

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	595
Land:	Somalia
Kilde:	ACLED
Titel:	Conflict Trends (NO. 61)
Udgivet:	september 2017
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. september 2017

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](https://www.acled.org/).

This month's issue focuses on increasing protests in the aftermath of the elections in **Angola**, growing uncertainty and frustration as the political stalemate in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** continues, changing dynamics of political competition and risk in **Kenya**, and the shifting tactics of Boko Haram in **Nigeria**.

A Special Report explores recent patterns of violence in **Somalia**; Al Shabaab's geographic expansion, changing lethality of violence in Somalia and relationship dynamics between Al Shabaab and clan militias.

Elsewhere on the continent, violence returned to **Burkina Faso** with a mid-month terrorist attack in Ouagadougou killing 19, protests continued in **Ethiopia** and clashes with anti-Balaka and unidentified groups in the **Central African Republic** resumed, following a dip in July.

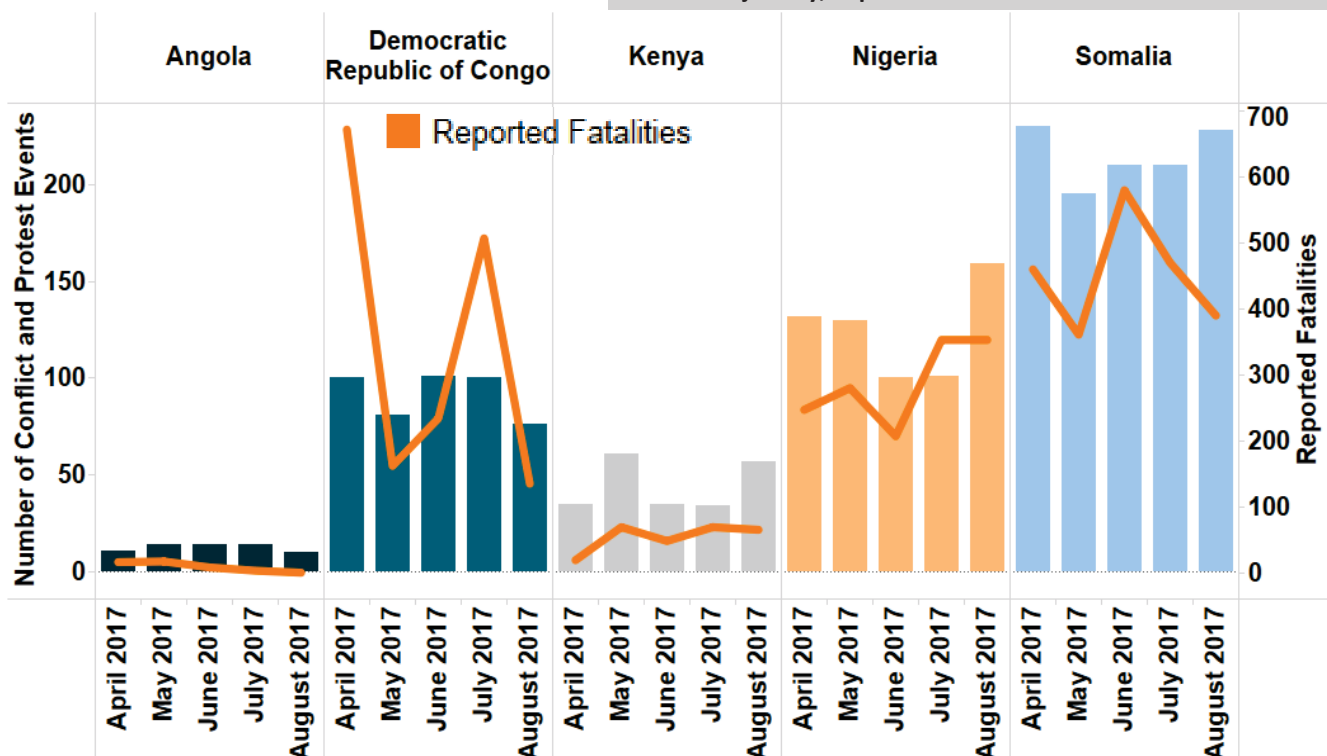


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, from April - August 2017.

Angola

On 24 August, before counting finished, it was announced that the MPLA had won the majority of the parliamentary seats in the Angolan election. The MPLA candidate, Joao Lourenco, won the presidential vote ([The Guardian, 24 August 2017](#)). There has been significant commentary that this election does not alter the politics of Angola. Jose Eduardo dos Santos stepped down after 38 years in power, but chose Lourenco, Minister of Defense and MPLA Vice President, as successor. Prior to leaving, dos Santos passed a bill protecting security figures from dismissal, and he promoted his daughter, Isobel, to chair Sonangol ([Financial Times, 20 August 2017](#)).

However, even given allegations of fraud – four opposition parties issued a statement demanding a re-count ([Maka Angola, 4 September 2017](#)) – the MPLA was less successful than it has been previously. The ruling party won 150 of the 220 seats, compared to the 175/220 won in 2012 and the 191/220 won in 2008 ([Al Jazeera, 25 August 2017](#)).

Moreover, 2017 has seen nearly five times the level of protest that was seen during the last election year, 2012 (see Figure 2). (Confidence in the exact number of protests over time is limited because of significant barriers to reporting). Dissidence is suppressed: protesters and journalists are often imprisoned ([All Africa, 24 August 2017](#)), on 12 August, demonstrations by groups not running for election were banned ([Human Rights Watch, 16 August 2017](#)),

and the state media accuses UNITA of using demonstrations to return the country to war ([Business Day, 23 August 2017](#)). Nevertheless, protest continues to grow. In June, UNITA marched for free and fair elections. Four thousand people demonstrated in Luanda ([News24, 3 June 2017](#)), and many hundreds more in Benguela, Huambo, Lubango, Menongue, Namibe, and Sumbe.

Many protests this year focused on economic issues: there were a number of actions from teachers and government employees demanding unpaid wages, there were also a number of protests against industries (FCKS Cement Company and Somipa Mine). The close links between the business elite and the political/military elite mean that economic protest is just as much an expression of frustration with the MPLA and state as political protest. The leadership of FCKS Cement, for instance, is closely linked to the MPLA and military ([Maka Angola, 25 September 2015](#)).

There has also been a rise in localised protest in the Lunda area, by groups demanding autonomy for the region ([Maka Angola, 27 June 2017](#)). An increase in localized activity was also reflected in the slight increase in reports of violent clashes in Cabinda. The FLEC rebels called for a poll boycott in Cabinda ([International Business Times, 13 February 2017](#)). The political status quo may not have altered significantly on 23 August but the rise in protest is an important signal for Angola's opposition.

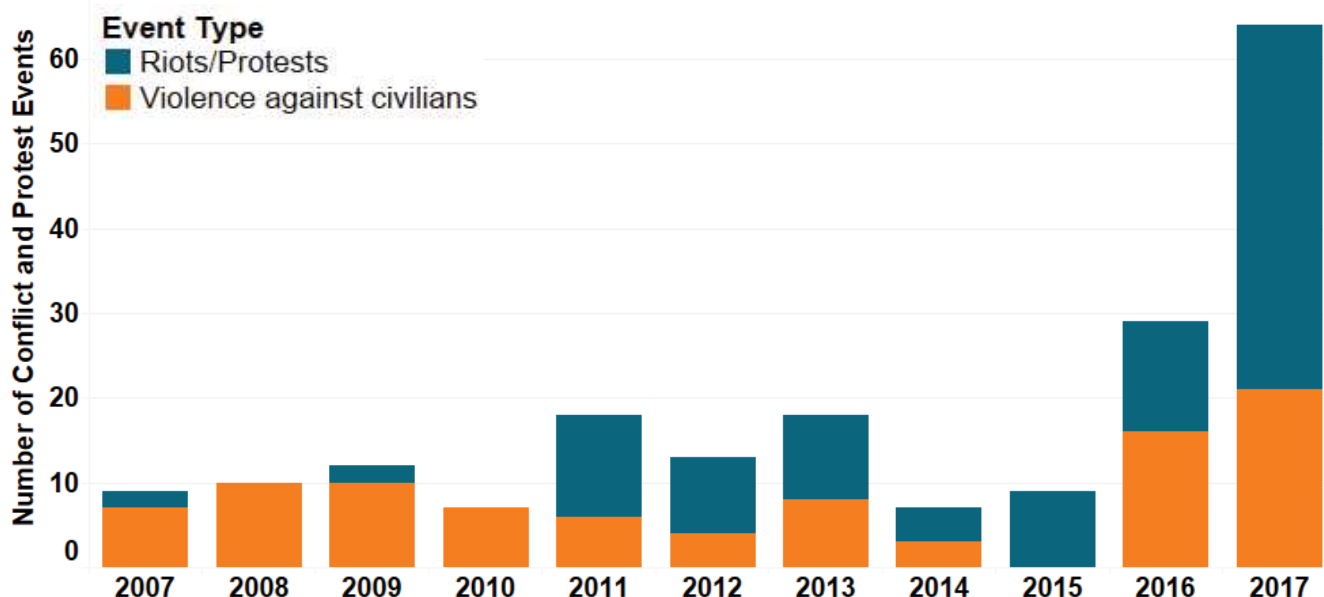


Figure 2: Number of Protest and Violence against Civilians Events in Angola, from 2007 - 2017.

Democratic Republic of Congo

On 19 December 2016, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR-Congo) Joseph Kabila's constitutionally-mandated two-term limit expired. Shortly after this deadline passed, the Congolese Catholic Church mediated the signing of the Saint Sylvester Agreement on New Year's Eve in order to defuse the political crisis and allow for a peaceful transition ([Deutsche Welle, 2 January 2017](#)). One of the main components of this agreement was the creation of a transitional government meant to preside over elections, which had been delayed repeatedly and originally scheduled for November 2016, to be held by the end of 2017. As part of this agreement, President Kabila agreed to appoint a member of the opposition to head the transitional government. This occurred on 7 April 2017 when Kabila selected Bruno Tshibala, former member of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) which is the DR-Congo's main opposition party and part of the opposition coalition the "Rassemblement" or Rally of the Congolese Opposition (OCR), to become the country's new prime minister ([Al Jazeera, 7 April 2017](#)).

Since then, there have been several developments in Congolese politics which have complicated and deadlocked the political situation. The first is the death of veteran

Congolese opposition leader and head of the UDPS, Étienne Tshisekedi. Second is the expansion of the Kamwina Nsapu conflict in the Kasai region, renewing international concern over insecurity in the DR-Congo. The third is the government's repeated dispersal of periodic opposition demonstrations calling for the president to step down and for elections to be held.

Tshisekedi's death was a significant challenge for the political situation in the DR-Congo as he was the nominal leader of the fragmented opposition to Kabila's rule. His death caused significant instability within the UDPS, which has since seen infighting despite Tshisekedi's son, Felix, taking over at the head of the party ([Reuters, 4 March 2017](#)). Within this context the appointment of Tshibala-- who had recently left the party-- as the new prime minister has been seen as the government exploiting these tensions to further divide the UDPS. On the other hand, the death of Tshisekedi has also opened up room for new leaders to step up to challenge Kabila ([African Arguments, 15 June 2017](#)), such as Moïse Katumbi, who was governor of the former province of Katanga (one of the country's largest and richest) for 8 years and has significant political clout.

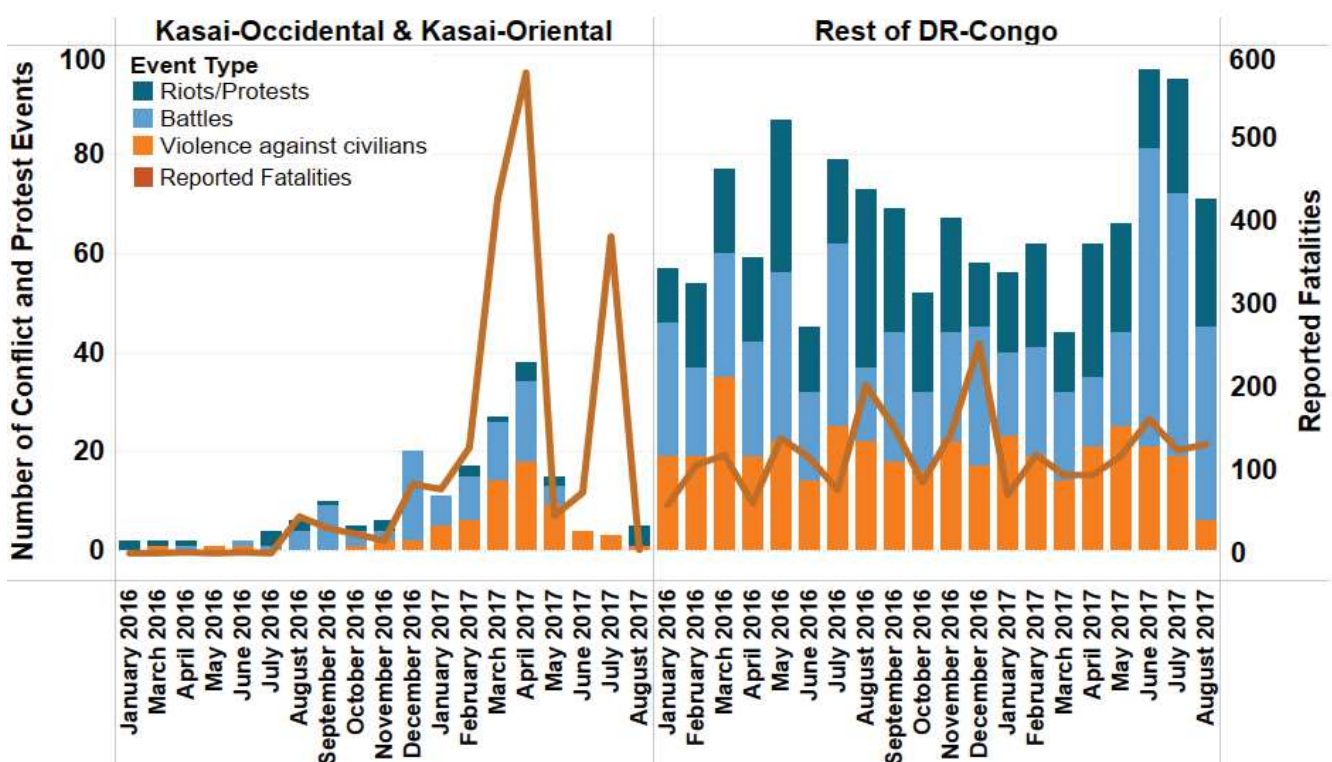


Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Event Type and Location, January 2016 – August 2017.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Despite this, the various factions within the opposition remain largely divided, and it is doubtful whether they can effectively mount a challenge to Kabila's strategy of using delaying tactics to put off giving up power.

Ambiguous statements by Kabila himself ([AfricaNews, 4 June 2017](#)), and the country's electoral commission head, that elections may not be held this year seem likely to reinforce this outlook ([Reuters, 9 July 2015](#)).

While the political situation has evolved, conflict in the Kasai region since late 2016 (see Figure 3) has further muddled the waters and pulled away international attention. The conflict has been riddled with accusations of atrocities committed, with mass graves and videos showing alleged killings on both sides leading to international condemnations ([New York Times, 28 July 2017](#)). This included the killing of two UN Group of Experts members who had been in the Kasai region to investigate the conflict, with both sides accusing the other of the killings ([New York Times, 23 May 2017](#)). And though seemingly a largely decentralized movement with no identifiable leader, a self-proclaimed Kamwina Nsapu spokesman added the implementation of the Saint Sylvester Agreement as part of their demands in an interview, alongside the local concerns which prompted the initial fighting ([ICG, 21 March 2017](#)). Despite a significant drop in fighting since June 2017, the large-scale displacement caused by this conflict, and its ability to pull international focus away from the political deadlock, can be seen as diminishing pressure on the Kabila government over the transition when it's needed most.

Pressure remains as the OCR has continued to organize

protests throughout the country (see Figure 4), albeit fewer than in previous years. The two most notable in 2017 occurred in April, including a national strike called on 3 April which was well-attended in the capital and cities ([France24, 3 April 2017](#)) of Goma, Kananga, Mbuji-Mayi and Lubumbashi. All demonstrations associated with this strike were quickly dispersed by police however. Following this, a second nation-wide day of protest on April 10 saw demonstrations in at least 10 cities despite a government ban ([Deutsche Welle, 10 April 2017](#)), almost all of which were dispersed by police with varying levels of violence. This coincided with a peak in violence in the country, a large part of which can be attributed to the conflict in the Kasai region (see Figure 3).

These demonstrations have been more subdued than those witnessed in previous years: protests in December 2016 resulted in as many as 40 deaths in the run up to Kabila's term limit expiring; and in January 2015, at least 27 were killed after a proposed law was announced extending Kabila's term limit until a national census could be held. The significant numbers of deaths during protests over the last two years, combined with the fragmentation of the opposition, seem to have deterred significant further action by the opposition on this front. The actions of the government have not gone unnoticed by the international community however. Over the past year, sanctions have been passed by the US, EU and others targeting police and officials involved in violence against protesters and other abuses ([HRW, 1 June 2017](#)), as well as members of the government seen as delaying the vote ([Al Jazeera, 11 July 2017](#)). Whether this pressure will have a serious effect remains to be seen.

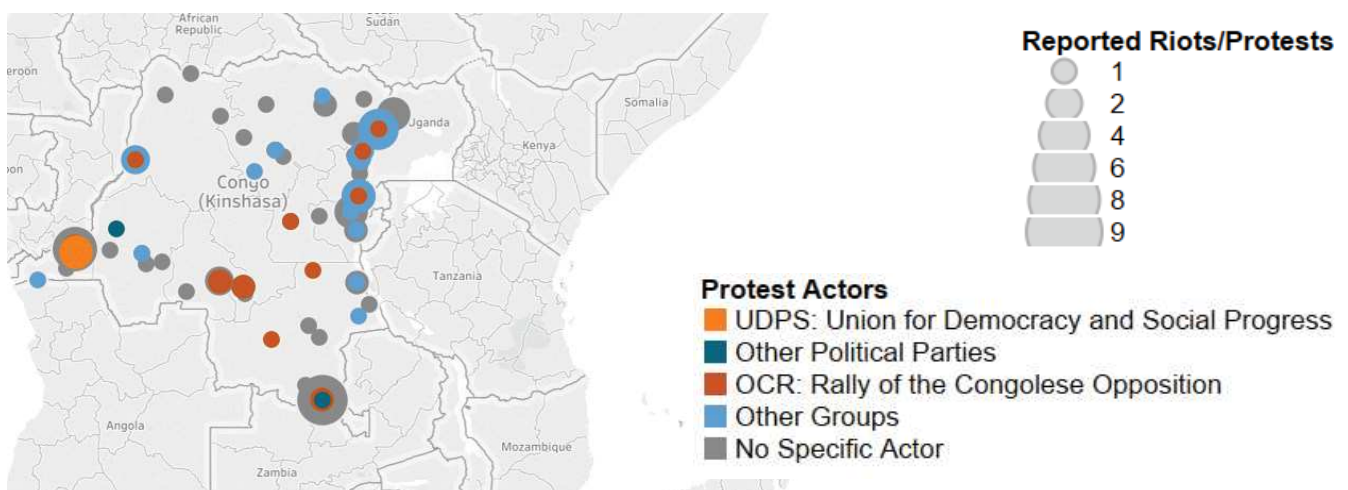


Figure 4: Number of Protest and Riot Events by Actor in Democratic Republic of Congo, January 2017 - August 2017.

Kenya

As Kenya heads for another election on 17 October to decide who will be president, we review how the August election passed. Concerns are growing that many of the local close elections will be re-contested, especially given the rate of incumbent overturns resulting from the August poll.

Overall, the Kenyan election was successful in myriad ways: the expected onslaught of violence never occurred: a limited and brief increase in activity occurred in key urban districts after the release of national level results (see Figure 5). President Kenyatta won the August contest by more than 10%, until those results were nullified by the Supreme Court.

Kenyans vote for six different positions when they go to the polls: president, governor, senator, MP (for county), women's representative (for county) and Members of County Assembly (MCA). Previously, Kenyans voted for the initial three positions. Because of the increase in constitutionally mandated positions, the presidency is less important now than it ever has been.

Instead, the positions of power in Kenya's system are the office of the governor and the MCA (for less wealthy candidates, as they will receive state redistribution funds). In line with calculations by [Nanjala Nyabola in August](#), the variation in power and positions has led to more intense competition for these seats: 15,082 people vied for positions in the August elections across all six levels. Specifically, the number of MCA candidates grew by 22% from 2013 levels.

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[As Hannah Waddilove notes in African Arguments](#), this competition led to an overturn of incumbent held seats unlike any experienced across recent African elections: over half of Kenya's incumbent governors, 62% of MPs and 79% of women representatives lost their seats in Au-

gust. The changes were most apparent in areas that supported the opposition coalition (NASA). There is little consolidation of the NASA coalition at the local level, as members of different opposition parties within the coalition competed for the same positions. Given this level of competition at the local level, and Kenya's typically highly lo-

calized political violence patterns, this election indicates that violence is neither necessarily nor particularly likely under periods of intense competition.

However, there other explanations for the low levels of election violence. Most election violence in 2007/8 was because of the political faultline between the Kikuyu affiliated political groups, and those affiliated with Kalenjin

political players. This was not the faultline of the 2013 and 2017 elections. Seen from this perspective, violence was never likely because the strongest parties are already in power, and have other means to get their preferred ends. The NASA coalition is wary of any association with violence, as it will affect their perceived moral legitimacy and ability to co-opt internally and internationally.

Waddilove also notes that the Presidential election was close in only 12 of the 47 counties. That may be due to bloc voting that is common when parties have built support in districts, but it may also be due to widespread inconsistencies in the presidential poll. The Supreme Court of Kenya has not yet spoken in detail as to its decision to demand a new President poll, but the reasoning relates to irregularities in the electronic system designed and implemented by the IEBC (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission). Both

the commission and its chief- Ezra Chiloba- were singled out by the Supreme Court, who pointedly did not accuse President Kenyatta's Jubilee coalition from being involved. Whatever the case, if the election was close in 12 of the 47, and several others within the remaining 35 are core constituencies of the Jubilee coalition, it stands to reason that oversight was strong in the competitive districts and

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Kenya

cheating- if it occurred- happened in areas that were expected to be pro-NASA, and may have been done in ways that were not observable to those on the ground.

The vote will be watched carefully from several angles- from the technical side to the local reporting side. However, this is now a contest of mobilization. Here, Kenyatta has the most to lose: any cheating that did occur did not save some Jubilee affiliated coalition governors, MPs or Women's representative who lost their seats. Although Jubilee won more governorships than in 2013, several of the losing incumbents are demanding recounts. Depend-

ing on who won or lost those seats, there could be a groundswell of support to push Odinga over the line and contest lost opposition-governor races. This could a viper's nest for Kenyatta to occupy as he goes into a new contest with his local affiliates knowing that he did not save many of them, and others knowing he looks out for himself over his local partners.

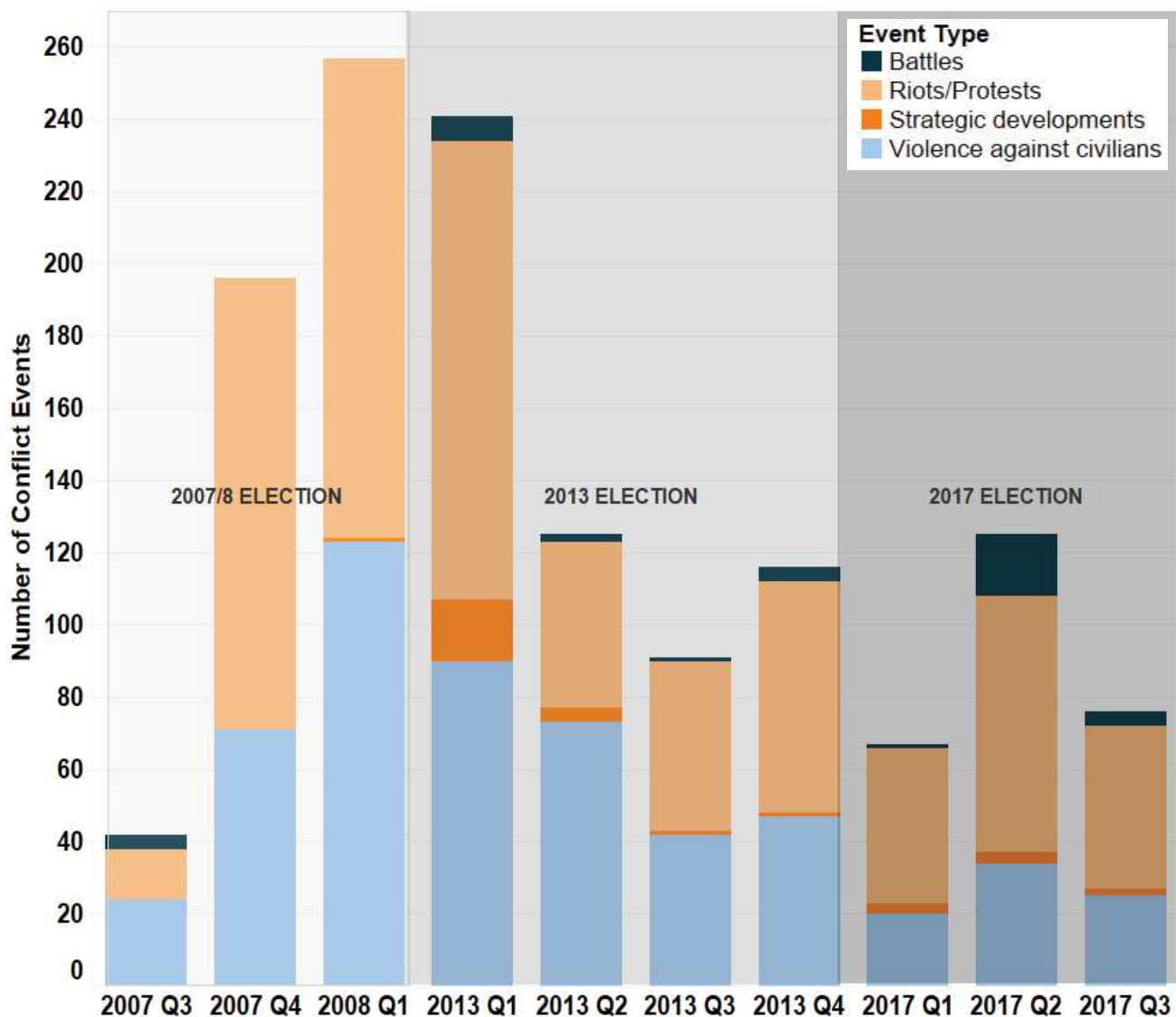


Figure 5: Number of Conflict Events by Quarter and Event Type in Kenya, from Q3 2007 - Q3 2017.

Nigeria

Boko Haram violence in Nigeria has decreased overall since the beginning of 2017 (see Figure 6). This may be attributed to the group's 2016 organizational collapse in much of the country's North-East; as a result, recent offensives have been limited guerrilla-style attacks against civilian and military targets.

Following the effective defeat of Boko Haram from Sambisa Forest in December 2016, government forces concentrated efforts on the destruction of remaining strongholds in the nearby Lake Chad region. A notable development following these military gains is the subsequent diaspora of sect's members throughout the Borno-Adamawa-Yobe corridor, leading desperate fighters marauding towns in search of supplies ([Vanguard, 25 August 2017](#)). As a result, some of the civilian population in these areas have been displaced. Other fighters have surrendered to military forces: sixty-eight members of Boko Haram's Borno fighters surrendered throughout August 2017 ([Nigerian Tribune, 24 August 2017](#)). Among those who have surrendered is Auwal Ismaeela, who led the notable 2014 abduction of the 'Chibok Girls' ([Premium Times, 27 August 2017](#)). The wider military operation in Borno State was fruitful throughout August 2017, reporting 82 Boko Haram deaths, 313 arrests, 630 cleared settlements and 468 rescued hostages ([Daily Post, 30 August 2017](#)). Bolstering these efforts, the United States recently agreed to the sale of attack aircraft and other weapons to government forces ([Sahara Reporters, 29 August 2017](#)).

Despite Boko Haram's current incapacity to launch complex attacks or overtake territory, the group continues to

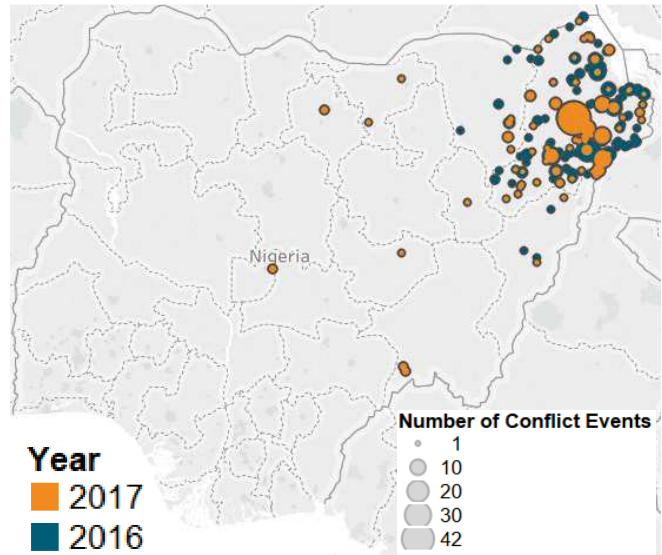


Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events involving Boko Haram by Location in Nigeria, in 2016 and 2017.

carry out suicide attacks against security forces and civilians. 2017 has seen a radical shift to the use of children to carry out these attacks, quadrupling its frequency from 2016 ([Reuters, 22 August 2017](#)). At least 223 civilians have been killed in Boko Haram attacks since April 2017 ([Premium Times, 5 September 2017](#)). A number of these strikes centred near Maiduguri, targeting checkpoints along the Bama-Maiduguri road. Common targets have been the University of Maiduguri, Muna Garage and Dalori ([Vanguard, 20 August 2017](#)). Attacks on the university have included a number of abductions for ransom, a possible indication of the group's financial straits ([Vanguard, 14 August 2017](#)).

In an effort to adapt to Boko Haram's diffusion throughout the north-east (see Figure 7), military forces began targeting top commanders for assassination or capture, establishing their whereabouts from integrations of captured members and other intelligence information ([Premium Times, 31 August 2017](#)). The government reports the imminent capture of Boko Haram commander Shekau, citing an air attack in the late weeks of August which yielded the death of five of the leader's top lieutenants ([Vanguard, 31 August 2017](#)). Boko Haram's near-term capacities will likely be determined on financial ability. As current funds are believed to be limited, it is feasible abductions for ransom may become more frequent in coming months.

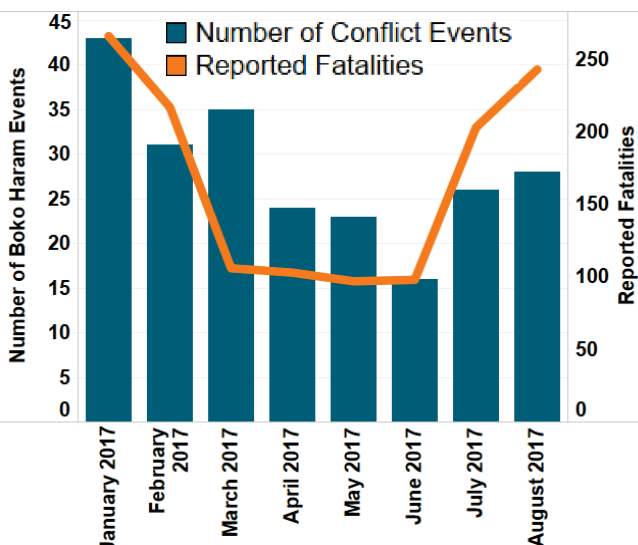


Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events and Fatalities involving Boko Haram in Nigeria, January 2017 - September 2017.

Special Focus Topic: Somalia

Somalia continues to be the most conflict-affected country in Africa in 2017 with 1,537 organized violent events. By comparison, South Sudan is the second most violent state, with 686 organized violent events thus far this year. Somalia has also incurred the most reported fatalities thus far this year (3,287 reported fatalities). While battles continue to result in the most reported fatalities (56% of all reported fatalities this year), the proportion of reported fatalities stemming from battles has decreased in recent years. But reported fatalities stemming from both remote violence as well as violence against civilians have both increased during this time – with Al Shabaab being the primary perpetrator of both of these types of violence.

The lethality of violence (number of reported fatalities per conflict event) against civilians has been on the rise since

2013. While Al Shabaab of Somalia falls high on the list of most lethal conflict actors against civilians in Somalia, they do not top the list. A number of clan militias – specifically, the Habar Gedir Clan Militia, Jejele Clan Militia, and Darood-Marehan Sub-Clan Militia – have been more lethal toward civilians this year, meaning that more civilians are reportedly killed as a result of each of their attacks. While the rate of violence against civilians carried out by clan militias has remained relatively constant over time, the lethality of this violence has been increasing (see Figure 8).

While large, high-profile actors such as Al Shabaab remain responsible for both high absolute levels of political violence, and a significant share of anti-civilian violence, strategically, the rate and lethality of events involving Al Sha-

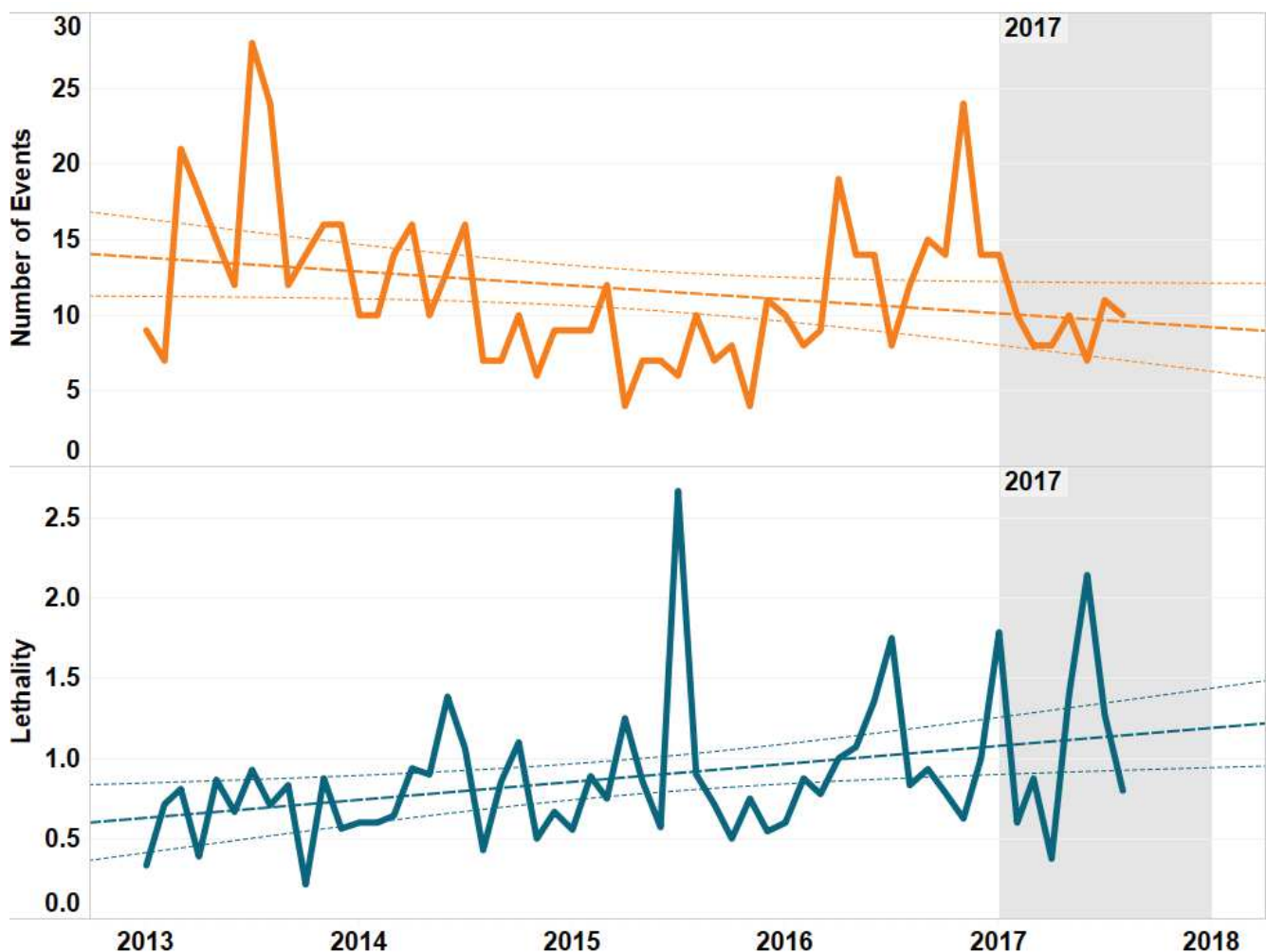


Figure 8: How have rates of civilian targeting by communal militias been changing?

Special Focus Topic: Somalia

baab have both remained relatively constant. Meanwhile, the lethality of violence by diverse clan militias has been on the rise, attesting to the sustained security risk and threat to civilian vulnerability that they constitute. In fact, the majority of new conflict actors in Somalia during the past year are clan militias, active in a variety of areas.

Unidentified armed groups (UAGs) also continue to be very active in Somalia. Thus far this year they have been second only to Al Shabaab. UAGs' activity against civilians, including remote violence against civilians, is particularly high. It is very likely that UAGs may be carrying out violence on behalf of others, such as Al Shabaab ([Kishi, 9 April 2015](#)).

But Al Shabaab have been responsible for the most reported civilian fatalities. Remote violence carried out by Al

Shabaab against civilians this year – especially violence involving IEDs – has increased the number of reported fatalities (see Figure 9). This could point to a shift in strategic tactics by the group.

This is coupled with Al Shabaab's continued geographic expansion into new locations, including a number of new locations in Shabeellaha Hoose (see Figure 10), putting more civilians at greater risk. As Al Shabaab expands into new locations, the number of clan militias active in those same locales is impacted. This suggests a relationship between clan militias and Al Shabaab – namely that Al Shabaab may in fact be a 'brand' under which numerous clan militias may fight. This is not to say that there is no centralized Al Shabaab; in fact, Al Shabaab has indeed been successful in usurping groups, as can be seen when

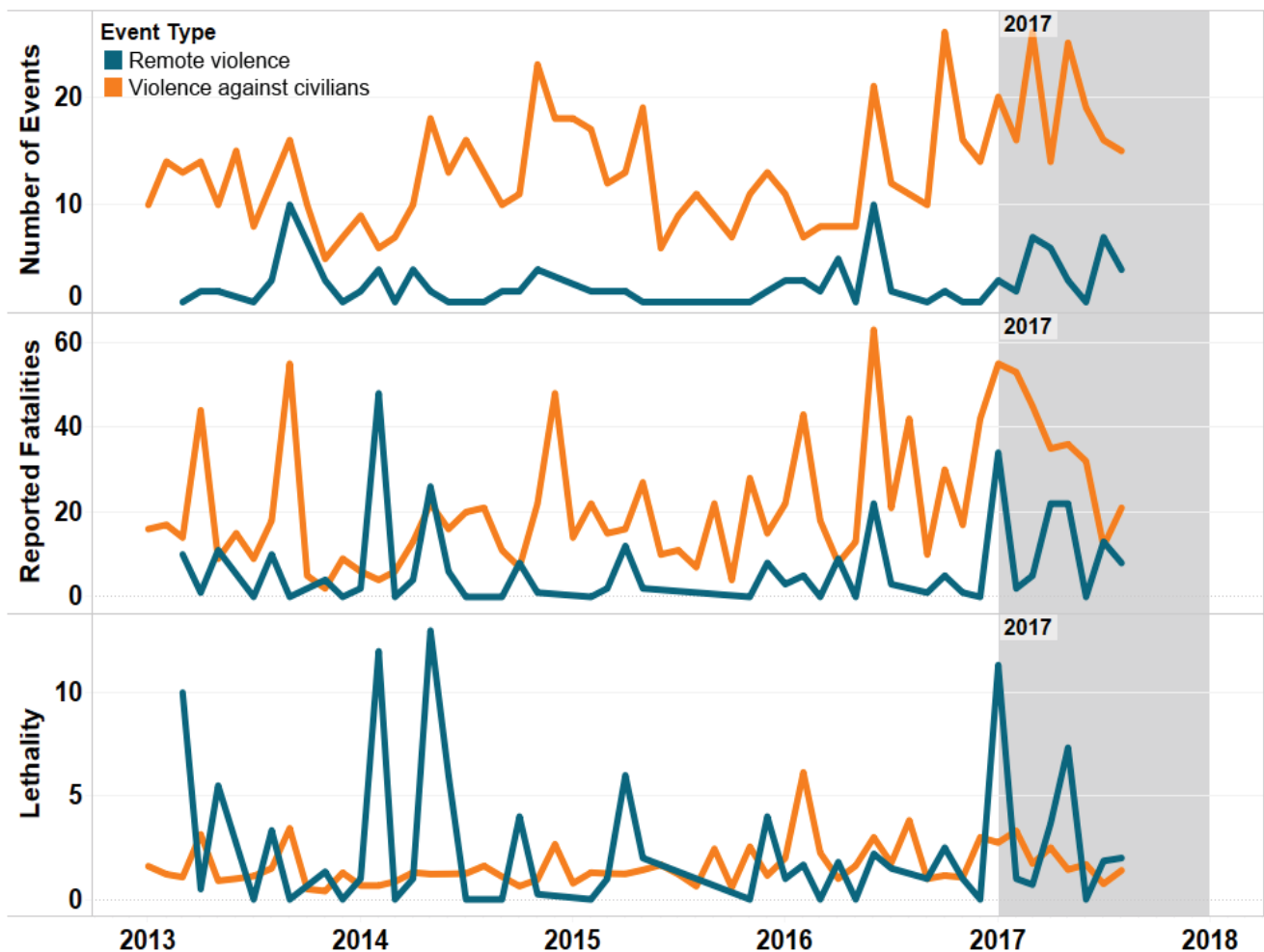


Figure 9: Anti-Civilian Violence Rates, Reported Fatalities, and Lethality Involving Al Shabaab in Somalia, from 2013 - 2017.

Special Focus Topic: Somalia

clan militia activity has stopped in certain locations into which Al Shabaab has recently expanded (see Figure 11).

Specifically, when looking at the locations in which Al Shabaab is newly active this year, the number of distinct, active clan militias has decreased in many of these locations during this same time.

Recently, a series of high-level Al Shabaab defections have been reported ([Somali Update, 13 August 2017](#)), with many defectors living in Mogadishu while enjoying state protection. This blanket protection “[does] little to deter future atrocities while simultaneously undermining reconciliation efforts” ([Ismail, 31 August 2017](#)). These defections could suggest that the group may be splintering. Some have pointed to this possibility, noting increased

mistrust among its members leading to the emergence of splinter cells – some swearing allegiance to ISIS while others remaining affiliated to Al Qaeda ([Wabala, 13 August 2017](#)). Alternatively, there may be a change coming in Al Shabaab’s campaign tactics or direction. Some suggest this could be in the form of a renewal of ties with the Yemen-based al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) ([Meservey, 3 January 2017](#)). In any case, Al Shabaab continues with two defining features: opportunism and deadly activity. The conflict landscape in Somalia is changing as a result of changes within Al Shabaab and the activity of clan militias and their alliances with non-state actors.

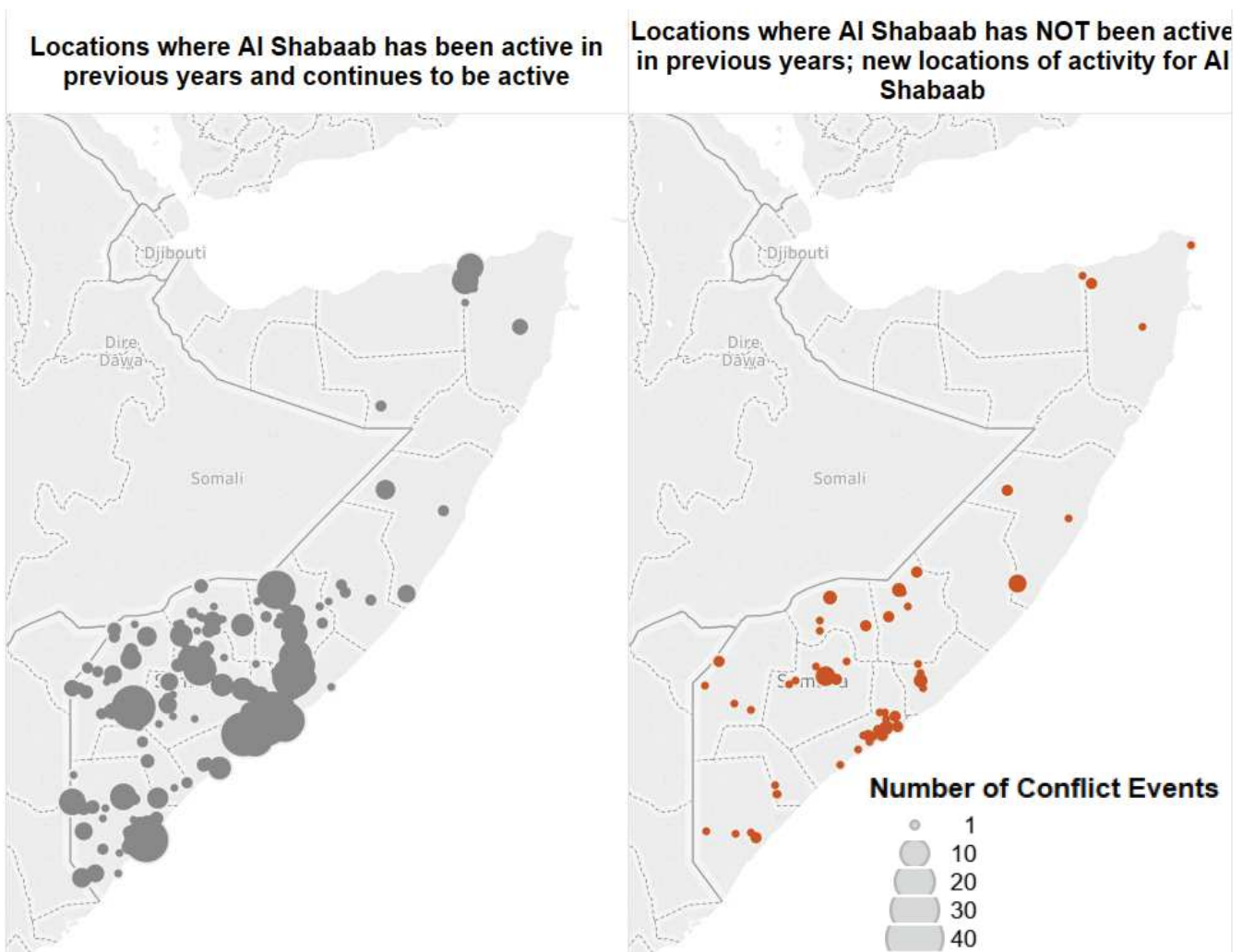


Figure 10: To Where is Al Shabaab Expanding in Somalia?

Special Focus Topic: Somalia

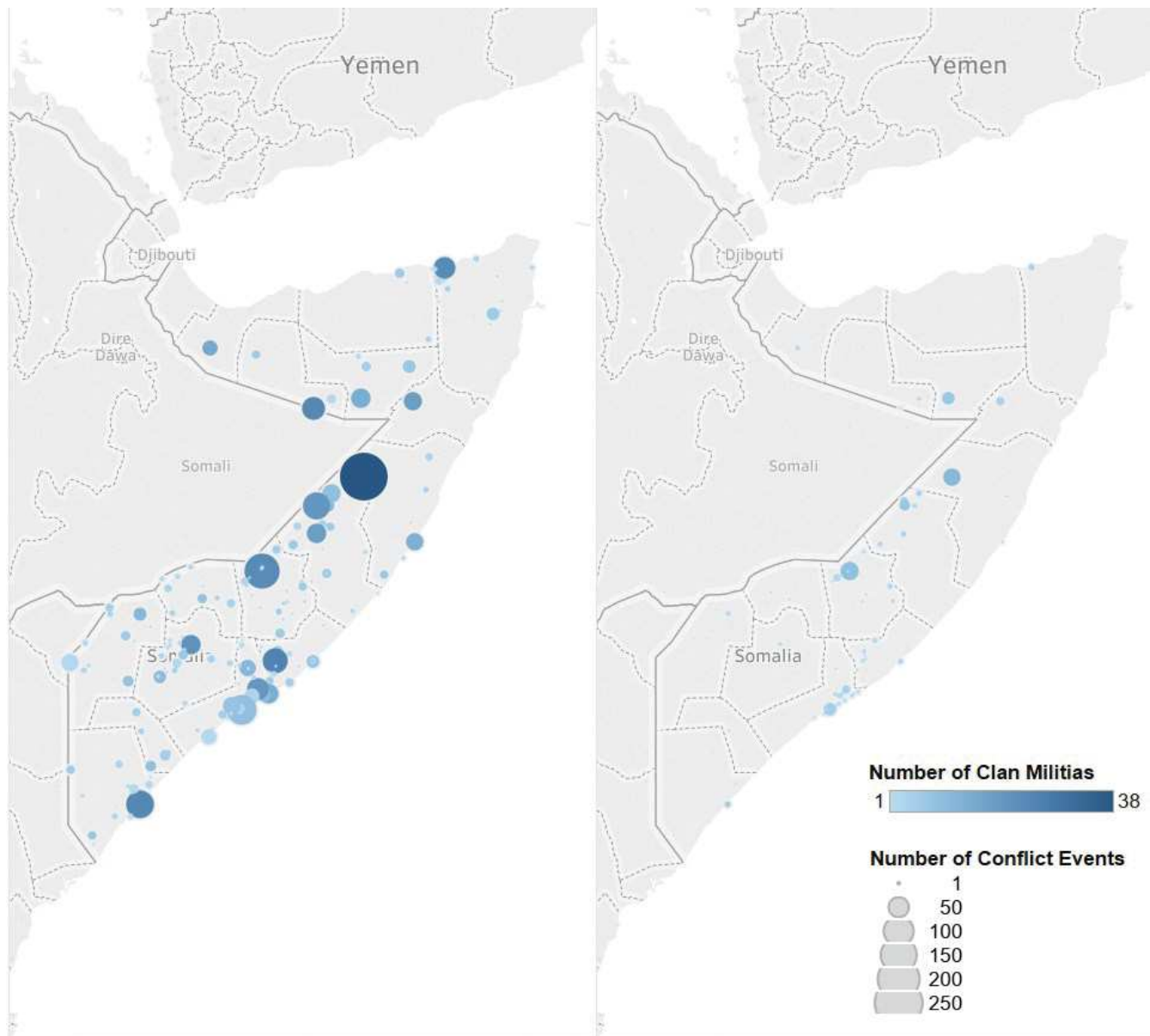


Figure 11: Clan Militia Activity in Locations in which Al Shabaab is Now Active in Somalia.

Support

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is supported by grants from the European Union and the United States Government.

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](http://www.acleddata.com).