

## REGIONAL REPORT: NORTH AFRICA

April 2014

In the last three years, the North African political landscape has been dominated by the Arab Spring uprising, and accompanying transformations in both the level and nature of violence across the region. Between 1997 and December 2013, the North African region (including Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) constituted 12.3% of the total number of conflict events in the African continent recording over 9000 violent events in total.

When studying North Africa in terms of intensity of conflicts (measured by the number of conflict-related fatalities), Algeria saw the highest levels of violence, primarily owing to the Algerian Civil War and a spike in conflict in 1997. Measured by the number of conflict events, Egypt is the seventh most violent country in the ACLED dataset with over 3600 conflict events, and subsequently the most violent country within North Africa. Comparable to the whole of Africa, Egypt has similar conflict levels to Kenya and Sudan. Despite accounting for the highest number of conflict events, Egypt experienced fewer reported conflict deaths than either Algeria or Libya.

Across the region, riots and protests have been prominent in the conflict landscape since the Arab Spring. In Tunisia,

which has both low levels of conflict events and reported fatalities, riots and protests constitute over 80% of total violence (see Figure 1). Meanwhile in Egypt, since the Arab Spring, violent events involving riots/protests increased by 16%.

To understand these historical patterns of conflict, this report will highlight a number of key conflict dynamics that challenge regional meta-narratives, and expose the individual socio-economic and political factors that shape conflict patterns in North Africa. Whilst common thematic trends are present across the territories, microanalysis of individual countries will serve to contextualise spatial and temporal dynamics.

With a strong focus on instability post-December 2010, this report explores the topography of these transitional political environments. The report proceeds through an analysis of the role and activity of the state in political violence in North Africa; dynamics of civil unrest in the form of riots and protests; and an actor-based study of historic and contemporary Islamist militancy in North Africa, serving to underscore the changing complexity of North Africa's conflict profile.

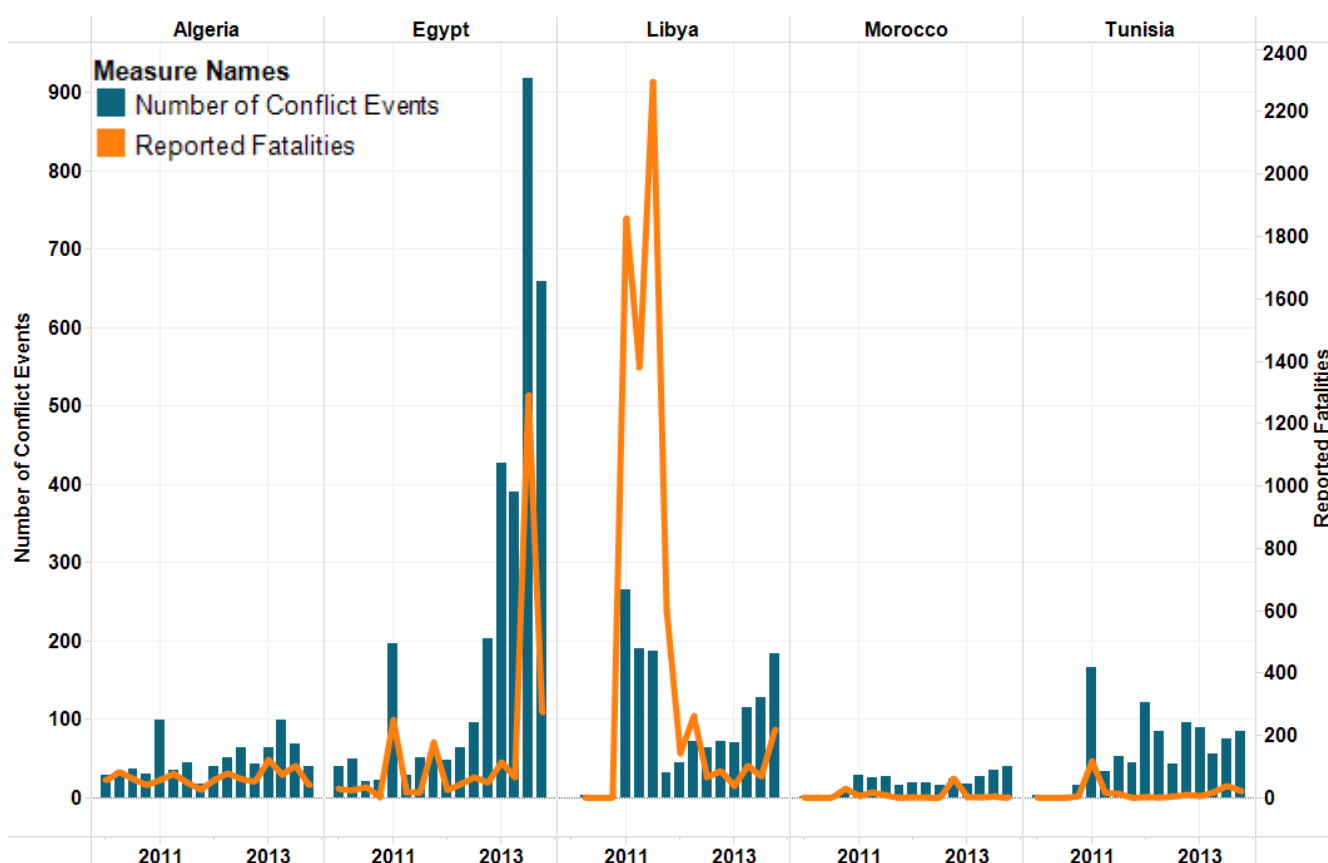


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, by Quarter, January 2010 - December 2013, North African Countries.

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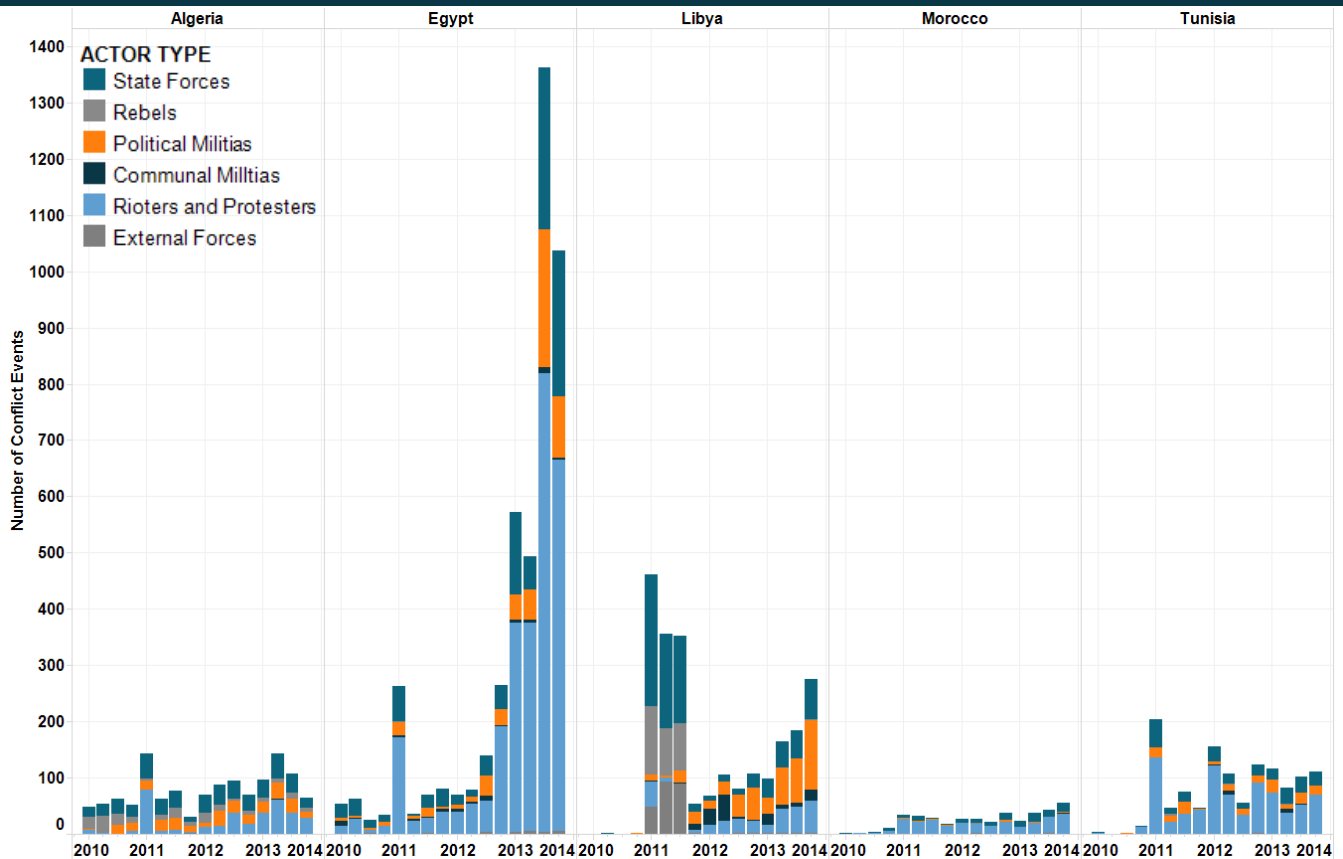


Figure 2: Conflict Events by Actor Type, January 2010 - December 2013, North African countries.

### State repression and weakness:

State forces' involvement in violent conflict events accounts for one one-third of activity in North Africa (see Figure 2). Across the region, there were 929 reported deaths where military forces were involved in the event in 2013. The role of the state in political violence has a particular significance in the context of the North African states.

While the uprisings of 2010 / 2011 challenged, undermined and in some cases overthrew repressive authoritarian regimes throughout the region, the state's role in political violence, and violence against its own populations, remains considerable, drawing our attention to the concurrent dynamics of state resilience and weakness. This dimension is reflected in remarkable continuity in two areas of state activity: first, sustained crackdowns on popular dissent by state forces on the one hand; and second, a distinct inability to address the

diffuse security threats that are concentrated in targeted localities on the other.

### Egypt:

Egypt's political transformation has been characterised by two military coup d'états that have served to prolong the countries transitional path to stability. The first uprising led to Hosni Mubarak's resignation and hand over of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that appeared to sever the government's military backbone and decades of repression. Yet notwithstanding Egypt's first democratic elections, the military's dynamic and powerful role in political decisions prevailed.

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Nowhere else have the tensions between the military's role in an emergent democratic political system, and the need to address sustained and diffuse security threats been more apparent. The ambiguity of the military's role has been clear in the re-emergence of the military as a political force since the ousting of President Morsi. Wider

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popular support for this move has since been used to justify sweeping and repressive action by the police and military against opposition voices, demonstrators, civilians and journalists, primarily in Cairo and urban centres in north-central Egypt. Over 10% of state forces' activity in Egypt since 2010 has involved targeting non-combatants; although this has fallen overall since the uprising. However, as Figure 3 shows, the military is also heavily engaged

in activity in eastern Egypt, where a growing level of insurgency has resulted in high rates of insecurity, including the declaration of a state of emergency in the region in July 2013. The state forces' dual role in tackling a growing insurgency, as well as in repressing civilian and opposition activity has implications for long-term stability and political openness in Egypt.

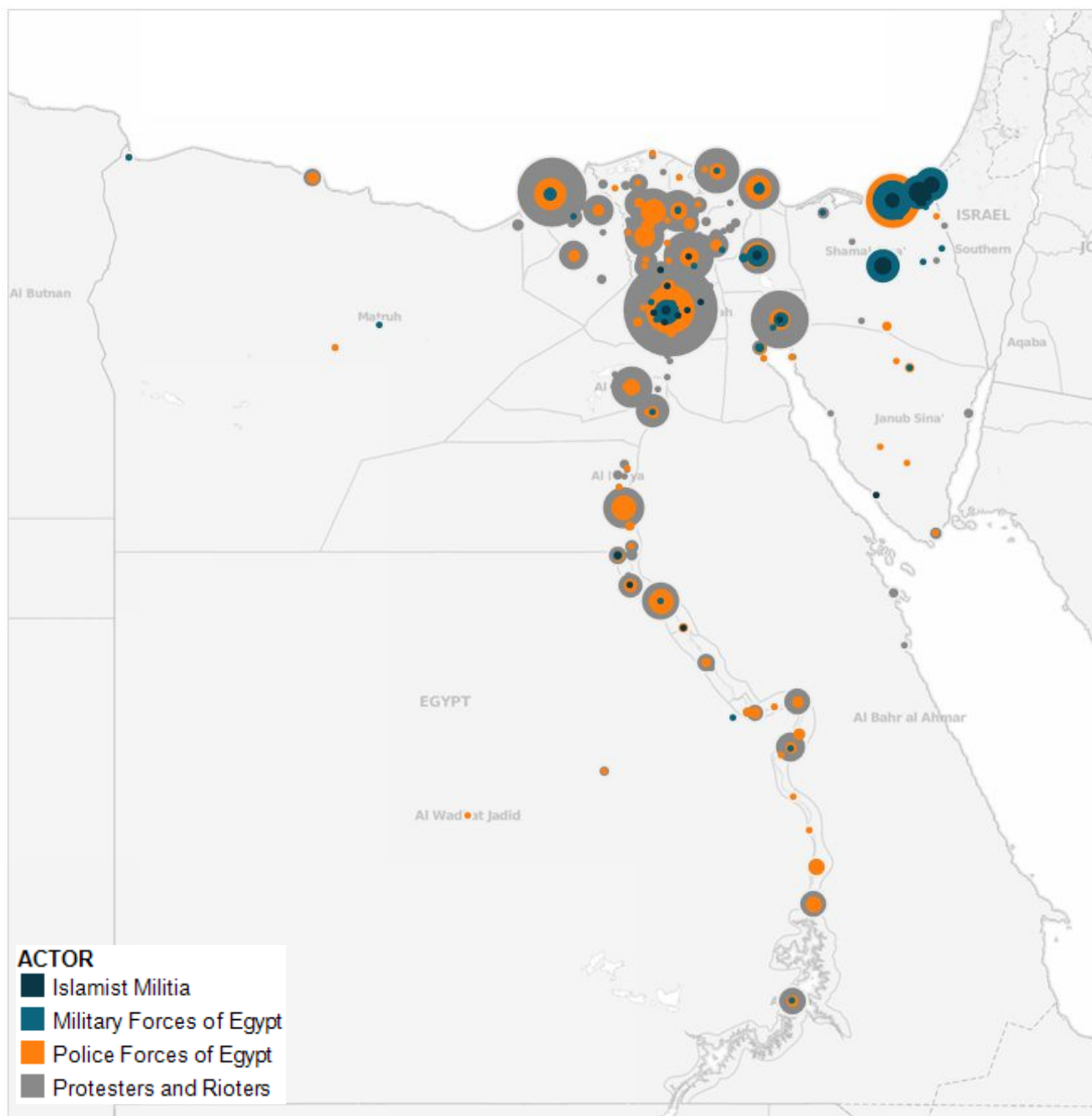
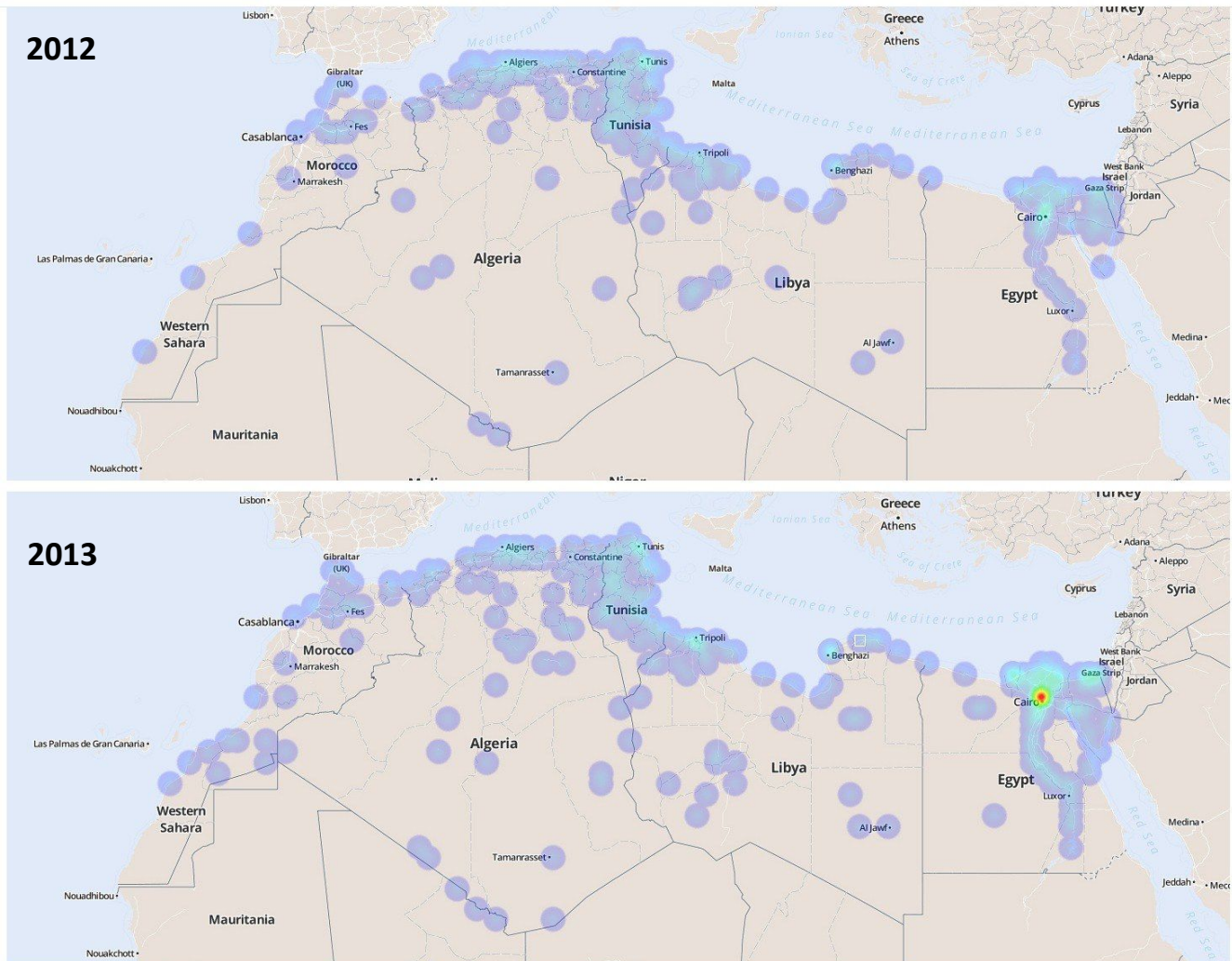


Figure 3: Conflict Events by Select Actor and Location, Egypt, January 2010 - December 2013.

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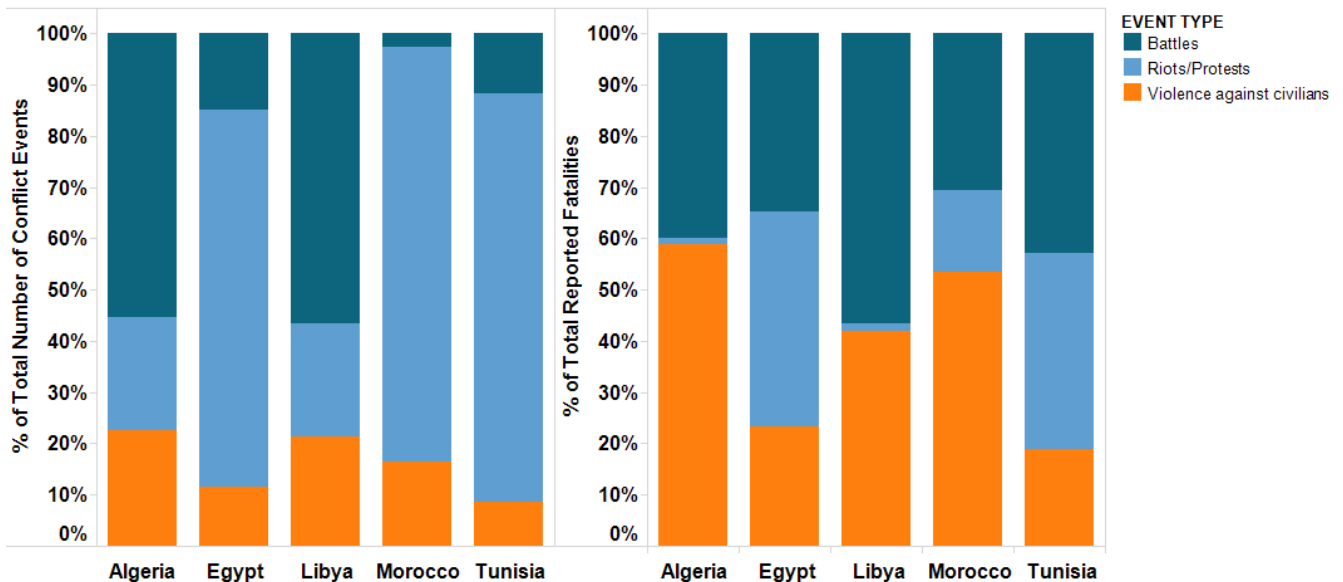
**Figure 4: Conflict Event Hotspots, North Africa, 2012 (top) and 2013 (bottom).**

### Libya:

In Libya, conflict intensity and reported fatalities in particular reached crisis levels in early 2011 when NATO-led military action in Libya led to uncharacteristically high civilian casualties. Although current levels of state force activity are well below this, event counts and conflict deaths are nevertheless gradually increasing, reflecting the on-going instability and potentially explosive dynamics underpinning violence in the volatile region. In a pattern similar to Egypt, military officials are subject to daily attacks by diffuse militia groups that have evolved from the official military strata and have developed their own political and religious ideologies. Whilst historically, Egypt's militancy has been located outside of urban areas, Libya's communal militias have concentrated their attacks in the conflict hotspots of Benghazi, Tripoli, Derna and Sirte (see Figure 4) which have witnessed increased factional fighting.

The emergence of various armed groups in Libya's post-Gaddafi era has created a tension between those loosely affiliated to the old military regime with a stake in upholding the country's security, and those with their own political ideologies who have engaged in higher levels of violence against civilians in a bid to unseat the incumbent power (POMED, 4 December 2013). The dependence of the government on these groups to maintain security has weakened its ability to dismantle, disarm or integrate them into formal military units. 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. Following the October 2013 abduction of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, violent activity by Libya's militias continued to undermine the General National Congress' legitimacy, undermining hope of future progress.





**Figure 5: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Overall Proportion by Type, all years, North African Countries.**

### Riots, protests and social unrest:

Human and socio-economic insecurities within North African countries in the years preceding 2010 - from human rights abuses to high youth unemployment - created a perfect storm wherein increasing demands for employment, services and economic growth resulted in widespread unrest. The overthrow of the Tunisian, Libyan and Egyptian regimes following mass riots and protests led to a drastic shift in the conflict patterns experienced in North Africa and surrounding 'fallout' states.

Over the course of the ACLED dataset, riots and protests make up the majority of conflict events in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, while Algeria and Libya, which have both witnessed full-blown civil wars, have experienced much higher rates of battles (see Figure 5). Across the region, the proportion of fatalities associated with violence against civilians is extremely high. The effects of the Arab Spring have not been confined to the immediate period of unrest: North Africa saw increased instability in 2013, as Libya, Egypt and Tunisia continued to grapple with transitional political environments created by the Arab Spring Revolutions. 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.

#### Egypt:

In January - February 2011, Egypt witnessed similar levels of violence as Tunisia and Libya, but the subsequent tra-

jectory of conflict across these three states diverged dramatically in the following months (see Figure 1). Following a relative lull in violence in Egypt in late 2011 and 2012, in 2013, a sharp resurgence of violence meant Egypt had the second highest level of conflict events in the ACLED dataset in 2013. Egypt hosted over two-thirds of all conflict events in North Africa over the course of the year.

There were several key drivers of this unrest, dominated by riots and protest, initially centring on the ousting and later detention of President Mohamed Morsi in July. These events were predominantly typified by clashes between pro-Morsi and pro-army protesters as well as local residents who grew tired of continued daily disruption but they also witnessed the development of a student protest movement that swept across Egyptian universities towards the end of 2013.

As increasing dissatisfaction prevailed and the demands of the Egyptian population were not met, a wider range of civil society actors mobilised with greater intent in 2013 with country-wide public demonstrations regularly taking place after Friday prayers. These emerging dynamics resulted in the number of conflict events being significantly higher than levels surrounding the January 2011 overthrow of Hosni Mubarak.

The referendum that took place in January 2014 saw the Egyptian population vote overwhelmingly in favour of a new constitution, but General Abdul Fattah el-Sisi's likely stand as presidential candidate suggests that tensions may continue to rise and levels of protest may continue to climb as Egypt moves closer to slipping back into a military

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-backed regime. Coupled with human rights abuses, continued attempts to curtail the freedom of the press and violations against journalists as well as the marginalisation and repression of the Muslim Brotherhood, it is unsurprising that mass mobilisation has been so prominent in Egypt, making up almost three-quarters of all conflict events and accounting for two-fifths of reported fatalities

### Tunisia:

Similar patterns to Egypt were initially evident in Tunisia, where the failure of job creation, particularly in the southern regions, spurred on civil unrest. Riots and protests are overwhelmingly the dominant event typology forming around 80% of all conflict events since 2010. While conflict events spiked in January 2011, levels of unrest have remained much higher than their pre-uprising averages since the uprising, indicating the potentially explosive nature of sustained and unaddressed grievances. Demands for economic development which were central to the mobilisation of the uprising have gone unmet. Consequently the region has been plagued by general strikes and violence directed towards the Islamist *Ennahda* party, with regional offices frequently being burnt by violent rioting groups.

### Algeria and Libya:

Conflict patterns from 2010 onwards show that Algeria and Libya experienced comparable changes in protests and riots, rising steadily as opposed to the volatile spike observed in Tunisia and Egypt. Commentators on this divergence have speculated that the nature of other coun-

tries' political economy and significantly smaller oil revenues may have impeded their ability to make concessions to satisfy discontent in comparison to Libya and Algeria (*Le Monde*, 15 March, 2011).

Libya's 2011 civil war created a fractious political environment that has substantially shaped Libya's protest landscape with low-level insurgencies and battles quickly dominating the conflict profile. Algeria on the other hand experienced localised protest movements from 2003 onwards, rising in magnitude in 2010 in response to poverty and lack of jobs. However, unlike Libya, the Algerian regime, fronted by President Bouteflika has avoided being overthrown and maintained power whilst developing its role as a key regional and international actor in tackling terrorism.

### Morocco:

Morocco saw lower levels of overall unrest even throughout the tumultuous period from 2011-2013, however its institutionalised authoritarianism was challenged by people demanding constitutional change. Socio-economic drivers similar to the rest of North Africa catalysed the upsurge in demonstrations that led King Mohammed VI to cede power in a constitutional reform that temporarily abated public fears but in 2012 questions that the Arab Spring only bought around cosmetic changes to government returned (NYT, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2012). This, coupled with the monarchy's religious legitimacy and its privileged political elite, prompted demonstrations asking for a democratic constitution.

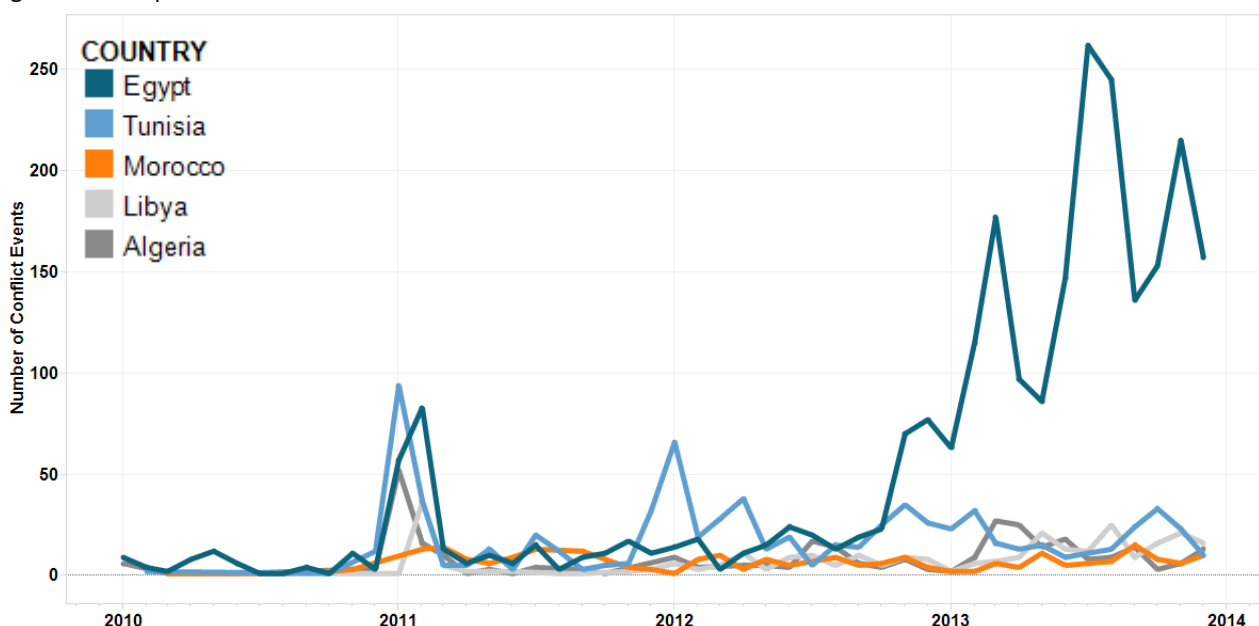


Figure 6: Riots and Protests Conflict Events by Country, January 2010 - December 2014, North African Countries.

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### Islamist militancy in North Africa:

Violent Islamist activity in North Africa peaked in 2013 after an incremental rise since 2012. However, the involvement of other non-Islamist actors similarly rose. Interestingly, in 2011 despite a dramatic increase in activity across almost all conflict actors, Islamist actor levels remained relatively stable (see Figure 7)

This latter dynamic suggests that militant Islamist groups largely failed to capitalise on the uncertainty that the Arab Spring created, although their increased activity in the wake of the uprisings has been facilitated by weak security structures and political volatility in a number of states. In addition to exploring the emergence of Islamist militancy in the wake of political upheaval in Egypt, this section will also explore longer-term trajectories of militancy in Algeria.

**Regional instability in countries neighbouring Algeria such as Mali, Niger and Libya make it a potential mobilising and operational base for Islamist militancy.**

### Algeria

Algeria's long history of struggle between the military and Islamism has dramatically shaped the country's historical and contemporary political landscape. Underlying tensions prevail in Algeria and sudden changes make it vulnerable to deep-rooted Islamist violence that erupts sporadically. After the Civil War in 1992 when Islamist militants attempted to overthrow the authoritarian, secular government, violent Islamist factions have evolved from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC) to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Conflict levels in Algeria were the second highest in North Africa between 1997-2013, but remained low relative to other North African states in the year of 2013. Conflict events and related fatalities declined between 2007-2008 after a spike related to Islamist militia activity. This coincided with parliamentary elections to elect the People's

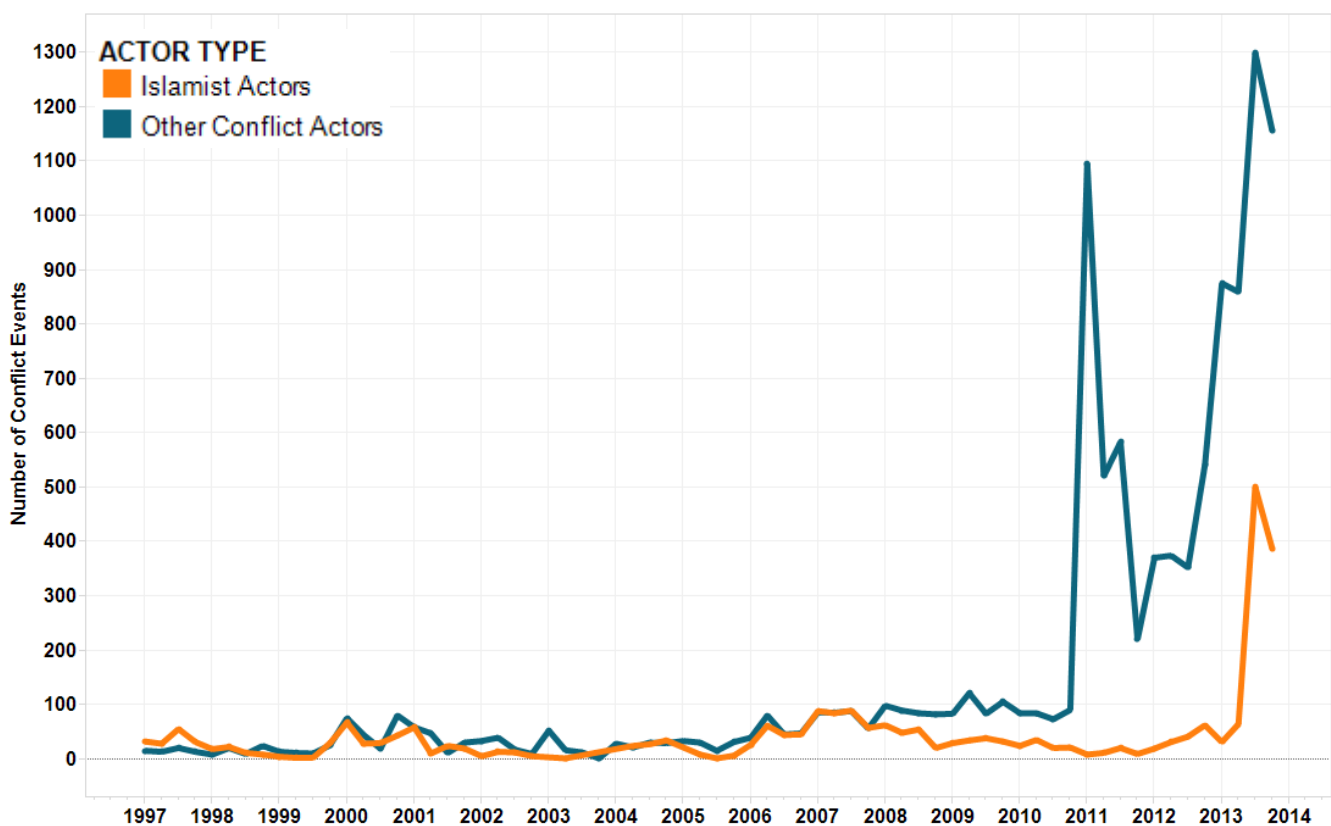


Figure 7: Conflict Events by Actor Type, Jan 1997 - Dec 2013 by Quarter, North African countries. Source: Dowd (2013).

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National Assembly in May 2007 and the formation of AQIM, who carried out a series of suicide attacks and violent campaigns to challenge the Algerian government. A low-level resurgence in militant activity since 2012 illustrates the underlying volatility the country faces even after a period of moderate stability. Regional instability in countries neighbouring Algeria, such as Mali, Niger and Libya, make it a potential mobilising and operating base for Islamist militancy, but the sporadic occurrence of attacks highlights Algeria's relative regional stability.

Recent militant activity has generally been limited to attacks against the police and military, although a shift in the security environment may arise from the presidential elections in April 2014. A weakness resulting from President Bouteflika's departure might provide opportunities for violent Islamist groups from neighbouring Mali and Libya to infiltrate the country and engage in violent clashes, or the re-emergence of old tension lines, shifting the current security paradigm (*World Review*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013).

### Egypt

The number of battles significantly increased in Egypt with the Sinai Peninsula playing host to an on-going Islamist insurgency that persistently targets military and police

check-points. The presence of violent Islamist actors drastically increased in Egypt in 2013, with the sudden emergence of Islamist group Ansar Beit-al Maqdis, a Sinai based group also known as Ansar Jerusalem. Whilst security forces have escalated their operations in Sheikh Zuweid, Rafah and Al Arish to flush out violent groups, the ability of the Egyptian state to control and ensure security currently varies dramatically across the territory.

While Egypt has experienced high-profile Islamist militancy in the past, in contrast to Algeria, the most recent militancy of this type has involved the relatively new militant group, Ansar Beit-al Maqdis, which has been active since 2011. Since its emergence, it has claimed responsibility for an attempt to assassinate the Egyptian interior minister, and carried out attacks on the military in Sinai (*Al-Arabiya TV*, 13 September, 2013). More recently, the group has claimed several deadly attacks in late 2013 and early 2014 including the shooting down of a military helicopter with an RPG near the Israeli border.

This surge in activity coincided with a transition in the group's strategic use and targeting of violence. Initially, Ansar Beit-al Maqdis was primarily engaged in outward-looking activities based in the Sinai, concentrating on engaging Israeli groups in infrequent attacks. More recently,

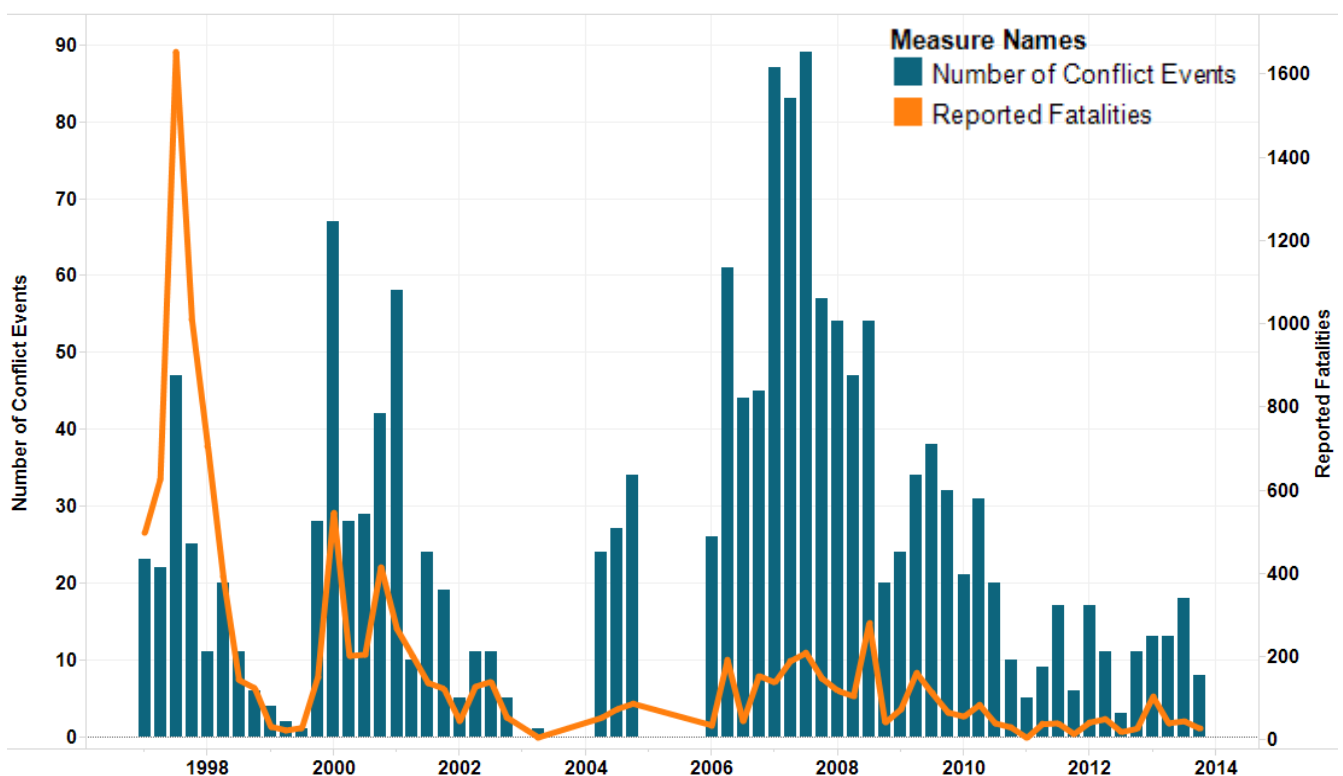
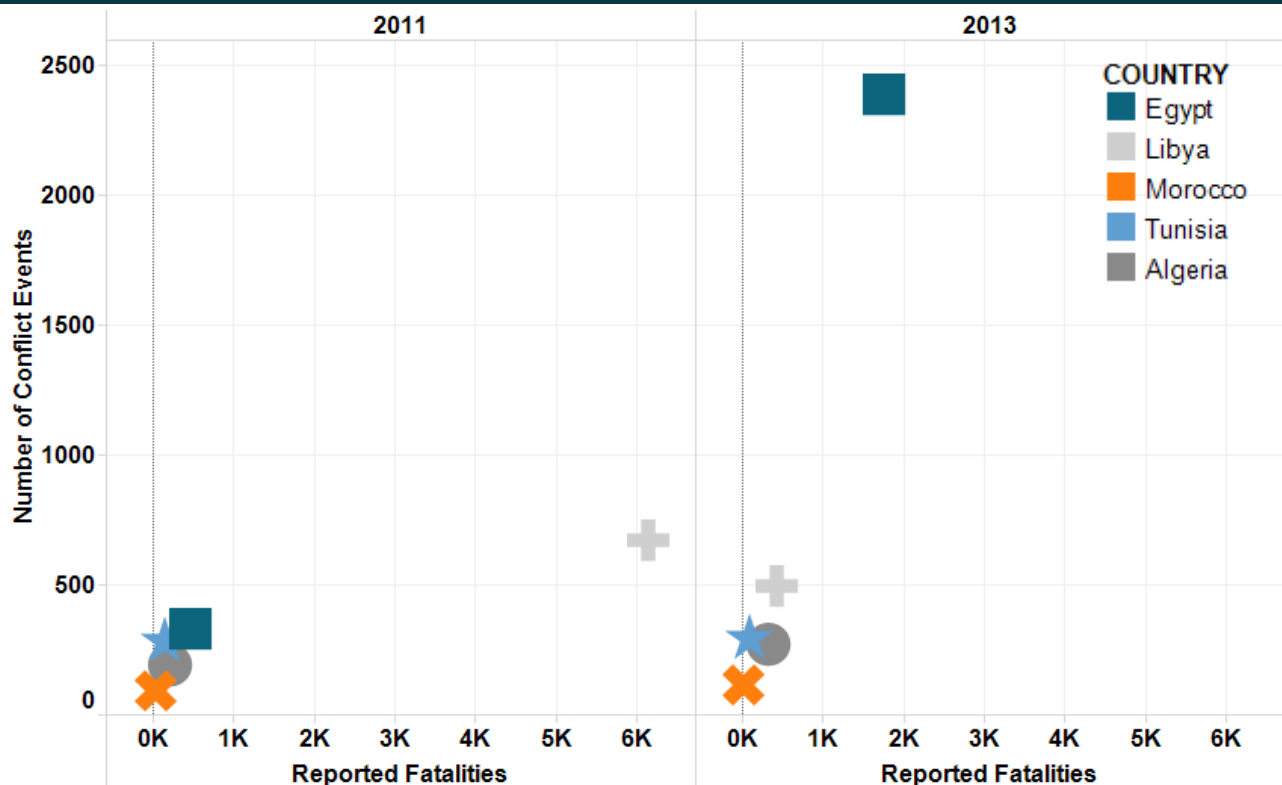


Figure 8: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Islamist Militants, Algeria, Jan 1997 - Dec 2013. Source: Dowd (2013).



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**Figure 9: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, 2011 and 2013.**

the group has refocused its efforts on internal violence within Egypt, and shaping the national agenda.

Much of its activities are now concentrated on Cairo, where attacks are a response to the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood and government dissidents by security forces after Morsi's removal from power (Kingsley, 2014). Beyond this individual group, the international focus that has historically dominated conflict in Sinai is undergoing a transformation, with increasing militant activity targeting the Egyptian regime, as a reaction against the national government.

There are also concerns that rebels returning from conflict in Syria have been radicalised and integrated into Islamist insurgency groups. The intensification and spread of attacks has been matched by strengthened military responses with massive military campaigns in the North Sinai towns of Sheik Zuwayid, Rafah and Al Arish to destroy dangerous elements.

### Support

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### Conclusions:

North African political violence since December 2010 has been underscored by deep-seated dissatisfaction with the practice of incumbent regimes yet as this report illustrates, the socio-historical and politico-economic nuances behind the revolutionary waves have resulted in divergent conflict environments across the region.

Figure 9 highlights the ongoing, escalating and differential levels of violence in countries affected by the Arab Spring and how violence evolved differently between 2011-2013. Whilst conflict escalated rapidly in Libya, the frequency and intensity of violent events receded after the civil war. Turmoil in Egypt was subject to the most dramatic escalation with nearly a four-fold increase in fatalities.

Across North Africa, the long-term governmental inadequacies that reinforce poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunities have largely gone unaddressed, often being disguised through short-term measures that fail to have significant implications on long-term stability. As protest movements fail to mobilise action for change and government repression prevails, the region could witness the development of civic action into more organised, concentrated and violent conflict.