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A Quantitative Look at Global Conflict Trends

Using Conflict Data to Assess Changing Conflict Trends

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Introduction

March 2023 marked the fifth anniversary of the *Pathways for Peace (P4P)* report, which began with a review of global conflict trends. It identified a surge and expansion in violent conflict around the world. Since then, trends in global conflict have shifted — both geographically as well as across a number of dimensions of conflict.

This paper updates and extends the analysis carried out in Chapter 1 of *P4P* — relying on a number of units of analysis, to consider a multifaceted review of conflict trends, as well as new sources of conflict data that were unavailable in 2017 (when *P4P* was published) to explore trends quantitatively, alongside short qualitative reviews of key country cases driving trends. The result is a data-driven look at global conflict trends in recent years, and how conflict has evolved and adapted across various contexts, exposing 20% of the world's population (roughly 1.7 billion people) to conflict.[1]

Methodology

To understand conflict patterns using quantitative data, one must first define and measure conflict. This is what data collectors do when they make decisions about dataset scope conditions, sources of information to use, and coding choices — all of which have a direct impact on the patterns of conflict that data outputs will depict (Raleigh, Kishi, and Linke, 2023). All data have biases — i.e. an inclination, prejudice, or directionality to information. These can be especially worrying when resulting in systematic omissions, inflations, or misrepresentations. Decisions made about what information sources to use, how to collect information, how to code information, etc. all result in biases, intentional or not. However, not all of these biases are necessarily damaging to all research questions. It is the responsibility of data users "to more thoughtfully reflect on potential biases, use data in good faith, and acknowledge limitations of data collection and critical interpretation" (Miller, Kishi, Raleigh, and Dowd, 2022).

One step in this endeavor is to use a complementary set of units of analysis, as this paper tries to do (*see Table 1*). This helps to bring together the unique utility of distinct units of analysis — which allows for analysis of various dimensions of conflict associated with activity, lethality, complexity, and more — while tempering associated biases with each by diversifying measurement tools. Further, this paper seeks to capitalize on multiple conflict datasets — using data from both the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), as well as from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). (*P4P* relied almost exclusively on UCDP data alone, especially as ACLED coverage was not then yet global.) By using different units of analysis associated with each dataset, this paper seeks to avoid the subject of analysis becoming a comparison of datasets — in turn allowing the focus to remain more substantive in nature — and in so doing instead tries to play to the strengths of each dataset.

[1] "In 2021, the latest year for which comparable population data are available, ACLED estimates that up to 20% of the world's population — roughly 1.7 billion people — were exposed to political violence" (ACLED, 2023e).

Table 1. Units of Analysis and Associated Utility and Potential Biases

Unit	Data Sourced Used in Paper	Definition	Utility	Potential Biases
Number of active ***conflicts***[2]	UCDP	Each active 'conflict' represents a specific incompatibility between two sides (i.e. a 'dyad') (which has resulted in 25+ fatalities in a given year)	• An increase in the number of conflicts indicates an increase in the extent of complexity of an environment • More (deadly) conflicts suggest more aggrieved parties and more incompatibilities that would require mediation	• Categorization of conflicts can be subjective (i.e. What actors are involved in a conflict? How to deal with multifaceted/complex conflicts? etc.) • There can be great variance in conflicts yet all are treated 'the same' (e.g. Russia vs. Ukraine may be a single conflict, just as two communal militias fighting one another may be a single conflict)
Number of ***conflict events***[3]	ACLED	Conflict *events* reflect the level of conflict activity in an environment; a single conflict may see periods of high or low activity, which indicate different periods during the lifecycle of a conflict	• A rise in conflict activity in an environment can indicate both a rise in the number of conflicts (i.e. stated incompatibilities between two sides) in an environment more largely (*see above*) and/or can indicate heightened tensions, resources, intensity, etc. within a specific conflict	• Conflict events are treated 'the same' yet they can vary in scale (e.g. one small-scale attack resulting in no fatalities may be a single event just as an airstrike killing hundreds may be a single event) • An 'event' is very granular and can at times be difficult for readers to understand

[2] Per UCDP, a conflict is deemed to be *active* if there are at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year in one of the conflict's dyads. This rule also applies to settle dyad activity and the activity of the primary warring parties. A secondary warring party is however considered to be active if it actively supports one of the primary parties with regular troops within the stated incompatibility. In other words, a secondary warring party does not have to, on its own, incur or suffer 25 battle-related deaths to be classified as active. A variant of this coding rule is applied in regards to one-sided violence. A one-sided actor is deemed to be active if an organized group incurs at least 25 deliberate killings of civilians in a year. To calculate the number of active conflicts, a dataset was developed, drawing information from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (version 22.1), the UCDP Non-State Conflict Datasets (version 22.1), and the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset (version 22.1). This is distinct from the number of conflicts that exist within the UCDP Georeferenced Event Datasets (GED) (version 22.1), which includes conflict events within inactive conflicts.

[3] ACLED 'conflict events' refer to all events with the 'event type' categorization of: *Battles, Explosions/Remote violence,* and *Violence against civilians.* Events with 'event type' categorizations of *Riots, Protests,* and *Strategic Developments* are not included here. Conflict events coded by ACLED (used as a unit of analysis in this paper) are distinct from conflict events coded by UCDP. ACLED uses a 'bottom-up' strategy in coding: coding every event that involves political violence, regardless of whether the actor is identified/named or fatality threshold; UCDP uses a 'top-down' strategy in coding: before a conflict event can be coded, a specific conflict (i.e. dyadic engagement) must first be identified, which must both have met a fatality threshold of at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year to be included as well as involve identified/named actors. As such, ACLED has far wider inclusion criteria, and, as a result, a much wider remit, resulting in many more events coded than UCDP. To avoid direct comparisons between the two, the conflict-event unit of analysis in this paper relies solely on ACLED data.

Number of **fatalities**	ACLED	The number of fatalities reported in an environment can be considered a proxy for the severity of conflict within that space	• The number of fatalities offers the most directly tangible measure of the impact of conflict on local populations (i.e. the human cost of war)	• Fatality counts are considered to be the most biased aspect of reporting on conflicts given, for example: • The incentives of conflict actors to over- or under-count fatalities (to appear strong; or to avoid international backlash) • The incentives of reporters to over-count fatalities (i.e. "if it bleeds, it leads") • The logistical difficulties with assessing accurate counts (hard to count bodies during war zones; hard to access places where people are being killed)
Number of **non-state actors** (NSAs)	ACLED	The number of NSAs reflects the number of distinct (non-state) conflict agents active within a specific context	• An increase in the number of NSAs can indicate an increase in the extent of complexity of an environment • More NSAs can suggest more aggrieved parties that would require mediation (i.e. new conflicts emerging) and/or can indicate that an ongoing conflict is becoming more multifaceted • The emergence of new NSAs can also have implications for the risks that civilians face	• Reporting (especially non-local reporting) is often unable to distinguish between small or lesser-known actors. As such, data collection that relies on such reporting will be limited to the level of detail available in such reporting

Temporally, trends using UCDP data extend from 1989 to 2021 — with 1989 representing when UCDP coverage of *all* conflict types begins,[4] and 2021 representing the latest year for which UCDP currently offers published data. While trends using ACLED data extend to include 2022 — and, as such capture the start of the War in Ukraine, which has a considerable effect on many of the conflict patterns explored here — the beginning of temporal coverage varies by region, as a result of the variance in ACLED's temporal coverage by country/region.[5] Analysis in *P4P* depicted trends up to 2016. Graphs throughout this paper seek to understand trends in conflict during the years since then, by highlighting that temporal range for ease of understanding.

Analysis in this paper considers only *conflict*, or the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation. *Violence* — including organized criminal violence, including that which may be akin to conflict in its role directly and fundamentally challenging public safety and security — has been

[4] While UCDP coverage of conflicts in which at least one party is the government of a state extends back to 1946, coverage of conflicts in which *neither* party to the conflict is the government of a state (i.e. non-state conflicts) begins in 1989. Considering all conflict types while looking at trends back to 1946 would result in an artificial spike in conflicts in 1989 onwards when non-state conflicts enter the dataset — resulting in not necessarily correct conclusions that the conflict landscape today is home to considerably more conflicts than the years following World War II. Meanwhile, *excluding* non-state conflicts in order to extend analysis back to 1946 could be done, but conclusions would be limited to an assessment only of conflict patterns *in which one party to the conflict is the government of a state*, and *not* an assessment of 'global conflict patterns' since non-state conflicts would be missing — a subset of conflicts that comprise a considerable proportion of the global conflict landscape today (as evident in Figure 14).

[5] For more on ACLED's varied temporal coverage by country/region, see their full list of country and time period coverage.

excluded from analysis here from both ACLED[6] and UCDP[7] data. This is despite the considerable role that such violence plays in the destabilization of countries and the risks it poses for local populations — many comparable to the impact of conflict (*see Box 1*). This too presents an update and extension to analysis in *P4P,* in which the organized criminal violence captured at the time by UCDP was not excluded from analysis.

Box 1. Violence: An Important Part of 'FCV'

While the trends in this paper explore *conflict* — or the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation — it is important to not forget about the role of *violence* — or the use of force by an individual or group without a direct political purpose or motivation, which may be interpersonal or criminal in nature. In certain contexts, particularly where such violence is organized, its effects can be akin to those of conflict in the role that it plays in causing human suffering, as well as directly and fundamentally challenging public safety and security — especially via holding *de facto* control of territory by limiting the state's ability to enter certain territories, or assuming a law and order role in such spaces; and via challenging the state's ability to ensure and enforce public security, especially through regular public acts of violence.[8] In other words, in such contexts, there is effectively "a gray zone between ordinary crime and political violence [i.e. conflict]" (Kalyvas, 2015, p.1517).

Policymakers, practitioners, and scholars have long viewed organized criminal violence (i.e. 'violence') and political violence (i.e. 'conflict') as distinct from one another, on the assumption that the former is not 'political' in nature. However, while criminal groups do not seek to replace or break away from the state, they increasingly engage in the politics of the state, even if indirectly, through the ways in which they challenge public safety and security, and the state's monopoly on the use of power. Further, 'criminal groups' "have developed variously collaborative and competitive relationships with the state that have produced heightened levels of violence in many contexts and allowed these [groups] to gather significant political authority" (Barnes, 2017, p.967), similar to more traditional non-state actors within more traditional conflict zones. Government actors too have benefitted from framing organized groups as 'criminal,' as it serves to "delegitimize or downplay the seriousness of these [groups] and their violence" (Barnes, 2017, p.979) — a strategy that has often been used in branding political non-state actors as well; such framing serves to in turn justify 'tough on crime' or 'law and order' policies, which may benefit the state.

As such, there is a case to be made to no longer exclude organized criminal violence from more traditional forms of conflict — especially in contexts in which organized criminal violence is quite akin to conflict — in the scope of conflict analysis. Both ACLED[9] and UCDP[10] collect data on such contexts, and find that the number of sustained dyadic engagements (i.e. the number of 'conflicts,' à la the unit of analysis presented in Table 1), violent activity (i.e. the number of events), and fatalities stemming from such violence have all been on the rise in recent years. Worrying is that such violence that is akin to conflict disproportionately impacts certain regions, namely the Americas, more so than other contexts. The result is that the Americas may appear much more peaceful in analyses that only focus on 'conflict' — such as those in this paper — than reality, significantly underrepresenting the risks that populations in the region may face.

If data on organized criminal violence (i.e. that which is akin to conflict) is integrated with data on 'conflict' more traditionally understood (i.e. the data presented elsewhere in this paper), new worrying trends emerge — especially those which center the risks that countries in the Americas may face. The Americas becomes the region home to the second highest number of 'conflicts' (i.e. sustained dyadic engagements) in the world, second only to Africa — hosting nearly 21% of all 'conflicts' around the world in 2021. In terms of conflict/violent activity (i.e. number of events), the Americas becomes the third 'most violent' region in the world in 2022 — second if excluding Ukraine, a considerable outlier; home to nearly 19% of all events, the Americas are considered 'more violent' than both Africa and Asia. Further, were fatalities from organized criminal violence to be included in the definition of 'conflict,' the Americas becomes home to nearly 15% of global 'conflict'-related fatalities in 2022 — more than that seen in the Middle East that year. More concretely, for example, more fatalities stemmed from such violence in Brazil that year than conflict-related fatalities in Syria. And this violence is considerably lethal — meaning that a single violent event, on average, results in a high number of fatalities. In 2022, when considering traditional conflict zones alone, each conflict event resulted in, on average, less than 1 fatality (0.87). In

[6] ACLED codes criminal violence that it deems to be akin to political violence (i.e. when violent gang activity directly and fundamentally challenges public safety and security); it deems that such criminal violence meets such thresholds in 11 Latin American countries where gang violence is pervasive: Belize, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela. As a result, for ACLED analysis here, all events that involved 'criminal gangs' from these 11 Latin American countries were excluded. *This was done with assistance from ACLED, who keeps an internal list of all actors it considers to be criminal gangs in nature.* When ACLED does not have reports that distinguish the name of actor(s) involved in an event, it still codes the event, though notes that the actor is 'unidentified.' In cases where the event depicts targets, tactics, and procedures (TTPs) often used by gangs, it codes the unidentified actor as a 'gang'; in cases where such TTPs were *not* displayed, it assumes that the unidentified actor was *not* a gang. Events involving unidentified gangs were also excluded from analysis here, though events involving unidentified (not gang) actors remain included since ACLED has no reason to believe these involved criminal groups.

[7] UCDP codes all organized violence between two named actors — including all political and criminal actors. For UCDP analysis here, all active conflicts involving criminal actors were excluded. *This was done with assistance from UCDP, who keeps an internal list of all actors it considers to have never engaged in conflict over political goals;* UCDP considers criminal actors who engage with the state at all to exhibit 'political goals,' by definition.

[8] ACLED uses such a methodology in its classification of such groups; for more, see their methodology primer on *Gang Violence: Concepts, Benchmarks, and Coding Rules*.

[9] ACLED, codes political violence, including criminal violence that it deems to be akin to political violence (i.e. when violent gang activity directly and fundamentally challenges public safety and security); they deem that such criminal gang violence meets such thresholds in 11 Latin American countries (*see Footnote 6*).

[10] UCDP codes all organized violence between two *named* actors (this includes all political and criminal actors). Organized violence that involves unnamed actors is not included.

countries of the Americas that are home to violence akin to conflict, the lethality rate was 32% *higher*, with each violent event resulting in, on average, more than 1 fatality (1.16). In certain particularly lethal countries, like Haiti, this rate was *even higher*: in 2022, each violent event in Haiti resulted in over 2 fatalities (2.49), a rate nearly three times the global conflict average. These trends, especially when taken together, underline the immense destabilizing effect that such violence has in such countries, rendering them comparable in many ways to more traditional war zones.

Importantly, the trends above represent but a *subset* of all violence — only considering the subset of violence that is akin to conflict in its organized and group-based nature. These trends do not account for rates of other, non-organized, interpersonal or criminal violence, intimate partner violence or domestic violence, etc., which of course pose even further risks for populations. Data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) suggests that rates of intentional homicide have been on the rise, with the vast majority of such violence (over 88% as of 2021) taking place in the Americas.

Conflict Trends

While the number of active conflicts has, on aggregate, remained fairly steady at a relatively high level in the years since *P4P* (i.e. from 2017 onwards) (*see Figure 1a*), there has been considerable variation across regions when it comes to conflict activity (i.e. the number of conflict events) (*see Figure 1b*).[11] *The latter variation in trends serves to underline the need for looking beyond aggregate trends alone*, explored in further detail in the following sections. Conflict is context specific: adapting to the local environment as conflict actors strategically evolve. Failing to account for such specificity by looking at aggregate trends alone not only misses nuance, but results in inaccurate conclusions — such as the assumption that conflict trends have shifted minimally, which Figure 1a implies, when the reality is that there has been incredible change in dynamics once one drills down, as seen in Figure 1b, which shows that conflict activity has risen in Africa and Europe while declining in the Middle East (*addressed in further detail in the following section*).

[11] Variation in temporal range across regions is due to ACLED's variance in country coverage years; considering global trends over a large time range would yield inaccurate aggregate trends.

Figure 1a. Number of Active Conflicts, *UCDP*, 1989-2021

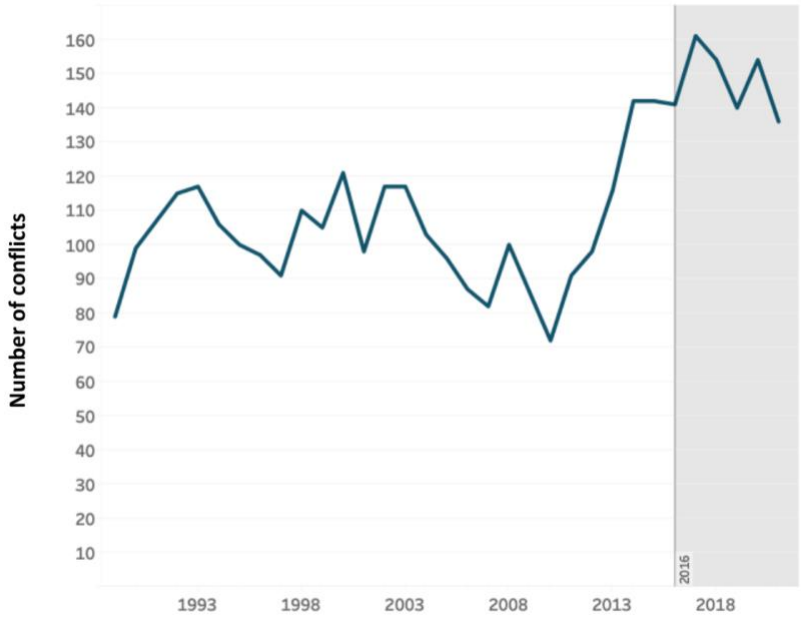
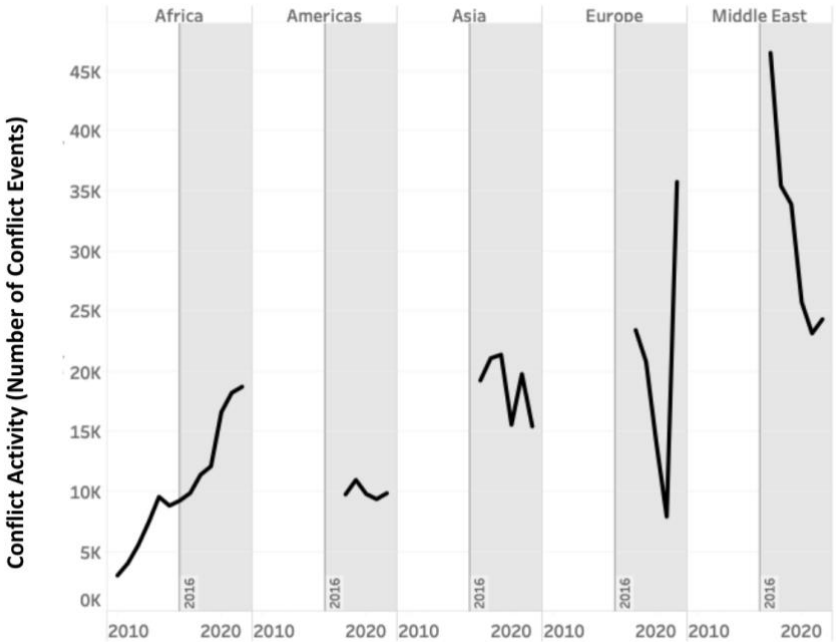


Figure 1b. Number of Conflict Events by Region, *ACLED*, up to 2022



Conflict and Income Classification

A commonly held misconception had been that poorer countries are home to more conflict. As such, income classification is often used as a proxy for state capacity and, to an extent, fragility — with poorer state capacity or higher fragility making it more difficult for a state to manage and prevent conflict. However, "while a state's capacity to manage and prevent conflict and violence tends to improve with income, this is developed through a gradual and uneven process that often lags as countries get richer" (World Bank, 2022). As a result, this means that conflict is not necessarily occurring in low-income countries alone.

In fact, as depicted in Figure 2, between 2009 and 2018, most of the world's active conflicts took place within middle-income countries (*in yellow*).[12] An initial shift in 2009 was driven by a reclassification of India — home to 13 active conflicts in 2008, and 10 in 2009 — from a low-income country to a middle-income county.[13] Later, beginning in 2013, a spike in the number of active conflicts in middle-income countries was driven by Syria as the crisis situation in the country escalated into a full-fledged civil war, made up of a number of 'active conflicts' (i.e. dyadic engagements).

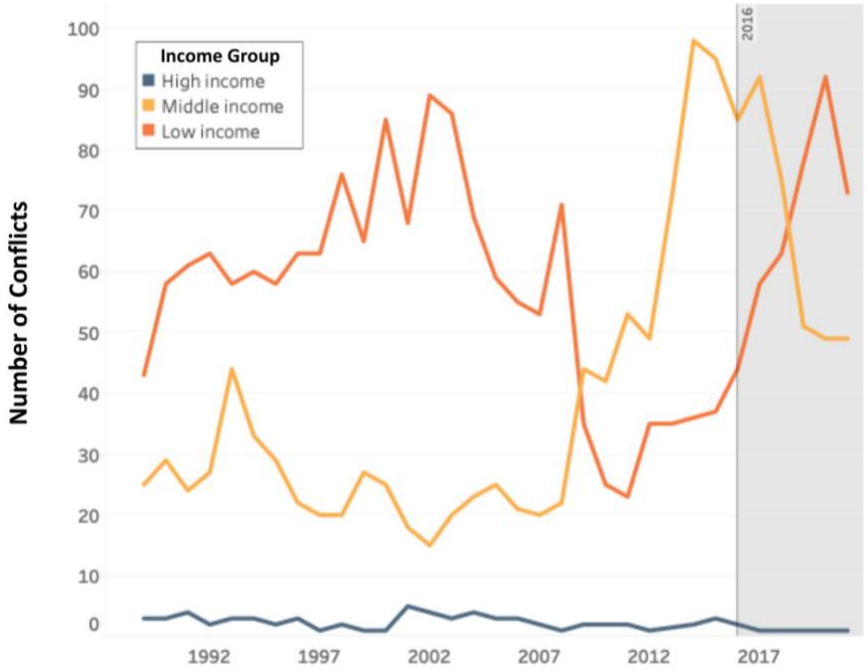
The steep decline in the number of active conflicts in middle-income countries in 2018 and 2019 reflects not only a change in the dynamics of the Syrian Civil War, with a number of 'active conflicts' (i.e. dyadic engagements) there ending or becoming inactive, but also the reclassification of Syria and Yemen, both home to ongoing conflicts, from middle-income status in 2018 to low-income status in 2019 — underlining the deleterious impact that war can have on economic gains in addition to its many other negative consequences.[14] In short, whether a country's income status transitions or not "may affect patterns of violence and, conversely, patterns of violence may also affect economic performance. Whatever the direction of causality, it is clear that patterns of economic performance and violence are closely related" (World Bank, 2022).

[12] Income classification used in this graph comes from the World Bank. Upper middle-income and lower middle-income classifications have been grouped together as 'middle-income.' Data used in the graph reflects the classification assigned to each country each year — i.e. country classifications may vary over time. In total, at least 26 countries depicted here shifted from one income status to another at least once — with some shifting multiple times. Some of these shifts represented positive changes — i.e. a shift from low-income to middle-income, for example — while others were less so — i.e. a shift from middle-income status to low-income. Only country-years in conflict are depicted here, so the full set of country-years that saw shifts in income status is well above this number. Country-years for which no income-level status was reported by the World Bank have been excluded.

[13] Other countries have shifted from low-income to middle-income status, or from middle-income to high-income status as well over the years. India, however, being home to a number of conflicts during the mentioned years — including state-based conflict against Maoist rebels or against Kashmir insurgents, to name a few examples — was a primary driver of this trend.

[14] While Syria and Yemen drove this trend, shifting in income status from 2018 to 2019, other countries have shifted from middle-income status to low-income, or from high-income status to middle-income, as well over the years. While income re-classification is not solely a result of conflict — with other factors also potentially contributing to such shifts, as seen in countries whose classification has shifted yet are not home to ongoing conflicts — ongoing conflict can indeed impact income status, or vice-versa. Other such examples include, for instance: Bosnia-Herzegovina (then the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) shifting from middle-income status in 1994 to low-income status in 1995, during the Bosnian War; and Angola shifting from middle-income status in 1996 to low-income status in 1997, during the Second Angolan Civil War.

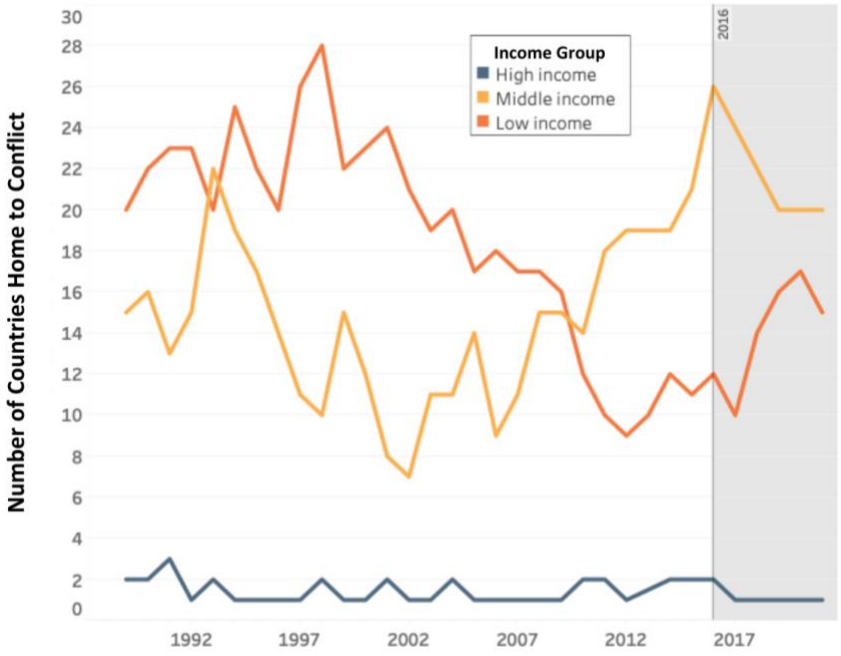
Figure 2. Number of Active Conflicts by Income Classification of Host Country, *UCDP*, 1989-2021



While most active conflicts in the world took place in low-income countries (*in orange*) in 2021, a number of the countries home to the highest numbers of ongoing active conflicts — such as Syria, Yemen, and Sudan — were countries that were, until recently, classified as middle-income countries. In short, middle-income countries home to ongoing active conflicts often do not remain middle-income in the long-term — eventually shifting to low-income classification as conflicts wage on, underscoring the relationship between fragility and conflict.

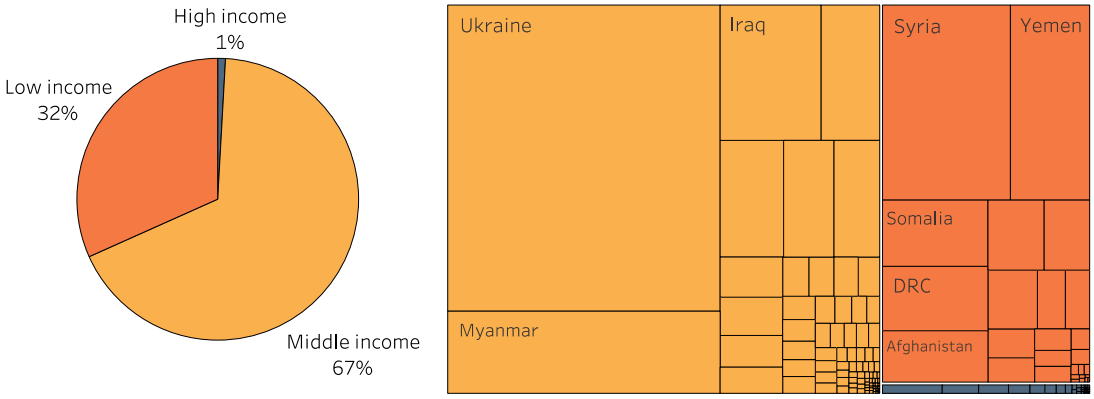
Worrying is that an increasingly large number of middle-income countries are becoming home to active conflicts. As depicted in Figure 3, since 2010, more middle-income countries (*in yellow*) have been home to active conflicts than low-income countries (*in orange*). An initial shift was seen in 2010 with a decline in the number of low-income countries home to active conflicts, followed by a rise in 2011 in the number of middle-income countries home to active conflicts, such as Syria, Libya, and Egypt — a function of the Arab Spring and its aftermath. Since 2016, there has been a decline in the number of middle-income countries home to active conflicts — though this is, at least partially, due to the reclassification of some middle-income countries with ongoing conflicts as low-income countries — such as Syria and Yemen, as noted above. Alongside this decline has been an increase in the number of low-income countries home to active conflicts — though again, at least partially, a result of the reclassification of some middle-income countries with ongoing conflicts as low-income countries, per above.

Figure 3. Number of Countries Home to Active Conflicts by Income Classification, *UCDP,* 1989-2021



The trend of middle-income countries being home to conflict continued into 2022. Figure 4a depicts how most conflict events (over two-thirds) took place within middle-income countries in 2022 (*in yellow*), driven primarily by conflict activity in Ukraine, as well as Myanmar and others (*see Figure 4b*). This is in line with findings that argue that "fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) in middle-income countries is one of today's major development issues" (World Bank, 2022).

Figure 4. (**a**) Percentage of Conflict Events by Income Classification of Host Country, *ACLED,* 2022; (**b**) Percentage of Conflict Events by Country and Income Classification, *ACLED,* 2022



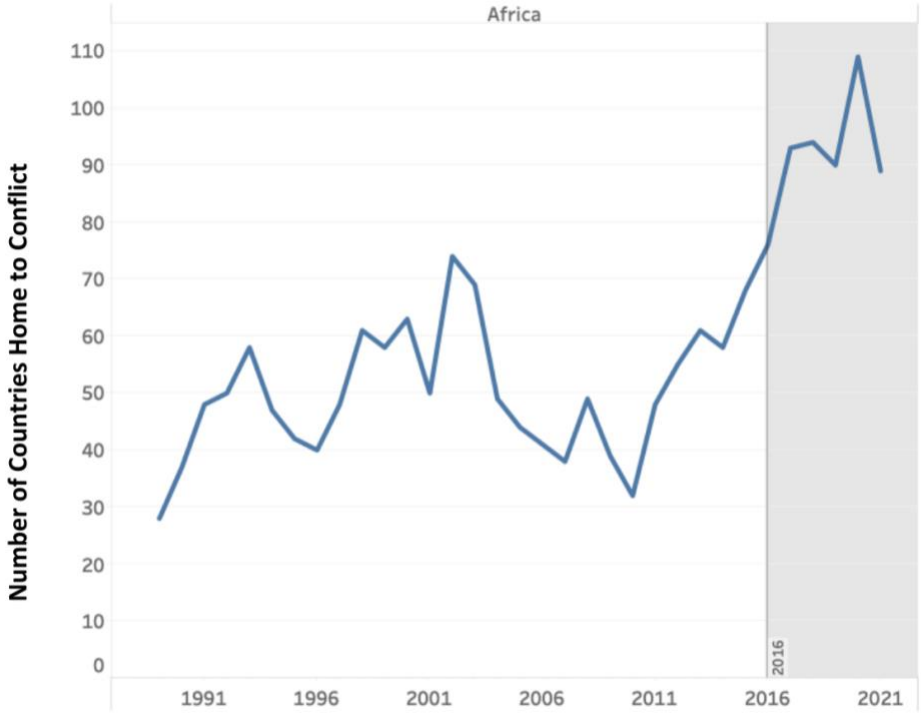
Regional Conflict Trends

Regionally, trends in where the world's active conflicts are taking place has shifted, with distinct dynamics in each region.

Africa

Africa remains home to most of the world's active conflicts, as of 2021. There has been a steady rise in the number of active conflicts on the continent since 2010 (*see Figure 5a*) — a trend that has largely continued since *P4P*. These dynamics have been driven especially by trends in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, and Mali (*see below*). Figure 5b maps all countries in Africa home to active conflicts in 2021.

Figure 5a. Number of Active Conflicts in Africa, *UCDP*, 1989-2021[15]

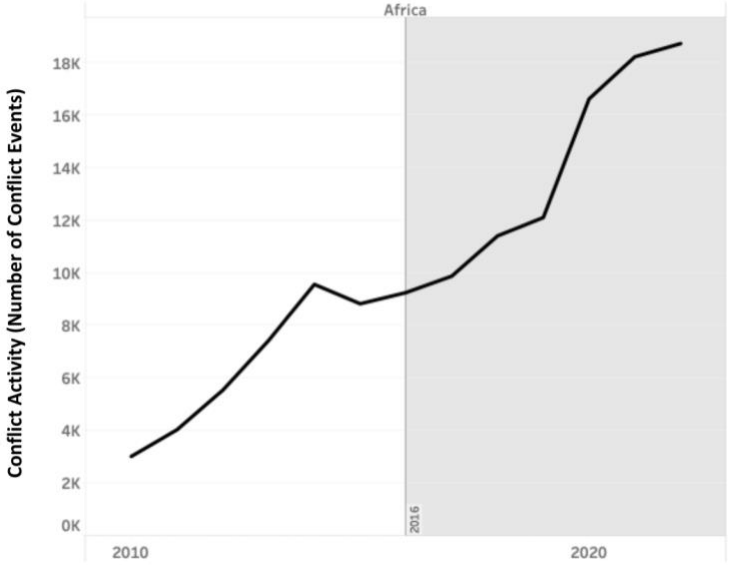


[15] Active conflicts for which UCDP codes multiple locations (i.e. a list of locations, separated by commas) have been excluded from regional analysis, as it was not possible to attribute such conflicts to a specific region, and it would not be correct for this analysis to attribute them to *all* regions listed. The result is the exclusion of 10 conflicts (0.27% of conflicts in the dataset) from analysis.

Figure 5b. Countries Home to Active Conflicts in Africa, *UCDP*, 2021

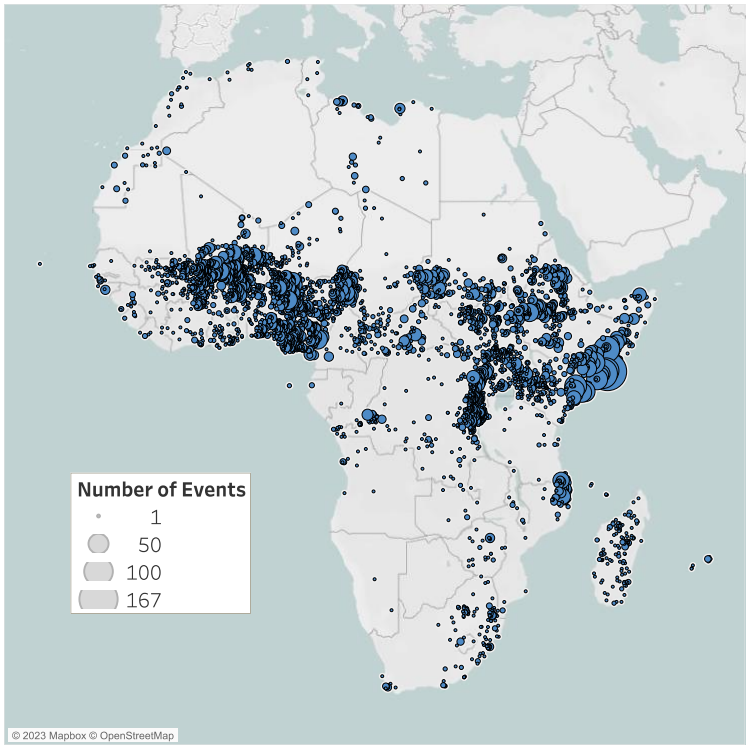
Similarly, the number of conflict events taking place in Africa has also been on the rise, especially since 2017 (*see Figure 6a*). This has been driven by dynamics in Nigeria, DRC, Ethiopia, and the Sahel (specifically Burkina Faso and Mali). Figure 6b maps all conflict events in Africa in 2022.

Figure 6a. Number of Conflict Events in Africa, *ACLED*, 2010-2022[16]



[16] While ACLED coverage of small African island states (Cape Verde; Comoros; Mauritius; Mayotte; Reunion, Saint Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha; Sao Tome and Principe; and Seychelles) extends back to 2020, given the relatively small number of conflict events in these countries, their entry into the dataset presents a small effect on trends. Hence, in order to maximize historical coverage, temporal coverage of ACLED data is extended back further than 2020 for analysis. N.B. Egypt is included alongside Middle East calculations instead of Africa.

Figure 6b. Conflict Events in Africa, *ACLED*, 2022



In Nigeria, conflict has intensified with the Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP) expanding its activity, conflict amongst communal and ethnic militias continuing, civilians continuing to be disproportionately targeted, and a separatist movement in the south, amongst other trends (ACLED, 2022a). In the DRC, large numbers of non-state actors (NSAs) continue to engage in multiple conflicts over territorial and resource control, with intercommunal conflict also on the rise (ACLED, 2023a). In Ethiopia, the outbreak of civil conflict in northern Tigray involving ethno-regional militias, as well as the militaries of both Ethiopia and Eritrea, has led to mass killings and humanitarian concern (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023a). In the Sahel, the decade-long crisis, largely driven by a jihadist insurgency, has not only persisted but has escalated, with spillover effects continuing to become a larger concern (ACLED, 2022b).

Middle East

Meanwhile, there has been a decline in the number of active conflicts housed in the Middle East since 2014 (*see Figure 7a*), driven largely by trends in Syria. While it has been a decade since the uprising that sparked the war in Syria, the country continues to be home to conflict and instability, and remains one of the deadliest countries in the world. Shifts in the dynamics of the war, including peace talks, negotiations, and ceasefires, have contributed to a decline in conflict in recent years, though the war remains far from over: "the country is fractured by actors with apparently irreconcilable interests: in areas beyond the regime's control, extremists promoting a Sunni Muslim theocracy have eclipsed opposition forces fighting for a democratic and pluralistic Syria, while regional powers have backed various local forces to advance their geopolitical interests on Syria's battlefields" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023b). The local Syrian population also continues to face other crises as well, in addition to the continued threat of conflict:

an economic crisis, with the vast majority of the population living in poverty, as well as a humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of the massive earthquake that shook the north of the country in early 2023. Figure 7b maps all countries in the Middle East home to active conflicts in 2021.

Figure 7a. Number of Active Conflicts in the Middle East, *UCDP*, 1989-2021

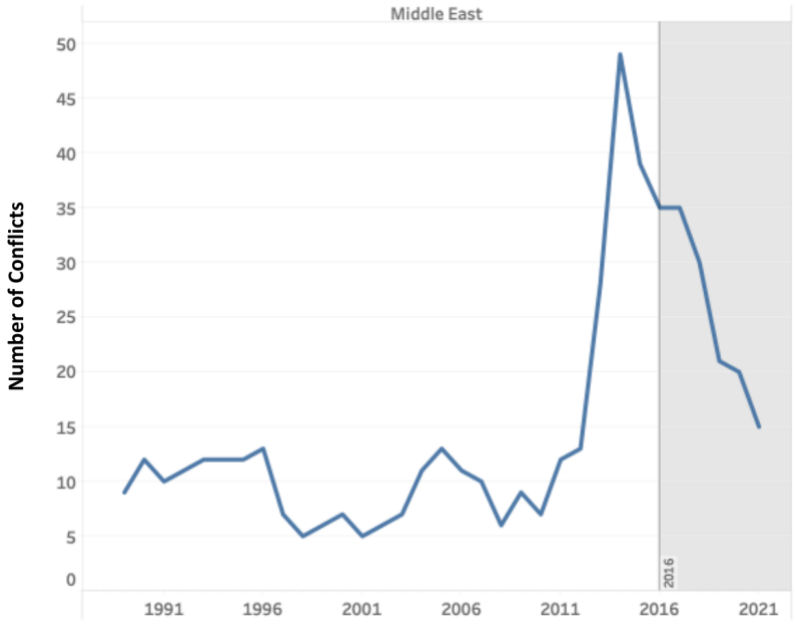
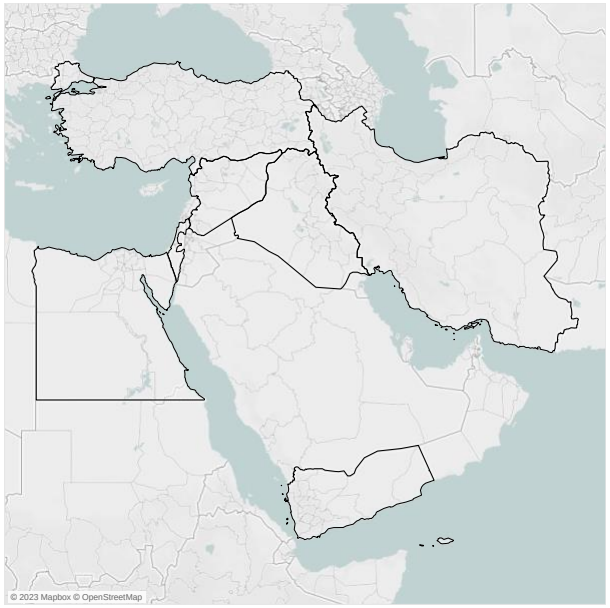


Figure 7b. Countries Home to Active Conflicts in the Middle East, *UCDP*, 2021



This decline in the number of active conflicts has been mirrored in the decline in the number of conflict events taking place in the region as well (*see Figure 8a*) — though conflict activity in the region remains very high relative to global trends. This trend has also been primarily driven by dynamics in Syria, as outlined above, though recent trends in Yemen have also contributed. While

conflict in Yemen continues, diplomatic efforts by the UN in 2022 helped in securing an unprecedented short-lived truce between Houthi-affiliated authorities and the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG), resulting in a decline in conflict in the country (ACLED, 2022c). Figure 8b maps all conflict events in the Middle East in 2022.

Figure 8a. Number of Conflict Events in the Middle East, *ACLED*, 2017-2022[17]

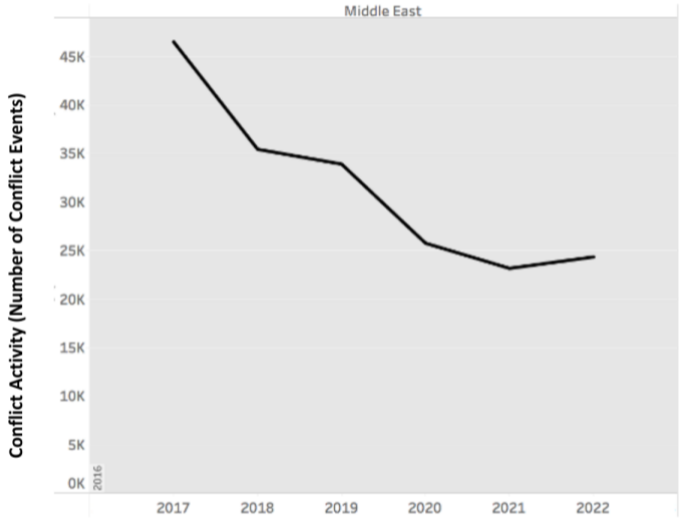
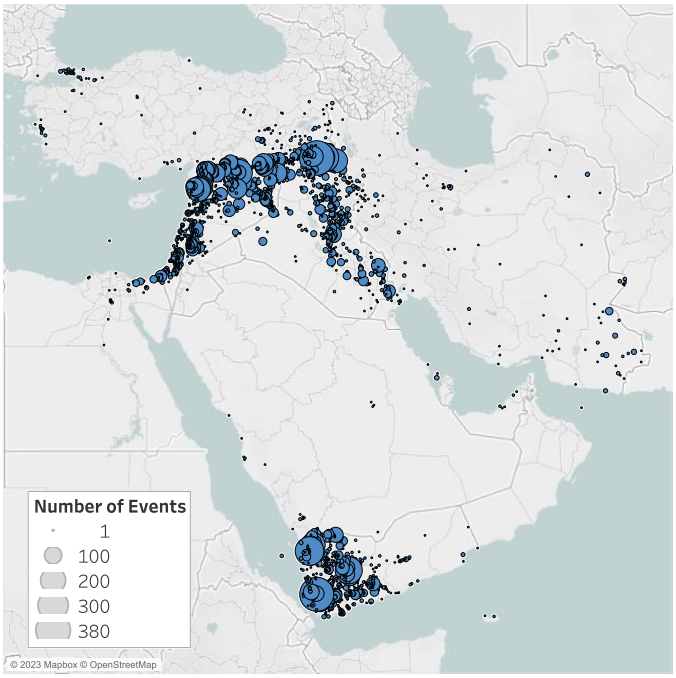


Figure 8b. Conflict Events in the Middle East, *ACLED*, 2022



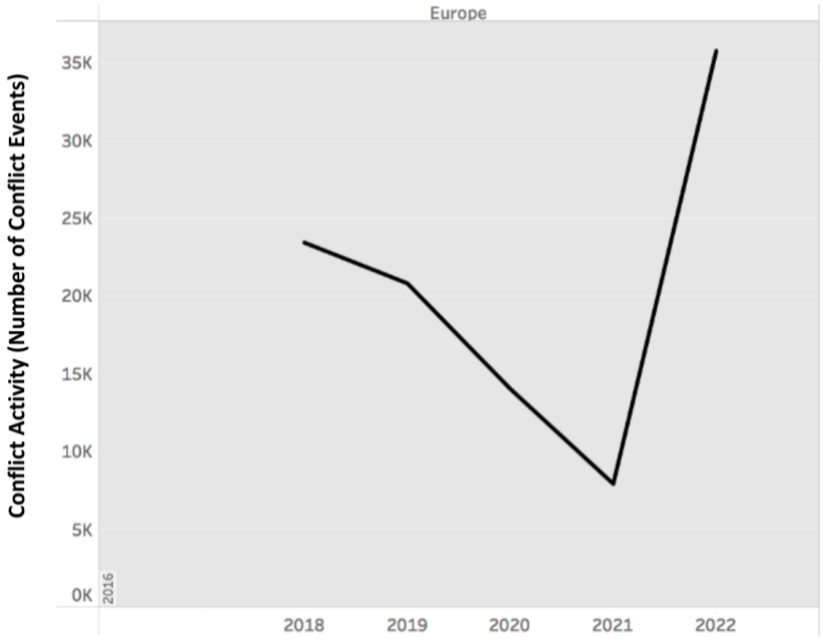
[17] ACLED coverage of the Middle East spans back to 2015 for some countries in the region, and to 1997 for Egypt. As coverage of Syria in particular — which yields a considerable proportion of conflict events within the Middle East dataset — extends back to 2017, temporal coverage of ACLED data is only extended back to 2017, so as to avoid skewing of trends.

These trends are a deviation from trends seen in *P4P*, where the number of active conflicts in the region had generally been on the rise (driven largely by Syria) and had been predicted to continue doing so. Nevertheless, despite these declines, the Middle East was still home to the most conflict activity (i.e. number of conflict events) in 2021. This underscores the need to explore trends both *within* regions as well as *amongst* regions, in order to understand *relative* trends; while the decline in conflict in the Middle East is welcoming, its comparison to other regions of the world underlines the gravity of dynamics in the region still.

Europe

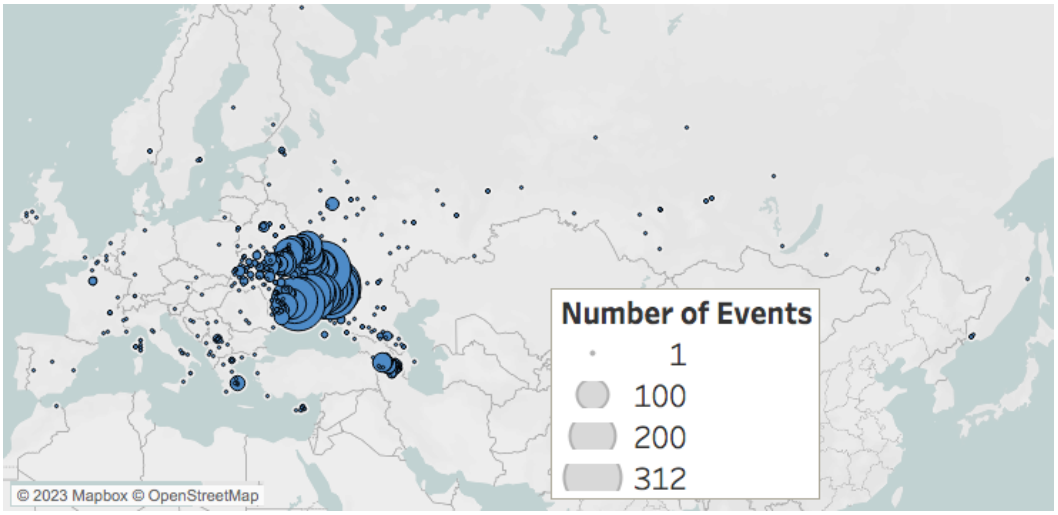
In 2022, Europe surpassed the Middle East in becoming the region home to the most conflict events in the world (*see Figure 9a*), driven by trends in Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine — in a major escalation of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict between the two countries and Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine that had been largely centered in Ukraine's Donbas region. The escalation has resulted in mass casualties and displacement — the largest and fastest displacement in Europe since World War II (UN, 2022) — and has been met with widespread international condemnation, especially as a result of apparent war crimes (ACLED, 2023b). Figure 9b maps all conflict events in Europe in 2022.

Figure 9a. Number of Conflict Events in Europe, *ACLED*, 2018-2022[18]



[18] ACLED coverage of Europe spans back to 2018.

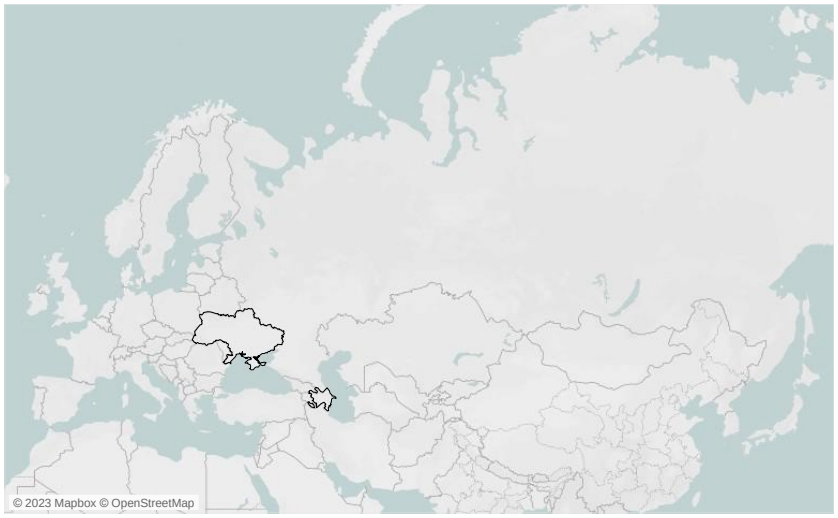
Figure 9b. Conflict Events in Europe, *ACLED*, 2022



The number of active conflicts in Europe, prior to the start of the conflict in Ukraine, had remained relatively low and constant in recent years, as of 2021 (*see Figure 10a*). This is a deviation from trends seen in *P4P* when the number of active conflicts in the region had been declining. Figure 10b maps all countries in Europe home to active conflicts in 2021, demonstrating that while conflict activity may be more dispersed across the region (*see Figure 9b*), the countries home to sustained, deadly engagement between two adversaries is more limited.

Figure 10a. Number of Active Conflicts in Europe, *UCDP*, 1989-2021

Figure 10b. Countries Home to Active Conflicts in Europe, *UCDP*, 2021



Asia

Meanwhile, in Asia, there has been a general decline in the number of active conflicts in the region, as of 2021 (*see Figure 11a*). This was driven by moderate declines in active conflicts across a number of countries. This trend is a deviation from trends seen in *P4P*, where the number of active conflicts in the region had remained relatively stable. Figure 11b maps all countries in Asia home to active conflicts in 2021, demonstrating that conflicts are not confined to only a small subset of countries in the region (as was the case in Europe, discussed above).

Figure 11a. Number of Active Conflicts in Asia, *UCDP*, 1989-2021

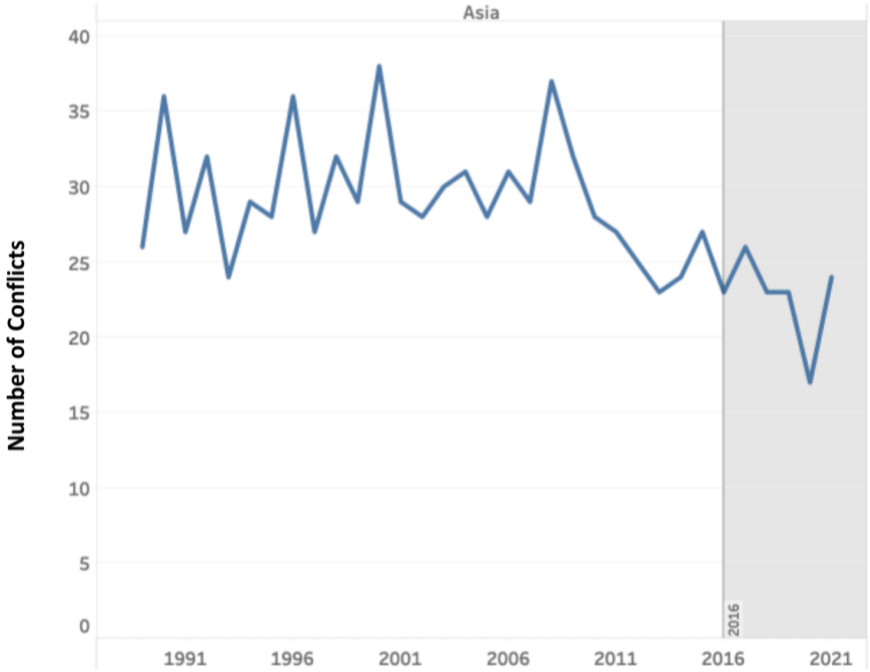
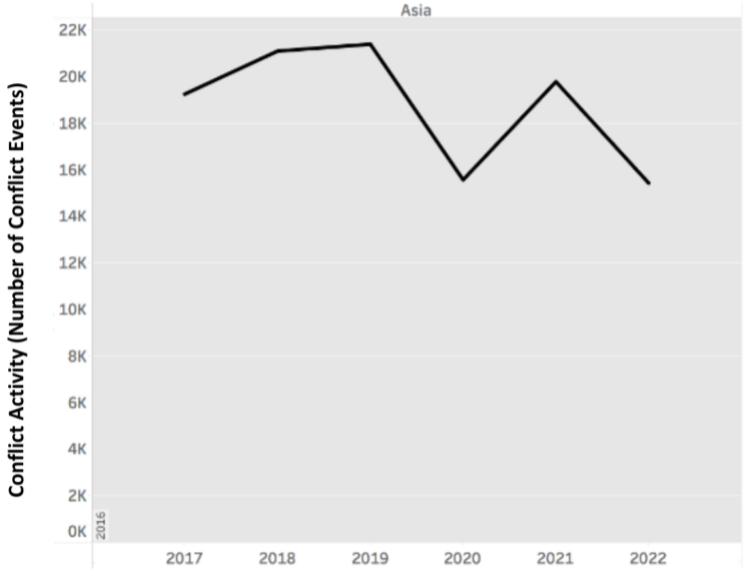


Figure 11b. Countries Home to Active Conflicts in Asia, *UCDP*, 2021

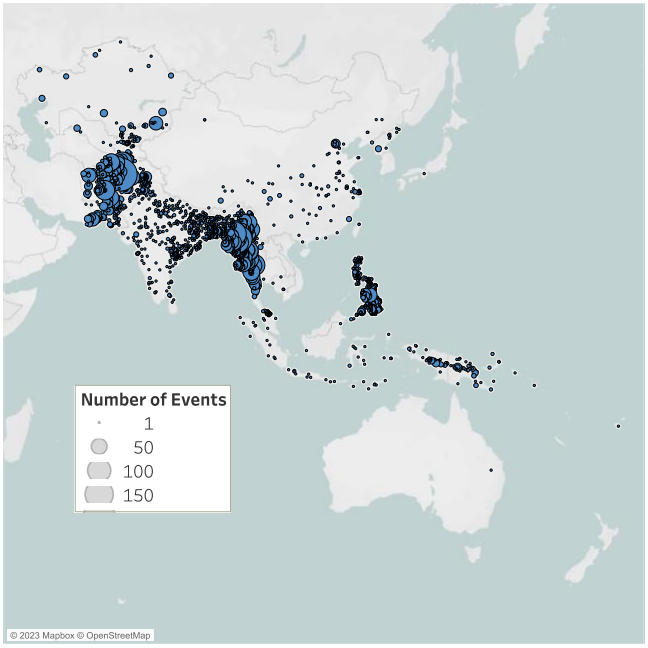
Similarly, the number of conflict events has also been declining, as of 2022 (*see Figure 12a*), though this trend was driven primarily by dynamics in Afghanistan rather than more regionally, despite the concurrent spike in the number of conflict events in Myanmar since 2021. Figure 12b maps all conflict events in Asia in 2022.

Figure 12a. Number of Conflict Events in Asia, *ACLED*, 2017-2022[19]



[19] ACLED coverage of Asia spans back to 2010 for some countries in the region. As coverage of Afghanistan in particular — which yields such a considerable proportion of conflict events within the Asia dataset — extends back to 2017, temporal coverage of ACLED data is only extended back to 2017, so as to avoid skewing of trends. While coverage of East Asia extends back to 2018, and coverage of Oceania extends back to 2021, given the relatively small number of conflict events in these countries, their entry into the dataset presents a small effect on trends. Hence, in order to maximize historical coverage, temporal coverage of ACLED data is extended back to 2017.

Figure 12b. Conflict Events in Asia, *ACLED*, 2022



The number of conflict events in Afghanistan began declining in 2020, following the US-negotiated 'reduction in violence' (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020) and accompanying decline in conflict events, in the by-then nearly 20-year war in Afghanistan. Conflict activity in the country spiked in the first half of 2021 — a result of a Taliban offensive that resulted in territorial takeovers across the country, ultimately culminating in the takeover of Kabul that summer and the fall of the US-backed government. With the formal end of the War in Afghanistan in mid-2021, there has concurrently been a considerable decline in conflict activity in the country since then. Nevertheless, local populations in the country — especially women and girls, as well as journalists, for example — continue to face considerable risk at the hands of the Taliban (The Intercept, 2022; Sky News, 2022), in addition to other continued threats posed toward the civilian population at large, like that by the Islamic State.

At the height of the War in Afghanistan, conflict activity there was incredibly high — contributing to Afghanistan regularly being one of the 'most violent' countries in the world, as a function of the sheer number of conflict events occurring there. The decline in conflict activity in the country was hence so considerable following the formal end of the war that trends, on aggregate, in the region declined, despite the significant spike in the number of conflict events in Myanmar, beginning in 2021 (*more on Myanmar below*). This underlines the importance of relying on complementary units of analysis. One of the limitations of using the number of active conflicts as a unit of analysis is that there can be great variance in conflicts, yet all are treated 'the same.' The conflict between the Taliban and the then-government of Afghanistan was a single conflict, yet it resulted in such massive rates of conflict activity that it dominated the conflict landscape of the region. While its end represents the end of a single conflict, its effects are much more pervasive on aggregate conflict activity trends in the region. This is why trends in Figure 12a above are driven largely by trends in Afghanistan, while not impacting trends in Figure 11a above as starkly.

Americas

Lastly, in the Americas — excluding organized criminal violence, even that akin to conflict, as discussed in Box 1 — there has been neither a considerable change in the number of active conflicts as of 2021 (*see Figure 13a*) nor the number of conflict events as of 2022 (*see Figure 13b*). Figure 13c maps all countries in the Americas home to active conflicts in 2021, while Figure 13d maps all conflict events in the Americas in 2022.

Figure 13a. Number of Active Conflicts in the Americas, *UCDP*, 1989-2021

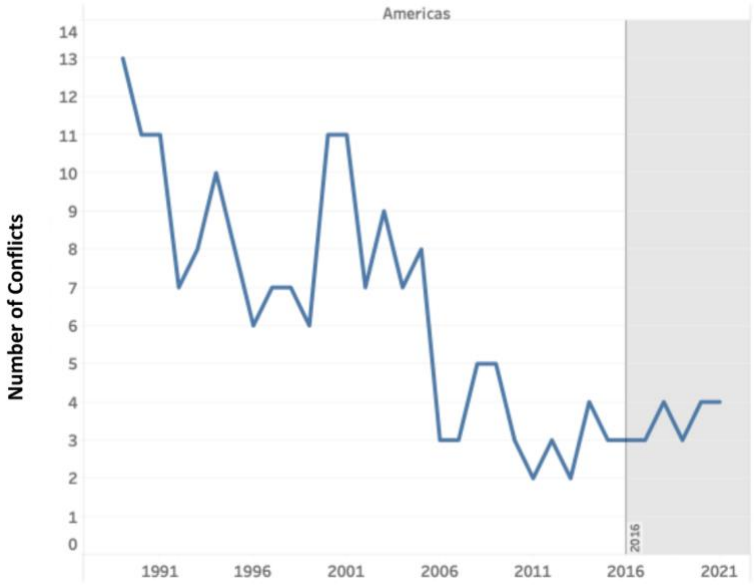
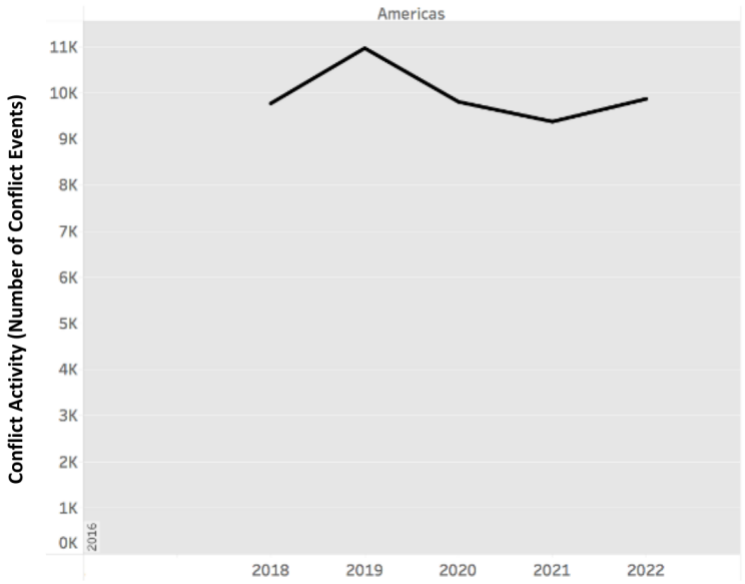


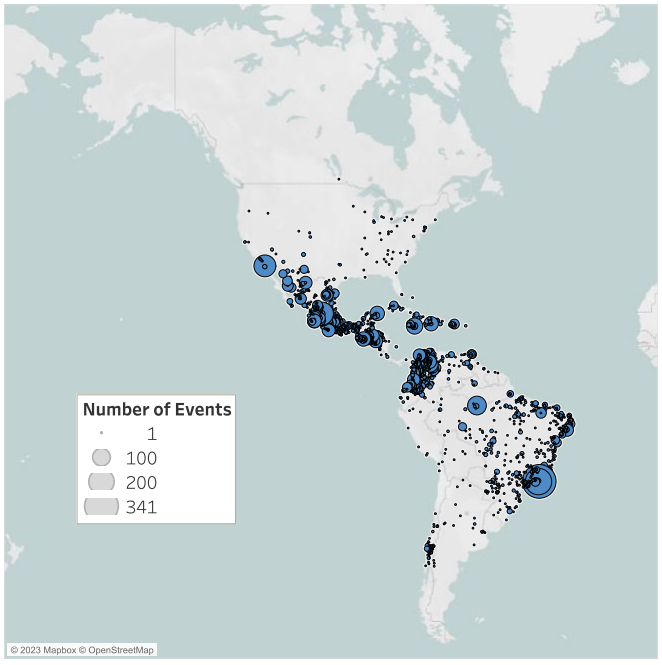
Figure 13b. Number of Conflict Events in the Americas, *ACLED*, 2018-2022[20]



[20] ACLED coverage of Latin American countries spans back to 2018. While coverage of the US extends back to 2020, and Canada and North American small states extends to 2021, given the relatively small number of conflict events in these countries, their entry into the dataset presents a small effect on trends. Hence, in order to maximize historical coverage, temporal coverage of ACLED data is extended back to 2018.

Figure 13c. Countries Home to Active Conflicts in the Americas, *UCDP*, 2021[21]

Figure 13d. Conflict Events in the Americas, *ACLED*, 2022[22]



[21] UCDP considers criminal actors who engage with the state at all to exhibit 'political goals,' by definition, and hence considers such engagements to constitute 'conflicts' (*see Footnote 7*); as such, these 'conflicts' are reflected in analysis here.
[22] When ACLED does not have reports that distinguish the name of actor(s) involved in an event, it still codes the event, though notes that the actor is 'unidentified.' In cases where the event depicts TTPs often used by gangs, it codes the unidentified actor as a 'gang'; in cases where such TTPs were *not* displayed, it assumes that the unidentified actor was *not* a gang (*see Footnote 6*). Events involving unidentified (not gang) actors remain included since ACLED has no reason to believe these involved criminal groups; as such, these 'conflict events' are reflected in analysis here.

Conclusions in Regional Conflict Trends

In short, regional trends in where the world's active conflicts are taking place has been shifting in recent years, since *P4P*. Some of these developments seem promising; for example, the number of active conflicts in both the Middle East and Asia have been declining — no longer generally on the rise or remaining constant, respectively, as trends in *P4P* had indicated. While such developments are welcome, they must be considered alongside other units of analysis and relative to other trends to be more fully understood.

For example, while the decline in the number of active conflicts in the Middle East has come alongside a decline in the number of conflict events, the region was still home to the most conflict events in the world in 2021 — underscoring the risk that local populations in the region continued to face. Similarly, the decline in the number of active conflicts in Asia has also come alongside a general decline in the number of conflict events — though unlike trends in the Middle East, dynamics across units of analysis were not driven by the same context. While the decline in the number of *active conflicts* in Asia has been driven by trends across multiple countries, the decline in the number of *conflict events* was driven especially by trends in Afghanistan. Trends in other countries in the region, such as Myanmar, differ in that they have increased considerably during the same time.

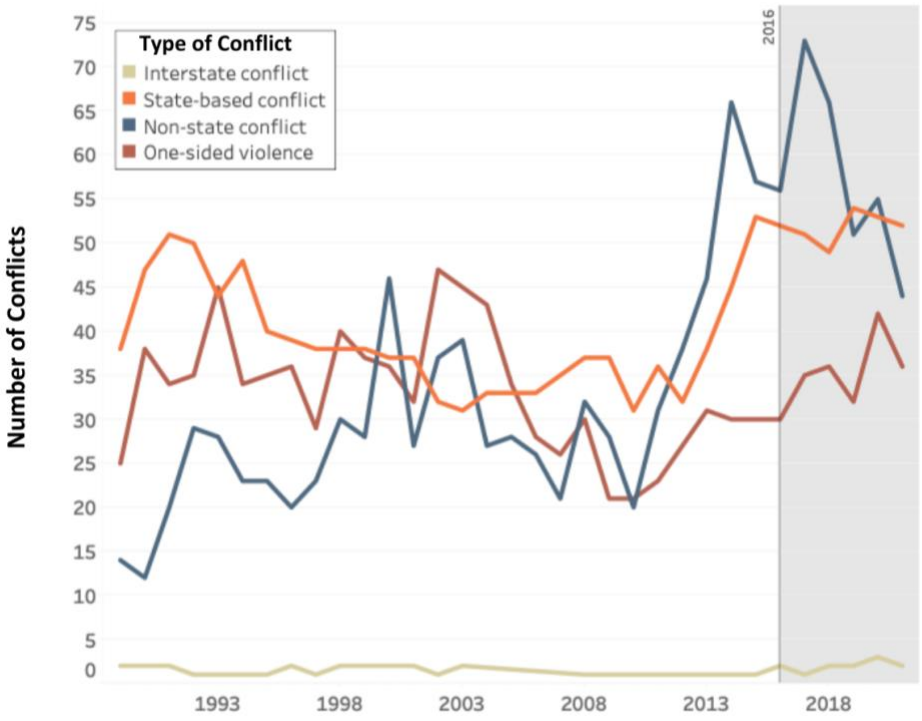
Other trends, meanwhile, suggest that things may be worsening. For example, the number of conflicts in Europe had generally continued to decline, as observed in *P4P*, though the start of the War in Ukraine in 2022 now suggests otherwise. In 2022, Europe was home to more conflict events than any other region; nearly 97% of these European conflict events took place within Ukraine.

Further, some worrying trends have not changed. The number of active conflicts in Africa had been on the rise in *P4P* — and this trend has continued. There were 33 more active conflicts in 2020 than there had been in 2016; and despite a decline in the number of active conflicts in 2021 from 2020, there were still 13 more active conflicts reported in 2021 than in 2016.

Trends in Conflict Type

Like regional trends in conflict patterns, trends associated with conflict types have also shifted in recent years, reflecting a change in the conflict landscape seen around the world (*see Figure 14*). Box 2 defines these conflict types in further detail, with conflict type a function of the parties to a conflict. (These definitions are based largely on those put forward by UCDP, though this conflict type categorization does not mirror UCDP's 'type of conflict' categorization exactly.)

Figure 14. Number of Active Conflicts by Conflict Type, *UCDP*, 1989-2021



Box 2. Definitions of Conflict Types

- **Interstate conflict:** A conflict in which both sides are the governments of states
- **State-based conflict:** A conflict in which one side is the government of a state and the other is a non-state actor
  - **Internationalized conflict:** A state-based conflict where one or both sides receive troop support from other governments that actively participate in the conflict
- **Non-state conflict:** A conflict in which both sides are non-state actors (i.e. *not* the government of states)
- **One-sided violence**: The deliberate use of force (by the government of a state or a non-state actor) against unarmed civilians[23]

There has been a general decline in the number of active non-state conflicts (*in blue on Figure 14*) — in which both parties to the conflict are non-state actors — between 2017 and 2021. This trend has been driven especially by a sharp decline in such conflicts in the Middle East — again, in Syria in particular. This is a deviation from trends in *P4P*, where the number of active non-state conflicts had generally been on the rise.

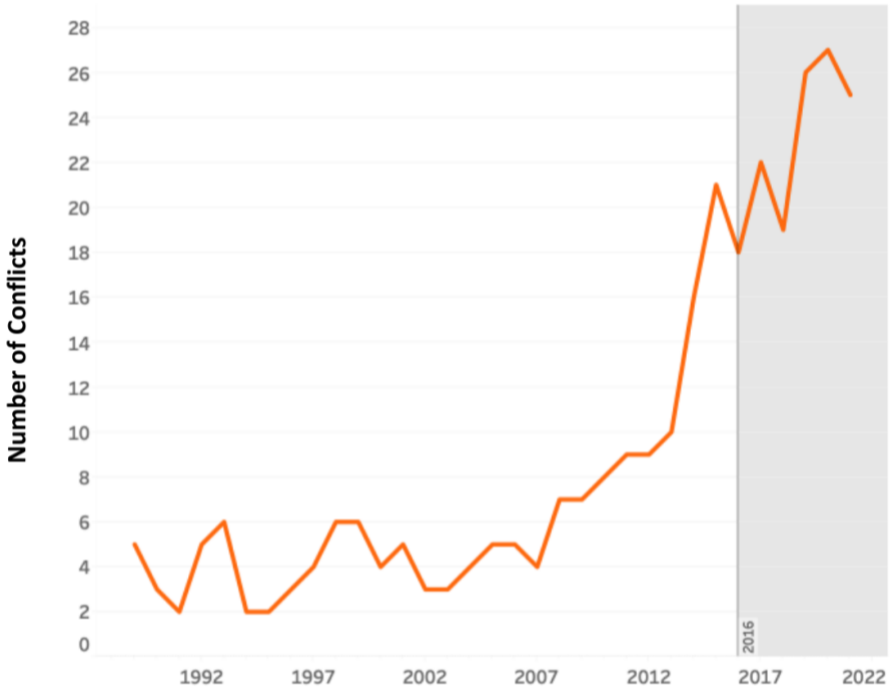
There has also been a deviation from patterns seen in *P4P* in relation to state-based conflicts (*in orange on Figure 14*) — in which one party to the conflict is the government of a state, and the

[23] This does not include *indirect* use of force against unarmed civilians (i.e. 'collateral damage'), which would be captured under one of the other conflict types, based on the perpetrator and intended target of the action.

other is a non-state actor.[24] In *P4P,* the number of state-based conflicts had been on the rise — resulting in an at-that-time-nascent reversal in the decades-long decline in such conflicts. Since *P4P*, the number of such conflicts has remained relatively unchanged between 2015 and 2021 — suggesting that a *rise* in state-based conflict is no longer a continuing trend. Nevertheless, as of 2021, most conflicts in the world were state-based; this poses another deviation from the patterns seen in *P4P*, in which non-state conflicts had been the most common type of conflict in the world.

One factor that contributes to state-based conflict trends has been the continued rise in internationalized conflicts.[25] These constitute a type of state-based conflict where one or both parties to the conflict receive troop support from other governments that actively participate in the conflict. Recent examples include fighting in the Sahel between the government of Burkina Faso and jihadist groups like the Islamic State and Nusrat al-Islam (JNIM); the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War between the militaries of Azerbaijan and the *de facto* Republic of Artsakh; or both the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen, to cite a few examples. These all represent conflicts in which other government actors are active participants in the conflict. This continued rise in internationalized conflicts is a continuation of the trend seen in *P4P* (*see Figure 15*), and underlines the increased transnational nature of conflicts and the role of geopolitics.

Figure 15. Number of Active Internationalized Conflicts, *UCDP*, 1989-2021



Between 2016 and 2021, the number of active interstate conflicts (*in tan on Figure 14*) — in which both parties to the conflict are the governments of states — did not change considerably. This was a continuation of trends seen in *P4P*. Since then, however, the number has risen — most notably with the War in Ukraine.

[24] While some may refer to state-based conflicts — in which one party to the conflict is the government of a state, and the other is a non-state actor — as 'civil wars,' these terms are technically not interchangeable. A civil war refers to conflict between citizens of the same country, meaning that many (though not necessarily all) non-state conflicts — in which both parties to the conflict are non-state actors — may also be considered 'civil wars' as well.
[25] These refer to conflicts that UCDP has specifically categorized as "internationalized."

Lastly, between 2016 and 2021, there has been a rise in one-sided violence (*in brown on Figure 14*) — i.e. the deliberate use of force against unarmed civilians, by the government of a state or a non-state actor. These trends have been driven significantly by trends in Africa, again especially in the DRC, Ethiopia, and Mali. While trends in one-sided violence were not explored alongside other forms of conflict in *P4P*, these trends are important — not only by capturing the direct risk to non-combatants, but also as one-sided violence represents the only type of conflict that has been on the rise in recent years.

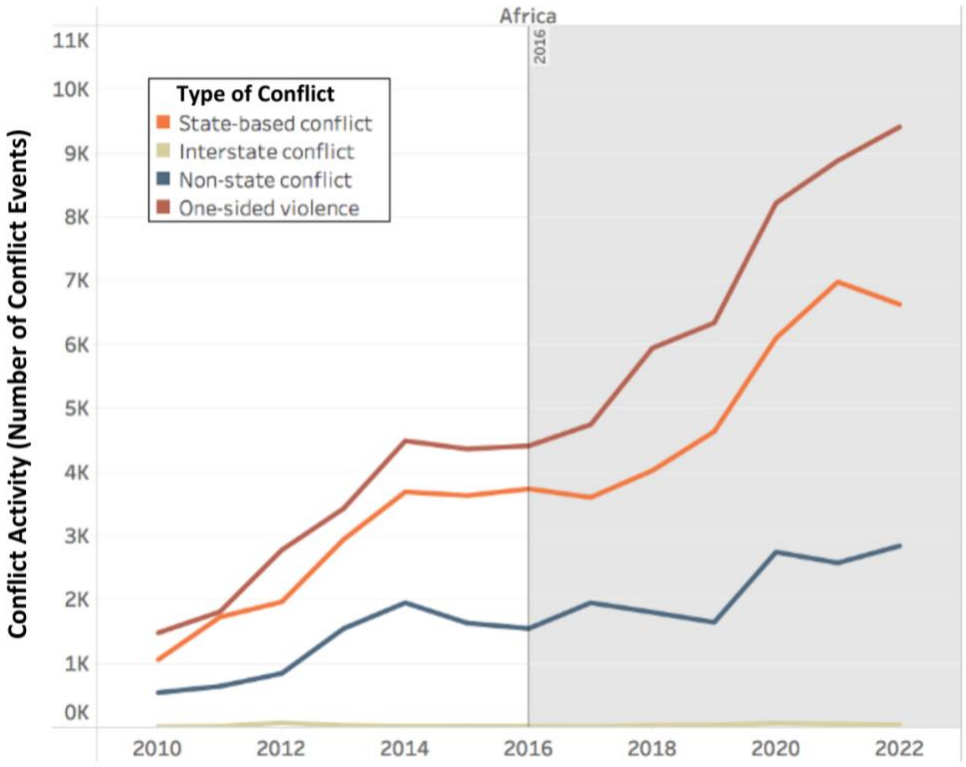
Regional Trends in Conflict Type

Exploring such trends regionally, and considering changes in the numbers of conflict events, help to complement the dynamics explored above in aggregate, regional conflict patterns.

Africa

In Africa, there has been a rise in the number of events associated with nearly all types of conflict: state-based conflict (*in orange*), non-state conflict (*in blue*), and one-sided violence (*in brown*), between 2016 and 2022 (*see Figure 16*). These trends have been driven by dynamics in a number of countries, including Nigeria, DRC, and Ethiopia, amongst others.

Figure 16. Number of Conflict Events in Africa, *ACLED*, 2010-2022[26]

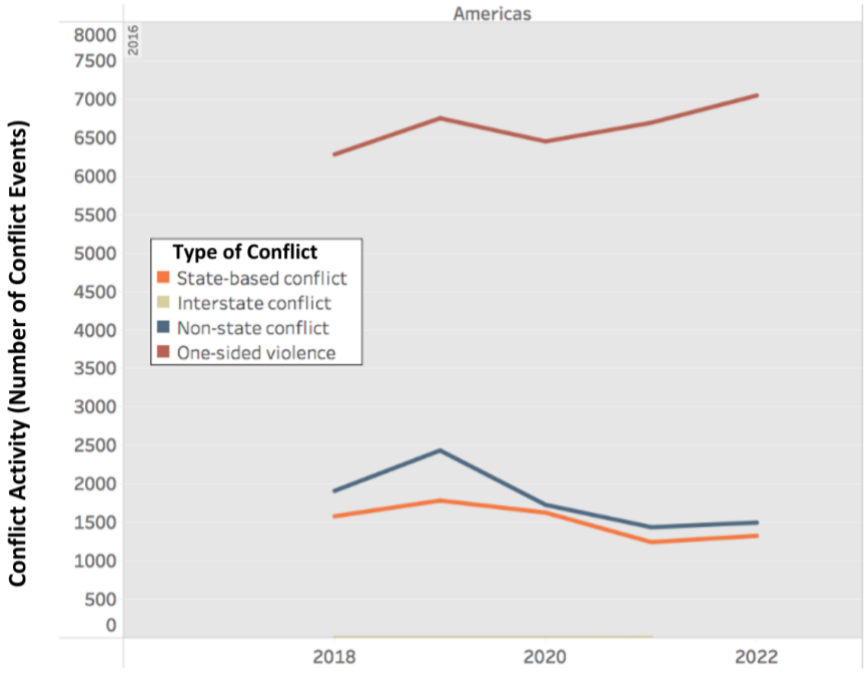


[26] ACLED's 'interaction' variable was used to develop a variable in line with the conflict type definitions put forward in this paper, which are based on UCDP's conflict type variable. *One-sided violence* includes all events in which unarmed civilians were targeted (or where unarmed protesters were targeted with explosions/remote violence), regardless of the perpetrator (state or non-state actors); *state-based conflict* includes all events in which state forces were involved, other than those in which unarmed civilians were targeted (as those are captured within the one-sided violence category); *non-state conflict* includes all events in which state forces were not involved, other than those in which unarmed civilians were targeted (as those are captured within the one-sided violence category).

Americas

Meanwhile, in the Americas, there has been no considerable change in the number of events associated with various conflict types, between 2018 and 2022 (*see Figure 17*). (Again, this does not include organized criminal violence, including that which may be akin to conflict, as outlined in Box 1.) Importantly, one-sided violence (*in brown*) continues to be the primary form of conflict seen in the region. These trends in one-sided violence have been driven by dynamics in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil especially, and tend to involve unidentified or anonymous actors. Such entities are responsible for 98%, 82%, and 91% of all fatalities stemming from one-sided violence in these countries, respectively, in 2022. In such contexts, it has become an increasingly dangerous place to be a journalist; as risk environments have worsened for journalists, journalists may use less specific language about armed actors in their reporting on violent events, to minimize the risk of being targeted (*see, for example,* Dorff, Henry, and Ley, 2022). Not capturing activity by unidentified or anonymous actors can hence result in environments appearing much more peaceful than they may be in reality.[27]

Figure 17. Number of Conflict Events in the Americas, *ACLED*, 2018-2022[28]



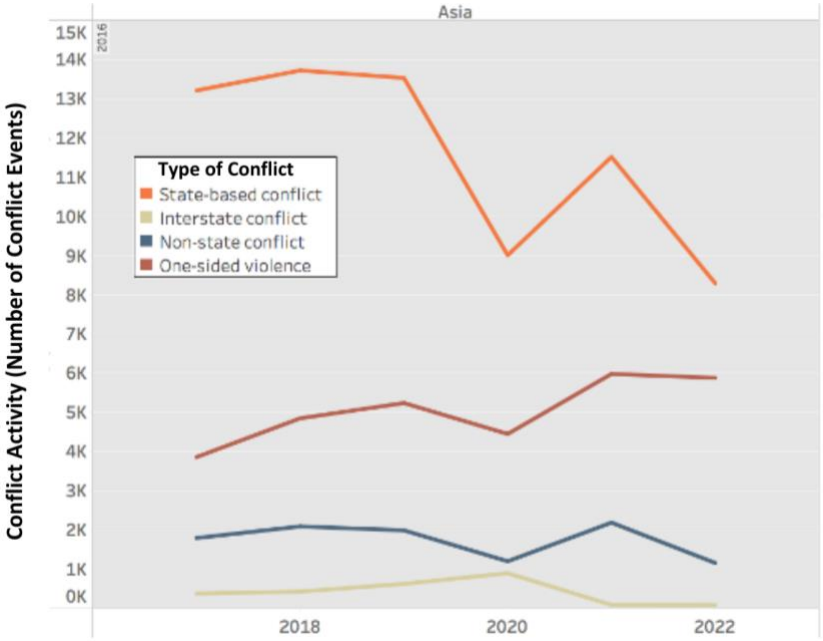
Asia

In Asia, there has been a significant decline in the number of state-based conflict events (*in orange*) between 2017 and 2022 (*see Figure 18*). This has been largely a result of the shifting dynamics in Afghanistan, as outlined above. Meanwhile, there has been a rise in the number of

[27] ACLED data, used here, includes coverage of political violence (and criminal violence within specific contexts, as outlined in Box 1) involving all groups, including unidentified or anonymous ones. UCDP requires that groups me named before inclusion, and hence does not capture activity involving unnamed groups.
[28] As outlined in Footnote 6, when ACLED does not have reports that distinguish the name of actor(s) involved in an event, it still codes the event, though notes the actor is 'unidentified.' In cases where the event depicts TTPs often used by gangs, it codes the unidentified actor as a 'gang'; in cases where such TTPs were not displayed, it assumes that the unidentified actor was *not* a gang. While events involving unidentified gangs were excluded from analysis here, as outlined in Box 1, events involving unidentified (not gang) actors remain included, as outlined in this trend, since ACLED has no reason to believe these involve criminal groups.

one-sided violence events *(in brown*) — driven primarily by trends in Myanmar. Following the coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the country remains under the control of a military junta; facing considerable opposition via both armed and unarmed resistance, the military has increasingly resorted to civilian targeting (ACLED, 2023c).[29]

Figure 18. Number of Conflict Events in Asia, *ACLED*, 2017-2022

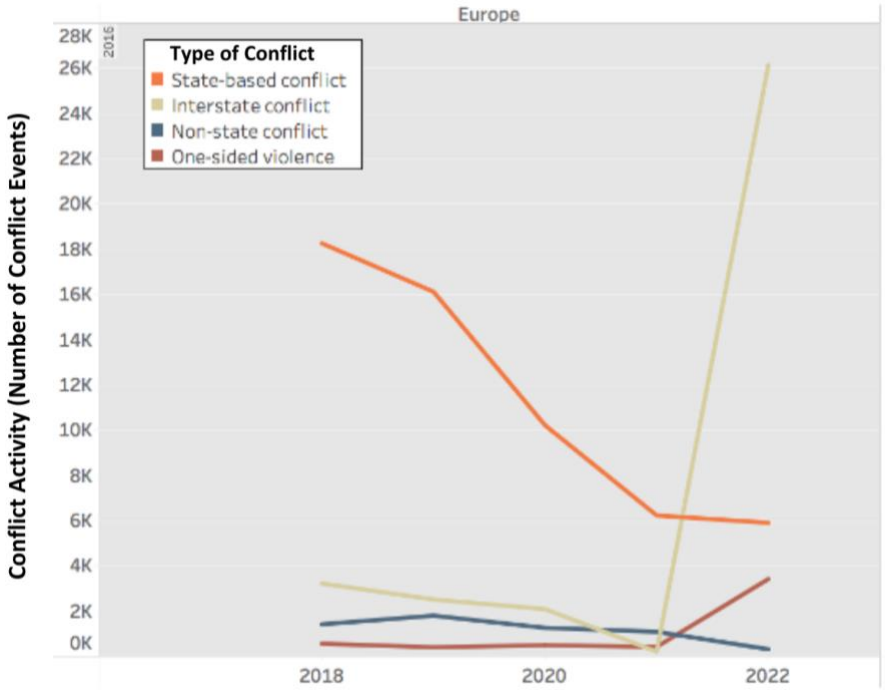


Europe

In Europe, the number of interstate conflict events *(in tan*) has spiked drastically in 2022, along with a rise in the number of one-sided violence events (*in brown*) (*see Figure 19*). This has been a result of the War in Ukraine.

[29] The trends explored here offer only a subset of the targeting that the local population in Myanmar has faced. The immediate aftermath of the coup saw considerable social unrest in response, comprised of overwhelmingly peaceful protests. These demonstrations were met with excessive, often deadly, force, resulting in the majority of demonstrators killed by state forces around the world that year to be centered in Myanmar, home to hundreds of fatalities as a result (ACLED, 2021). These fatalities are not included in analysis here since events coded by ACLED as *Protests* are not included in this analysis, per Footnote 3.

Figure 19. Number of Conflict Events in Europe, *ACLED*, 2018-2022



Meanwhile, the number of state-based conflict events (*in orange*) has declined — a result of a decline in fighting in two contexts. The first was between the Ukrainian military and the Russian-backed United Armed Forces of Novorossiya (NAF); the two had been engaged in fighting, primarily in the form of regular ceasefire violations, as part of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict, which had been largely centered in Ukraine's Donbas region before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Fighting in the Donbas region, involving the Ukrainian military, had declined considerably after the July truce in 2020 — though again began to rise, especially in 2021, leading ultimately to the Russian invasion in early 2022 (ACLED, 2022d).

The second was between the militaries of Azerbaijan and the breakaway Republic of Artsakh, who claims, and partially *de facto* controls, parts of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.[30] Fighting between the two, as well as that involving the military of Armenia, spiked in 2018 before declining — hence the decline in both state-based conflict (*in orange*) as well as interstate conflict events (*in tan*) between 2018 and 2021. The high numbers of events were due largely to regular ceasefire violations along the Line of Contact: the front line separating Armenian and Artsakh forces from Azerbaijan.

Similar to the limitations of using the number of active conflicts as a unit of analysis — discussed above in relation to Asia and the role of the War in Afghanistan in particular — the limitations of using the number of conflict events as a unit of analysis are also important to consider. There can be great variance in conflict events, yet all are treated 'the same.' Small-scale ceasefire violations in both Ukraine as well as across the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh region each comprised singular conflict events in the same way that the much deadlier clashes between the same actors were treated in 2022 (during the ongoing War in Ukraine) and 2020 (during the

[30] As ACLED does not treat the military of Artsakh as the military of a distinct country, conflict between the two militaries is categorized as state-based conflict rather than interstate conflict here.

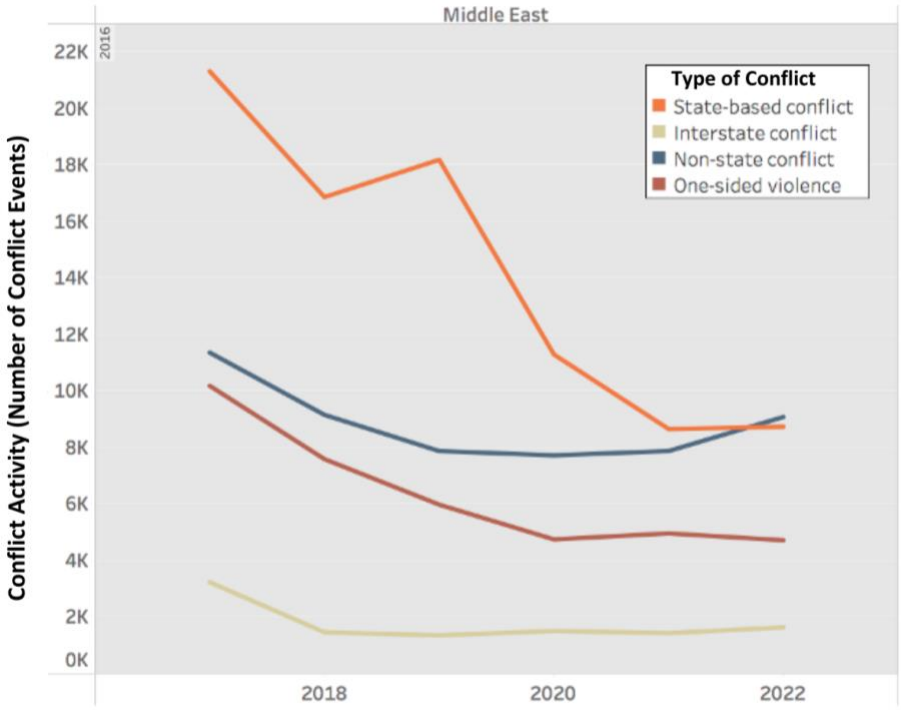
Second Nagorno-Karabakh War), respectively, each of the latter resulting in thousands of fatalities. In fact, since the number of conflict events in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 were lower than the very many ceasefire violations in years earlier, the result is a general decline in conflict events associated with both state-based and interstate conflict between 2018 and 2020.

Middle East

Lastly, in the Middle East, there has been a general decline in the number of events associated with all types of conflict between 2017 and 2022 (*see Figure 22*). This decline is driven largely by trends in Syria, as outlined above. More recently, however, in 2022, there has been a rise in the number of non-state conflict events (*in blue*), driven by trends in Iraq especially, as well as Syria. Both of these trends have been driven by Turkish cross-border military operations in the region (considered to be non-state given that these conflict events do not involve domestic Iraqi or Syrian state forces, respectively):[31] targeting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq, and groups like the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD) and the Kurdish Peoples Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria. Turkey initially began increasing its activity in the region in 2019, launching a series of operations dubbed 'Claw' in northern Iraq and later that year 'Operation Peace Spring', in conjunction with Syrian rebel allies, in northeast Syria. Since then, activity has not only continued (Reuters, 2022), but in fact escalated significantly in 2022 (ACLED, 2023d).

[31] ACLED codes the military forces of states as 'external' or 'other' — and distinct from their coding of 'state forces' —when they are active outside of their home state.

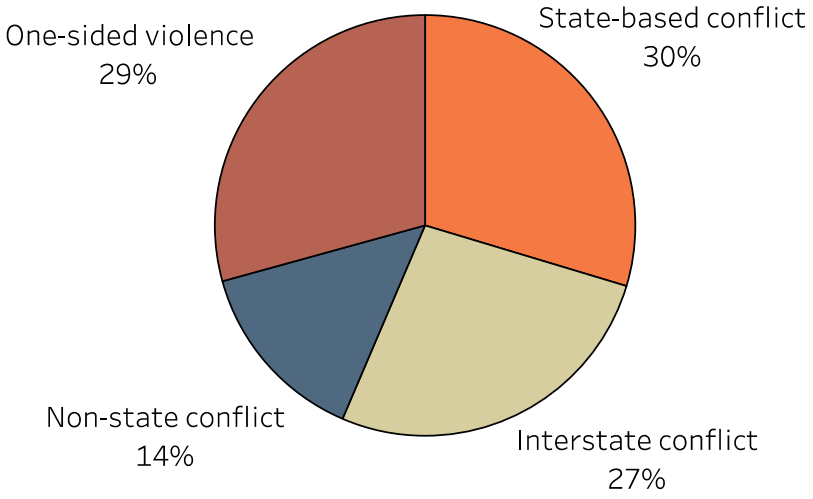
Figure 20. Number of Conflict Events in the Middle East, *ACLED*, 2017-2022



Conclusions in Regional Trends in Conflict Type

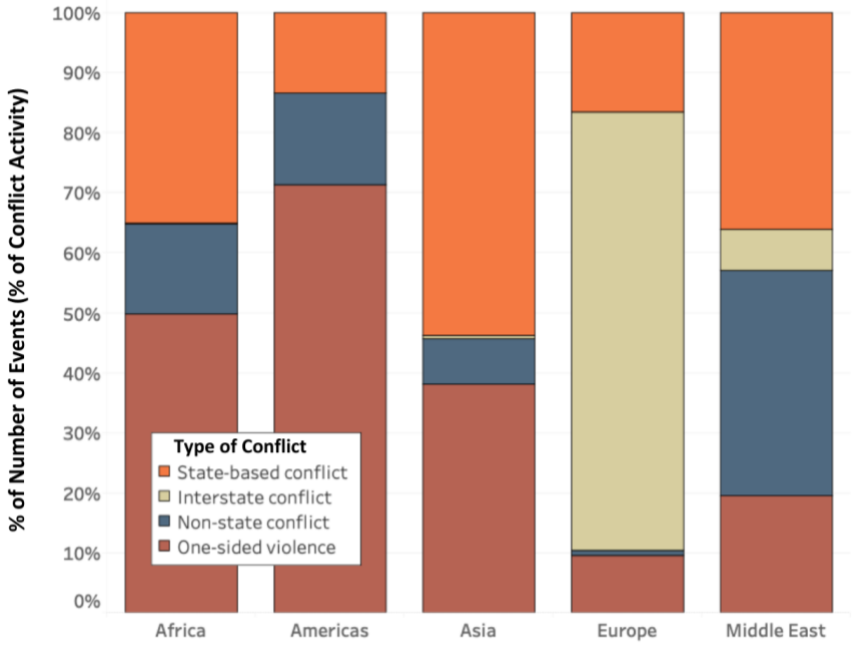
A snapshot of conflict activity (i.e. number of conflict events) in 2022 helps to illustrate that conflict events around the world do not primarily take a single form (*see Figure 21*). In fact, conflict events are least likely to take the form of non-state conflict (*in blue*), with only 14% of conflict events around the world in 2022 taking this form. This is a deviation from trends in *P4P* where non-state conflicts were the primary type of active conflict.

Figure 21. Percentage of Conflict Events by Conflict Type, *ACLED,* 2022



Exploring these trends regionally, it is evident that the 'conflict profile' of each region varies, with conflict events taking on different forms around the world (*see Figure 22*). In Africa and the Americas, most conflict events in 2022 were one-sided violence (*in brown*); in Asia, they were state-based conflict (*in orange*); in Europe, they were interstate conflict (*in tan*); and in the Middle East they were non-state conflict (*in blue*).

Figure 22. Percentage of Conflict Events by Conflict Type by Region, *ACLED,* 2022



In short, the types of conflict seen around the world have been shifting in recent years, since *P4P*. The number of active non-state conflicts is no longer increasing, and in fact has been declining — hence, as of 2021, non-state conflict is no longer the primary type of conflict seen around the world. The number of active state-based conflicts too has no longer been actively rising — with the number of such conflicts remaining relatively constant since 2015, as of 2021.

Despite some of these positive developments, other trends continue to raise serious concern. While the number of active state-based conflicts has no longer been actively rising, the subset of *internationalized* conflicts has continued to rise. Interstate conflicts too, while not showing considerable change in numbers in recent years, have risen since then, with the war in Ukraine in 2022 as an example. And lastly, one-sided violence has been on the rise, especially in the years since *P4P*. In short, conflict seems to be becoming increasingly global and transnational in scope across a number of contexts.

Non-State Actors (NSAs)

Exploring conflict dynamics beyond the dyadic level (i.e. looking at active conflicts or conflict events), and examining dynamics at the monadic level (i.e. looking at actors in particular) are important complementary tools for more granular conflict analysis. Changes in the number of non-state actors can signal changes in conflict environments — either through the proliferation of NSAs, for example, which can signal new groups emerging or old groups splintering; or a decline in their numbers, which can be attributed to groups dissolving and conflicts ending, or the building of alliances across groups coming together. Box 3 outlines the different types of NSAs that exist. (These definitions are based on those put forward by ACLED.)

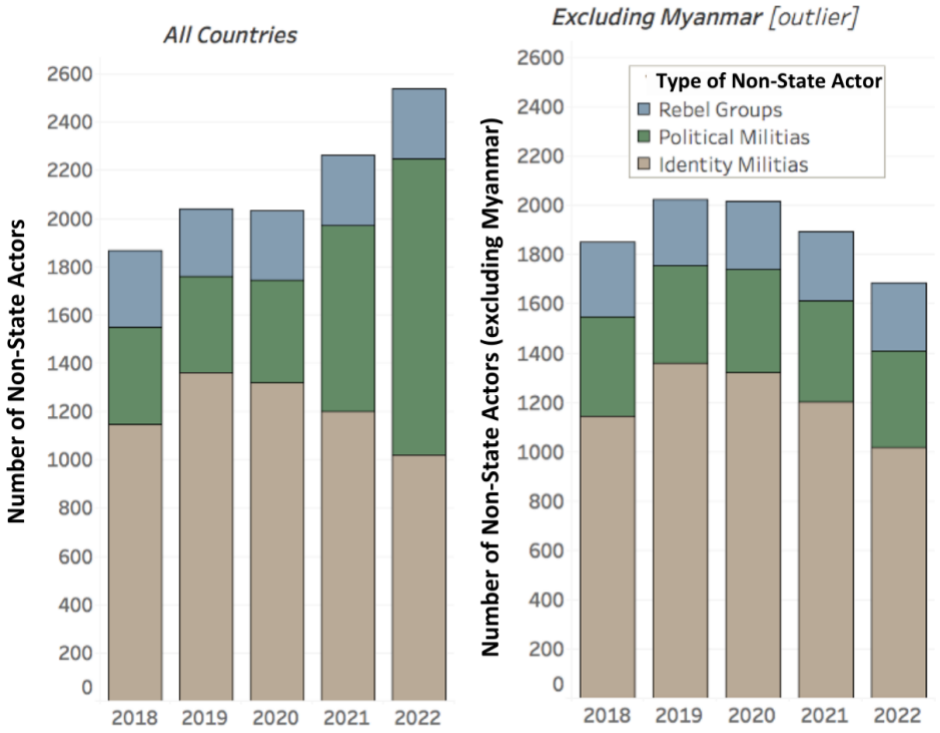
Box 3. Definitions of Non-State Actors

- **Rebel groups:** Political organizations whose goal is to counter an established national governing regime by violent acts (i.e. have a stated political agenda for national power, either through regime replacement or separatism).
- **Political militias:** Political organizations that seek to influence and impact governance, security, and policy, without seeking the removal of a national power; rather, such groups are typically supported by, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements. These include, but are not limited to, pro-government militias (*see, for example,* Raleigh & Kishi, 2023).
- **Identity militias**: Armed and violent groups organized around a collective, common feature including community, ethnicity, region, religion or, in exceptional cases, livelihood; such groups often act locally, in the pursuance of local goals, resources, power, security, and retribution.

Aggregate trends suggest that there has been a rise in the number of distinct NSAs in recent years, especially since 2020 (*see Figure 23a*). This trend, however, has been driven almost exclusively by the extreme proliferation of People's Defense Forces (PDFs) in Myanmar in the aftermath of the February 2021 coup (*coded in Figure 23a as 'political militias,' in green*). These groups were initially viewed by many as "hastily organized groups of young vigilantes who would be quickly overrun by the junta's military force" (US Institute of Peace, 2022). In 2022, ACLED reports over 2,530 distinct non-state actors around the world, one-third of which (over 850) were active in Myanmar (*see also* Brookings, 2022).[32] Contrary to initial assessments, these pro-democracy groups "have grown in size, organization and capability … and now pose a major threat to the junta's viability. Though they lack heavy equipment, an advanced command structure and international support, the proliferating PDFs have demonstrated remarkable tactical ingenuity and resilience" (US Institute of Peace, 2022), and have gained considerable momentum (War On The Rocks, 2022; Wilson Center, 2023).

[32] Non-state actors here include those which ACLED has categorized as rebels, political militias, or identity militias. Only named actors are included; actors noted as being unidentified, unnamed, or anonymous were excluded. Only actors which have been coded as a primary actor within a conflict event were included. The temporal scope is bound to 2018 only, in order to account for ACLED's differing temporal coverage by country/region.

Figure 23. (**a**) Number of Distinct, Named, Non-State Actors, *ACLED,* 2018-2022; (**b**) Number of Distinct, Named, Non-State Actors Excluding Myanmar [outlier], *ACLED,* 2018-2022



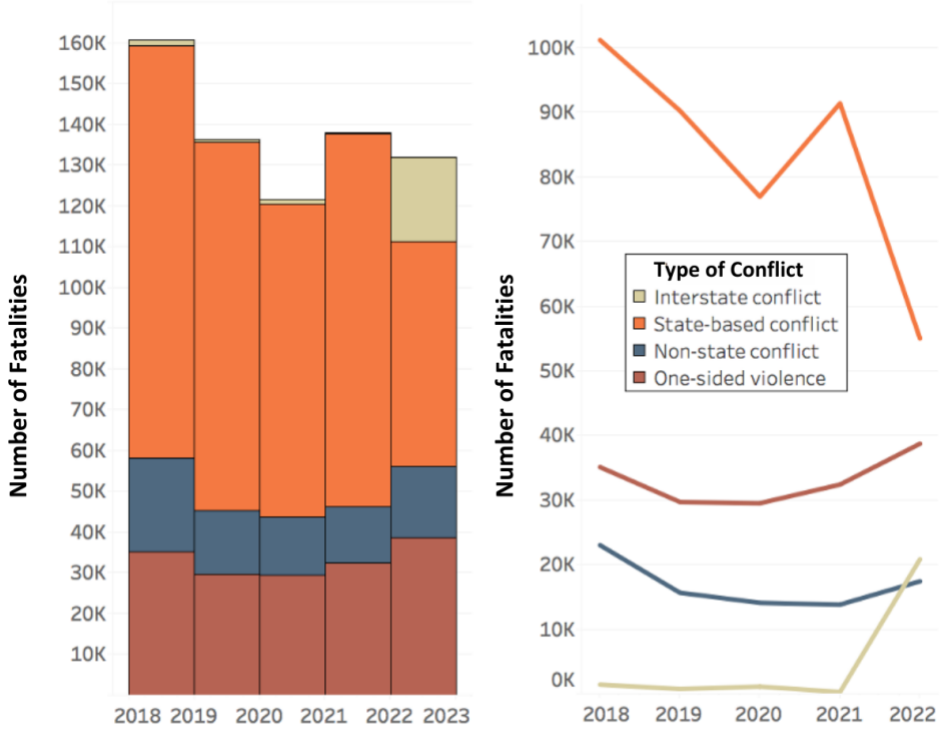
Excluding Myanmar, given it is a considerable outlier (*see Figure 23b*), the number of non-state actors has actually been *declining* in recent years — a continuation of the trend noted in *P4P*.[33] This trend has been driven by a decline in the number of local identity militias (*in gray*) — whose violence is often localized, situational, and limited. Trends in South Asia (e.g. communal, religious, ethnic, and caste militias in India; communal, ethnic, and tribal militias in Pakistan; and communal and religious militias in Bangladesh) and in Africa (e.g. clan militias in Somalia) have especially contributed to this trend. This is despite the concurrent *proliferation* of such local identity militias in countries like Nigeria and South Sudan, both of which saw a particular rise in such groups in 2020, with numbers nearly doubling (from 119 identity militias to 212, and from 54 to 100, respectively). These countries also topped the list of countries where conflict escalated most that year on the African continent — underlining the significant contribution to conflict dynamics that such groups can make within countries (Raleigh and Kishi, 2021). Identity militias are not limited to Africa alone, however. Considerable proliferation of such groups also took place in Yemen and Syria as well, for example, in 2020 (from 66 identity militias to 148, and from 40 to 76, respectively).

Conflict-Related Fatalities

[33] Data from UCDP suggests similar trends: that the number of non-state actors engaged in active conflicts has been declining in recent years. This number was calculated by considering the non-state actor side(s) coded in each active conflict (where relevant), and calculating the distinct number of such actors. In some cases, UCDP lists more than one actor name when listing the non-state actor side(s) of a conflict, separated by commas. Such cases were excluded for ease in calculations, especially as often these actors were already included (as part of conflicts in which they were acting alone).

Conflict-related fatalities offer the most directly tangible measure of the impact of conflict on local populations, as they directly capture the human cost of war (though importantly, they are not the *only* cost of conflict, which is explored in further detail in the following section). Fatality trends in recent years suggest that conflict-related fatalities have been generally declining globally, on aggregate (*see left-hand graph of Figure 24*) — though some suggest that these trends remain much higher than trends seen decades ago.

Figure 24. Conflict-Related Fatalities, *ACLED,* 2018-2022



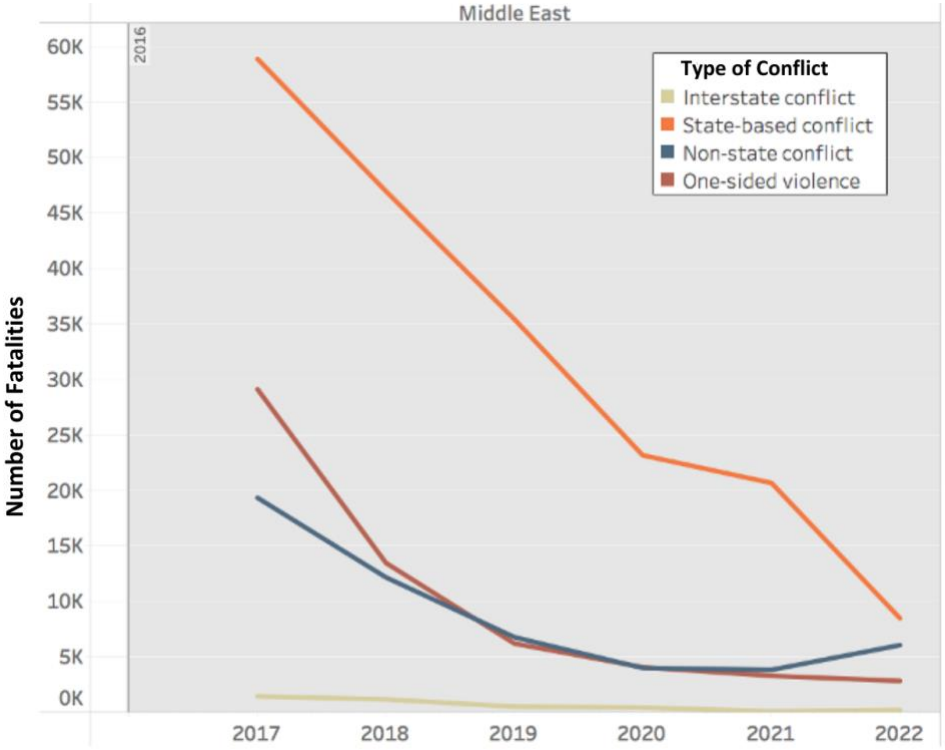
This trend has been driven by a decline in fatalities stemming from state-based conflict (*in orange*) (*see right-hand graph of Figure 24*).[34] Meanwhile, since 2020, fatalities stemming from one-sided violence (*in brown*) have been steadily increasing, while fatalities stemming from interstate conflict (*in tan*) spiked in 2022 (*see right-hand graph of Figure 24*).

[34] Data from UCDP suggests similar trends: that conflict-related fatalities have been generally declining in recent years, and that this has been primarily driven by a decline in state-based conflict deaths. Such trends are based on the number of fatalities stemming from active conflicts specifically, in line with other UCDP analysis in this paper.

Middle East

The decline in conflict-related fatalities on aggregate, and especially the decline in state-based conflict deaths in particular, is driven most considerably by dynamics in the Middle East. In the Middle East, fatalities stemming from state-based conflict (*in orange*) — as well as from one-sided violence (*in brown*) and non-state conflict (*in blue*) — have all declined in recent years (*see Figure 25*).[35]

Figure 25. Conflict-Related Fatalities in the Middle East, *ACLED,* 2017-2022



While over 17,000 conflict-related fatalities were reported in the region in 2022, this is a decline from the over 110,000 fatalities reported in 2017. The decline in state-based conflict deaths is driven largely by the War in Yemen.[36] The decline in fatalities stemming from one-sided violence and non-state conflict, however, is driven by dynamics in Syria.

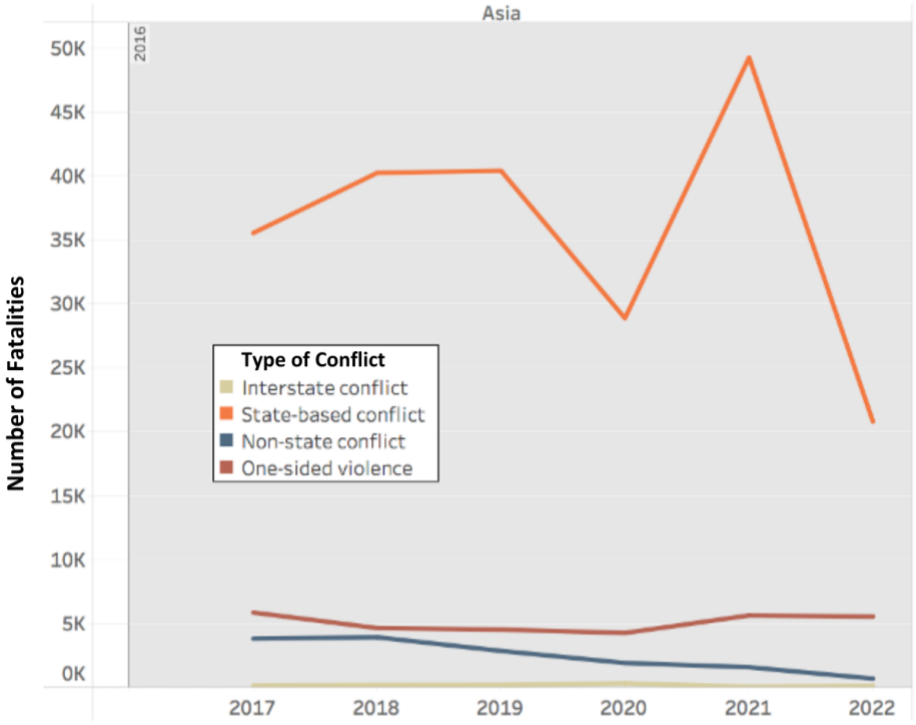
[35] Data from UCDP suggests similar trends: that conflict-related fatalities in the Middle East have been generally declining in recent years, and that this has been primarily driven by a decline in state-based conflict deaths.

[36] Data from UCDP suggests that conflict-related fatalities in Yemen spiked in 2021 — a different trend that the continued decline in fatalities in Yemen reported by ACLED. UCDP notes that this spike in fatalities may, at least partially, be attributed to the Houthi movement beginning to report their own losses to a greater extent (per correspondence). "Fatality numbers are frequently the most biased and poorly reported component of conflict data" (Washington Post, 2017), a result of: the incentives that exist for conflict actors to over- or under-count their own fatalities, to appear strong, or to avoid international backlash, respectively, the former of which we may be seeing here; the incentives of reporters to inflate fatalities in their reporting (i.e. "if it bleeds, it leads"); as well as the logistical difficulties of assessing accurate death counts in war zones; amongst others.

Asia

Similar to the Middle East, a significant decline in state-based conflict deaths in Asia also contributed to the overall decline in conflict-related fatalities (*see Figure 26*). Over 27,000 conflict-related fatalities were reported in Asia in 2022, down from more than 45,000 in 2017.

Figure 26. Conflict-Related Fatalities in Asia, *ACLED,* 2017-2022



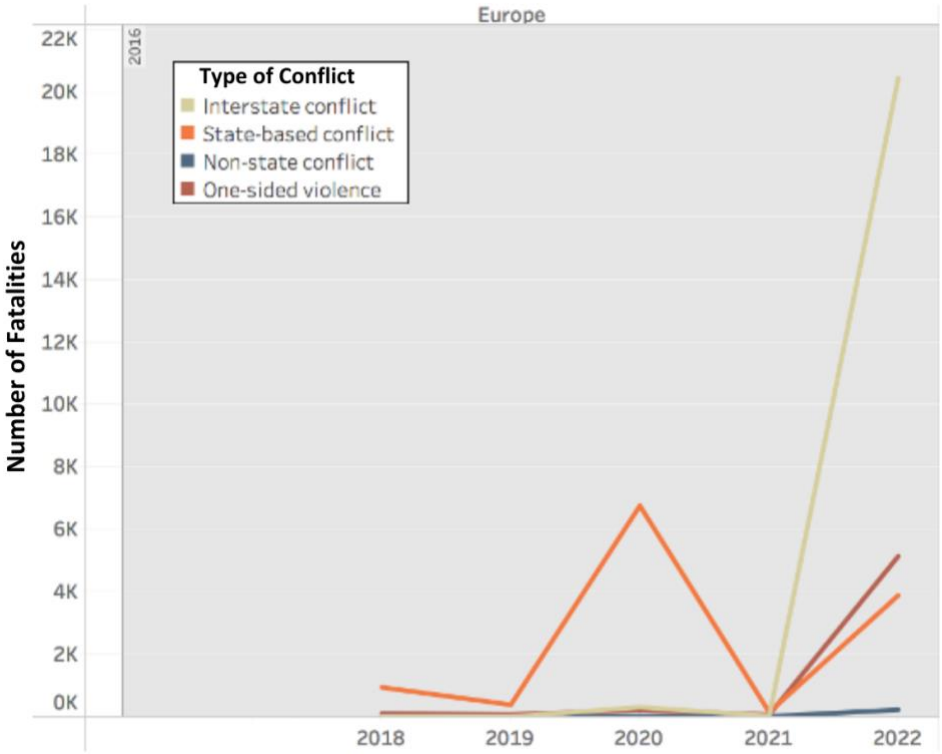
These trends were driven by the War in Afghanistan, which saw a decline in 2020 with the US-negotiated 'reduction in violence' and the accompanying decline in conflict-related fatalities; fatalities spiked during the first half of 2021, in line with the Taliban offensive that ultimately culminated in the collapse of Kabul that summer.[37] With the end of the war, fatalities stemming from state-based conflict declined considerably in 2022. This is despite the spike in state-based conflict deaths in Myanmar in 2022 as a result of fighting between the military junta and pro-democracy opposition forces.

Europe

While fatality rates may have declined in the Middle East and Asia, they spiked dramatically in Europe — a result of the War in Ukraine (*see Figure 27*) — from nearly 1,000 conflict-related fatalities in the region in 2018, to over 29,000 in 2022.

[37] Data from UCDP suggests similar trends: that conflict-related fatalities declined in 2020 before seeing a spike in 2021, driven by trends in state-based conflict deaths, in Afghanistan in particular.

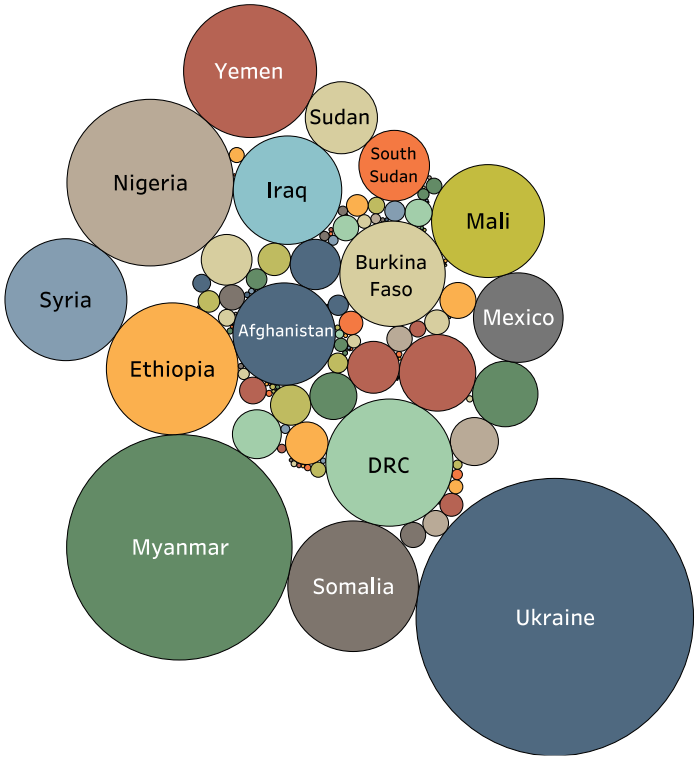
Figure 27. Conflict-Related Fatalities in Europe, *ACLED,* 2018-2022



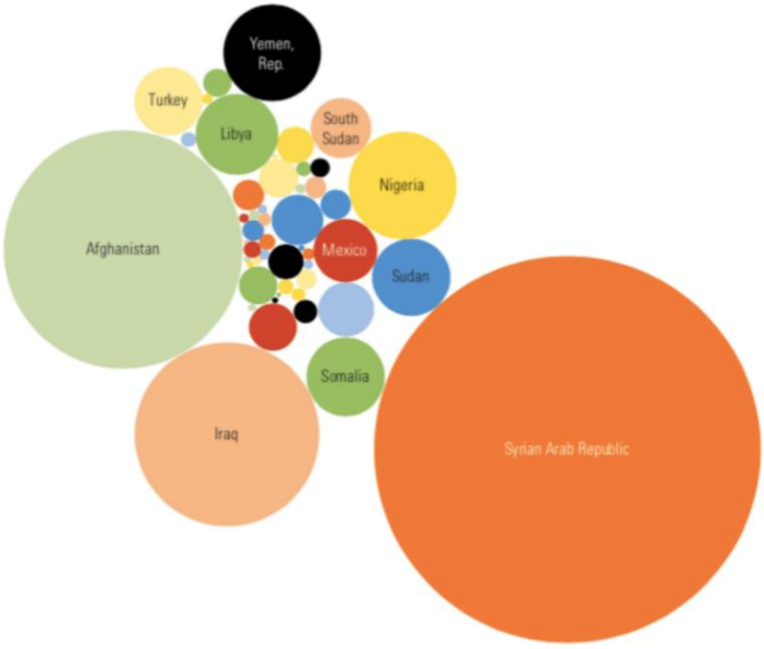
In 2022, Europe was the second deadliest region of the world, home to over 29,000 conflict-related fatalities. This is a result of it being home to Ukraine, home to nearly 99% of the conflict-related fatalities reported in Europe in 2022.

Over 29,000 conflict-related deaths took place in Ukraine alone in 2022, making it home to more conflict deaths than any other country in the world that year (*see Figure 28*). However, unlike previous trends noted in *P4P* — in which a few countries, primarily Syria, were home to the vast majority of conflict-related fatalities (i.e. few large circles, many small circles) — high numbers of conflict-related fatalities in 2022 can be seen across a number of countries (i.e. many medium-sized circles). (*See Figure 1.3 from P4P inserted below for comparison, though note that circle sizes between the two figures are not to scale.*)

Figure 28. Conflict-Related Fatalities by Country, *ACLED*, 2022 (left-hand figure)



Number of Conflict-Related Deaths Worldwide, by Country, 2016

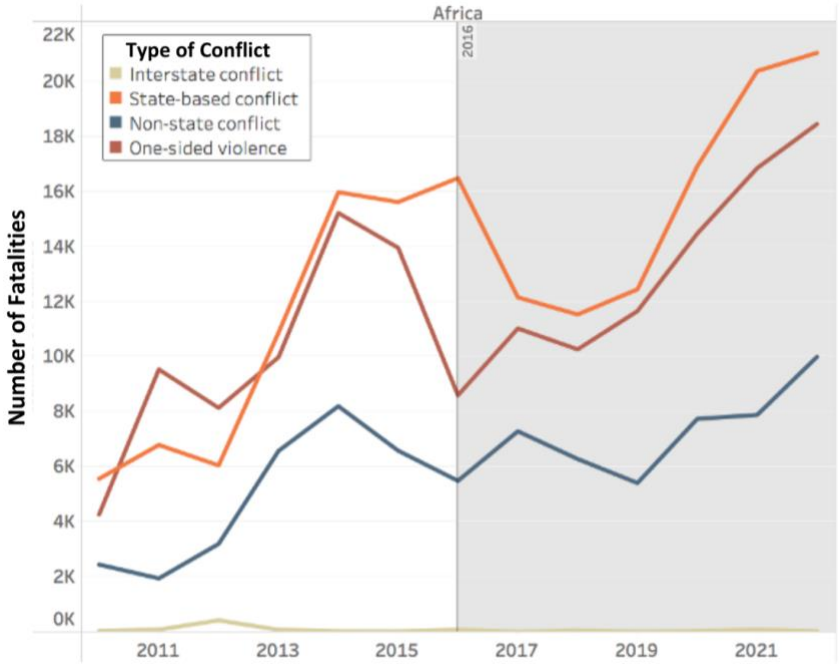


Source: Uppsala ConflictData Program (UCDP) (Sundberg and Melander 2013; Croicu and Sundberg 2017).
Note: This figure is based on the UCDP definition of conflict (Sundberg and Melander 2013; Croicu and Sundberg 2017).

Africa

The deadliest region of the world in 2022 was Africa — home to over 49,000 conflict-related fatalities — up from less than a quarter of that (over 12,000 fatalities) in 2010. An increase in deaths stemming from nearly all forms of conflict — state-based conflict (*in orange*), one-sided violence (*in brown*), and non-state conflict (*in blue*) — all contribute to this trend (*see Figure 29*).

Figure 29. Conflict-Related Fatalities in Africa, *ACLED,* 2010-2022



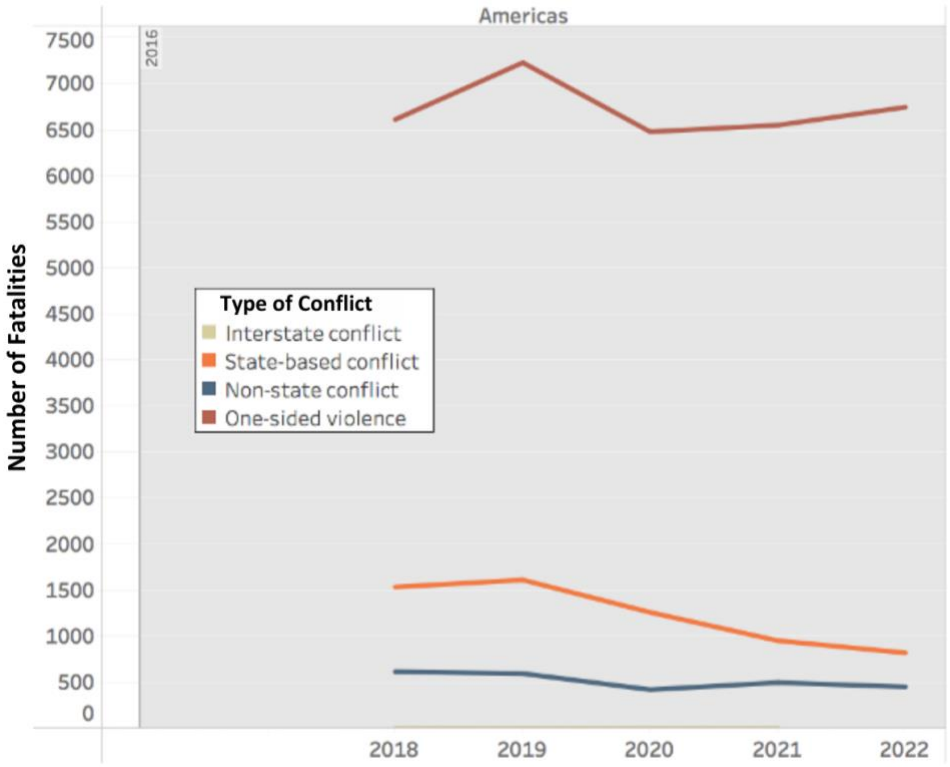
While a number of African countries saw increases in fatalities stemming from state-based conflict (*in orange*)[38] and one-sided violence (*in brown*), such trends were especially pronounced in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the DRC. Non-state conflict deaths (*in blue*), meanwhile, were not driven by any specific country, though again such trends can be seen in countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sudan, in addition to the aforementioned countries.

Americas

Lastly, conflict-related fatalities in the Americas have remained relatively constant in recent years,[39] with over 8,700 conflict-related fatalities reported in 2018, down to over 8,000 reported in 2022. Fatalities stemming from one-sided violence (*in brown*) continue to be the most common form of conflict in the region (*see Figure 30*). While there was an initial decline in fatalities stemming from such conflict in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated lockdowns and restrictions on movement, trends have once again been on the rise, especially those involving unidentified or anonymous actors.

[38] Data from UCDP also suggests a significant increase in state-based conflict deaths in the region.
[39] Data from UCDP suggests similar trends: that conflict-related fatalities have remained relatively constant in recent years.

Figure 30. Conflict-Related Fatalities in the Americas, *ACLED,* 2018-2022



Conclusions in Conflict-Related Fatalities

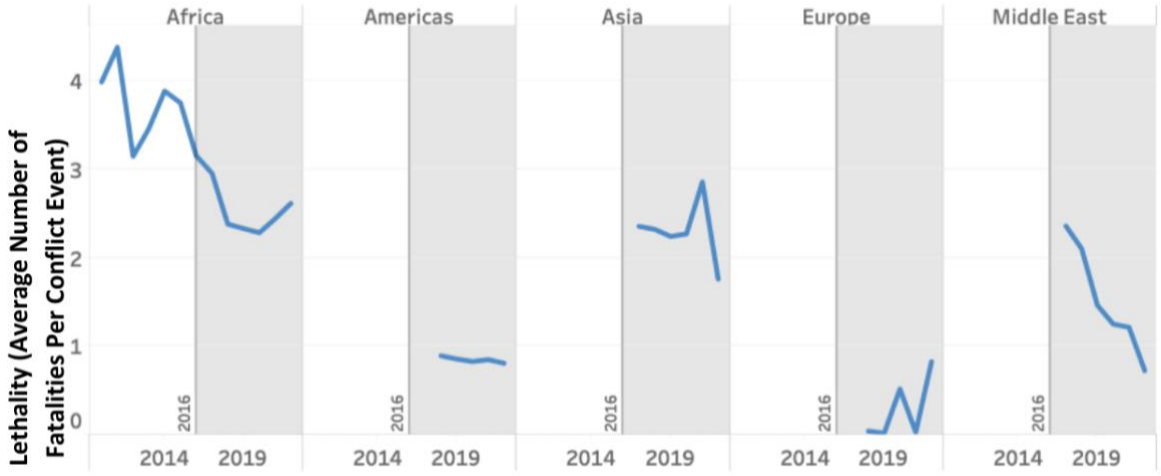
Conflict-related fatality rates trending downwards more largely, even minimally, is a welcome trend. Though, unfortunately, such is not the case uniformly — with regions like Europe (specifically Ukraine) and Africa seeing considerable increases in fatality rates since *P4P*. Further worrying is that conflict may also be getting more *lethal* in these same contexts.

Conflict events are treated 'the same' despite the fact that they can vary in scale — e.g. a small-scale attack resulting in no fatalities is a single event, just like an airstrike killing hundreds is a single event — as discussed above in relation to conflict events and the Nagorno-Karabakh region, for example. Considering *lethality* — i.e. the number of fatalities that result, on average, from a single event — can help to offer some nuance in assessment. In other words: are more fatalities resulting from more conflict activity taking place, or is conflict activity intensifying (as well), resulting in more fatalities stemming from each conflict event.

Figure 31 depicts these trends.[40] In both Europe and Africa, an initial decline in lethality rates has been replaced by an increase in lethality in 2022 — raising even further concern about the rising fatality trends explored above. In fact, 14 of the 15 countries home to the most lethal conflict in 2022 — i.e. where each conflict event yields the most fatalities — were in Africa, underlining the threat that local populations there face.

[40] Lethality is calculated here by creating a new variable comprised of the number of fatalities in each country each year, divided by the number of conflict events in each country each year, to determine the average number of fatalities stemming from each conflict event.

Figure 31. Lethality of Conflict by Region, *ACLED,* up to 2022



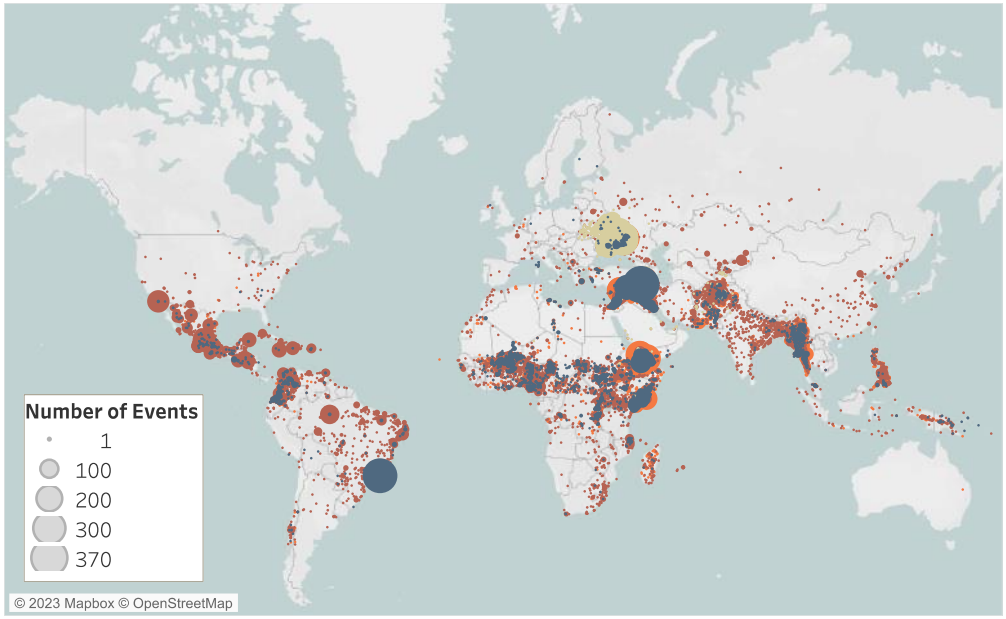
Conclusion

Conflict trends have shifted in recent years, many not for the better

- *Conflict is on the rise in Europe, driven by trends in Ukraine*
- *Conflict-related fatalities are rising in Africa, and conflict there is more lethal than before*
- *One-sided violence targeting civilians is on the rise, and is the only type of conflict to be increasing*

In conclusion, conflict trends have shifted since the publication of *P4P* — many not for the better. Five years ago, *P4P* hardly made mention of Europe, where the number of active conflicts had been declining. And yet, since then, the number of conflicts has risen in the region, most prominently with Ukraine — which has also contributed to the rise in interstate conflict activity in the region. Elsewhere, *P4P* had noted that conflict-related fatalities had begun to decline in Africa — but they have risen once again since then, even becoming more lethal, with the region home to 14 of the 15 most lethal conflict zones last year. Europe too had been home to relatively stable and low conflict-fatality rates — yet trends have both risen and become more lethal in the region since *P4P.* One-sided violence has also been on the rise since 2016: resulting in a rising number of direct civilian fatalities around the world. (Even more worrying is that this only considers direct civilian targeting; if one were to consider indirect civilian targeting [i.e. collateral damage] and other forms of repression [such as the state repression of protests], the risk to civilians would be even more considerable.) Figure 32 maps all conflict events around the world in 2022, by conflict type.

Figure 32. Global Conflict Events by Conflict Type, *ACLED*, 2022

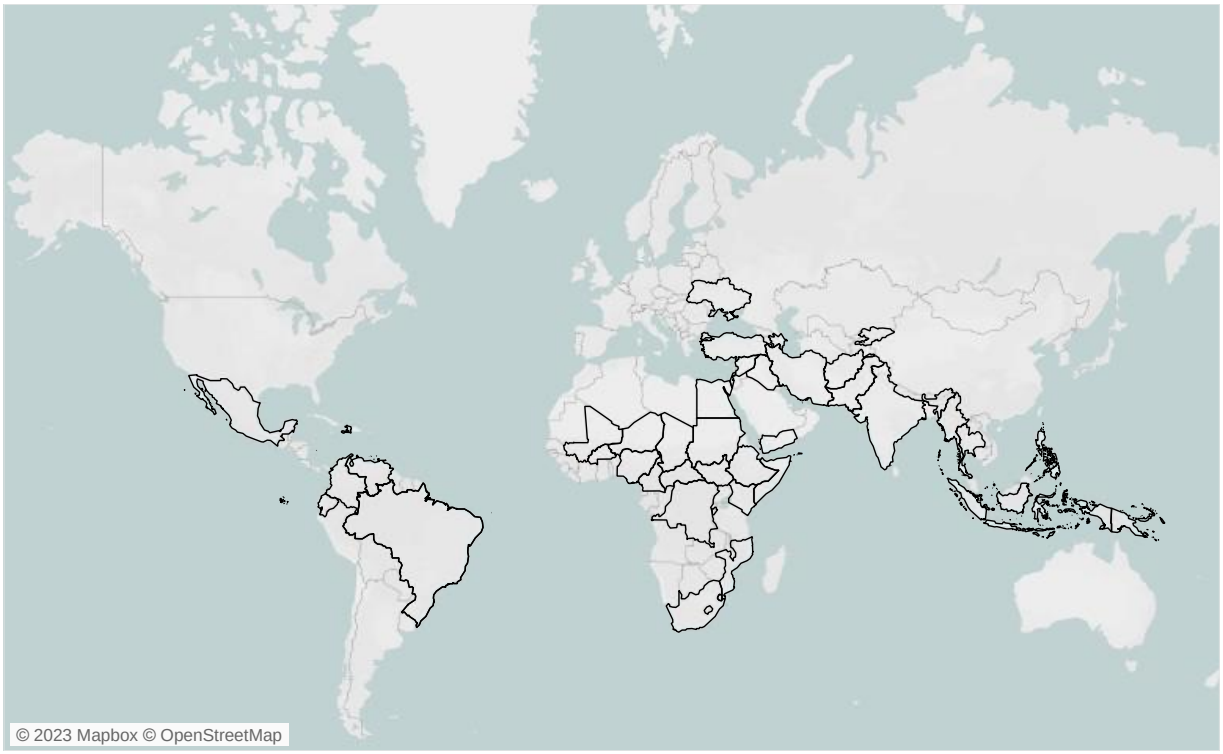


Promising trends in conflict patterns come with caveats

- *Conflict has declined in the Middle East, though rates of conflict activity remain high*
- *Conflict and fatality rates declined in Asia, yet the region remains home to particularly deadly contexts, like Myanmar*
- *State-based conflict is no longer on the rise, yet is now the primary form of conflict*

Even new trends that may seem promising come with caveats. Five years ago, *P4P* noted that conflicts in the Middle East had increased and that "these trends are predicted to continue" (p.19) — and yet the number of active conflicts and fatalities in the region has declined significantly from their peak in the years leading up to the publication of *P4P*. Nevertheless, the Middle East was still home to more conflict activity than any other region of the world in 2021 — underscoring the risk that local populations in the region continued to face. Similarly, the number of active conflicts and conflict-related fatalities in Asia may also be declining, but that can obscure the significant increase in conflict activity and fatalities — especially civilian fatalities — that have occurred during the same time in Myanmar, the result of which has been Myanmar being the second deadliest country in the world last year, behind Ukraine. And while state-based conflict may no longer be on the rise — reversing the at-that-time-nascent reversal in the decades-long decline in such conflicts seen in *P4P* — state-based conflict is now the most common form of conflict. The continued rise in internationalized conflicts contributes to that trend, underlining the increasingly transnational nature of conflict. This conclusion has important implications for both diplomacy and mediation. Figure 33 maps all countries around the world home to active conflicts in 2021.

Figure 33. Countries Home to Active Conflicts Globally, *UCDP*, 2021[41]



Conflict trends change and evolve, as conflict actors adapt to environments

In short, the trends explored above point to how quickly conflict trends can change. The patterns, informed by data, in these charts and graphs are not forecasts; trends five years from now will look different as conflict actors adapt to their environments, and conflicts hence evolve. But these trends *can* help us in understanding the unique dynamics across different contexts, which underline how each context requires distinct strategies and responses. The fact that there is no single type of conflict that dominates in prevalence globally (*see Figure 21*) helps to underline that no form of conflict will necessarily be more or less common, but rather that the form that conflict takes remains context dependent.

Violence is an important part of 'FCV'

- *Organized criminal violence has implications and effects akin to those of traditional 'conflict' in certain parts of the world (e.g. Americas)*
- *Excluding such violence from assessments of conflict minimizes the risk that certain populations face*

In addition to these conclusions regarding traditional conflict patterns, it is important to not discount the role of violence — especially organized criminal violence which may be akin to our understanding of conflict in the role that it plays in causing human suffering, as well as directly and fundamentally challenging public safety and security. If data on such violence is considered alongside data on 'conflict' more traditionally understood, the risks that certain countries face —

[41] Active conflicts for which UCDP codes multiple locations (i.e. a list of locations, separated by commas) have been excluded from regional analysis, as it was not possible to attribute such conflicts to a specific region, and it would not be correct for this analysis to attribute them to all regions listed.

in the Americas in particular — become clearer. In fact, when considering lethality rates over the past five years — i.e. how many people, on average, die as a result of each violent event — the rate seen in countries of the Americas that are home to violence that is akin to conflict is 1.5 times higher than the global lethality rate stemming from traditional conflict (1.29 fatalities per event, relative to 0.86 fatalities per event, respectively). Arbitrary definitional categorizations are a disservice to local populations that face such incredible risk.

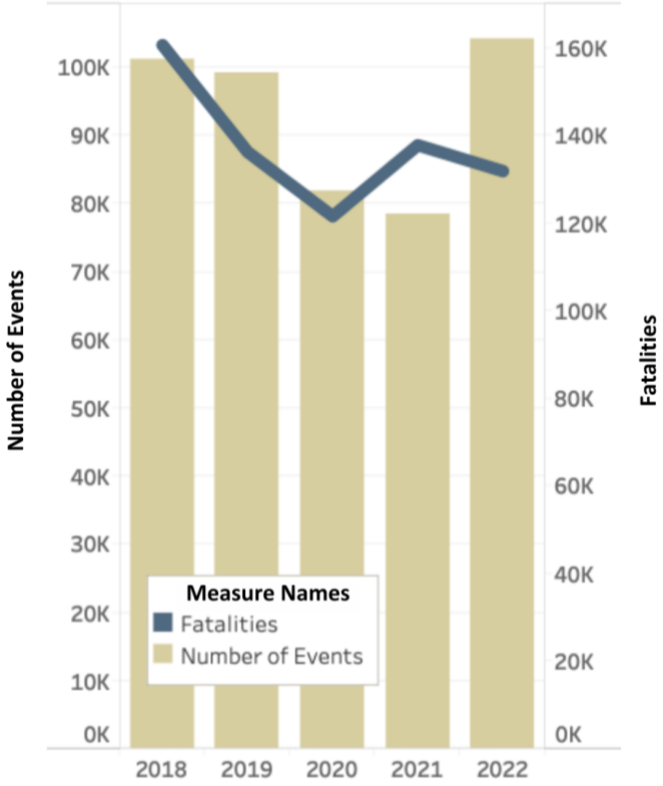
Lessons learned about quantitative analysis of conflict data

- *Indicators and measures used to understand conflict should be as multifaceted and multidimensional as conflicts themselves*
- *Quantitative analysis should be coupled with qualitative analysis*
- *Data users have a responsibility to thoughtfully engage with data by understanding data biases*

In addition to these substantive conclusions, there are lessons to be learned too about quantitative analysis using conflict data. Conflict is multifaceted and multidimensional; the indicators and measures that we use to understand it should reflect that. Relying on an array of indicators, especially when engaging in quantitative analysis, can help in this regard.

For example, as seen in Figure 34, considering conflict-related fatalities alone (*in blue*), one would deduce that the world may be becoming more peaceful, with fatality counts declining between 2018 and 2020, and then declining again last year. However, considering conflict activity (*in tan*) alongside conflict-related fatalities, one can see that violent activity increased considerably last year, reaching new highs, demonstrating new risks to populations around the world. Conflict can be responsible for deaths off of the battlefield; the many indirect consequences of war — such as food or economic insecurity, amongst others — can have deadly consequences as well. And furthermore, direct conflict-related deaths — i.e. those captured in data points, like Figure 34 — are biased towards men's experience of war. Political violence targeting women can take many forms — and it is the less deadly forms of such violence — such as abductions and forced disappearances, or sexual violence — that tend to disproportionately impact women relative to civilian populations at large (Kishi, 2021). Limiting conflict assessments to fatality counts alone captures only a single dimension of conflict.

Figure 34. Number of Conflict Events and Conflict-Related Fatalities, *ACLED*, 2018–2022



Capitalizing on increasingly available quantitative data can be useful. Quantitative analysis can elucidate trends over time, and can aid in comparative analysis. However, quantitative analysis should be coupled with qualitative assessment if one is to better understand the substantive nuance behind a graph or chart, and form hypotheses as to why these trends are occurring. The examples of Afghanistan and Nagorno-Karabakh discussed above, for example, help to underline the limitations of quantitative units of analysis. A single graph alone cannot answer questions about what particular contexts, types of conflict, etc. may be driving depicted trends; 'looking under the hood' using qualitative analysis can help to uncover the unique nuances of cases that may be fueling trends.

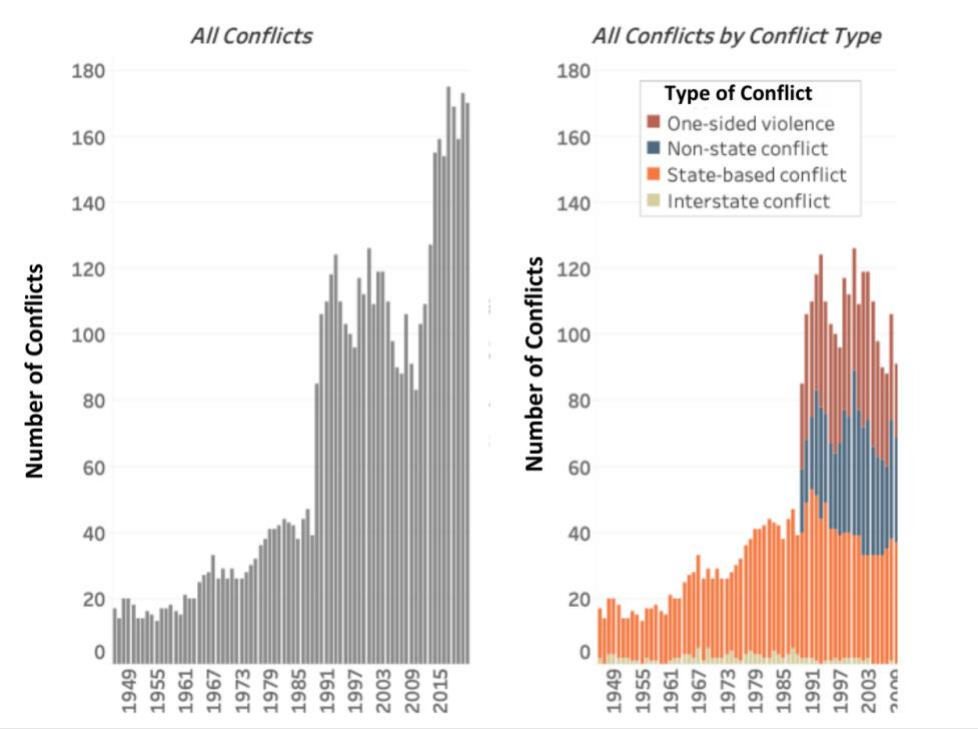
And lastly, with that said, with increased use of quantitative data, there must also be greater responsibility by data users to thoughtfully engage with such data. All data have biases — based on the definitions and inclusion criteria that are used (e.g. are certain types of violence, such as that which is more criminal in nature, included alongside other types of 'conflict violence'?), where information comes from, how information is collected, what methodologies are used, etc. — all of which can affect analyses in different ways. Data users need to understand the decisions made by data providers and consider the ways in which the assumptions made by such data providers impact their own research, policies, and programming (*see Box 3*). Honest evaluation, and critical assessment of data, in order to understand these potential biases, and the implications of them for decision-making, is integral and should not be discounted (*see* Miller et al., 2022).

Box 3. Common Incorrect Conclusions Stemming from Inaccurate Data Usage

Below are some commonly-shared — yet incorrect — examples, which fail to take into account decisions made by data providers.

For example, Figure 35a is often used to conclude that the conflict landscape today is home to considerably more active conflicts than the years following World War II. The graph suggests that the number of conflicts spiked immensely in 1989, with the number of conflicts in the world in 2021 *ten times higher* than that seen in 1946. However, *this conclusion is the result of an artificial spike* — a result of data users not taking into account (or perhaps even being aware of) decisions made by data providers: namely, a variation in UCDP's temporal coverage by conflict type.

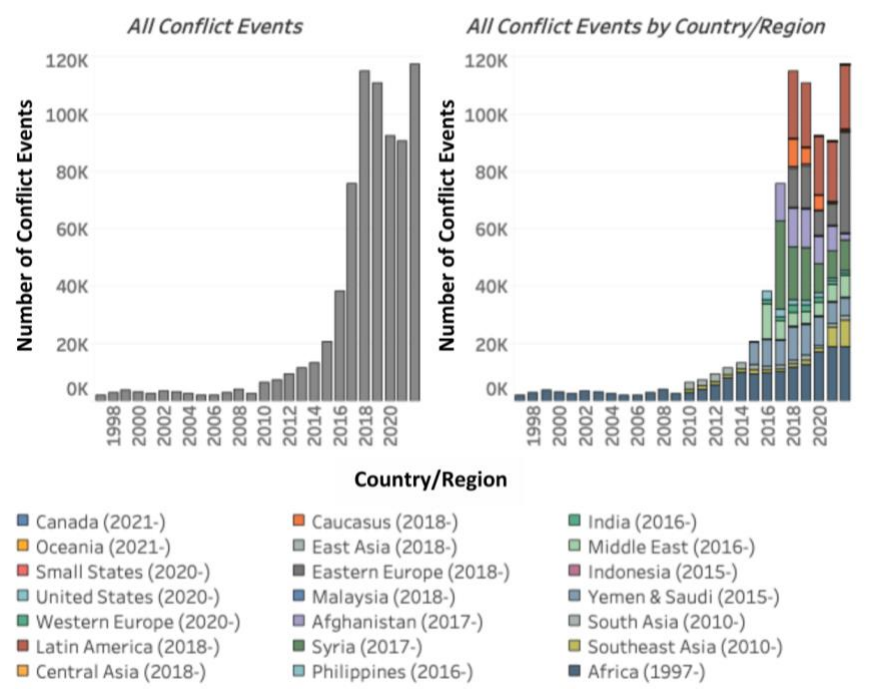
Figure 35. (**a**) Number of Active Conflicts, *UCDP*, 1946-2021; (b) Number of Active Conflicts by Conflict Type, *UCDP*, 1946-2021



Temporal coverage of conflict types varies in the UCDP dataset — an effect that Figure 35b, which notes conflict type by color, helps to make more visible. While coverage of conflicts in which at least one party is the government of a state (i.e. interstate and state-based conflicts, *in tan and orange, respectively*) extends back to 1946, coverage of conflicts in which neither party to the conflict is the government of a state (i.e. non-state conflicts, *in blue*) as well as coverage of one-sided violence (*in brown*) begins in 1989. It is evident that the 'spike' seen in Figure 35a is the result of new subsets of information entering the dataset, not a real-life trend. Of course, as a result, a similar artificial spike would be seen if one were to consider conflict-related fatalities when using UCDP data if not accounting for conflict types.

In a similar example, Figure 36a is often used to conclude that conflict activity has scaled up considerably in recent years, with conflict activity beginning to trend upwards in 2010, followed by considerable spikes in conflict activity year on year, beginning in 2015. However, *this conclusion is the result of artificial trends and spikes* — again a result of data users not considering decisions made by data providers: namely, a variation in ACLED's temporal coverage by country/region.

Figure 36. (**a**) Number of Conflict Events, *ACLED*, 1997-2022; (b) Number of Conflict Events by Country/Region, *ACLED*, 1997-2022



Temporal coverage by country/region varies in the ACLED dataset — an effect that Figure 36b, which notes conflict events by country/region by color, helps to make more visible. ACLED began as an African dataset, with coverage of Africa (*in blue*) hence spanning back in time the farthest (to 1997). As ACLED has expanded — now fully global in coverage — each of its geographic expansions has a different temporal start date.[42] It is evident that the initial upward trend beginning in 2010, for example, is the result of a number of South and Southeast Asian countries (*in light gray and light green, respectively*) entering the dataset. The spike in 2015 corresponds with Yemen and Saudi Arabia entering the dataset (*in light blue*) — home to a considerable number of conflict events as a result of the War in Yemen. The spike in 2016 is the result of many Middle Eastern countries (*in light green*) entering the dataset — namely Iraq, then-home to the height of deadly conflict involving the Islamic State. The considerable spike in 2017, meanwhile, is the result of Syria (*in dark green*) and Afghanistan (*in purple*), entering the dataset — two countries home to considerably active and lethal conflicts at the time. The spike in 2018 is driven again by a number of geographic expansions: Latin America (*in red*), home to considerable rates of events in the ACLED dataset; the Caucasus (*in orange*), home to regular ceasefire violations by Azerbaijan and Armenia; and Eastern Europe (*in dark gray*), home to regular ceasefire violations by Ukraine and Russia. In short, these spikes are again the result of new subsets of information entering the dataset, not necessarily real-life trends. Again, similar artificial spikes would be seen if one were to consider conflict-related fatalities when using ACLED data without accounting for country/region.

A difference in temporal coverage, by conflict type or by country/region, is one of the more clear-cut features for data users to identify and consider, especially as such decisions are not only straightforward, but are also explicitly noted on the websites of conflict data providers.[43] Other decisions made by data providers will require data users to pay closer attention to detail, namely to methodological decisions that have been made. Dataset scope conditions, sources of information that are used, and coding choices, to name a few, all have a direct impact on the patterns of conflict that data outputs will depict (Raleigh, Kishi, and Linke, 2023). Data users must consider both what data from providers show as well as what they do not show — both deliberately (e.g. choosing to start temporal coverage of a conflict type in 2010 means corresponding data for years prior to that will be 'missing') and consequently (e.g. choosing to rely on information from English-only language sources means that information only picked up by non-English sources will be 'missing'; or choosing to only capture events after a certain fatality threshold is met means that events that do not meet that threshold are 'missing'). Without consideration of these base assumptions — by both raw data users, as well as by those relying on visualizations stemming from data — conclusions drawn from such data may be biased.

[42] Admittedly, the starkness of these trends, visible in Figure 36b, can be obscured if one uses different regional categorizations than ACLED (the graph here reflects ACLED'). For example, those categorizing Egypt as part of the Middle East — as is done in graphs throughout this paper — might be led to believe that ACLED's Middle East coverage extends back to 1997, but this would be because ACLED categorizes Egypt as part of Africa, whose coverage extends back to 1997. It is nevertheless the responsibility of the data user to consider variations in temporal coverage and the impacts that may have on one's conclusions.

[43] UCDP notes temporal coverage of each of its datasets on their 'Dataset Download Center' page; ACLED notes the temporal coverage of each country in its dataset on their 'Data Export Tool' portal.