

Welcome to the September issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED) *Conflict Trends*. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Realtime conflict event data is published through our research partners at [Climate Change and African Political Stability \(CCAPS\)](#) where it is updated monthly.

In addition, historical data from Volume III of the dataset, covering conflict in Africa from January 1997 to December 2012, is available online at [acleddata.com](#), along with previous *Conflict Trends* reports, country profiles for key conflict-affected states (including Somalia, Nigeria and DRC), thematic special features, and information on the data collection and publication process.

This month's issue takes a look at ongoing unrest in the **Central African Republic**, and mounting tension in the neighbouring **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. In the Horn of Africa, conflict dynamics in **Ethiopia** are explored in historical perspective after a wave of unrest there, and **Somalia** witnessed a slight drop in violence and signs of a resolution to the Jubaland crisis. Finally, in **Nigeria**, we look at the emerging phenomenon of communal vigilante groups in Nigeria.



Conflict Trajectory, August 2013

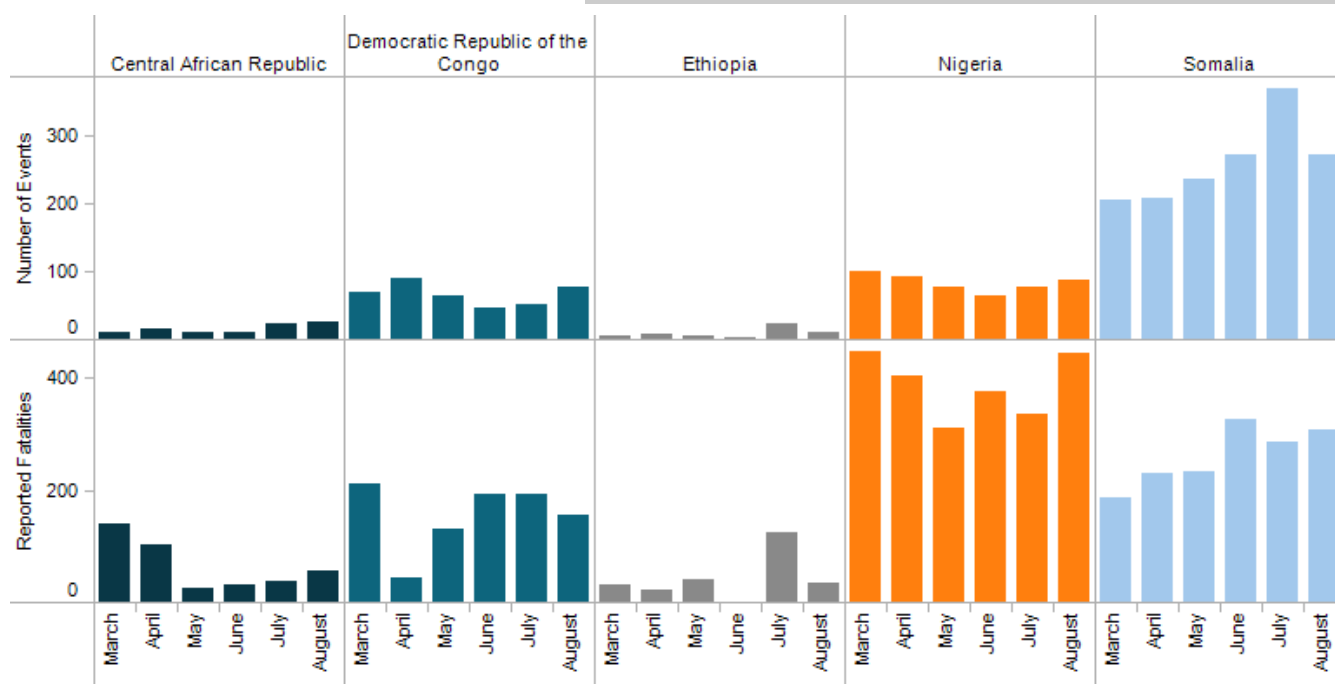


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Select Countries, January - August 2013.

#### Central African Republic

Central African Republic continued its short journey towards failed statehood this month. Political changes over this month include the instatement of Michel Djotodia-led transitional government, although few believe it is going to transition away from his leadership. The capital, Bangui, experienced fighting between multiple groups and sub-groups: the present security and Séléka forces fought to rid Bangui neighbourhoods of the military agents of the former President Bozizé; they also claim to be restoring the public peace by fighting 'illegitimate' Séléka members who continue to maraud the city and state. Séléka has seen its 'membership' soar, as released prison inmates and others take the opportunity to loot, rape, and pillage without much consequence. Figure 2 depicts a timeline showing the recent volatility in violence across the state.

The violence rates hide the multiple forms of conflict currently underway in Central African Republic. The highest violence is against civilians by rebels, whose internal activity against each other and other armed groups also represent a significant proportion of conflict. The government is ineffective against all armed groups and represents a small and lessening portion of activity. Riots have decreased, as civilian violent agents have either joined vari-

ous forces or attempted to leave the state. Finally, outside of Bangui communal violence against civilians has increased in recent months, reaching its highest point in August. This may indicate that ongoing national insecurity has created a cover for local disputes to turn violent.

**The problem with 'failed states' is that they persist despite malfunction. the state is not failing for everyone. Central Africa has made 'state failure' a cottage industry.**

As reported by *The Economist*, financial problems are high on Djotodia's list of concerns. These include empty state coffers, and payment demands from Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries who are largely responsible for Séléka's success. Although it seems the only way for Séléka to keep up overwhelming force is through plunder and pillage, this has a nearing endpoint.

The problem with failed states is that they persist despite malfunction; 'state failure' is perhaps not a useful phrase, as within these states a form of distorted rule is practiced, and the most brutal create an environment in which they flourish. In short, the state is not failing for everyone, but constructed to benefit the most violent and unscrupulous agents. Central Africa has made 'state failure' a cottage industry, within which the Central African Republic is perhaps the most egregious yet little known.

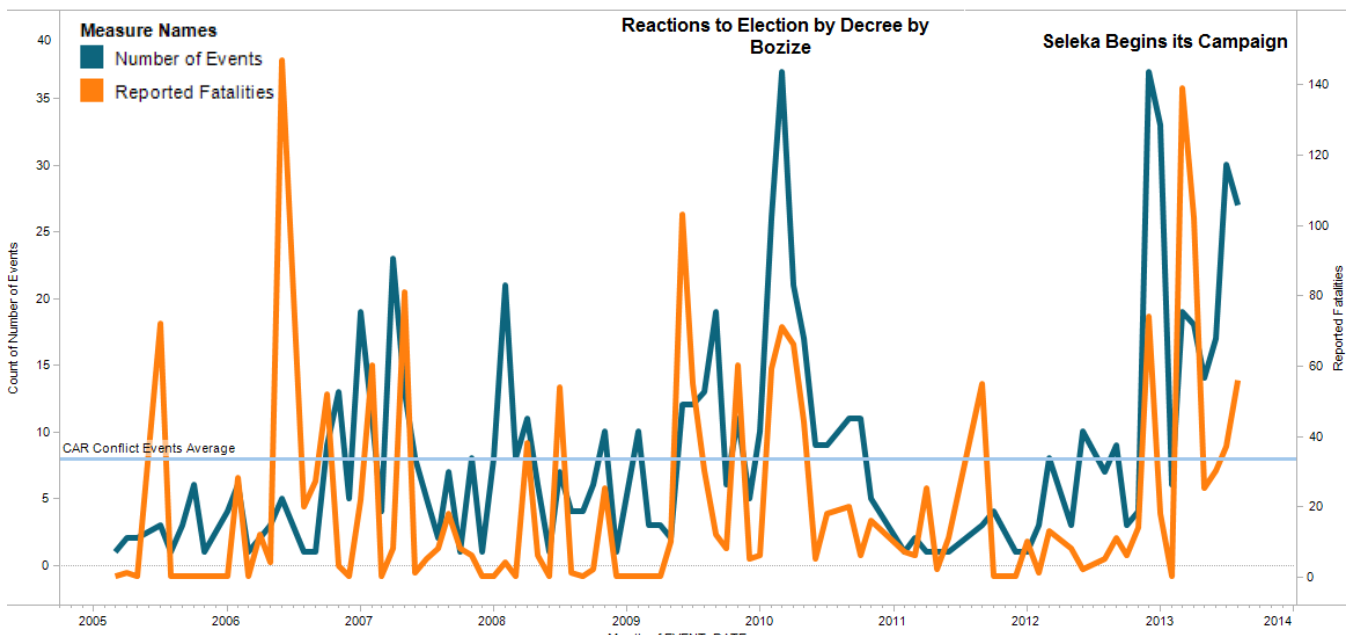
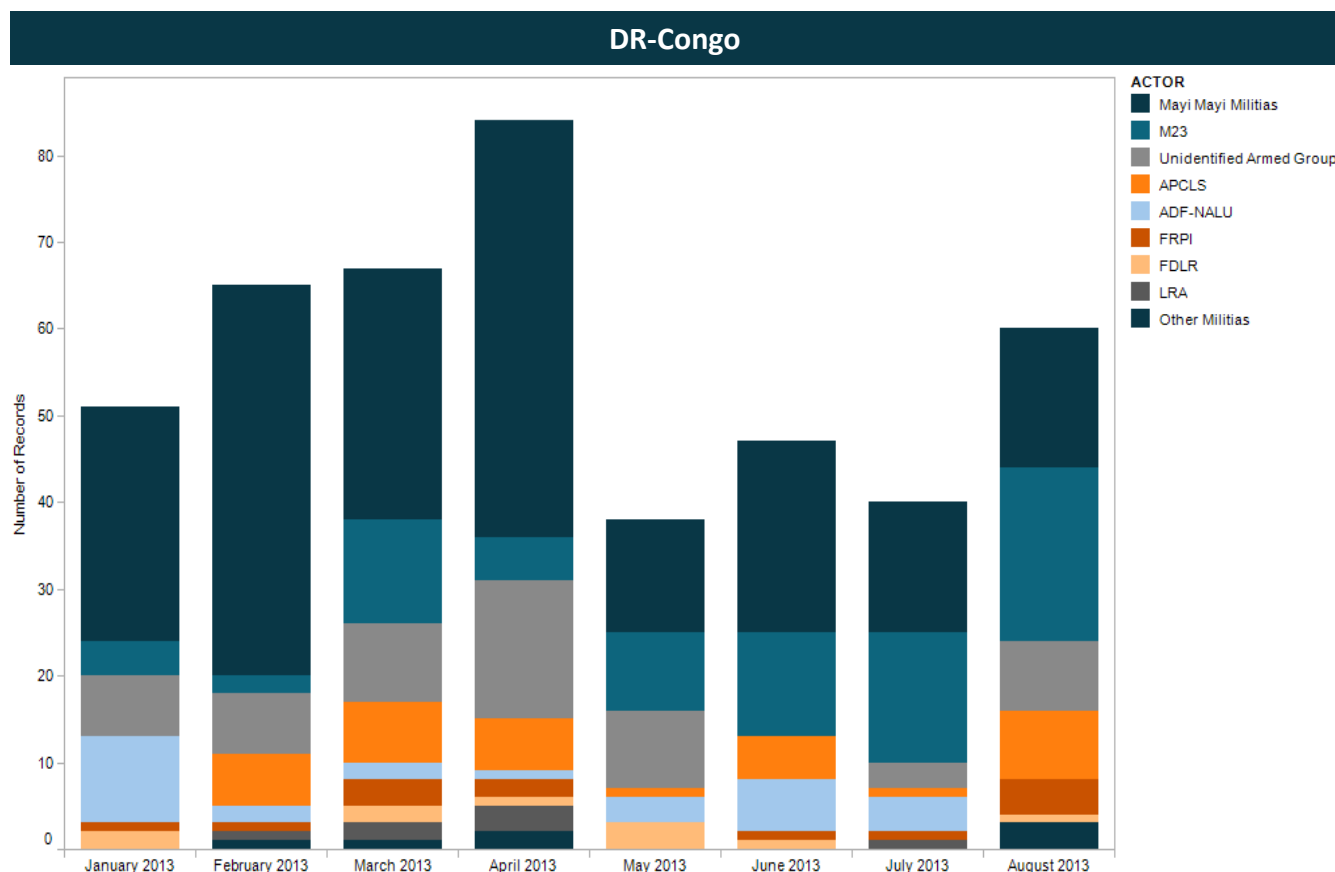


Figure 2: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Central African Republic, January 2005 - August 2013.



**Figure 3: Conflict Events by Top Actors, DR-Congo, January - August 2013.**

DR-Congo is on the path to war, or is it? Peace talks taking place between Rwanda and DR-Congo governments pretend the M23 movement fighting with international and Congolese forces is not a proxy war between these neighbours. Unfortunately for Rwanda, M23 is not holding up well against the improved military might of Congo and accompanying forces in MONUSCO, which have proved to be a highly effective force.

For the past 19 months, the M23 movement has shown the Congolese military to be incapable of keeping peace in the Kivus. However, the steps to war were much more evident between July and November 2012, and the recent activity is still far lower than during that period where M23 claimed it was fighting for Kivu independence.

The M23 rebels are mainly made up from those Tutsi soldiers who mutinied in April 2012. They are closely allied to Rwanda, as were their predecessors CNDP. As a proxy force for Rwanda, they undertake activities to secure space to attack FDLR, protect Banyamulenge populations, and assault any element of the Congolese state that may

impede those goals. Indeed, various theories about the recent bombings in Rwandan territory support the notion that the Rwandan government needed to get directly involved in the conflict to save M23 from debilitating losses. Bombing itself (or rather, having M23 bomb) created those conditions. Rwanda is nothing if not a tough taskmaster - if M23 cannot do the job, both they and the leaders responsible will likely disappear, to be replaced by another force.

But the range of agents involved conflict in the Congo is much more diverse than international attention on the M23 suggests. As IRIN reported this month, the M23 are only one of many groups operating the east. Indeed, as seen in Figure 3, the plentiful Mayi-Mayi militia groups actually engage in most of the discrete conflict events in the East of the troubled country. The 'marketplace' for violence is still active and healthy despite the quelling of conflict between M23 and the government. Indeed, the newer forces (including Raia Mutomboki) and resurrected older threats (ADF-NALU from Uganda) continue to sow instability throughout all of Eastern Congo.

#### Ethiopia

August witnessed a drop in conflict levels and reported fatalities in Ethiopia after a relatively sharp peak in battles in July (see Figure 4). Ethiopia's conflict landscape has historically been dominated by battles between the country's Military Forces and various rebel groups. Since 1997, battles have made up 68.8% of all conflict events in Ethiopia, and 92.6% of all reported conflict-related fatalities. Years of exception include 2005, 2006 when riots and protests were noticeably prevalent. In 2006, riots and protests made up almost half (46.6%) of all conflict events, though the proportion of reported conflict-related fatalities attributed to battles remained almost unchanged (96%).

By contrast, the years 2007 to 2011 saw a lower level of open political opposition within the country. The spike in riots and protests seen in 2012 and now trending into 2013 has been reported in parallel with the increasing presence of the Semayawi opposition party, which has been holding rallies in the country's capital Addis Ababa as recently as September 1, 2013 (Walta Information Centre, 1 September 2013). In 2012 and 2013 to date, political demonstrations have made up over one-fifth (22.2%) of all political events.

This aggregate figure hides significant temporal changes

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over time: July 2013 was characterized by a spike in battles between Ethiopia's Military Forces and rebel groups, which constituted the highest level of battle events to date this year. Rebel groups are an extremely active conflict agent in Ethiopia's profile: they are involved in 32.5% of all conflict events in the country over the course of the dataset. July witnessed a series of discrete, relatively low-intensity clashes between the military and the ONLA in a comparatively sudden upsurge in attacks.

Regionally, Ethiopia's conflict profile is in stark contrast to neighbouring states. In an analysis of conflict event type and - to a lesser extent - actor type, Ethiopia is most similar to Somalia, with a high levels of battles between armed groups, and relatively lower share of violence against civilians. Similarly, both Somalia and Ethiopia witness a high level of rebel activity, and comparatively much lower rates of ethnic or communal conflict than in Sudan, South Sudan or Kenya.

Ethiopia's stronger state security forces are also reflected in this analysis: regionally, Ethiopia has the second highest level of state involvement in conflict events (after Eritrea) much higher than in neighbouring Somalia, Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan.

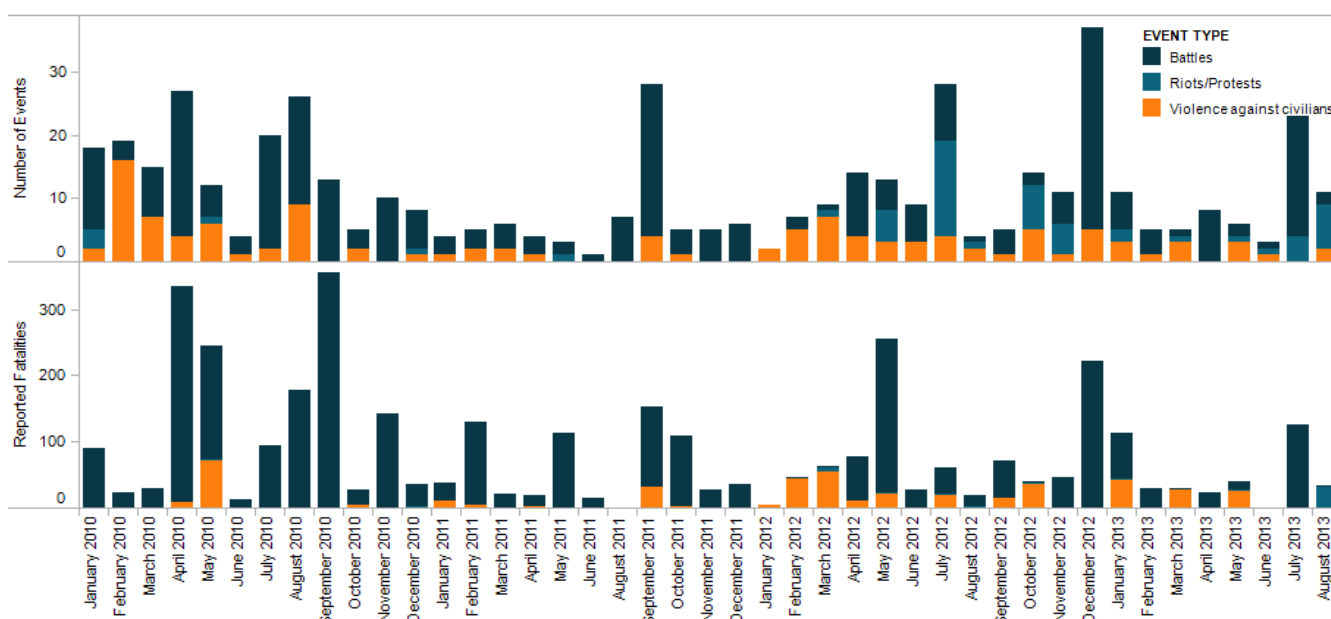


Figure 4: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Conflict Type, Ethiopia, January 2010 - August 2013.

#### Nigeria

Levels of conflict events and associated reported fatalities both increased in Nigeria in August (see Figure 5), alongside an intensification of the long-raging conflict in the country's North-East.

Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan has long been criticised for his apparent inability to contain and mitigate the conflict with the local Islamist militia, Boko Haram. An earlier attempt by military forces to engage with the militants involved excessive force and resultant mass destruction in civilian areas in April, and only drew further criticism of heavy-handedness and human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 1 May 2013). The subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in May in three states of the North-East allowed hundreds of arrests of suspected militants, but high levels of security force violence against civilians revealed the dangers of arbitrary arrest and abuse which often accompany massive security operations and disarmament campaigns.

The most recent strategy, however, may be the most dangerous and destabilising yet: President Jonathan and a host of local politicians have given their blessing to the formation and active engagement of bands of vigilante groups to directly seek out Boko Haram members and patrol local areas, most under the banner of the 'Citizens JTF'.

There are multiple potential dangers in this approach.

In the first and most pressing instance, there is no evidence to suggest that Boko Haram will contain any attacks or clashes with armed vigilantes to those immediate members of the group. Over time, Boko Haram has developed an evolving sense of the legitimate target of attack, which has seen it transform from a militant group which primarily engaged with security forces, to one which has increasingly targeted political figures which opposed its activities, Christian civilian populations, and increasingly, Muslim civilians within its areas of operation. In 2009, violence against civilians constituted only 20% of all attacks involving Boko Haram; this rate almost tripled in 2010 to 56.8% of all conflict events; while 2012 witnessed the highest absolute levels of violence against civilians to date, peaking at 23 separate attacks on unarmed noncombatants by the group in September of that year. Figure 6 shows locations and instances of battles and civilian targeting by Boko Haram since the beginning of the year. There is a real and grave danger that military responses by Boko Haram will take the form not of direct engagement with armed vigilante groups, but as reprisal attacks on civilians in areas where militias have formed, thus putting those civilians in greater danger still.

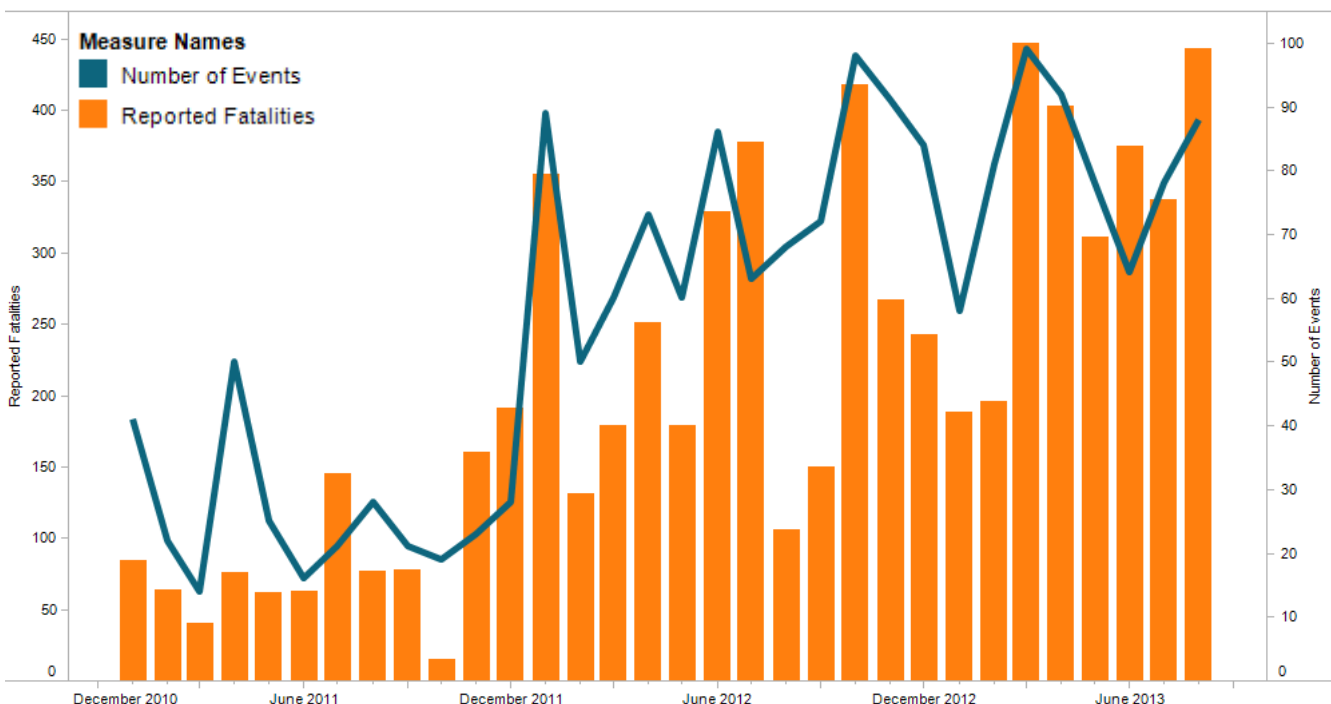
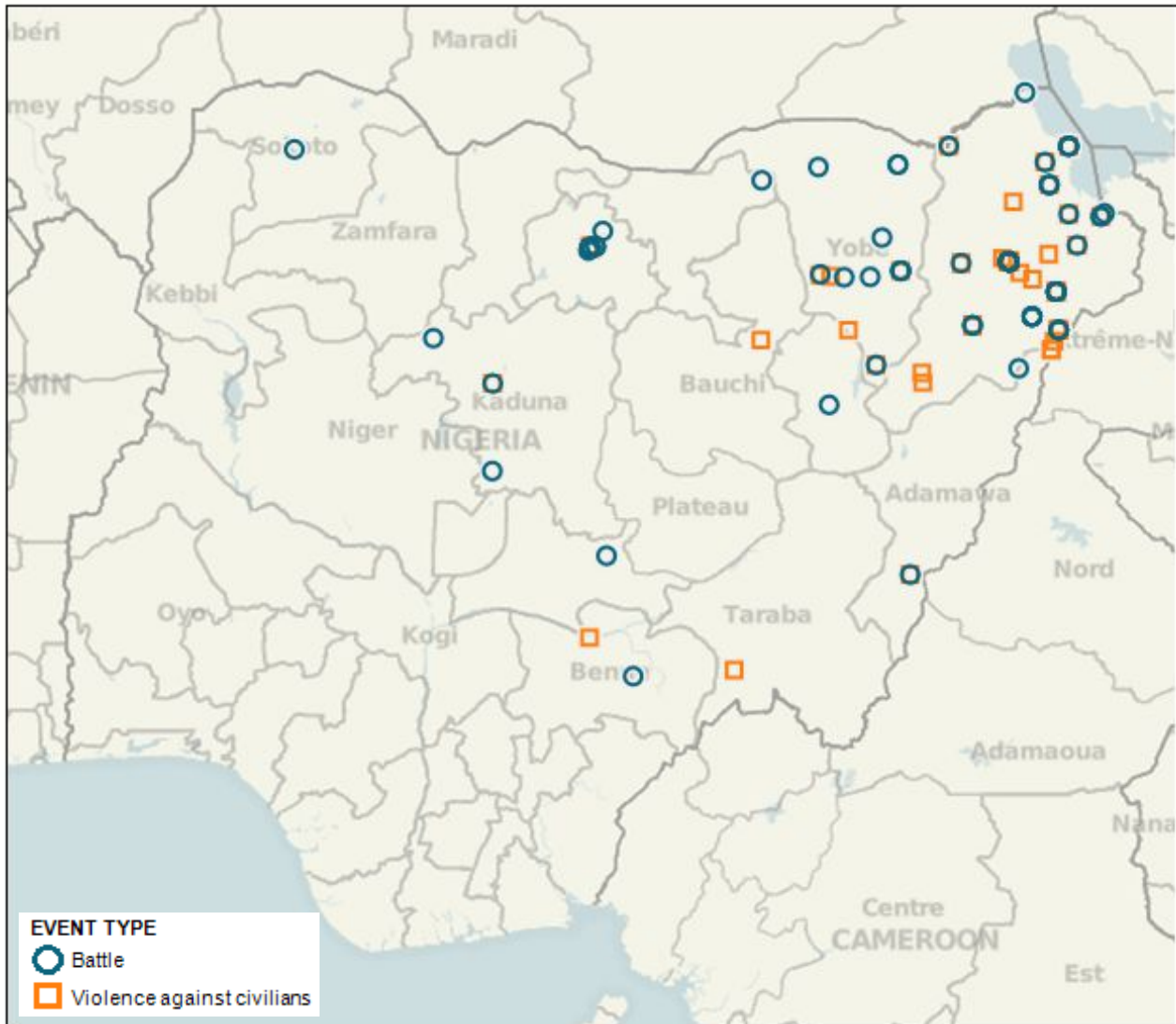


Figure 5: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Nigeria, January 2011 - August 2013.



#### Nigeria



**Figure 6: Boko Haram Activity by Event Type, Nigeria, January 2013 - August 2013.**

In the second instance, there are dangers associated with the open and approved formation and professionalisation of bands of vigilante militias. While many members of these vigilante groups may be responding to the real and devastating security crisis which has racked the region for years, willing to use various degrees of non-violence and force, others may have different motivations. As John Campbell writes (*Africa in Transition*, 9 September 2013), several analyses have suggested that Civilians JTF members include prisoners released on condition of joining up, or the core military structure of a network of militias established in advance of the 2014 elections. Permitting the formation of these groups in this context is a dangerous

gamble that their stated objective is simple, self-contained and time-limited.

Finally, and most fundamentally, even if vigilante groups limit their activity to identifying and reporting Boko Haram members, it is clear that their formation in no way addresses the underlying security and development challenges which precipitated much of the North-East's militancy in the first instance. Further entrenching informal security force activity over the development of capable, accountable and responsible federal and state security structures is short-sighted and dangerous for the medium - to longer-term objectives of establishing lasting peace in Northern Nigeria.

#### Somalia

Conflict event levels fell in Somalia for the first time since February (see Figure 7), while fatality levels remained fairly stable on previous months' figures.

The drop in overall violent events was accompanied by other good news in the troubled country: on the 27th of August an interim agreement was between the Federal government and the Jubaland Administration of Ahmed 'Madobe.' The agreement at least temporarily settles the dispute between officials in the southern Jubaland area on the border with Kenya, and the nascent Federal Government. Authorities in the now renamed 'Juba administration' were pushing for greater autonomy and control over the region's affairs, as well as commercial resources in the port town of Kismayo (*Africa Confidential*, 6 September 2013).

The substance of the agreement maintains considerable regional autonomy in the form of a recognised administration and regional leaders. However, while it lays the foundation for recognition of the Juba region as a separate state in future, its implementation defuses a potentially explosive clash over full independence for what some see as a Kenyan proxy authority in a regional buffer state.

The agreement also has implications beyond South-Central Somalia: at the centre of the statebuilding narrative and accompanying investments and processes within Somalia, lies the potential contradiction between a strong Federal Somali government, and push for autonomy and self-declared independence in the northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland. For years, the secessionist and autonomy-seeking pressures of the northern regions were ignored in favour of the more immediate claims of sovereignty in Mogadishu and across the South-Central region. Now, as the pressure by Al Shabaab is transformed (but by no means totally dissipated), the irony is that the prospect of a more peaceful Somalia may itself pave the way for more conflict.

In spite of the overall drop in political violence and the aforementioned progress on the political front, attacks by Al

Shabaab remain significant. The ongoing and deliberate attempt to cast Somalia as a nation on the brink of emerging into a bright post-conflict future is undermined by the persistence of this threat. In August, while attacks by Al Shabaab dropped slightly levels of violence against civilians increased both in absolute and proportional terms. Meanwhile, reported fatalities as a result of Al Shabaab

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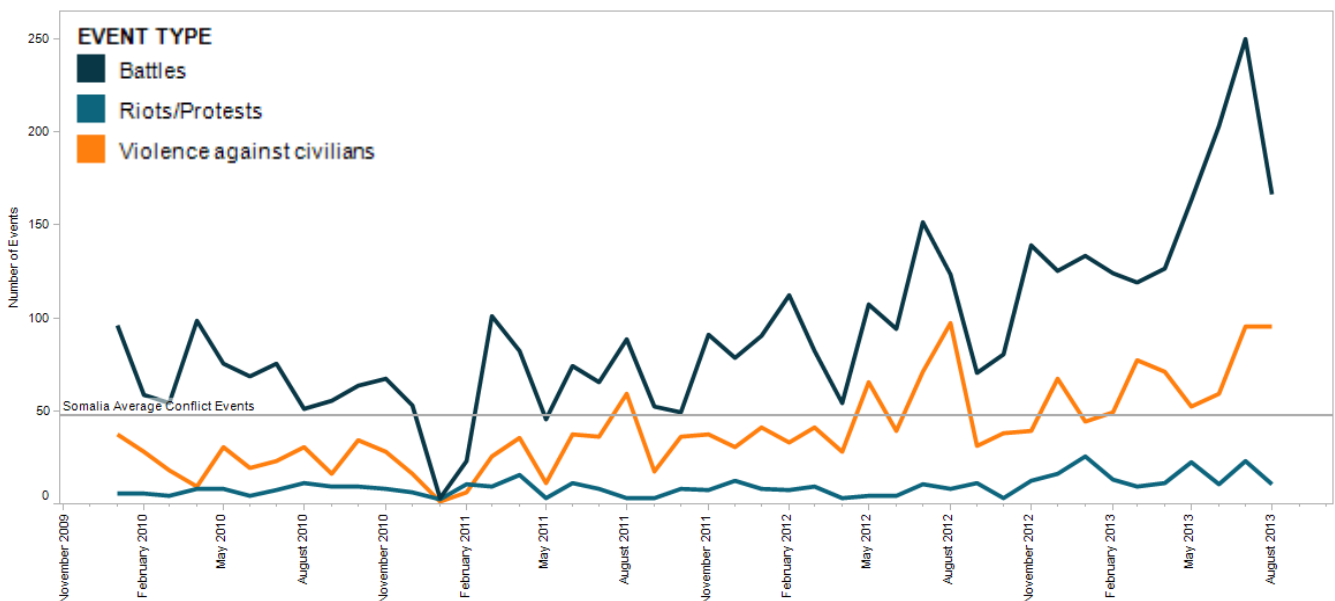
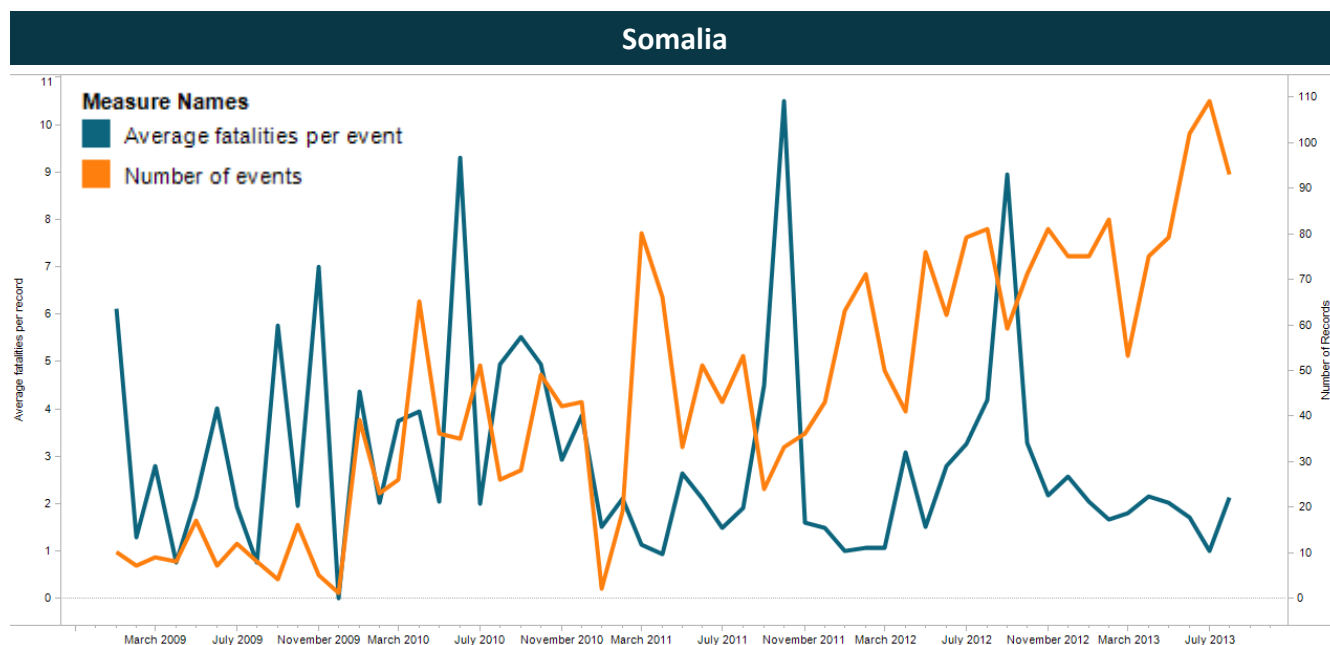


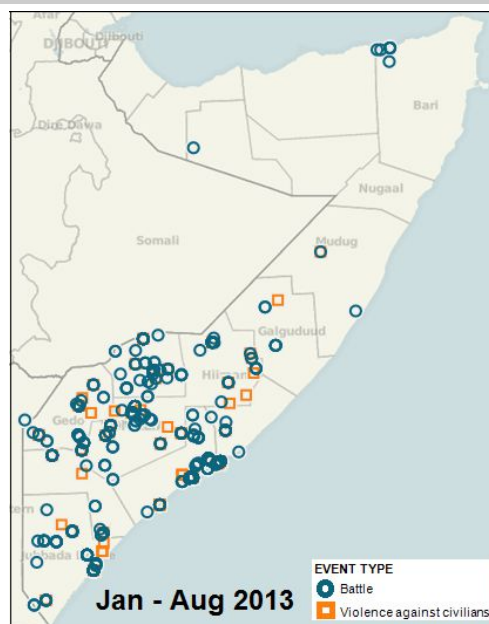
Figure 7: Conflict Events by Type, Somalia, January 2010 - August 2013.



**Figure 8: Conflict Events and Average Reported Fatalities per Event, Al Shabaab, Somalia, January 2010 - August 2013.**

activity almost doubled, from just over 100 in July, to 198 reported fatalities in August. This pattern in August reverses a longer-term trend whereby levels of events have been increasing on the part of Al Shabaab and affiliated operatives, while the average number of fatalities per event monthly has been declining (see Figure 8). This pattern is consistent with a militant group which is operating at reduced organisational and military capacity, and so has begun to rely to an increasing degree on frequent but low-intensity attacks on softer targets. While Al Shabaab has continued to engage in a small number of high-profile attacks on highly visible targets, the group is increasingly relying on lower-grade attacks with few or no casualties as a means to assert its presence in an area.

A related development is the increased presence of security forces in Puntland between Galgala and Bosaso, in response to Al Shabaab presence in the area (Sabahi, 6 September 2013). Al Shabaab activity has persisted in Northern Somalia this year (see Figure 9) and should serve as a reminder of the militants' capacity to relocate to relatively isolated locations and regroup.



**Figure 9: Al Shabaab Activity by Event Type, Somalia, January - August 2013.**

#### 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 analysis from *Africa Confidential*, *Africa in Transition* and others. Full details of sources of ACLED Data and coding processes are available online at [acleddata.com](http://acleddata.com).