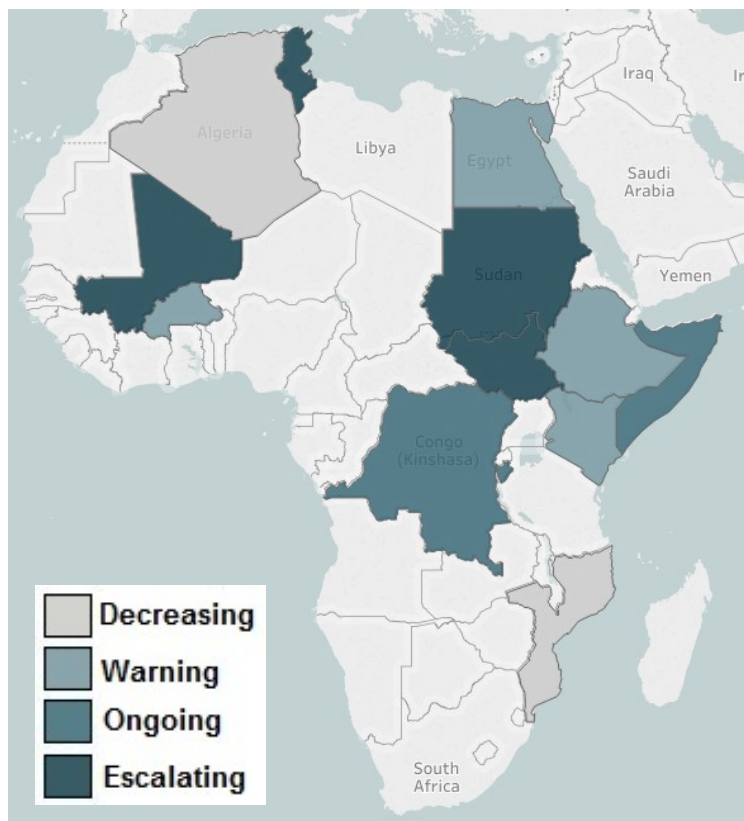


Welcome to the May issue of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) *Conflict Trends* report. Each month, ACLED researchers gather, analyse and publish data on political violence in Africa in realtime. Weekly updates to realtime conflict event data are published on the [ACLED website](http://www.acleddata.com).

This month’s issue focuses on the strategies, patterns and geography of al-Shabaab violence in **Kenya** and **Somalia**, an upswing in riot activity in **Ghana** by New Patriotic Party (NPP) supporters, political party protest activity during election primaries in **Kenya**, decreasing conflict activity by Boko Haram and Fulani militias in **Nigeria** and escalating rebel clashes & civilian attacks in **South Sudan**. A Special Report explores pro-government militias and electoral violence in **Kenya**.

Elsewhere on the continent, following a recent merger of al-Qaeda groups in **Mali**, The Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) escalated attacks on military forces and nationwide riots and protests reached their highest levels in over a year in **Tunisia** with mobilisation particularly concentrated in the southern-most governorate of Tataouine.



Conflict Trajectory, May 2017

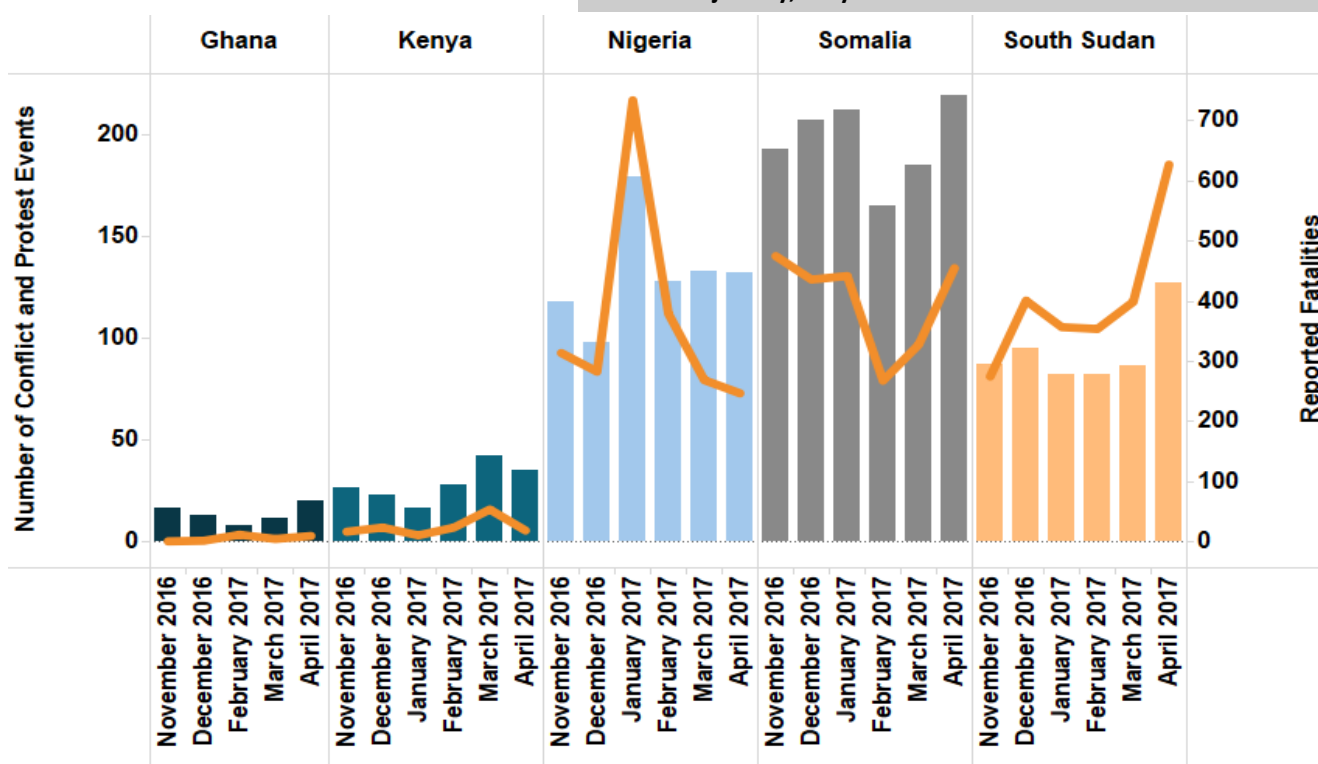


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Country, November 2016 - April 2017.

Al-Shabaab and Insurgent Activity in Somalia and Kenya

The areas in which al-Shabaab operates continue to be the most active and deadly on the continent. In the last six to eight months, this region - consisting mainly of southern Somalia and, to a lesser extent, eastern Kenya - has maintained a relatively stable level of al-Shabaab activity, with notable spikes of activity over the last weeks of October 2016 and mid-January 2017 (see Figure 2). The military of the Somali National Government, as well as the multi-national regional force AMISOM have continued to actively engage al-Shabaab and the United States drone and missile programmes have seen a steadily increased use over both short and long term. Most recently, on 15 April 2017, following a series of airstrikes on al-Shabaab

locations at War-Gaduud and Ceel Adde, the US government confirmed its soldiers would hold an AMISOM and Somali military training exercise that would last until the September of that year ([ChinaGate, 15 April 2017](#)). However, the American mission may have a broader scope - less than three weeks later an ill-fated Navy SEAL raid on a high profile Amniyat target took place 60 kilometres west of Mogadishu. ([Reuters, 5 May 2017](#))

Since September 2016, the primary locations for violent activity involving al-Shabaab have been in the population centres of Mogadishu as well as areas in the immediate south-west along the southern tail of the Shebelle River. Over the past several months, these two areas alone ac-

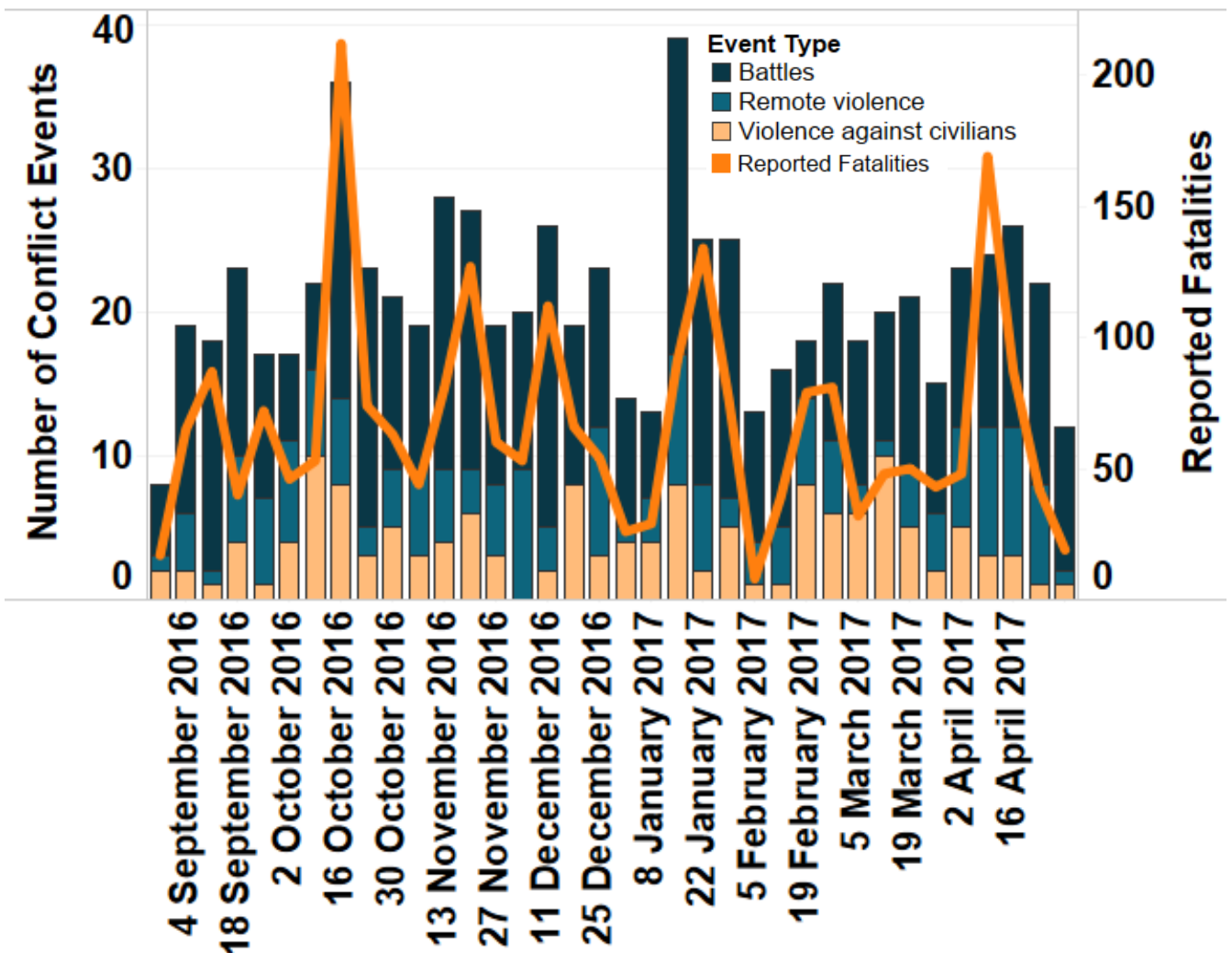


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Fatalities Involving al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, from September 2016 - May 2017.

**Al-Shabaab and Insurgent Activity in Somalia and Kenya**

count for over 40 percent of all violent al-Shabaab activity in the region (see Figure 3). Prominent and deadly tactics of the sect’s violence in this area have come in the way of large IEDs or explosive-laden vehicles placed in crowded open air-markets markets, hotels, or military checkpoints. Often, these tactics have been used in coordination with other methods, such as organized raids following the initial explosion. Notable recent events include the coordinated bomb attacks on the Dayah and Wehliye hotels in January and March, respectively ([BBC, 25 January 2017](#); [Reuters, 13 March 2017](#)). Generally, these attacks tend to have a specific and strategic human target, which could include senior military officers or politicians, which was the case in at Wehliye. In more remote areas, al-Shabaab tends to target AMISOM supply convoys and armed patrols with buried IEDs and other mines. In similar tactic to urban settings, the attackers may lay in wait for the initial blast, and then engage their target in the ensuing confusion. This strategy of attack is often used in the Lower Shabelle, along the Marka – Afgooye – Mogadishu corridor.

Despite significant human and territorial loss at Kolbiyow in late January ([The Guardian, 27 January 2017](#)), Somali government, Jubaland and AMISOM forces have made several territorial gains against al Shabaab in the south, particularly in Bay, Lower Shabelle and Jubba Valley regions (see Figure 4). Progress in these regions is largely due to several small-arms military raids on bases, armouries, or villages that have in past fallen under insurgent control.

Al-Shabaab has carried out several incursions in western Kenya in recent months, with a primary focus on the extreme northeast of Mandera County and to a lesser extent border areas in southern Garissa (see Figure 4). In these areas, the main targets are police security posts and civilians for abduction. In many instances, the attackers cross a shared border, strike a target, and return to Somali territory the same day. In an effort to minimise the effectiveness and frequency of these raids, Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) and the Ministry of Interior erected a 3-kilometre barbed-wire fence in southern Lamu County, with the

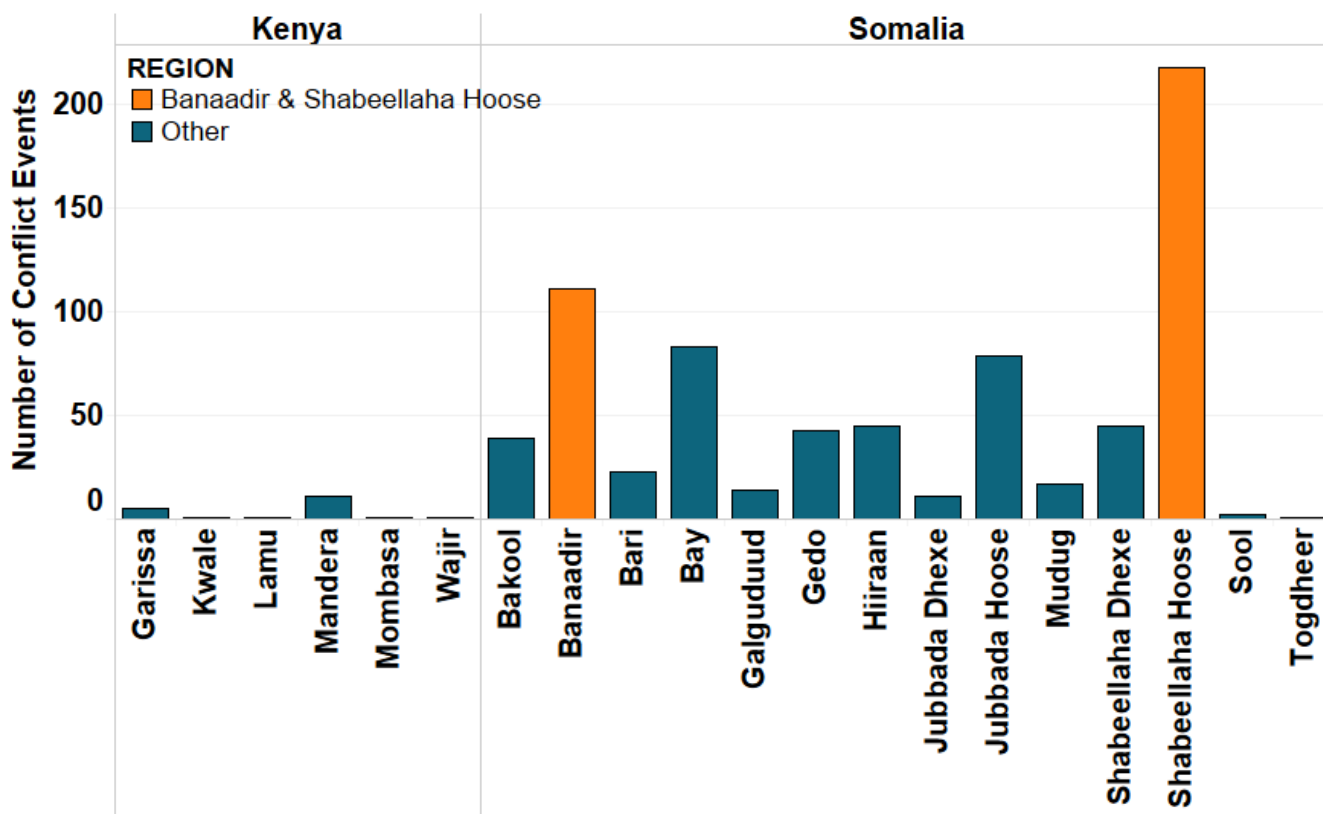


Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events Involving al-Shabaab by District/Region in Kenya and Somalia, from September 2016 - May 2017.

**Al-Shabaab and Insurgent Activity in Somalia and Kenya**

intention of reaching Mandera in the far north ([All Africa, 4 December 2016](#)). The project has experienced several problems as of late, most of which related to government finance issues ([The Star, 8 February 2017](#)).

While al-Shabaab’s operations have remained somewhat steady in Mogadishu [1] and its southern rural environs, insurgent activity in Puntland’s Bari Region have experienced a relatively new dynamic in the operational presence of Islamic State fighters, whose franchise in the area have in large part been populated with defectors of al-Shabaab, including leader Abdul Qadir Mumin. Though Islamic State-Somalia (ISS) has had limited functionality in Bari for several years, their recent focus has been directed at the seaside town of Qandala, where between October 2016 and March 2017 allied Puntland and NATO forces battled for on-off control in the region ([Bloomberg, 23 March 2017](#)). The initial fall of Qandala in late October was seen by Western observers as particularly troublesome due to the city’s situation on the Gulf of Aden, which could potentially impact shipping through the strait, was well as economic activity in the immediate region ([CBS News, 27 October 2016](#)). Held by ISS for several

weeks, the port city was eventually liberated by Puntland forces in early December, causing the ISS elements to scatter to the south and west ([Puntland Vision, 8 December 2016](#)). Currently relegated to smaller raids against Puntland military convoys in the mountainous regions of Qandala’s outskirts, the extent of the Islamic State’s growth and regional influence is an open question in the foreseeable future. The Qandala operation was ultimately unsuccessful, but ISS was able to temporarily establish a high profile beachhead on the Horn and caused the fracturing of al-Shabaab’s Al-Qaeda loyalties. How ISS re-groups and ultimately mobilises from their current state retreat will likely hinge on recruitment and finance.

[1] Except for March 2017 in which al-Shabaab increased assassinations of civilians and attacks against government forces in Mogadishu.

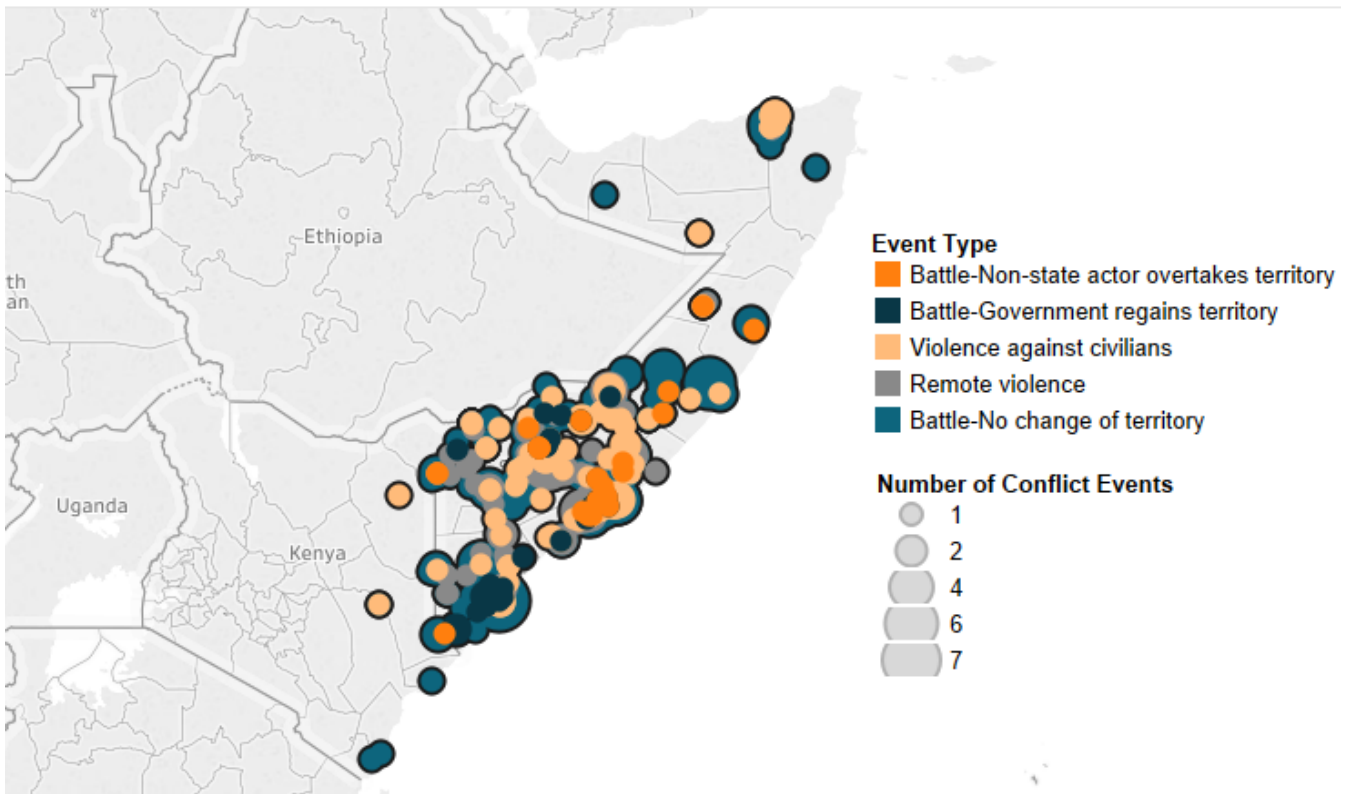


Figure 4: Location and Frequency of Events Involving al-Shabaab, in Kenya and Somalia, September 2016 - May 2017.



Ghana

Political violence in Ghana has risen sharply since the beginning of 2017. While Ghana is among the least violent places in both West Africa and the continent at large, recent internal developments raise concern. They reveal widespread dissatisfaction among the ruling party supporters with the new regime, but also the latter’s inability to control the violence.

This upward trend in political violence has been mainly driven by riot episodes throughout the country (see Figure 5). One main issue since president Nana Akufo Addo, from the New Patriotic Party (NPP), took office end December 2016, has been the rejection of his regional and district appointees by NPP supporters. Through protests and riots across several regions from as early as February, NPP supporters expressed frustration at the lack of participation of these appointees in the party’s electoral success. In the Ashanti region in particular, riots were led by an NPP-affiliated gang under the name of “Delta Force”, who played an important role in ensuring security and support for local party officials during the campaign and was expecting rewards in the form of government appointments among their ranks (GIN, 12 April 2017). As these appointments did not materialise, they felt neglected. On 24 March, the gang stormed the premises of the Regional Coordinating Council in Kumasi, destroying public property and manhandling the new Ashanti Regional Security Coordinator, whom they did not support. Two weeks later, the group freed its fellow members charged after the first incident by attacking the Kumasi Circuit Court (AFP,

12 April 2017). Protests and riots by NPP youth expanded to Ashanti’s neighboring regions and to the northern part of the country following these events, involving the vandalizing of party offices.

Two main elements raise the risk that an armed resistance emerges against the regime if not properly tackled: first, discontent vis-à-vis Akufo Addo’s ability to implement his ambitious electoral agenda to fix economic issues and corruption in Ghana (Independent, 18 March 2017); second, the very existence and expectations of these party-affiliated youth gangs. This is even more true as around 20 such gangs are said to exist throughout the country. Several countries in the region, such as Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, have witnessed similar trends in the past (Ghana Web, 18 April 2017).

Other riots also expressed an increased tendency among populations to resort to violence to resolve issues of discord and to take law into their own hands. In Bimbilla (Northern region) for instance, youth burnt houses and stormed the police station after a murder in the context of a chieftaincy clash, asking to be handed the suspect (Daily Guide, 10 March 2017). In Half-Assani (Western region) and Wa (Upper West), people rioted against police to protest the latter’s involvement in cases of death in custody or on roads (Myjoyonline, 2 April 2017). Finally in Adina (Volta region), local angry youth besieged and damaged property at a salt company to protest harassment and drying up of water sources, leading up to a clash with police that left one person killed (GNA, 20 March 2017).

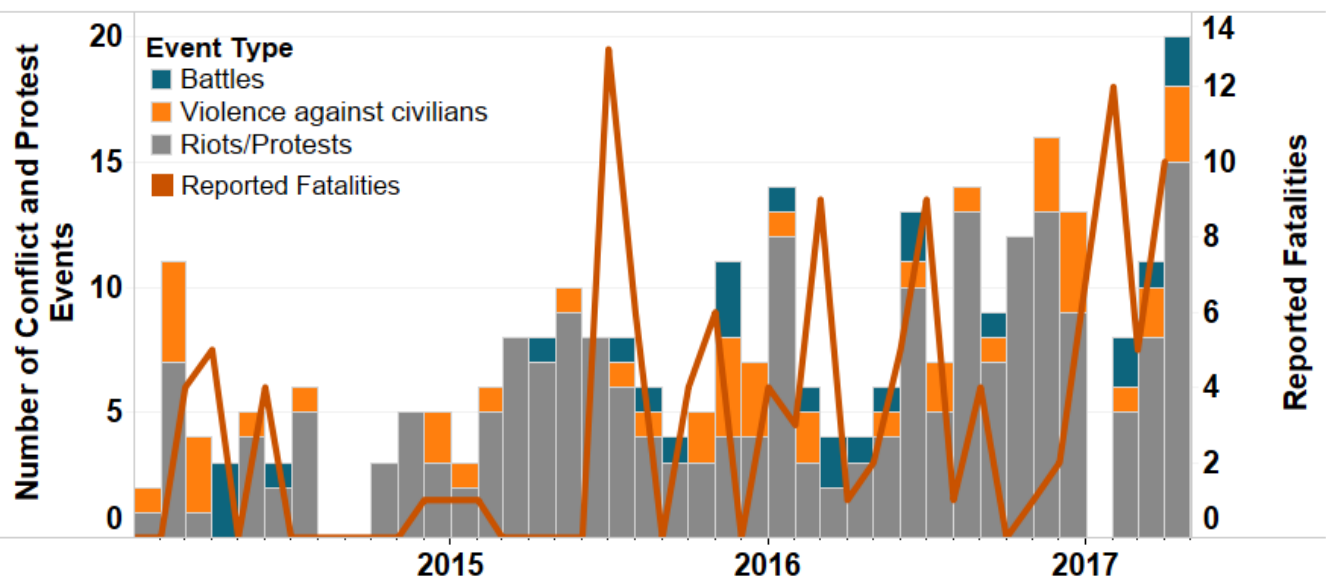


Figure 5: Number of Conflict, Riot and Protest Events and Fatalities in Ghana, from January 2014 - April 2017.

Political Party Protest Activity in Kenya

While local communal tensions and militancy have been notable sources of recent unrest in Kenya, levels of politically driven protest action in the period since January have become a cause of concern, particularly in an election year. Protests mainly occurred in both the heavily populated east and the remote southwest (see Figure 6); motivated by political discord from electoral primaries throughout April. These patterns suggest intra-party turmoil.

Leading among this unrest are factions of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), whose split has largely come over candidate loyalties, perceived voter fraud, and ultimately party leadership. Though no side of the ODM’s splinter is especially well defined, much contention comes from supporters of perspective grassroots candidates

challenging a current office holder, or, less commonly, challenging the party leadership on choice to run for an open seat. In the past, many frustrated members have defected to other parties, most commonly the rival Jubilee Coalition ([Kenya Standard, 12 February 2016](#)). Following an unfavourable outcome at party primaries, many supporters alleged fraud and threatened open rebellion ([Kenya Standard, 30 April 2017](#)). Speciously seen as an effort to consolidate power on behalf of party leaders, rank and file party members have resorted to violence over seemingly small matters including the choice of election clerks, or voting delays ([Daily Nation, 25 April 2017](#)).

Though many of these misgivings encourage simple protest demonstration at party meetings, an increasing number recently led to outright violence as the April primaries neared. One such instance in mid-March caused a death and several injuries when supporters of Senator Elizabeth Ongoro and Ruaraka MP TJ Kajwang clashed in suburban Nairobi ([The Star, 16 March 2017](#)). Further examples of grassroots-driven antagonism can be found over a rivalry among supporters of Governor John Mruttu and those of National Assembly Minority Whip Thomas Mwadeghu, which came to blows during a mid-April party meeting in Taita Taveta County ([Capital FM, 18 April 2017](#)). Moreover, during the last weeks of April, the primary vote itself was rife with tension, confusion and anger. Many polling stations experienced long lines and balloting delays, fueling distrust of party leadership ([All Africa, 24 April 2017](#)).

Despite a benefit from their current position of political power, the ruling Jubilee Coalition has in some ways mirrored the problems of the ODM. During a late March meeting to select Kirinyaga county election board members, many rank-and-file party supporters threw objects at Jubilee officials after their influence on the process was diminished ([The Star, 25 March 2017](#)). A month later, supporters of Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, a candidate for Nairobi governorship, destroyed public ballot papers after complaining of voter delays ([The Star, 27 April 2017](#)). In short, party unity following the spring primaries is yet to be seen. As observed from the violence following 2007 election ([New York Times, 31 December 2007](#)), many voters may be distrustful and unaccepting of the eventual August result.

Political Group

- NASA: National Super Alliance
- ODM: Orange Democratic Movement
- FORD-Kenya
- Jubilee Coalition

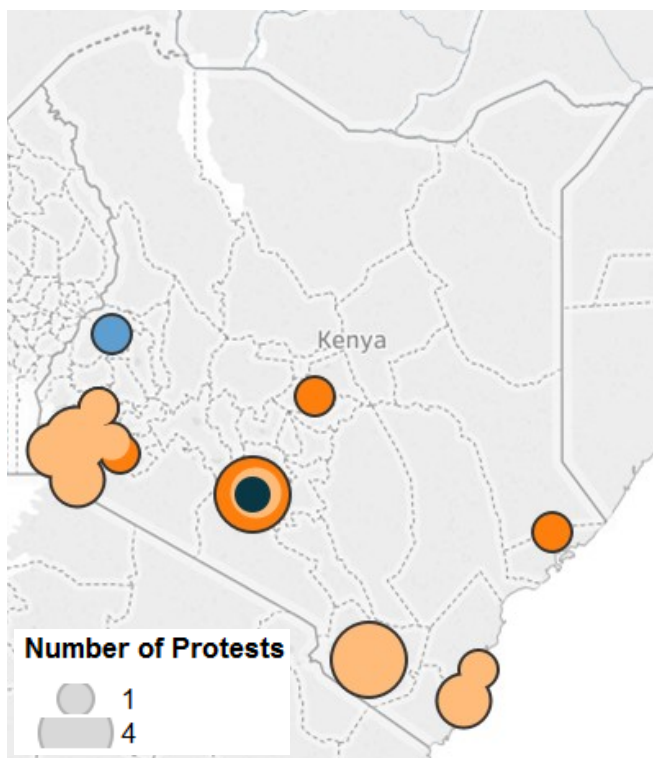


Figure 6: Protest Action by Location and Political Group in Kenya, from January 2017 - May 2017.

Nigeria

Levels of political conflict have continued to decrease in Nigeria throughout 2017. The drop in political violence seems to stem from the reduced activity of two of Nigeria’s most active and lethal conflict actors, the Fulani and Boko Haram (see Figure 7).

Boko Haram’s capacity to fight against the state or to inflict violence against civilians remains severely diminished with most activity relegated to small raids on army posts and suicide bombings (Anyadike, 4 May 2017). These bombings typically rely on delivering young women to crowded urban areas to detonate suicide vest. However, these attacks are decreasing in lethality and are increasingly concentrated in the group’s Borno base. In 2015, the average fatality count for Boko Haram suicide attacks was 15, in 2016 it was 9 and so far in 2017, an average of 3.4 people have died in each suicide attack by the group. While in 2015, 35.7% of the group’s suicide attacks took place outside of Borno state, in 2017 the figure is only 7.1%. This indicates that the Nigerian security services are becoming more adept at countering Boko Haram’s main tactic of destabilisation.

The diminished activity may also be fed by the ‘Safe Corridor’ initiative, launched a year ago, which enables Boko Haram foot soldiers to surrender and be reintegrated back into their respective communities (Anyadike, 4 May

2017). Similar projects are being quietly piloted in Niger as well (Rackely, 20 April 2017). Both projects appear successful in draining Boko Haram’s manpower.

Activity by Fulani militias has also decreased in lethality compared to previous years. Conflict tends to spike during the dry season (September-May) as herdsman move their cattle southwards for available pastures and water (Roseline and Amusain, 2017). Violent conflict events involving Fulani has followed this pattern with activity rising from October 2016 and reaching an apex this January. But in spite of a large number of conflict events, fatalities remain comparatively low compared to last year. In 2016, the average number of fatalities for an event involving Fulani militias was 10, in 2017, it is 3.5. Another major trend is that incidences of political involving Fulani militias are increasingly witnessed in the far southern states of Delta, Abia and Ogun. The reaction of southern states to these incursions has not been conciliatory, with Bayelsa state rejecting a federal bill to establish grazing reserves across the country and Abia and Ekiti state passing anti-grazing laws to prosecute those who destroy farm crops (Vanguard, 16 November 2016; Vanguard, 22 October 2016). These activities may further stoke tensions between indigenes and the migrating pastoralists, but the wariness of the southern states to the Fulani may also lead to increased deployment of security personnel and limit the violence.

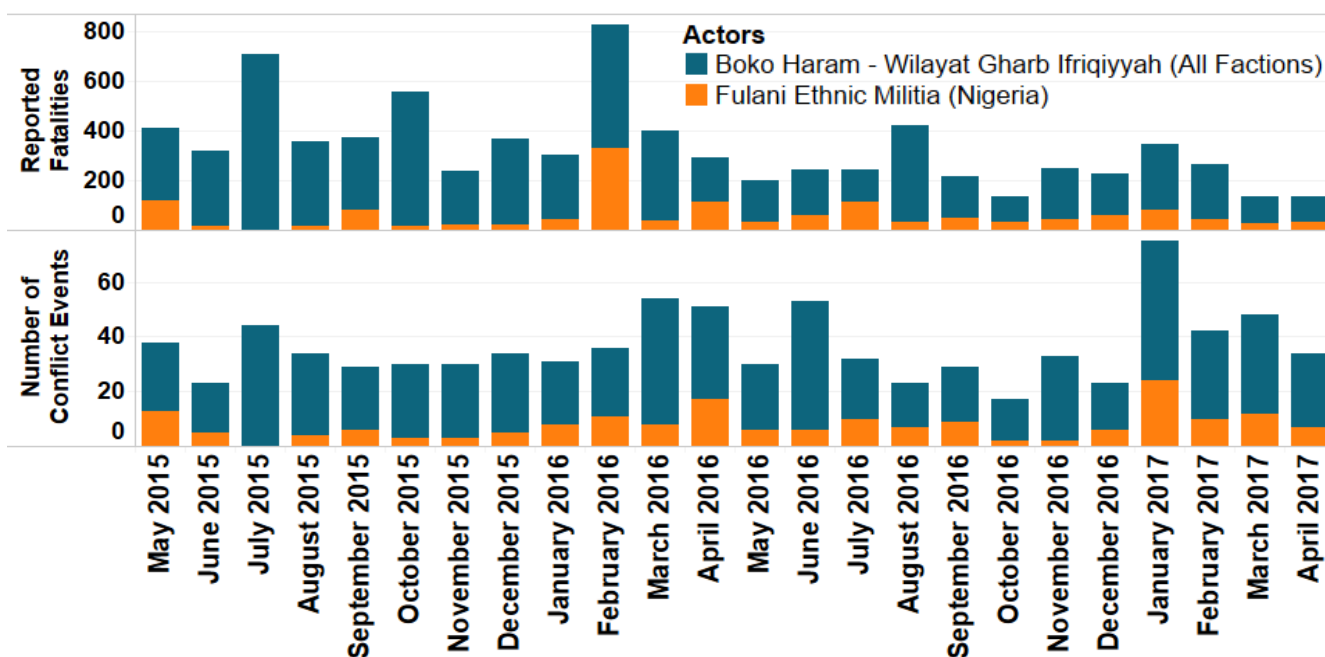


Figure 7: Boko Haram and Fulani Ethnic Militia Activity, Nigeria, May 2015 - April 2017.

South Sudan

In April 2017, violence escalated to its highest level in more than three years in South Sudan. 120 conflict events were recorded resulting in 627 fatalities – a 1.7 times increase on their respective monthly average over that period. Battles between the government and rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) mainly drove this trend, but so did violence against civilians, which reached unprecedented levels since the country’s independence in 2011 (see Figure 8).

Government and rebel forces engaged in major battles over March-April that often resulted in claims of territorial gains (see counties highlighted in red in Figure 9). This can be understood as an attempt by both sides to consolidate territory before the onset of the rainy season around early

May.

In April, battles particularly rose in Bahr el Ghazal and in Jonglei. In Western Bahr el Ghazal, SPLA claimed control of several SPLA-IO strongholds around Bagari (Wau county), after battles outside Wau town quickly expanded ([Africa News, 12 April 2017](#)). A week later, SPLA-IO claimed to have captured Raja town ([Radio Tamazuj, 18 April 2017](#)). In Jonglei, government forces supported by the Mathiang Anyoor militia claimed major gains after heavy battles around Yuai in Urur county ([Protection Cluster, 4 May 2017](#)). At the same time, battles remained sustained in Greater Equatoria and in Upper Nile. Among the most recent flashpoints were SPLA-IO’s capture of various areas in Morobo county in Central Equatoria ([Radio Tama-](#)

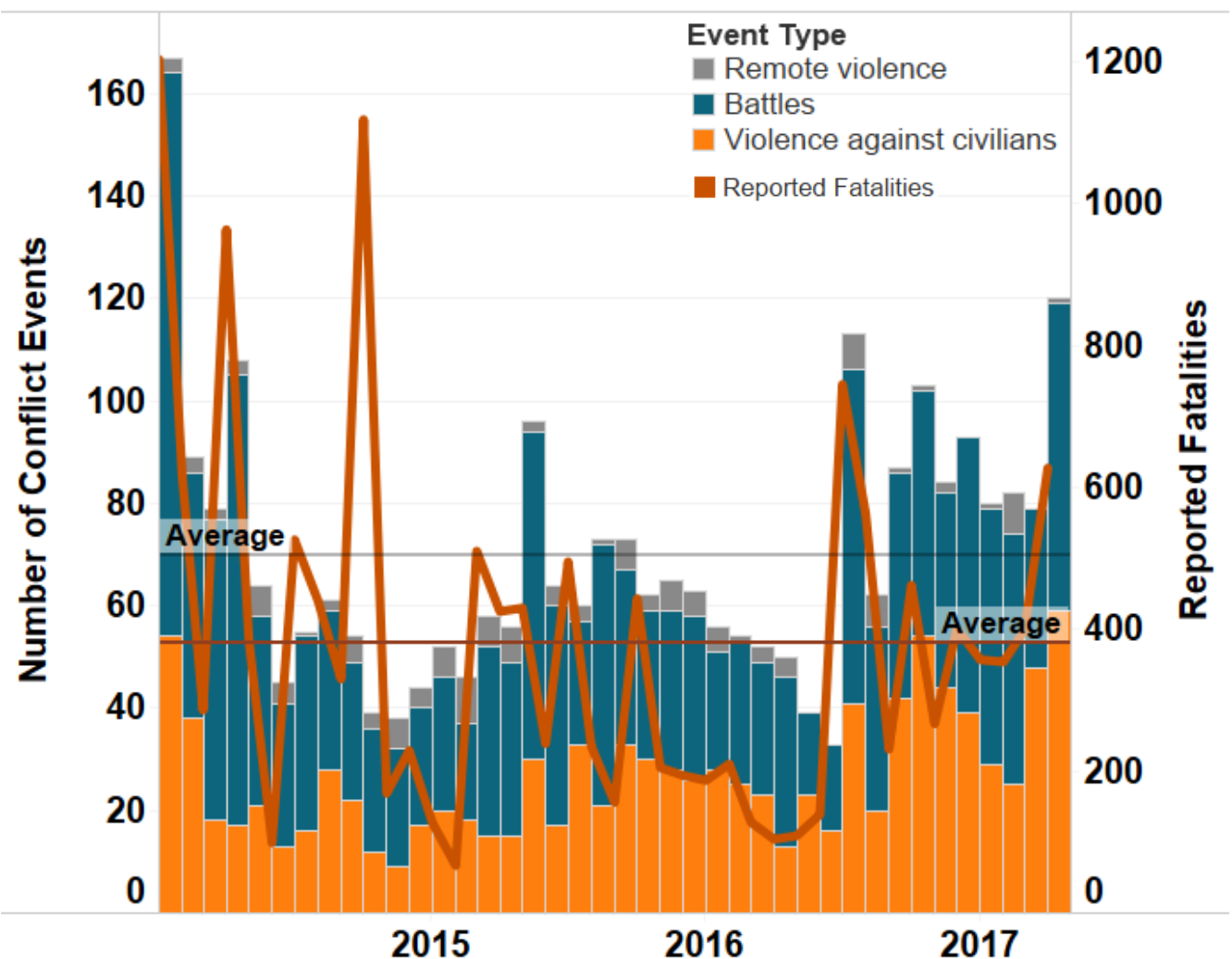


Figure 8: Number of Conflict Events and Fatalities in South Sudan, from January 2014 - April 2017.



South Sudan

[zujm, 30 April 2017](#)); and SPLA's regaining of Kodok (Fashoda county), Gel Achel (Baliet county) and Tonga (Panyikang county) in Upper Nile. Tonga was recently re-captured by the rebel forces ([Sudan Tribune, 4 May 2017](#)).

The impact of the battles on civilians rose due to the many executions, abductions, and looting and burning down of properties carried out by conflict parties. SPLA, in particular, showed wide distrust towards populations in areas where battles occurred, arresting and killing dozens in the aftermath of clashes, for instance in Pajok in Eastern Equatoria's Magwi county early April ([Radio Tamazuj, 10 April 2017](#)).

With conflict logistics and ease of movement made more difficult during the rainy season, it is likely that government/rebel battles reduce in the next few weeks. However, as parties continue to disagree on steps to de-escalate the crisis, this period may be used to regroup forces and prepare for larger offensives in the last quarter of the year.

Communal violence also rose over the past two months, mainly over land and cattle, but also in revenge for earlier attacks carried out by rival groups. In Jonglei, while violence persisted between the Murle and Lou Nuer communities, new trends showed unprecedented conflict levels between Murle and Dinka youths. The latter's recent attacks on Murle villages around Boma in Pibor county underlined the youth's frustration with authorities' failure to recover stolen cattle and abducted children, and the potential for the crisis to escalate ([Radio Tamazuj, 7 May 2017](#)). Other violent episodes drove the upward trend: in Lakes state, between youth and herders from Eastern and Western Lakes (for instance in Yirol county); and in Western Bahr el Ghazal, between Wau farmers and herders from Tonj county (in Warrap state).

Communal fighting is usually less affected by the rainy season, as resources are the most abundant and cattle raiding most likely to be successful during this period. There is thus a potential for communal violence to escalate in the coming weeks.

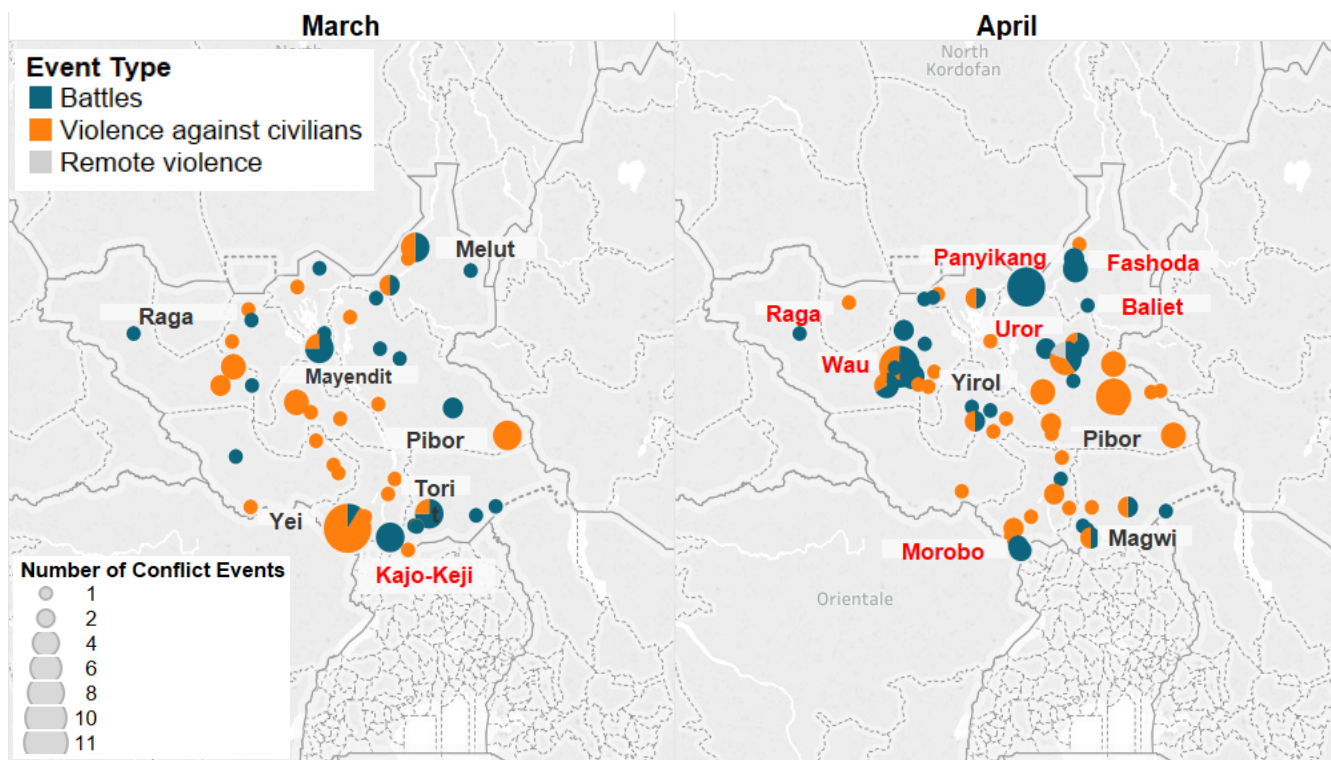


Figure 9: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location in South Sudan, over March - April 2017.

Special Focus Topic: Pro-Government Militias and Electoral Violence in Kenya

Pro-government militias (hereafter PGMs) are political, armed organizations that assist regime and state elites through the practice of illicit violence. They are designed to perpetuate conflict for purposes that conform to regime agendas, and their existence can shed light on power struggles and competition within African institutions. These groups are a large and diverse community who often defy simple categorization, yet they present a serious threat because of support they receive from state elites and a political culture that allows for unaccountable violent agents and actions. State elite sponsorship results in impunity for engaging in violent competition on behalf of those elites.

A new working paper by [Raleigh and Kishi](#) considers the contexts in which PGMs emerge and their functions within unstable contexts. PGM activities in Africa are likely to increase in the future, as political environments of high-level violent competition expand across the continent.

The new working paper introduces *PGM-Set*, an extensive roster of PGM groups with direct and indirect alliances to state power in Africa, and an associated methodology for determining what distinguishes these groups from others.

It is based on conflict events by groups in the ACLED dataset. PGMs are defined as groups with either a political link to the regime or President, an allied association with state forces, and/or a regional or ethnic tie to the regime or President.

While PGM use is widespread, it is particularly common during election periods in classic competitive political environments. While elections can be a testament to the participatory nature of democracies, many new democracies depend on violence to build electoral influences, especially as violence is a product of political competition itself ([Mueller, 2008](#)). Violence can be used prior to an election to win, and occur in the post-election period in response to outcomes. We use Kenya as an example of how and under what conditions PGM use by a regime occurs during contested elections.

Figure 10 depicts PGM events over time in Kenya, with election periods highlighted (the 25-month period including the 12 months prior to an election, the election month itself, and the 12 months following an election). While the spike in conflict activity involving PGMs can be seen especially prominently during the 2007 election period, the

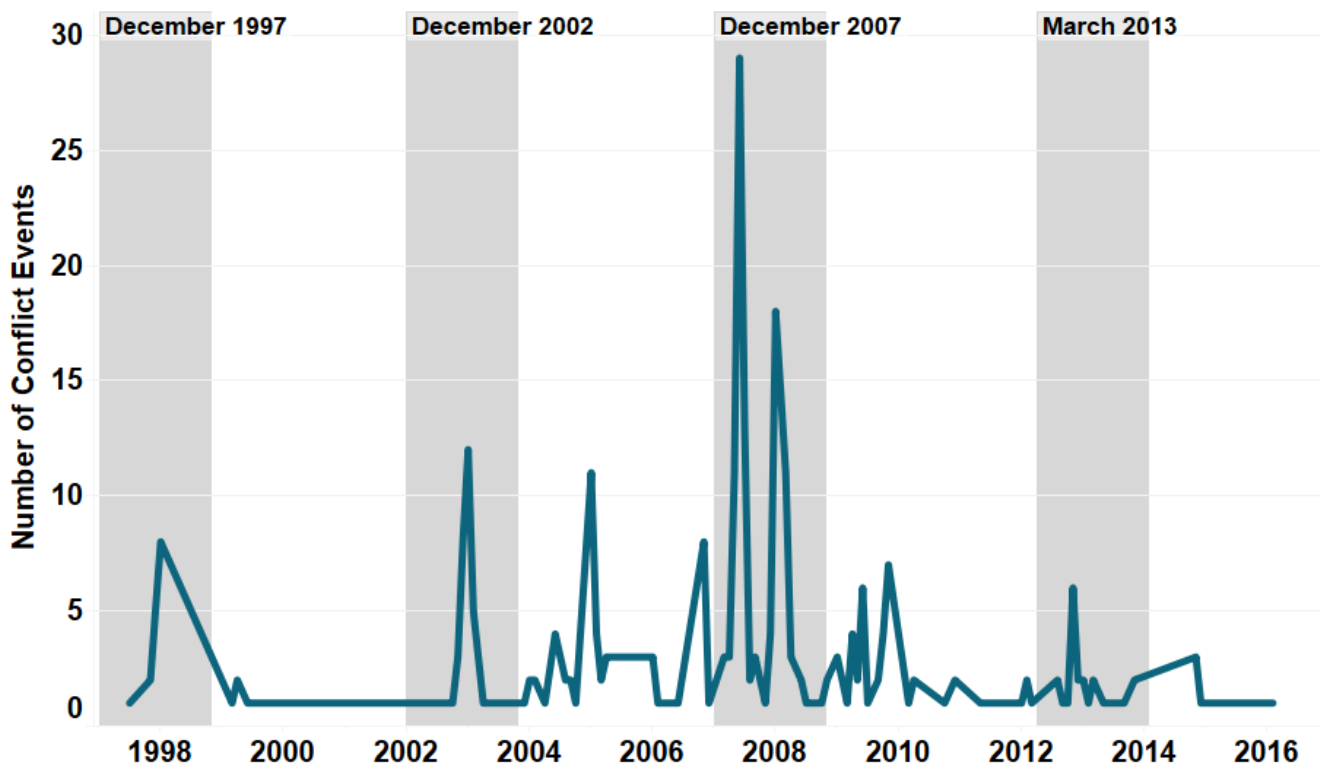


Figure 10: Pro-Government Militia Activity & Election Periods in Kenya, from 1997-2016.



#### Special Focus Topic: Pro-Government Militias and Electoral Violence in Kenya

election periods surrounding the December 1997, December 2002, and March 2013 election periods also feature spikes in the activity of these groups. Figure 11 maps the location of PGM events during the 2007 election period specifically.

There are several reasons as to why some elections are violent while others are not, and why some include PGMs while others do not. Unclear and not credible election results can be a factor. Such a case occurred in December 2007 election in Kenya: after the closest election in Kenya's history ([McCrummen, 31 December 2007](#)), the incumbent President Kibaki was declared the winner of the election over candidate Raila Odinga, despite claims of vote-rigging, and very little transparency. Problems were exacerbated as Kenya's political system grants almost all power to the president – the same person accused of 'stealing the election'.

"A system where the winner 'takes all'" can also contribute to electoral violence ([The Atlantic, 2013](#)). This can be especially problematic in cases where political parties align with ethnic groups and shape patronage politics. Under such circumstances, 'zero-sum ethnic politics' may be at play – meaning that a win for one political party or ethnic group means a 'loss' for other groups, as they do not stand to gain much benefit within the clientelistic system ([Mueller, 2011](#)). This is evident in Kenya, where presidential candidates campaign along ethnic lines, and some ethnic groups swear to only vote for candidates of their ethno-regional group ([The Economist, 2013](#)). The new constitution of 2010 altered key facets of ethno-political voting and made 'grand coalitions' of ethno-regional communities more likely.

In cases where "a precedent of violence proved effective," there may be a heightened risk of future electoral violence ([The Atlantic, 2013](#)). The use of hired gangs and militias to influence elections results has a history in Kenya; in these contexts, violence used to intimidate people into not voting aided in 'securing' a close election for a political candidate or party ([Mueller, 2011](#); [The Atlantic, 2013](#)). Most commonly, however, electoral violence is seen when a leader believes an election may unseat them or their party from power. In cases where a leader faces few constraints on their power and authority, these elites may incite violence ([Hafner-Burton et al., 2014](#)). This is why electoral violence is seldom seen in the most repressive and least democratic regimes – such as in North Korea where electoral competition is all but non-existent as no opposition candidates ever appear on the ballot – as

the risk of losing the election is negligent ([Hafner-Burton et al., 2014](#)).

As the August 2017 elections in Kenya near, will we see a spike in electoral violence again involving PGMs? Some signs of violence have occurred around registration, candidate selection and primary abnormalities ([ISS, 17 June 2016](#)), as well as worries regarding "the ability of Kenya police to respond effectively and lawfully should violence occur before, during, or after the 2017 elections" ([Human Rights Watch, 2017](#)). "The lead-up to this year's contest has been characterized by discord over the electoral rules and the impartiality of the electoral commission" ([Bloomberg, 15 March 2017](#)).

However, in that light, "both sides have made moves towards cooperation. In response to increased riots and a worsening security situation, the government agreed to engage in dialogue with opposition principals – mainly [with Raila Odinga's Coalition for Reforms and Democracy]. And in response to intense criticism from Odinga and his supporters about corruption and election rigging, the entire board of the country's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission resigned and has been replaced by members from both sides – an action that has helped legitimize the government's efforts to bring transparency to the electoral process and has improved the CORD's position as the main opposition" ([Brookings, 30 January 2017](#)). Given these steps, electoral violence, especially at rates seen surrounding the 2007 election, seems less likely this election period.

Special Focus Topic: Pro-Government Militias and Electoral Violence in Kenya

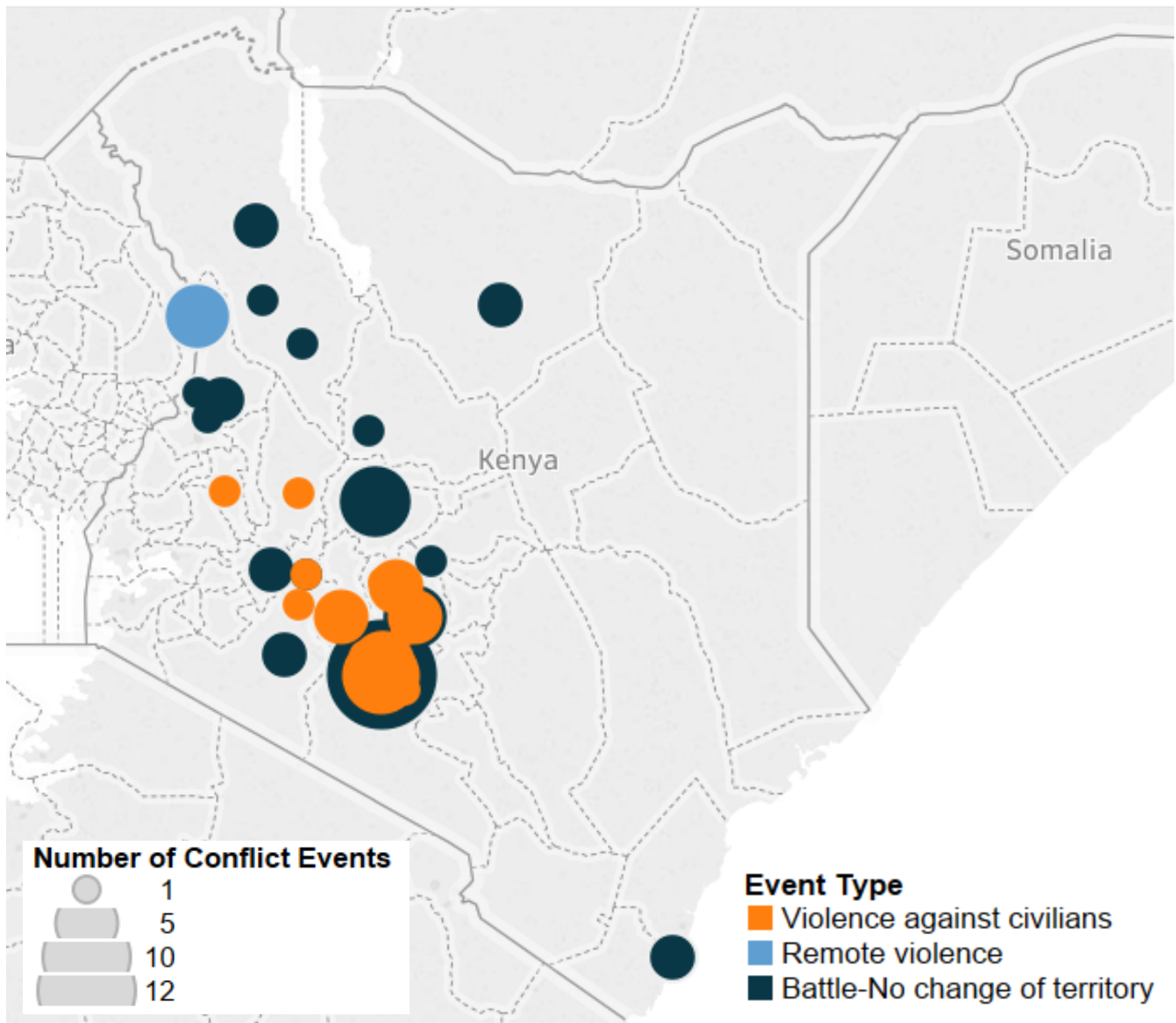


Figure 11: Pro-Government Militia Activity by Location in Kenya, 2007 Election Period.

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Sources

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