

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 59) REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE,
JUNE 2017

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Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2017)

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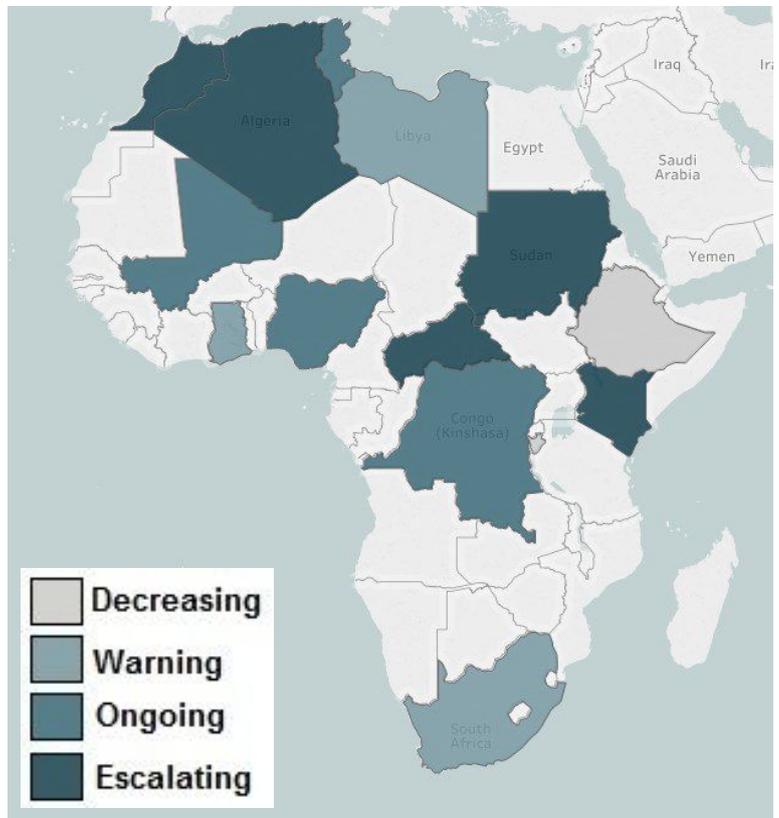
CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 59)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, JUNE 2017

Welcome to the June issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published on the [ACLED website](http://www.acleddata.com).

This month’s issue presents conflict summaries on **Ethiopia, Libya, and Mali** and explores the decline in activity of the Kamwina Nsapu (KN) militia in **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the potential for nationwide escalation of protests in **Morocco**, violent activity across **Niger**, an increase in riots/protest against President Zuma’s recent cabinet and poor service delivery in **South Africa**, a temporary lull in overall conflict in **South Sudan** but unprecedented levels of intercommunal violence in the first part of 2017, conflict between government forces and Darfur rebels in **Sudan**, and economic protests in southern **Tunisia**.

Elsewhere on the continent, between April - May 2017, violence against civilians decreased by 53% in **Burundi**, and Anti-Balaka militia violence contributed to a surge in fatalities in **Central African Republic**.



Conflict Trajectory, June 2017

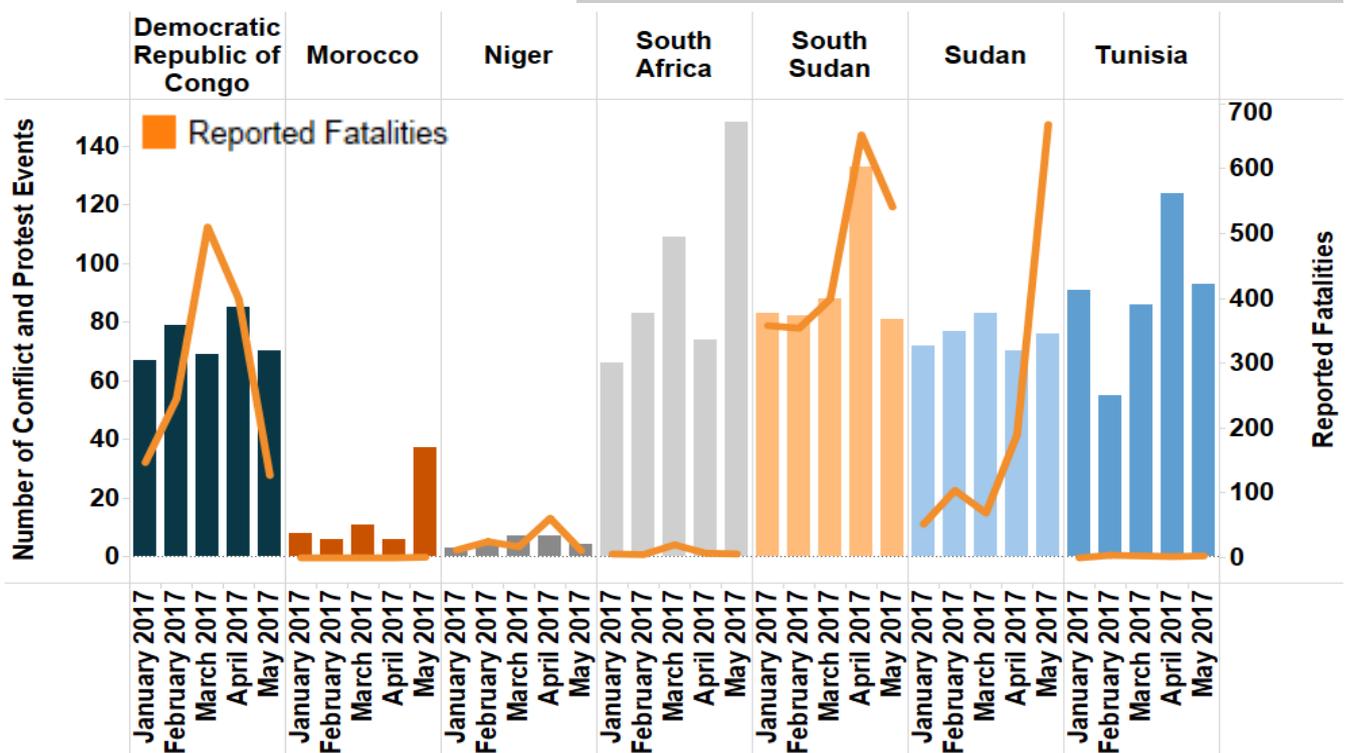
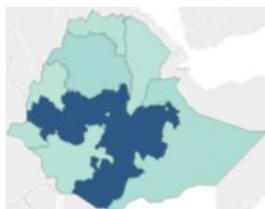


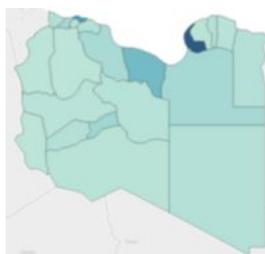
Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, January - May 2017.

Conflict Summaries



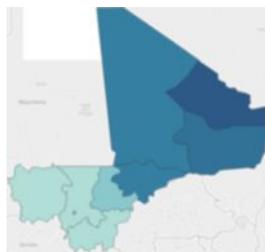
Ethiopia

From November 2015, Ethiopia has experienced an unprecedented wave of popular mobilisation. The government responded to the protests with a heavy hand, resulting in thousands of casualties and tens of thousands of people arrested, and charged with terrorism offenses. A state of emergency has been extended into July 2017. Further, militant activity has risen in tandem with popular unrest, stemming from both the distraction that civil unrest posed for the Ethiopian military, and also shared grievances. Available data collected from international and local media since November 2015 points to more than 1,200 civilians were reported killed during protests by Ethiopian security forces. Approximately 660 fatalities are due to from state violence against peaceful protesters, 250 fatalities from state engagement against rioters, and more than 380 people killed by security forces following the declaration of the state of emergency in October 2016. ACLED registered an additional 2,000 people killed over this period from conflicts not – or at least less distinctly – related to the riots and protests (e.g. from battles between government and rebel forces or political/ethnic militias; or from violence against civilians perpetrated by each of these latter actors).



Libya

Overall conflict levels have remained relatively high in Libya in the first five months of 2017, though have been decreasing since mid-2015. Violence spiked in March 2017 as the Libya National Army (LNA) conducted a series of intense air raids against the Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi (BDB) who advanced on the oil terminals in the central Sirte basin. Since April and May 2017, conflict has spread into the southern Libyan regions of Sabha and Al Jufra where the LNA has achieved a number of decisive territorial victories. This represents a significant shift in the territory in which the LNA is operating. Clashes have pitted the LNA's 12th brigade against the Misratan Third Force militia in a contest to control the strategic Tamenhint airbase and an attack on Brak al-Shati airbase involving the BDB left 141 dead. This is the first time since March 2015 that the LNA has engaged in sustained fighting outside of the eastern region and signals a change in the balance of power in favour of Gen. Khalifa Haftar who may attempt to mount an advance on the western region and into the capital, Tripoli. The Presidency Council (PC) meanwhile announced the establishment of seven military zones. This effort is likely an attempt to consolidate military support in the western region against the encroaching eastern forces but has the potential to escalate fighting between the east and west as well as between military constellations situated in the west.



Mali

Mali has seen a considerable increase in violence since the beginning of 2017, with 103 reported fatalities in January 2017, the country's highest monthly fatality count since May 2014. This is comparable with the height of the conflict in Northern Mali between January and March 2013. Mali has also witnessed a considerable increase in its numbers of reported conflict events since the beginning of the year, dramatically rising from a low of 7 in December 2016 to 27 in January 2017 and reaching a high of 43 in April 2017. This number of events is similar to the months of January and February 2013 which witnessed the flurry of activity following the French intervention in the northern conflict. The rising violence and fatality counts can both largely be attributed to the increased activity of radical Islamist groups, with events involving JNIM (and its former constituent members), Ansaroul Islam and unidentified Islamist militias accounting for a clear majority of fatalities in 2017. Events involving these groups produced 249 of the reported fatalities recorded by ACLED in 2017, or 66% of the overall total of 376.

NB: Darker shading in the country maps indicates a higher number of relative conflict and protest events in the administrative region from 2014 - 2017.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Although the number of conflict events in DR-Congo stayed relatively level in May 2016, a dramatic drop in fatalities was recorded compared to the highs of March and April (see Figure 2). This coincided with a considerable drop in the number of events involving the Kamwina Nsapu (KN) militia in May 2017 as compared to March and April, which had three and four times more events involving the group respectively. Given that roughly half of all high-fatality events (defined as resulting in 10 or more fatalities) from March and April involved the KN militia, a clear correlation can be drawn between the decreased activity of the militia and the drop in fatalities. At the same time, simmering tensions between the government and the Bunda Dia Kongo (BDK) politico-religious movement also ignited in May 2017, resulting in the event with the month's highest reported fatalities.

There are at least two dynamics which could explain this evolution of the conflict with the KN militia. The first is the potential degradation of the group's operational capabilities. This is backed up by the high numbers of militiamen reported killed per event by the security forces, particularly in late April, as well as the surrender of as many as 100

militia members recorded by ACLED in the same month. On the other hand, the Congolese government also acceded to two key demands of the militia in April by returning the body of Kamwina Nsapu, the traditional chief and namesake of the militia, and recognizing his successor, Jacuques Kabeya Ntumba, as customary chief ([VOA News, 17 April 2017](#)). Despite the considerable violence which has been witnessed across the Kasai region since the beginning of the conflict between the KN militia and the government, these attempts to resolve two major factors which initially catalyzed the fighting suggest a willingness by the government to engage in serious reconciliation.

However, against the backdrop of a relative lull in the KN rebellion, renewed tensions with another group opposed to the central government, the BDK, have come into even greater relief. The BDK is a politico-religious movement associated with the Kongo ethnic group which supports the establishment of a state for the Kongo people ([IBT, 22 February 2017](#)). Following several clashes and the killing of a number of BDK members by the security forces in 2007 and 2008, the group was banned by the Congolese government ([ISS, 14 April 2008](#)). Since then it had not appeared in ACLED's coding until late January 2017 when clashes broke out between BDK members and the police in the Kimpese area after police officials refused to return the body of one of their leaders who had allegedly been murdered ([Radio Okapi, 3 February 2017](#)). Following these clashes, in mid-February police surrounded the house of the BDK leader, Ne Muanda Nsemi, in the Ma Campagne area of Kinshasa, resulting in a two-week stand-off with his supporters, during which at least 6 BDK members were killed, before the police succeeded in negotiating his surrender ([Reuters, 4 March 2017](#)).

Since the arrest, BDK activity had fallen off completely until mid-May 2017 when a number of BDK supporters attacked the Makala prison in Kinshasa. During the attack at least 50 inmates, although some sources had the number in the thousands ([New York Times, 19 May 2017](#)), were freed from the Makala prison by BDK members, including their leader Nsemi. Reports also claimed that between several dozen to as many as 100 people were killed in the violence ([BBC, 18 May 2017](#)). With the KN conflict seeming to have been quelled at least for the time being, this prison break engineered by the BDK creates a dangerous potential for a new anti-government conflict to take its place.

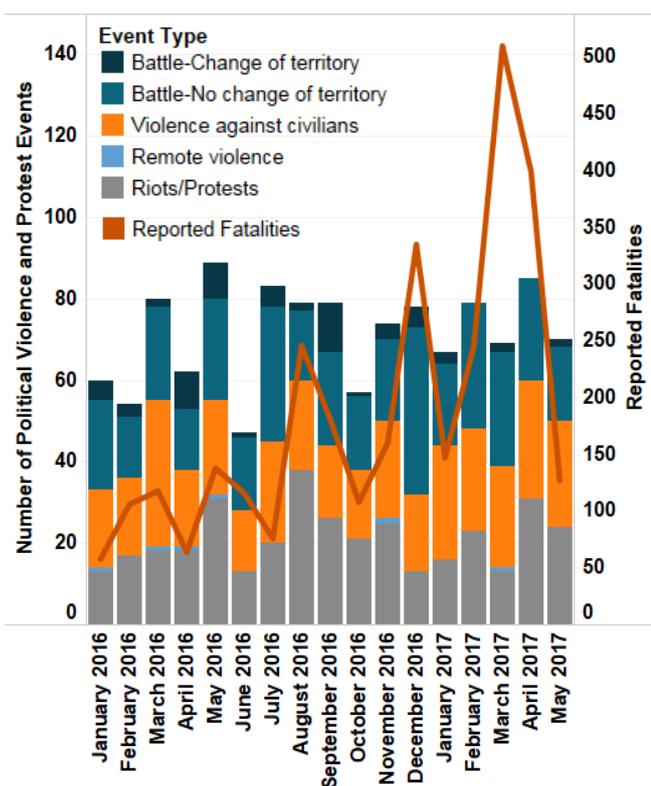


Figure 2: Number of Conflict and Protest Events and Reported Fatalities in DR-Congo, from January 2016 - May 2017.

Morocco

In May, Morocco experienced the highest rate of protests recorded in the ACLED dataset (see Figure 3). Tensions erupted in Al-Hoceima in northern Morocco in late October 2016 following the death of a fishmonger in a garbage truck. Police had confiscated his goods and he was crushed to death attempting to retrieve them. The event struck a chord with the local population in the historically marginalised Rif region and initial protests in late October 2016 centred on a wide range of grievances from justice against police abuse to socio-economic development and have in some instances evolved to denounce corruption against the regime.

Last month, protests in Al-Hoceima and surrounding areas intensified and spread to Marrakesh, Nador, Oriental, Tangier and the capital Rabat leading to questions over the potential for protests to spread nationally. Some have pointed to the underlying ethnic nature of the Rif protests, a predominantly Berber region and how this could hinder national mobilisation (Mekouar, 5 June 2017). Others have identified how many regions in Morocco share similar grievances to those expressed in the Rif movement (Masbah, 29 May 2017). Historical strategies of the state

combined with current developments in protest behaviour and internal party dynamics offers one way to interpret the processes that could shape the trajectory of the protest movement.

The Moroccan regime of Mohammed VI has traditionally employed a mixture of concessions and repression, courting the interests of potential challengers, and incorporating groups into a nominally open but contained political system. For example, during the 2011 constitutional reform process, the King effectively dismantled the momentum behind the February 20 Movement and subsequent mobilisation by reincorporating divided political parties back into the regime severing their alliances with the popular movement (Abdel-Samad, 2014). The regime has tended to employ repressive tactics when protest demands move beyond specific reform policies that the King can address and into more general calls for democratic openings. For example, the state has routinized the performance of protest by unemployed graduates in Rabat seeking jobs (Badimon, 2013) amongst many others negating the need for repression.

The reason for this mixed strategy is to deter the esca-

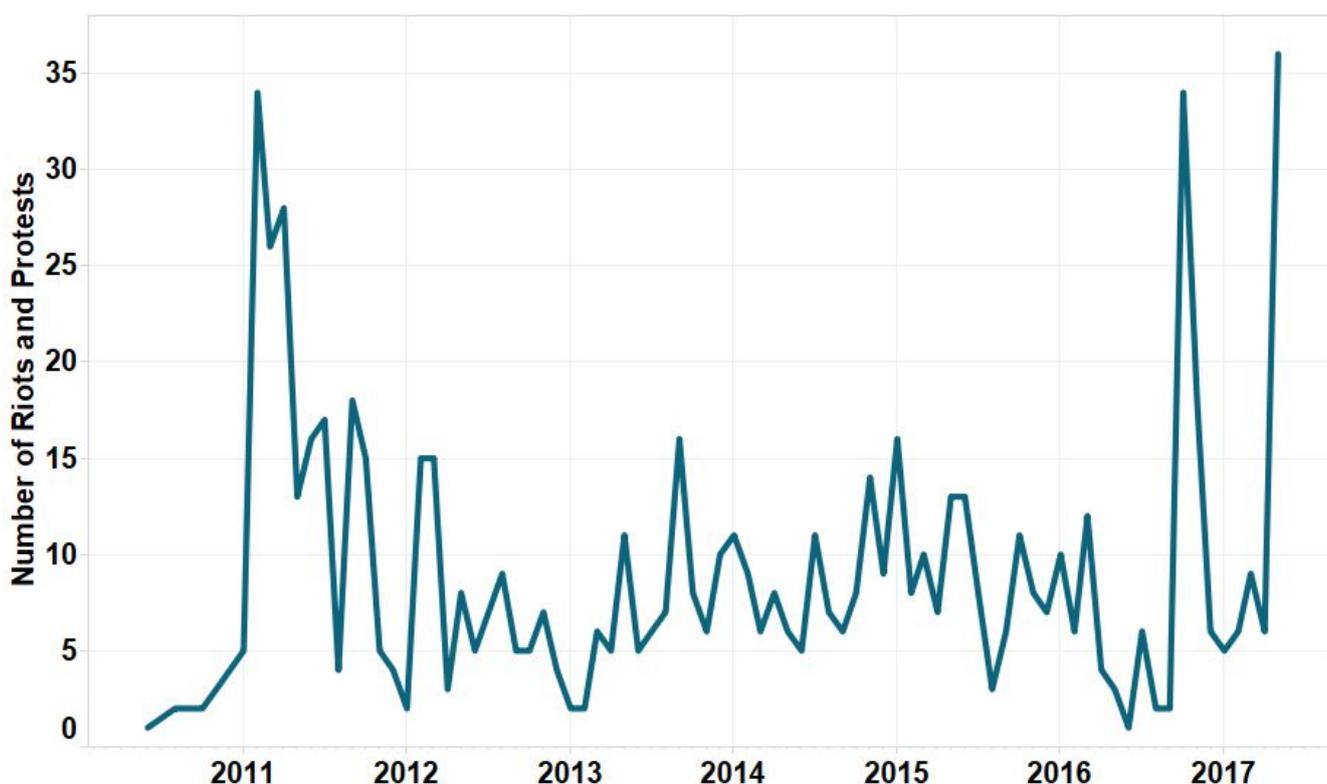


Figure 3: Number of Riots and Protests in Morocco, from 2010 - May 2017.

Morocco

tion of demands and wider appeal nationwide and for groups to accept concessions. The state did not violently engage with the initial October 2016 protests, allowing them to unfold peacefully despite clustering in a restive region. Repression in Al-Hoceima significantly increased in May 2017 (see Figure 4) and the arrest of the de facto leader of the Hirak (Popular Movement) – Nasser Zefzafi – has sparked further protests. This in part can be understood by Zefzafi’s [refusal to negotiate](#) with the regime. Therefore, the challenge to the monarchy, despite being regionally-contained in the Rif, would not have sat well with Mohammed VI especially after a delegation led by the Interior Minister visited Al-Hoceima in late May in a gesture to boost investment in the economy.

The detention of Zefzafi poses two possible trajectories:

1. Zefzafi has been replaced by two women leaders. If the new leaders of the Hirak (Popular Movement) are

willing to negotiate with the regime then the protesters may be accommodated before threatening to spill over into other areas with similar grievances. Therefore, support for the protest movement will gradually decline as grievances are appeased and the opportunity-cost to mobilise increase (protesting likely hit with repression as King has extended concessions).

2. However, precisely because of this new leadership, there is an opportunity to extend the appeal of the Rif protests beyond the North-West region. Zefzafi’s narrow Berber appeal, misogynist views, crude tactics and lack of education ([Al Jazeera, 4 June 2017](#)) would potentially have divided rather than united a popular movement.

Regardless of these two possible pathways of protest, having offered an economic concession to the region and decapitated the movement ‘leadership’, the monarchy would expect the protesters to accept the terms of negotiation. Any repression that does occur is likely to be swift, targeted and aimed at preventing backlash and cutting it off from national support and wider political appeal.

After the King removed Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane after five-months of deadlock in forming a coalition government, he appointed another member of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) – Saad-Eddine El Othamni as leader. Seen as more of a technocratic politician, the replacement led to the almost immediate formation of a coalition government. This has in many respects appeared to consolidate the Palace’s hold on power by incorporating palace allies into the coalition government and limiting the increasingly popular PJD under Benkirane which was seen by some to pose a threat to the *Makhzen’s* strategy of governance.

It may however have provoked internal discontent within the party apparatus. Notably, the PJD has called for a hearing on police conduct during the protests ([Morocco World News, 3 June 2017](#)). Similarly, the Istiqlal party — a nationalist party long accused of discriminatory policies towards non-Arab communities in Morocco ([Agoravox, 17 October 2014](#)) recently voiced support for the protests. Taken together, these two dynamics are potential signals of resistance for the King from within the established ruling and opposition elite which could benefit the momentum behind the Rif protests and lead to further protests throughout the country.

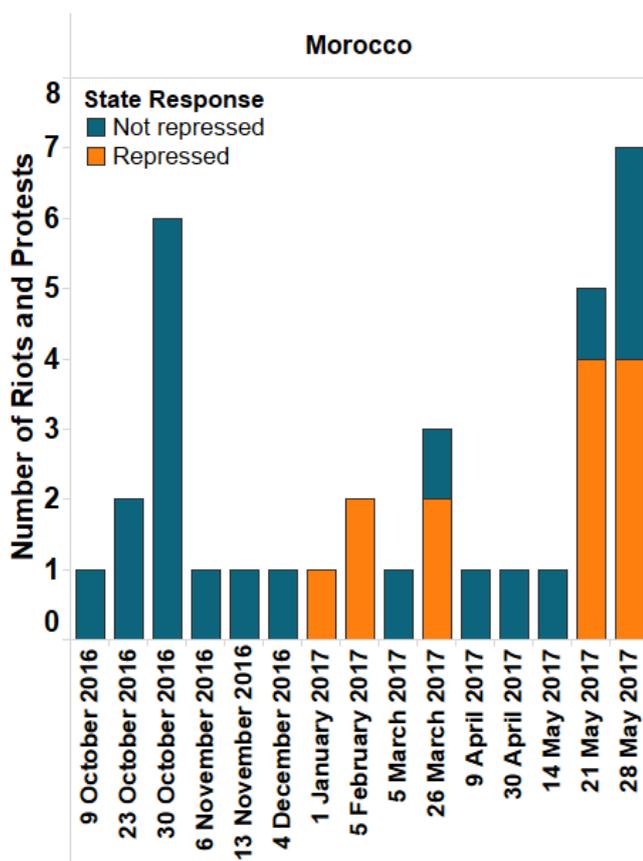


Figure 4: Number of Riots/Protests by State Response in Al-Hoceima, Morocco, from October 2016 - May 2017.

Niger

Violent activity in Niger has been sporadic over the last year and half, and its political nature has been generally divided by region. As the sparsely populated north east has remained nearly untouched over the recent period, the western areas, including the capital and along the south-east border of Nigeria’s Boko Haram stronghold of Borno State have had presence of protest and battles, respectively.

In the country’s southeast, Boko Haram has launched excursions into the Diffa Department along the N1 Highway’s southern loop (see Figure 5). Situated along Borno State to the south, Boko Haram often uses armed squads and buried IEDs to attack state military convoys travelling in the area. Attacks along border towns, primarily Diffa and Bosso, remained fairly consistent until the late 2016 - early 2017 collapse of Boko Haram’s core operations within Sambisa Forest of Nigeria ([The Guardian 24 December, 2016](#)). As a result, only four instances of Boko Haram activity occurred in the region since the beginning 2017; the most notable being a substantial defeat at the hands of the Chadian and Nigerien militaries, which led to 57 Boko Haram fatalities at Gueskerou in April ([Reuters, 10 April 2017](#)). Overall, future success for the group in Niger will likely depend on new core organizational efforts in Borno, Nigeria.

To the northwest, most activity has been concentrated along the flow of the Niger River, primarily in Tahoua and

Tillabéri Departments and the capital, Niamey. Here, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar Dine – who, along with the Macina Liberation Front and Al-Mourabitoun, merged their organizations in March 2017 becoming Nusrat al-Islam ([Africa News, 3 March, 2017](#)) – are active insurgent actors, ambushing gendarmeries in rural areas along the shared border with Mali. A somewhat recent development from late 2016 is the presence of the Islamic State cells in this same area, again targeting police patrols. This development is somewhat unsurprising, as several AQIM splinter groups pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2014 ([Religion and Politics, 8 October 2014](#)). Broadly, the majorities of these attacks are small in scale, infrequent and yield low fatalities. However, the geographic area of activity is relatively vast compared the size of their force, perhaps an indicator of their spreading influence in the region.

Although activity among these groups has been a multi-regional phenomenon, protest action has primarily been centred in Niamey (see Figure 5). These demonstrations have largely been non-violent labour movement related protests. In rare instances of protest action outside the capital, demonstrations are often related to security concerns, such as in reaction to insurgent attack. It stands to reason these protests will become less frequent in the short term as Boko Haram’s presence in the southeast diminishes.

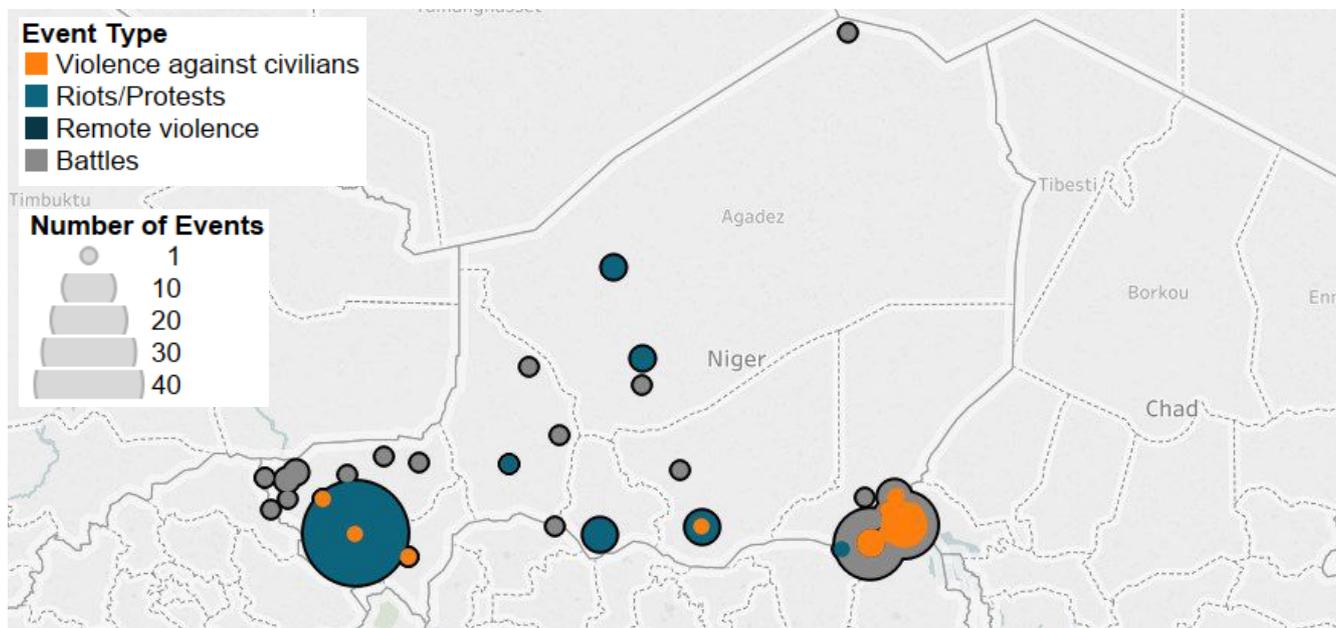


Figure 5: Number of Conflict and Protest Events in Niger, from 2015 - May 2017.

South Africa

Political violence and protests in South Africa over the first few months of 2017 have steadily increased. May 2017 witnessed an upsurge in conflict events and protests with levels of violence and protests not seen since October 2016. Given the plethora of current political, social and economic *malaise* in South Africa, the increase in protests is not entirely unexpected. Mass mobilisation against President Zuma’s recent cabinet reshuffle as well as violent protests and riots over poor service delivery have been the primary drivers of increases in conflict.

On 30th March 2017, President Zuma unleashed a political tsunami by controversially replacing 20 Ministers and Deputy Ministers in the cabinet and replacing them with Zuma loyalists ([Business Day 30 March 2017](#); [Business Day, 31 March 2017](#)). Within a week of the reshuffle, the #ZumaMustFall campaign had mobilised a myriad of opposition parties and civil societies calling for his immediate resignation. Together with thousands of South Africans, these groups as shown in Figure 6 held a series of peaceful demonstrations in cities and town across the country ([Daily Maverick, 7 April 2017](#)). The large turn-out to the protests demonstrate the level of negative public opinion regarding Zuma’s recent performance, sentiments which are supported by recent polling data indicating that the majority of respondents believe Zuma should resign ([IPSOS, 20 May 2017](#)). While Zuma again faces a vote of

no confidence in Parliament, he is largely expected to win given the historic [loyalty](#) of African National Congress (ANC) Members of Parliament ([Eyewitness News, 10 November 2016](#)).

Pressure is also mounting on government over the lack of adequate basic services. The recent spikes in violent service delivery protests, as seen in Figure 6, in early May are indicative of the growing pressure ([ISS Africa, 19 May 2017](#)). While violence over the lack of services and development is not uncommon in South Africa, this latest wave of widespread violence serves as yet another reminder of the failings of government to improve the lives of those most in need. In this instance, residents who were furious over the lack and unequal distribution of housing took to the streets in areas of south west Johannesburg. The result was several days of violence, clashes with police, the barricading of roads and the looting of stores, a story which has become all too familiar in post-Apartheid South Africa ([ISS Africa, 19 May 2017](#); [Eyewitness News, 11 May 2017](#)). This period of violence counts as the most violent and active of 2017. Moreover, 44% of events in the month of May were recorded as violent riots, compared to an average of 35% between January and April 2017. This suggests violence is becoming increasingly more common and popular when expressing political grievances.

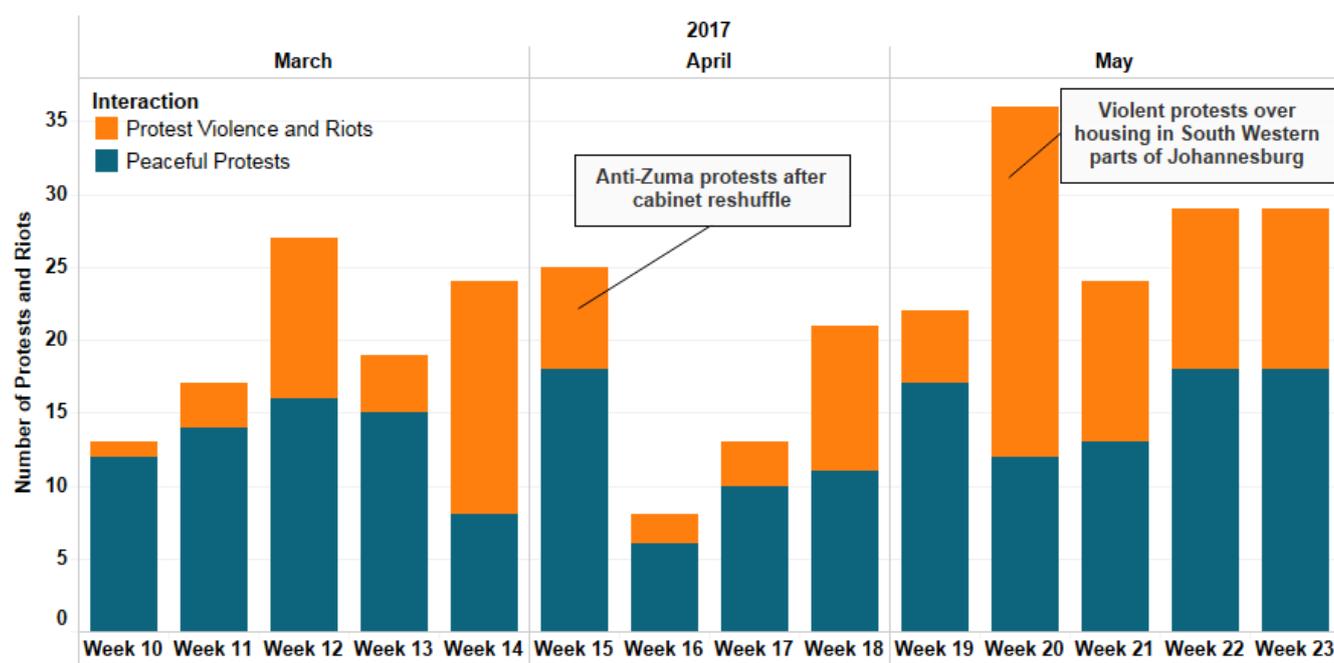


Figure 6: Number of Protests and Riots in South Africa from March 2017 - June 2017.

South Sudan

Conflict levels reduced by nearly half between April and May 2017 in South Sudan. This is mainly due to reduced battles between the two main opposing factions, the government and rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), as well as to lower civilian targeting. This is a repeated occurrence at the onset of the rainy season, with expectations that conflict will likely resume later in the year close to November, barring peace negotiations.

Battles continued between government and rebel forces in May, though at reduced levels and with a different geographic focus. While Upper Nile remained an important battleground – SPLA-IO and Agwelek forces claimed to have recaptured Tonga after heavy offensives early May for instance – fighting in Jonglei and Western Bahr El Ghazal significantly subdued compared to April ([Sudan Tribune, 4 May 2017](#)). Government and rebel forces instead clashed around Panyjiar in Unity, and around rebel positions along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo in the southern part of Central Equatoria (mainly

around Yei and Kajo-Keji) ([Radio Tamazuj, 26 May 2017](#)).

The reduction in battles can be attributed to the onset of the rainy season in May, which makes conflict logistics and ease of movement more difficult. The downward trend might also be linked to conflict resolution efforts undertaken at the national level. These include president Salva Kiir’s dismissal of the controversial army chief of staff, Gen. Paul Malong, whom several senior army officers accused, upon resigning from their positions, of conducting an ethnic war against non-Dinkas ([Al Jazeera, 9 May 2017](#)); and the announcement, in parallel to the launch of the delayed national dialogue process on 22 May, of a unilateral ceasefire and pardon ([Radio Tamazuj, 1 June 2017](#)).

However, the continuation of the government’s counter-insurgency campaign throughout May – including via the deployment of additional troops in strategic rebel areas ([Sudan Tribune, 9 May 2017](#)) – and the conditioning of SPLA-IO’s participation in the national dialogue to the side-lining of their leader, Riek Machar, compromised the government’s credibility in regards to these efforts. SPLA-IO refused to participate in the national dialogue and continued its offensives as a result, which could significantly affect the relevance of the overall dialogue process.

Communal violence also reduced in May across South Sudan. This can be attributed to reconciliation efforts between rival communities. In Central Equatoria for instance, the Dinka and Mundari tribesmen agreed to cease fire following a series of attacks on civilians in Terekeka state ([Guriong, 22 May 2017](#)). In Lakes, members of the Gony tribe clashed with various communities, but reconciled with the Thuyic. Finally, in Jonglei, the Dinka Bor and Murle reached a ceasefire agreement on 23 May, following weeks of negotiations amid unceasing revenge attacks and cattle raids ([Radio Tamazuj, 25 May 2017](#)).

It is important to note, however, that intercommunal infighting reached unprecedented levels in the first part of 2017 in South Sudan. Over January - May 2017, there were nearly 1.5 times more conflict events involving communal/ethnic militias than over the corresponding period in 2016, which had already represented a peak in South Sudan’s history. There was also a marked rise in civilian targeting in the context of this violence (see Figure 7). These South Sudanese militias are now among the most active on the whole African continent.

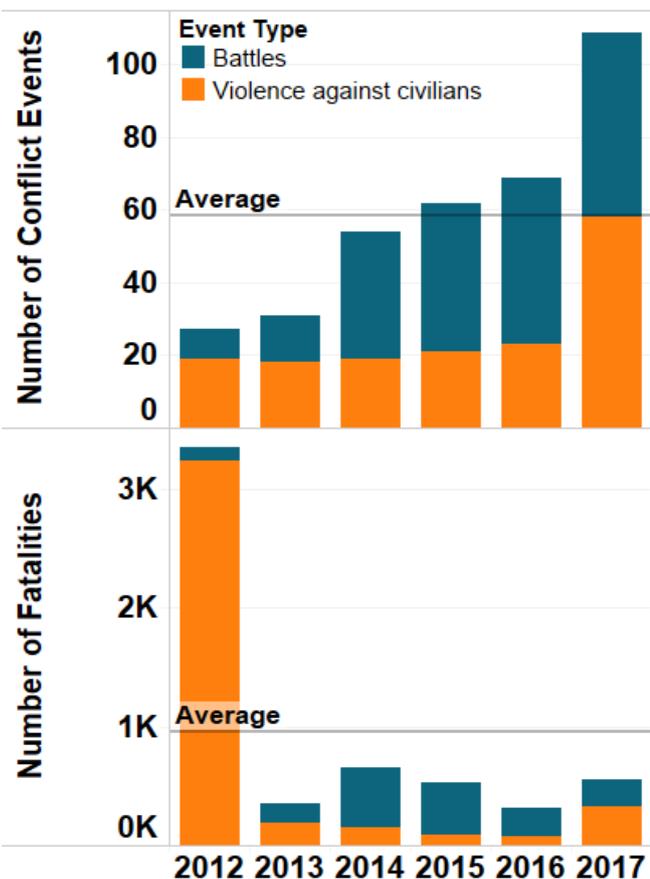


Figure 7: Conflict Activity by Ethnic/Communal Militias in South Sudan, from January - May 2012 to 2017.

Sudan

Sudan witnessed a rise in conflict activity and fatalities over April - May 2017, driven by renewed clashes between government and Darfur rebels, and by intercommunal violence.

In May, battles resumed between Sudanese forces supported by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, and the Minni Minawi and Transitional Council factions of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA/MM and SLA/TC) in North and East Darfur ([Nuba Reports, 1 June 2017](#)). This represents the first engagement of SLA/MM in Sudan since April-May 2015, when they tried to re-enter Darfur together with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) from their alleged bases in neighbouring countries. Government's large victory in 2015 significantly weakened both rebel movements, which were said to have returned abroad to rebuild their capabilities and wait for an enabling regional environment to re-enter Darfur ([UNSC, 9 January 2017](#)).

Although it remains unclear who launched the most recent attacks and why, it is possible that clashes re-erupted in May 2017 because SLA/MM deemed to have amassed enough capabilities to return to Darfur to defend its cause. The government's lack of credibility towards recent efforts to resolve the conflict in Darfur (by continuing its counterinsurgency operations in Jebel Marra despite having committed to a unilateral ceasefire for instance) might have also provoked an armed rather than diplomatic response (see Figure 8; [Radio Dabanga, 26 April 2017](#)). Upon recommitting to their own unilateral ceasefire on 1 May

2017, SLA/MM and JEM had signalled that it would not prevent them from acting in self-defence or to protect civilians ([Radio Dabanga, 1 May 2017](#)).

The government showed that it remained wedded to a military response to the conflict led by its militia. Following the clashes, RSF and Sudanese forces launched a violent campaign of bombardments, mass killings, lootings and burning down of entire villages in Darfur ([Sudan Tribune, 1 June 2017](#); [Radio Dabanga, 1 June 2017](#)). This might urge rebel groups to gather forces and jointly resist the government, leading to a surge in conflict over the next few months. Divisions within the country's strongest other rebel front, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement North faction (SPLM/N), compound the situation and risk undermining achievements made over the past few years to stabilise the country as a whole ([Nuba Reports, 1 June 2017](#)).

In parallel, localised intercommunal violence, militia activity and banditry continued unabated throughout Darfur and Kordofan (see Figure 8). Communal violence in Darfur rose from 3 events and 8 related fatalities in March to 10 events and 76 fatalities in May. This is due to deadly rivalry between Arab tribes in South and West Darfur (the Salamat, Habbaniyah and Misseriya), as well as to continued herder attacks on farmers around Katur and Tawila in North Darfur, and around Jebel Marra ([Radio Dabanga, 25 May 2017](#); [Radio Dabanga, 17 May 2017](#)).

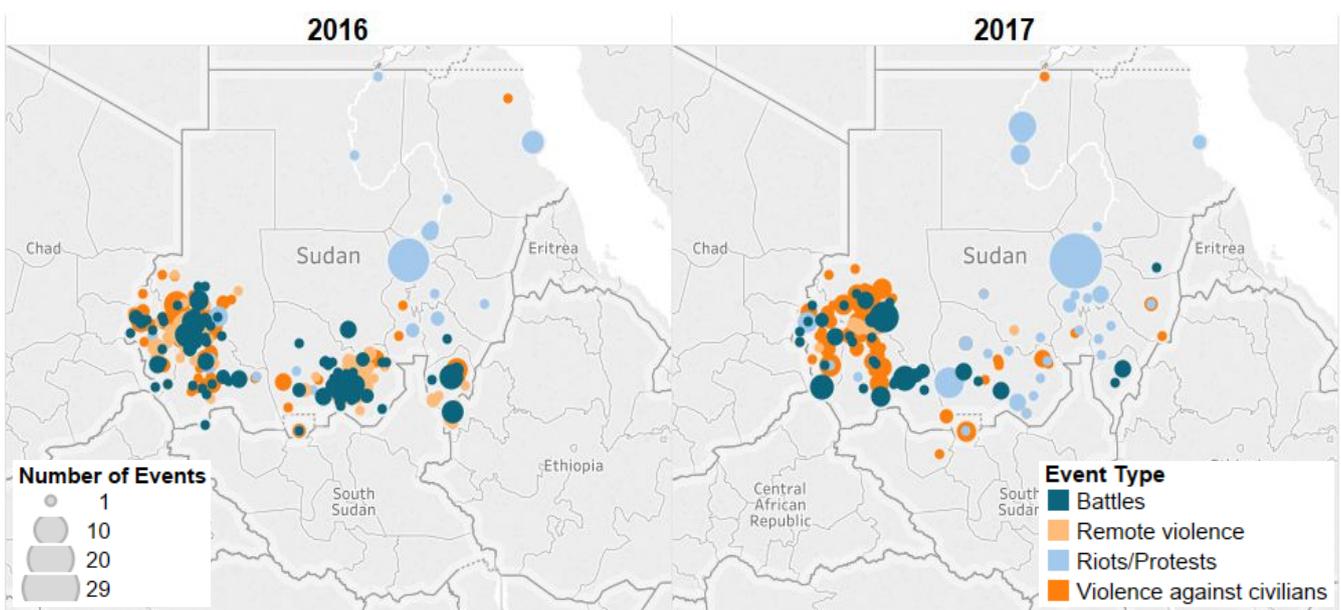


Figure 8: Conflict, Riot and Protest Events in Sudan, from January - May 2016 and 2017.

Tunisia

The first half of 2017 has seen Tunisia going through one of the deepest political crises in recent years. Widespread popular protests have flared up in the country’s inner regions, severely hitting the domestic production of oil and gas. A government-sponsored judicial investigation resulted in the arrest of well-known politicians and businessmen, accused of corruption, embezzlement and threatening national security. Armed Islamists operating in mountainous areas in the west of the country continue to pose a serious threat to civilians despite the enduring state of emergency. At the same time, weak economic recovery and protracted partisan bickering mar the government of 42-year-old Youssef Chahed, limiting its capacity to tackle the country’s acute problems effectively.

Since the beginning of the year, Tunisia has witnessed a marked increase in the number of riots and protests recorded by ACLED. Large-scale protest movements have taken place across the country, involving long-restive and traditionally quiet governorates alike. The south-eastern region – comprising the governorates of Gabes, Mede-

nine, Sfax and Tataouine – accounted for almost one third of all protest events between January and May, followed by the governorates of the centre-west and the north-east of the country (see Figure 9).

Whilst the grievances driving the demonstrations have not changed since 2011 – high youth unemployment, anaemic socio-economic development, political marginalisation – these have become ever more acute as the absence of tangible improvements became apparent and long-standing industrial crises went unresolved. Last January, protests near the industrial areas and the mining basins of Sidi Bouzid and Gafsa escalated into violent riots when the demonstrators erected roadblocks and engaged in stone-throwing against the police ([Reuters, 14 January 2017](#)). Starting from late March and throughout April, thousands of residents took to the streets in the north-eastern province of Le Kef to protest the relocation of a local manufacturing plant to the coastal town of Hammamet, which would require the layoff of 430 employees ([Kapitalis, 30 March 2017](#); [Le Monde, 20 April 2017](#)).

Popular unrest has most notably rocked in the southern governorate of Tataouine, a scarcely populated province whose economy is highly dependent on natural resources extraction and informal cross-border trade with neighbouring Libya ([International Alert, December 2016](#)). Since March, the local population has protested demanding that the region’s energy revenues are used to promote jobs creation and development. Demonstrations have rapidly spread from the town of Tataouine to remote villages and the desert oil sites, where demonstrators have blocked roads and camped out for weeks bringing oil and gas production to a halt ([Reuters, 8 May 2017](#); [Jeune Afrique, 2 June 2017](#)). In the ensuing attempt of breaking up the protest camps, a National Guard vehicle “accidentally” ran over a protester in Oued El Kamour, leading to his death and sparking outrage among the demonstrators ([Al Jazeera, 22 May 2017](#)).

The turmoil in Tataouine has had major repercussions on national politics, forcing the government to take exceptional measures for the region and stoking tensions between political parties ([Tunisie Numerique, 10 April 2017](#); [Realités, 23 May 2017](#)). However, these events were further brought on the spotlight following a judicial investigation that resulted in the arrest of the businessman Chafik Jarraya, the former presidential candidate Yassine Channoufi and a number of other businessmen, politicians and

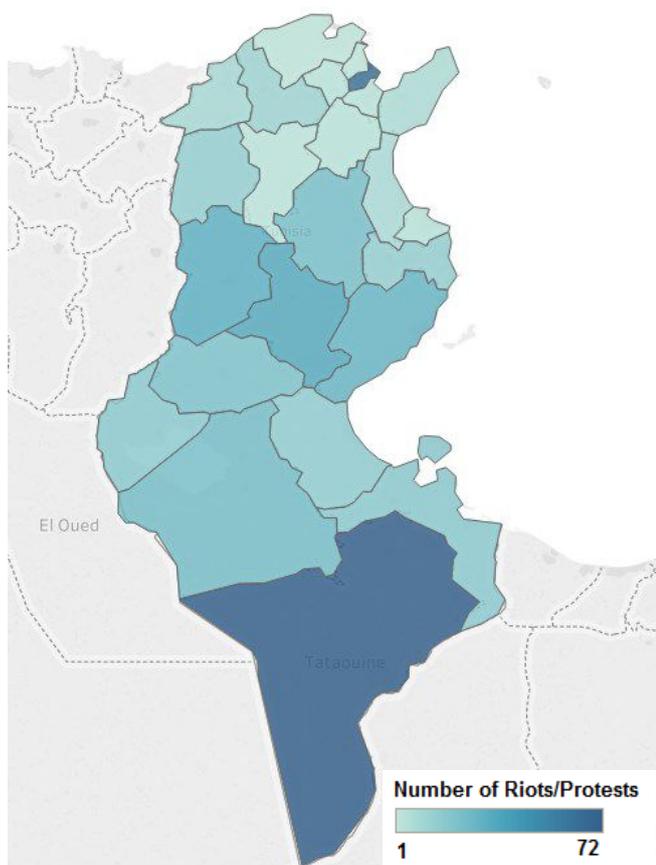


Figure 9: Number of Riots and Protests by Governorate in Tunisia, from January - May 2017.

Tunisia

government officials on charges of corruption and threats to national security ([Jeune Afrique, 24 May 2017](#)). According to media sources, Chafik Jarraya – a well-known tycoon with vast financial interests in Tunisia and Libya and strong political connections domestically and abroad – is accused of financially supporting protest movements in Tataouine and across the country ([Business News, 23 May 2017](#); [Jeune Afrique, 30 May 2017](#)). The investigation has thus unveiled an extensive network of corruption, revealing how second-tier political and economic elites are willing to stir up unrest in an effort to influence the political process for personal gain.

Following the Islamist offensive on Ben Gardane in March last year, Tunisia has managed to avoid other major attacks on its territory. Conflict fatalities have significantly decreased compared to previous years, and are largely limited to armed clashes between armed militants and security forces in the west of the country (see Figure 10). These trends notwithstanding, the active presence of militants groups in the heights of Kasserine – Jebel Chaambi, Jebel Mghila and Jebel Semmama – continue to breed insecurity among the civilian population. Landmine explosions have injured and killed several shepherds over the past few months, while militants frequently raid civilian

homes in search of food. In the latest episode of violence, the Tunisian branch of the Islamic State claimed the assassination of the young shepherd Khalifa Soltani, the brother of Mabrouk who had in turn been killed and beheaded in November 2015 in the same area ([Mosaïque FM, 3 June 2017](#)). Although the prime minister has pledged to support Soltani’s family, the government is widely perceived as unable to promote local development and protect communities living in isolated areas from armed militants ([Inkyfada, 28 January 2016](#)).

Tunisia is currently facing multiple, intertwined challenges. Economic stagnation and political marginalisation have fuelled widespread frustration across the regions in inner Tunisia. Endemic corruption continues to pervade national and local politics, fostering distrust in the government and the political parties. Despite declining activity, armed militants continue to threaten civilian lives in remote areas. Shaken by persistent instability – three cabinet reshuffles have occurred in less than ten months – and with limited financial leeway, the coalition government is criticised for failing to live up to its promises and push through effective reforms ([Le Point Afrique, 12 April 2017](#); [Tunis Afrique Presse, 15 May 2017](#)). Hence, in absence of palpable improvements, Tunisia will likely continue to see sustained popular mobilisation in the coming months.

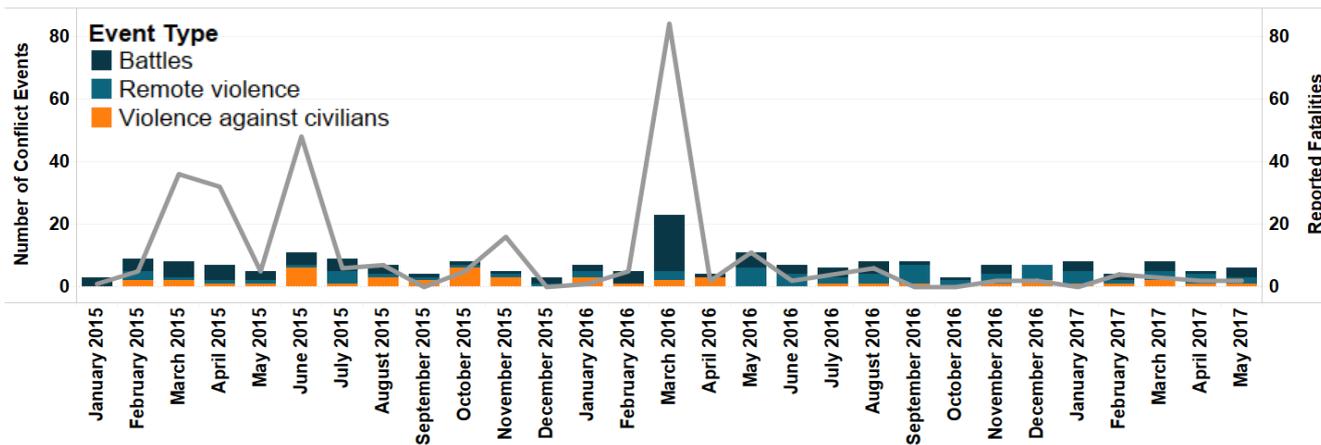


Figure 10: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Month in Tunisia, from January 2015 - May 2017.

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Sources

Conflict Trends reports are compiled from ACLED data and draw on news sources, civil society reports, and academic and policy analyses. Full details of sources and coding processes are available online on the [ACLED website](#).