

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 51) REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE,
SEPTEMBER 2016

Author(s): Batten-Carew Matt, Carboni Andrea, Moody James, Wigmore-Shepherd Dan
and Dan Moody

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2016)

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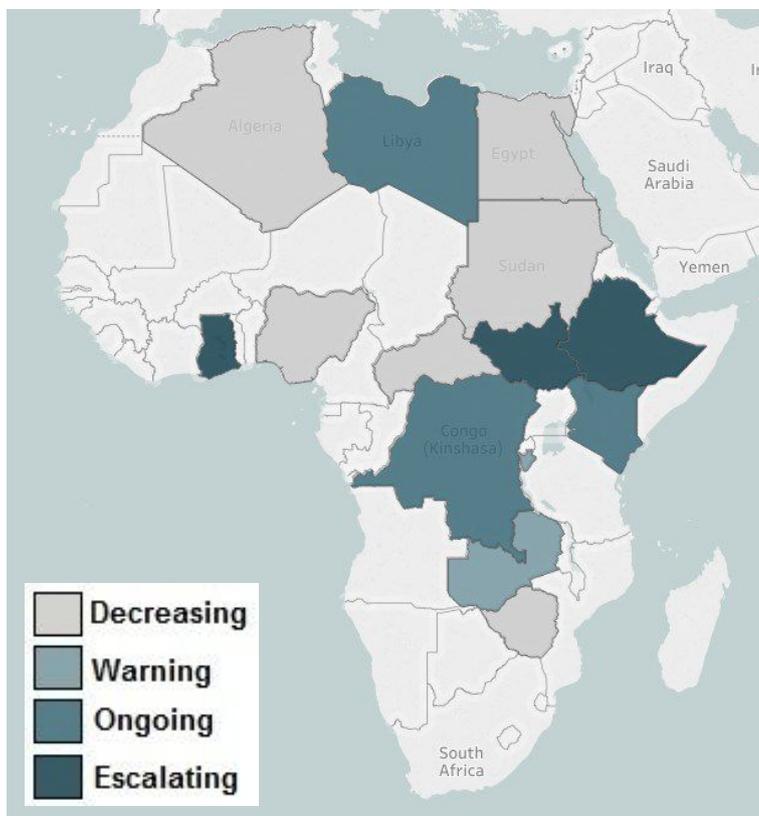


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Welcome to the September issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project's (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime 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 ADF-NALU attacks in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, growing coordination between popular demonstrations in Oromia and Amhara regions in **Ethiopia**, the prospect of wider protests against the re-election of President Ali Bongo Ondimba in **Gabon**, Boko Haram and Niger Delta Avenger (NDA) activity in **Nigeria**, regionally-clustered riots in **Zambia** and increased mobilisation against ZANU-PF in **Zimbabwe**.

Elsewhere on the continent, low-levels of activity were recorded in **Egypt** and conflict continued to decrease in **Sudan**. **Burundi** experienced a slight resurgence in activity as civilian-targeted violence by unidentified armed groups dominated the conflict landscape in August 2016.



Conflict Trajectory, September 2016

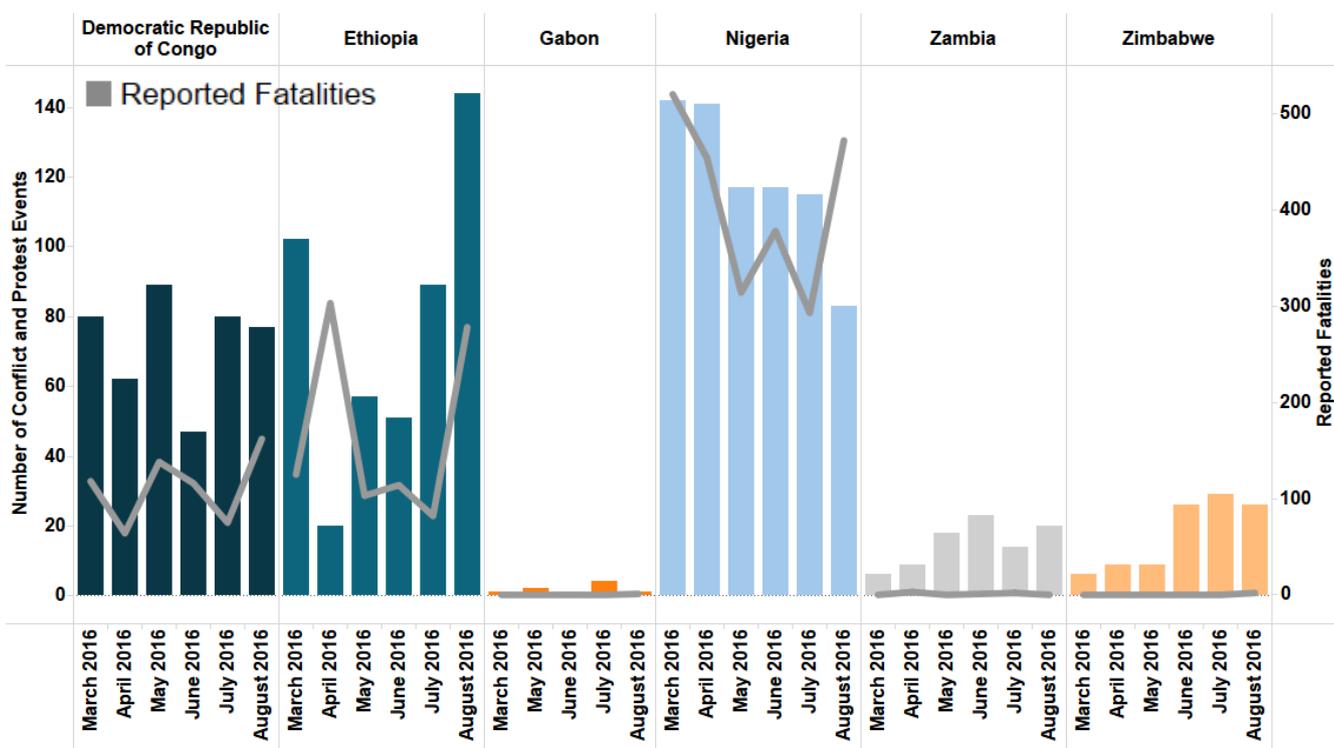


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, March - August 2016.

Democratic Republic of Congo

On 14 August 2016 an attack by suspected ADF-NALU rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) North Kivu province killed between 45-51 people ([Xinhua, 14 August 2016](#); [Telesur, 16 August 2016](#)), with some official estimates putting the fatality count as high as 75-101 ([Al Jazeera, 14 August 2016](#); [United Methodist News, 17 August 2016](#)). The attack targeted the Rwangoma suburb of Beni - the capital of Beni territory - whose towns and villages have been the target of frequent attacks on civilians by suspected ADF-NALU forces since late 2013 (see Figure 2). This attack reinforces two general insights from counter-insurgency operations: that soft targets remain vulnerable even when considerable military pressure is being put on a group (especially in areas of difficult terrain like that of the Eastern DRC) and that often this is the time when these groups are most dangerous to civilian populations ([AFP, 5 January 2016](#)).

The Rwangoma attack is particularly note-worthy as even conservative fatality estimates would make it one of the deadliest attacks in the ADF-NALU's history of operations in the DRC, leading to a significant fallout. A 3-day national mourning was announced ([Africa News, 15 August 2016](#)), violent demonstrations took place in Beni and Butembo resulting in at least 2 deaths ([AFP, 18 August 2016](#)), and suspected ADF-NALU members were lynched ([Reuters, 24 August 2016](#)). This demonstrates the growing frustration of the local population over the inability of security forces in the area to defend them ([Al Jazeera, 18 January 2016](#)). This perception is reinforced by the fact that this attack occurred despite ongoing

offensives by the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) backed by MONUSCO ([Radio Okapi, 23 May 2016](#)).

The attack reveals the cyclical relationship between military operations and violence against civilians.

This is expressed to some extent in the data by the repeated peaks and troughs in violence related to the ADF-NALU and the associated types of violence recorded (see Figure 2). As expected, these spikes in the data are often aligned with government offensives, with May 2014 marking a climax of FARDC's Operation Sokola I against the ADF-NALU launched after their defeat of the M23 rebellion ([Daily Monitor, 10 May 2014](#)), and October 2015 which saw another series of major operations ([IBT, 30 October 2015](#)). However, excluding the period from January to July 2014 where significant gains were made against ADF-NALU, each of these spikes contain considerable numbers of civilian fatalities alongside ongoing government operations. Even the most active month in terms of battles between the FARDC and ADF-NALU forces saw an attack in which "dozens" were reportedly killed in the Mamiki area of Beni territory.

Despite the gains made by FARDC and MONUSCO against the ADF-NALU, the battle for the confidence of the population is in jeopardy if the civilian population continues to fall victim to high-fatality attacks by the ADF-NALU. Without this confidence, the ADF-NALU's ability to destabilize the region in response to FARDC advances will only increase, creating an uncertain foundation for any lasting security for the population.

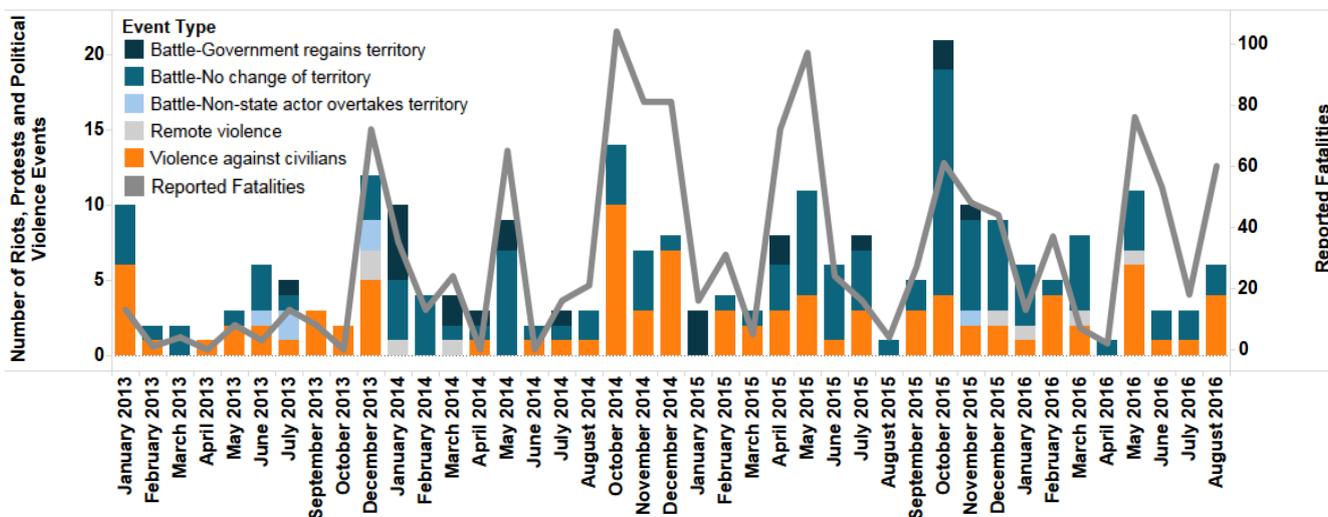


Figure 2: Number of Riots, Protests and Political Violence Events by Type in Democratic Republic of Congo, from February 2013 - August 2016.

Ethiopia

Since November 2015, Ethiopia’s Oromia region has witnessed an unprecedented wave of popular mobilisation. Mass protests swept across Oromia’s main towns and villages, reflecting widespread discontent with a large-scale development strategy promoted by the Ethiopian government ([ACLED Crisis Blog, 4 March 2016](#)). Violent state repression in Oromia have killed more than 400 people over the past ten months, while thousands have been arrested in connection to the protests ([Human Rights Watch, 15 June 2016](#)). Reports suggest mass protests occurring in the region since 2013. As Figure 3 shows, the unrest in Oromia region has been responsible for nearly half of the reported political violence fatalities recorded for Ethiopia between November 2015 and August 2016.

While demonstrations in Oromia continued over the summer, fresh protests rocked the northern Amhara region.

This new wave of unrest originated on July 12 when police forces tried to arrest Colonel Demeke Zewdu in the city of Gondar, sparking violent clashes that claimed the lives of at least 16 people ([Africa Confidential, 22 July 2016](#)). Colonel Zewdu is a prominent member of the Wolkayt committee, a regionalist movement demanding that the Wolkayt district is incorporated in the Amhara region, replacing the current Tigray administration. Mass demonstrations spread throughout the region during the month of August, involving the capital Bahir Dar and other densely populated areas such as Debre Markos, Dessie and Gojjam ([Addis Standard, 1 September 2016](#); [Africa Confidential, 26 August 2016](#)). Around one hundred people have died as Ethiopian security forces opened fire on the protesters in Amhara region (see Figure 4).

Whilst the demonstrations in Oromia and Amhara reflect the popular frustration with the policies of the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the respective local contexts have shaped the nature of the protest ([Jeune Afrique, 22 August 2016](#)). In Oromia, opposition to a government-imposed developmental plan, which would usurp the land of many farmers, revealed the growing discontent over authoritarian rule and widespread corruption among local and national elites. On the other hand, the protests in Amhara pointed to the unresolved Wolkayt issue and to Ethiopia’s perceived unfair ethnic-based federal system, which has reportedly marginalised Amhara people – the country’s second largest ethnic group – to the advantage of Tigray. Additionally, historical tensions and diverging political agendas – the Oromos aspire to greater autonomy for their region, while the Amhara traditionally uphold national unity – have made it difficult for these opposition groups to form a political platform alternative to the EPRDF ([Nazret, 1 September 2016](#); [International Business Times, 10 August 2016](#)).

The absence of common political objectives and coordination among opposition groups ([Jeune Afrique, 26 August 2016](#)) thus raises questions over how civil unrest could rapidly spread across the country. The answer lies in Ethiopia’s centralised political system, which has left little or no autonomy to the regions and has not created any effective and legitimate mechanism for dispute resolution ([Africa Confidential, 26 August 2016](#)). Repression has thus become the only available means for the EPRDF to handle locally grown tensions, quelling unofficial demon-

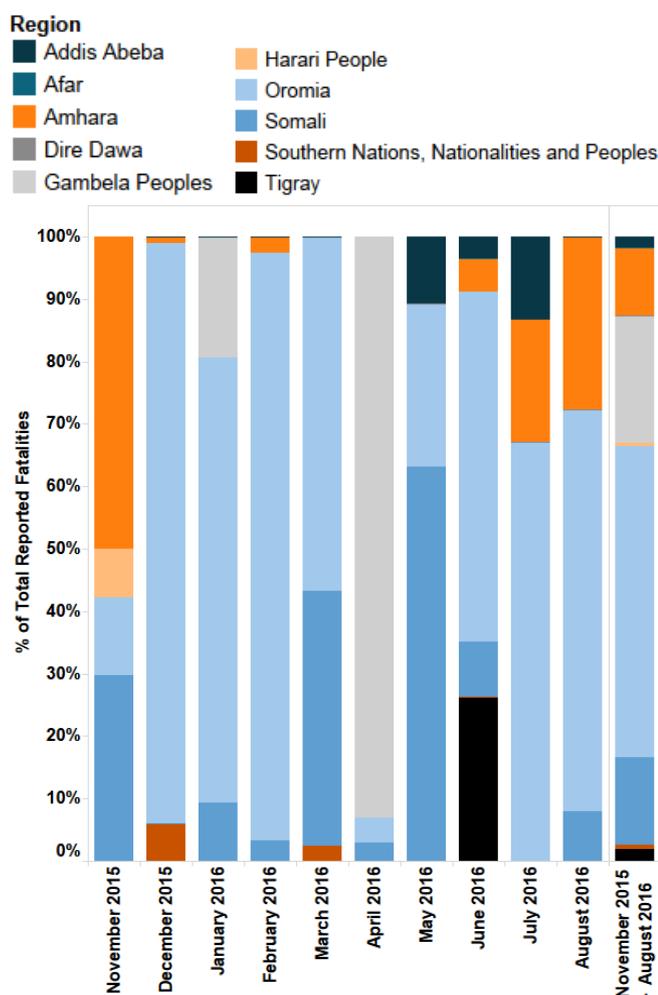


Figure 3: Percentage of Reported Fatalities by Region and Month in Ethiopia, from November 2015 - August 2016.

Ethiopia

strations and stifling any dissent perceived as existential. Nevertheless, the use of lethal force against peaceful protesters in Oromia bolstered the deep-rooted sense of injustice within the Amhara community, while uncovering the regime’s inability to contain the uprising. As such, the diffusion of protests across Ethiopia exposes the failure of the EPRDF to address local grievances and manage pluralism in a federal political order ([Nazret, 6 September 2016](#); [ACLED Crisis Blog, 6 May 2016](#)).

However, as protests in the two restive regions unfolded during the summer, embryonic forms of coordination have started to emerge within the opposition camp. Demonstrators have employed common non-violent tactics, including head shaving in solidarity with jailed opposition leaders ([VOA News, 29 August 2016](#)), in the attempt of fending off state repression. Furthermore, two main exiled groups backing the protests, the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) and Ginbot 7, have recently formed an alliance to coordinate their efforts domestically and abroad ([Africa Confidential, 26 August 2016](#)). Although there remain doubts over the prospects of this alliance, the two groups have organised public demonstrations worldwide in order to attract the international attention on the protests in Oromia and Amhara.

Despite growing international concerns for the deteriorating human rights situation ([Mail and Guardian, 6 Sep-](#)

[tember 2016](#); [Amnesty International 30 August 2016](#); [Reuters, 10 August 2016](#)), the Ethiopian government has dismissed the criticisms, blaming “outside enemies” for being responsible for the current turmoil and vowing to investigate allegations about indiscriminate use of force by the security forces ([Al Jazeera, 20 August 2016](#)). After initial concessions aimed at placating the protesters, including the withdrawal of the ‘Master Plan’ in Oromia region last January, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn sent the military and the Federal Police to restore order. However, the security crackdown has failed to stop the uprisings and risks turning a largely peaceful protest movement into an armed insurgency.

Paralysed by internal rifts and a lack of leadership, the ruling EPRDF is unable to find a durable solution to Ethiopia’s current crisis ([Jeune Afrique, 22 August 2016](#); [Nazret, 1 September 2016](#)). The authoritarian configuration of its political system make significant liberalisation an unlikely prospect, although the recent unrest revealed the widespread dissatisfaction among large sections of the population with centralised development initiatives and insufficient political reforms. A key security and trading partner of the United States, the European Union and China in the Horn of Africa, the Ethiopian government thus needs to address these crucial political challenges to prevent instability from escalating.

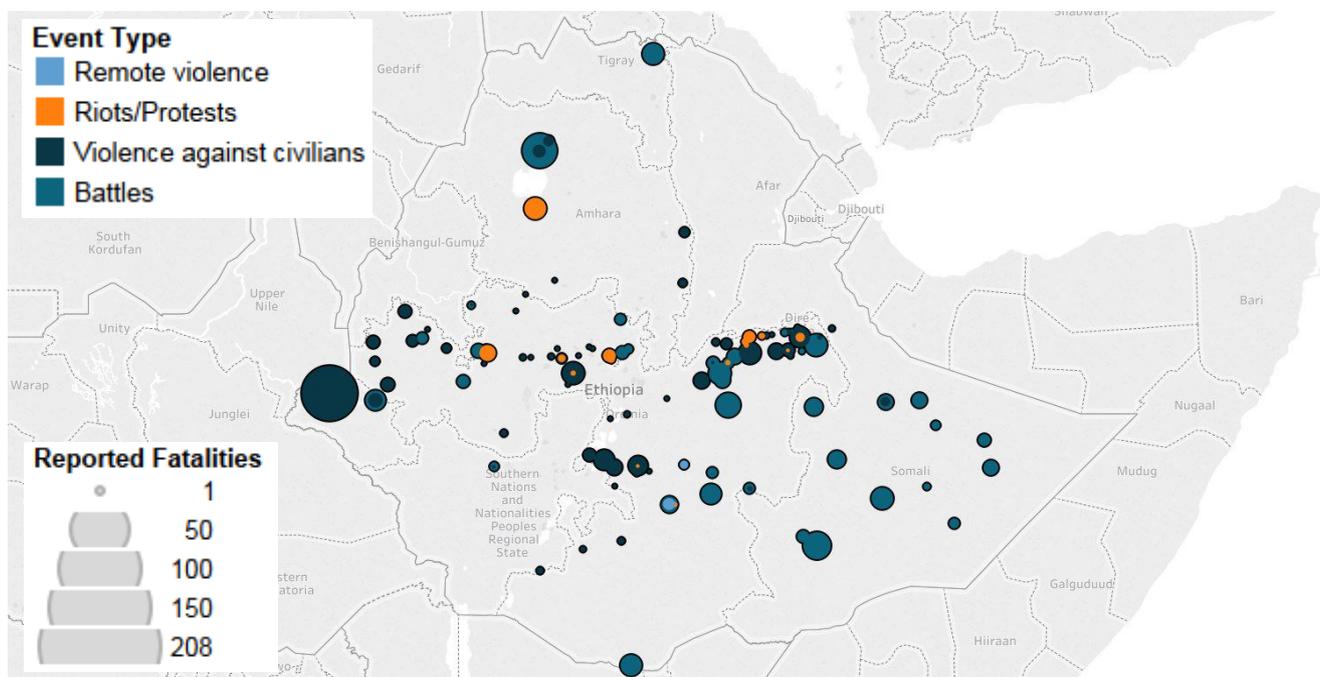


Figure 4: Number of Reported Fatalities by Location in Ethiopia, from November 2015 - August 2016.

Gabon

Riots and protests increased in Gabon since July 2016. The majority of these events are related to the candidacy and later re-election of President Ali Bongo Ondimba by a margin of 5,594 votes amidst calls of election fraud ([Al Jazeera, 31 August 2016](#)). The intensity and location of protests provides insight into the prospects of larger mobilisation in Gabon and offer preliminary insight into future instability. Despite the increased violence present in August and early-September, the limited geographical coverage of protest suggests a narrow opening for large scale social and political change. Wider riots and protests may take place if defecting elites act to capitalise on Gabonese discontent.

To date, Gabon protests have remained relatively contained, with protest levels lower than March 2015. That period witnessed a series of public service strikes, and reactionary protests by students against the strikes in Libreville and Port Gentil. These fairly routine political protests fail to pose a challenge to the Gabonese administration who quell opposition momentum through concessions ([U.S. Department of State, May 2015](#)). The most recent electoral violence is a departure from the usually inactive political violence landscape, which saw only minor resistance against municipal election results by opposition Gabonese People’s Union (UPG) in December 2013.

The anti-Bongo protests that started on 31 August erupted in three areas within three separate provinces, all of which have been the sites of prior protests (see Figure 5). Oyem, where a policeman was killed after being shot in the head by rioters, last witnessed a protest in April 2015; Port Gentil in March 2015 and in the capital, Libreville, postal workers held a strike in July 2016.

ACLED recorded 5 fatalities from the unrest from 31 August – 3 September. This compares to 11 fatalities for the entire period preceding these events since 1997. This indicates that despite the intensity of violence in the latest eruptions over Gabon’s spurious election results, the geographical diffusion of the protests is yet to spread to new areas that haven’t previously experienced protest. The lack of widespread protest coverage may demonstrate that opposition networks across Gabon are fragmented, so new nodes of mobilisation struggle to emerge to pressure the government. From this pattern it appears that unless activists can unlock the capacity of surrounding regions to organise non-violently, protesters demands can be expected to continue to be channelled in limited locations with a heavy response from central security forces. By comparison, the Burkinabé uprising in October 2014 was successful in forcing a change of leadership when 10 out of 13 provinces protested against then-incumbent Blaise Compaoré.

Whilst the guarantee of a win for Ali Bongo was never truly in doubt ([Africa Confidential, 26 August 2016](#)), post-election fortunes and stability hinges on elite developments. Gabon’s "competitive authoritarianism" ([Africa Arguments, 22 August 2016](#)) has somewhat been undermined by Bongo’s overtly fraudulent behaviour and may signal a weakness in the central regime. With a tighter election race than in 2009, a more cohesive opposition, and defections from the PDG including Oyé-Mba and the resignation of Justice Minister, Seraphim Moundounga ([BBC, 5 September 2016](#)), this burgeoning opposition may build on protest momentum to unseat Bongo’s and spoil his attempts to secure a second term.



Figure 5: Number of Riots and Protests by Province and Location in Gabon, from 1997 - August 2016 (left) and from 31 August to 3 September 2016 (right).

Nigeria

Conflict events in Nigeria declined in August, continuing a trend that has persisted since the Nigerian Army’s offensive against Boko Haram positions in March 2016. The March offensive was concentrated in the insurgent’s base in the Alagarno forest in Borno State ([Sahara Reporters, 3 March 2016](#)). Operations were also conducted in Adamawa, Taraba and Yobe state. During the offensive the government destroyed numerous camps and recovered swaths of territory. The operation also accelerated the shrinking of Boko Haram’s area of operations to the point where the group is barely operational outside of Borno state, where its capacity is severely reduced (see Figure 6).

Buhari was elected on an anti-Boko Haram and anti-corruption platform, and the military’s success against the insurgents is likely to bolster support. However, new challenges to the regime have emerged in the South, driven in part by external pressures and domestic political competition. A series of bomb attacks on oil pipelines by a group known as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) has reduced oil production by over a million barrels a day ([Africa Confidential, 24 June 2016](#)). The group emerged in early 2016; at this time Buhari announced 70% reduction in funding for the \$200 million a year amnesty program which offers ex-militants in the Niger Delta a monthly stipend and job training ([Africa Confidential, 5 August 2016](#); [BBC News, 2](#)

[June 2016](#)). Fiscal constraints imposed by the tumbling price of oil, which accounts for the majority of government exports and revenue, prompted Buhari to consider phasing out the program entirely by 2018 ([Vanguard, 23 January 2016](#)).

In response, the NDA launched its bombing campaign with the expressed intent of ‘crippling’ the Nigerian economy ([BBC News, 2 June 2016](#)). These acts have been accompanied by a few instances of fatal violence against civilians and battles with state forces, though the insurgents have not seized any territory from the government (see Figure 7).

Buhari’s decision to phase out the amnesty payments made financial sense due to the country’s dire financial straits and the cost of the Boko Haram counter-insurgency. However, the decision was politically untenable due to the enduring role of identity politics on the Nigerian political system. Buhari, a Muslim from the far northern Katsina state, has been repeatedly accused of discrimination against the South. The Southern elite have accused Buhari of underrepresenting the South in key government appointments while simultaneously over representing those from the North-Western region ([Guardian, 8 June 2016](#); [Punch, 11 June 2016](#)). Of the new appointments made during Buhari’s tenure, 70% have gone to fellow northerners.

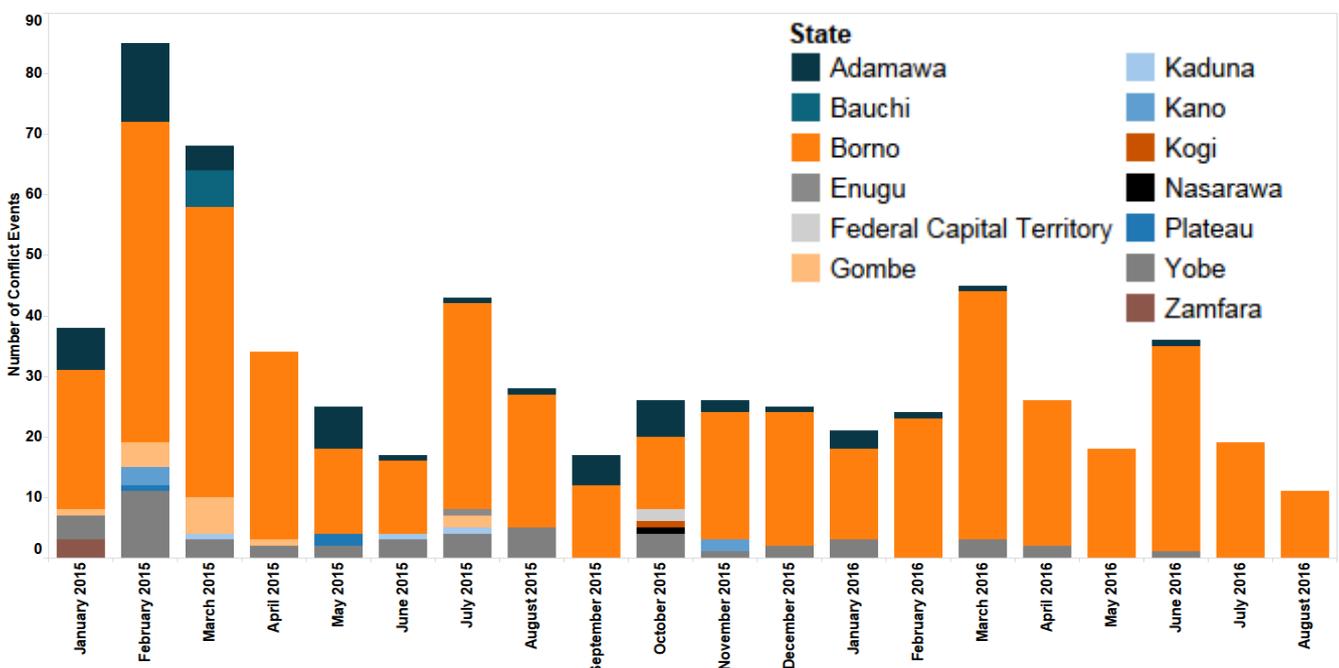


Figure 6: Boko Haram Activity by State in Nigeria, from January 2015 - August 2016.

Nigeria

As a result, Buhari’s government has come to be interpreted as a threat to southern elites. This is especially true for politicians tied to the previous regime of Goodluck Jonathan who are now the focus of Buhari’s anti-corruption drive ([Africa Confidential, 15 April 2016](#)). These anti-corruption drives have also targeted former Niger Delta militants such as Tompolo, a senior commander of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) ([Africa Confidential, 19 February 2016](#)).

The presence of dissatisfied elites and militants in the South, particularly the Delta, explains the geographical shift southwards in the main centres of conflict and protest in Nigeria. A comparison between the geographical spread of conflict in August 2015 and August 2016 shows that the while Borno remains the epicentre of political violence in Nigeria, conflict is becoming more prevalent in the Delta.

The grievances of the southern elites and militants also explain the limited nature of political violence in the Delta. Both the elites and militants are demanding a larger portion of the state’s resources, either through the allocation of key positions in government or through amnesty payments.

The Niger Delta Avengers campaign has proved successful with the government agreeing to resume am-

nesty payments ([BBC News, 2 August 2016](#)). The success of the NDA’s insurgency may signal to other groups dissatisfied with their treatment by the government that violence can be an effective means of gaining additional resources from the state. Demonstrations by the separatist Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) have been violently repressed by state forces, resulting in casualties ([Vanguard, 30 May 2016](#)). Similarly, the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was imprisoned in late 2015 and has continued to speak out against the government’s treatment of the Delta region ([Today, 4 September 2016](#)).

A final group that may take note of the NDA’s success is the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (INM), a Shia religious organisation. After the group was accused of a failed assassination attempt against the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, clashes between the INM and the military left hundreds dead and the group’s leader, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, in police custody ([ACLED Conflict Trends, January 2016](#)). While subsequent demonstrations calling for Zakzaky’s release have been largely peaceful, the violent successes of the NDA in extracting concessions from the state may prompt INM, MASSOB and other groups to alter their tactics.

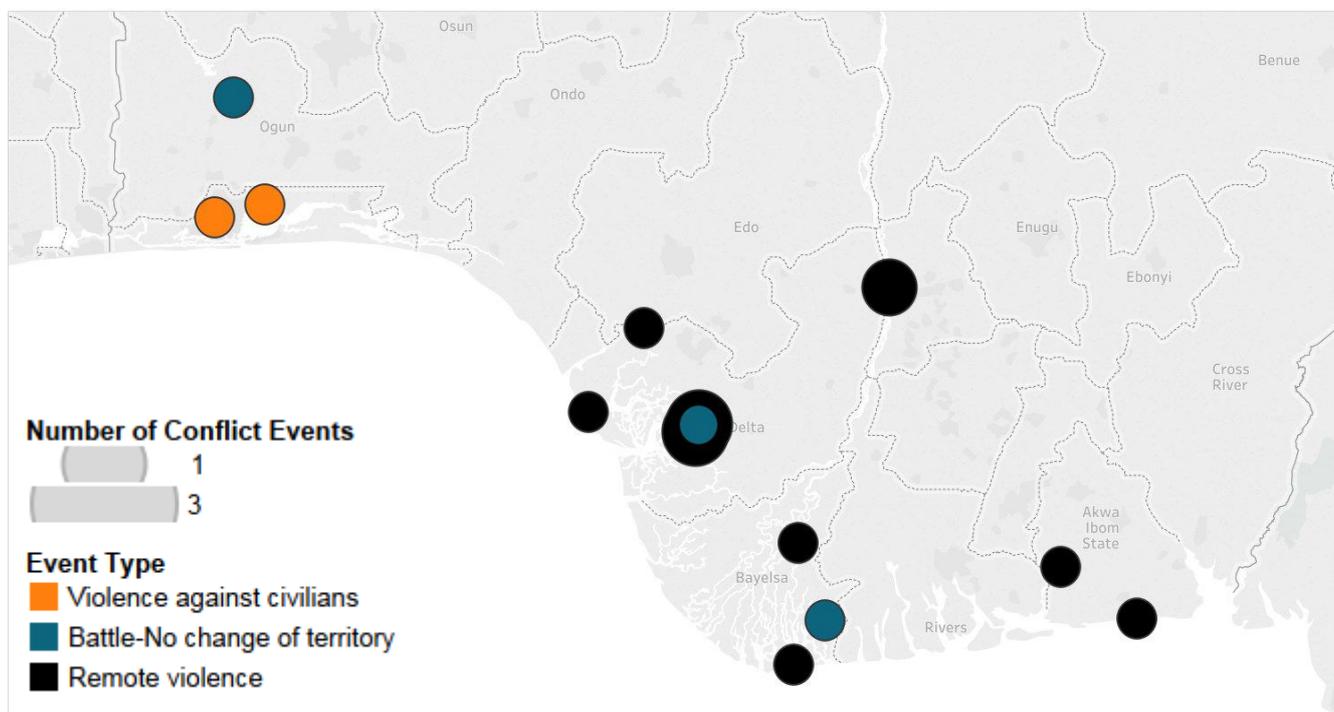


Figure 7: Niger Delta Avengers Activity by Event Type in Nigeria, from May 2016 - August 2016.

Zambia

Zambia provides a typical case study for the growing protest movements appearing in sub-Saharan Africa in response to fragile economies and illiberal multiparty democracy ([The Economist, 20 August 2016](#)). With declining copper prices, unequal distribution of wealth ([World Bank, 8 April 2016](#)) and claims of a fraudulent election victory for Edgar Lungu, since May 2016 Zambia has been hit by the highest levels of riots and protests since October 2014 (see Figure 8).

Whilst low-level diffusion of rioting has taken place, it is regionally clustered. Furthermore, police activity and the abandonment of non-violent strategies of resistance signal a changing approach that suggest that violence is providing a substitute for the inability to generate the

widespread adoption of protest.

Whilst mid-August protests predominantly concentrated in Southern province, the recent unrest in Zambia signals a shift in the primary mode of resistance by aggrieved populations. Since August 2014, Zambians predominantly staged protests, which accounted for over 61% of popular contention. Since May 2016 however, riots constituted an average of 83% of collective action events, reaching a climax in August 2016 with nearly 95% of events being riots.

The reason for adoption of more violent techniques may be partly explained by the geographically-contained nature of protests across Zambia. Since May 2016 protests have largely been staged within Southern, Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. Even within these provinces, the

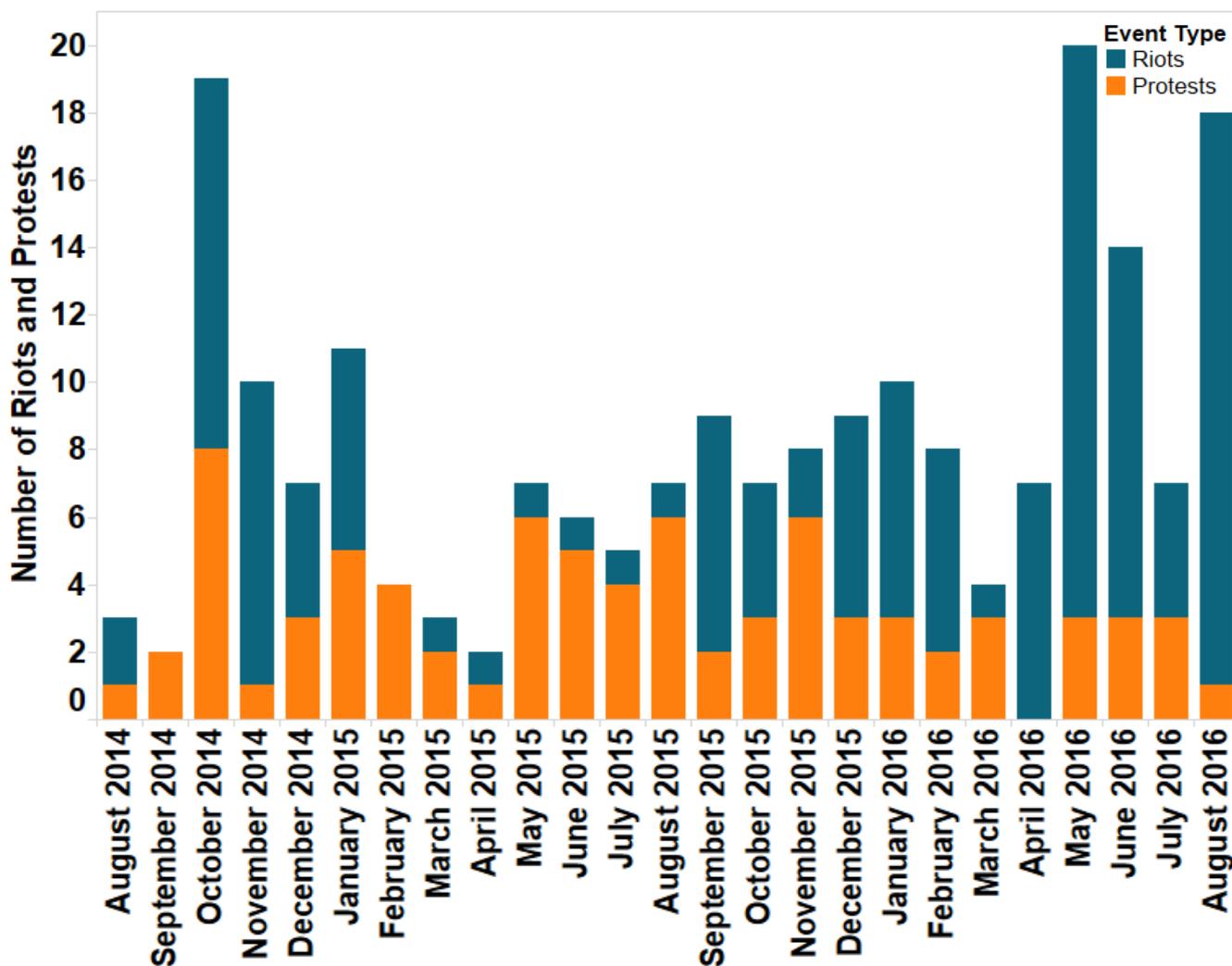


Figure 8: Number of Riots and Protests in Zambia, from August 2014 - August 2016.

Zambia

protesters have not always been unified solely against a national grievance or a common target such as the ruling Patriotic Front (PF). For example, Copperbelt has witnessed the expression of immediate grievances over specific economic demands such as student riots, protests by university lecturers over the allocation of parking spaces and cement worker protests. Therefore, the increased rate of riots may signal a growing frustration with the fragmented organisation of protests in light of the most recent elections.

Police repression has not displayed strong systematic activity, with police activity reported sporadically across Central, North-Western and Lusaka Province in roughly equal measure. Slightly higher levels of repression have been recorded in Copperbelt and the opposition stronghold of Southern province, but no obvious trends emerge that suggest the regime is under pressure.

Similar to Gabon, protests beginning the week of 14 August 2016 took place in provinces that already have net-

works and organisational capacity to mobilise protesters. Yet, Zambia diverges from Gabon when analysing the specific subnational level locations, where riots diffused to new areas in Southern province that in the past two years have not experienced political violence (see Figure 9). In the map, the red translucent circles indicate locations with protests since August 2014 and the blue circles represent the most recent protests. New locations include Choma, Batoka, Muzoka and Monze.

Whilst national media reports a series of isolated protests ([Zambia Reports, 17 August 2016](#)), these riots clearly indicate a localised success in generating new support and momentum for the opposition United Party for National Development (UPND) and an increased propensity for Zambians to take to the street to change the status quo. Nevertheless, the absence of recorded protest activity since 22 August and limited police crackdowns suggests that the diffusion of protests will struggle to reach beyond Southern province to pose a credible challenge to the Lungu regime.

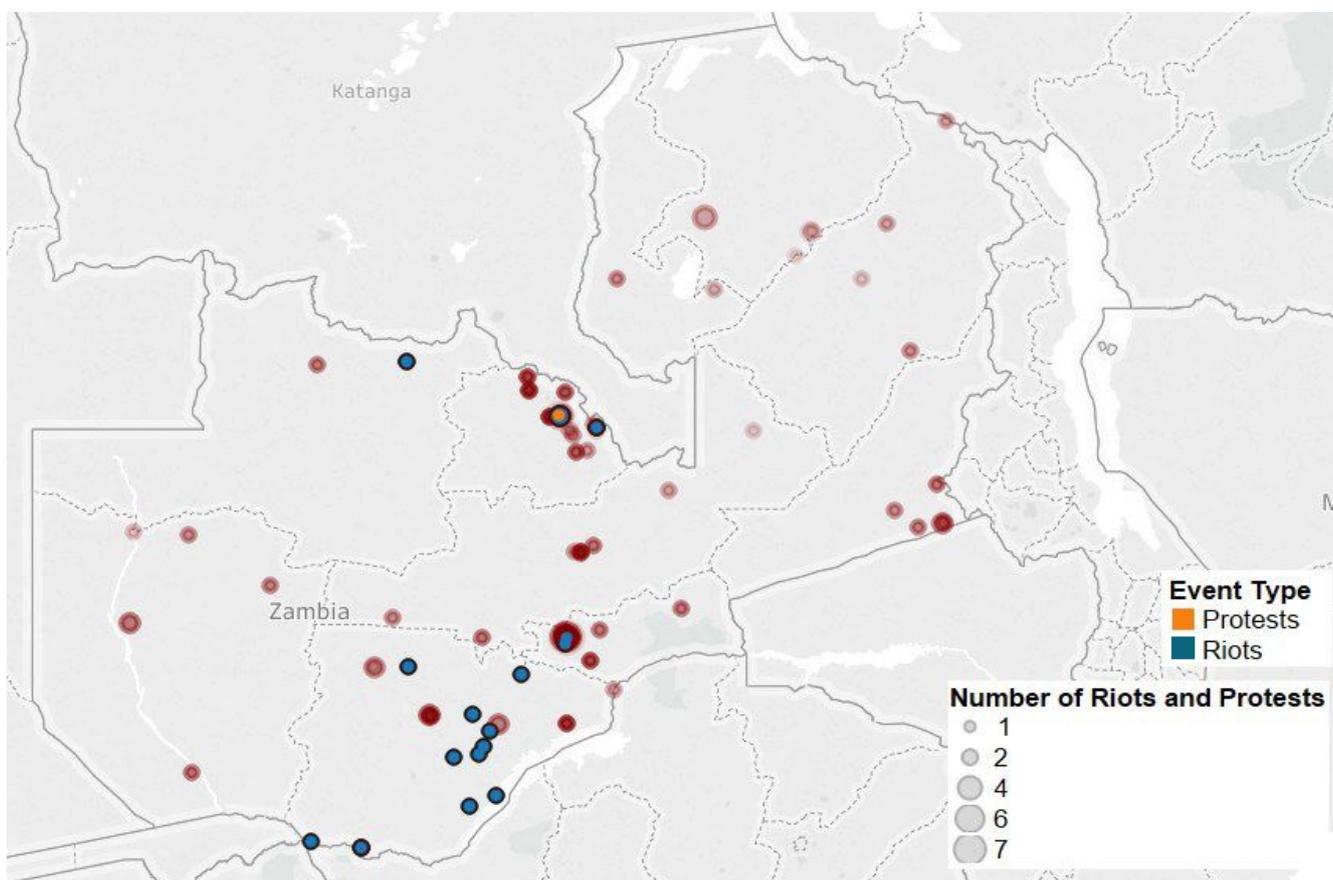


Figure 9: Number of Riots and Protests by Event Type and Location in Zambia, from August 2014 - August 2016.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe conflict and protest events rose markedly in June through to August 2016 and reached their highest levels since November 2015 (see Figure 10). In this period, protests and riots accounted for the majority of events with only a small percentage constituting violence against civilians.

The rise in protest action is due to increased activism and mass mobilisation by civil society actors – trade unionists, workers and taxi drivers – who have mobilised against the mismanagement of the economy and high levels of corruption by the Zimbabwean African National Union-Patriotic Front’s (ZANU-PF). While political infighting and competition for support in the run-up to the 2018 elections increased within and amongst Zimbabwe’s largest political parties, non-governmental organisations and mass movements took their grievances to the street in attempts to alter the status quo.

The Zimbabwean State of Affairs

The first half of 2016 saw a relative decrease in violence and protest action. Yet, Zimbabweans are facing a worsening economic and political climate. The country is battling a deepening economic crisis as the country deals with severe cash shortages, resulting in unpaid salaries and the retrenchment of workers ([The Chronicle, 9 June 2016](#); [African Arguments, 4 July 2016](#)). Unemployment in the formal sector is estimated at 90% and the government’s recent policy to restrict certain imported goods such as bottled water, soaps and foodstuffs is forecast to negatively affect the large informal economy ([Business Day, 21 July 2016](#)).

Politically, Zimbabwe remains in a difficult and somewhat paralyzed position, as political parties are internally fractured. The succession battle within ZANU-PF has heated

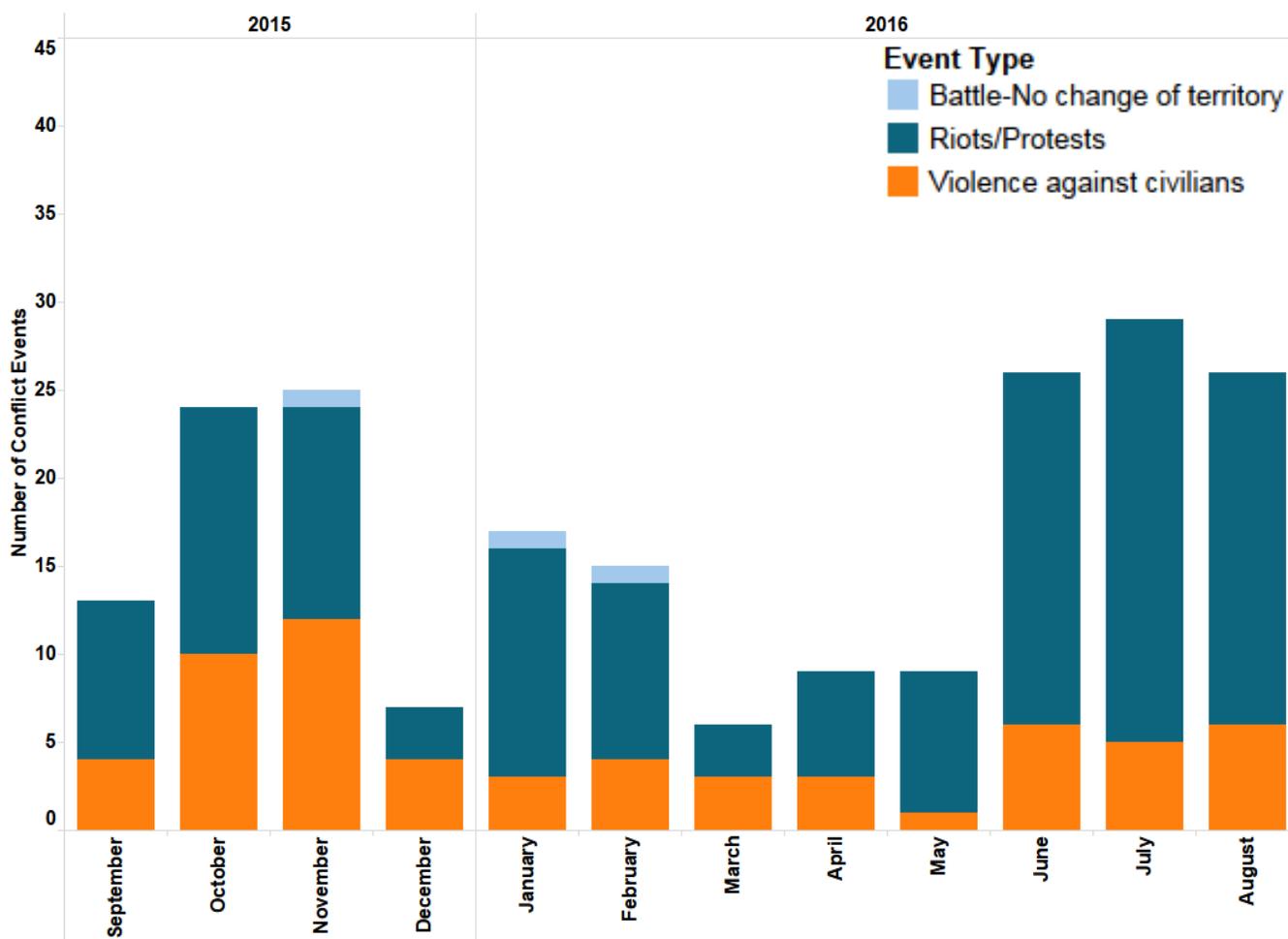


Figure 10: Number of Conflict and Protest Events by Type in Zimbabwe, from September 2015 - August 2016.

Zimbabwe

up with factions led by Grace Mugabe (G40), the wife of President Mugabe, and Vice-President Emmerson Mnangagwa (Lacoste) lobbying figures within and outside the party for support. The government continues to clamp down on Zimbabwe’s media, and the security services within the country have routinely suppressed peaceful protests by opposition parties and political activists.

Civil Society and Protest Action

It is within this increasingly unstable economic and political climate that protests and demonstrations have increased over the past few months. Online campaigns such as #ThisFlag broke a ‘taboo’ of openly criticising the government and have been successful in mobilising Zimba-

bweans ([African Arguments, 4 July 2016](#)). The #ThisFlag campaign emerged when Evan Mawarire, a frustrated pastor based in Zimbabwe’s capital of Harare, donned a Zimbabwean flag and gave an impassioned speech criticising the government on Twitter ([African Arguments, 4 July 2016](#)). The video attracted thousands of online views and encouraged others to emulate the pastor and air their grievances.

The growth of activism on social media during the electoral campaign is translating into protest action on the streets. On 1 June 2016, a 16-day sit-in began in Harare’s African Unity Square in which various civil society organisations assembled to demonstrate against the deteriorating socio-economic situation as well as political oppres-

Event Type

- Riots/Protests with no state interactions
- Riots/Protests with state interactions

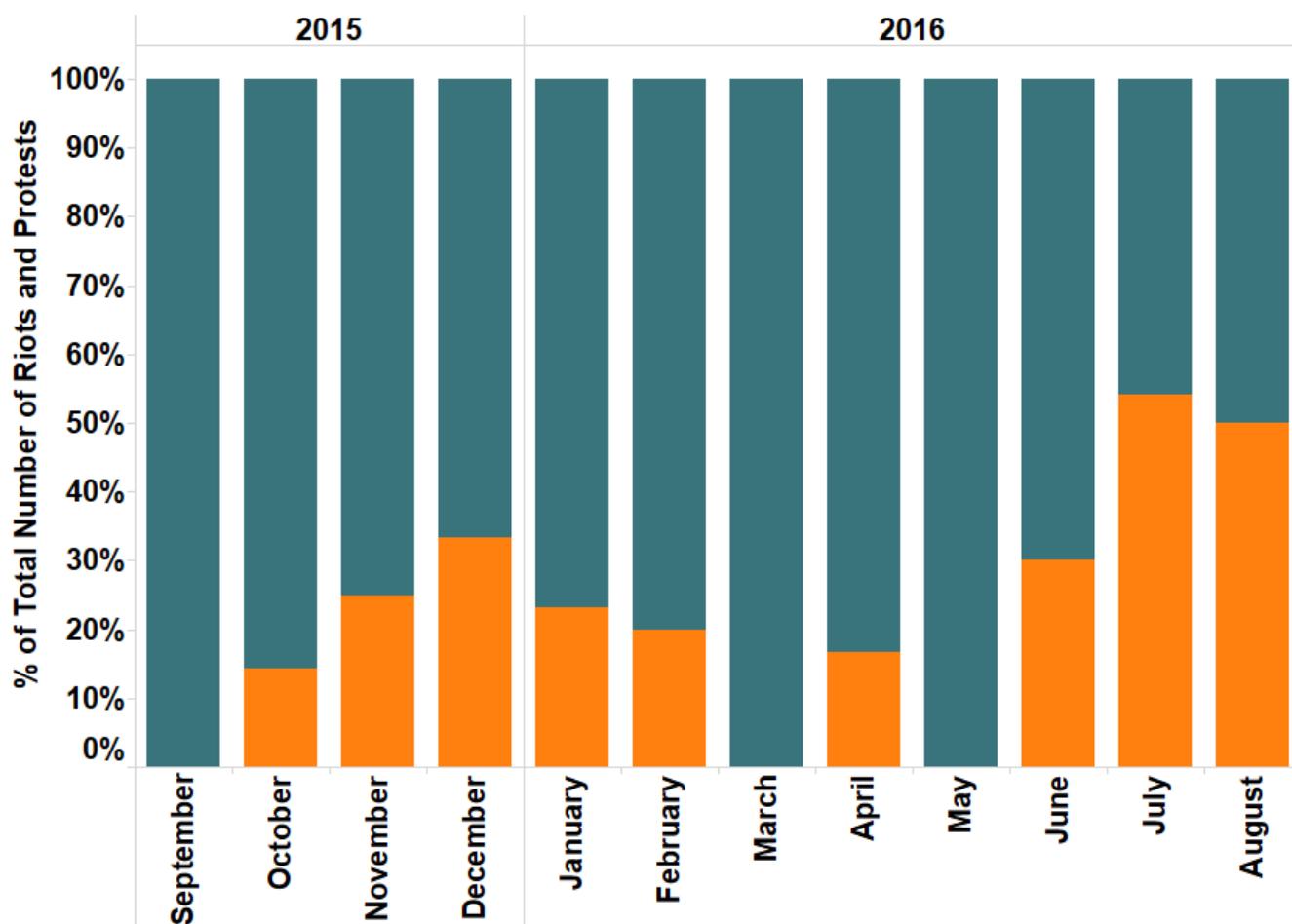


Figure 11: Percentage of Riots and Protests Involving State Force in Zimbabwe, from September 2015 - August 2016.



Zimbabwe

sion and widespread corruption in Zimbabwe (Bulawayo24, 29 June 2016). Reports that Zimbabwean police forces arrested and beat several leading activists during the days of peaceful protests have served to reinforce the community. Similarly, protests took place in Harare when activists – including those from the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ) and #Tajamuka – protested at the Rainbow Towers Hotel against Vice-President Mphoko stay of 551 days in the hotel at the taxpayers’ expense. The police response was similarly repressive.

Many of the demonstrators are those hardest hit by economic mismanagement, corruption and government policy. In July, a week of mass action engulfed the streets of Harare and Bulawayo, in which demonstrators vented their anger over unpaid salaries and corruption. During the previous week, rioters burnt a government warehouse in response to the unpopular import ban (The Chronicle, 25 July 2016).

The mass protest action in Harare, which was met with violent suppression from Zimbabwean security forces and the arrests of at least 100 people, continued throughout the week with demonstrators involving running battles with security forces in neighbourhoods throughout Harare and other areas of Zimbabwe. The demonstrations coincided with a three-day strike by teachers and nurses. Additionally, Pastor Mawarire’s call for a nationwide stayaway was, according to some reports, largely successful (Nehanda Radio, 18 July 2016).

Over the past few months of political unrest, the state’s

use of the violence to quash mass protests has been a common trend. Arrests, the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and intimidation are standard tools of the state when dealing with dissent. According to Figure 11, state forces – notably the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZPR) - have used increased violence and force to quell riots and protests. More than half of riots and protest in July and August were met with force by state security forces, suggesting that while anti-government protests increase, so too does the violent reaction of the state in quashing such dissent.

Zimbabwe has not witnessed demonstrations of this scale and intensity for some time; commentators suggest that ZANU-PF is rattled by such brazen and intense protest action; others that Vice President Mnangagwa may benefit from the discontent against Mugabe. What effect such mass mobilisation will have on the political and economic trajectory in Zimbabwe remains to be seen. Historically, the governments has used its security apparatus to quash dissent. The state’s violent reaction to protests in June, July and August 2016 suggests that it will continue with this repressive trend.

However, the denouncement of President Mugabe in early August by his once staunch ally, the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Alliance (ZNLWVA), is perhaps a strong indication that Mugabe and the ZANU-PF are losing their once mighty grip on political power (New York Times, 21 July 2016). The level of resilience and patience amongst activists and the Zimbabwean citizenry at large will further play a crucial role if Zimbabwe is to escape the deepening crisis it finds itself in.

Support

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is supported by European Commission Grant no. 283755.

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.