

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 53) REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE,
NOVEMBER 2016

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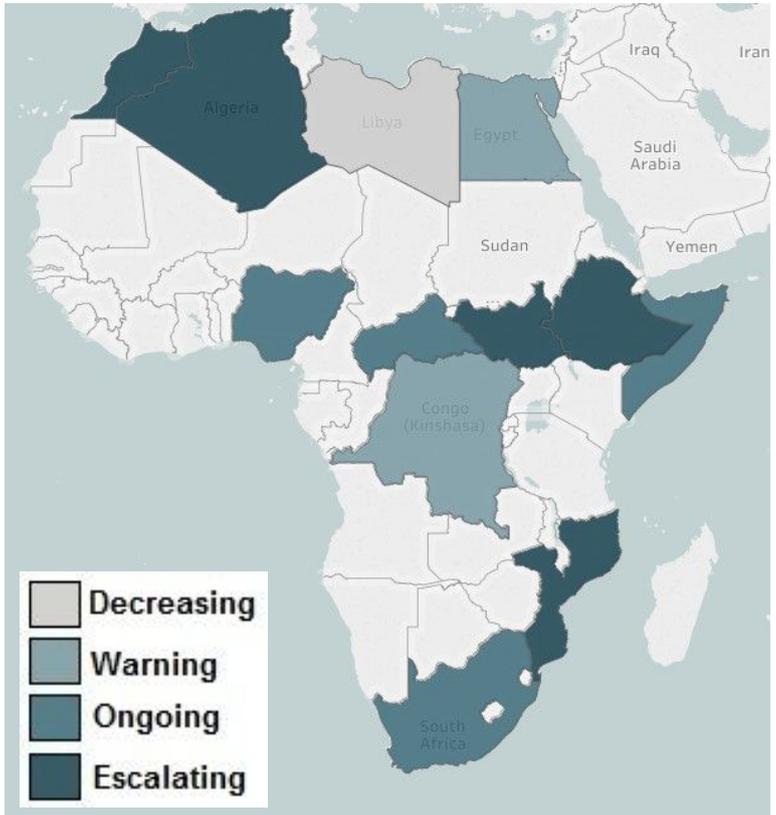
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Welcome to the November issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project's (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published on the [ACLED website](http://www.acleddata.com), and are also available through our research partners at [Climate Change and African Political Stability \(CCAPS\)](http://www.ccap.su.se).

This month's issue focuses on the chances of localised protest episodes - including organised labour movements - to coordinate across **Egypt** and escalating violence in the Sinai Peninsula, the increasing incidence of violent riots and the emergence of local armed militias in **Ethiopia** as concessions by the TPLF fail to abate unrest, and rising anti-state violence in Greater Equatoria in **South Sudan** in a review of conflict dynamics over the past few months.

Elsewhere on the continent, protests organised by February 20 Movement sharply escalated in Northern **Morocco** after a fish seller died and in **Algeria** where demonstrations over electricity bills, insecurity and socio-economic deterioration spread northwards to Skikda and Biskra.



Conflict Trajectory, November 2016

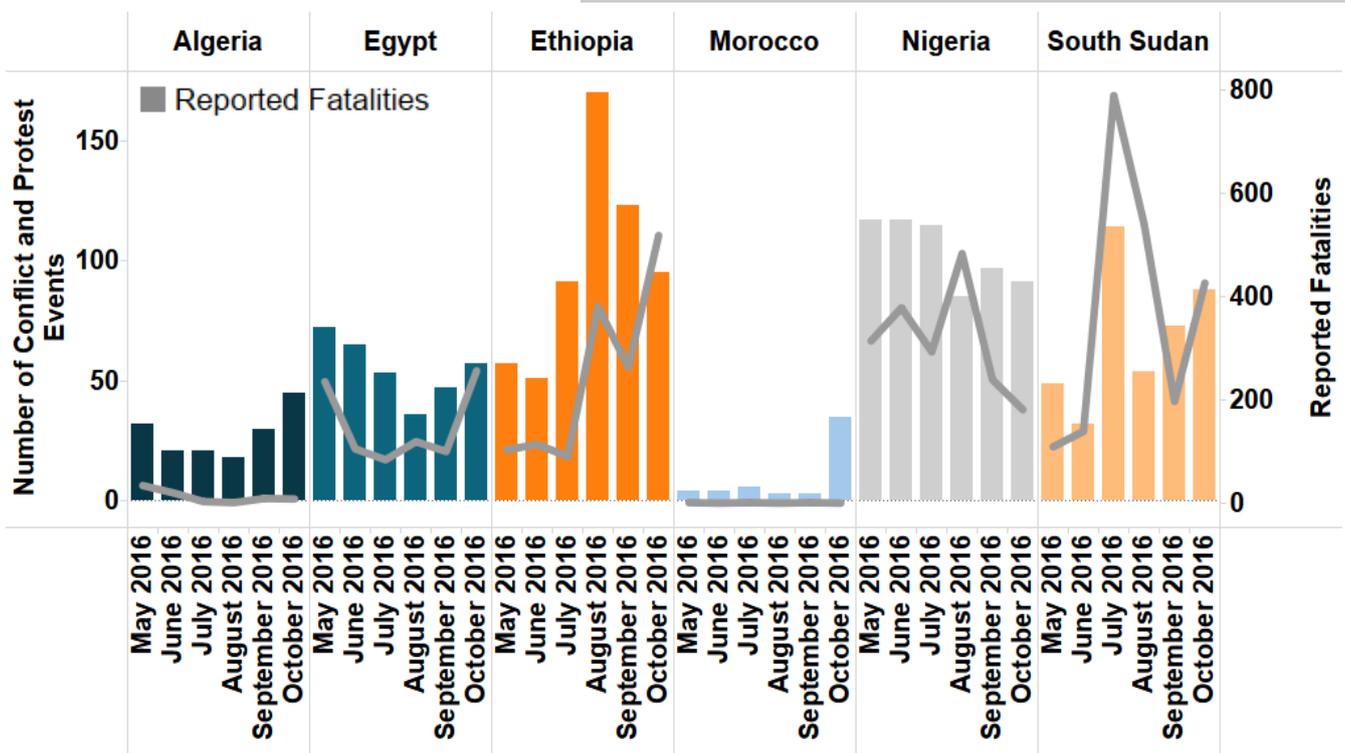


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, May - October 2016.

Egypt

Political violence and protest events in Egypt have been rising since August 2016, largely driven by two dynamics. First, protests have rebounded nationwide coinciding with a seven-year high inflation rate of 15.5 percent in August ([NYTimes, 20 October 2016](#)). Second, violence against civilians reached its highest level since February 2016 as kidnappings surged in North Sinai; and off-duty police officers and military personnel continued to be targeted in

wide-ranging militant attacks that spread from North Sinai to closer to the capital.

In recent months the shortage in supply of baby milk formula, wheat, and the most recently contested sugar has caused speculation that a major outbreak of social unrest is imminent ([Daily News Egypt, 5 November 2016](#)). Whilst protests have steadily risen from August – October, the deterioration in economic circumstances by itself is unlikely to spark mass, destabilising unrest ([Ketchley, 2016](#)). Instead, the protest landscape characterising Egypt is one of fragmentation where locally directed demands trump concerted efforts of national coordination. Throughout October, protests centred upon a myriad of localised interests including access to basic services in social housing units in 6 October City; demands to be rehired by factory workers at Tanta Linen Factory; rising apartment prices in Port Said; and cuts to electricity and water supply due to flooding in the Red Sea governorate.

Calls for nationwide street protests on 11 November have gained attention in Egypt. These calls largely originated internationally by a Turkey-based activist and seemingly gained traction with the Muslim Brotherhood group ‘Anti-Coup Alliance’. In the run up to 11 November however, only very limited protests have been staged expressing direct support for, or momentum behind, the call to protest against economic conditions, with political parties withholding political backing ([Albadaiah, 5 October 2016](#)). On 21 October, the pro-Morsi Anti Coup Alliance staged a demonstration in the Menoufiya governorate after a housewife was arrested on charges of calling for protests on 11 November. Piggybacking on the arbitrary detention of civilians is unlikely to galvanise widespread support for the movement and obfuscates the economic grounds the protests are based upon. Speculation that the Muslim Brotherhood are the main instigators of these calls ([Egypt Independent, 28 October 2016](#)) demonstrates the improbability that any protests that emerge will spread and the threat it poses to the Sisi regime appears minimal, as religious/ethnic organisational leadership in protests in 2016 has dwindled from 50.6% of protests in 2014 to 14% of all protests in 2016 (see Figure 2).

Instead, the composition of movements and political & societal groups behind the protests suggest a growing role for organised labour unions where in October, six labour protests (both officially sanctioned and worker-led) were recorded compared to one in August and September re-

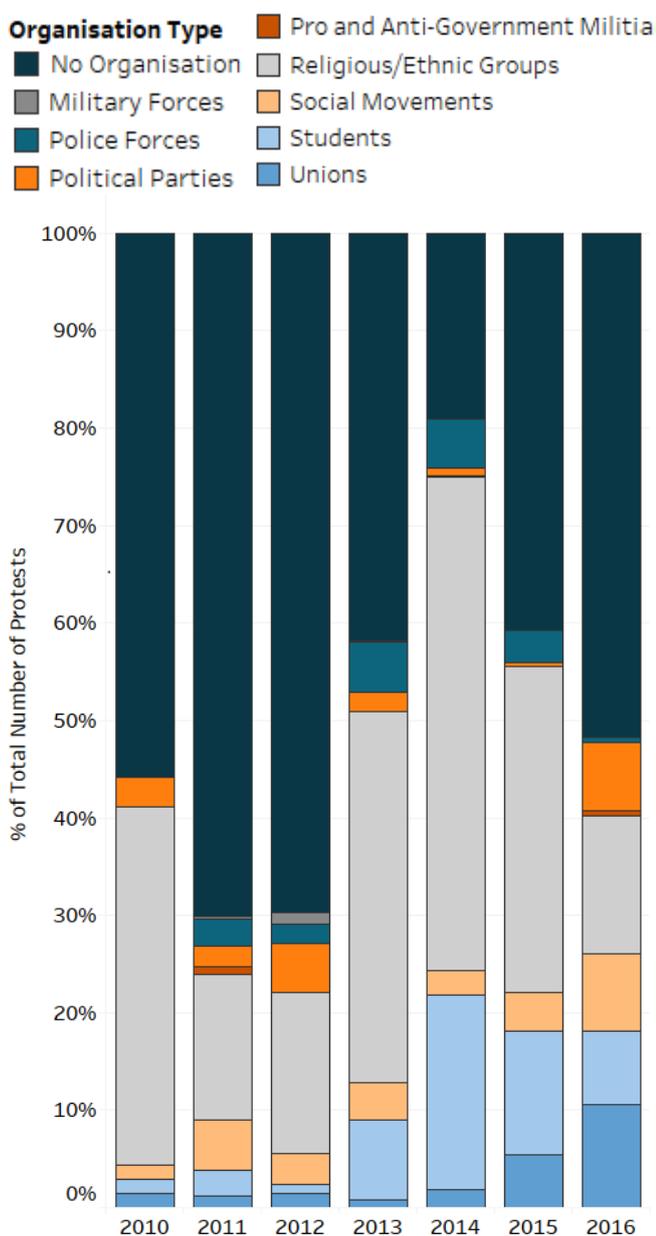


Figure 2: Percentage of Protest Events by Organisation Type in Egypt, from 2010 - November 2016.

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Egypt

August 2016 September 2016 October 2016



Number of Conflict Events	Event Type
19	Battle-No change of territory
24	Remote violence
29	Violence against civilians

Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events by Islamist and Unidentified Armed Groups by Type in North Sinai, Egypt, from August - October 2016.

spectively. In determining the impact these protests will have on trajectories of contention, during the Arab Spring “massive labour protests remained parochial, fragmented, and to a large degree sidelined from the unfolding political process” (Ketchley, 2016: 3). On this basis mobilisations by organised labour unions and professional groups is unlikely to translate into a cohesive opposition that has

the potential to escalate. Furthermore, although police abuses have continued to beset Egyptian society and offered some signs of growing divisions between the security sector and the regime in October, el-Sisi has acted to contain the fallout. A prison break following riots in Ismailia resulted in Magdy Abdel Ghaffar sanctioning swift and sweeping changes in personnel in the Ismailia security apparatus as investigations were opened into the involvement of police in the jail break (MENAFN, 25 October 2016). El-Sisi continues to distance the police apparatus from continued violence against informal traders, describing them as isolated incidents by rogue police officers. Notwithstanding these signs of tension, the Egyptian military tightens its hold on Egyptian public life by wading further into the provision of goods and services to counter growing inflation in the wake of austerity measures set by the IMF (Al-Jazeera, 26 September 2016; Financial Times, 5 October 2016). Combined, these dynamics suggest that opportunities for revolt remain scant at this time.

From August to October, violence against civilians became the tactic of choice by Islamist militants, Unidentified Armed Groups and the State of Sinai militant group in

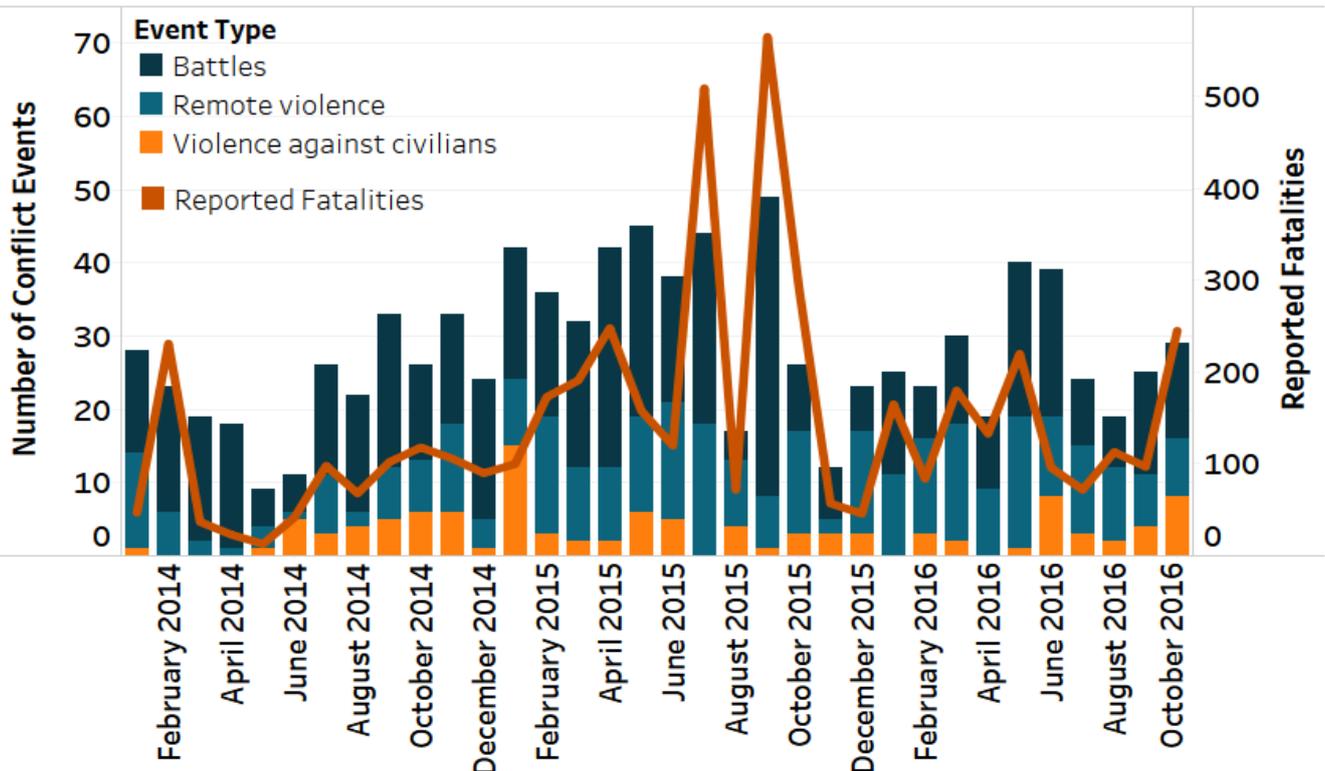


Figure 4: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in North Sinai, from February 2014 - October 2016.

Egypt

North Sinai, rising by 300% (see Figure 3). Overall counts of battles and remote IED attacks remained well below levels seen in May and June of this year. However, the nature of the violence in October shifted from usual patterns of police-targeted violence. Instead, militants more aggressively pursued kidnappings of civilians who were suspected of being army informants or vocal critics of Islamic State-linked attacks. This contrasts with other periods of higher civilian violence, such as June 2016, where non-commissioned police officers bore the brunt of militant advances (see Figure 4).

The early days of November however offer signs the a longer-term trend in which militants continue to primarily target high-ranking officials. In recent months, these attacks have usually occurred at their place of residence in Al-Arish and surrounding villages. The rate at which off-duty military officers are targeted may reflect the resumption in military raids and operations against Sinai militants following a large checkpoint attack on 14 October in the north-west near Bir al-Abd which left 12 soldiers killed.

This most recent attack represents a geographical expansion in activity that until now has chiefly concentrated in the triangle between Al-Arish, Rafah and Sheikh Zuweyid and where the Egyptian military force directs its counter-

terror activity (see Figure 5). Intermittent clashes have taken place in the central areas of the Sinai province in 2016 but the north-west of the peninsula has altogether avoided direct confrontations between military forces and the State of Sinai militant group. There have only been two recorded events in Bir al-Abd, both taking place in February 2016 and both involving a remote IED attack on police forces. Concern over this expansion may explain the highest recorded fatalities of 2016 as 'Operation Martyrs Right', a military operation against militant Islamist groups in North Sinai, responded to this provocation.

The complications the Egyptian army faces with eradicating the Sinai insurgency may come under further pressure in the coming weeks as new militant groups emerge closer to Cairo. Both the Hasam Movement and Lewaa El-Thawra have claimed attacks on security personnel in Al Qalyubiah, Al Menufiah, Giza and a suburb of Cairo. Should these groups conduct further attacks, and with some arguing that the military's role in civilian life is detracting from its security prerogatives ([Al-Jazeera, 26 September 2016](#)), El-Sisi will need to strategically supervise the armed forces to ensure their resources effectively address economic demands of protesters, security concerns in Upper Egypt, and counter-terrorist operations in the Sinai.

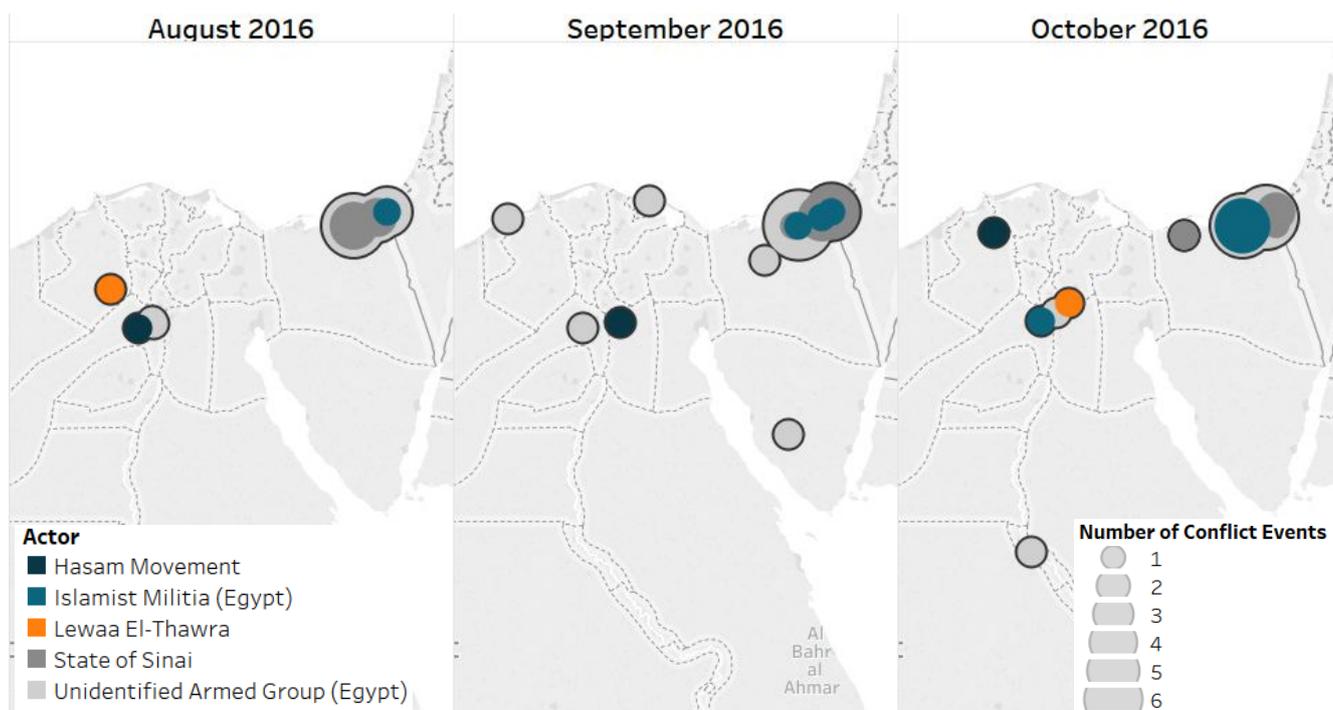


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Actor and Location in Egypt, from August - October 2016.

Ethiopia

Twelve months after the beginning of the uprisings in the Oromia region, violence shows no sign of decreasing in Ethiopia. In its strenuous efforts to contain a wave of protest unseen for decades, the government has launched a violent crackdown that is estimated to have killed more than one thousand people over one year. Thousands of people, including prominent opposition leaders and journalists, have been arrested and are currently held in detention centres across the country.

The month of October has seen the highest number of fatalities, with more than five hundred people reported killed despite decreasing overall levels of conflict (see Figure 6). Violence has flared up after the events at a religious festival in Bishoftu, when a stampede caused by police firing on a protesting crowd killed at least 55 people ([Al Jazeera, 6 October 2016](#)). The massacre was greeted with widespread outrage by the opposition, which blamed the government for the killings. In the following days, rioters vandalised and torched several foreign-owned factories and flower farms, accused of profiting from the government’s contested development agenda. An American biologist has also died when her vehicle was pelted with stones near Addis Ababa. Reports vary as to whether the rioters were locals or not.

Additionally, data show how the unrest is evolving geographically across the Ethiopian territory (see Figure 7). Whilst the vast majority of the protests remain located in Oromia, where the local population first mobilised to oppose a government-backed developmental plan last November, other regions have increasingly experienced violence during the past few months ([ACLED Crisis Blog, 9 September 2016](#)). The Amhara region has witnessed more protests since mid-July, when discontent with state repression countrywide ignited pre-existing tensions over regionalist grievances around the city of Gondar ([Africa Confidential, 22 July 2016](#)). State crackdown on dissent was also reported in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’, the native region of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, as local communities began to stage anti-government demonstrations ([Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, 20 September 2016](#)).

These trends seem to reflect the increasing lethality of state repression, which is contributing to escalating and diffuse conflict, rather than stifling dissent. Although most of the protests have remained peaceful over the past year (see Figure 8), the increasing incidence of violent riots and the emergence of local armed militias may point to an escalating conflict cycle. As indiscriminate repression con-

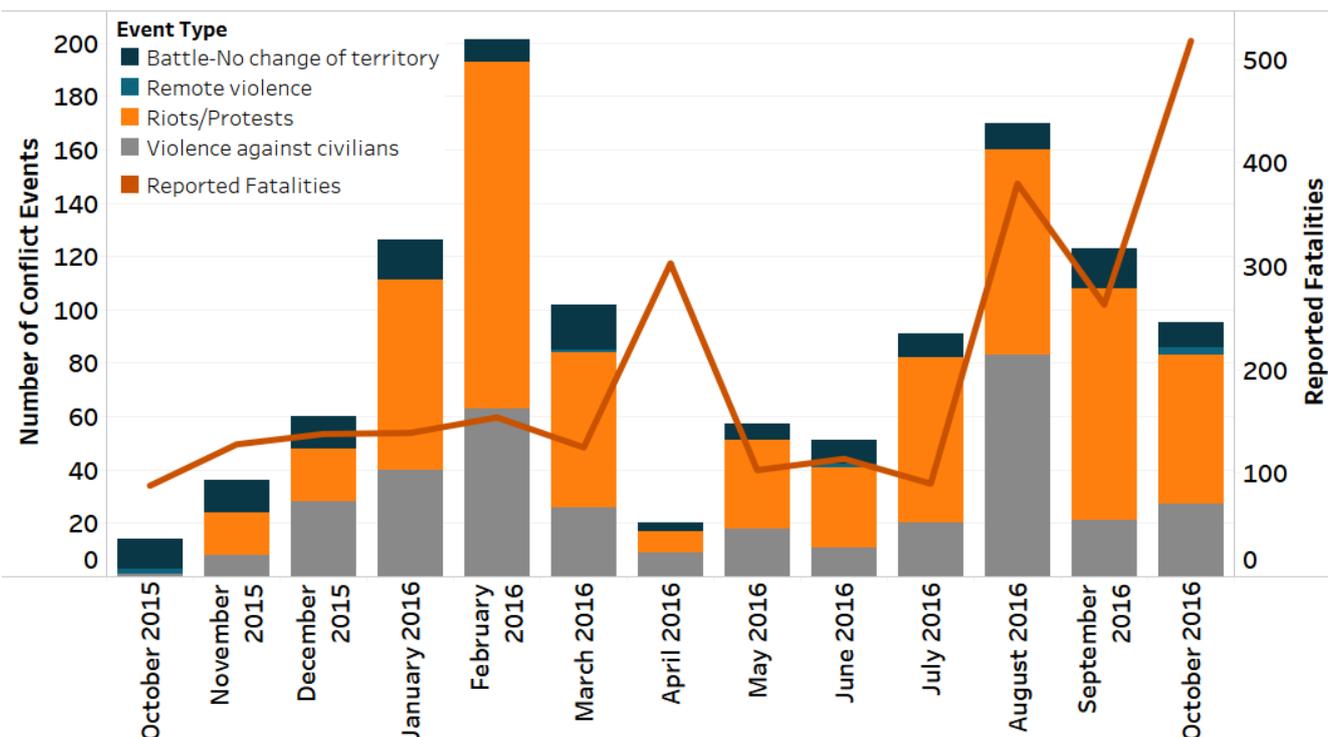


Figure 6: Number of Conflict and Protest Events by Type and Month in Ethiopia, from November 2015 - October 2016.

Ethiopia

tinues, an increasing number of protesters may resort to violent tactics, turning the largely peaceful unrest into an armed insurgency. The risk of that occurring seems largely to be determined by government actions.

Despite these escalating trends, the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition (EPRDF) is unwilling to mitigate its repressive measures. Internet access was allegedly shut down in the attempt of hampering the protest movement, which use online media and social networks to disseminate anti-government information and coordinate collective action. On 9 October, the government introduced a six-month state of emergency, the first time since the ruling EPRDF came to power in 1991 ([Al Jazeera, 17 October 2016](#)). Foreign diplomats were banned from travelling outside the capital Addis Ababa, a restriction that was lifted only on November 8 ([BBC, 8 November 2016](#)). At least 1,600 people are reported to have been detained since the state of emergency was declared, while the Addis Standard, a newspaper critical of the government, was forced to stop publications

due to the new restrictions on the press ([Nazret, 25 October 2016](#)).

International institutions and non-governmental organisations have expressed major concerns on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. In a joint statement addressed to the UN Human Rights Council, fifteen civil society organisations have called for "international, independent, thorough, impartial and transparent investigations" over the ongoing repression in Ethiopia ([Human Rights Watch, 8 September 2016](#)). The government has claimed that any allegations of systematic wrongdoings by its security forces are unsubstantiated, and has instead blamed "foreign elements" linked with the Egyptian and the Eritrean political establishments for instigating the rebellion and arming the opposition ([BBC, 10 October 2016](#)).

Following increasing pressure from the international community and foreign investors, the government has agreed to make some limited concessions to the opposition. After meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Hailema-

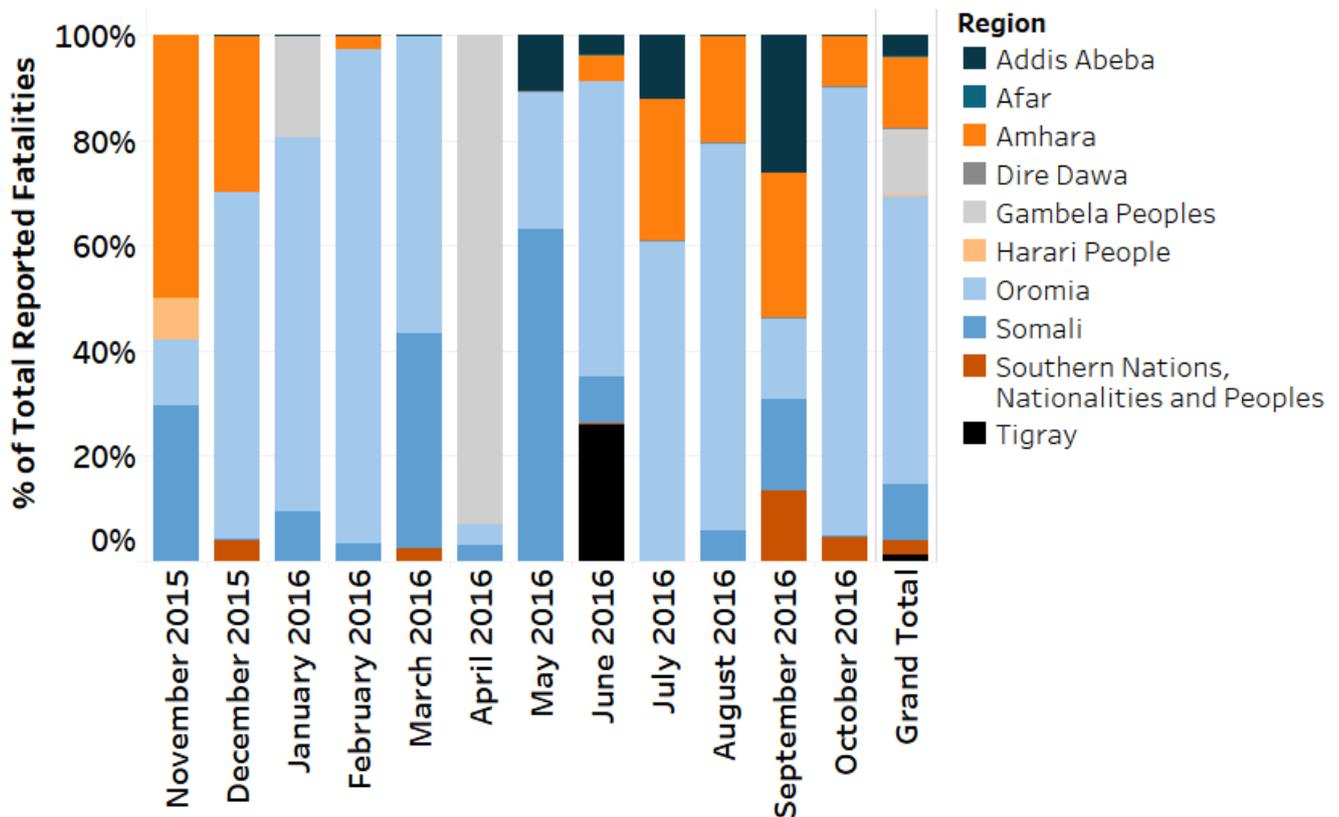


Figure 7: Percentage of Reported Fatalities by Region and Month in Ethiopia, from November 2015 - October 2016.

Ethiopia

riam pledged to reform Ethiopia’s electoral system, which currently allows the EPRDF to control 500 of the 547 seats in Parliament ([Newsweek, 12 October 2016](#)). The leadership of the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO), junior ally in the ruling EPRDF coalition, was removed during the September party congress in a timid attempt to placate the protesters. On 1 November, Ethiopia’s Prime Minister reshuffled its cabinet, replacing some of the most unpopular ministers and assigning Oromos the key ministries of foreign affairs and communication ([Financial Times, 1 November 2016](#); [Nazret, 1 November 2016](#)).

These limited concessions are nevertheless unlikely to deter the protesters. By contrast, they are widely seen as being orchestrated by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which has dominated the country’s political, economic and security elites since the EPRDF took power in

1991. Although some party hardliners have dismissed the opposition’s allegations of Tigrayan dominance as mere racism ([Africa Confidential, 21 October 2016](#)), the TPLF seems to recognise the need of a more accommodating stance towards the opposition. However, these decisions may have come too late to satisfy the protesters’ demand for immediate and substantial change.

Twenty-five years of uninterrupted EPRDF rule have left many Ethiopians discontent with rampant corruption, a political system increasingly perceived as unjust and the unequal gains of economic development. The protests have thus revealed the weakness of the social contract regulating Ethiopia’s political life since 1991, and call on Ethiopian elites to deliver far-reaching political reforms. However, the violent repression of peaceful protests is unlikely to ease the tensions the country has been experiencing since last year.

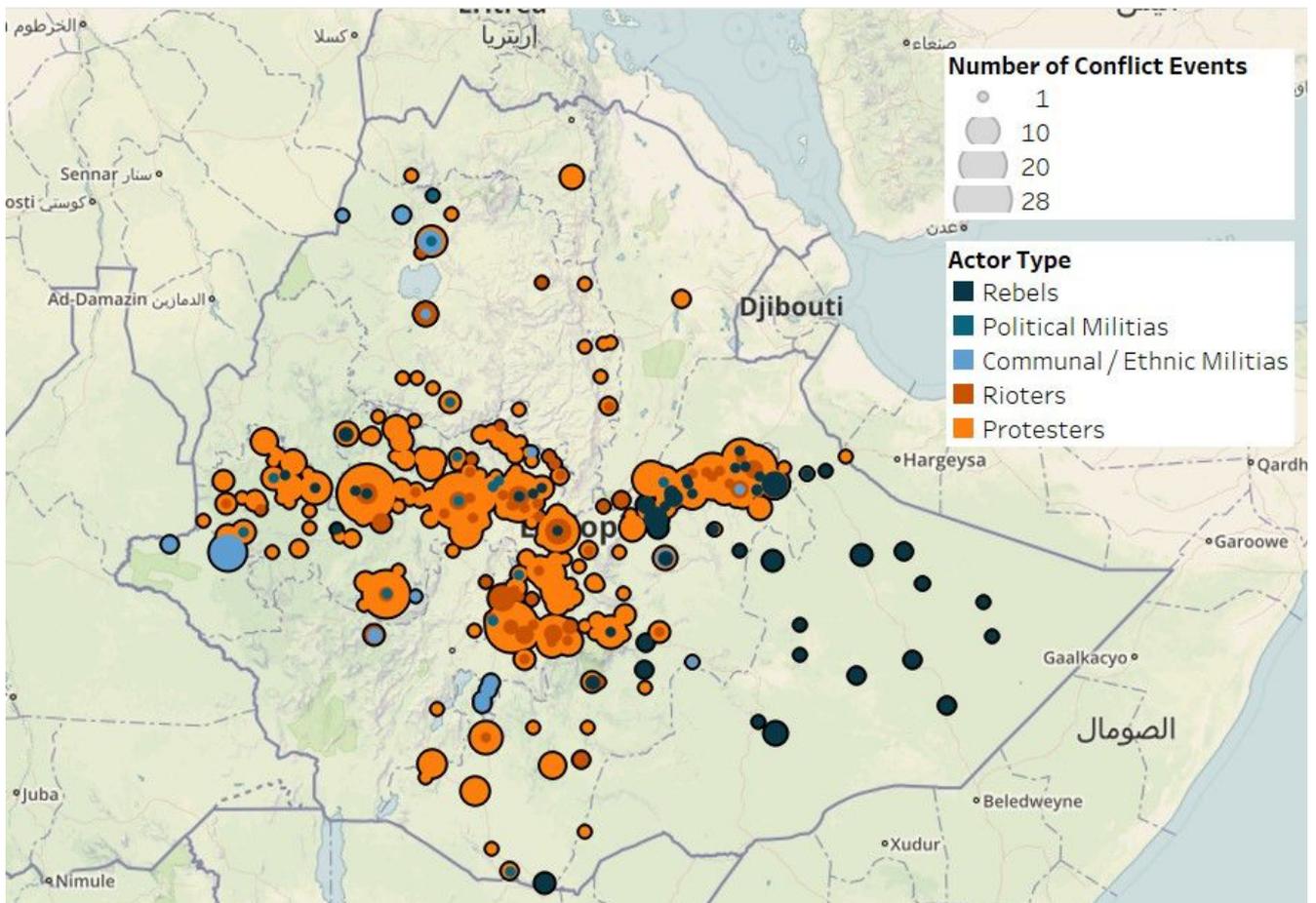


Figure 8: Number of Conflict and Protest Events Involving Non-State Actors by Actor Type and Location in Ethiopia, from November 2015 - October 2016.

South Sudan

Political violence in South Sudan continued to increase through October, reaching its highest point since the battles in July when violence re-erupted in the capital between the government and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO). Since July, the spread of conflict remained localised to the Greater Equatoria region (see Figure 9).

This marks a contrast to the outbreak of the civil war in Juba in late 2013, where conflict quickly spread to states where SPLA-IO leader and former vice president Riek Machar had a following (in Unity), where previous instances of rebellion had occurred (in Jonglei), and to the key oil region of Upper Nile.

There are three potential reasons for this trend. Firstly, the SPLA-IO has gained grounds in Greater Equatoria over the past few months and remains committed to overthrow the government. Secondly, there has been a rise in political militias battling government forces and targeting civilians in the region. Lastly, government forces have engaged in violent counter-insurgency tactics and targeted perceived supporters of the opposition within Equatoria.

SPLA-IO’s rising foothold in Greater Equatoria

The geography of conflict in South Sudan started to shift west by December 2015 (see [ACLED, June 2016](#)), primarily driven by expanded fighting between government and SPLA-IO allied rebels in Western Equatoria. Machar used ambiguity in the August 2015 peace deal to ask for 19 cantonment sites outside of Greater Upper Nile, including 11 in Greater Equatoria, which would merge his forces

with anti-government groups within Equatoria. President Kiir, under pressure from anti-peace elements on his side, rejected the notion that groups outside Greater Upper Nile were related to the conflict and continued to prevent rebels from gathering at the designated cantonment sites ([Small Arms Survey, July 2016](#); [Radio Tamazuj, 2016](#)). By late 2015, anti-government grievances and anti-Dinka sentiment had risen among SPLA-IO-allied factions in Western Equatoria state, including factions of the Arrow Boys militia. This prompted the government to launch a counter-insurgency campaign, during which abuses were committed by both sides ([HRW, 6 March 2016](#)).

During the July violence in Juba, Machar’s ability to bring in support from aligned rebel groups outside the capital proved limited, primarily due to the groups’ limited resources ([RFI, 18 August 2016](#); [Small Arms Survey, July 2016](#)). The clashes drove Machar’s outgunned forces out of Juba and into the Greater Equatoria region, where they have remained mobilized and are engaged in active recruitment ([ICG, 17 August 2016](#)). From South Africa, where he fled for protection after the clashes, Machar declared that the peace deal had collapsed and called for the reorganization of his forces to “wage a popular armed resistance against the authoritarian and fascist regime of President Salva Kiir” ([RFI, 25 August 2016](#)). His calls for continued resistance resonated in Greater Equatoria as his rebellion was joined by a number of soldiers and civil servants who defected from the government, as well as by new groups such as Lam Akol’s New Democratic Movement (NDM) and the South Sudan Democratic Front

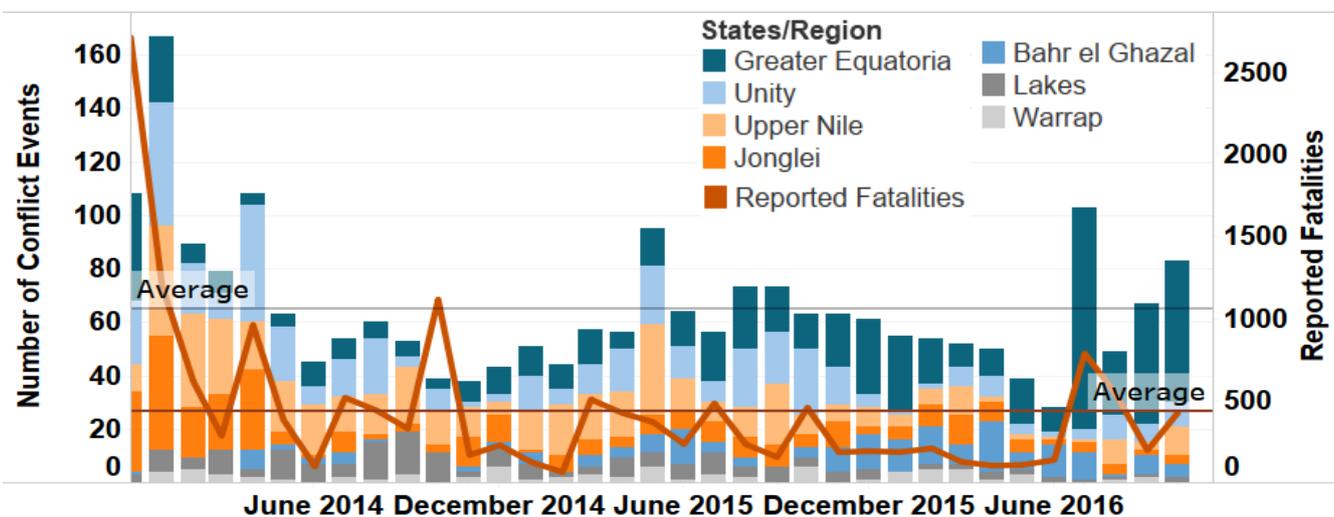


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events by State and Reported Fatalities in South Sudan, from December 2013 - October 2016.

South Sudan

(SSDF) ([Sudan Tribune, 25 September 2016](#); [Sudan Tribune, 31 October 2016](#)).

Directly after the clashes in the capital, opposition and government forces fought in the forests to the south and west of Juba ([Sudan Tribune, 2 August 2016](#)). Until early August, their battles split along two suspected escape routes used by Machar across Central and Eastern Equatoria. Towards the DRC, major battles took place in Lainya and Yei counties, while on the way to Uganda, fighting was reported in Torit and Magwi ([Sudan Tribune, 10 August 2016](#)). Throughout September and October, battles have continued in these counties and were particularly sustained in Yei. But violence has also expanded to others areas such as Morobo county in Central Equatoria, where SPLA-IO briefly captured the main town on 30 October, to Chukudum in Budi county of Eastern Equatoria, and to Mundri counties in Western Equatoria where gains were also made by the opposition in Kediba (see Figure 10; [Radio Tamazuj, 1 October 2016](#); [Radio Tamazuj, 20 October 2016](#); [Sudan Tribune, 10 October 2016](#)).

Suspected SPLA-IO rebels have also carried out several attacks on commercial vehicles travelling along the main Juba-Nimule highway linking South Sudan and Uganda, leaving dozens of people killed, injured or abducted, including foreigners, and affecting trade between the two countries ([Daily Monitor, 5 September 2016](#); [Radio Tama-](#)

[zuj, 24 September 2016](#)). Nevertheless, the SPLA-IO remains responsible for comparatively few attacks against civilians.

Increasing attacks by unidentified groups

Since the Juba clashes, there has been a surge in violent activity by unidentified armed groups (UAGs) in Greater Equatoria, with UAGs accounting for 28.6% and 41.25% of violent events in September and October respectively.

The Juba clashes left Machar relatively weakened. In addition to being ousted from the capital, Kiir’s nomination of former SPLA-IO chief negotiator Taban Deng Gai as the new Vice-President after the clashes further side-lined Machar on the political stage and divided his fighters ([RFI, 18 August 2016](#); [IRIN, 12 October 2016](#)). While some have continued to fight with the SPLA-IO, it is likely that a number of gunmen within Greater Equatoria have split to operate with relative autonomy and no longer fight under the SPLA-IO banner. The lack of a figurehead to force a consensus may explain the high incidence of battles between government forces and UAGs in Greater Equatoria, and the high incidence of UAGs and political militias targeting civilians (see Figure 11).

Additionally, the heavy-handed government response to rebellion in Greater Equatoria is likely to have fuelled renewed ethnic hatred and caused new guerrillas in the region ([Gurtong, 1 November 2016](#)). Rising ethnic rheto-

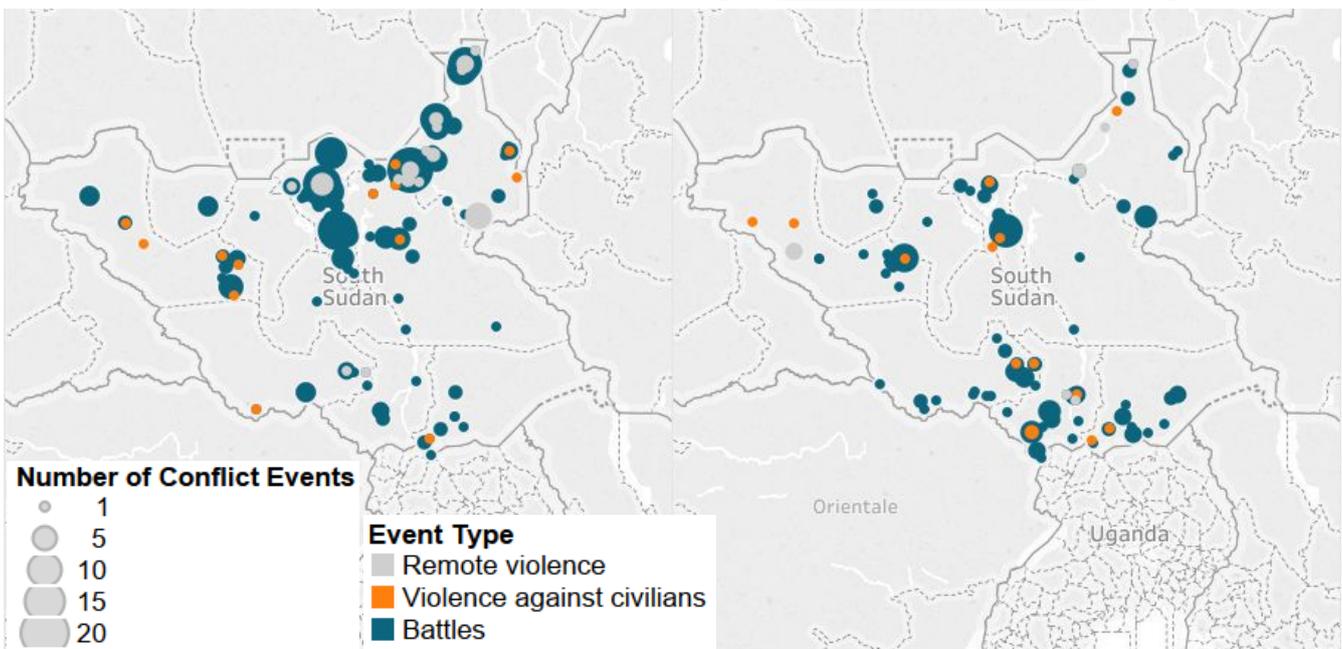


Figure 10: Rebel Conflict Activity by Event Type in South Sudan, 2015 and 2016.

South Sudan

ric, hate speech and incitement to violence have recently been reported in the region and condemned by international observers, especially following a spate of fatal attacks targeting ethnic Dinkas by unidentified groups along trading routes ([UNMISS, 11 October 2016](#)). On 8 October militiamen opened fire on four lorries transporting about 200 passengers on the Juba-Yei road, leaving at least 30 people killed and 21 injured, mainly ethnic Dinkas ([Radio Tamazuj, 11 October 2016](#)). Other notable instances of violence against civilians by unidentified groups have included waves of night-time killings in Yei county at the end of August ([Radio Tamazuj, 29 August 2016](#)) and civilian killings in Wonduruba area of Juba targeting ethnic Dinkas ([Sudan Tribune, 20 September 2016](#)).

Aid workers have also been specifically targeted throughout the three states, recently costing the life of a ZOA aid worker in Torit ([OCHA, 20 October 2016](#)). Political militias have also clashed with government forces on various occasions between July and October, most notably in Chukudum in Budi county of Eastern Equatoria early October, where they captured several parts of the town ([Radio Tamazuj, 13 October 2016](#)).

Rising VAC by government forces

The government’s response to rising anti-state violence in Greater Equatoria has been increasingly heavy-handed and directed at civilians perceived to be supporting the opposition (see Figure 11).

Many villages along Machar’s axis of retreat were attacked by government forces in July and early August, often in the aftermath of battles with SPLA-IO rebels ([Gurtong, 1 November 2016](#)). In mid-August, following battles with rebels, government forces reportedly killed, arrested and assaulted civilians in Wonduruba and in Lainya county ([Sudan Tribune, 29 August 2016](#)). After fighting in September in Yei, government forces again attacked civilians and looted property in villages in Yei county and the Lasu refugee camp, forcing thousands of people to flee to Yei town ([UNHCR, 30 September 2016](#)). In the most recent attack, government forces killed people and looted property in Mundri during fighting with SPLA-IO on 17-18 October ([Sudan Tribune, 18 October 2016](#)).

Dozens of cases of sexual violence against displaced women have been attributed to government soldiers, including assaults near UN protection sites in the capital, as well as incidents of violence against aid workers themselves ([UN, 1 November 2016](#); [Beaubien, 23 August 2016](#)). This increasing violence against civilians and external bodies has occurred within the context of an increasingly hostile attitude by Kiir’s government to internal and external challenges ([Sudan Tribune, 9 September 2016](#); [Sudan Tribune, 8 September 2016](#)).

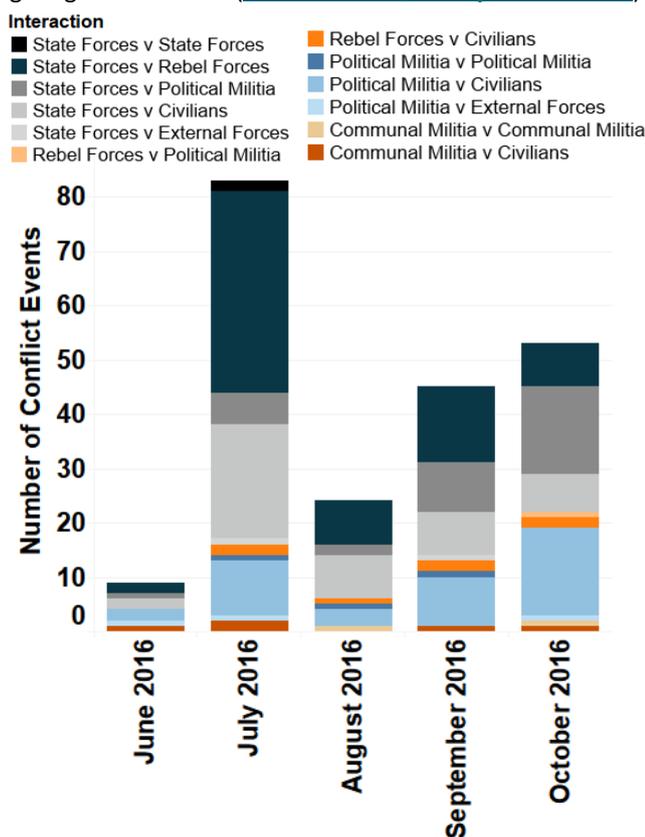


Figure 11: Number of Conflict Events by Interaction in Equatoria State, South Sudan, from June 2016 - October 2016.

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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](#).