendet - has claimed that the chaos is over, and appealed to the Seleka (and Anti-Balaka) militias to disarm and demobilize, or risk being neutralized. He convened a group of soldiers from President Bozize's former army and lambasted their lack of performance since Djotodia took power in September, after leading the Seleka forces from December 2012.

Seleka is still without an agenda or leader, and as shown in Figure4, their performance has recently involved more battles than violence against civilians. This is perhaps a response to their challenges in key North Western parts of the state. They also ceased holding territory after Djotodia took power in September, and before he took to ineffectively dismantling the organization in the months following his ascension to power.

Whatever the case with the active and opposing militias, Figure 5 shows that glaring fact that an army under Bozize or Djotodia did not do much in the past year - far more
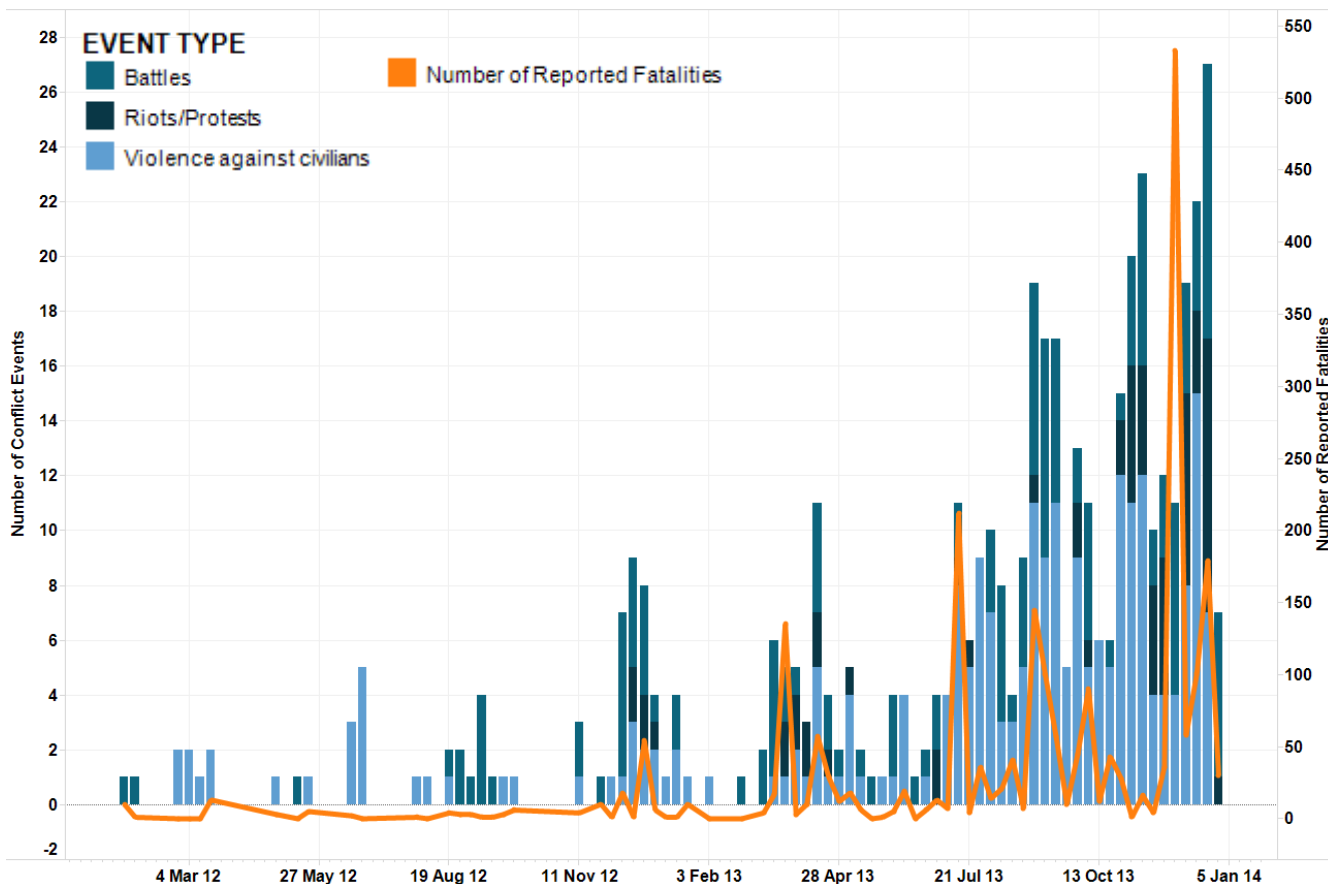
> **One of the highest proportional increases in conflict year-on-year (over 500% change from 2012 to 2013)**
>
> **The military has been relatively inactive in the past year, with far more violence carried out by political militias and rebels**

Figure 3: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Central African Republic, January 2012 - December 2013.
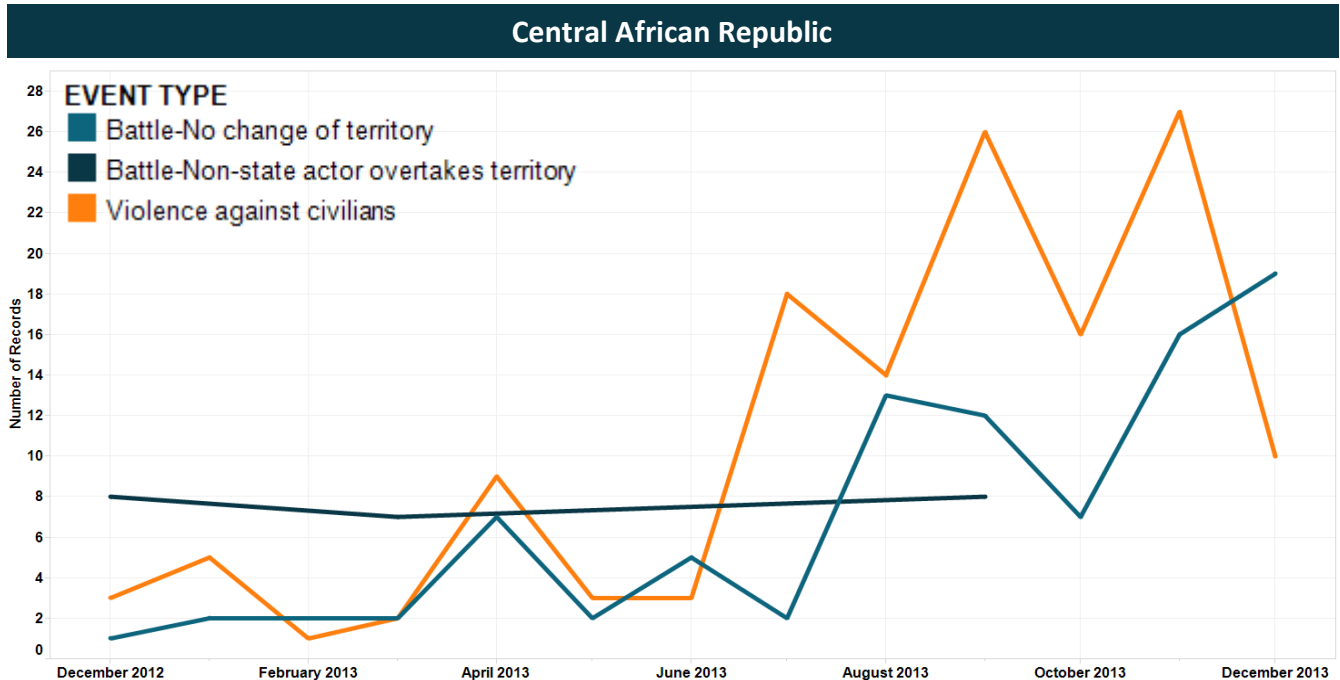
Central African Republic

Figure 4: Seleka Activity by Type, Central African Republic, December 2012 - December 2013.

political violence involved militias, rebels and even communal organizations than the government or police in any form. A new direction from Nguendet may provide the motivation, but the capacity of this army has never been overwhelming. This is, in part, why Burundian and French troops are the effective military power in the area, but there are open questions about where to start?, who to target? And what will follow if the foundations of a func-
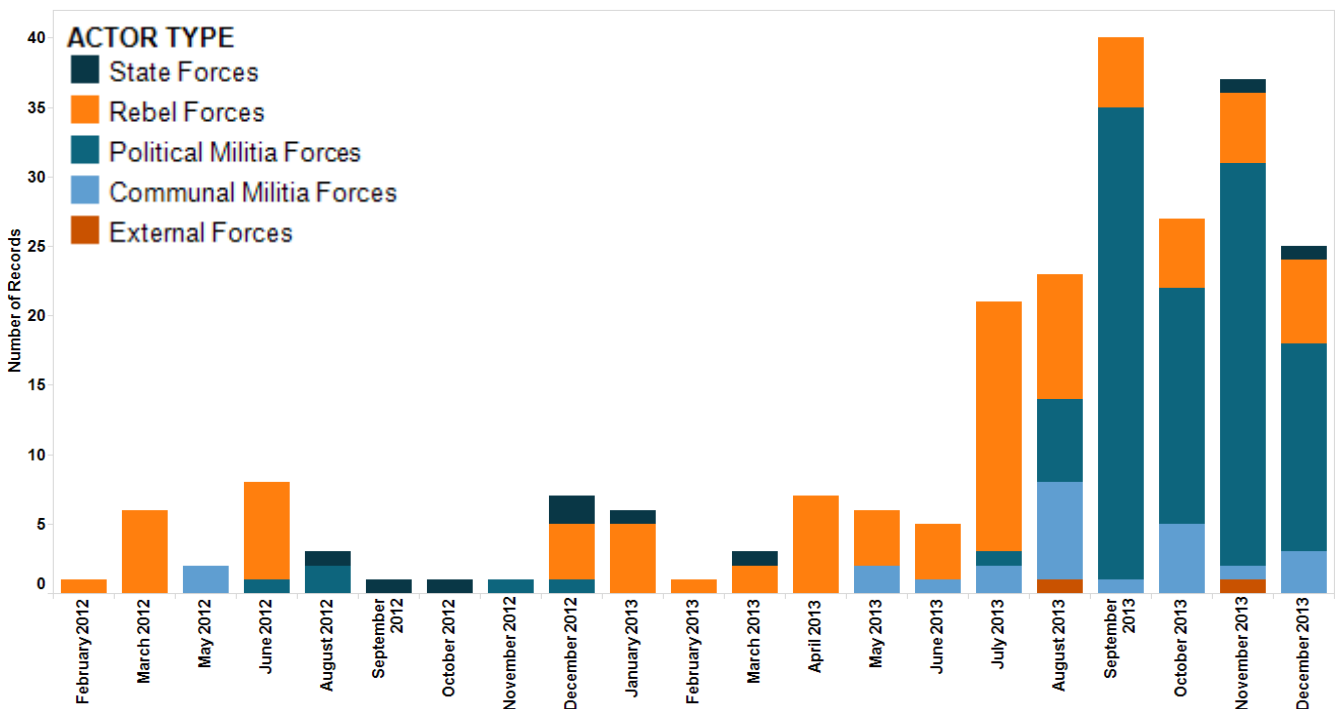

Figure 5: Conflict Events by Actor Type, Central African Republic, February 2012 - December 2013.

DR-Congo

DR-Congo had the sixth highest levels of conflict events in Africa in 2013; although it is one of the few conflict hotspots in which violence levels actually declined from the annual levels of 2012 and 2011 (*see* Figure 6). DR-Congo could reliably claim that it is no longer the region's main source of chaos. Violence rates in Congo did drop in 2013 by approximately 100 events, but reported fatalities increased during the same period. Nonetheless, DR-Congo's violence rates are decreasing, while some of its neighbours are either engaged in their own instability, or looking decidedly shaky.

Part of this decrease is that the M-23 rebel movement, covertly supported by Rwanda and once holding hopes of a 'liberated Kivu' had an excellent period to November 2012, and everything went a bit south since. A foreign military task force (FIB) based on a renewed initiative from the UN got M23 to effectively surrender in November 2013, a year after they took Goma so easily.

> **Conflict levels declined slightly in 2013 from the previous two years, although reported fatalities increased**
>
> **Although international attention is focused on M23, the country's conflict actors are extremely numerous and diverse**

FIB's mandate is to rid the area of the dozens of active militias that have benefitted from the veil of violence and limited governance in the East. However, very recent reports suggest that fanfare may be premature: M23 is reportedly recruiting again, and UN forces are encouraging the international community to fix this problem, once and for all. But as reported in ACLED's November and December *Conflict Trends*, the M23 is not the only show in town as far as violent groups in Eastern Congo.

Even with this group out of active commission on the battlefield, violence rates are still at or above 2013's summer average (or, more worryingly, at December 2011 rates, before the onset of the recent war). Most damning, there has been almost a three-fold increase in reported fatalities from November to December 2013, in areas from Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kolwezi, Maniema and North Kivu.
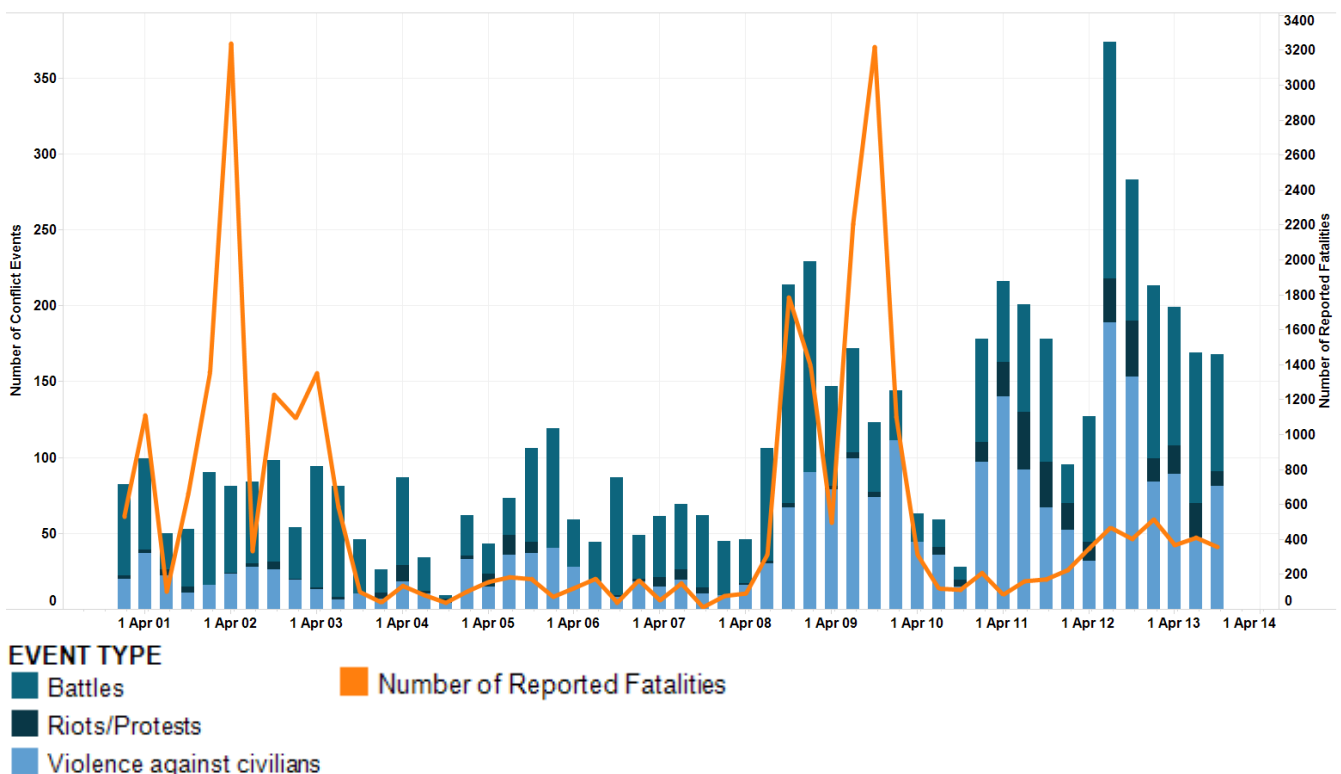

EVENT TYPE
- Battles
- Number of Reported Fatalities
- Riots/Protests
- Violence against civilians

Figure 6: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Central African Republic, January 2012 - December 2013.

Nigeria

Nigeria had the fourth highest level of conflict activity in Africa in 2013. Conflict event levels increased slightly in Nigeria in 2013 over 2012; while fatality levels increased sharply over the previous year (*see* Figure &). A particularly sharp spike in conflict-related fatalities occurred in mid- to late September, with the intensification of clashes between Boko Haram, security forces and diffuse vigilante militias which were mobilised to combat the group in several locations.

As in 2012, conflict remained extremely high in the North of the country, but it was more concentrated geographically in 2013 (*see* Figure 8). Whereas last year, the states of Kaduna, Plateau, Yobe and Kano saw relatively high rates of violence, conflict activity was much more concentrated in the North Eastern state of Borno than previously, with a drop in activity evident in Adamawa, Bauchi and Yobe. While conflict events were relatively dispersed across the country in 2013, reported fatalities were very clearly concentrated in Borno state in the North East of the country. Over half of all reported fatalities over the course of the year occurred in the state, compared to over 20% of events.

Elsewhere in the country, violence in Plateau, while still high, dropped slightly, with a more noticeable decline in reported fatalities as well. Benue and Nassarawa, by contrast, indicating that conflict dynamics remain in flux in the volatile North Central region.

The South South region, while still witnessing relatively low levels of political violence overall, did see a year-on-year increase in both conflict events and fatalities in 2013. Longer term trends, show a significant decrease over time in violence levels in key states such as Delta, a drop which is generally seen as reflective of the peace dividends of the amnesty programme introduced in

Slight increase in conflict levels and very sharp increase in reported fatalities in 2013

In the North East, conflict more concentrated in Borno than previous years

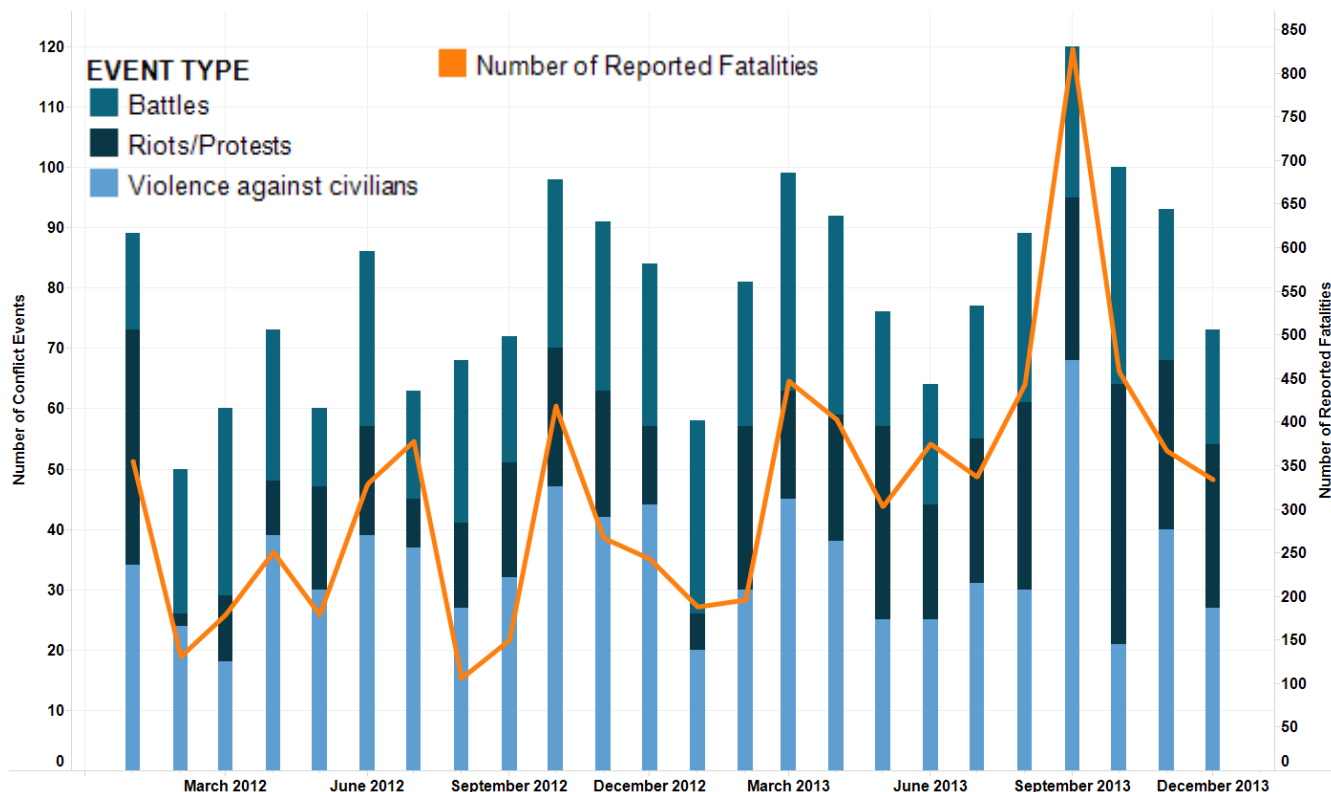**Conflict levels fell in North Central and rose slightly in South South around the Delta region**

Figure 7: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Nigeria, January 2012 - December 2013.

Nigeria

2009. Some believe that the programme has also created incentives, however, for diffuse militant groups to take up arms in order to secure a share of the dividends. While the reduction in political violence in the region is very real, increases in activity over time, coupled with ongoing high levels of violent criminal activity in the region, and concerns that the programme is not financially sustainable in the long-run, raise cause for concern for future stability.
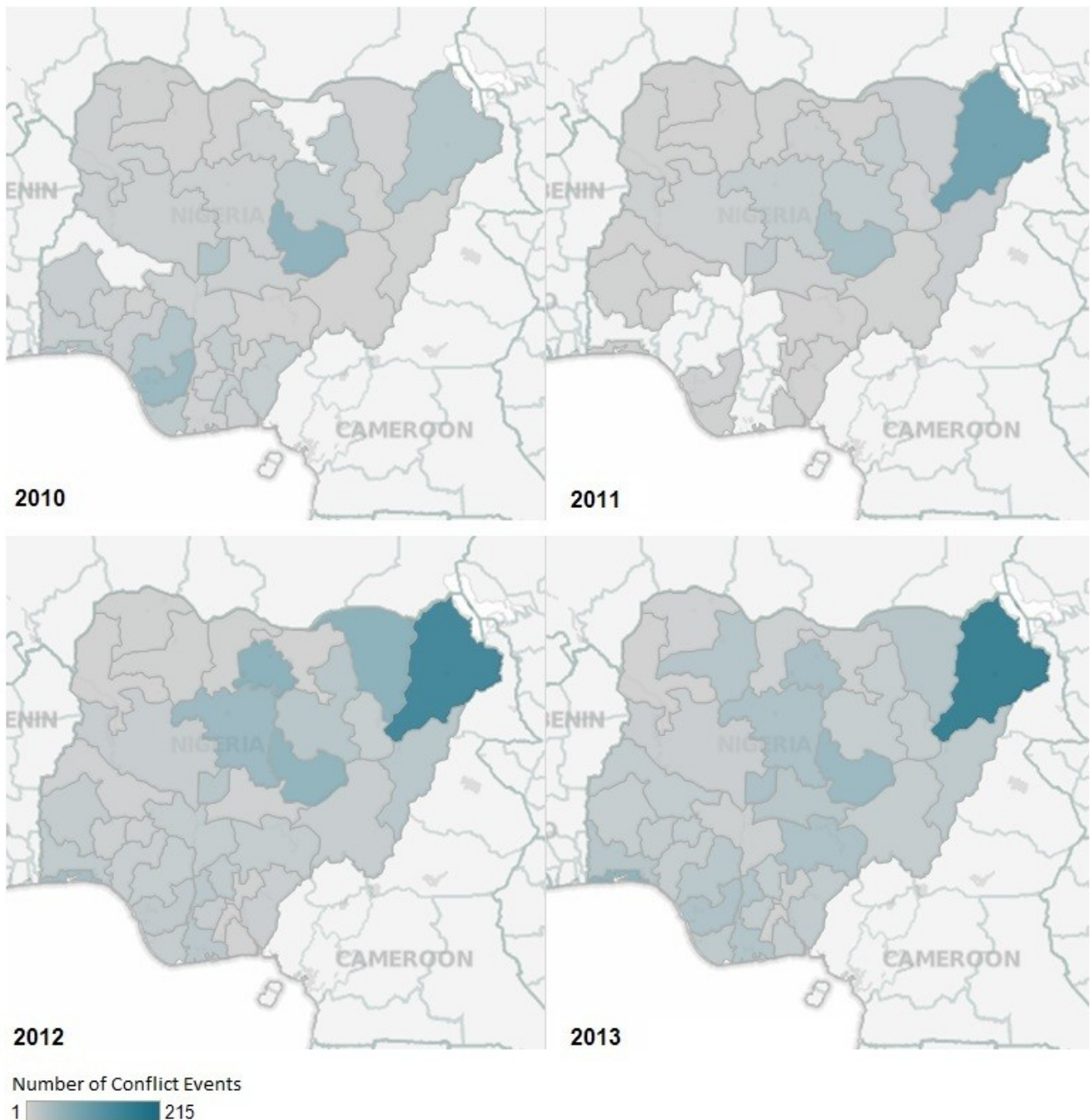

Number of Conflict Events
1 ▬▬▬▬ 215

Figure 8: Conflict Events by State, Nigeria, 2010 - 2012.

Nigeria

Boko Haram is by far the single most active militant group in Nigeria, involved in over one-third of conflict events and 57% of reported fatalities. State forces intensified their campaign against Boko Haram militants in 2013, with the declaration of a state of emergency in three North Eastern states in May.

Vigilante groups - dubbed the 'Civilian JTF' - were also a prominent feature of the conflict landscape in North East Nigeria over the course of the year, active in over 7% of events. Their mobilisation is controversial for several reasons. First, while ostensibly formed to identify and turn-

over Boko Haram militants, several units engaged in clashes and were victims of intense violence directly. This raises underlying concerns about the mobilisation of armed militant units who may have diverse motives and medium- to longer-term goals. Further, it is likely that the spike in violence against civilians in October 2013 (*see* Figure 9) was at least part driven by retaliation attacks against local units but targeting non-combatant populations. Finally, vigilante action does little to address underlying drivers of insurgency in the country and can only serve, at best, as a stop-gap measure, and one which has potentially explosive consequences at that.
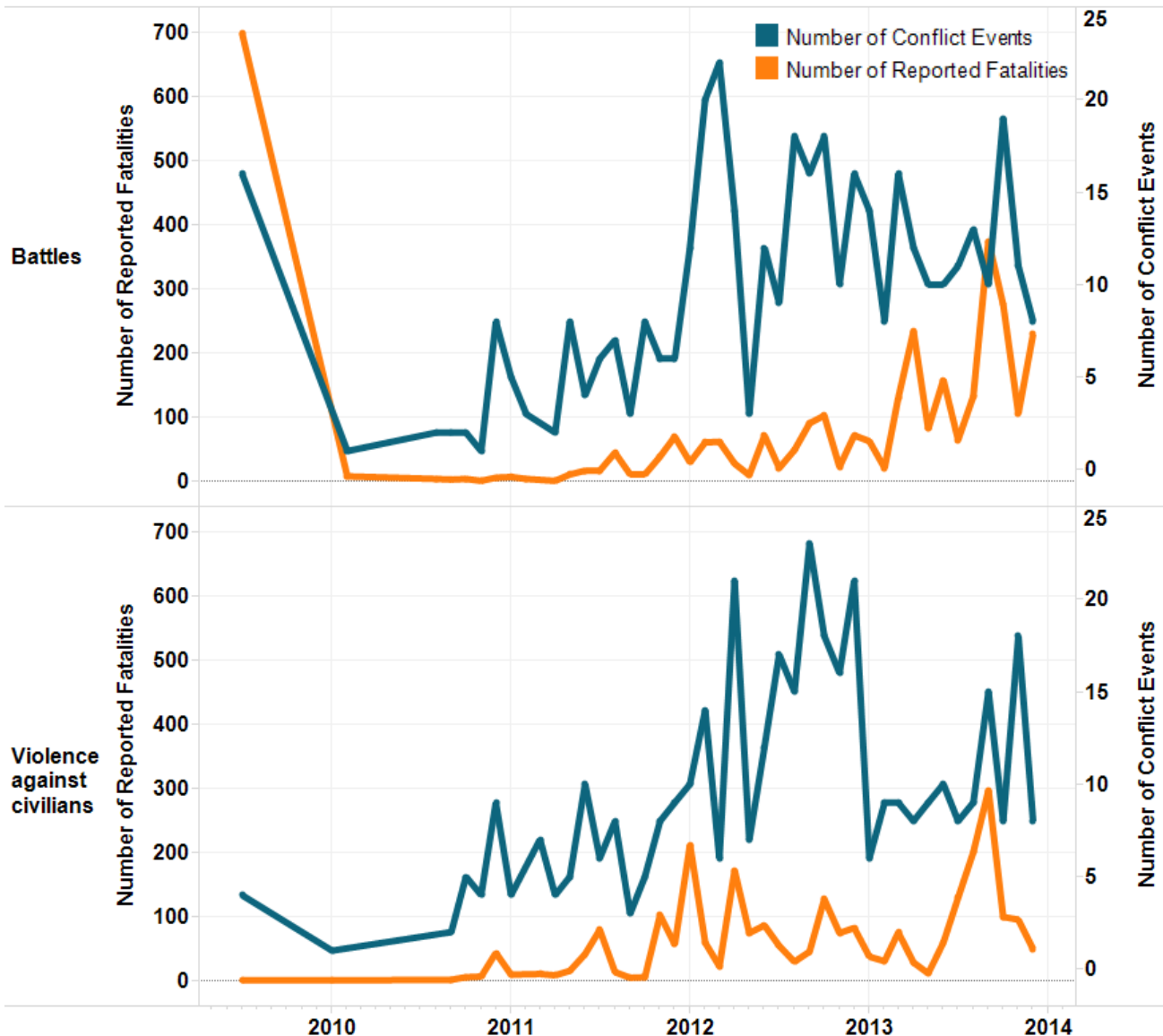

Figure 9: Boko Haram Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type, July 2009 - December 2013.

North Africa

North Africa saw increased instability in 2013 as countries continued to grapple with transitional political environments created in the political fallout of the Arab Spring. Conflict event levels rose in Algeria and Libya, but Egypt was subject to the most dramatic rise with violent conflict events constituting 65% of all events in North Africa in 2013 (*see* Figure 10).

Egypt had the second highest level of conflict events in the ACLED dataset in 2013. Riots and protests dominated the conflict profile over the year as a reaction to the ousting and later detention of President Mohamed Mursi in July. Sustained crackdowns against the Muslim Brotherhood also contributed to tensions in a polarised country with its classification in December as a 'terrorist group' by the interim government.

As increasing dissatisfaction prevailed and the demands of the Egyptian population were not met, more civil society actors mobilised with greater in-

Increased instability in North Africa in 2013

Highest conflict and fatality rates in Egypt, but gradual increase over course of the year in Libya

Conflict was more geographically dispersed in 2013 with a greater number of areas affected

tent in 2013; most notably the student protest movement that swept across Egyptian universities towards the end of 2013. Despite a referendum scheduled for January, the increased likelihood that General Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi will stand as a presidential candidate coupled with the continued repression of Muslim Brotherhood opposition voices suggests that tensions will continue to rise and we will witness sustained, high levels of conflict in 2014.

The number of battles also significantly increased in Egypt with the Sinai Peninsula playing host to an on-going Islamist insurgency that persistently targeted military and police checkpoints. The presence of violent Islamist actors drastically increased in Egypt in 2013.

Similar patterns were apparent in Libya where military officials were subject to daily attacks by diffuse militia groups that have evolved from the official
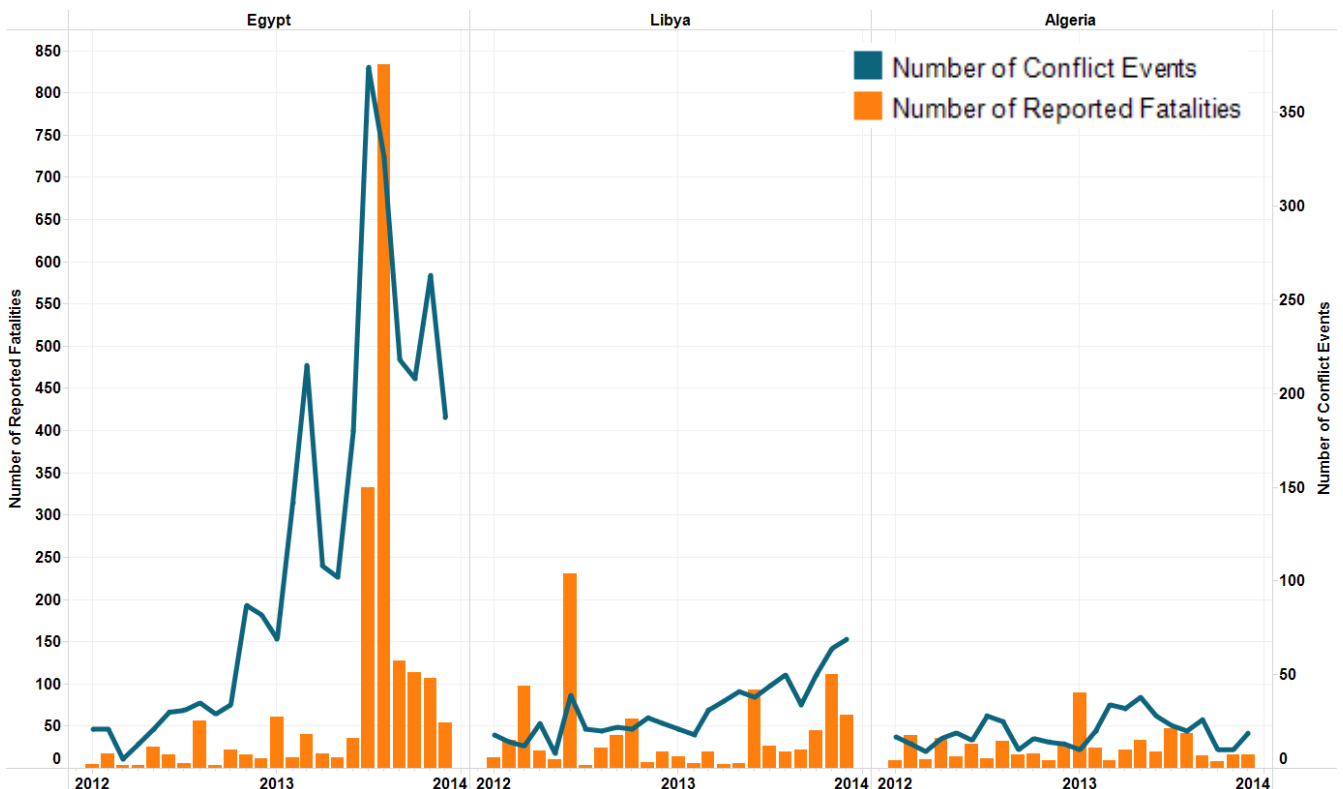

Figure 10: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, North Africa, January 2012 - December 2013.
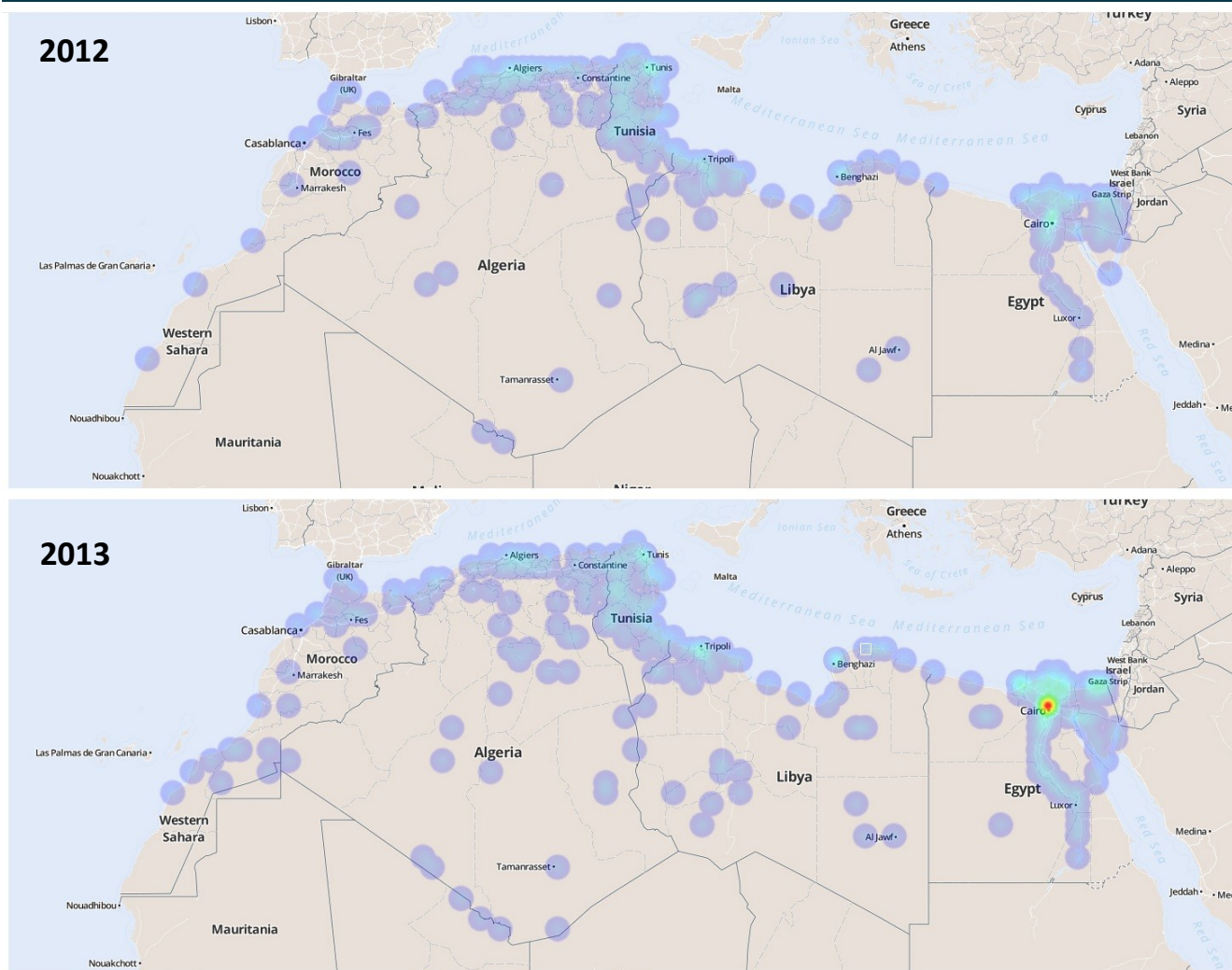
North Africa

Figure 11: Conflict Event Hotspots, North Africa, 2012 (top) and 2013 (bottom).

military strata and have developed their own political and religious ideologies. All conflict types escalated in Libya in 2013 as the inability of the government to control divisions persisted: these included minority Berber groups seeking autonomy to cyclical rebel violence – all symptomatic of the post-Gaddafi security crisis. Nevertheless, overall fatalities were lower in the country year on year, perhaps owing to a reduced number of tribal clashes that were fuelled by the spread of weapons in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Gaddafi regime.

The conflict hotspots of Benghazi, Tripoli, Derna and Sirte (*see* Figure 11) witnessed factional fighting that contributed to a more than two-fold increase in violence against civilians with several protest movements targeted by militia groups. Prospects of reconciliation in 2014 depend on

the ability of the government to restore stability to cities where militia rule has prevailed, a task that has thus far proved unsuccessful.

Conflict levels in Algeria remained low relative to other North African states. Despite the In Amenas hostage crisis in January 2013 that left 74 dead, the sporadic occurrence of events of this nature highlight Algeria's relative regional stability. A shift in the security environment may arise from the presidential elections in April 2014 or a weakness resulting from Bouteflika's departure may provide opportunities for violent Islamist groups from neighbouring Mali and Libya to infiltrate and engage in violent clashes, shifting the current security paradigm (World Review, 30th October, 2013). However patterns in the data would suggest that conflict levels will remain low **10**

Somalia

Somalia had the highest level of conflict events in Africa in 2013. The country saw an over 50% increase in conflict event levels, increasing from just under 2,000 conflict events in 2012 to just under 4,000 last year (*see* Figure 12). Levels of conflict have been persistently high in Somalia since 2006, but 2013 represents a very significant marginal increase over previous years.

Nevertheless, the intensity of conflict appears to have reduced somewhat, with reported fatalities dropping slightly over the course of the year. While event levels reached a historic peak in 2013, reported fatalities have remained relatively low and stable over the course of the year, following a peak in September 2012 when fierce fighting preceded the

A 50%+ increase in conflict events in 2013, but a slight decrease in reported fatalities.

Al Shabaab continues to dominate the conflict profile of the country, but its tactics and dynamics have evolved, particularly in the increased targeting of civilians.

battle between Federal Government-allied forces and Al Shabaab for the control of the southern port city and former headquarters of the group, Kismayo.*

Political violence in Somalia is dominated by the activity of Al Shabaab and its conflict with the Federal Government and allied forces. Al Shabaab was involved in over 20% of all conflict events in Somalia in 2013, and over 30% of all reported fatalities, making it the single most active non-state force. The group's declining capacity and control over territory is evident in the data, however, as this rate represents a decline from over 26% of activity attributed to the group in the preceding two years.
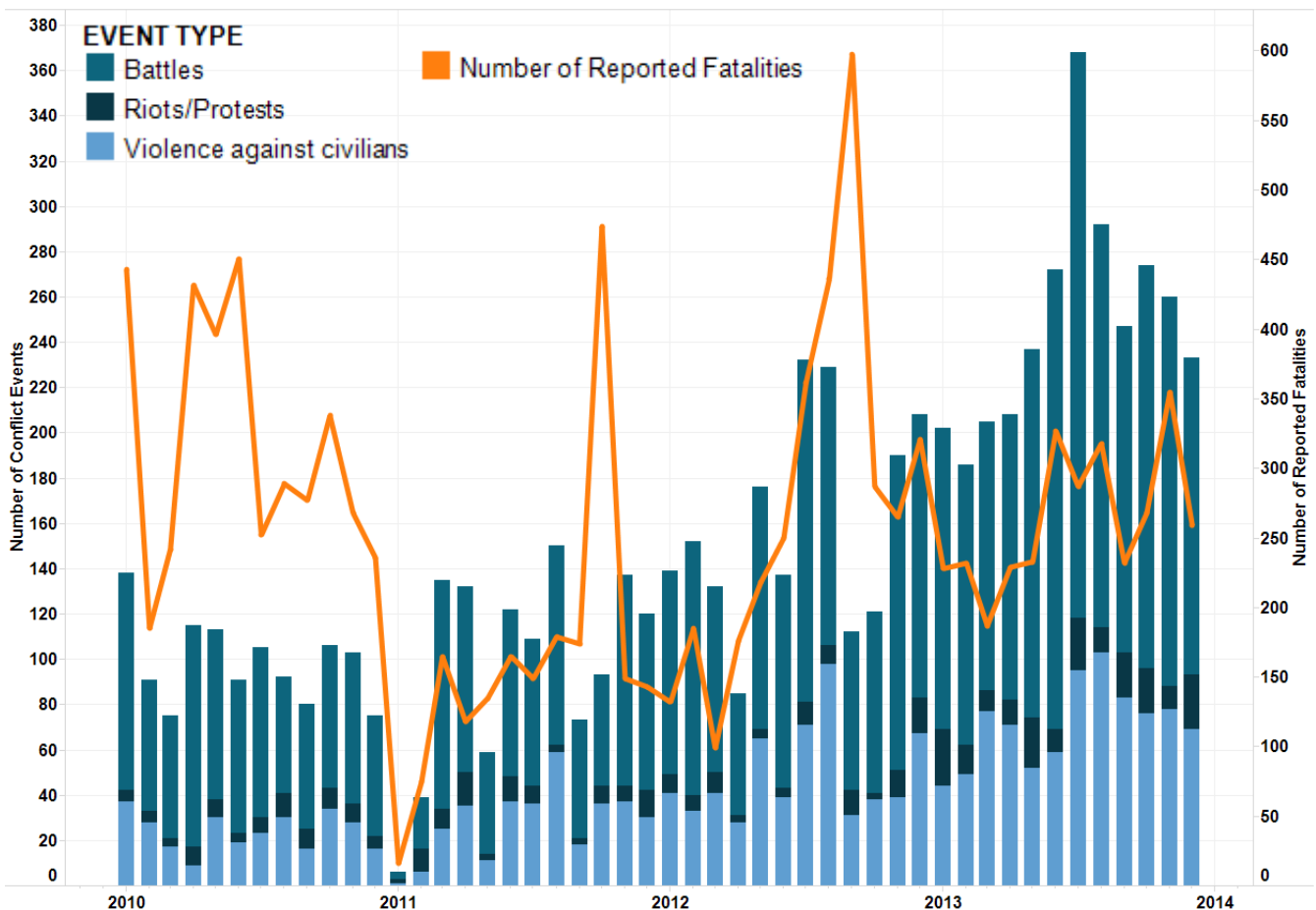

Figure 12: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Somalia, January 2010 - December 2013.

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*Fatality trends should be considered alongside the fact that fatality figures are particularly difficult to obtain and triangulate in contexts of conflict where territory is being controlled and contested by competing groups, as in Somalia for much of 2013.

Somalia

The dynamics of Al Shabaab activity have also changed in recent years: the proportion of Al Shabaab activity that has targeted non-combatants populations has increased steadily since late 2011, following the Kenyan incursion into Somalia, with a particularly marked increase in civilian fatalities as a result of a suicide bombing in Mogadishu in October of that year.

Notable spikes in Al Shabaab violence against civilians are evident in August 2012, December 2012 and September 2013 (*see* Figure 13), and many correspond with periods of territorial contestation with the Federal Government and allied forces. In areas which were soon-to-be seized from the group by Federal Government forces, attacks on civilians accused of spying appear to have increased in the run up to the territorial transfer. Similarly, in many areas which were recently seized from the group remained vulnerable to indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations - such as bombings in marketplaces.

Both patterns are important in determining and mitigating the risk to civilians in Somalia: in the first instance, civilians remaining within territory controlled by Al Shabaab appear more vulnerable to attacks for alleged spying as the group comes under increasing pressure from Federal Government forces; in the latter, it is important to note that even once the Federal Government has regained territory, the non-combatant population remains exceptionally - if not increasingly - vulnerable to Al Shabaab attacks on soft targets in the wake of the group's departure and

reduced operational capacity. Together, these patterns are a reminder that while the group's operational and logistical capacity was much reduced in 2013, it remained a significant threat to the stability and security of Somali populations through its ability to launch guerrilla-style attacks on civilian populations in particular in spite of the Federal Government's nominal control of over a location. This should serve as a warning to overly positive predictions about Somalia's imminent return to peace and stability, particularly in light of the deliberate targeting of civilians.

The prominent position of Al Shabaab in Somalia's conflict landscape should not obscure the myriad other conflict actors throughout the country, including diverse communal clashing with armed members of other groups, or deliberately targeting their civilian members. The activity of political militias vying for control over territory is also a concern.

Finally, however, among the less predictable dynamics to emerge in Somalia in 2013 has been the increase in protest activity across the country, which saw an over two-fold increase in 2013 over very stable and relatively low levels of activity since 2010. Woqooyi Galbeed and Togdheer in North-Eastern Somaliland saw the highest levels of peaceful protest in 2013, but activity in Banaadir remained significant, pointing to the increased mobilisation of civil society actors engaging peaceful means for political participation.
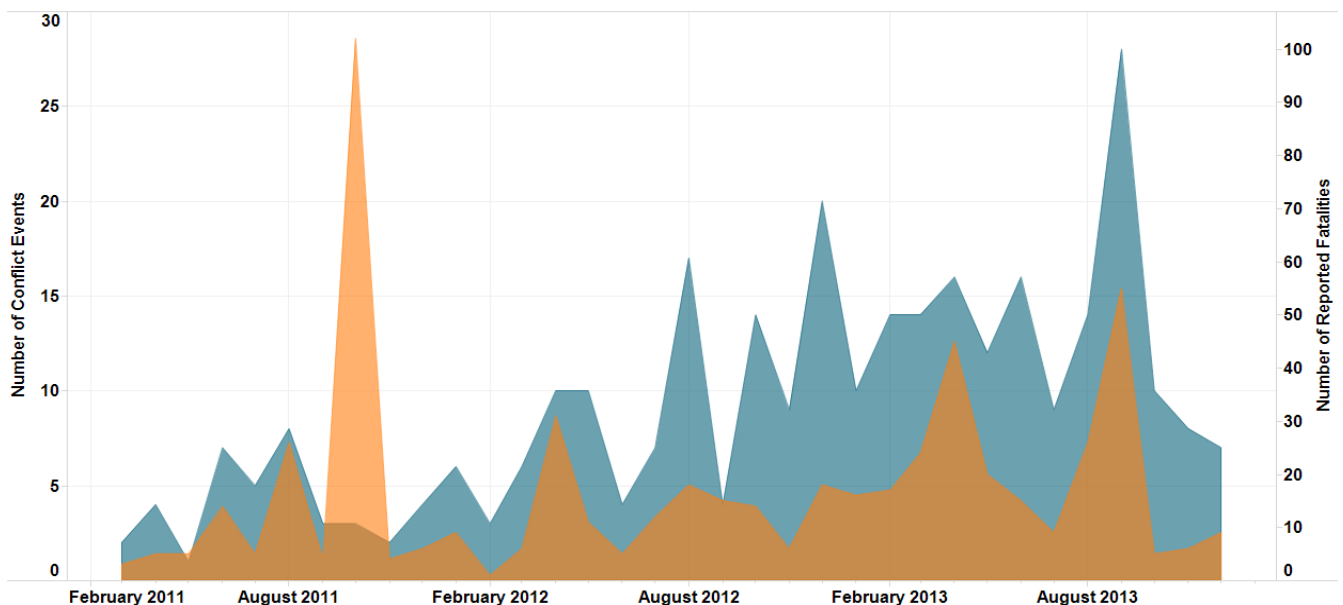

Figure 13: Violence against Civilians Events and Reported Fatalities attributed to Al Shabaab, Somalia, 2011 - 2013.

South Sudan

South Sudan had the 11th highest conflict levels in Africa in 2013, compared to the 13th highest on the continent in the previous year, with a significant increase in conflict events in the past twelve months (*see* Figure14). Currently, violence continues amongst the 'mutinous' rebels of former Vice-President Riek Machar who started their campaign in mid-December. South Sudan has been frequently profiled in recent ACLED *Conflict Trends* reports, but persistent conflict emanating from the Sudan-South Sudan contest and regional struggles that continued to upset the east, particularly the Jonglei area, mark it out as one of the most significant hotspots of the year. The current conflict is undoubtedly different in tenor and consequence, although not especially in location: Jonglei is still the main crisis area and the 'supportive home' of the rebellious factions, but violence is spreading into Unity and Upper Nile to take advantage of the logistics and resource wealth there.

At the time of writing, fighting for the town of Malakal is underway, rebels have lost control of Bentiu in recent days and Bor (capital of Jonglei) remains contested. Malakal provides road access to Jonglei and the rest of Upper Nile State, and this is especially important for aid work and trade. Whoever holds Malakal will be in the strongest strategic position. Fighting between government and opposition is fierce and protracted because of their similar capacity. Machar may have spent the past six months fomenting revolution against Salva Kiir's government, a job made easier by Kiir's dictatorial attitude in the past year. Many political elites have felt side-lined, and were more than willing to show Kiir the door, despite the hurried and somewhat disorganized nature of the opposition.

However, Kiir is not going without engaging the revolutionaries, despite his own disorganization and lacking support. Machar's problems may be bigger though- he has potentially made deals with several 'renegade' operatives who had found a home in Jonglei (Gadat's militia, White Army, and potential other groups made up of Lou Nuer) and everyone will want their share.

Further, military commanders and political elites in South Sudan are not renowned for their loyalty. So, there is no sign of agreements or one side overwhelming the other. As political contests go, these opposing forces are easily matched. Other groups active in South Sudan are being quite careful about who they ally with: the Yau Yau have claimed they would not fight in this contest, while there are conflicting reports about whether the White Army is assisting Gadat's forces (allied with Machar's).

Whatever the case, the distinction between groups does not fall into Nuer/Dinka divides, as is reported in media outlets. As shown in Figure 15, Jonglei is home to a mix of multiple ethnicities (Nuer, Dinka and Murle are dominant within), and the lines of contest to not fall based on ethnicity, but the shifting allegiances and power dynamics with the center (and now, two centers of potential political power).
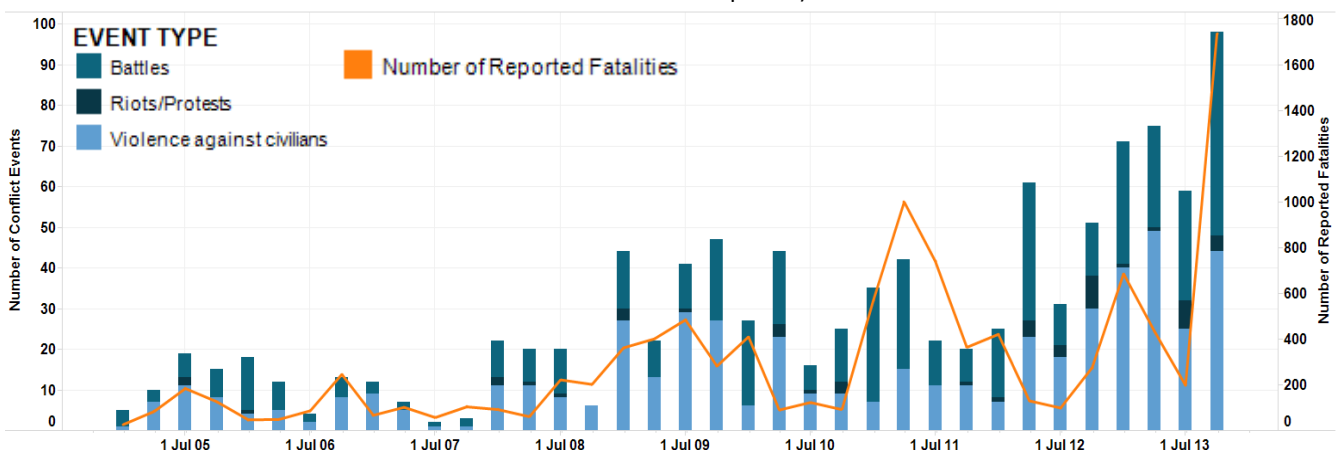
> **Conflict levels and reported fatalities increased significantly in South Sudan in 2013**
>
> **On-going conflict should not simplified to Nuer/Dinka divides as the locations and dynamics of conflict are more diverse**

Figure 14: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, South Sudan, January 2005 - December 2013.
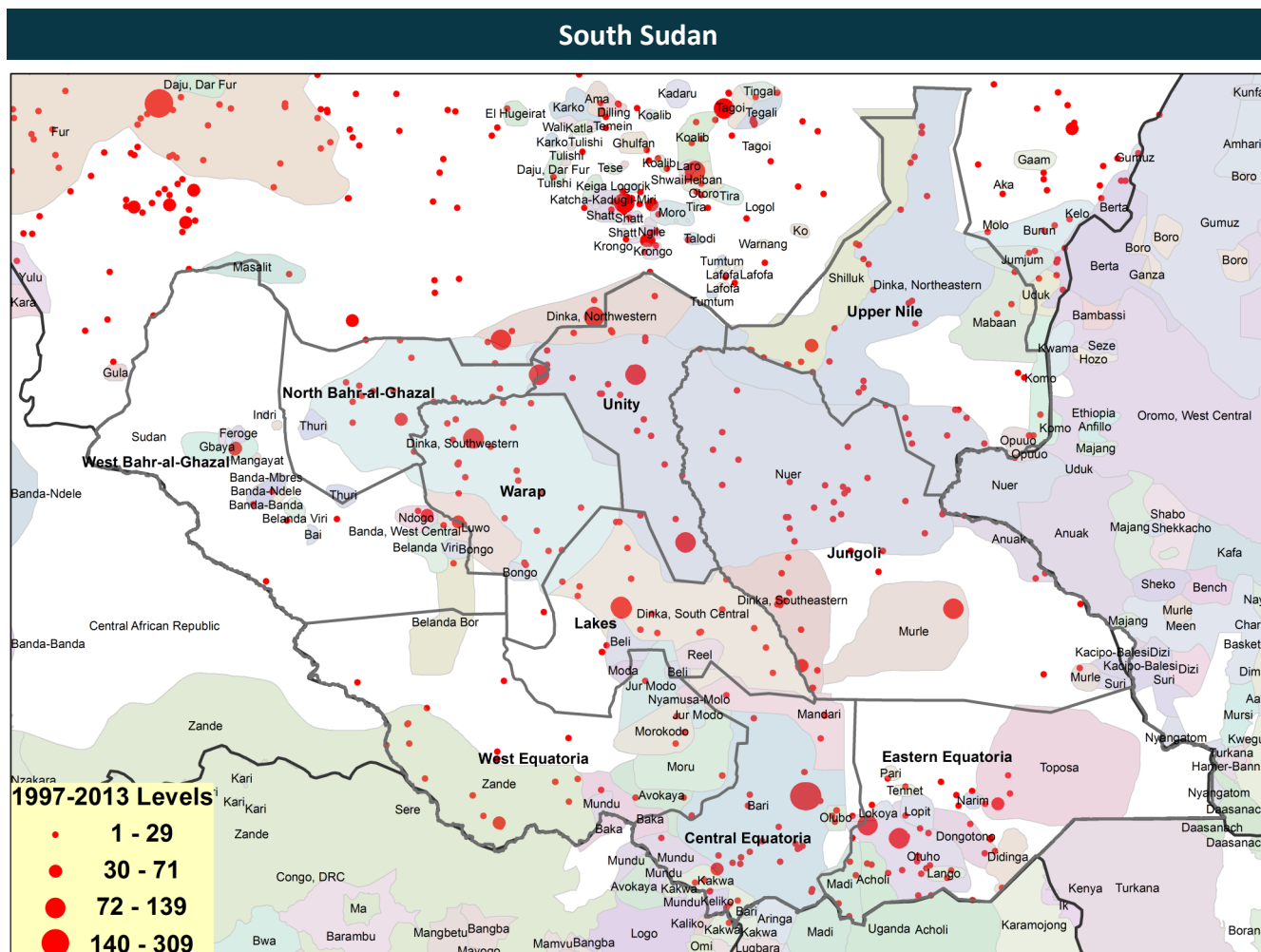
South Sudan

Figure 15: Map of Conflict Event Levels and Ethnic Territories, South Sudan, 1997 - 2013.

About ACLED

ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) is the most comprehensive public collection of political violence data for developing states. These data contain information on the specific dates and locations of political violence, the types of event, the groups involved, fatalities and changes in territorial control. Information is recorded on the battles, killings, riots, and recruitment activities of rebels, governments, militias, armed groups, protesters and civilians.

ACLED makes its dataset of disaggregated conflict data publicly available. A new version of the dataset is released annually, with data from the previous year and targeted quality review being added in each new version. Files for all countries are composed of ACLED events which indicate the day, actors, type of activity, location, fatalities, sources and notes for individual politically violent events. Please see the codebook for further details on conflict categories, actors, events and

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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 at acleddata.com.