

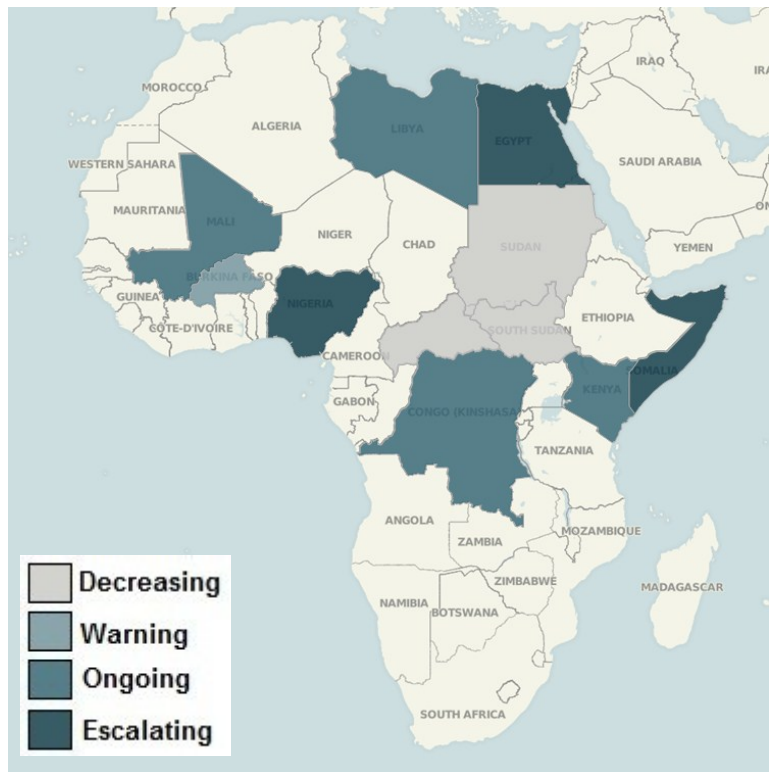
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 24)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, MARCH 2014

Welcome to the March 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. Monthly updates to realtime conflict event data are published through our research partners at [Climate Change and African Political Stability \(CCAPS\)](#) and also on the [ACLED website](#).

In addition, historical data from January 1997 to December 2013 is contained in ACLED Version 4 is available online at [acleddata.com](#), along with previous *Conflict Trends* reports, country profiles and other resources.

This month's issue focuses on conflict in **Central African Republic, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia**. Across the continent, violence fell in February, owing in large part to a reduction in conflict in Central African Republic, South Sudan and Sudan. Elsewhere, however, even where conflict events dropped (such as Nigeria and Egypt), reported fatalities increased, indicating an intensification of violence in those states. Violence levels are persisting in key regional conflicts such as Mali, Libya and DR-Congo, in spite of longer-term and recent attempts at establishing peace in those states.



Conflict Trajectory, February 2014

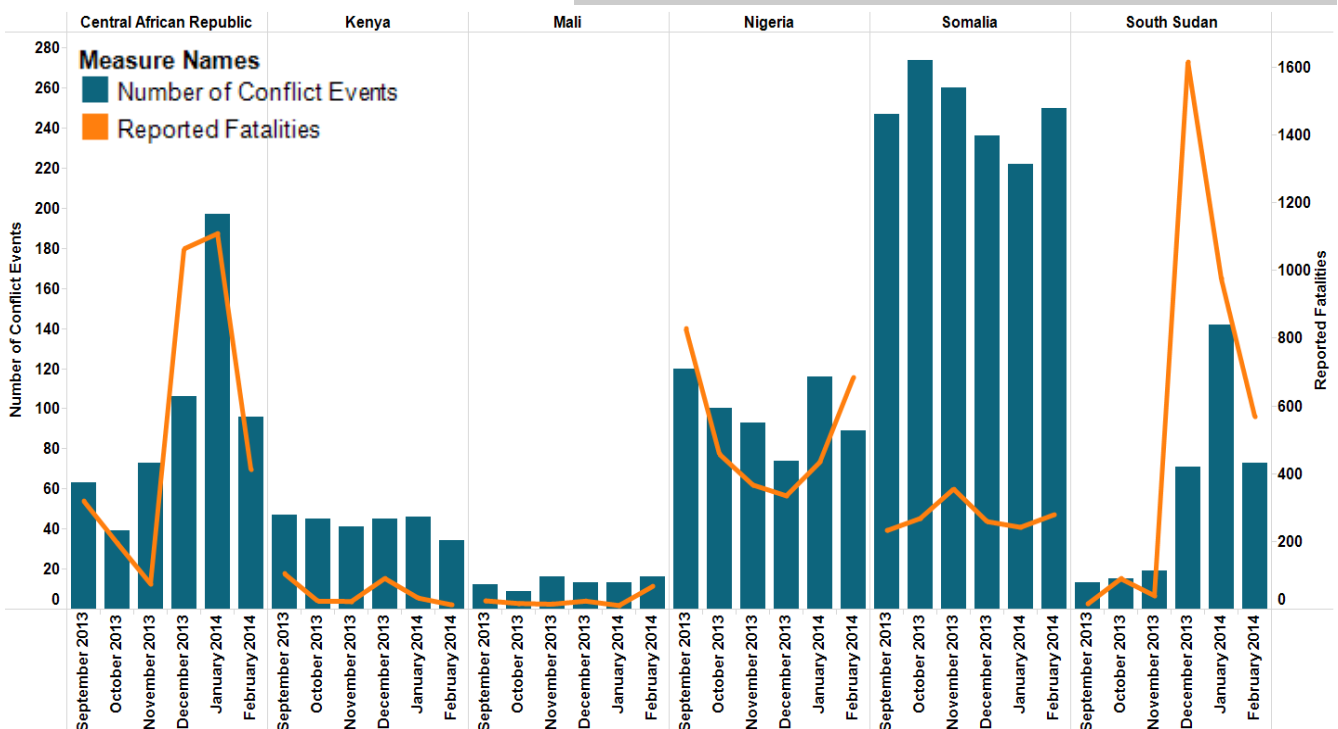


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, CAR, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, February 2013 - February 2014.

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Central African Republic

In February, violence in CAR was significantly lower than in previous months (see Figure 2). This can be attributed to the new political landscape in CAR: the French troops and MISCA offer the military support that was sorely lacking due to the effective dissolution of FACA; Séléka troops are considering their next moves and Anti-Balaka are confident in their dominance of the Western parts of the state. On March 7th, a detente between Anti-Balaka and Séléka troops was reported; March will see what cooperation brings. Before signaling the end of the war however, some uncomfortable truths need to be acknowledged: multiple reports from CAR suggest that Séléka is reconsidering its options and strategies.

One obvious option is to move back into the East where the fighters can regroup and retrain. There are indeed some scattered reports that this is occurring but a lack of reporting in the sparsely populated East limits confidence in those assertions. There is also the uncomfortable truth that present Séléka fighters are not actually Eastern or North-Eastern, but many hail from Bangui and joined the movement for its potential to loot and pillage without any great degree of intrusion from government forces.

These fighters are not likely to be Muslim, and less likely to be ideologically drawn to the fictitious divide between

Christians and Muslims that has been promoted in media assessments of this conflict. Their 'retreat' to the East is a tactical exercise, as external forces are unlikely to follow, and there is the promise of an enduring conflict. The last LRA fighters are also in the South-East, and some analysis suggests that cooperation with Séléka may breath new life into both organizations.

The Anti-Balaka movement continues to be called out for its quite obvious and brutal attacks on any Muslims within CAR. Chadian MISCA troops have escorted or protected Muslims in some parts of the country (and are regarded as brutal and violent in many cases), so Anti-Balaka may be running out of targets (Muslims make up approximately 10% of CAR's population). Further, Anti-Balaka have effective control over the parts of the state that matter to them, and reports suggest that they are hoping for a disarmament deal that may never arrive. Behaving themselves may also be a play to be considered as effective partners in the new government; they will have to be dealt with in some way as former FACA (and indeed, maybe current FACA) are very involved in this movement. In short, while new announcements should make us hope for the best, the realities of political forces and violence in CAR make for continued fear of the worst.

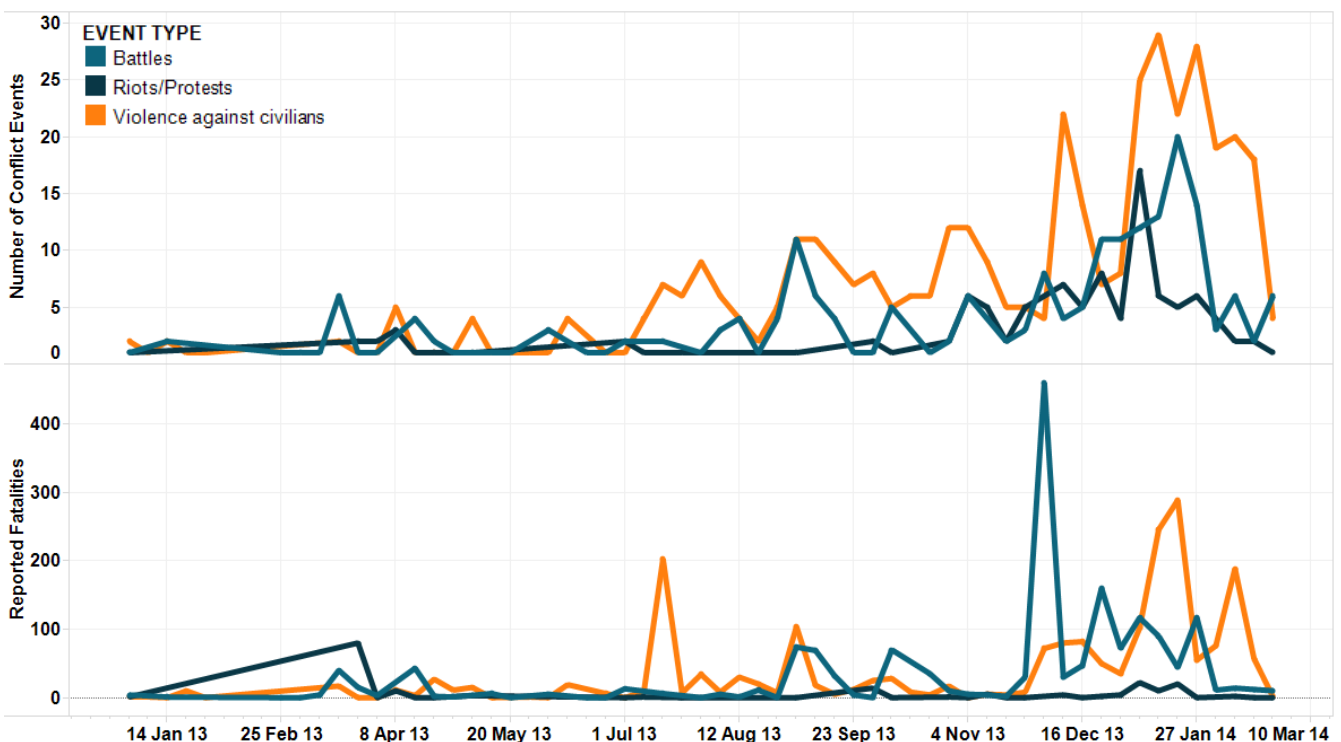


Figure 2: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type, Central African Republic, January 2013 - February 2014.

Kenya

It has been a year since the devolution process introduced in Kenya's 2010 constitution became more concretely realised through the election of county governors and other local officials in the March 2013 elections. The process was intended to bring government closer to the people, thus improving the responsiveness of the local government and tackling marginalisation. Further, through the creation of multiple, powerful positions at county level, the architects of the constitution hoped to reduce the pressure of the winner-takes-all mentality associated with the presidency, and with high levels of violence.

There is considerable optimism in many counties about the process of devolution. However, the past month has highlighted several sites of tension within the process, some of which have spilled over into open conflict.

First, there is contestation within the central government itself over the process and balancing powers between the branches of government. Persistent tensions between are being expressed through contentions over the devolution process, and wrangling for with parliamentarians seeking to disband the Senate since its inception (*Daily Nation*, 25 February 2014).

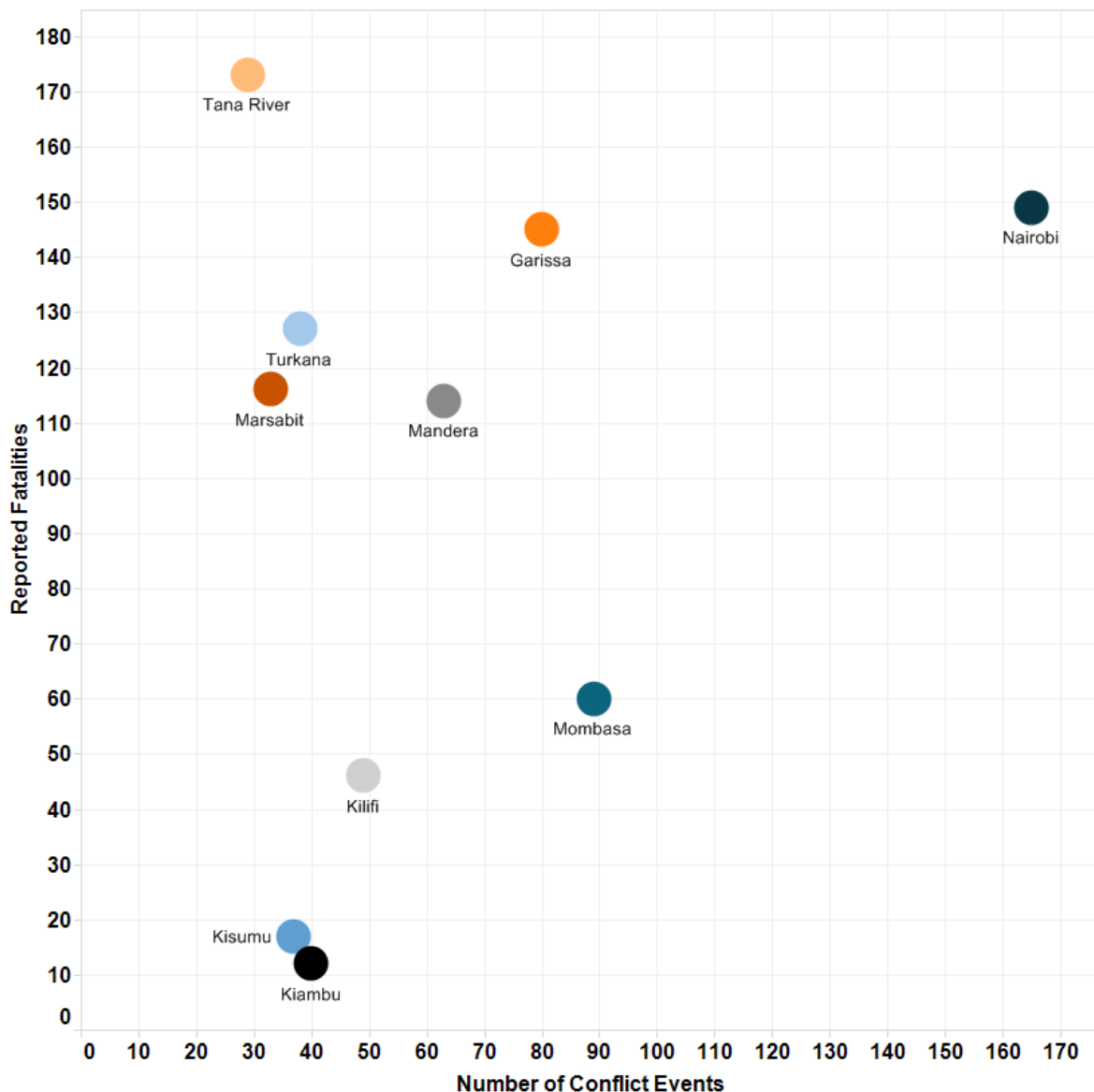


Figure 3: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, 10 Most Violent Counties (Event Count), Kenya, Jan 2012 - Feb 2014.

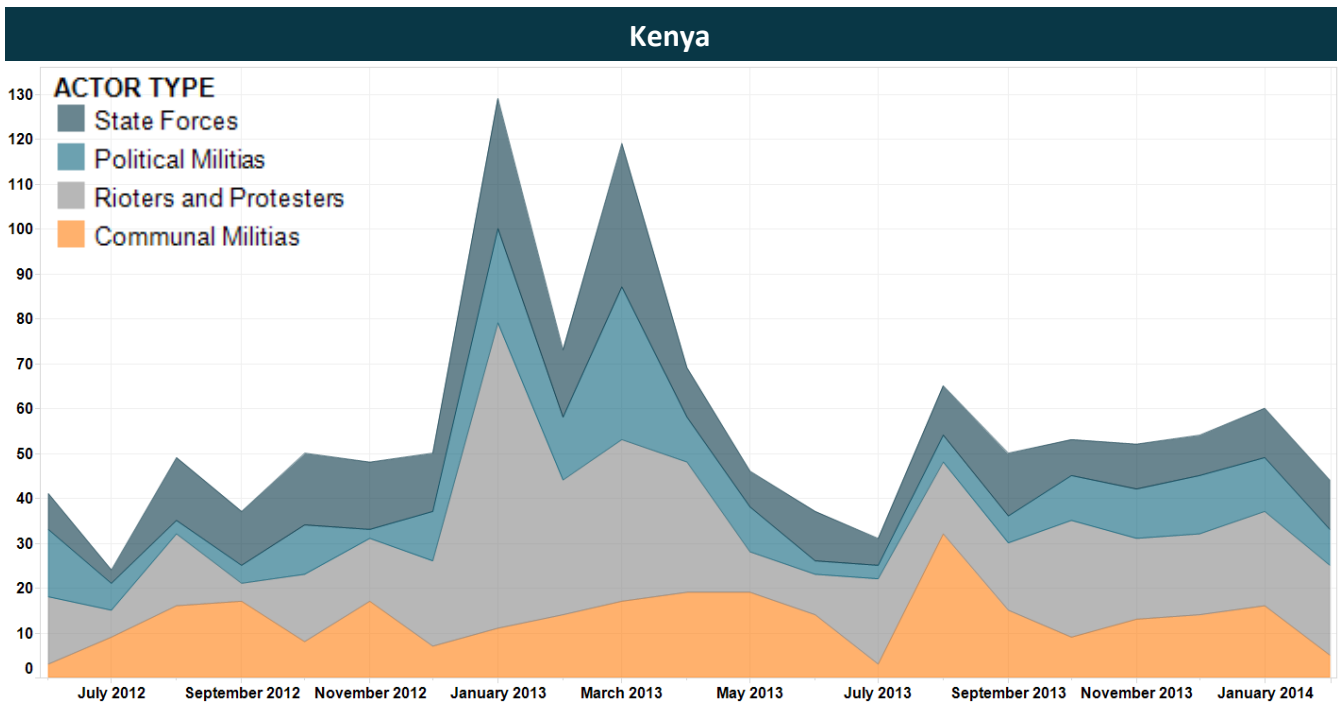


Figure 4: Conflict Events by Actor Type, Kenya, June 2012 - February 2014.

Secondly, there is strain between the central government and the counties: the impeachment of the Embu governor is only one move in a long line of proposed curtailments of governor's power in the counties, including Senate proposals for senators to take the lead on county development planning; placing restrictions on how governors spend county money; and the stripping of certain titles and ceremonial privileges from governors (*Daily Nation*, 24 February 2014).

Finally, there are multiple clashes within the counties, which undermine the logic of devolution as a process which reduces conflict and competition through the creation of multiple sites of power. In effect, the process has created multiple sites of competition and contestation. While many counties were created to coincide with ethnic group concentrations (and reduce the likelihood of significant diversity and ethnic competition within constituencies), some counties continue to have significant minorities, such as the Turkana and Pokot within Samburu County. In these areas, tensions over grazing rights and communal homelands have arguably been exacerbated by the demarcation of counties and sub-counties which risk marginalising minority groups within the county administrative and executive allocation of resources.

In other cases, diverse counties such as Tana River and Marsabit have witnessed the forging of new alliances of multiple minority groups against a numeric majority. The-

se counties have witnessed the most pronounced conflict. The military were deployed to Marsabit, West Pokot, Samburu and Turkana Counties in December 2013 to manage violence between communal militias (*The Star*, 7 December 2013), but the incidence of violence in Marsabit remains extremely high (see Figure 3). It is driven up, in part, by the county's proximity to the Ethiopian border, with multiple communal groups straddling both sides of the border and able to move relatively freely between the two and thus evade security forces.

Some of the larger counties, in particular, such as Turkana and Mandera, have a considerable battle ahead of them to ensure marginalisation is tackled within counties: without either further devolution of power to sub-counties within the large territories, or greater oversight from the central government to monitor the expenditure and resource allocations to minority groups and peripheral areas, it is difficult to see how communities far from the county capital, and close to county borders (which often coincide with borders of land rights between communal groups), will be well served by the process.

The impact of communal violence of this type on Kenya should not be under-estimated. While international attention has focused on high-profile junctures such as the 2007/2008 post-election violence, in 2013, communal violence continued to make up just under a quarter (22%) of all political violence in Kenya (see Figure 4).

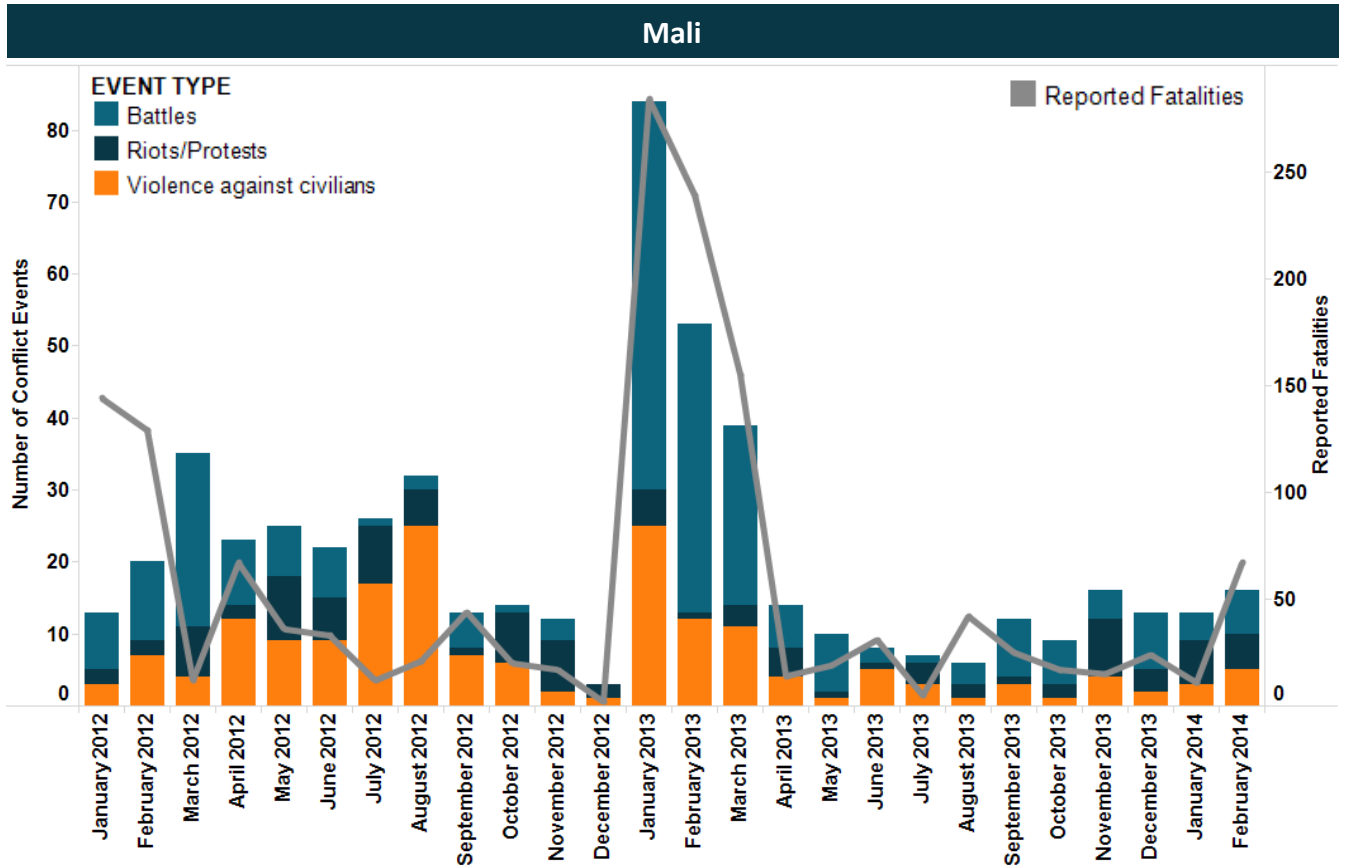


Figure 5: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Mali, January 2012 - February 2014.

Although conflict events in Mali have decreased significantly in the past year, violence has risen slightly since mid-2013 (see Figure 5), with most occurring in northern regions of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. Reported fatalities increased sharply in February 2014, following a short period of relative stability. While battles between armed groups account for the majority of events, violence against civilians has made up over one-quarter (26%) of conflict events since January 2013.

In addition to shifting levels of overall violence, conflict dynamics in Mali have been changing on several key fronts: first, interactions between various conflict actors have been evolving in the dynamic security environment (see Figure 6). In early 2013, most conflict between armed groups involved state or external forces and rebel groups. Interaction patterns have shifted since November 2013, with a notable increase in conflict between political militias and external forces, clashes between various rebel groups (e.g. MNLA and MUJAO), and violence between rebel groups and communal militias.

Conflict activity on the part of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is indicative of this shift-

ing dynamic: the group has been involved in clashes with various militia groups (Islamist militias and Tuareg, Arab, and other ethnic militias) and in violent confrontations with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Increased levels of conflict *between* non-state actors (not only those targeting state and international forces) is a significant shift. It speaks to a devolving security context wherein diffuse rebel and militia groups are increasingly targeting one another in a contest for primacy and control over territory and resources. This is particularly important in the context of Mali, where the insurgency brought it to international attention was the result of unlikely alliances forged across diverse militant groups. This devolution, therefore, is a sign of the temporary and unsustainable nature of those alliances, but their continued capacity to destabilise the security environment.

In addition to changes in the patterns of engagement between different actors, the levels and nature of violence in which groups are involved have also shifted. Levels of activity among certain actors active in early 2013, such as Ansar Dine, have decreased significantly. Meanwhile, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO),

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Mali

after an apparent drop in activity in mid-2013, has increased its profile again in early 2014. Recent activity has included battles with French military forces, killings of Tuareg civilians in northern Mali, clashes with the MNLA, and the kidnapping of Red Cross workers. Strategically, the group has recently aligned with Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s Mourabitounes group, which released a statement in January 2014 threatening retaliation for French military intervention in Mali.

Unidentified armed groups (including those potentially linked to groups such as MUJAO and MNLA) have also been consistently, and increasingly, active in Mali. The activity of these groups also reflects an evolving security context in which diffuse and nascent militant groups are increasingly active and competing with rival militant formations for control, access and primacy in a complex multi-actor environment.

In November 2013, the MNLA and Arab Movement of the Azawad (MAA) agreed to participate in peace negotiations

with the Malian government, focused on resolving conflict in northern Mali, though talks began only in February 2014. The process has already proven to be a complicated one, due to refusal to participate by some armed groups, divisions between and within allied groups (e.g. MNLA and MAA), and concerns over the legitimacy of the government’s approach (International Crisis Group, 2014).

Other recent peacebuilding actions include the establishment of a new Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Security Council’s visit to Mali in early February, intended to improve relations with Bamako and advance peace efforts (*Africa Confidential*, 7 February 2014). Both military interventions and peacebuilding approaches, involving national and international actors, ought to consider and respond to the shifting dynamics among conflict actors in northern Mali, including changing levels of activity on the part of certain actors, violence against civilians by state forces, changing patterns of interaction between conflict actors, and emerging movements.

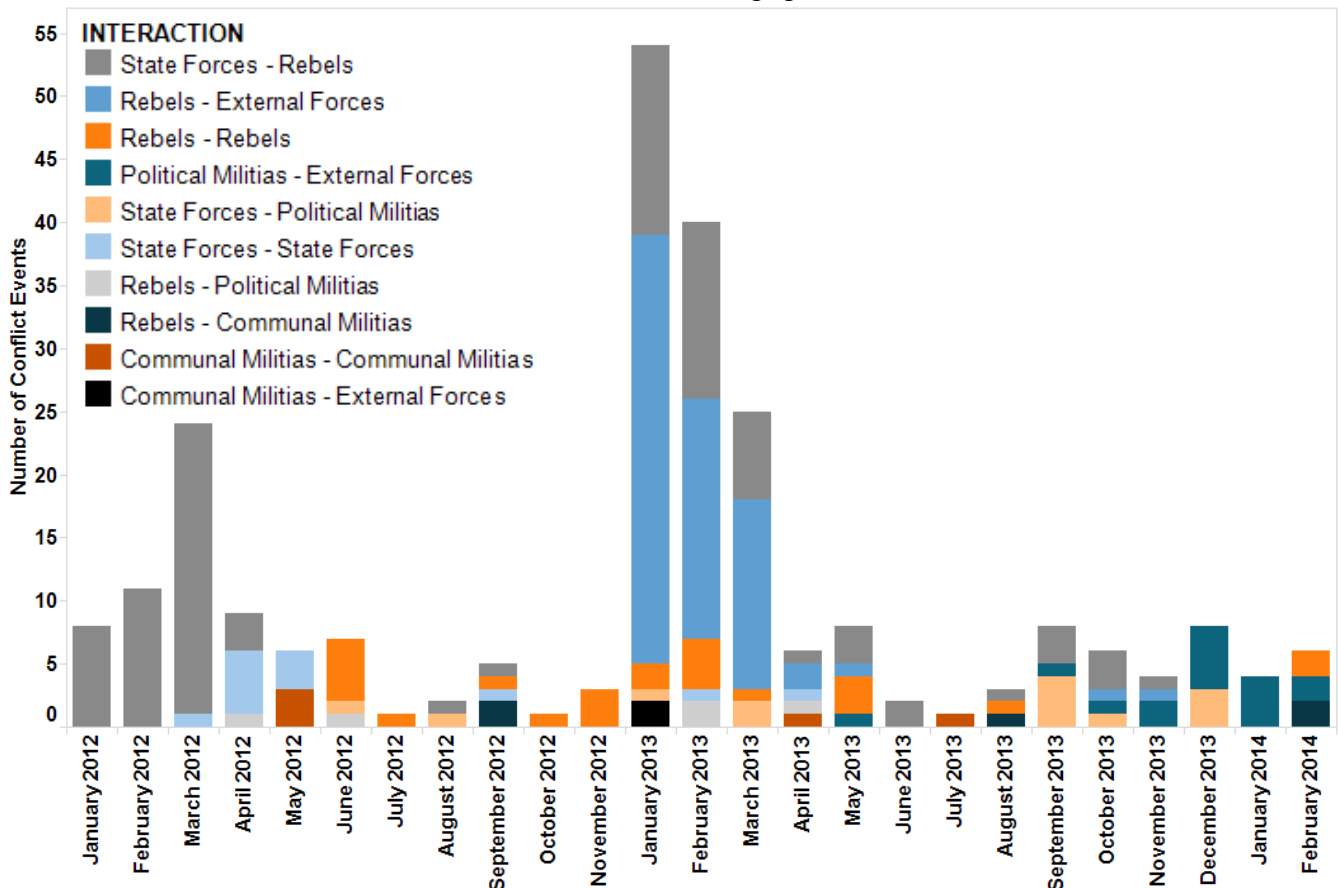


Figure 6: Battles by Interaction Type, Mali, January 2012 - February 2014.

Nigeria

While conflict event levels dropped somewhat in February, following a spike in the previous month, fatality levels continued to increase for the third month in a row, reflecting a growing intensity of conflict even as the number of individual incidents decline. This dynamic is often characteristic of violent groups which are operating within limited capacities and territorial scope. As governments push militants out of urban and strategically significant areas, groups operating at reduced capacity engage softer targets, such as schools and markets.

Since January 2013, violence in the North East has accounted for 30% of all violence in Nigeria, and almost two-thirds (64%) of all reported fatalities. This proportional breakdown speaks to an intensely high fatality conflict environment: since January 2013, conflict events in the North East have resulted in an average of 10 fatalities per event, more than twice the next highest average rate of 4.9 fatalities per event in North Central and an average of

0.3 fatalities per event in the South West, the region with the lowest ratio in the country. To put these rates in comparative perspective, the North East's ratio is considerably higher than the ratio of average fatalities to a single conflict event across the African continent since January 2013 (2.1); and even in key conflict hotspots such as Somalia (1.1), DR-Congo (2.1) and South Sudan (8.8).

Also of concern is the increasing rates of civilian targeting in the region: while absolute levels of violence and fatalities have been subject to some volatility (see Figure 7), in proportional terms, the rate of violence against civilians has been increasing steadily since January 2013, peaking in February 2014 as two-thirds of all conflict events in the region, and over 75% of all reported fatalities. Revisiting the ratio calculation above also underscores the intensity of this violence: an incident of non-combatant targeting in the North-East since January 2013 results in an average of 9 deaths.

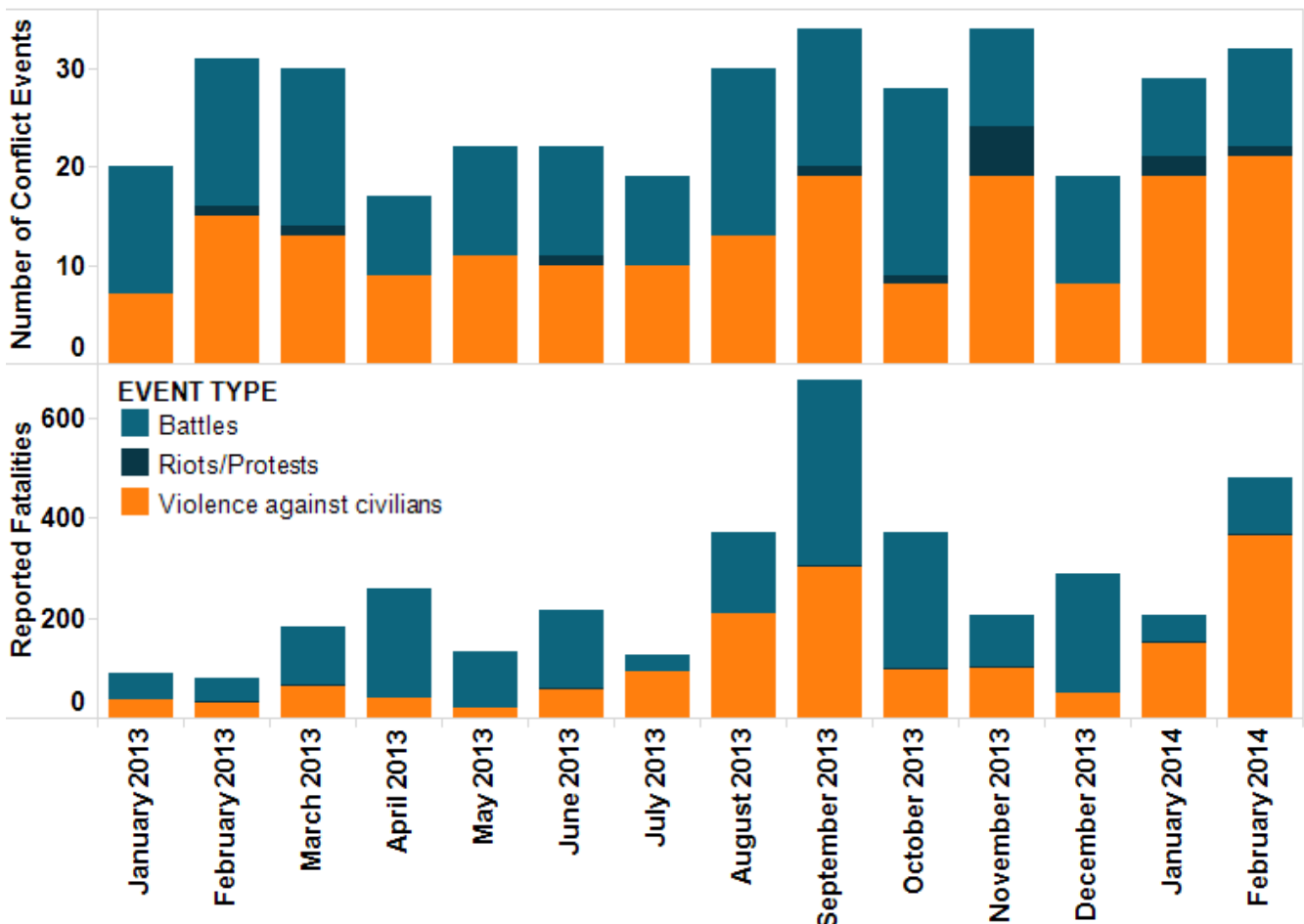


Figure 7: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type, North East Region, Nigeria, January 2013 - February 2014.

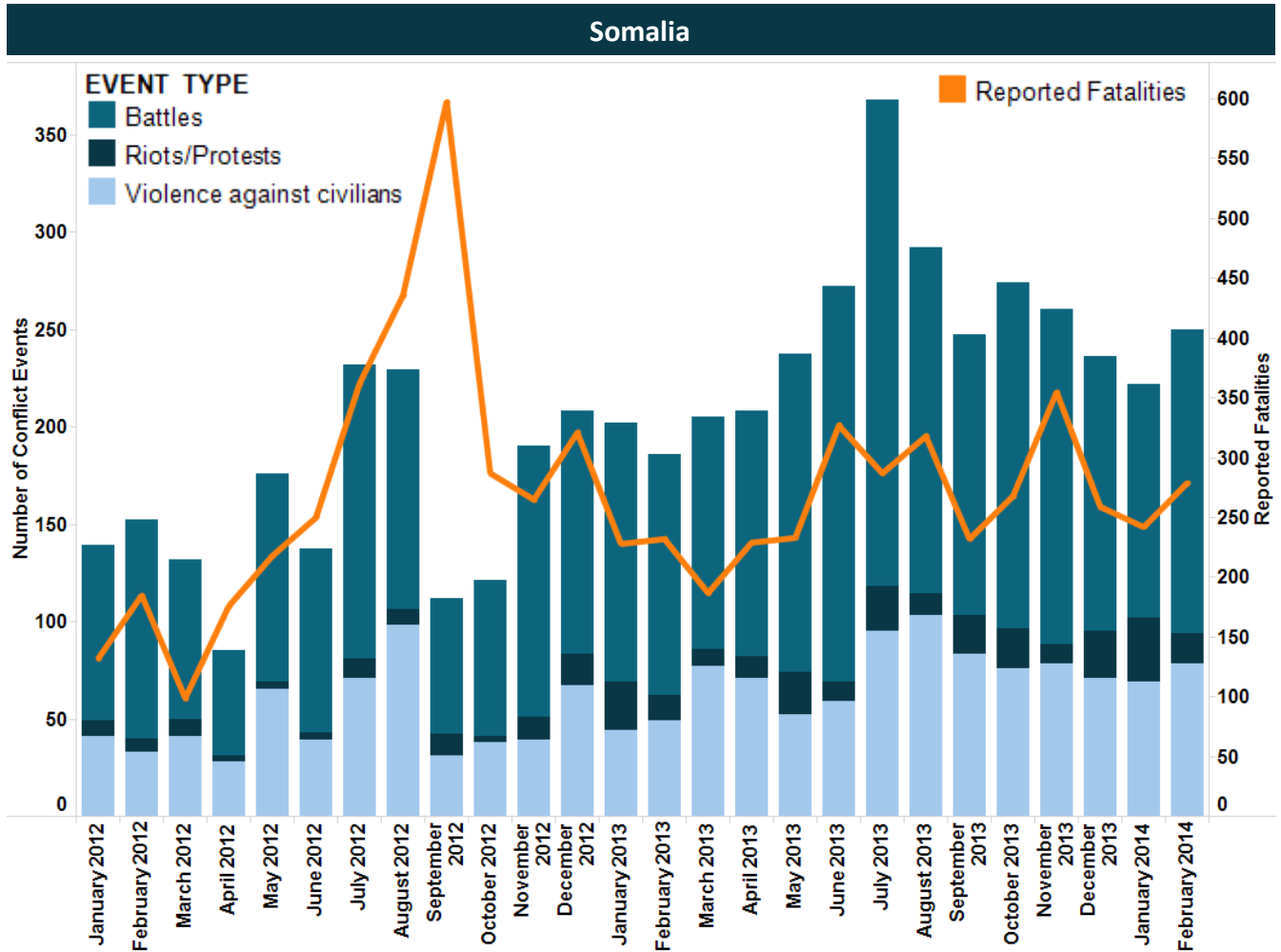


Figure 8: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, Somalia, January 2012 - February 2014.

Conflict event levels increased in Somalia for the first time in five months with reported fatalities trending upwards in February as well (see Figure 8). The driver of this increase is two-fold.

First, Al Shabaab activity in the country increased from just over 60 conflict events in January, to over 90 in February. In proportional terms, Al Shabaab was involved in over 40% of conflict events in February, up from 35% the previous month. While this is a substantial increase, it remains roughly in line with levels of activity since mid-2013, when the group was involved in an average of 3.5 conflict events per day. Increased activity has largely taken the form of battles against other armed groups, although increased fatalities (which were also driven up this month) have escalated most significantly in the area of non-combatant targeting. Al Shabaab is more active in battles, but violence against civilians by the group is more intense, resulting in higher rates of casualties, and a much

higher ratio of average fatalities to conflict events (3.7 for violence against civilians in February; 1.5 for every battle event in the same month).

However, sustained Al Shabaab activity is not the only driver of conflict in Somalia: communal and clan militias, as well as unidentified armed groups together were active in over half of all conflict events in Somalia in February. As in Mali, the prevalence of unidentified armed groups speaks to several dynamics: the first is that some of these units are Al Shabaab-aligned or sympathetic, and are engaging in violence which is either unacknowledged by central Al Shabaab commanders, or is only carried out in broad sympathy with the aims of the group. A second, and potentially coterminous dynamic is that an increasingly diffuse range of diverse and nascent militant units are operating across the country, reflecting the growing complexity of a security context in which Al Shabaab may be persistent, but may no longer enjoy primacy.

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South Sudan

South Sudan is still fully engaged in its quagmire (see Figure 9), and similar to the conflicts of the past two and a half years, it conforms to no standard definition. Continued significant movements by Salva Kiir and Riek Machar to bolster their forces underscore ongoing accusations by both sides that the other is not committed to peace. In February, the conflict continued in Upper Nile State, Jonglei and Unity and mainly around and within the significant and large cities therein (Malakal, Bor and Bentiu, respectively).

Multiple groups are involved in this violence: contrary to the Nuer vs Dinka ethnic dichotomy that is being presented in media accounts, there are multiple regional, ethnic, and perhaps most importantly, civil war based dimensions to the groups, agents and strategies practiced during this conflict. Groups include present and former rebel and militia groups, new agents (e.g. potentially M23 as reported last month), and small communal militias organized for community protection: youth in Duk, Jonglei are arming themselves to protect civilians and property from the Opposition forces. See Figure 10 for visual of where different agents are present.

The various non-state groups (and Uganda) active in the oil producing areas of Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei are

necessary for the international community to recognize, as these play a crucial local role in violence perpetuation and civilian harm.

This past month also witnessed important changes: UNICEF reports child soldiers being used by both government and opposition groups. Although conflict is largely clustered in areas logistically or economically important, there is evidence for escalation, entrenchment and diffusion into new areas: in the Malakal/Upper Nile area, General Gat-hoth Gatkuoth, former commissioner of Nasir, is the self declared local leader SPLA-In Opposition. SPLA-In Opposition are supposedly in control of the Sobat/Nasir areas of Upper Nile and are reportedly active in Longchuk. Ongoing violence in Nasir and Longchuk is partly due to boundary disputes and these are key gerrymandering areas.

These areas are difficult to access as there is swamp land that separates Longchuk from Jonglei, and will be largely cut off after the rainy season begins in June. The opposition is not just diffusing: air strikes by the Kiir Government on Maban County in Upper Nile State occurred in February, where the Blue Nile Sudanese refugees live. Although no fatalities were reported, this act has the potential to militarize Maban, SPLA and SPLA-N.

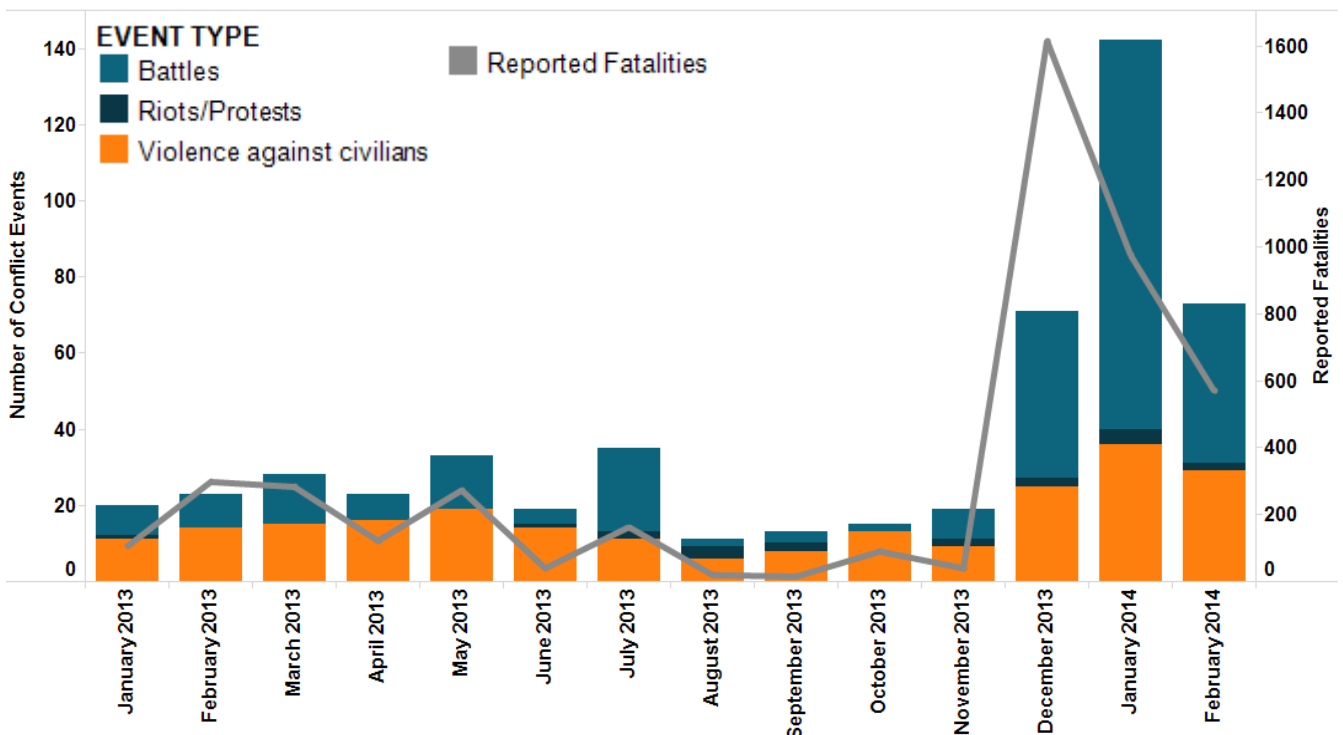


Figure 9: Conflict Events by Type and Reported Fatalities, South Sudan, January 2013 - February 2014.

South Sudan

Militarization of the other groups may be part of the Kiir plan: due to heavy defections, the government is seeking out all extra hands. IHS Global Insight & Small Arms Survey report: "government officials confirmed that up to 70% of the South Sudanese army, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, have defected. An IHS source in Juba reported that

SPLA soldiers were unwilling to engage soldiers who had defected in the fighting. Consequently, the government has enlisted support from Sudanese rebel groups Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North in Unity and Upper Nile states, respectively".

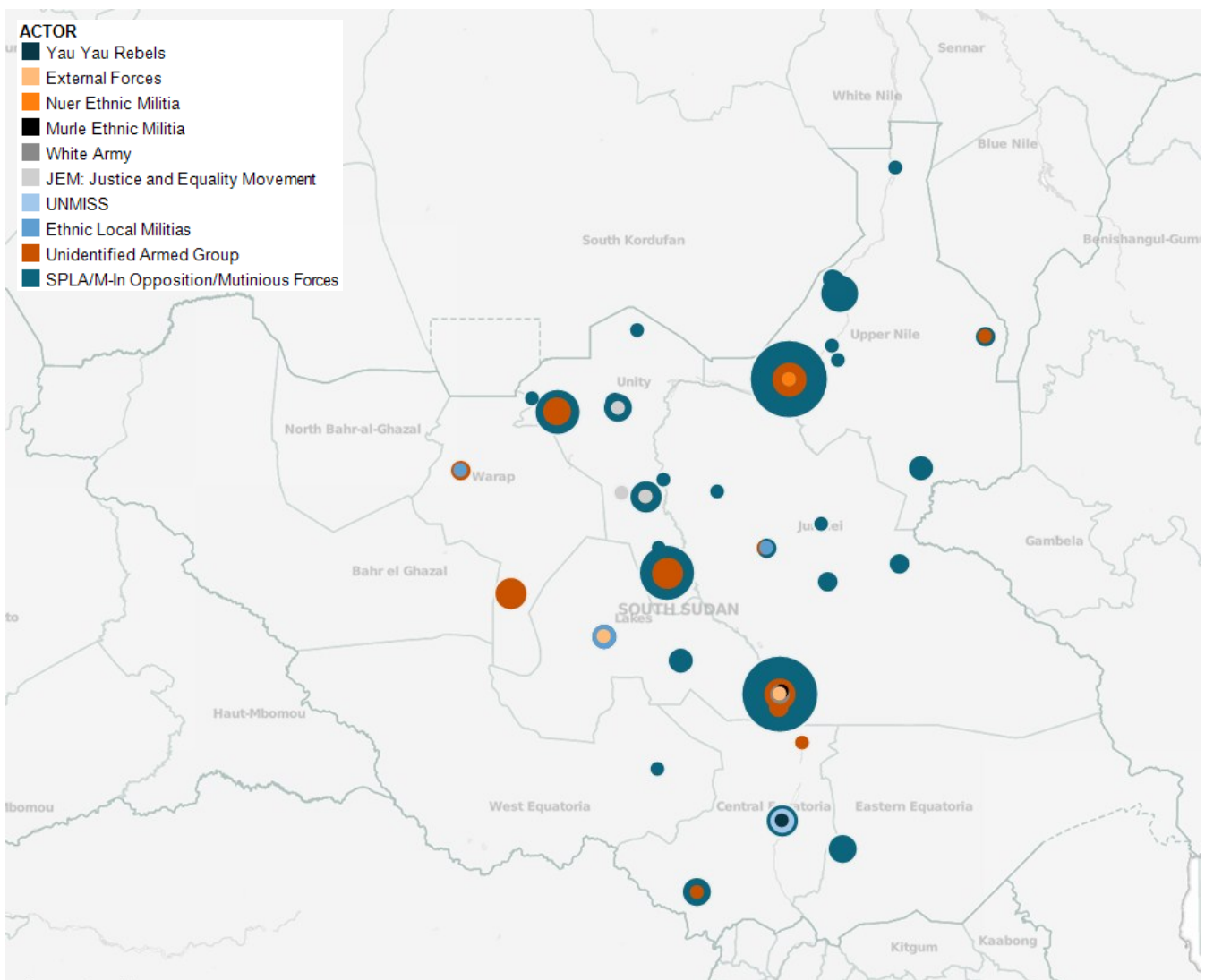


Figure 10: Conflict Events by Most Active Groups, South Sudan, January - February 2014.

Support

This material is based upon work supported by, or in part by, the U.S. Army Research Office grant number W911NF-09-1-0077 under the Minerva Initiative of the U.S. Department of Defense.

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.