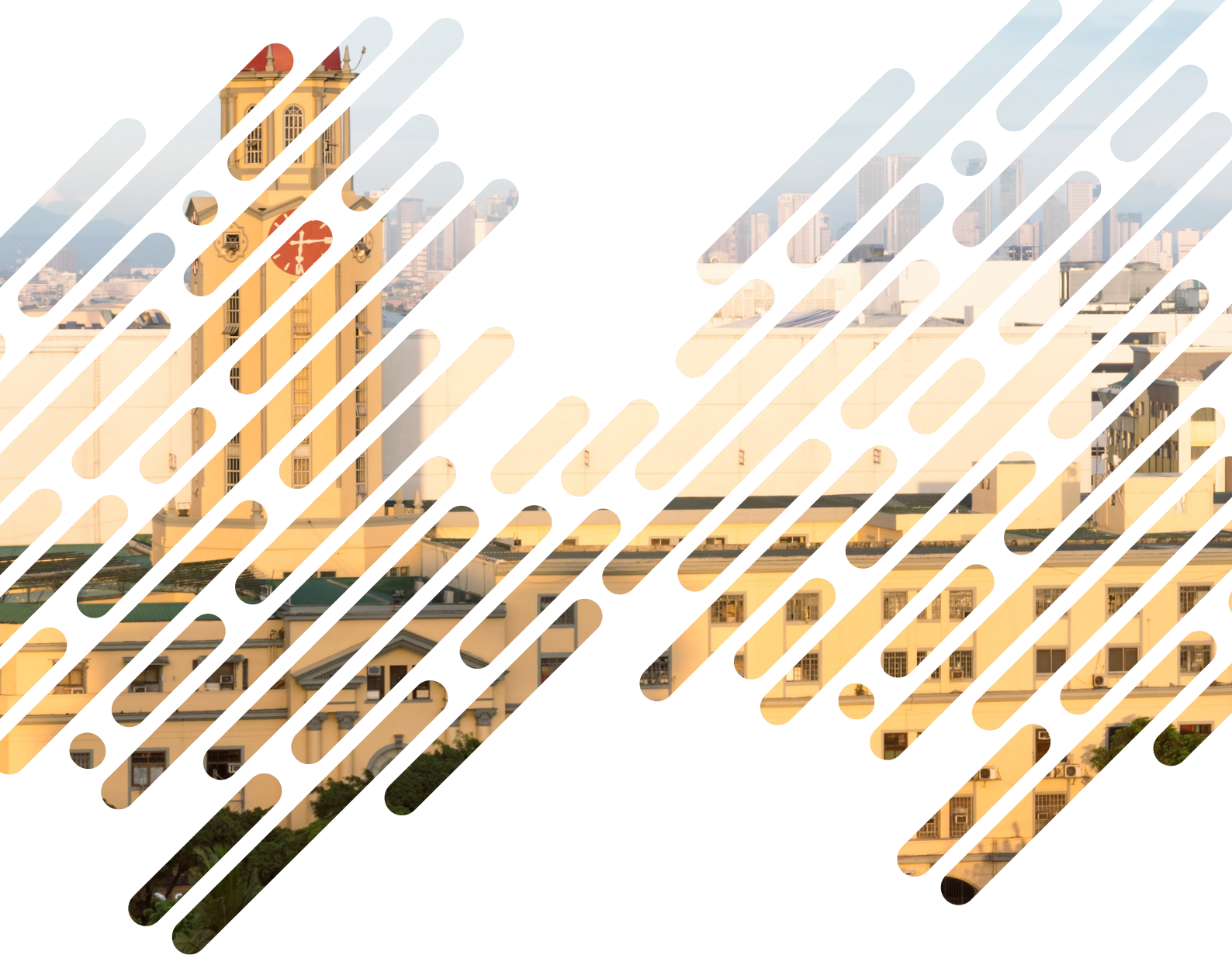


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Annual Report on
**VIOLENCE
TARGETING
LOCAL OFFICIALS**
2023

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Cover photo: Manila City Hall, Philippines by fazon / Adobe Stock

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FOREWORD

Subnational Elites and the Costs of Governing

By Clionadh Raleigh
CEO & President, ACLED

Contested elections, highly charged political campaigns, public demonstrations, and populism have increased the rate of local official targeting worldwide. The increasing attention to the threats and violence experienced by local officials¹ across the world is welcome. We see widespread concern for local officials in the United States, in Mexico, and further in Afghanistan, India, and Ethiopia – indeed almost every country has experienced violence against local officials in the recent past. But are these threats unique? Are they growing as democratic practices are contested and populism grows? And why and who would target local officials?

Our ‘violence against local officials’ project combines data and analysis of these threats to reveal their proliferation and depth in countries considered to be in conflict, and those that are largely peaceful. This project reveals that because local governance is prolific in all countries, violence against local officials is often the most obvious and accessible frontline for conflict. It also tells

us about the nature of violence and power contests at the local front.

Growing threats to local officials and administrators come from three sources:

1. Specific attempts to dismantle or disturb national governance by attacking its local pillars. This occurs when administrators are attacked for being ‘cogs in a system.’
2. Attacks on specific areas that are beyond the reach of the central government, allowing non-state or competing armed groups to rampage. Al-Shabaab’s prolific violence against local officials in Somalia are examples of such displays.
3. Attacks can suggest local competition, where local administrators are entirely independent from larger forces. Conflict here is controlled by local political contenders – local election violence, or those between officials and gangs, militias, and cartels, produce this violence in Mexico, Brazil, and the Philippines.

¹ Examples of these officials are mayors, zonal and regional leaders, political and campaign organizers, police, and security staff. In general, it includes those who have a formal role and authority, and represent the interests of a larger elite or population (e.g., in a political party structure; state apparatus, or formal government role).

Why are local officials important?

Violence against officials who occupy regional or local seats is important because of what it tells us about how violence is shaped by the type and form of local authority. Who has power and who can take it?

In many ways, violence against local officials works against a common narrative about conflict environments. Accounts of conflict often suggest that the locations of violence are ‘ungoverned’ or ‘under-governed’ at the very least, and by association, conflict occurs in ‘ungoverned spaces.’ Yet, there are agents of governance everywhere — and not solely security forces. Local government is prolific in all contexts, including sites of intense conflict. People do not suspect that Ukrainian governance in conflict zones looks similar to that in Mali, but in both cases, the local officials are representations of the central government in a contested space.

Local officials are often uniquely powerful in conflict zones because they are responsible for far more than representing the state: they must also determine and hold order against violent opposition; provide and distribute goods and security, if available; and often engage with violent opposition over how to reach highly volatile resolutions or local agreements. It is a costly endeavor to be a local official in and outside of conflict areas, but it is not a passive one. With the benefits local officials provide for the central government in conflict zones, they extract a return with additional powers, money, support, less oversight, etc.

In conflict areas where state security and authority is less present, non-state armed groups with sufficient control and territorial dominance may seek to replace local authorities. Where it can be difficult to co-opt local officials, or to demand the acquiescence of the local population, harming and destroying the local authorities can send a clear signal of ‘new powers.’ In such cases — like Afghanistan before the fall of the government,² or the TPLF’s killing of 22 government representatives in Tigray³ — the intention is to display dominance on the part of the armed group, and weakness by the central government.

These contexts are rare but incredibly destructive. Even when a violent group overtakes a territory, they very rarely want to control or enforce control there — in part because staying in one place makes a group a ‘sitting duck.’ When local officials are killed, the result tends to be a patchwork of armed group-led decisions about organizing people, repression, and extraction. More violence — especially from other armed group competitors — tends to follow rather than alternative governance.

Of course, the vast majority of threats, assaults, and local authority killings are taking place in countries that are not considered ‘actively violent,’ like India. But the situation is not uniform: most events recorded for January to April 2024 are in Mexico, India, Myanmar, Philippines, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Colombia. Some have elections, active conflicts, or high levels of localized competition and — due to their large populations — many local political figures to target.

² Human Rights Watch, “‘No Forgiveness for People Like You’: Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban, 30 November 2021.

³ Associated Press, ‘Ethiopia says 22 regional officials killed by Tigray rebels,’ 27 May 2021.

A major finding we have throughout the years is the correlation between elections and spikes in violence against local officials — especially so for local elections, like in Mexico or the Philippines. This applies to competitive and less competitive elections, suggesting that running for office often spurs intra-party competition and often between local candidates.

Final Thoughts

The evidence we created in our data about violence against local officials suggests that these men and women are targeted for a variety of reasons, across all contexts. The risk of attack in their job is growing because of the power it holds both as a position and as a representation of a role in a structured political order. Rarely has the importance of local government been so clear: if armed groups are seeking to destabilize authority, it must be because it presents an obstacle for them.

Conflict is a contest for power, and as such, it is directed toward authority. This violence is perpetrated by gangs, militias, or insurgents, but behind the attackers are elites who are investing in violence to create new authority, or destabilize current authority. The victims — beyond the officials — are all of us who depend on functioning local government.

FOREWORD

Democracy Under Fire

By Roberto Montà
President of Avviso Pubblico

Since 2010, Avviso Pubblico has published *Administrators Under Fire*, a report that lists threats against and intimidation of local administrators and public officials throughout Italy. In addition to reporting statistics, the Report analyzes the intricacies of this phenomenon through expert analysis and opinions. The monitoring of these events has enabled over 5,000 cases of intimidation to be registered nationwide at an average rate of one threat every 23 hours. This has raised awareness of a phenomenon that was previously given little consideration institutionally or by the media.

In 2013, the Italian Senate established a Parliamentary Investigation Commission which produced an official report and draft legislation that became law in 2017, aimed at increasing protection for local administrators by providing investigators with new analytical tools.

Since 2018, the Ministry of the Interior has operated a Coordination Center on threats against local administrators to

analyze incident trends at the highest level. In 2022, a fund was established for local governments to adopt initiatives that promote legality, enact measures to restore government assets, or support local administrators who received threats in connection with their work.

It is unacceptable that in one of the world's biggest democracies, local administrators are being intimidated daily with fires, threatening letters, physical assaults, shootings at homes, the use of explosives, insults, and fake news spread anonymously on social networks. Many public officials in Italy deal with these types of occurrences on a daily basis.

Choosing to run for office and to govern their city if they are elected has become a monumental task that demands immense bravery and a profound sense of individual and collective responsibility. Today, accepting the mantle of public office entails the risk of exposing oneself to the growing societal anger, grappling with the pervasive distrust of politics and institutions, and

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enduring a deep-seated sense of isolation. In numerous instances, administrators stand firm against the threats and continue their service. They do so because of the unwavering and explicit support they receive from their families and communities. In other cases, however, fear forces them to step down or withdraw from electoral campaigns prematurely. When this occurs, it is a collective defeat, as it is not just the individual who is targeted, but the entire community and the democratic system of the country.

Avviso Pubblico is committed to maintaining vigilance over this issue — not just in Italy, but across Europe, thanks to a fruitful collaboration with ACLED. This ongoing analysis and comprehension of the issue are crucial initial steps toward safeguarding our institutions and democracy.

Avviso Pubblico (Local Municipalities and Regions Against Mafia and Corruption) is an Association founded in Italy in 1996 with the aim to connect and organize local administrators who concretely promote and spread the culture of legality and transparency in politics, in the Public Administration and on the territories governed by them. Currently, Avviso Pubblico has more than 500 members including Municipalities, Unions of Municipalities, Metropolitan Cities, Provinces, and Regions. The Association also collaborates with some Italian Universities to carry out research, dissemination, and training activities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around the world, local authorities are an integral component of state governance.

They perform several functions, including representing the state across a country's territory, administering budgets, and overseeing security forces. Either appointed from the center or selected through elections, they contribute to conferring legitimacy to state institutions and reinforcing the bond with the citizenry. In virtue of their role, local government officials are frequent victims of violence and intimidation.

ACLED's 2023 Annual Report on violence against local officials reveals the global reach of this phenomenon. In 2023, close to 2,500 attacks against local government officials were reported in 94 countries around the world. Among those attacked are governors, mayors, village heads, local councilors, local government or election workers, and other officials who are exposed to the use or threat of violence by organized groups and crowds.

Election cycles are shown to heighten the risks for local officials. In 2023, gubernatorial, municipal, and other subnational elections were associated with higher violence against local officials in several countries, including Colombia, Nigeria, India, and the Philippines.

Local authorities are the target of rival candidates and groups attempting to influence the electoral outcome, as well as criminal cartels that aim to impose control over incoming local administrations. Anger over alleged irregularities and fraud also resulted in increased violence and threats on elected and appointed officials.

Outside elections, rebel and militia groups frequently identify local officials as 'low-cost' yet high-profile targets. Assassinations of local officials thus become a tactic to publicly expose a state's weakness, settle scores with rival local elites, and create a governance vacuum that armed groups are capable of filling in. This form of violence is common in several armed conflicts, such as Myanmar, Sudan, and Ukraine, but also extends to the armed insurgencies across the Sahel and in Somalia and other countries engulfed in conflict. Abductions of local officials also provide a lucrative financing strategy for armed groups, which forces local communities to rally in support of their representatives.

While targeted aggressions remain the most common mode of violence exercised on local officials, at least 30% of all recorded events took place in the context of riots. Public dissatisfaction with electoral outcomes was a frequent motive

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for the violence in Colombia, Guatemala, and Bangladesh, all of which headed into elections in 2023. Elsewhere, there were other motives. Local officials represent the institutions most proximate to the citizens, and as a result, they also become the most accessible representatives for the citizenry to voice discontent. France recorded the highest year-on-year increase due to a wave of anti-government demonstrations that resulted in hundreds of acts of vandalism, arson, and violence against local government buildings and officials. Likewise, local authorities in India, South Africa, and Kenya are blamed for poor service delivery and justice administration, with crowds and mobs frequently assaulting the state's local representatives.

National and international institutions are increasingly placing violence against local officials at the top of their agendas. During the 45th session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Council of Europe's pan-European assembly of local and regional elected officials, local government representatives addressed the issue of increasing verbal abuse and physical violence, highlighting how such violence can "deter citizens from engaging in politics."¹ In the United States, authorities are confronted with a worrying increase in threats and harassment against state and local officials amid false assertions of widespread fraud in the 2020 election.²

Alarming trends of violence on local authorities and its effects on democracy were also highlighted recently in regard to Italy,³ Mexico,⁴ South Africa,⁵ and the Philippines,⁶ among other countries.

Through this report, ACLED seeks to shed light on this worldwide phenomenon, highlighting not just the distinctive character of each context, but the many points that are shared across different regions and countries. These findings presented in this report ultimately call for a collective discussion on the role and safety of local officials, which may produce a deeper understanding of the drivers of the violence and encourage the sharing of best practices.

¹ Council of Europe, 'Violence against local and regional elected representatives: a threat to our democracies,' 27 October 2023

² Reuters, 'Campaign of Fear: The Trump World's Assault on U.S. Election Workers'; Gowri Ramachandran et al., 'Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders,' Brennan Center for Justice, 25 January 2024; Bridging Divides Initiative, 'BDI Launches Public Event-Level Dataset on Threats and Harassment Against Local Officials,' 11 April 2024.

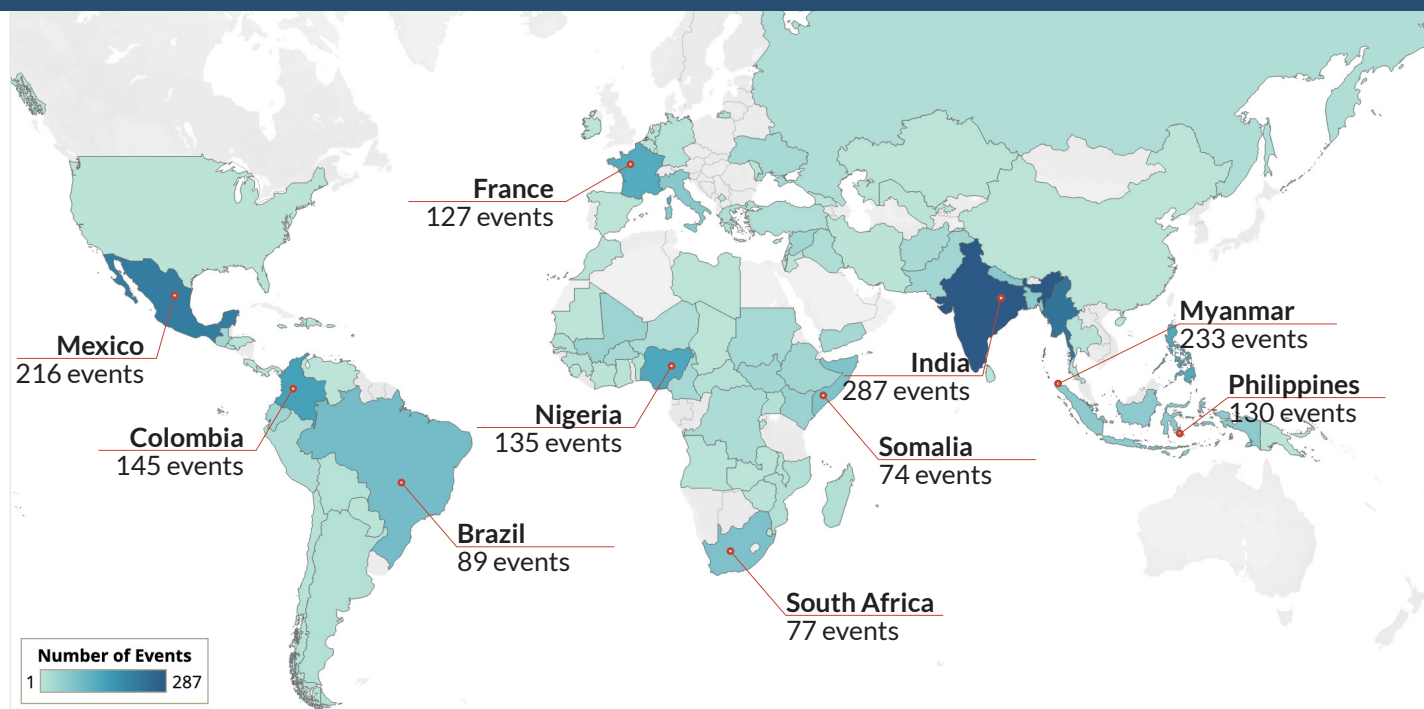
³ Avviso Pubblico, "Amministratori sotto tiro": presentato a Roma il Rapporto 2023. Avviso Pubblico: "Nel mirino anche i candidati alle elezioni", 17 April 2024

⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Mexico's Forgotten Mayors: The Role of Local Government in Fighting Crime,' 23 June 2023

⁵ Nkosikhona Duma, 'KZN political killings: Talks of ending violence appear to be a PR stunt, charges Salga chair,' News24, 14 October 2023; SABC News, 'SALGA warns of rising political violence in KZN,' 27 December 2023; Kealeboga Molaakgosi, 'SALGA chairperson raises alarm over political killings,' Power 98.7, 15 February 2024

⁶ Mong Palatino, 'Alarming Pattern of Killings Continues in the Philippines,' The Diplomat, 15 March 2023

DATA SUMMARY



Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023



In 2023, ACLED records more than **2,400 events** of violence targeting local officials **globally**, an **11% decrease** compared to 2022. ACLED records more than 2,700 events in 2022, and more than 2,600 in 2021.

How does ACLED track violence targeting local government officials?

ACLED specifically tracks events wherein violence is perpetrated against officials in local administrations. Local government officials are understood as administrators who are part of subnational government institutions, from the first-level administration division down to cities, towns, and villages. Under this category, ACLED includes a broad range of elected and appointed officials, such as governors, mayors, city councilors, local election workers, local government employees, and any other members of subnational administrations.

ACLED users can find all relevant events by applying the “local administrators” marker to the ‘Tags’ column in the ACLED dataset. An event is considered relevant when 1) violence is used against local officials or 2) public or private property belonging to local officials or governments is targeted.

Besides acts of direct physical violence used against local officials (e.g. attacks, kidnappings) and infrastructure associated with them (e.g. looting and property destruction), ACLED also tracks episodes of unorganized violence (riots) where local officials are the targets. This includes cases of rioting activity where property associated with local officials is damaged or destroyed or local officials are targeted by mobs or vigilante groups. ACLED data do not include threats or cases of interpersonal violence involving local officials.

For more details on ACLED’s methodology and coverage, see the entry on ACLED’s Knowledge Base about our [coverage of violence targeting local officials](#).

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials



Despite a 15% decrease in incidents, **Asia-Pacific** remained the **leading region** for the **third consecutive year**. **Latin America and the Caribbean** was the **only region** where this violence **increased**.

While most of the other regions maintained relatively similar levels compared to the previous two years, **Europe and Central Asia** observed a **20% decrease compared to 2022**, a year when this violence more than **doubled compared to 2021**.



India, Myanmar, Mexico, Colombia, and Nigeria were the most dangerous countries for local officials, accounting for **more than 40% of events worldwide**.



Violence targeting local officials **increased in 29 countries**, with **France** recording the most outstanding rise, as events **spiked by 12 times** compared to 2022.

A notable **dropdown** was recorded in **Ukraine**. Incidents decreased by 85% compared to 2022, as overall violence targeting civilians — including violence targeting local officials — has reduced in the second year of the Russian invasion.



Around **40%** of all events targeting local officials were **direct attacks**, the most common type of violence directed at local officials.

These **attacks** and other forms of **targeted violence** were **mostly perpetrated** by **unidentified groups**, which were collectively responsible for **56%** of the violence.

Abductions remained a **significant threat** for local officials, especially in **Nigeria, Mali, Mexico, India, and Cameroon**, which concentrated **more than half** of all reported cases.



ACLED records **88 cases** where **women officials** were the reported targets of violence. More than **50%** of these cases took place in **Mexico, the Philippines, India, and Colombia**.



Riots were the **second most common** form of violence, accounting for 30% of all incidents worldwide. In fact, **riots** that target local officials have been on the rise, as these events **increased by 38%** compared to the year prior.

Notable surges in riots have been recorded in **France, Colombia, Guatemala, and Bangladesh**. In the latter three, a significant part of this trend can be linked to election-related violence, while in France, it is mostly connected to spikes in demonstrations against the government and police brutality.



AFRICA



ACLED

*A worker gestures at a polling station in
Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria February 25, 2023.
REUTERS/James Oatway*

AFRICA

In 2023, there were at least 636 attacks against local government officials in Africa. Despite an 11% decrease from 2022, when ACLED records over 700 events, the numbers suggest a broader upward trend from the 355 events in 2019. Most violence took place in Western and Eastern Africa, with 243 and 219 events, respectively, followed by Southern Africa (84), Middle Africa (58), and Northern Africa (32). Nigeria leads the ranking for most events on the continent with 135 events, nearly twice those recorded in South Africa (77) and Somalia (74). Kenya (39), Mali (37), and Ethiopia (32) are the only countries with more than 30 cases. Organized armed groups are responsible for nearly 80% of violence against local officials, while around 20% of incidents take place in the context of riots and violent demonstrations.

The phenomenon is widespread across Africa and extends to countries engulfed in civil wars and violent insurgencies as well as to those that are more stable, albeit characterized by a violent political context. Competition over the control of local territories leads resource-seeking armed groups, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia and

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel, to assassinate or abduct local government officials in an effort to undermine state institutions, extract concessions, or intimidate others. Across the continent, local authorities also face widespread popular discontent, driving angered crowds to assault members and symbols of local government in countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Nigeria accounts for 135 attacks against local officials in 2023, the highest number on the African continent despite a 12% decrease from 2022. The general and gubernatorial elections held in 2023 constituted a flashpoint for violence against local officials and election workers, with at least 26 attacks recorded on election day alone.¹ Polling units were assaulted on election day in several states, including Lagos, Kano, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom, among others. Yet, violence against local officials was also reported outside the election cycle. Local authorities were the victims of abductions in at least 20 states, underscoring Nigeria's banditry crisis that has its hotbed in the northwestern and central regions. Frequent targets of

¹ The presidential elections were held on 25 February 2023. On 18 March, 28 states voted for their governors, while three other states (Bayelsa, Imo, and Kogi) held elections on 11 November. Supplementary elections were held on 11 April in constituencies where the vote was suspended due to violence and irregularities.

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these attacks are village heads, whose high profile makes them a lucrative prize, forcing communities to raise money to pay the ransom.²

While overall violent events targeting local officials in **Somalia** decreased from a record-high 91 in 2022 to 74 in 2023, the country ranks third in Africa, with al-Shabaab responsible for at least 58 attacks. Al-Shabaab has a long history of targeting government officials in Somalia. In 2019, a suicide bomber detonated a device in the Banadir regional administration headquarters, killing Mogadishu Mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman.³ The Banadir regional administration headquarters were also the target of another attack in January 2023, when three suicide vehicle-borne IEDs detonated, killing several local government officials. Al-Shabaab's high-scale attacks, often conducted with lethal explosive devices to overcome heavy security measures, reportedly killed at least 220 people, including local officials, soldiers, and bystanders. Yet, the militant group also turned its attention to locations beyond the capital, Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab staged several attacks against members of state parliaments, mayors, councilors, and other dignitaries in Hiiraan, Gedo, Lower Shabelle, and other regions, in what appears to be a concerted effort to undermine local institutions and support for the government's counterinsurgency drive. Further north, local tensions in Somaliland and Puntland, as well as clan rivalries in Somalia, resulted in occasional

attacks against local government officials. In February 2023, local militias at odds with the Somaliland government attacked the Sool governor's office in the regional capital, Las Anod.

The war in **Sudan** that broke out in April 2023 unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence against local officials. From Darfur to Kordofan, armed groups targeted local government officials in an effort to undermine government control and replace hostile administrations with loyalists. Darfur accounted for over half of the 26 events recorded across Sudan, with the highest concentration reported in West Darfur. In June, the governor of West Darfur and leader of the largely ethnic Masalit Sudanese Alliance Forces, Khamis Abakar, was murdered in the state's capital El Geneina while he was in the custody of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).⁴ Abakar's killing happened in the context of a concerted effort by the RSF-backed Arab militias to target the Masalit population of West Darfur, which raised concerns about the ethnicization of the conflict.⁵ A new government, led by the RSF's local allies, was then appointed in November after the RSF claimed full control of West Darfur.⁶ In the following weeks, Abakar's successor and West Darfur governor-designate was the target of an unsuccessful assassination attempt in Ardamata.⁷ Beyond Darfur, Kordofan was another hotbed of violence against local government officials, as the Sudanese army and the RSF attempted to make inroads in the region. In the summer

² Musa Umar Bologi, 'Mass Exodus Follows Abductions In A North-central Nigeria Community', HumAngle, 21 September 2022; Ifeanyi Nwannah, 'Bandits abduct Zamfara District Head, Chief Imam, demand N5m', Daily Post, 19 December 2023.

³ Matthew Weaver, 'Mayor of Mogadishu dies as result of al-Shabaab attack', The Guardian, 1 August 2019.

⁴ ACAPS, 'SUDAN: West Darfur Pre-crisis Profile', 18 July 2023.

⁵ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Sudan: High Commissioner appalled by killing of West Darfur Governor', 16 June 2023.

⁶ Radio Dabanga, 'RSF captures West Darfur capital – poised to advance on North Darfur and Kordofan', 6 November 2023.

⁷ African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, 'Ethnic Genocides in Ardamata locality in West Darfur', 27 November 2023, p. 20.

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of 2023, RSF-backed militias allegedly abducted a senior administrative officer and killed another one in West Kordofan.

In **Cameroon**, there were 25 acts of violence against local government officials, the second-highest yearly figure after 2020. 84% of all events in 2023 occurred in Cameroon's Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions, home to a secessionist rebellion that armed separatists launched in 2017, when they proclaimed the independence of the self-styled 'Federal Republic of Ambazonia.' Over the past few years, Ambazonian rebels have targeted civilians suspected of collaborating with the Yaoundé government, including local government officials, civil servants, and traditional chiefs.⁸ In 2023, at least four local officials were killed at the hands of the separatists in the Northwest region. However, violence was not only used to retaliate against suspected collaborators. ACLED records at least 10 abduction attempts aimed at mayors, councilors, and council workers in the Anglophone regions in 2023, suggesting the existence of a lucrative shadow economy based on kidnappings for ransom. In some cases, separatists used violence to control the right of taxation. On 10 November, members of the Ambazonian Restoration Forces opened fire on local council workers collecting taxes from vendors in the market of Muyuka, a town situated in the Fako division of the Southwest region.

Despite not suffering from armed conflicts or acute security crises like the above-mentioned countries, **South Africa** (77 events) and **Kenya** (39) rank second and fourth, respectively, for attacks against local officials. In South Africa, at least 31 people were killed in assassinations and assassination attempts targeting current and former elected officials and local government employees. Organized crime and intra-party competition are among the drivers of this violence across the country. However, angered crowds have also stormed local administration buildings and assaulted officials over poor service delivery, a chronic challenge in South Africa. Mob violence also accounts for over half of all reported attacks in Kenya, where political youth wings and vigilante groups assaulted local officials over party rivalries or in attempts to enforce vigilante justice or resist state authority.

⁸ 'Cameroon: With or against Us: People of the North-West Region of Cameroon Caught between the Army, Armed Separatists and Militias.' Amnesty International, 4 July 2023. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/6838/2023/en/>.

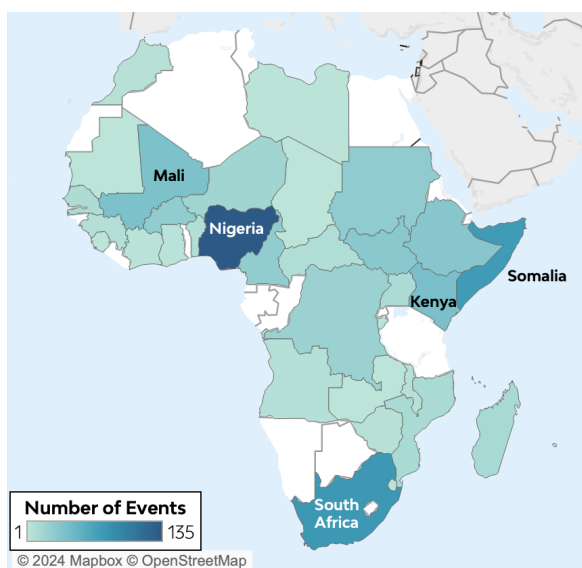
AFRICA

SITUATION IN 2023

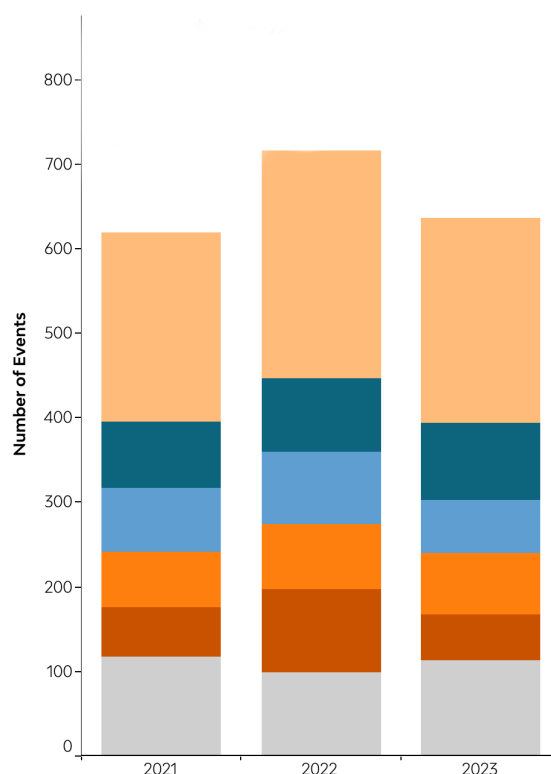
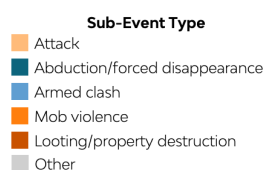
**636** events*recorded in 2023***11%** decrease*compared to 2022*

Top 5 countries with most events

1.	Nigeria	135
2.	South Africa	77
3.	Somalia	74
4.	Kenya	39
5.	Mali	37



EVOLUTION SINCE 2021

Forms of Violence Used Against
Local Officials: 2021 – 2023**ACLED**

THE SAHEL: Insurgent groups target community leaders

Jihadist militants affiliated with Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) have long targeted local state officials during their decade-long insurgency in the Sahel. Until around 2018, assassinations and abductions of local administrators were largely confined to northern and central Mali. Yet, JNIM and IS Sahel have since expanded operations to the north of Burkina Faso, as they conspired to undermine state institutions and consolidate control in the tri-border area of Liptako-Gourma.

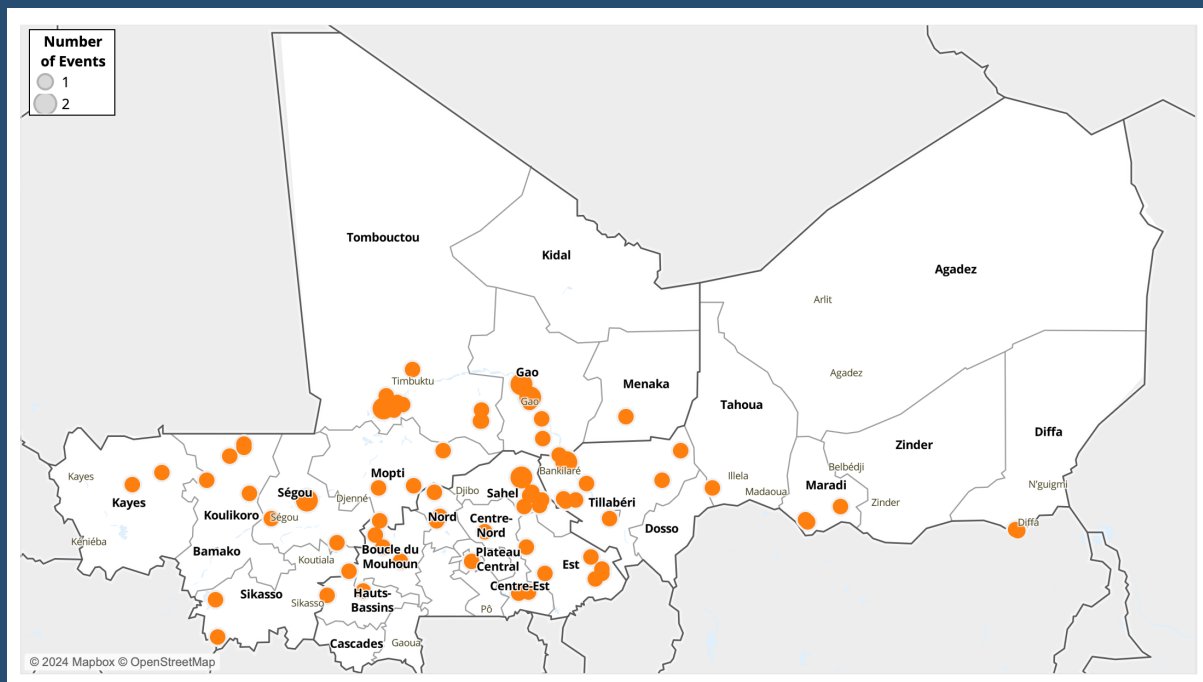
ACLED records over 500 attacks on local state officials in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger between 2018 and 2023. Jihadist groups were reported involved in at least three-quarters of all recorded events. Burkina Faso accounts for approximately half of all events in the Sahel (256), although attacks decreased by a staggering 71% in 2023 compared to the previous year (from 86 events in 2022 to 25 in 2023). According

to some estimates, at least 300 community leaders and their family members were assassinated or abducted in the border areas of the three Sahelian countries between 2018 and 2021. This was a significant increase compared to the previous six years, when fewer than 20 leaders were targeted.

These numbers suggest a deliberate attempt by militants to destabilize and infiltrate local communities. Attacks on village chiefs, councilmen, and other local authorities are aimed at breaking the ties between the central government and rural populations, disrupting intelligence networks, and undermining community morale. These actions create an environment of fear and compliance, providing a fertile environment where jihadists can replace the state to impose their own systems of governance and schooling. Violence against state officials not only facilitates the expansion of jihadist groups but also complicates efforts by state forces to restore security and governance.

¹ Edward McAllister and Lena Masri, 'Extremists target African village leaders in wave of assassinations', Reuters, 8 October 2021.

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials in the Sahel: 2023

ASIA-PACIFIC



ACLED

*Manila City Hall, Philippines
By fazon / Adobe Stock*

ASIA-PACIFIC

Despite a 15% fall in attacks, the Asia-Pacific region — encompassing South, East, and Southeast Asia, and Oceania — remained the most dangerous region in the world for local officials in 2023. Of at least 891 attacks that occurred in the region, nearly two-thirds took place in India (287 events) and Myanmar (233 events), which also topped the list of countries worldwide. In total, the region was home to seven of the top 20 countries worldwide, led by India, Myanmar, the Philippines (130), Nepal (60), and Indonesia (57).

The drivers and forms of this violence are diverse. Though the majority of attacks were perpetrated by a plethora of armed actors, rioters carried out 33% of attacks across the region. In India and the Philippines, local elections saw surges in attacks on local officials in the second half of 2023, albeit with a majority of attacks being perpetrated by rioters in India compared to organized groups in the Philippines. In Indonesia, enduring tensions around separatism and regional autonomy in traditionally restive parts of the countries continued to be the leading drivers of this violence. In the case of Myanmar, the targeting of local officials has continued to present an important battle line between the military and anti-coup forces.

The leading country in the world, **India** witnessed a 44% increase in violence directed at local officials in 2023 compared to 2022, driven by notable increases in violence in West Bengal, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, and Haryana. The most significant increase took place in West Bengal, where *panchayat* — village council — elections in July saw a surge in mob violence targeting the nomination process in the months leading up to the election and election booths on polling day. This violence also occurred during the post-election formation of *panchayat* boards in August. Among the violence in the aftermath of the elections, there were also several targeted attacks on newly elected officials, at least four of which were fatal.

The targeting of local officials has remained an ever-present aspect of the ongoing conflict in post-coup **Myanmar**, colored by disputed definitions of officialdom tangled up in competing claims of legitimacy between the military junta and the National Unity Government (NUG), led by members of the dissolved parliament. Despite the persistent significance of this form of violence in Myanmar, violence directed at local officials fell by 50% compared to 2022 when anti-coup forces carried out a targeted campaign against

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military-appointed officials. Local officials are targeted due to suspected political affiliation with the military or the NUG and its related law enforcement activities. Many military-backed local administrators have been linked to specific military activities, including surveilling anti-coup activists and compiling lists for military conscripts.¹ Some of them are armed and act as members of the pro-military Pyu Saw Htee militias.² At the same time, the military has actively targeted members of NUG administrative bodies, known as the Public Administration Team (Pa Ah Pha), and former local administrators who quit since the coup, especially those who were appointed by the pre-coup government and are suspected of assisting anti-coup armed groups and providing public services.

In the **Philippines**, *barangay* — local village or neighborhood — elections in October saw a late-year spike in attacks on local officials despite an overall 19% decrease in annual violence compared to 2022. Unidentified gunmen carried out the majority of these attacks, with assumed motives spanning the ongoing drug war, blood feuds, and political disputes, while the New People's Army was also implicated in at least six events as part of their long-running communist insurgency. This violence included dozens of lethal attacks on former and current *barangay* officials, as well as the high-profile killing of the governor of Negros Oriental in March 2023. As was the case in 2022, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao continued to be the site of the highest levels of violence targeting local officials.

While the overall level of attacks on local officials remained stagnant in **Nepal** in 2023, the country experienced a growth in these attacks within the context of violent demonstrations — which made up 47% of attacks, compared to 29% in 2022. The growth in such events was particularly notable in Koshi, previously known as Province 1, driven by the administrative decision to rename the province after the Koshi River in March 2023. Demonstrators directly targeted at least seven province-level politicians, including ministers and parliamentarians, during violent demonstrations calling for the province's new name to instead be reflective of the historical importance of the Kirat ethnic identity in the region.

In **Indonesia**, a surge of events in the restive provinces of Papua drove a more than doubling of violence directed toward local officials and government infrastructure nationally in 2023. The separatist West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) was responsible for the largest share of this violence as it intensified its long-running insurgency against the Indonesian state. This surge was particularly pronounced in Highland Papua province, where the TPNPB carried out multiple targeted attacks on local organs of the Indonesian state, killing at least three local officials and carrying out arson attacks on government buildings on at least three separate occasions. Similar arson attacks also occurred in Central Papua province.

¹ Hein Htoo Zan, 'For Local Officials, Myanmar Junta's Conscription Law Is a Goldmine,' *The Irrawaddy*, 21 March 2024; Moe Oo, 'Two village administrators shot dead for assisting Myanmar regime's conscription effort,' *Myanmar Now*, 20 March 2024

² Burma News International, 'Junta officers start military training for Pyu Saw Htee militias,' 28 January 2023; Aung Zay, 'Junta pushes to boost Pyu Saw Htee membership in Bago Region,' *Myanmar Now*, 24 October 2023

ASIA-PACIFIC

SITUATION IN 2023

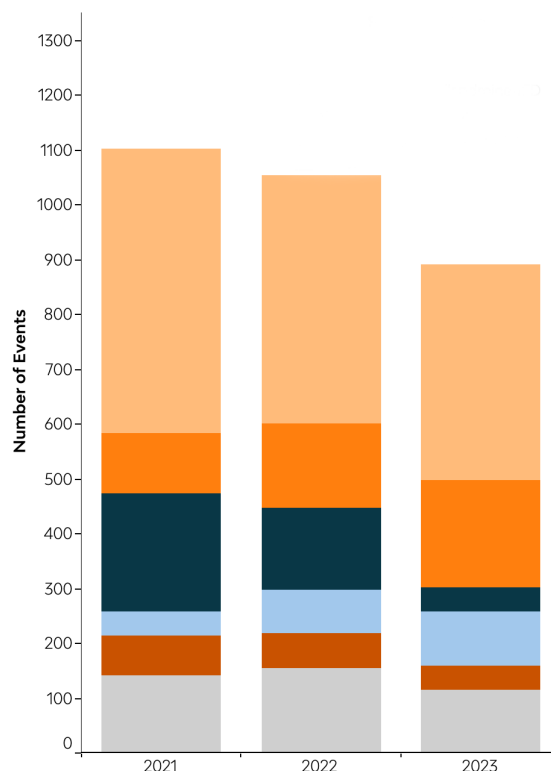
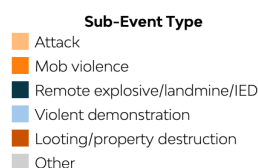
**891** events*recorded in 2023***15%** decrease*compared to 2022*

Top 5 countries with most events

1.	India	287
2.	Myanmar	233
3.	Philippines	130
4.	Nepal	60
5.	Indonesia	57



EVOLUTION SINCE 2021

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PHILIPPINES: Political rivalries in local elections trigger violence

The overall level of violence against local officials in the Philippines fell in 2023 compared to 2022. This reflects a long-standing trend that sees such violence — targeting incumbent officials or those running to be one — increasing during election periods, particularly during the legislative and local elections that happen every three years.¹ The last such elections in May 2022 were especially important because they also coincided with the presidential elections that only happen every six years. As such, for the entirety of 2022 and 2023, the election month of May 2022 saw the highest number of violent events targeting local officials, at 36 events. This figure fell by 78% year-on-year in 2023, with just eight such events recorded in May 2023.

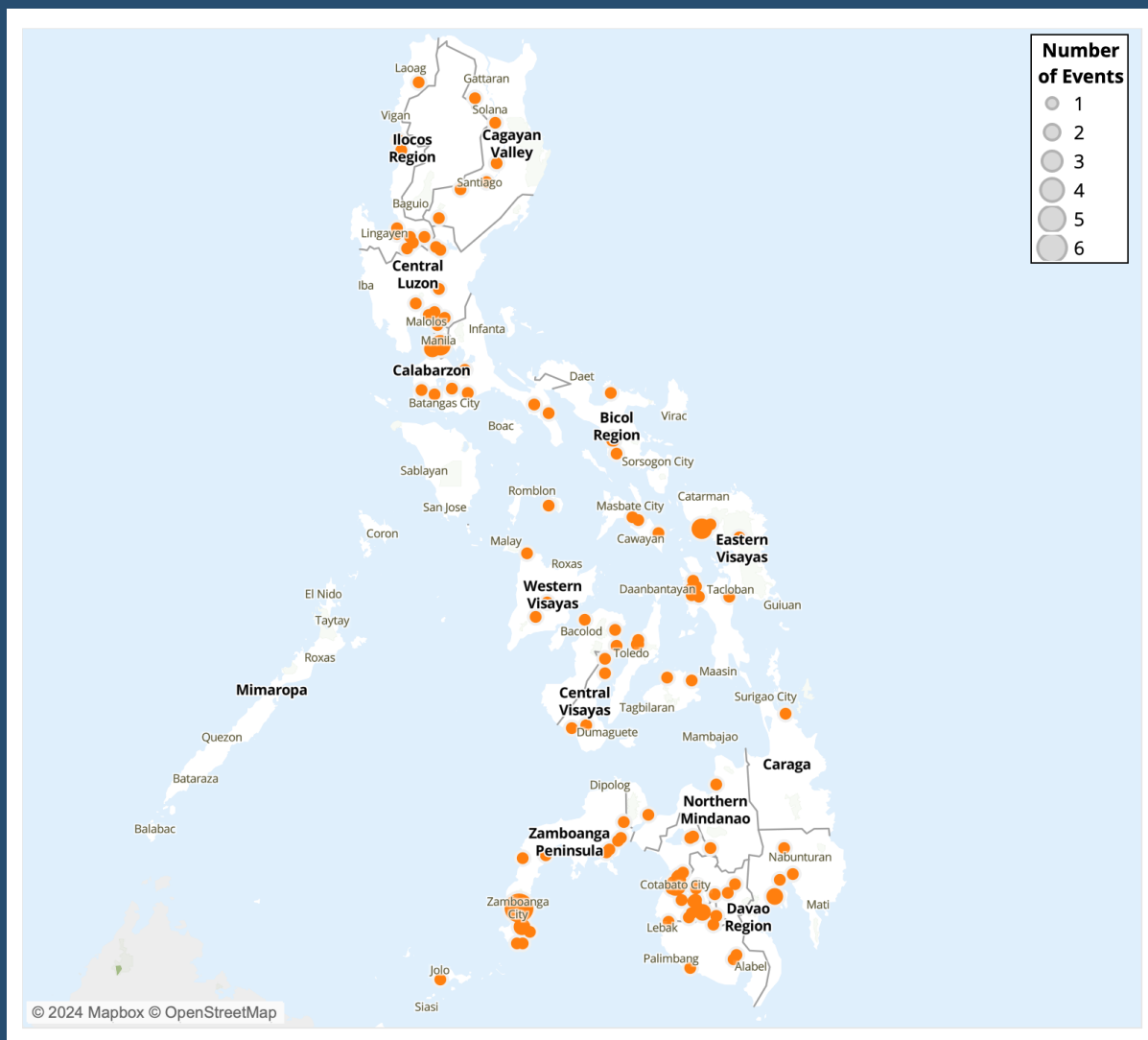
Given this close link between Philippine electoral cycles and violence against local officials, driven partly by rivalries between local elite families, the overall drop in numbers for such violence from 2022 to 2023 was expected. Still, in conformity with the overall pattern, this trend slightly reversed around the period of the *barangay* elections of October 2023,

where positions at the *barangay* level were contested. While these elections are for the lowest administrative unit in the Philippine government, they are still politically significant. September, October, and November 2023 thus registered higher levels of violence targeting local officials compared to the corresponding months in 2022, despite overall numbers for 2023 being lower than in 2022.

For both years, however, the violence remained concentrated in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), recording 35 events in 2022 and 27 events in 2023. As found in [a previous ACLED report](#), the recourse to violence for political disputes has become easier in BARMM than elsewhere due to the concurrent presence of other conflicts, such as those involving Moro secessionists and Islamic State-inspired militants, making weapons easily accessible. Significant violence also extended to the neighboring Zamboanga Peninsula, while an outlier in the northern part of the country was the Calabarzon region, which also saw elevated violence in 2022.

¹ Imelda Deinla et al., 'Introducing the Philippine Electoral Violence (PEV) data set: Uncovering trends, targets, and perpetrators of election-related violence during the 2013–2019 elections,' *Asian Politics & Policy*, 12 April 2023

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EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA



BORNE OUT



ACLED

Mulhouse, France: 7 February 2023 - people protesting against the pensioners reform with placard in french: borne out, in english, burn out. Photo: pixarno / Adobe Stock

EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

In 2023, there were 215 attacks on local officials in nine of the European Union's 27 countries – a 73% increase from the 124 events recorded by ACLED in 2022. France records the highest incidence of cases, with 127 events, more than twice those recorded in Italy (62) – the country that topped the list from 2020 to 2022. Greece with 12 incidents, up from five in 2022), Germany with six, and Cyprus with four follow suit.

The targeting of local officials in the EU is linked to two main trends. The first involves the impact of street violence, chiefly in France, where local officials have been the target of violent actions. The second is the anonymous nature of such attacks, attesting to intimidatory practices that are prevalent in several EU countries.

France accounts for nearly 60% of all events recorded in the EU in 2023. This predominance is largely a by-product of the protest movements that emerged in response to the controversial pension reform bill passed by the government under Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne and the killing of a 17-year-old at the hands of a police officer on 27 June. In addition

to these cases, there were several events attributed to organized groups. On 22 March, a far-right group set ablaze the private residence of the mayor of Saint-Brevin-les-Pins in western France, after the opening of a government-backed refugee center. Likewise, Corsican nationalists claimed responsibility for a string of attacks on town halls and private residences in the island's Ajaccio region, in what appears to be an attempt to boost the group's public profile.¹ These actions, often isolated, suggest the willingness of some radical groups to attack local administrators by virtue of their relative association with the state and their status as low-resource but high-profile enough targets.

In **Italy**, violence against local state officials decreased by approximately a third compared to 2022. ACLED data are largely in line with the figures presented by ACLED's partner Avviso Pubblico and the Italian Ministry of the Interior, which both showed a lull in the number of reported violence and threats against local administrators in 2023.² Similarly to 2022, local officials in the country's southern regions remained the most at risk of unclaimed physical violence. Perpetrators

¹ Yves Bordenave, 'La Ghjuventù clandestina corsa, une « nébuleuse » qui cherche à peser sur l'avenir politique de la Corse', *Le Monde*, 1 March 2023

² Ministero dell'Interno, 'Atti intimidatori nei confronti degli amministratori locali – Report al 30 settembre 2023; October 2023; Avviso Pubblico, 'Amministratori Sotto Tiro – Rapporto 2023', 17 April 2024

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have favored softer targets, including private vehicles (often unguarded and readily accessible property, notably at night), main businesses or practices, and private residences of local officials and their families. Most actions remain unclaimed and are criminal in nature, with the intent of intimidating and influencing local authorities.³

In **Greece** — where the legislative election campaign [rekindled political polarization](#) — violence against local officials has increased amid public outcry over the Tempe train crash on 28 February, the government's mishandling of severe flooding in central Greece in September, and the killing of a 17-year-old Romani youth during a police chase on 11 November. Among the most notable cases are an assault against a regional government transport office in Patras and the aggressions against the governor of Thessaly and the mayor Lamia in central Greece.⁴ In all these cases, the perpetrators had taken part in violent demonstrations against their respective local administrations.

Radical groups in other EU countries have taken advantage of popular dissatisfaction with national institutions to promote their agenda. In **Germany**, the majority of violent acts targeting local officials were linked to national and local political dynamics, including opposition to the anti-migrant rhetoric of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), support

to the ongoing Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, and the controversial demolition of Lutzerath village, in the southwest of Germany, to make room for a coal mine expansion project. In Leipzig, far-left and anarchist groups directly claimed responsibility for an attack against a fleet of municipal cars, citing solidarity with two of the above opposition movements. Similar dynamics also unfolded in **Ireland**, where an unknown far-right group stormed the house of a councilor in the Ballybrack suburb of Dublin, throwing stones at the building and warning him against continuing support to asylum seekers.

Outside the EU, ACLED records a 75% decrease in violence against local administrators in 2023, with a total of 52 events compared to 209 recorded in 2022. This phenomenon continues to be rampant in Ukraine, where aerial and missile attacks launched by Russian forces continue to routinely target the premises of local administrations, like town halls. Trailing Ukraine by some distance are Russia with 15, Kosovo, Moldova, and Uzbekistan with three each.

In **Ukraine**, the shift from a war of movement in 2022 into a war of position in 2023 has gradually changed the nature of attacks against local officials. Often victims of targeted assassinations and abductions with the deliberate aim of [eliminating any resistance to the occupation](#), Ukrainian mayors and local administrators continue

³ ANCI Lombardia, 'Atti intimidatori in Lombardia: I dati e le testimonianze degli amministratori locali,' 5 March 2024

⁴ Florian Schmitz, 'Greece train crash: Protesters rage at political system,' DW, 14 March 2023; Nektaria Stamouli, 'Greek floods bring more flak over government's handling of disasters,' Politico.eu, 9 September 2023; Moira Lavelle, 'Another Roma boy dies in police chase, marking grim pattern in Greece,' Al-Jazeera, 27 November 2023

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to be the target of aerial and missile attacks launched by Russian forces. In the occupied territories, however, there were at least 16 attacks on local officials appointed by the pro-Russian authorities. In at least seven of these cases, the alleged victim of the attack was killed. Ukraine has also targeted administrative buildings in the border region of Belgorod in Russia.

Among the most significant dynamics are the clashes that took place at the end of May 2023 in the Serb-majority areas in northern **Kosovo**. During demonstrations against the inauguration of ethnic Albanian mayors in some Serb-majority towns, rioters assaulted town halls in the Mitrovica region. Following these tensions, Kosovo's main electoral body recommended that elections be repeated, while the representatives of parties representing the Kosovo Serbs announced that they would withdraw their boycott. The region of Mitrovica continues to be a hotbed of tensions. The attack against the ethnic Serb deputy mayor of Leposaviq on 14 November — weeks after a group of Serb militants clashed with Kosovo police in Banjska — points to the delicate role of local governance in the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia.

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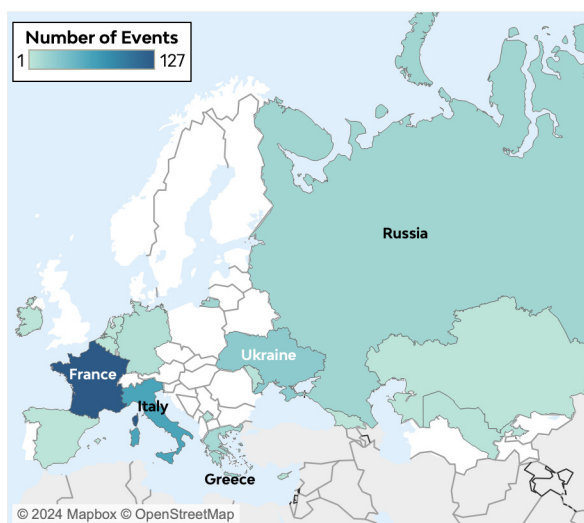
EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

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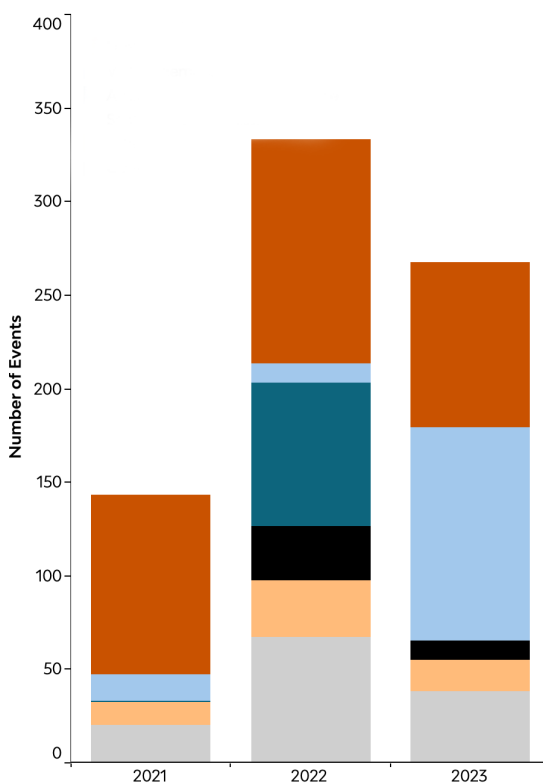
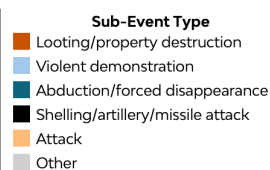
**267** events*recorded in 2023***20%** decrease*compared to 2022*

Top 5 countries with most events

1.	France	127
2.	Italy	62
3.	Ukraine	26
4.	Russia	15
5.	Greece	12



EVOLUTION SINCE 2021

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FRANCE: Public outcry over police shooting manifests in street violence

Recent surveys have shown that France was among the EU countries with the highest levels of trust in local officials — and specifically mayors — in 2023,¹ confirming that French public opinion places trust in their local representatives.² Yet, France is also the European country where local officials were the most exposed to acts of violence in 2023, as attacks against local administrators increased by a staggering 15 times: 127 events in 2023 compared to 10 in 2022). Overall, France accounts for approximately 60% of all aggressions against local officials across the EU.

Cases of violence were reported in all 13 metropolitan regions and in 53 out of 96 departments. 32 events took place in the **Île-de-France** region, followed by 17 in **Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes** and 14 in **Hauts-de-France**. Among the departments accounting for most events are Val d'Oise and Seine-Saint-Denis in Île-de-France (9 and 7 events, respectively) and Nord in Hauts-de-France (8). Taken together, ACLED records violence against state officials in at least 115 distinct locations across the country.

The increase in the violence against local officials is partly an outcome of the mass street activism that broke out in 2023. In approximately 87% of all cases recorded by ACLED in France or 110 events, violence took place in the context of violent

demonstrations. More than 90% of these cases were linked to the street violence that broke out in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of Nahel Merzouk by a police officer in a western suburb of Paris on 27 June. Before that, other violent episodes had characterized the demonstrations against the pension reform presented to parliament by the Borne government. Aggressions were not limited to town halls, police stations, and other public buildings, occasionally set on fire, but were also aimed at mayors, their offices, and private property.³

On the night of 1 to 2 July, rioters rammed a car into the private residence of Vincent Jeanbrun, mayor of L'Haÿ-les-Roses, in the southern suburb of Paris. A mob rammed a car through the gates of his home before setting the vehicle on fire and injuring the mayor's wife and children. The attack sparked a wave of solidarity across the country. Demonstrators rallied outside of hundreds of town halls while the government announced introducing harsher measures to punish violence against local officials.⁴ Among the drivers of street violence against French mayors are social exclusion and widespread frustration with national authorities, whose local representatives are often perceived as ineffective extensions of the institutions in the center.

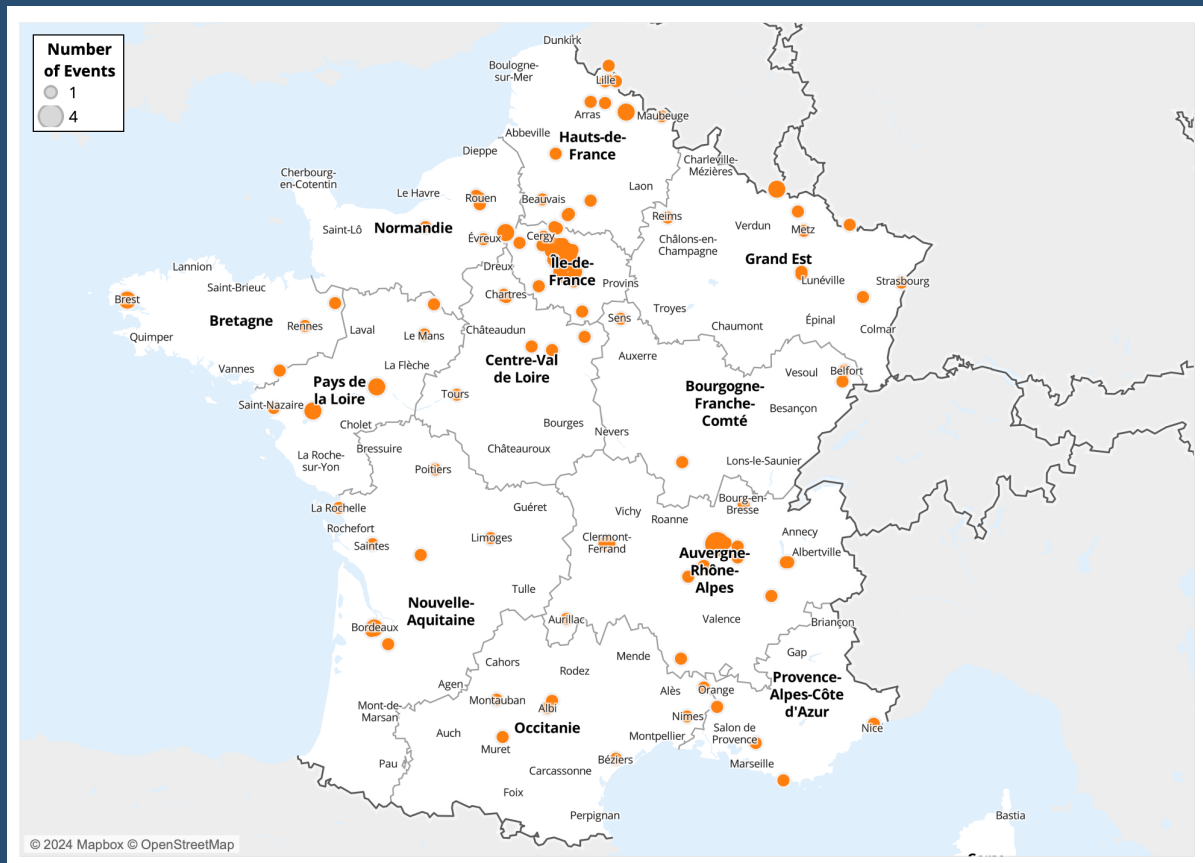
¹ Eloïse Cimbidihi, 'Les Français plébiscitent leurs maires, insuffisamment protégés et rémunérés selon eux,' *Le Figaro*, 23 November 2023; Sciences Po/CEVIPOF and OpinionWay, 'En qu[ot]oi les Français ont-ils confiance aujourd'hui?', February 2024.

² Richard Balme, Jean-Louis Marie, and Olivier Rozenberg, 'Les motifs de la confiance (et de la défiance) politique : intérêt, connaissance et conviction dans les formes du raisonnement politique,' *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 2003; *Le Figaro*, 'Politique: profonde crise de confiance,' 11 January 2010; Public Sénat, 'Sondage: 68 % des Français considèrent que leur maire est l' élu qui comprend le mieux leurs préoccupations,' 20 June 2019.

³ Cyrielle Cabot, 'Les agressions contre les maires, "une incarnation du malaise démocratique",' *France 24*, 3 July 2023.

⁴ Benoît Floc'h, 'Riots in France: Attack on mayor's house one of several targeting elected officials,' *Le Monde*, 2 July 2023; *France 24*, 'Émeutes : devant les maires, Emmanuel Macron annonce une loi d'urgence pour la reconstruction,' 4 July 2023a.

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Residents and members of the new self-defense group known as 'El Machete' look for members of drug gangs and municipal authorities during a protest against the growing violence in the area, in Pantelho, in Chiapas state, Mexico July 27, 2021. Picture taken July 27, 2021. REUTERS/Jacob Garcia

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Latin America and the Caribbean was the only region in the world where attacks against local government officials increased in 2023. Last year the region saw 580 such events, 4% more than in 2022. Mexico (216 events), Colombia (145), Brazil (89), Ecuador (34), and Guatemala (29) accounted for nearly 90% of all reported violence against local officials. While the threats authorities experience have varied across these contexts, the increasing interference of non-state armed groups and criminal gangs in local politics represents a common threat to the security of government officials. The overlap between criminal and political interests leaves local government officials exposed to intimidation and violence — especially around elections, when organized crime groups and other power brokers aim to ensure control of incoming local administrations, often through the use of violence. In addition, national and especially local elections are associated with higher levels of violence against local authorities due to angry mobs' rejection of the results, often prompted by real or perceived irregularities.

Mexico leads the region with the highest number of violent events against local officials. Despite perpetrators usually remaining unidentified, there is a consensus that criminal gangs are behind a large share of attacks, and officials become targets if it is perceived that they are not aligned with criminal groups' interests or are affiliated with a competing group.¹ However, local officials have been exposed to violence that goes beyond gang activity, with research also pointing to the involvement of local power brokers in the violence.² In states such as Puebla, Guerrero, and Chiapas, angered mobs assaulted local government officials accused of poor leadership and a failure to meet community needs. In Santa Isabel Cholula, Puebla state, the president of the auxiliary board³ was retained by a mob for seven hours under allegations of making decisions without consulting citizens, among other alleged malpractice episodes.⁴ While local officials experienced significant threats during the past year, they might face even more danger this year during the upcoming general and subnational elections; ACLED data show that in Mexico, this violence has [spiked](#) during the election periods.

¹ International Crisis Group, 'Mexico's Forgotten Mayors: The Role of Local Government in Fighting Crime,' 23 June 2023

² Gema Kloppe Santamaria, 'Mexico's recent election violence can't be blamed on organized crime gangs alone,' Open Democracy, 10 June 2021

³ Auxiliary boards are decentralized government bodies who act as intermediaries between higher-ranked authorities and the citizens; Telediario, 'Qué es una junta auxiliar y cuáles son las de ciudad de Puebla,' 13 January 2022

⁴ Angelina Bueno, 'Pobladores de Santa Isabel Cholula retienen y castigan a presidente auxiliar,' e-consulta, 20 February 2023

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In **Colombia**, amid local government elections, the targeting of local officials more than doubled in 2023 compared to 2022. This trend intensified in the run-up to the local government elections, culminating on election day, 29 October. Cauca, Norte de Santander, Bolívar, Valle del Cauca, and La Guajira departments – all of which have a strong presence of armed groups – record nearly half of these events. To solidify their control in these areas, and regardless of the peace talks some of them are entertaining with the government, armed groups have directed targeted attacks or threats to mayors, members of the municipal councils, and other high-ranking officials, either incumbent or newly elected, who were forced to leave their towns and perform their duties in other municipalities.⁵ Electoral authorities and facilities have also been targets of threats and unrest motivated by discontent with election outcomes. In Gamarra, Cesar, a registry office was burned a day before the elections.⁶ After the voting, officials from municipal registries in Antioquia received threats amidst discontent with the results and fraud claims.⁷

In contrast, violence against local officials decreased by 26% compared to 2022 in **Brazil**. This also coincides with a 6% decrease in overall violence targeting civilians and a 5% decrease in overall political violence. This shift reflects a pattern over the last four years in which violence fluctuates every other year along

the electoral calendar. In 2020 and 2022, [violence targeting local officials increased](#), coinciding with the 2020 local elections and the polarized 2022 general elections. Regardless of this trend, a pattern has been common in the past two years: More than 85% of violence targeting local officials was likely perpetrated by militias and criminal groups. Likewise, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo continue to be among the top three states with the highest levels of violence, accounting for nearly 30% of events nationwide. Attacks against local officials also continued in the northern states, especially in Rio Grande do Norte, where events more than tripled compared to 2022, driving the state to closely follow Rio de Janeiro in the number of incidents. Gangs and criminal groups in Rio Grande do Norte reportedly target local government officials in retaliation for the harsh security measures imposed by the authorities.⁸ In March, the Sindicato do Crime gang carried out [several coordinated attacks](#) across the state against public infrastructure, including city halls and municipal chambers, an escalation motivated by demands for better conditions in the state's prisons.⁹ Nevertheless, criminal interests are not the sole driver of violence. Studies have shown that politicians also frequently target local officials to uphold corrupt agreements.¹⁰

In **Ecuador**, escalating gang activity that resulted in [unprecedented levels of political violence ahead of the August snap election](#), as well as the assassination

⁵ Defensoría del Pueblo, 'Servidores públicos en 17 departamentos han tenido que desplazarse debido a amenazas de grupos armados,' 16 June 2023; Julio Caicedo

and Ricardo González, 'Elecciones amenazadas: voces de alcaldes desplazados de sus municipios,' La Silla Vacía, 11 July 2023

⁶ El Espectador, 'A menos de 24 horas de elecciones, incendian sede de Registraduría en Gamarra (Cesar),' 28 October 2023

⁷ El Colombiano, 'Registradores en Antioquia están recibiendo amenazas por descontento con resultados de elecciones de octubre,' 30 November 2023

⁸ Herculano Barreto Filho, 'Ataques no RN: facção usa tática terrorista, enfrenta PCC e desafia Estado,' UOL, 15 March 2023

⁹ Jeniffer Mendonça, 'Sindicato do Crime e PCC se uniram por melhorias nas prisões do RN, aponta pesquisadora,' Ponte, 16 March 2023

¹⁰ Mariana Carvalho Barbosa, 'Political Assassinations and Criminal Politics in Brazil,' UC San Diego, 2022

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of a presidential candidate, also put local government officials at risk. The geography of this violence follows a pattern associated with illicit economies. Nearly 80% of the attacks targeting local officials took place in the Esmeraldas, Guayas, and Manabí provinces, areas of strategic importance for drug trafficking operations, either because of their proximity to the Colombian border or because their ports are located across the Pacific Ocean coast.¹¹ In these areas, criminal groups target officials who are perceived as at odds with criminal interests or unwilling to accept bribes.¹² The city of Durán, the second largest in Guayas, was the site of several violent incidents. On 3 August, the city's director of territorial planning was shot and killed.¹³ The manager of the property registry was a victim of a targeted attack on 26 September.¹⁴ The mayor, who was also a victim of an attack during his second day in office,¹⁵ has alluded to the attempts to formalize irregular settlements and neighborhoods controlled by criminal groups as one of the reasons behind rising violence against local officials in the city.¹⁶

Violence targeting local officials also doubled in **Guatemala**, reaching the highest levels since ACLED started covering the country in 2018, and took place in 14 of the country's 22 departments.

These concentrated around the [25 June general election](#) and the equally [turbulent aftermath](#). In the days following election day, rioters assaulted polling stations amid claims of electoral irregularities.¹⁷ Newly elected members of municipal councils and mayors were also victims of harassment and aggression. On 18 July, in Santa Cruz del Quiché, an elected councilman of the Vamos party was shot and injured by unidentified gunmen.¹⁸ Two days later, in Ayutla, 10 unidentified attackers opened fire against the house of the newly elected mayor.¹⁹ In both cases, the reasons behind the attacks remain unknown. Beyond the elections, local officials were also exposed to violence related to local struggles. On 9 February, the house of the mayor of Nahualá was burned down after clashes between Nahualá and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán communal militias.²⁰ The two municipalities have been involved in a long-standing dispute over the delimitation of boundaries since 1862.²¹

¹¹ BBC News Mundo, 'Asesinato de Fernando Villavicencio: cómo pasó Ecuador de ser país de tránsito a un centro de distribución de la droga en América Latina,' 11 August 2023

¹² Anastasia Austin, 'Plata o plomo: funcionarios públicos en Ecuador bajo la mira de las bandas,' Insight Crime, 27 March 2024

¹³ Roberto Cadena, 'Lo que se sabe del asesinato de Miguel Santos Burgos, director de terrenos del Municipio de Durán,' Metro Ecuador, 3 August 2023

¹⁴ El Universo, 'Gerente del Registro de la Propiedad de Durán esquivó atentado la tarde de este martes,' 26 September 2023

¹⁵ Kiarinna Parisi, 'Atentado contra un alcalde en Ecuador deja al menos 1 policía muerto y varios heridos,' CNN, 15 May 2023

¹⁶ Alexander García, 'El crimen organizado marca los pasos del Municipio de Durán,' Primicias, 26 September 2023

¹⁷ Oscar García, 'Bombas, disturbios y carros quemados: Las imágenes de los incidentes en algunos municipios durante las elecciones 2023 en Guatemala,' Prensa Libre, 25 June 2023; Transparencia Electoral, 'Elecciones en Guatemala: Abstencionismo y disturbios,' 26 June 2023

¹⁸ Sandy Pineda and Héctor Cordero, 'Qué se sabe del ataque armado contra concejal electo de Santa Cruz del Quiché,' Prensa Libre, 18 July 2023

¹⁹ La Hora, 'Reportan atentado contra vivienda de alcaldesa electa de Ayutla,' 20 July 2023

²⁰ Fátima Najjarro, 'Enfrentamiento Nahualá-Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán: Queman casa de alcalde Manuel Guarchaj,' La Hora, 10 February 2023

²¹ Gilberto Escobar, 'Los detonantes del conflicto entre Nahualá y Santa Catarina,' Plaza Pública, 3 May 2022

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SITUATION IN 2023

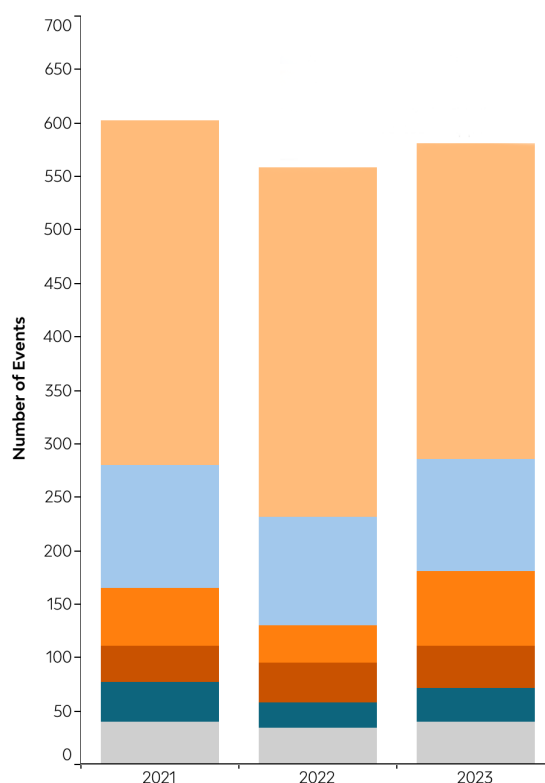
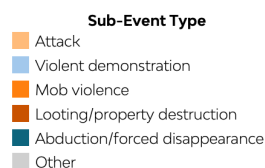
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Top 5 countries with most events

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3.	Brazil	89
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5.	Guatemala	29



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Forms of Violence Used Against
Local Officials: 2021 – 2023**ACLED**

COLOMBIA: Intensified armed group violence puts mayors and social leaders at risk

Local elections held in October 2023 drove an increase in violence targeting local officials in Colombia. Most of the incidents where local officials were targeted took place in municipalities affected by armed groups' violence. It intensified before and after the elections as armed groups sought access to local power to control security operations and funnel illicit earnings through government contracts.¹ To that end, they threatened and targeted political figures, including social leaders, who they deemed likely to hamper their illicit operations – namely drug production and trafficking, extortion, and illegal mining. Increased pressure on local administrators in areas with a heavy presence of armed groups notably forced at least 12 mayors to exercise their function from another municipality.² Although the targeting of local officials increased during previous electoral cycles, 2023 stands out for its high levels of violence. Paradoxically, the peace negotiations launched in 2022 by President Gustavo Petro, along with the related ceasefires signed with some armed groups, may have exacerbated this violence, as armed groups apparently tightened their control over territories and intensified clashes with rival groups.³

Notwithstanding, competition between candidates and irregularities in the electoral process also remained drivers of violence against local officials, as interest groups and powerful families sought to interfere in the elections' outcome to secure the victory of their candidate.⁴ In 2023, about a third of recorded violence was also attributable to a spike in riots, especially around the vote, during which ballots were burned and polling stations were set ablaze in a number of municipalities. According to the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia, most cases of unrest were prompted by voting irregularities and claims of fraud against the backdrop of a highly polarized political environment.⁵ One such case was reported in the town of Gamarra, Cesar department, where municipal candidates were suspected of coordinating a riot hours before the vote against the removal of their candidate from the race by electoral bodies. The incident led to the burning of the National Registry and the killing of a civil servant.

¹ International Crisis Group, 'Colombia: Is "Total Peace" Back on Track?', 4 October 2023

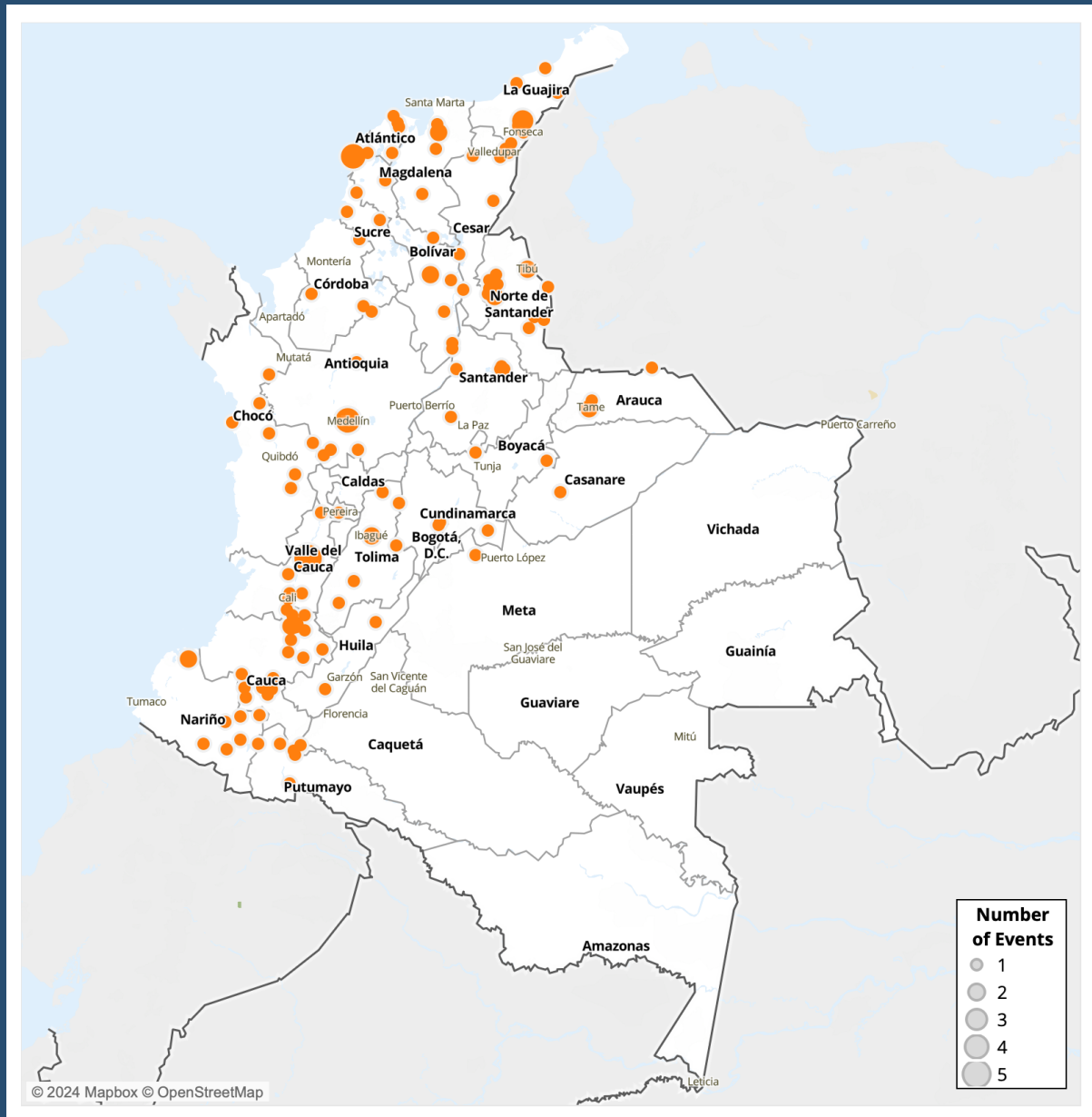
² Misión de Observación Electoral, 'Cuarto informe preelectoral de violencia contra liderazgos políticos, sociales y comunales en el 2023 (29 de octubre 2022 – 29 de mayo 2023)', 29 May 2023, p.12

³ Sergio Saffron and Sara García, 'GameChangers 2023: Unintended Consequences for Colombia's "Total Peace"', Insight Crime, 29 December 2023

⁴ Elizabeth Dickinson, 'Elecciones regionales en Colombia ponen a prueba la paz', International Crisis Group, 25 October 2019

⁵ Defensoría del Pueblo, 'Defensoría del Pueblo registró un total de 98 eventos de disturbios y protestas relacionados con las elecciones regionales, 31 October 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials in Colombia: 2023

MIDDLE EAST



A fighter from the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF) stands with his weapon at the western entrance to Manbij city, in Aleppo Governorate, Syria, June 21, 2016. REUTERS/Rodi Said

MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, ACLED records 111 acts of violence directed toward local officials, a reduction of 13% from 2022. Syria (32), Yemen (27), Iraq (17), Turkey (17), and Palestine (8) saw the highest number of events targeting local officials, and accounted for 91% of all events. Iran dropped from fourth place in 2022 to seventh place, with just three events. This follows the decrease in activity relating to the death of Mahsa Amini that began in September 2022. Events perpetrated by unidentified armed groups remained at similar levels, accounting for 44% of all events in 2023 and 43% in 2022.

Despite recording a 22% decrease in the number of events targeting local officials in 2023, **Syria** retained its position as first in the region, making up nearly a third of all events. In a repeat of 2022, violence was largely carried out by unidentified armed groups (18), two-thirds of which occurred in Daraa governorate. The Islamic State (IS) was the most prolific identified actor, perpetrating five attacks on Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD) local officials in Dayr al-Zawr as part of their ongoing insurgency in the region. In total, 12 events were reported in Dayr al-Zawr, compared

to six in the previous year, making it the governorate with the largest increase. In comparison, Aleppo governorate dropped from 12 events in 2022 to two in 2023.

27 events targeting local officials were recorded in **Yemen**, a 13% decrease compared to 2022. Violence against local officials happens in a climate of widespread impunity, with unidentified armed groups reported to be the perpetrators in over half of the reported events (15 out of 27). In the central Taizz governorate, home to at least nine reported events, violence is largely an outcome of the infighting within the governing coalition. In the southern Aden and Abyan governorates, which record four and three events, respectively, competition between the secessionist [Southern Transitional Council](#) (STC) and the [Internationally Recognized Government](#) is a significant driver of violence. In the STC-controlled city of Aden, armed separatists allegedly abducted an advisor to a district director in June. In Abyan, forces loyal to STC also abducted local council members and tribesmen against the backdrop of a counterterrorism drive against [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#).

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

In **Iraq**, violence also dropped by 39% from 28 recorded events in 2022 to 17 in 2023. The only governorate that saw an increase in events was Thi Qar, which rose from three events in 2022 to seven in 2023. Unidentified armed groups were also responsible for the most events (10), followed by IS and tribal militias. Despite a [relatively peaceful election period in December](#), there was one instance of violence against local officials recorded in Kufa city, Najaf, when unknown militants detonated two IEDs and a sound grenade near three voting stations.

Turkey rose from fifth to joint-third place, recording 17 events in 2023 compared to six in 2022. There was an increase in violence both [before](#) and [after](#) President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was re-elected president on 28 May. In the run-up to the vote, a local council president in the southeastern town of Viransehir and the Republican People's Party (CHP) mayor of Erdek, Balikesir province, were victims of aggression in March. Other opposition officials were subject to intimidation attempts in the weeks preceding the vote, including shots fired into the air next to a vehicle belonging to a local executive of the CHP in Elazig and the storming of a public meeting organized by opposition parties that injured 17 people. On election day, ballot box workers affiliated with Erdogan's Justice Development Party (AKP) assaulted

the CHP mayor of Beylikduzu when he was casting his vote, and in Izmir, unknown persons vandalized a People's Democratic Party (HDP) building with racist words. Separately, the Kurdish People's United Revolutionary Movement (HBDM) carried out at least six attacks against symbols of the government, including a string of bomb explosions targeting municipal buildings in Istanbul, Şanlıurfa, and Van regions on 25 August.

Palestine also moved up one place in 2023, recording eight events compared to five the year prior. The Israeli military destroyed municipality buildings in both Gaza City and Khan Yunis as part of the ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israeli settlers carried out at least three distinct attacks on Palestinian local officials, two of which were before the Hamas attacks on 7 October. On 22 March, armed settlers opened fire on a vehicle belonging to the municipality of Salfit, and on 19 August, both Israeli settlers and soldiers assaulted Palestinian workers of the Qaffin municipality. On 22 October, the head of the Kisan village council near Bethlehem was the victim of aggression conducted by armed settlers – an example of the rising Israeli settler violence after 7 October.

MIDDLE EAST

SITUATION IN 2023

 **111** events
recorded in 2023

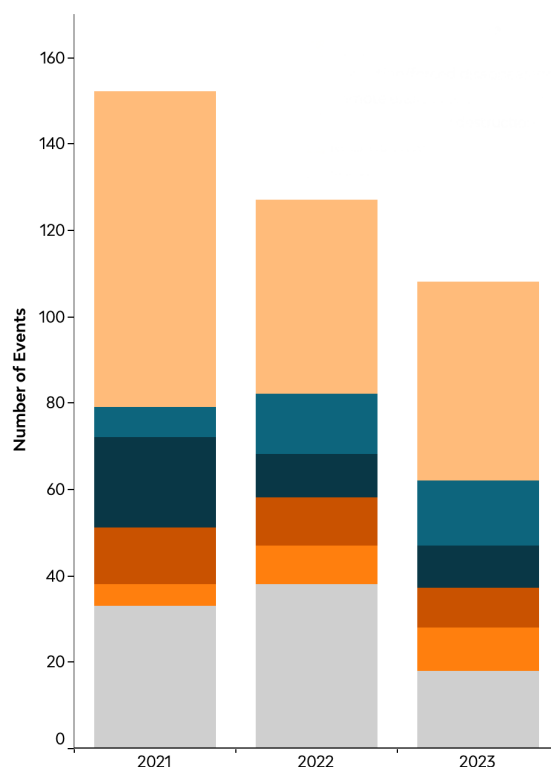
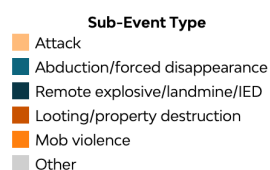
 **13%** decrease
compared to 2022

Top 5 countries with most events

1.	Syria	32
2.	Yemen	27
3.	Iraq	17
4.	Turkey	17
5.	Palestine	8



EVOLUTION SINCE 2021

Forms of Violence Used Against
Local Officials: 2021 – 2023

SYRIA: Attacks attempt to subvert regional control

Local governance continues to be highly contested in Syria. Attempts by the Islamic State (IS) and other armed groups to weaken the regime of Bashar al-Assad and other rebel-held administrations make Syria the country with the highest number of violent events targeting local officials in the Middle East, with 32 events recorded in 2023 alone. At least 266 events took place in Syria between 2018 and 2023.

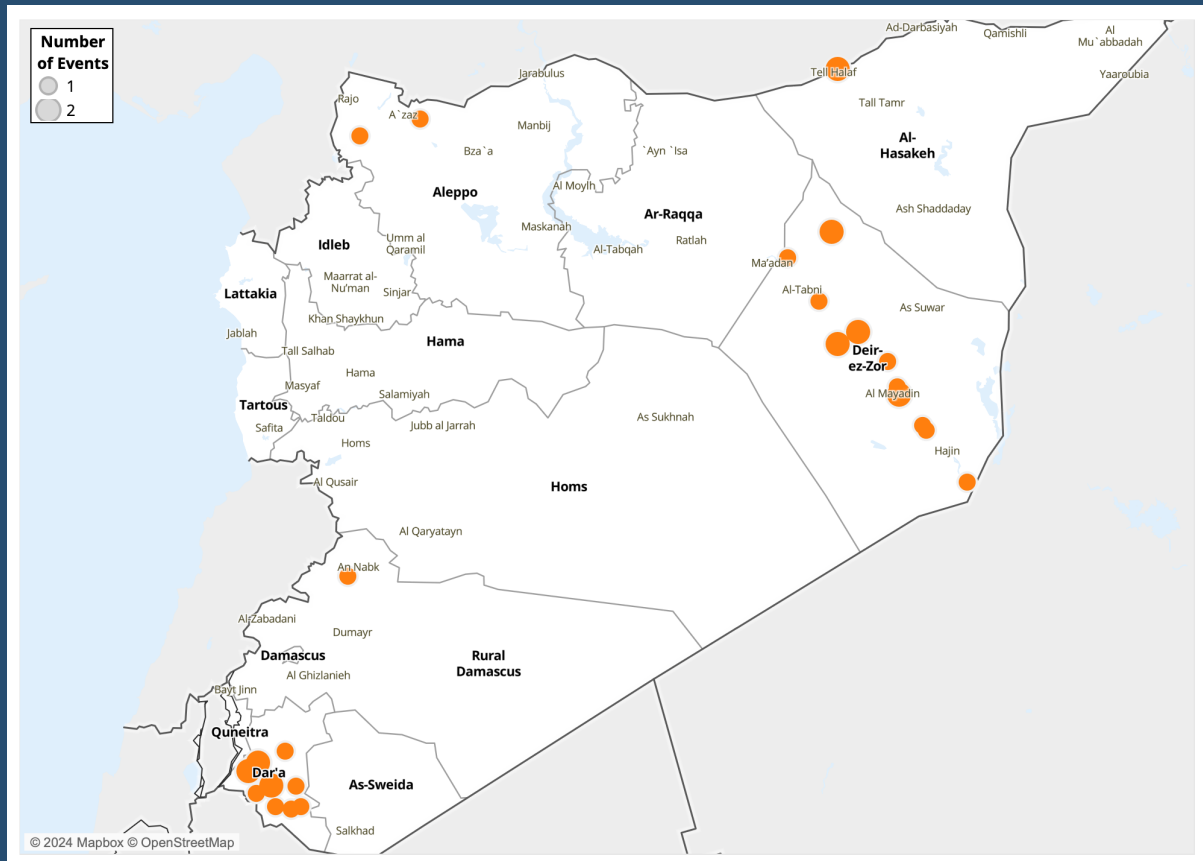
The eastern governorate of **Dayr al-Zawr** accounts for approximately 47% of all attacks on local officials recorded in Syria. The region, once partially under the control of IS, is now split between the Syrian government and the breakaway administration under the authority of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD). IS militants were allegedly involved in five distinct attacks on QSD officials in the countryside of Dayr al-Zawr, killing at least three council members. These actions suggest an attempt by IS to destabilize the local administration, while the detention of an IS member serving as a commissar in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria points to the group's penetration in the region. Other attacks reportedly occurred at the hands of unidentified armed groups and Iranian-backed militias.

The regime-held governorate of **Daraa** is another hotbed of violence against local officials, with 12 events recorded in 2023 and 71 total between 2018 and 2023. Unlike in Dayr al-Zawr, attacks against local administrators in Daraa remain largely unclaimed. Once an opposition stronghold, Daraa fell under the control of the Syrian government in 2018. A string of assassinations has since targeted officials who are suspected of collaboration with either the regime or the opposition.¹ Other interpretations point to an internecine fighting between different branches of the Syrian regime vying for influence. These dynamics are evident in the town of al-Naymah, whose mayor was killed by unidentified gunmen in September 2023. The two previous mayors were also assassinated in 2021 and 2022.²

¹ Horan Free League, 'Human rights report: Continuing bleeding in Daraa 2023', 5 January 2024

² North Press Agency, 'For The Third Year In A Row, The Third Mayor Was Killed In Daraa', 12 September 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials in Syria: 2023

UNITED STATES & CANADA



ACLED

*An employee of the Fulton County Board of Registration and
Elections processes ballots in Atlanta, Georgia U.S., November 4, 2020.
REUTERS/Brandon Bell*

UNITED STATES & CANADA

Local officials in the United States have faced an increasing number of threats, ranging from insults to harassment, threats, and physical attacks.¹ Death threats and harassment against elected and appointed officials at various administrative levels have been reported in nearly all US states and increased in 2023, recent research by Princeton University's Bridging Divides Initiative shows.² Law enforcement has struggled to ensure the security of local officials, with arrests being made only in a handful of cases.³ Claims of election fraud and inflammatory rhetoric from candidates may, however, increase the risks of intimidation and targeted violence against local officials, including election workers and judicial officials overseeing the regular conduct of elections in 2024.

ACLED records four acts of violence against local officials in 2023, down from five in 2022, six in 2021, and 17 in 2020. Events recorded in 2023 include cases from across the country: shots fired outside the office of Democratic State Senator Antonio Maestas in Albuquerque, New Mexico and on the home of Republican State Representative Spencer Roach in North

Fort Myers, Florida;⁴ an aggression against Democratic State Representative Maryam Khan in Hartford, Connecticut;⁵ and bricks thrown through a window of Democratic State Senator Iwen Chu's district office in Brooklyn, New York.⁶ ACLED's relaunched [United States Crisis Monitor](#) provides regular coverage of demonstration and political violence trends across the US in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential elections, tracking, among other things, all acts of violence carried out against local officials.

In addition to acts of violence, US local officials are exposed to several forms of intimidation, such as harassment and threats, many of which may not be fully captured by ACLED. Some of these trends started emerging in late 2023. Some elected officials were subject to 'swatting', an increasingly frequent practice consisting of falsely reporting a serious emergency to solicit the dispatch of law enforcement to a specific address. In December 2023, fake calls targeted several political figures from across the political spectrum, including Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu.⁷

¹ Gowri Ramachandran et al., 'Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders,' Brennan Center for Justice, 25 January 2024

² BDI, 'BDI Launches Public Event-Level Dataset on Threats and Harassment Against Local Officials,' 11 April 2024

³ Reuters, 'Campaign of Fear: The Trump World's Assault on U.S. Election Workers'; Linda So and Jason Szep, 'U.S. election workers get little help from law enforcement as terror threats mount,' Reuters, 8 September 2021

⁴ Nicole Maxwell, 'Police investigating after shots fired at Democratic politicians' houses,' New Mexico Political Report, 6 January 2023; Tomas Rodriguez, 'Bullet strikes front window of Florida House member Spencer Roach's Lee County home,' The News-Press, 20 July 2023

⁵ Deena Zaru, 'Connecticut state Rep. Maryam Khan speaks out about alleged assault at Eid prayer service,' ABC News, 6 July 2023

⁶ CBS News, 'Mou Hu accused of throwing brick through window at State Sen. Iwen Chu's Brooklyn office,' 15 July 2023

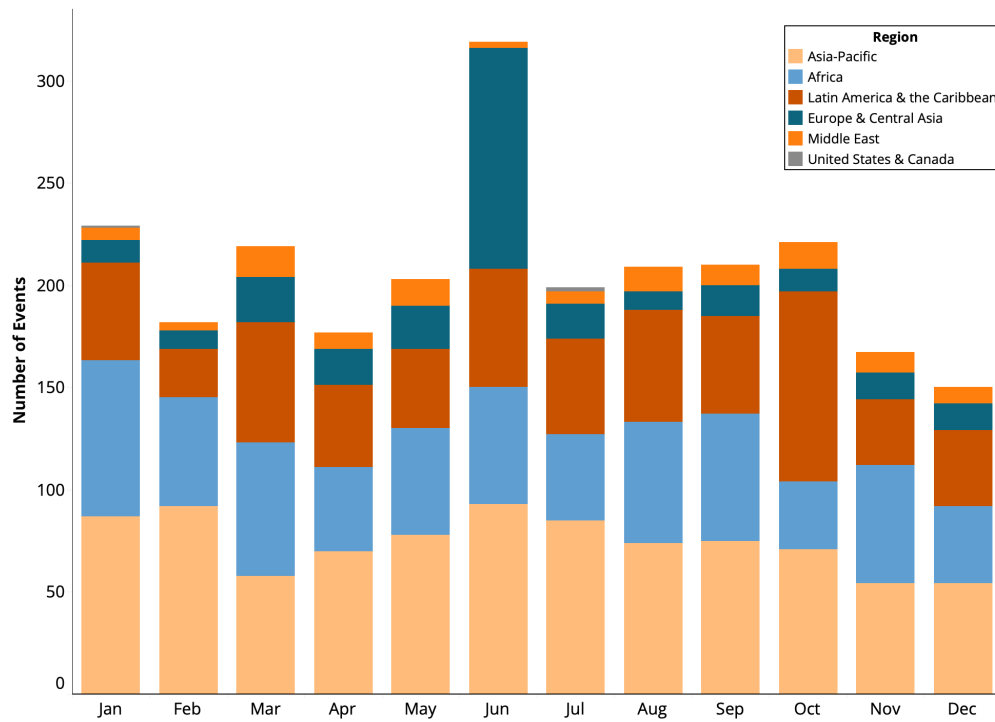
⁷ Brian Bennett, 'Swatting Hoaxes Are Targeting Elected Officials From Both Parties. Here's What to Know,' Time, 3 January 2024

VISUAL APPENDIX

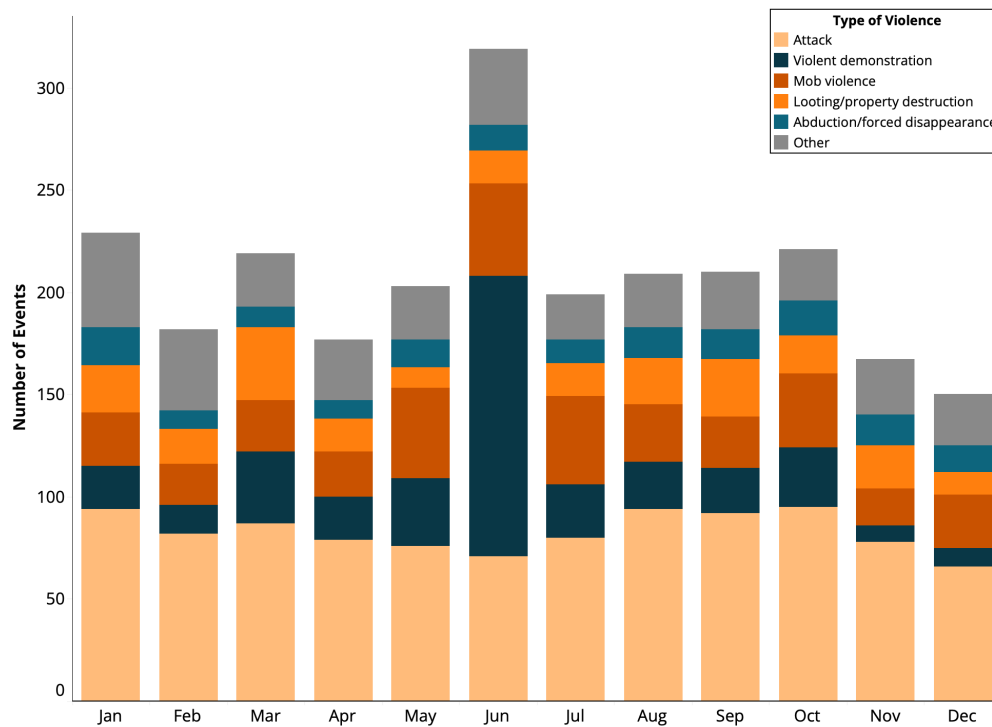
Country	2022	2023	Change Compared to 2022	
India	199	287	↑	44%
Myanmar	466	233	↓	-50%
Mexico	221	216	↓	-2%
Colombia	71	145	↑	104%
Nigeria	154	135	↓	-12%
Philippines	160	130	↓	-19%
France	10	127	↑	1,170%
Brazil	121	89	↓	-26%
South Africa	76	77	↑	1%
Somalia	91	74	↓	-19%

Top 10 Countries with Most Violence Targeting Local Officials in 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

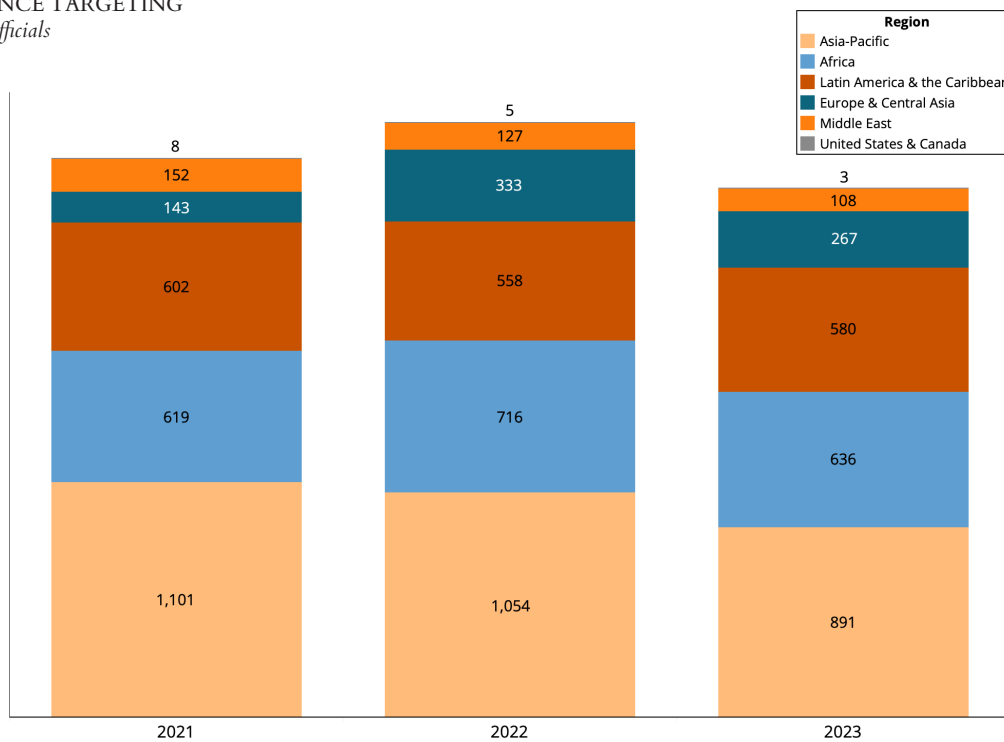


Violence Targeting Local Officials by Region: 2023

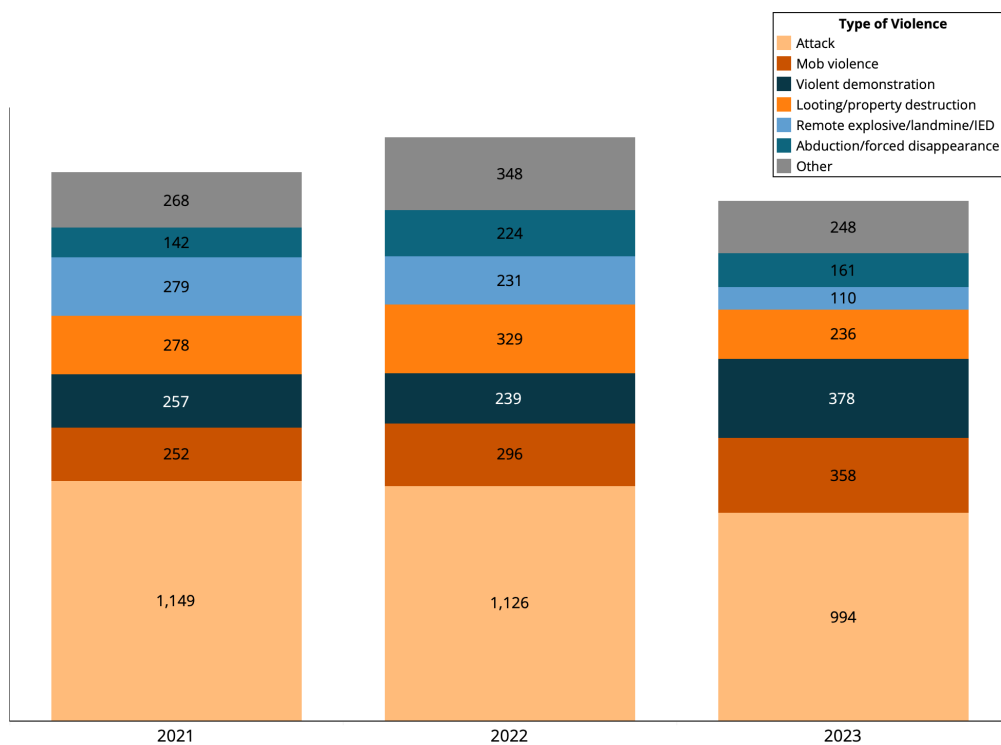


Violence Targeting Local Officials by Type of Violence: 2023

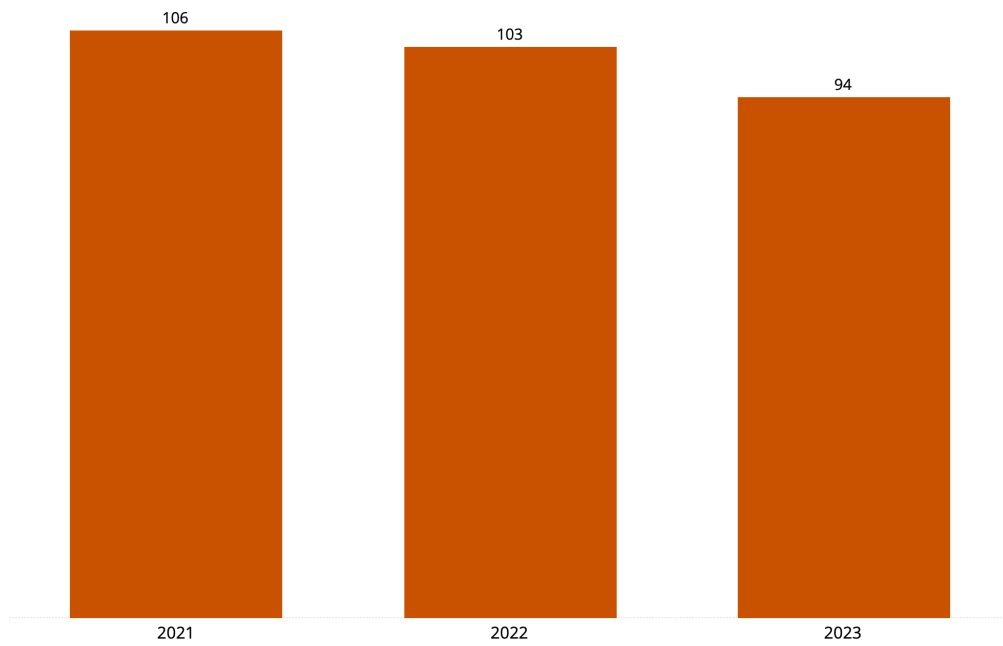
VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials by Region: 2021–2023



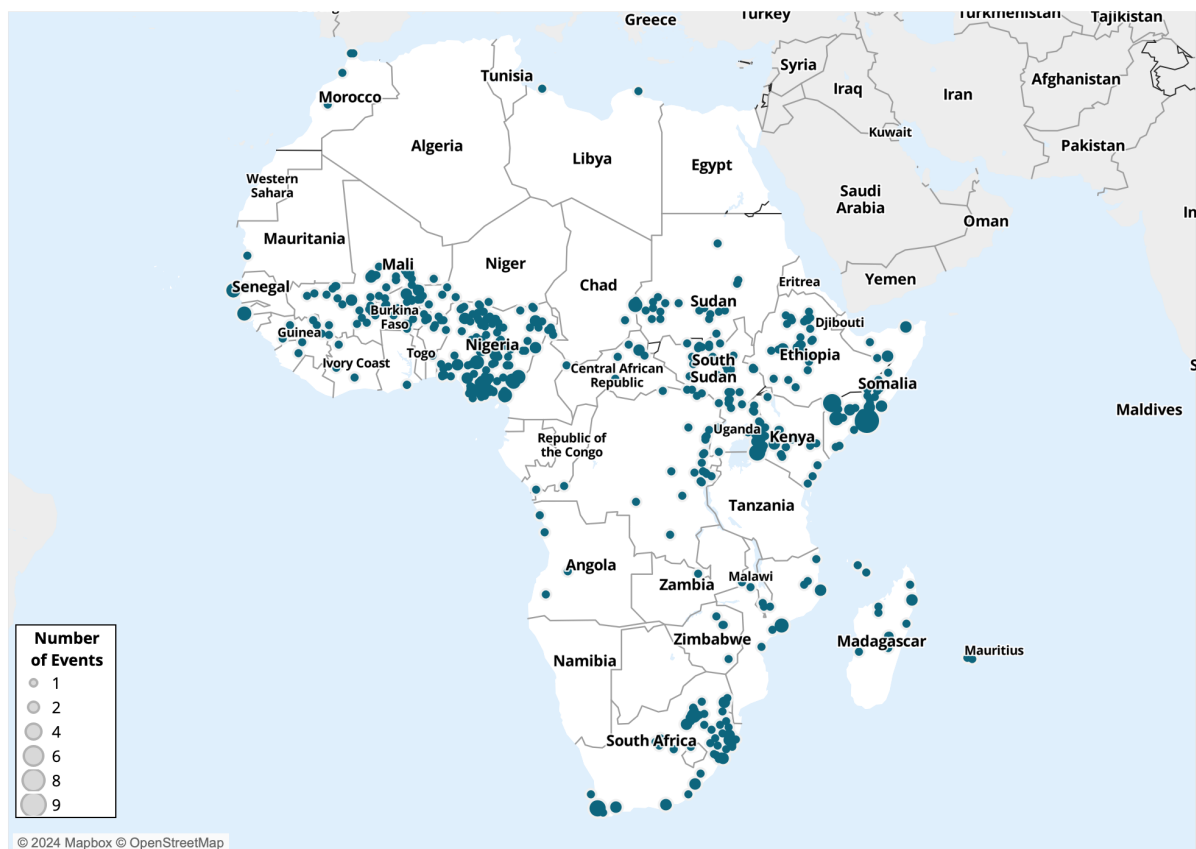
Violence Targeting Local Officials by Type of Violence: 2021–2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2021–2023

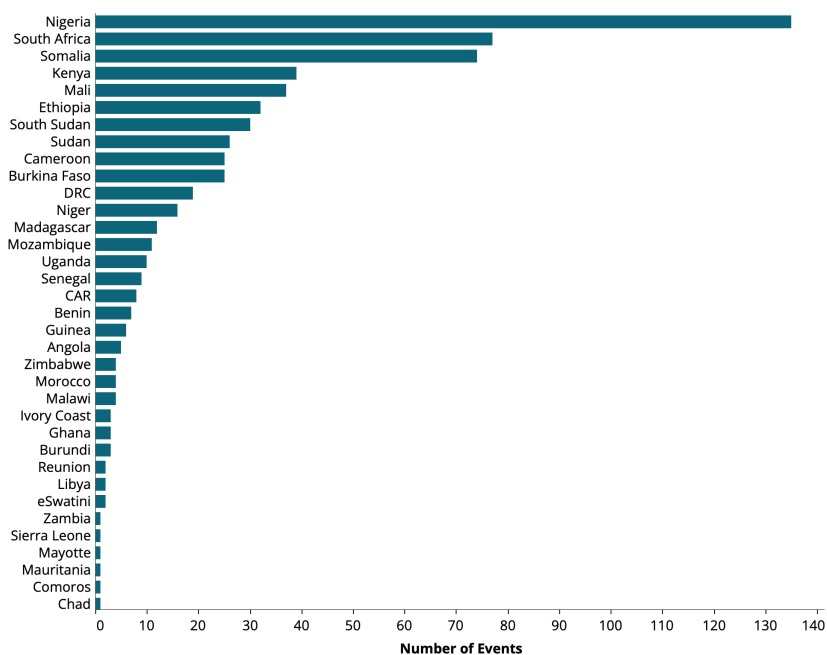


REGIONAL TRENDS: AFRICA

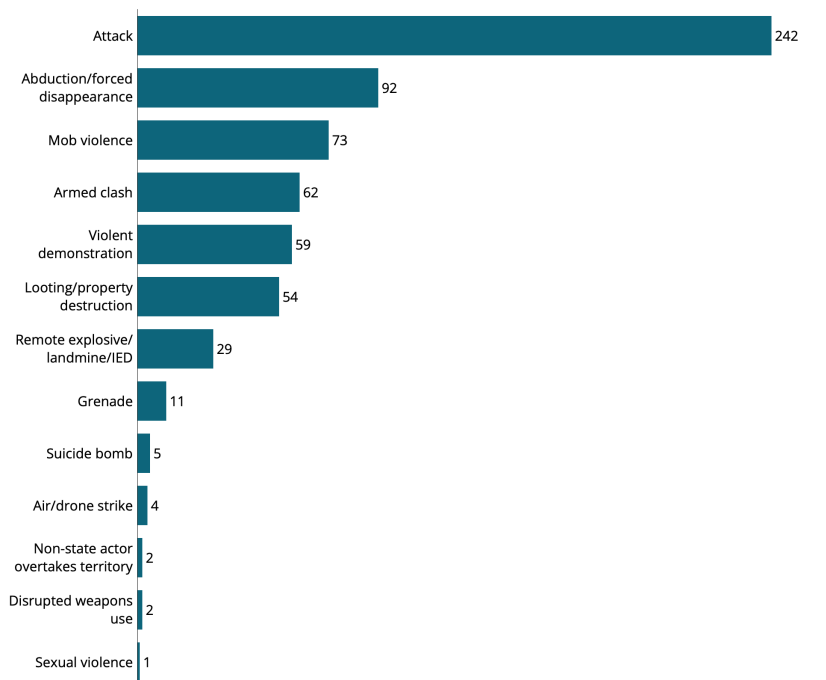


Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

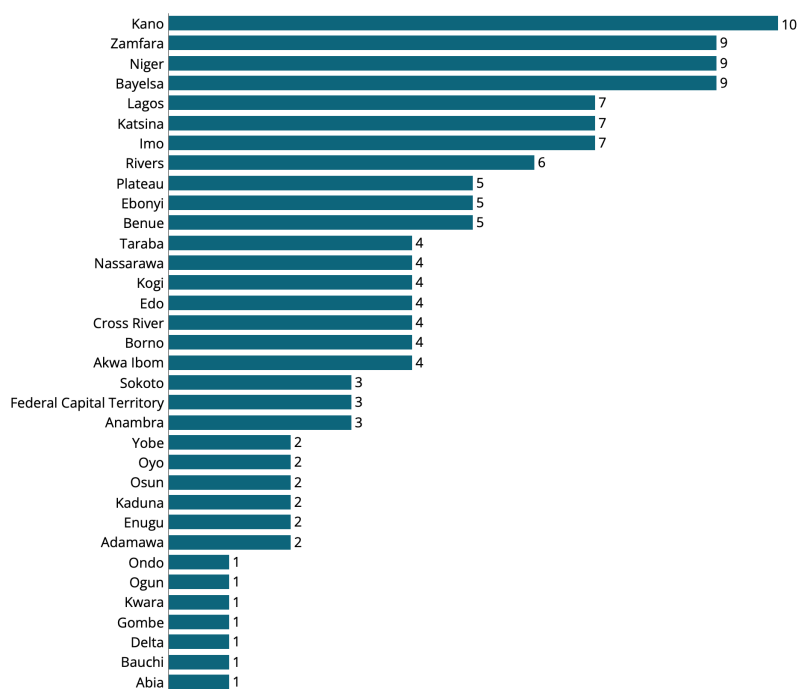


Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials in Africa: 2023

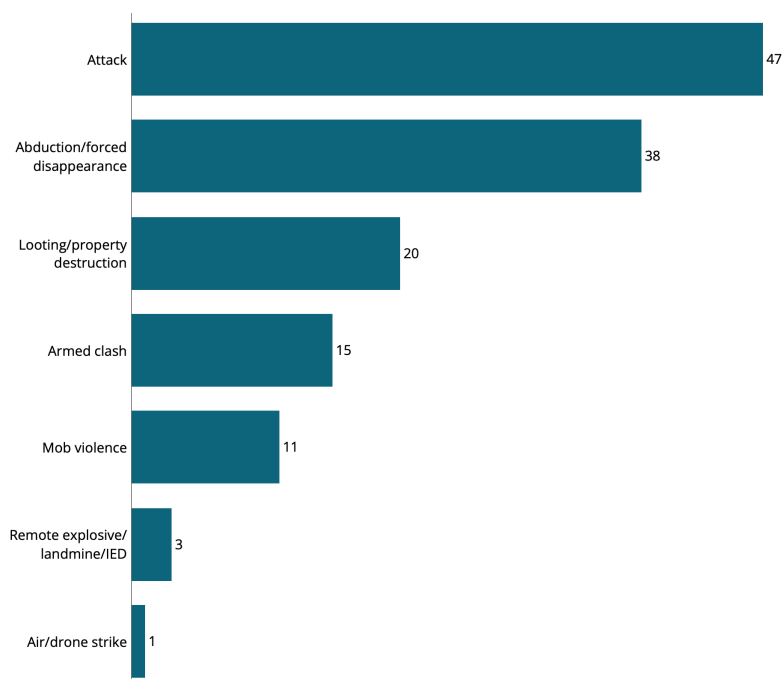


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Africa: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials



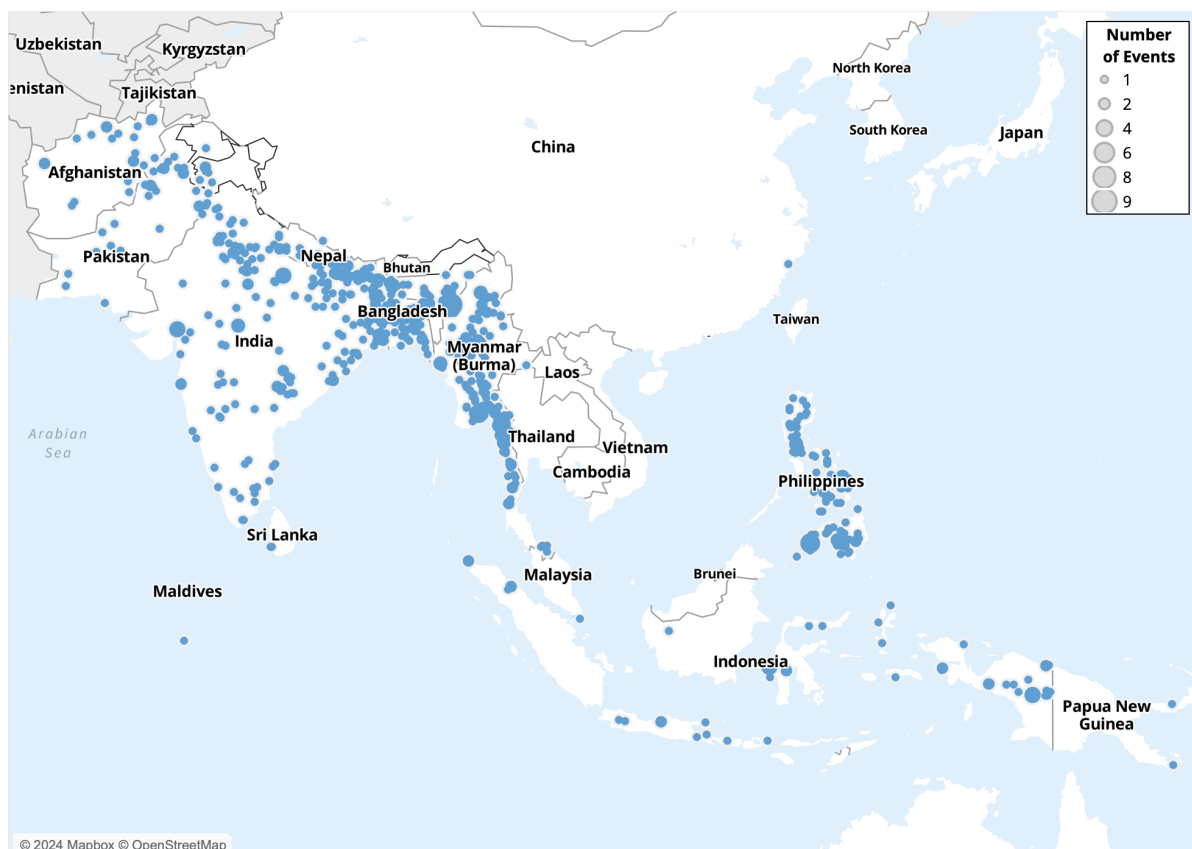
Violence Targeting Local Officials Events per State in Nigeria: 2023



Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Nigeria: 2023

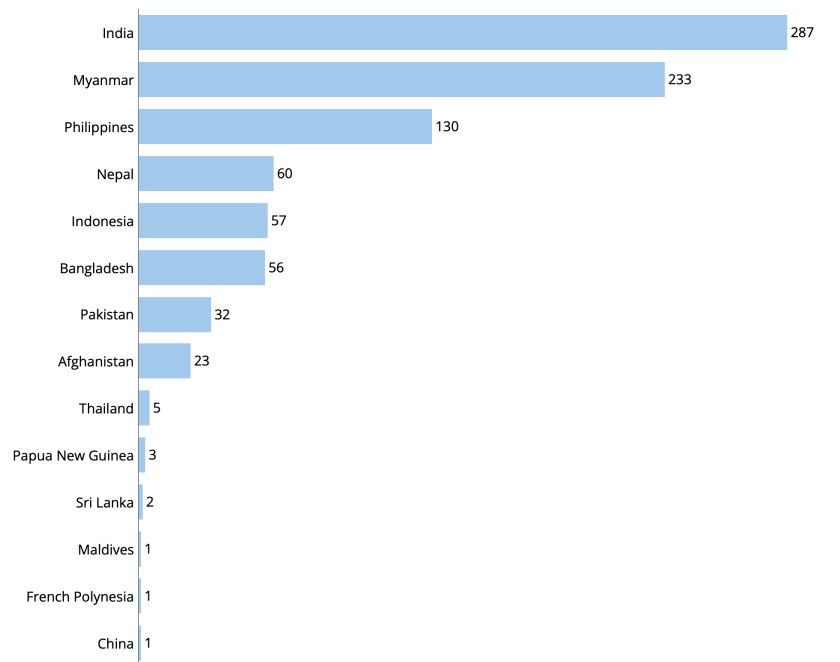
VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

REGIONAL TRENDS: ASIA-PACIFIC

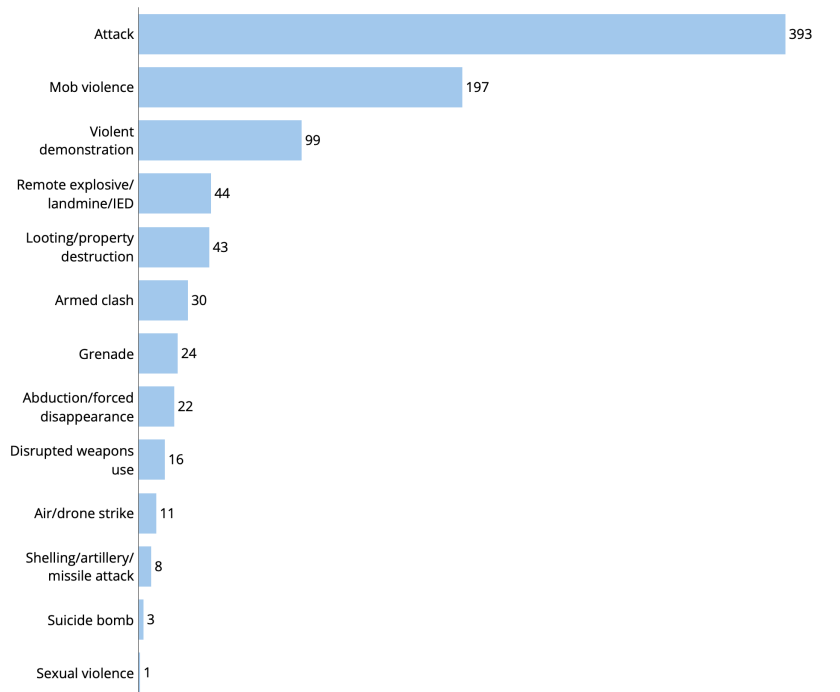


Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

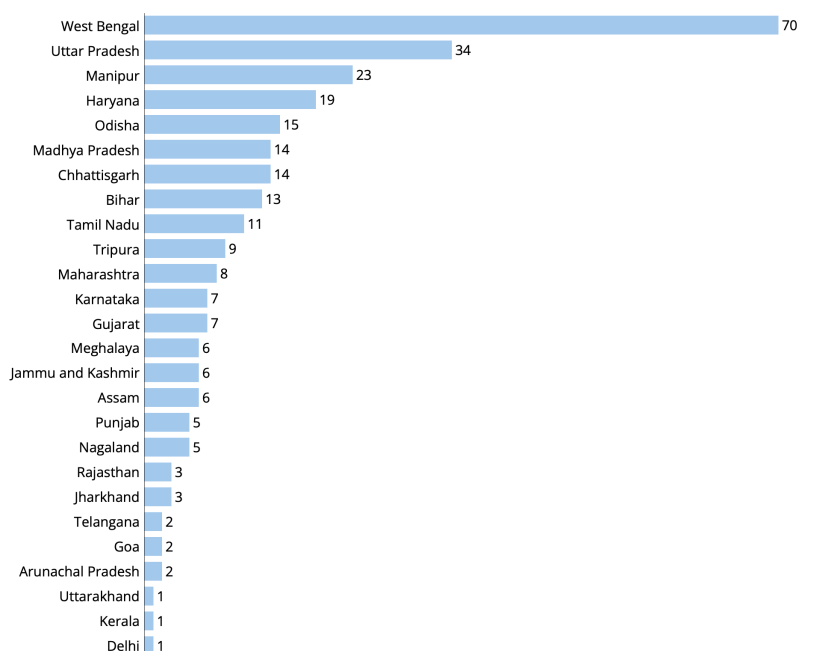


Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials in Asia-Pacific: 2023

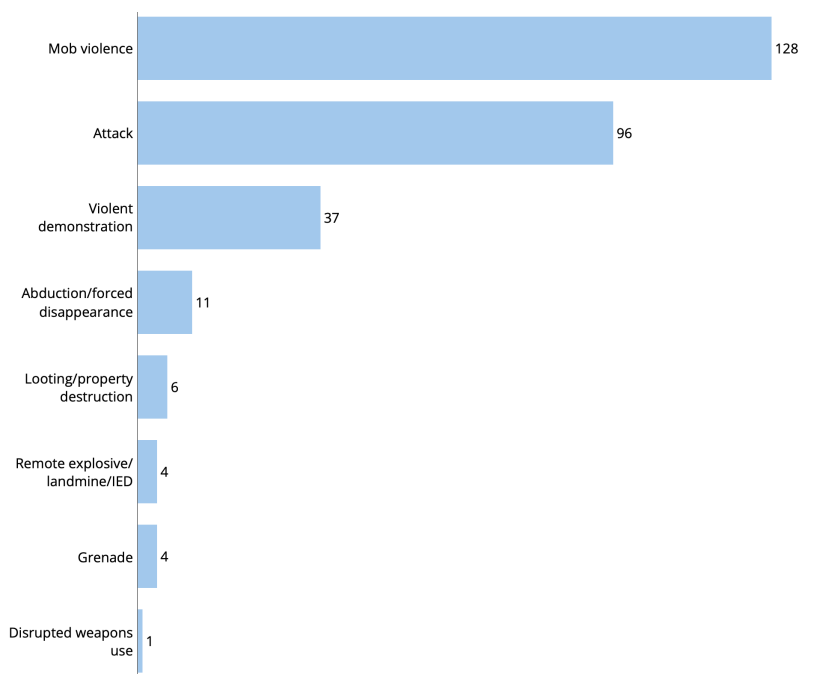


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Asia-Pacific: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials Events per State and Union Territory in India: 2023



Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in India: 2023

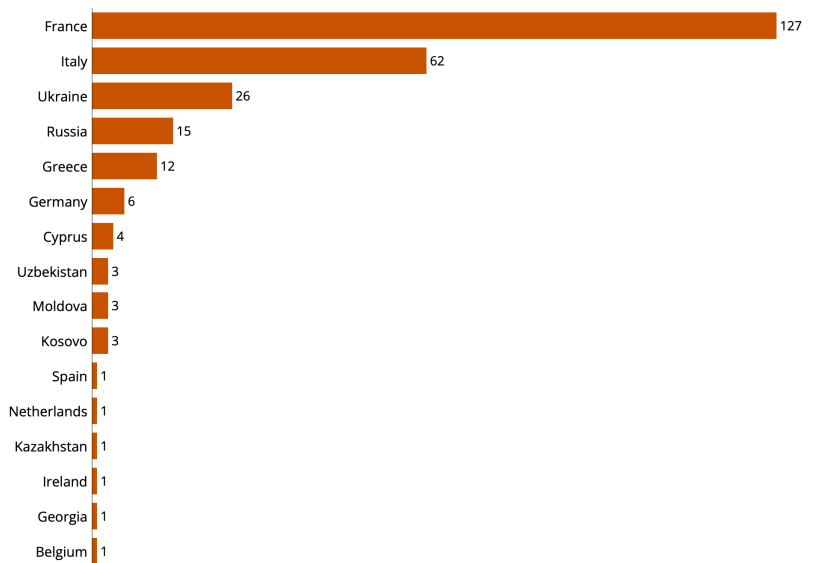
VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

REGIONAL TRENDS: EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

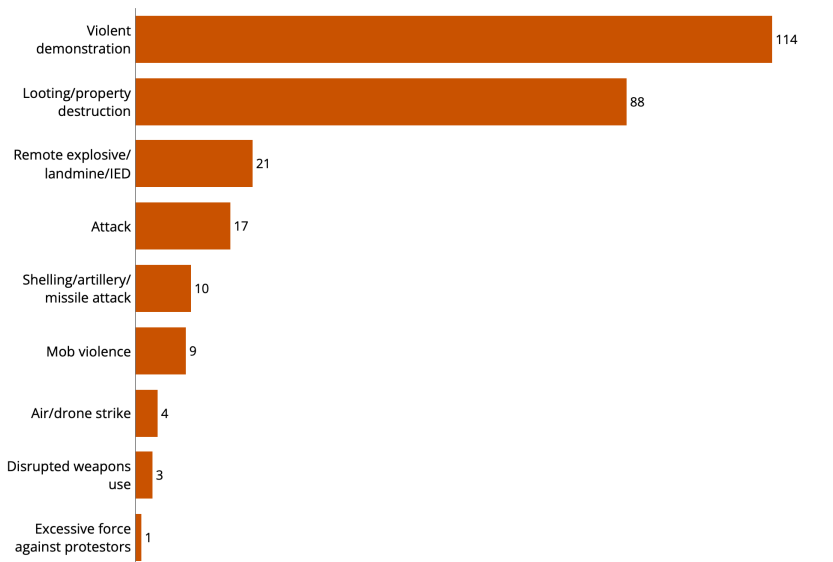


Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local Officials

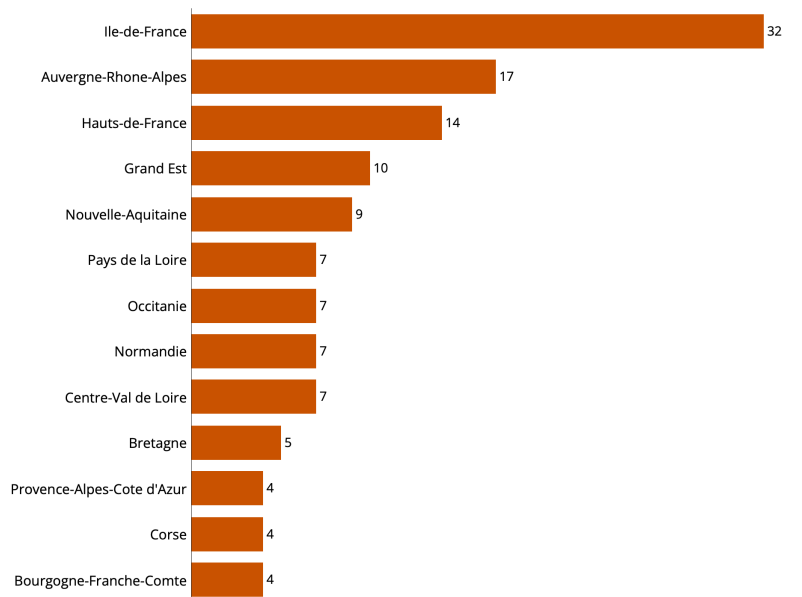


Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials in Europe & Central Asia: 2023

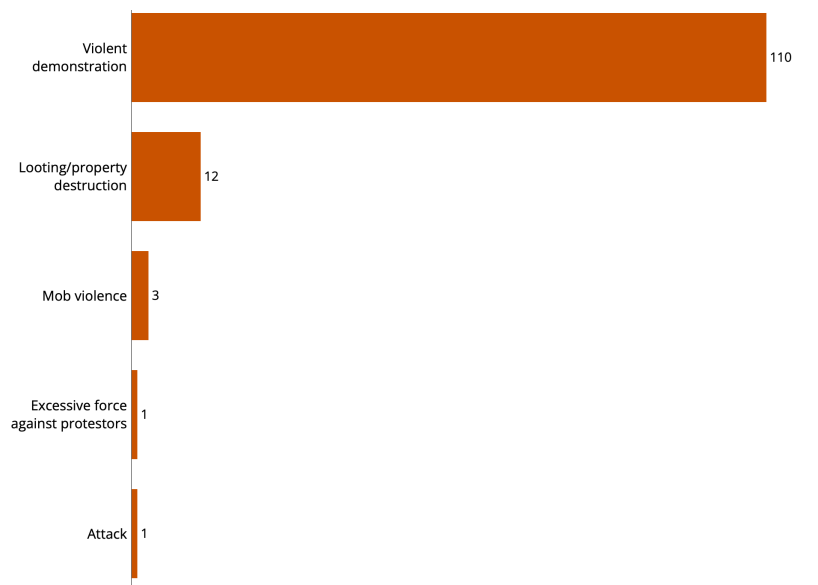


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Europe & Central Asia: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials Events per Region in France: 2023

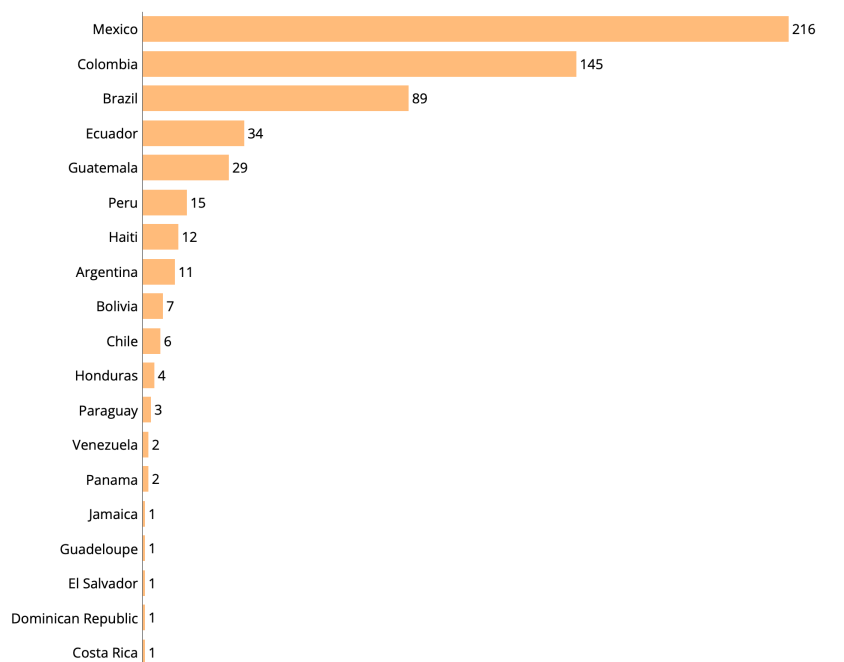


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in France: 2023

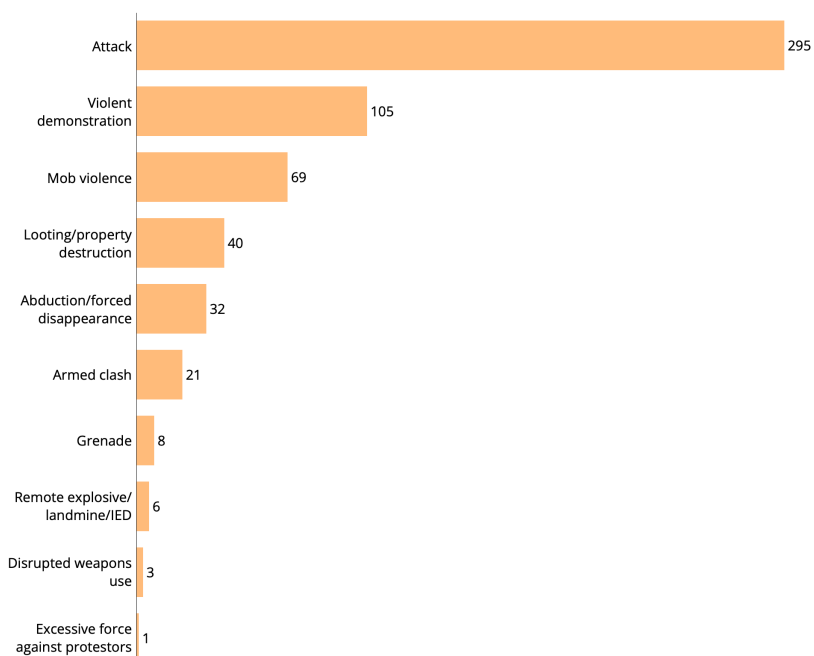
VIOLENCE TARGETING
Local OfficialsREGIONAL TRENDS:
LATIN AMERICAN & THE CARIBBEAN

Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

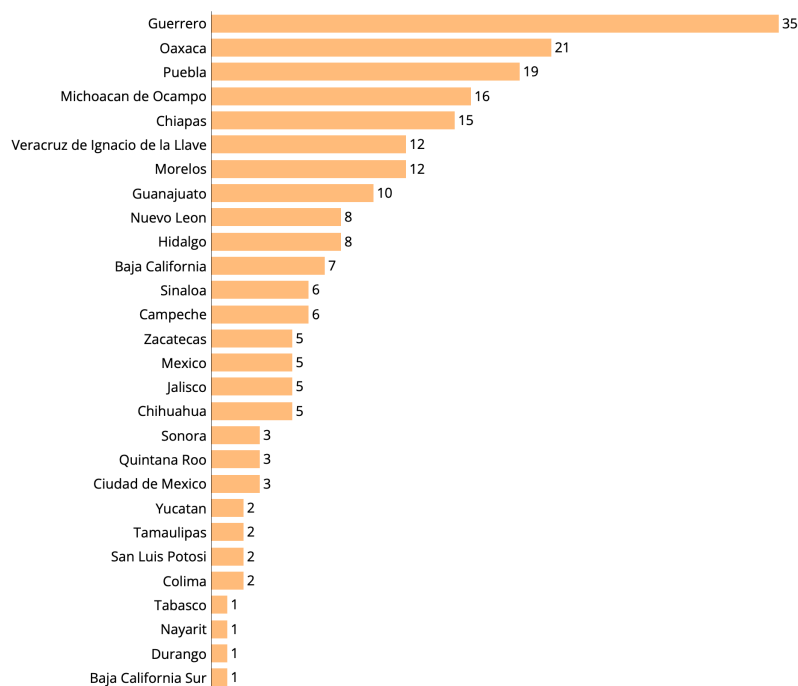


Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials in Latin America & the Caribbean: 2023

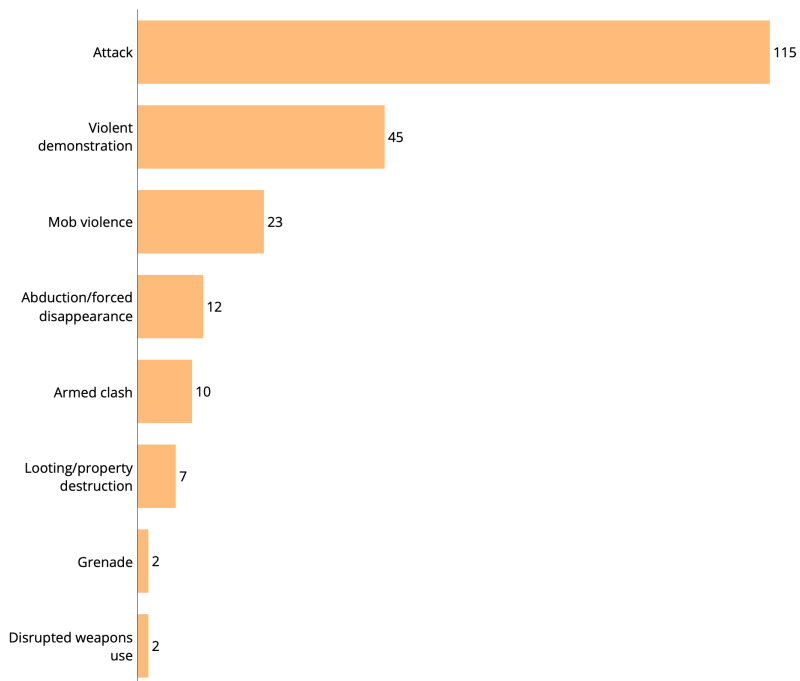


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Latin America & The Caribbean: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

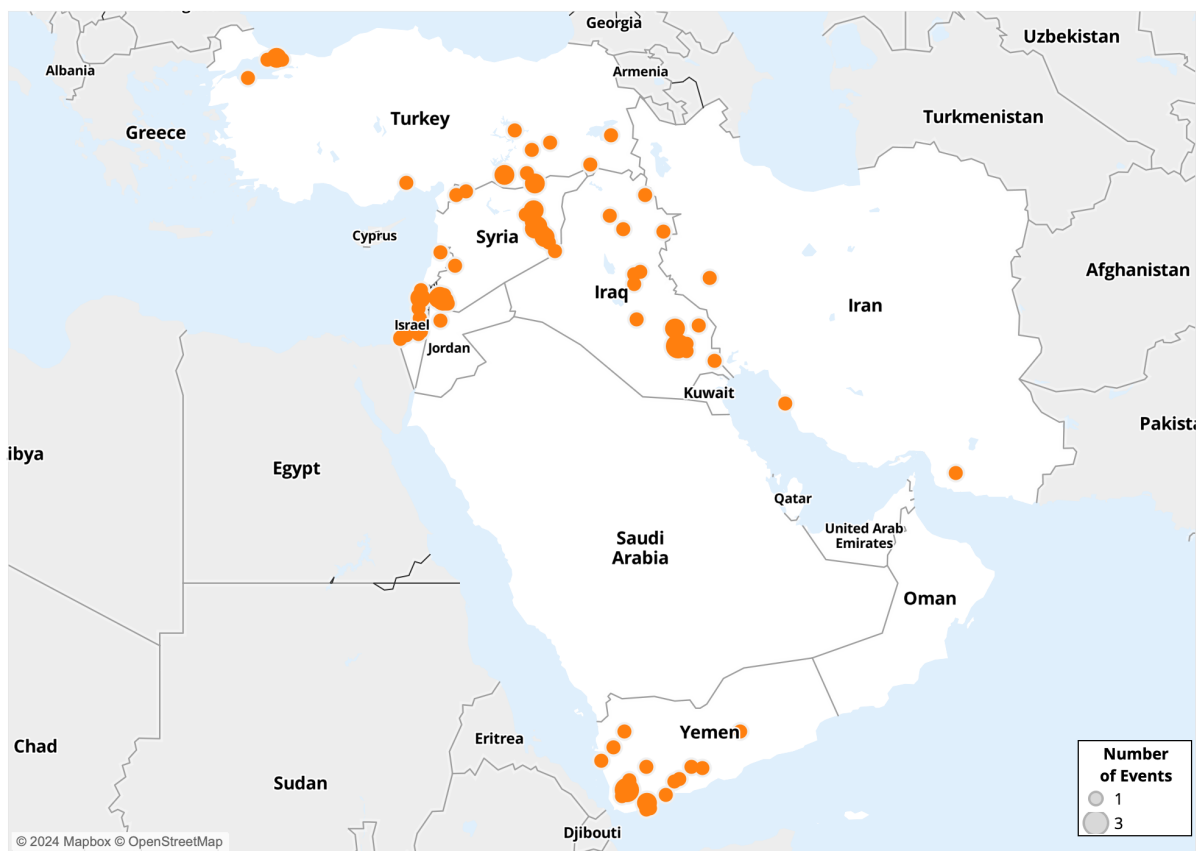


Violence Targeting Local Officials Events per State in Mexico: 2023



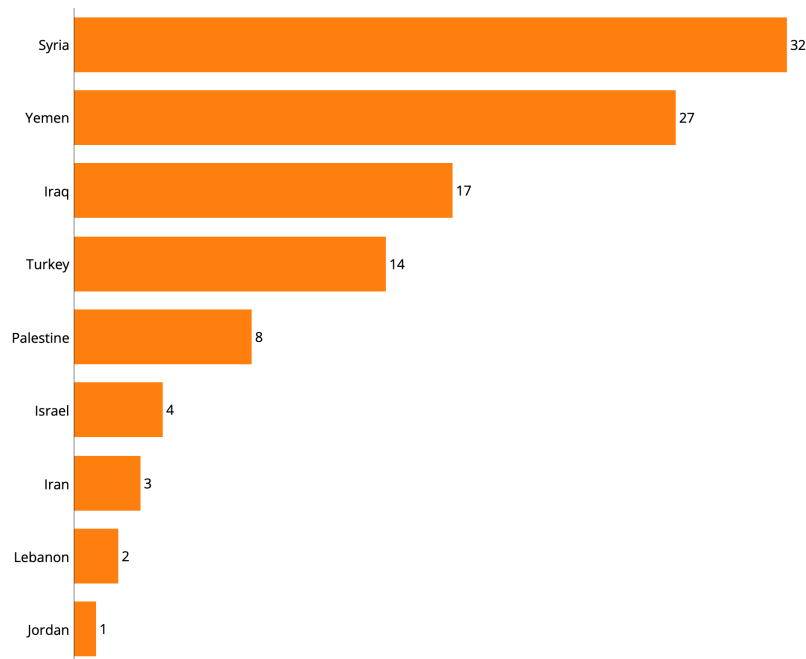
Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Mexico: 2023

REGIONAL TRENDS: MIDDLE EAST

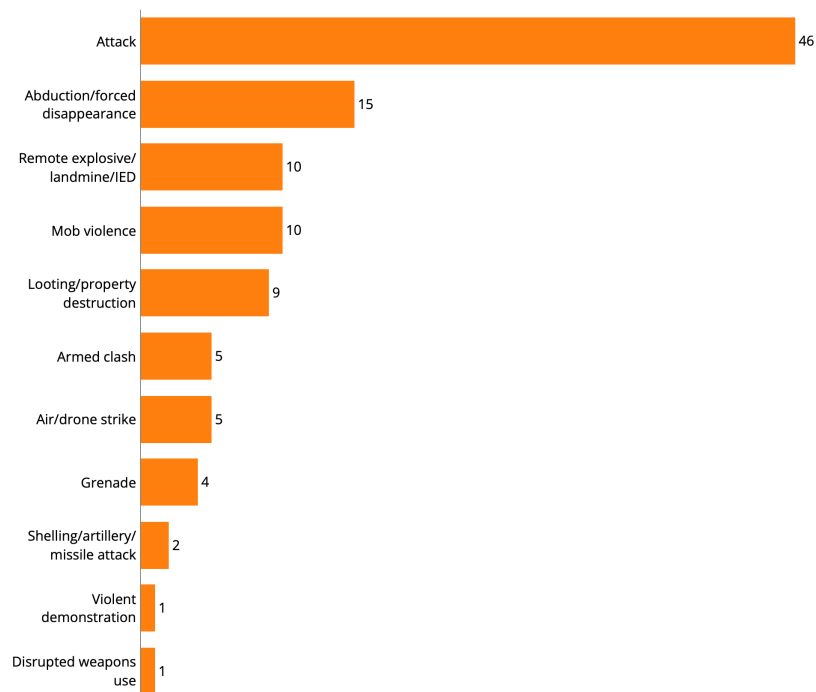


Violence Targeting Local Officials: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials

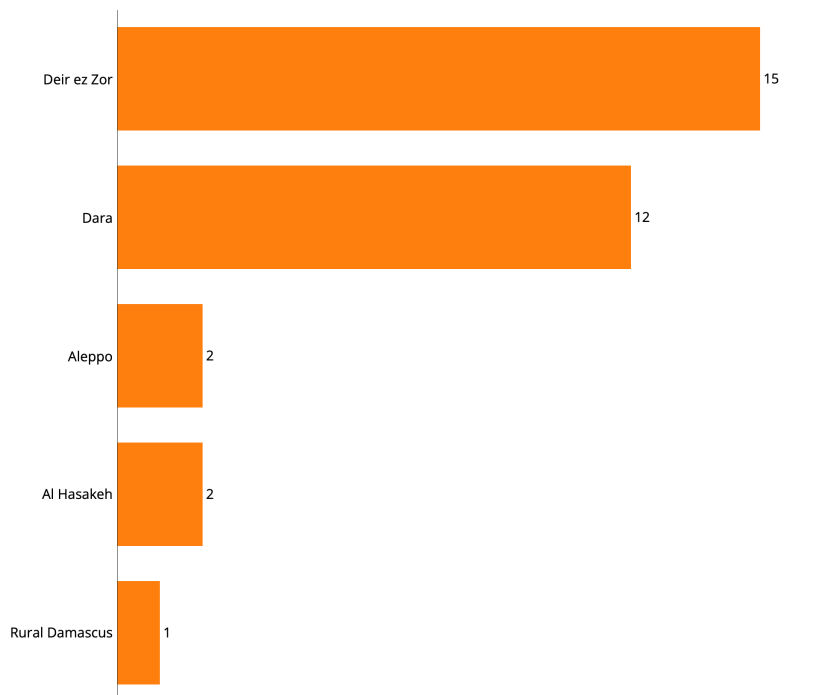


Countries with Reported Events of Violence Targeting Local Officials in the Middle East: 2023

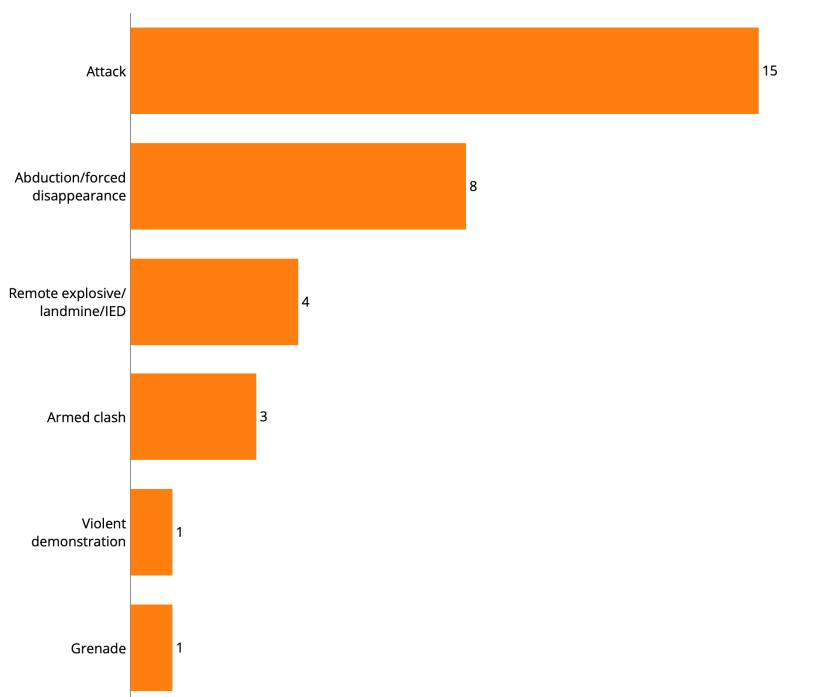


Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in the Middle East: 2023

VIOLENCE TARGETING Local Officials



Violence Targeting Local Officials Events per Governorate in Syria: 2023



Forms of Violence Used Against Local Officials in Syria: 2023



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