

Organized violence, 1989–2019

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Abstract

This article reports on trends in organized violence, building on new data by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). The defeat of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq has pushed the number of fatalities, almost 75,600, to its lowest level since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. However, this de-escalation in Syria is countered by increased violence in Africa, as IS and other transnational jihadist groups have relocated their efforts there. Furthermore, violence has continued to increase in Afghanistan; UCDP recorded more than 31,200 fatalities in Afghanistan in 2019, which accounts for 40% of all fatalities from organized violence across the globe. The general decline in fatalities from organized violence does not correspond with the trend in the number of active conflicts, which remained on a historically high level. UCDP recorded 54 state-based conflicts in 2019, including seven wars. Twenty-eight state-based conflicts involved IS (Islamic State), al-Qaida or their affiliates. In the past decade, conflicts involving these transnational jihadist groups have driven many of the trends in organized violence.

Keywords

armed conflict, conflict data, non-state conflict, one-sided violence, transnational jihadist, war

Organized violence 1989–2019¹

UCDP data show several significant events for organized violence in 2019. The defeat of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq has pushed the number of fatalities to its lowest level since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, illustrated in Figure 1 and Table I. However, this de-escalation in Syria is countered by increased violence in Africa, as IS and other transnational jihadist groups have relocated their efforts there. Pushing into new territories, and continuing to spread terror with complex suicide attacks, IS still dominated the trend in organized violence, despite being severely weakened by large-scale offensives. Furthermore, violence has continued to increase in Afghanistan, in spite of attempts at negotiating peace, and the country witnessed its bloodiest year since the end of the Soviet intervention in 1989. UCDP recorded more than 31,200 fatalities in Afghanistan in 2019, which accounts for 40% of all fatalities from organized violence across the

globe. Table I shows that Afghanistan is the third most conflict-affected country in terms of total fatalities in the 1989–2019 period, after Rwanda and Syria.

The first section of this article presents recent trends in three types of organized violence, focusing particularly on events in 2019 and their impact on the landscape of organized violence. In the second section, we look closer at the recent expansion of transnational groups, such as IS, al-Qaida, and their affiliates.

State-based conflict 1946–2019

In 2019, UCDP recorded 54 active state-based conflicts – the highest number in the post-1946 period – matching the previous peak year of 2016.² This is an increase by two compared to 2018. Africa seems to be driving this

¹ UCDP collects data on state-based armed conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence. The categories are mutually exclusive and can be aggregated as ‘organized violence’. They also share the same intensity cutoff for inclusion – 25 fatalities in a calendar year.

² Since the end of World War II, 639 dyads have been active in 290 conflicts in 158 locations. Corresponding numbers for the 1989–2019 period are 397 dyads in 183 conflicts in 96 locations. See Online appendix for definitions.

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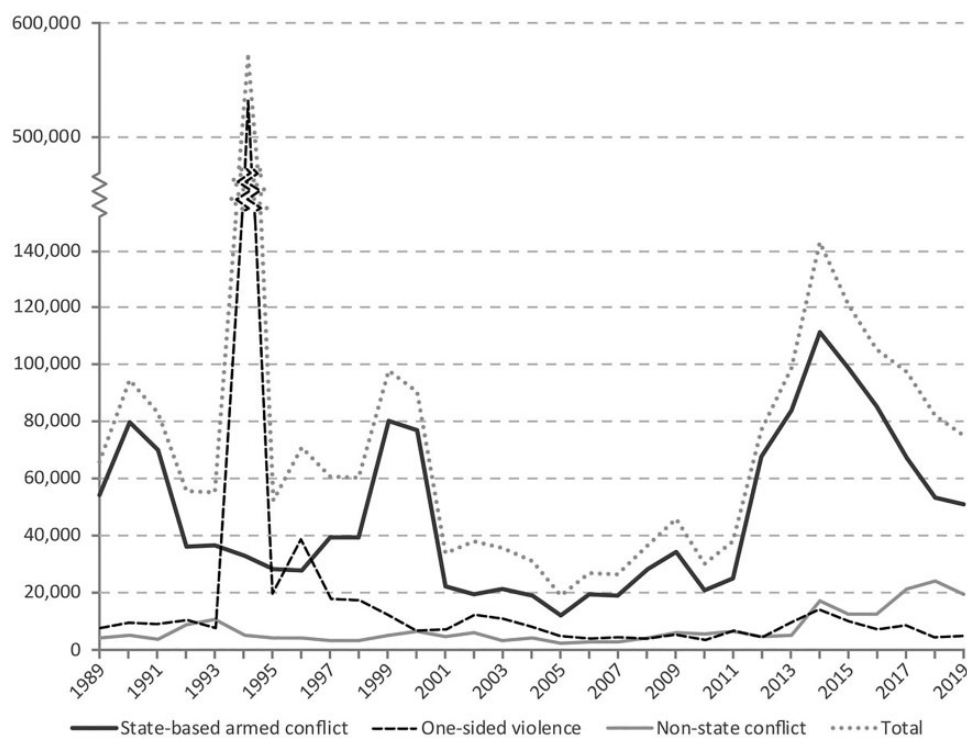


Figure 1. Fatalities in organized violence by type, 1989–2019

Table I. The ten most conflict-affected countries in terms of fatalities, 1989–2019

Country	Total no. of fatalities 1989–2019	Fatalities in state-based conflict	Fatalities in non-state conflict	Fatalities in one-sided violence
Rwanda	515,793	6,752	11	509,030
Syria	361,193	302,583	47,305	11,305
Afghanistan	258,746	243,210	4,830	10,706
Ethiopia	178,779	167,551	7,801	3,427
Iraq	122,560	100,246	3,141	19,173
DR Congo (Zaire)	116,422	28,693	17,269	70,460
Sudan	93,980	51,889	22,108	19,983
Sri Lanka	65,716	61,298	648	3,770
Nigeria	59,434	18,527	24,419	16,488
India	58,690	40,055	6,050	12,585
Other countries	710,997	457,073	119,086	134,838
Total	2,542,310	1,477,877	252,668	811,765

recent trend with 25 active conflicts, of which eight are new or restarted.³ Figure 2 shows that this is Africa's highest number of conflicts in the post-1946 period. IS continued to be involved in many conflicts around

³ Mozambique (Islamic State), Somalia (Islamic State), and Burkina Faso (Islamic State) recorded new conflicts, whereas conflict restarted in Burundi (government), Cameroon (Islamic State), Libya (government), Angola (Cabinda), and Ethiopia (government).

the world, despite the fall of the last remnants of its caliphate in Iraq and Syria in March 2019. IS challenged the governments of 16 different countries in 2019, an increase by four from 2018. All of these four were located in Africa.

The number of interstate conflicts continued to be low; the two conflicts recorded in 2018 were also active in 2019: Iran–Israel and India–Pakistan. However, Figure 3 shows that the number of intrastate conflicts

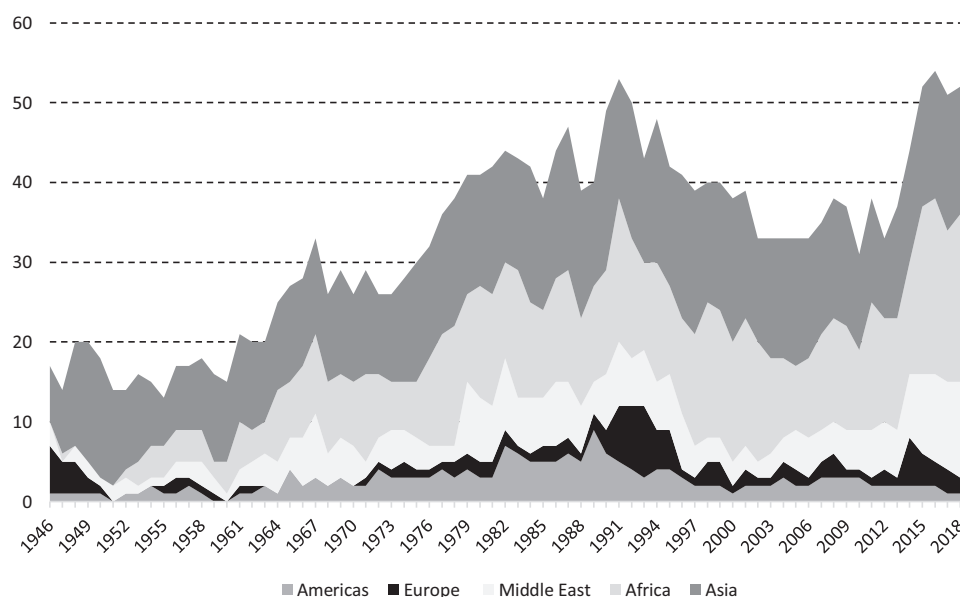


Figure 2. State-based armed conflict by region, 1946–2019

with troop involvement from external states continued to rise. In 2019, 22 of the 52 intrastate conflicts were internationalized in this way, the highest number in the post-1946 era and an increase by four since 2018. As in previous years, the USA was the country involved in the largest number of conflicts as a secondary warring party, ten in 2019. This is an increase by three from 2018, despite the US announcement in late 2018 to pull out troops from several countries (Gibbons-Neff & Mashal, 2018). In August 2019, the USA announced that the focus of anti-IS operations had shifted from the Middle East to Africa, given the expansion of IS in the region. Although IS has been present in many countries in the Sahel region for years, the group has recently intensified attacks (Szuba, 2019). During the first half of 2019, a new IS chapter in Central Africa – Wilayat Wasat Ifriqiya – claimed attacks in DR Congo and Mozambique (AP, 2019; Weiss, 2019), signaling a push into new territories.⁴

In 2019, seven conflicts reached the intensity level of war, with at least 1,000 battle-related deaths during the year. This is an increase by one from 2018. In two countries – Nigeria (Islamic State) and Libya (government) – violence escalated during 2019, again reaching the level of war after several years of lower levels of violence, whereas one conflict – Syria (Islamic State) –

de-escalated, and was not registered as war for the first time since 2013.⁵

The de-escalation in Syria contributed to the total number of fatalities reaching its lowest level since 2011; UCDP recorded just over 51,000 fatalities incurred in state-based armed conflict in 2019. Figure 1 shows that this is the fifth consecutive year with falling numbers of battle-related deaths, and the drop since the peak year of 2014 is more than 54%. As in recent years, this is mainly due to the de-escalation in Syria and Iraq, but also in Yemen. Meanwhile, violence escalated in Afghanistan and Libya.

In Syria, two active state-based conflicts⁶ caused 7,300 deaths in 2019. Down by almost 4,500 (38%) from 2018, this is the lowest level recorded since the Arab Spring in 2011. IS has been pushed by the Syrian regime from the west, while losing territories east of the Euphrates river to the Kurdish-led alliance SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) supported by a US-led coalition. In 2019, the final push against IS's last enclave in Deir Ezzor, resulted in a '100% territorial defeat' being declared by SDF on 23 March (Bali, 2019). Another

⁴ References to event IDs in UCDP GED v 20.1 are provided throughout the article. In this case, the corresponding IDs are: 284529 and 290327.

⁵ The remaining five wars were the same as last year: Afghanistan (government), Afghanistan (Islamic State), Syria (government), Somalia (government), and Yemen (government).

⁶ UCDP codes conflicts based on the stated goal of incompatibility. In Syria, this means that three different state-based conflicts have been active in recent years: over government, over the territory of Islamic State, and finally over both government and the territory Rojava Kurdistan.

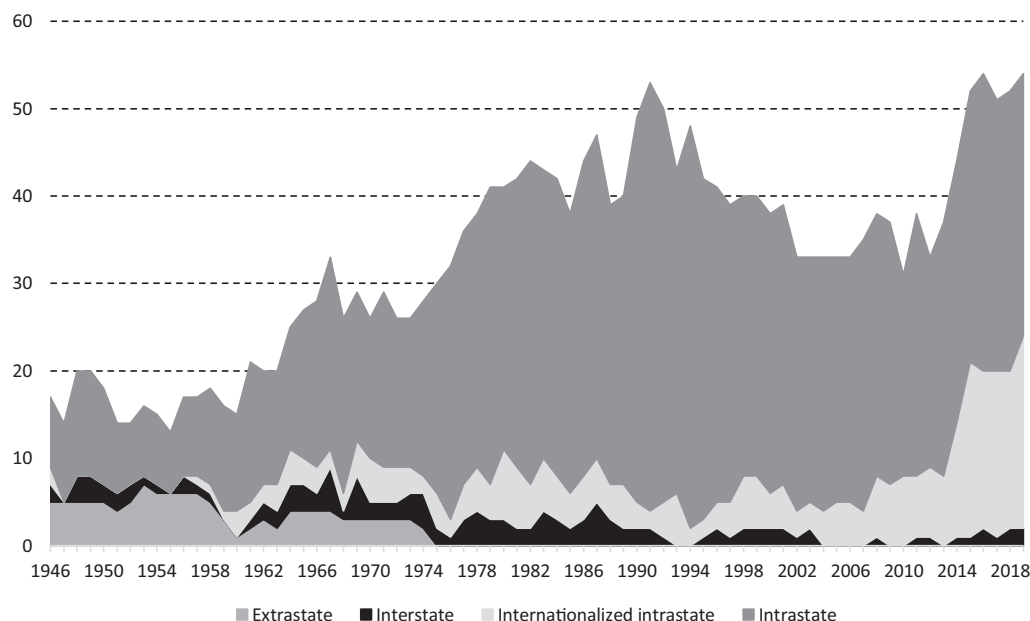


Figure 3. State-based armed conflict by type, 1946–2019

blow to the group followed in October, when its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed during a US raid in Idlib (White House, 2019).⁷ Although violence has decreased significantly, IS is still conducting guerrilla attacks across Syria and Iraq.

Fighting between the government of Syria and other opposition groups also declined in 2019, in spite of the offensive in Idlib province, pitting the Syrian regime against different al-Qaida linked jihadists and Turkey-backed rebels. Accompanied by extensive Russian airstrikes, the Idlib operation resulted in thousands of civilian casualties and created a severe humanitarian crisis (Berger, 2019).

In Yemen – one of the worst cases of state-based violence in 2018 – battle-related deaths decreased drastically in 2019.⁸ This was partly due to the UN-brokered peace talks in Sweden in December 2018. While parts of the Stockholm Agreement have been implemented, others have stalled, raising fears that the agreement will collapse. The Saudi-led coalition conducted fewer airstrikes in 2019 and the number of fatalities due to fighting in and around the city of Hodeida decreased markedly. Despite the de-escalation, the impact on civilians remained disastrous (UN, 2019; BBC, 2020).

⁷ GED ID: 309875.

⁸ Access to reliable information from Yemen remains limited and the numbers reported by UCDP should be seen as conservative low estimates.

For the second consecutive year, Afghanistan was the country hardest hit by state-based violence, despite the peace talks between the Taliban and the USA. In order to strengthen their bargaining power, rebel groups may escalate violent attacks with the start of negotiations (e.g. Bara, 2020). With over 29,900 fatalities recorded in state-based conflict, 2019 was the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since the end of the Soviet intervention in 1989. US airstrikes also increased in intensity in 2019, accidentally killing civilians on at least nine occasions.⁹ However, violence involving IS in Afghanistan plummeted during the year. UCDP recorded just over 1,000 battle-related deaths in fighting between the Afghan government and IS, a 62% drop from 2,800 fatalities in 2018. The group has been severely weakened due to offensives launched by both the Afghan government and the Taliban in IS's stronghold Nangarhar, along the border with Pakistan.

Another case of concern is Libya, where violence intensified during 2019, and the conflict reached the level of war for the first time since 2016. In April 2019, Khalifa Haftar's forces, loyal to Libya's eastern-based House of Representatives, launched an offensive against Tripoli and its internationally recognized government. Haftar's forces met more resistance than anticipated as an array of militia groups joined forces with the government to protect the city. By the end of the year,

⁹ GED IDs: 278193, 283320, 304917, 314183, 320710, 320302, 320729, 320600, and 322419.

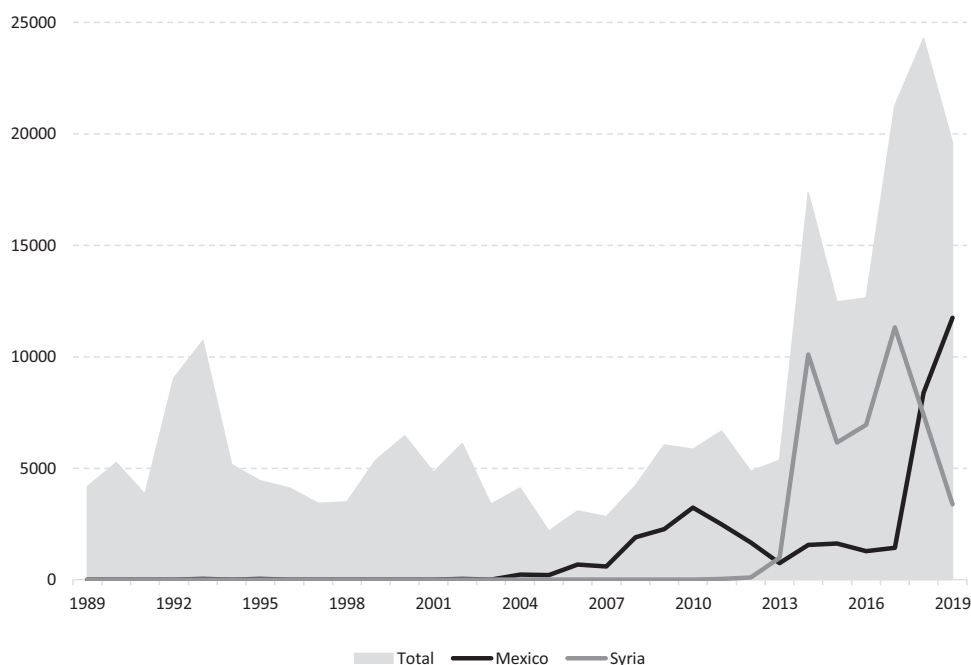


Figure 4. Fatalities in non-state conflict, 1989–2019

the conflict had resulted in over 1,600 fatalities, and UN-brokered talks have so far failed to produce a peaceful solution to the conflict (Debre, 2020).

Non-state conflict 1989–2019

Non-state conflict decreased in 2019, both in terms of number of active conflicts and in the number of fatalities directly caused by these conflicts.

Since 1989, UCDP has recorded 763 active non-state conflicts with a yearly average of 41. Higher numbers of non-state conflicts have characterized the years following 2012; during 1989–2011, the yearly average was 31 conflicts in contrast to 70 conflicts on average in the 2012–19 period. In 2019, the number of registered conflicts was 67, a decrease by 13 (16%) from 2018,¹⁰ and the lowest number reported since 2013.

With a drop from 12 conflicts involving 17 different groups in 2018, to five conflicts with five different groups, Syria recorded the most notable reduction in the number of non-state conflicts. In the peak year of 2014, UCDP registered 32 non-state conflicts in Syria. A large share of the non-state conflicts have centered around IS and its rivalries against other opposition groups – the number

sky-rocketed in 2014 following IS's declaration of a world-wide Islamic caliphate – and with the group nearly defeated the number of active conflicts has also diminished. Yet, Figure 4 shows that Syria continued to be one of the countries with the highest number of recorded fatalities in non-state violence, surpassed only by Mexico.

Being the most fatal non-state conflict for several years, IS against SDF de-escalated in 2019. During the first three months of 2019, an SDF offensive, supported by US-led airstrikes and troops, pushed IS from its last strongholds in eastern Syria. The other main non-state conflict cluster in Syria took place in the northern parts of the country, for many years under the control of SDF. After the final push against IS in March, SDF's dominance in northern and eastern Syria caused Turkey's concerns to increase. Turkey sees the main component of the SDF as an offshoot of PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party), which has fought against the government of Turkey since the 1980s. Following the US announcement in early October that it would reduce the number of troops in northern Syria, Turkey initiated 'Operation Peace Spring', pitting the Turkey-backed rebel group SNA (Syria National Army) against SDF. This increased tension between NATO allies Turkey and USA, who supported opposing sides in this non-state conflict. There were also concerns that the offensive against SDF could help IS to regroup, in addition to creating a humanitarian crisis in northern Syria (Cebul, 2019).

¹⁰ Last year, we reported 76 active conflicts in 2018 (Pettersson, Högladh & Öberg, 2019). Based on new information, we have added eight cases and removed four.

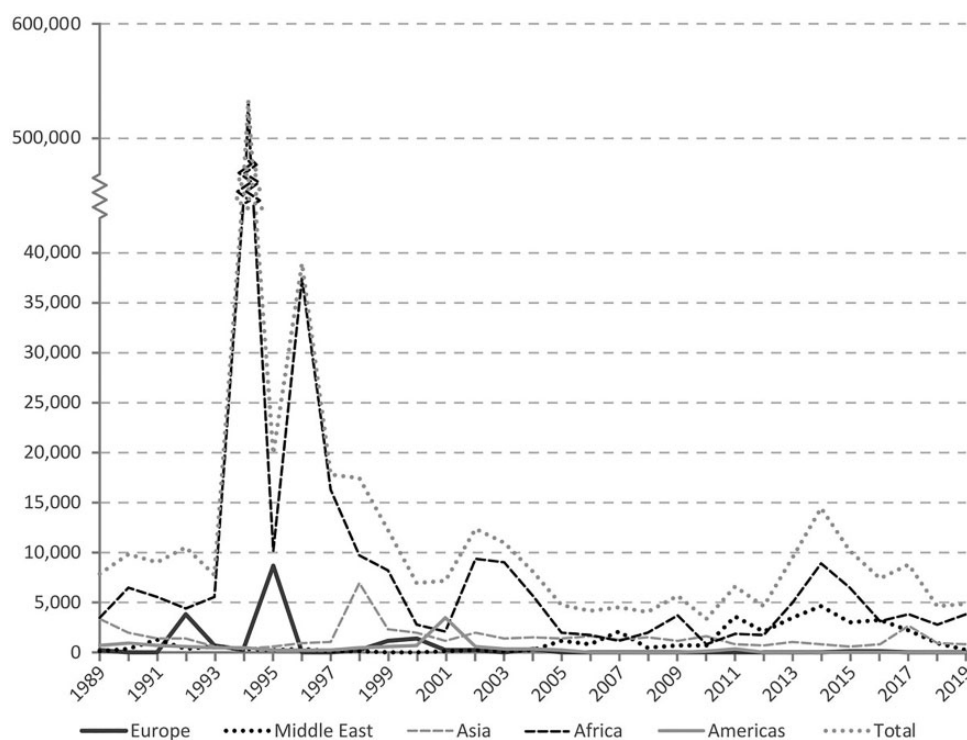


Figure 5. Fatalities in one-sided violence by region, 1989–2019

Mexico continues to be one of the countries with the highest number of non-state conflicts. UCDP recorded 11 different non-state conflicts in 2019, making Mexico the country hardest hit for the second consecutive year. Figure 4 shows that UCDP also recorded an increase in the number of fatalities in Mexico, reaching 11,700 in 2019. The Jalisco Cartel New Generation continued to dominate the cartel landscape, present in at least 25 of Mexico's 32 states and active in seven non-state conflicts. The Jalisco Cartel is known for its aggressive tactics and use of forced recruitment, and violence involving the group constituted 90% of the fatalities recorded in Mexico during 2019 (Borderland Beat, 2019). Three of the four deadliest non-state conflicts in the world in 2019 involved the Jalisco Cartel. Fighting against the Sinaloa Cartel has surged as the latter has been weakened by leadership struggles after extradition of Sinaloa leader Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzman. Forging alliances with remnants from the Tijuana Cartel, Jalisco Cartel has tried to take control of Tijuana – an important gateway to the USA – with thousands of deaths as a result (Fry, 2020). In Guanajuato, another strategically important state, Jalisco's push to take control resulted in the state being the deadliest one in Mexico last year (Mexico News Daily, 2020).

Globally, UCDP recorded at least 19,500 fatalities from non-state conflict in 2019. This is a decrease by

almost 4,700 fatalities (19%) since 2018. In spite of this decrease, Figure 4 shows that the past three years are the worst in terms of fatalities since 1989.

One-sided violence 1989–2019

UCDP registered 31 actors targeting civilians in 2019, a decrease by three since 2018.¹¹ Since 1989, UCDP registered 281 actors active in one-sided violence, with a yearly average of 33.

Although Figure 5 shows a slight increase in the number of civilians killed in targeted violence, from almost 4,700 in 2018 to just over 4,900 last year, the level of one-sided violence is still on a low level compared to the five years preceding 2018. Excluding Africa, one-sided killings in fact decreased by 43% in 2019. Africa however, witnessed a 37% increase when compared to 2018.

A few cases account for this increase in violence, most notably Burkina Faso and Mali. Both countries have witnessed an upsurge of violence connected to the al-Qaida-loyal alliance JNIM (Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin) which in turn has led to several self-

¹¹ Last year, we reported 32 actors for 2018 (Pettersson, Högladh & Öberg, 2019). Based on new information, we added four cases and removed two.

defense militias, for example the Koglweogo, taking up arms. This has caused non-state conflicts, as well as extensive one-sided violence, in the region.¹² The growing presence of armed groups has reinforced longstanding tension between the mainly Muslim, pastoralist Fulani ethnic group, and other, agriculturalist, groups. The Fulani have been accused of collaborating with jihadi groups, and anti-jihadi militias have frequently targeted Fulani civilians, sparking retaliatory attacks by al-Qaida affiliates (BBC, 2019; Kleinfeld, 2020).

For the fifth consecutive year, IS continued to be the actor most involved in one-sided violence. However, the number of people killed by IS has decreased steadily since 2015. In spite of this general decrease, IS has stepped up its attacks in Africa, where IS one-sided killings increased by 56% in 2019. During the year, attacks targeting Christian civilians in the Greater Sahel region intensified. Following the killing of IS leader al-Baghdadi and IS spokesperson Abul-Hasan al-Muhajir in October, the group claimed revenge attacks against aid workers and other civilians (Ewang, 2020; Keay, 2019).¹³

Just like in recent years, non-state groups carried out most of the one-sided violence. Governments were responsible for 17% of the fatalities in 2019. Notable cases include violent crackdowns on the wave of protests that spread over the world during the year, including in Sudan and Iran.¹⁴

Transnational jihadist groups, 2010–19

In the past decade, conflicts involving transnational jihadist groups have driven many of the trends in organized violence. In 2019, 28 of 54 state-based conflicts involved IS, al-Qaida, or their affiliates. These groups have also generated much international attention, security concerns, and military interventions, contributing to the increase in internationalized intrastate conflict in recent years. They have been recruiting fighters and performing or inspiring attacks in a large number of countries, raising security concerns far outside their core operating areas. Here we look at trends in violence involving transnational jihadist groups 2010–19.

Following Melander, Pettersson & Themnér (2016: 731; see also Svensson & Nilsson, 2018) we define transnational jihadism as ‘the immediate or future aim of a non-state group to establish a caliphate across internationally recognized borders, using violence’.¹⁵

Figure 6 shows the share of fatalities in organized violence involving IS, al-Qaida, and their affiliates. The sharp increase in violence beginning in 2012 is driven by the escalating conflicts in Syria and Iraq at the time, involving both IS and al-Qaida. Also, the recent decrease in the number of fatalities caused by al-Qaida, and more importantly IS, has contributed to the general decrease in fatalities from organized violence in the world.¹⁶ Looking at state-based conflicts alone, in seven out of the last ten years, conflicts involving al-Qaida, IS, and their affiliates generated the majority of battle-related deaths in the world. Considering the core groups only, the share has decreased precipitously, from a high of 44% of the global total in 2017 to 14% in 2019. Yet, if we include affiliates of IS and al-Qaida, 73% of all battle-deaths in 2019 occurred in fighting involving transnational jihadist groups. This recent trend is, in large part, driven by the escalating conflict in Afghanistan, which sees both IS and the al-Qaida affiliated Taliban¹⁷ challenging the government, as well as fighting each other and killing civilians.

The transnational jihadists have also been prominent in the non-state category. From 2014 to 2017 more than half of the non-state fatalities occurred in conflicts involving IS and al-Qaida. As noted above, fighting between IS and other rebel groups skyrocketed in 2014, following its declaration of an Islamic caliphate. Many of these conflicts also attracted external support from other countries, for example the US-led coalition supporting SDF with

¹² For example GED IDs: 282148, 285401, 285419, and 323140.

¹³ For example GED IDs: 321804, 321261, and 321606.

¹⁴ In other countries, protests turned violent and do not meet the definition of UCDP one-sided violence, which requires that civilians do not use armed force. Many of the events in countries such as Iraq and Venezuela are instead coded as part of our forthcoming Violence in Civil Protests dataset. UCDP coding is always done on an event basis, meaning that there may be several types of violence ongoing simultaneously.

¹⁵ All actors in UCDP data have been arranged into five different categories: IS, al-Qaida, IS affiliate, al-Qaida affiliate, and lastly no IS or al-Qaida connection. Acceptance by the central leadership is required for a group to be coded as IS or al-Qaida. Groups that openly support either IS or al-Qaida, are supported by either IS or al-Qaida, or have pledged allegiance to one of the groups but are still waiting for a formal acceptance have been registered as IS or al-Qaida affiliates. The coding is done on a yearly basis, meaning that the same group can be registered in different categories in different years. As with other UCDP coding, the groups’ stated intentions are coded, regardless of possible underlying incentives or alternative agendas.

¹⁶ However, decreasing levels of fighting between the Syrian government and opposition groups without ties to transnational jihadists also account for a large part of the overall trend.

¹⁷ The Taliban is considered an al-Qaida affiliate based on al-Qaida leaders’ open support to the Taliban, and the close cooperation between the groups on the ground. However, it should be noted that the Taliban has a national agenda, focusing on Afghanistan, rather than a transnational one.

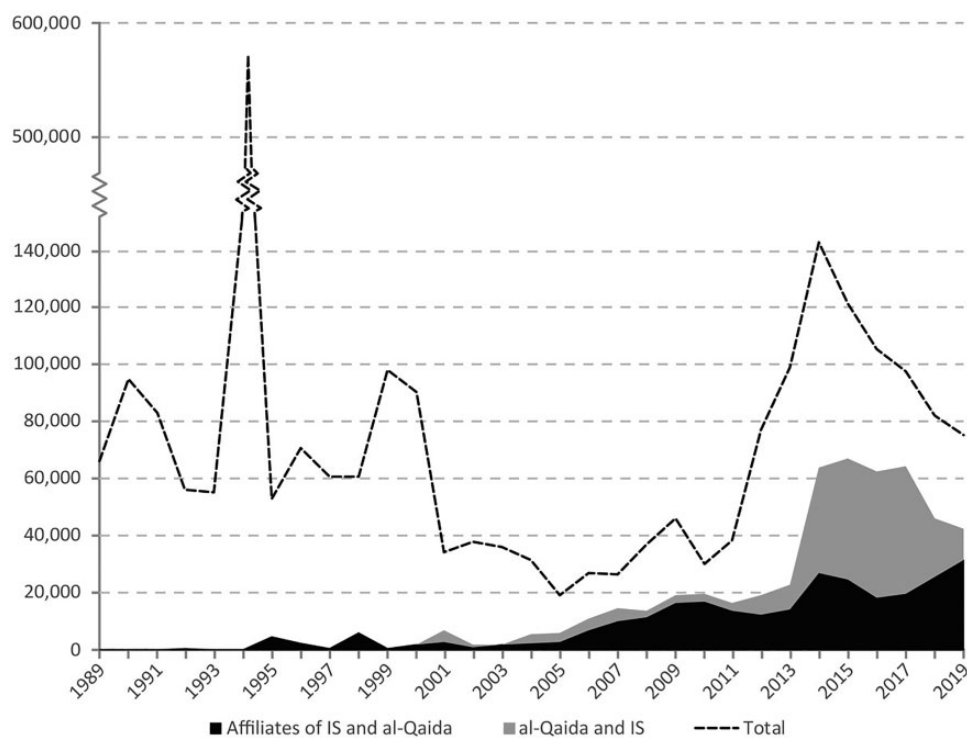


Figure 6. Fatalities in organized violence, IS, al-Qaida, and affiliates, 1989–2019

airstrikes as well as troops on the ground. The conflict between IS and SDF alone has resulted in at least 18,500 fatalities over the past five years, more than any other non-state conflict in UCDP data.

Regarding one-sided violence IS, al-Qaida, and their affiliates are responsible for a large share of the civilian victims. In 2019, 71% of fatalities caused by non-state groups were due to attacks from these groups. Surpassed only by AFDL (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo) in DR Congo, IS is in fact the second most deadly non-state actor since 1989, responsible for at least 28,000 civilian fatalities in direct targeting. Al-Qaida was severely weakened after the counterterrorism operations following 9/11, again with the killings of Osama bin Laden and other senior leaders, and finally with the split of al-Qaida in Iraq, which became IS in 2013. However, experts warn that the group has used the counterterrorism focus on IS to regroup and to grow stronger (Jones, 2017; Carey, 2019). The one-sided attacks by al-Qaida or affiliates coded by UCDP have indeed increased during the past few years, but the trend is largely driven by JNIM attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Thus, the transnational jihadist groups have either driven or had a major impact on the trends in all categories of violence in the past ten years. In a longer historical perspective, however, it is not their capacity for violence that set them apart (Melander, Pettersson & Themnér, 2016:

733). What does set IS and al-Qaida apart is their transnational presence, their ability to attract allegiance or affiliation of local Islamist groups, and their ability to recruit fighters and followers globally. There is nothing similar in recent history. However, the anarchist movement and the revolutionary socialist movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries display some similarities. The anarchists were a transnational non-state movement active in many countries, engaging in terror attacks, fighting in civil wars and revolutions, and raising international security concerns (cf. Atran, 2010: 84–88; Joll, 1980: Part 3).

The Bolshevik movement in the early 20th century is perhaps the closest historical parallel to IS. They were a radical exponent of a broader ideological movement present in many countries. In a time of regional upheaval, they managed to establish a revolutionary state in Russia along with the Comintern to promote world revolution. Many Bolshevik or similarly inclined movements across Europe and beyond joined the revolution along with young idealists around the world (cf. McDonald, 1988). Some of the young idealists went to fight abroad, most famously in the Spanish Civil War, but many other revolutionary movements also attracted foreign fighters, like the Janglái in Iran (Dailami, 1990). Within a few years after the Russian Revolution, local Soviet Republics were established in many countries (e.g.

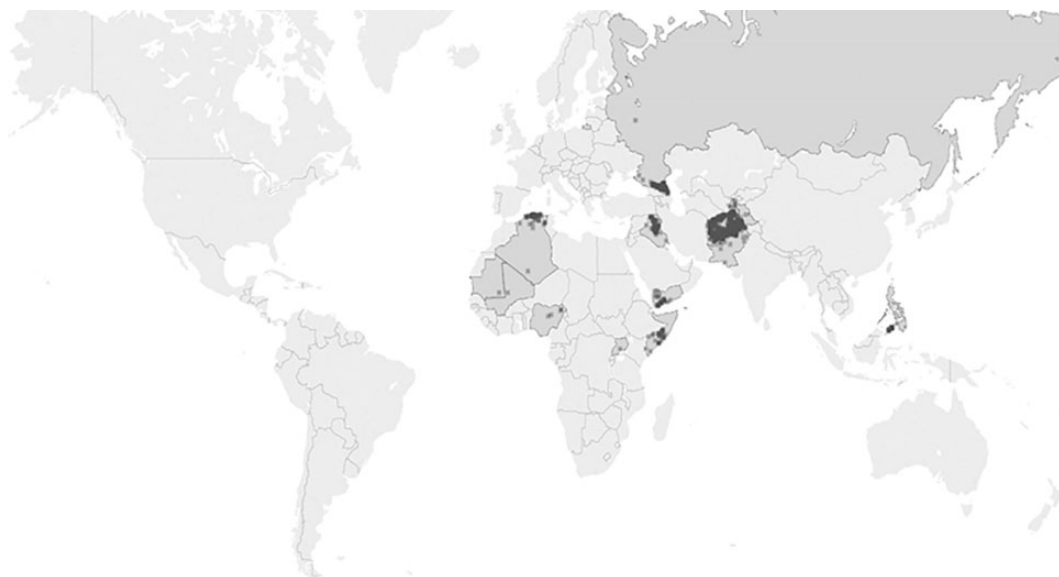


Figure 7. Geographical distribution of IS, al-Qaida, and affiliates, 2010

Map shows countries with transnational jihadist violence (light grey), as well as where in these countries violent events took place (dark grey).

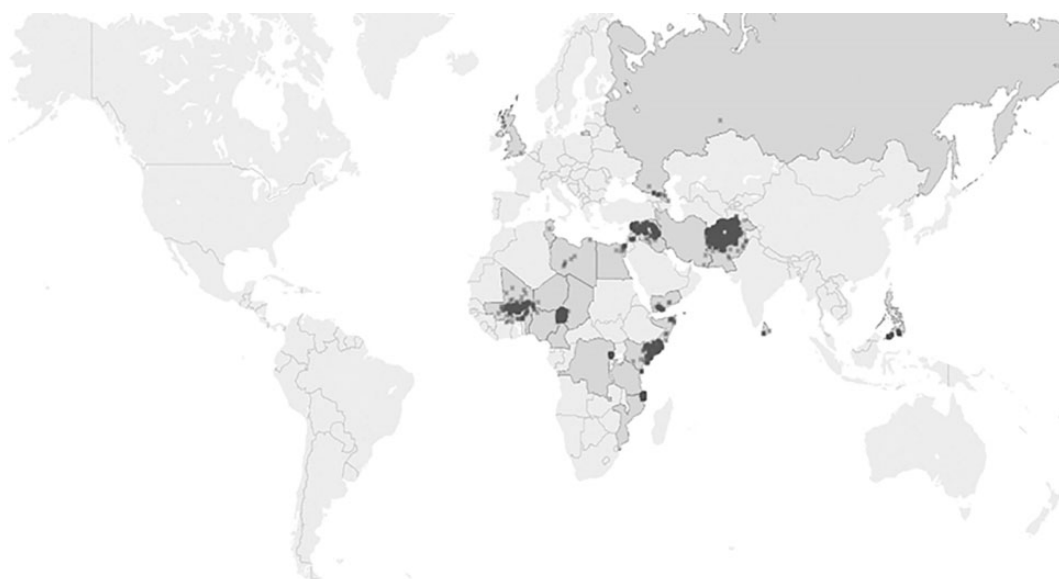


Figure 8. Geographical distribution of IS, al-Qaida, and affiliates, 2019

Map shows countries with transnational jihadist violence (light grey), as well as where in these countries violent events took place (dark grey).

Azerbaijan, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Latvia, and Ukraine). Like the IS provinces, they were often fiercely contested locally and sometimes attracted international interventions. Most Soviet Republics were short lived, but in spite of great power interventions, the Bolsheviks managed to take control of most of the former Russian Empire and establish the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The IS, in contrast, lost its core territory in 2019, while expanding its provinces.

Figures 7 and 8 show the geographical expansion of the transnational jihadist movements over the past ten years. In 2010, al-Qaida and affiliated organizations were active in 13 different countries and challenged 11 different governments in state-based armed conflict. At that time, what was to become IS was al-Qaida in Iraq. Having separated from al-Qaida in 2013, IS established a caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014, and declared that it would expand its territory across the globe. Aside from its core group in Iraq

and Syria, IS's global ambitions meant that it also established 'provinces' (wilayah) in other countries. In the years following 2014, IS created such provinces in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Afghanistan/Pakistan (Khorasan), Algeria, West Africa, and Russia (Leigh, French & Juan, 2016). Establishing a province often included a merger of local militant outfits into the IS umbrella structure. In some areas, IS established presence without declaring a province. Examples include the Philippines, where IS named a local commander emir of the area without incorporating the country into its official structure. The global aspirations of IS contributed to the increase in the total number of state-based armed conflicts in the world. In 2019, IS, al-Qaida, and their affiliates carried out attacks in 25 countries, challenging 20 different governments. In spite of major setbacks and military defeats in Syria during 2019, IS and affiliated groups were active in 23 different countries in that year, having emerged since 2014 as the leading transnational jihadist organization. In 2019, IS also declared a new province – Central Africa – the first one since 2017.

It has been noted previously that the transnational jihadists have had difficulties realizing their goals compared to other rebel groups (Melander, Petterson & Themnér, 2016). The defeat of IS in Syria and Iraq in March 2019, and the death of al-Baghdadi in October the same year underscore this observation. But even as IS has been in decline in Syria in recent years, the group has expanded geographically.

In the longer term, the ability of IS and al-Qaida to reach their goals may depend on how they are received locally. The transnational jihadist goals at times come into conflict with local goals and desires, and the groups' reliance on foreign fighters may be a problem if it is seen as a foreign intrusion or imposition on local authorities. IS has experienced resistance – even defeat – from local groups, including from local jihadist groups that may otherwise be expected to sympathize with IS's goals. For example, in Libya, IS first established a presence in Derna through the local Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam, which pledged allegiance to IS that was accepted in November 2014. IS proceeded to set up courts and schools and attempted to persuade another local Islamist group, the Derna mujahideen, to also pledge allegiance to IS – but they refused. Increased tensions led to the killing of two Derna mujahideen commanders by IS militants in June 2015.¹⁸ This, in turn, led the Derna mujahideen to declare jihad against IS and after two rounds of intense fighting they threw IS out of Derna in April 2016. A similar episode transpired

in Benghazi, forcing surviving IS members to retreat to Sirte (Zoschak & Gambhir, 2015; Joscelyn, 2016).

Conclusion

The number of fatalities in organized violence decreased for the fifth consecutive year in 2019. The defeat of IS in Syria and Iraq has pushed the number of fatalities to its lowest level since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Yet, the number of active state-based conflicts remained on a historically high level, many of them involving IS, al-Qaida, or their affiliates. A recent expansion by IS into new territories in Africa has contributed to this trend. In the past decade, transnational jihadist groups, such as IS and al-Qaida, have driven many of the conflict trends, across all three types of violence recorded by UCDP. One example is Afghanistan, where fighting involving IS and/or the al-Qaida affiliated Taliban caused over 31,200 fatalities in 2019, the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since the end of the Soviet intervention in 1989. Since 2013, the country has witnessed a sharp increase in fatalities, which in 2019 made up 40% of all deaths from organized violence in world.

Replication data

The complete UCDP datasets updated to 2019, as well as older versions of the datasets, are found at <http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/>. The tables and figures in this article were created directly from the Excel sheets at the UCDP web page. Detailed descriptions of the individual cases are found in the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia at www.ucdp.uu.se/. Replication data for this article can be found both at <http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/> and <https://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets/>.

Authors' notes

The data for all three categories included in organized violence go back to 1989; for state-based armed conflict, they extend back to 1946.

For the first time, the UCDP Geo-referenced Events Dataset version 20.1 includes events data for Syria. Note that these data are preliminary and may be significantly revised in future versions.


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¹⁸ GED ID: 216021.

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Appendix 1. State-based armed conflicts active in 2019

This list includes all conflicts that exceeded the minimum threshold of 25 battle-related deaths in 2019 and fulfilled the other criteria for inclusion.¹ The column 'Year' shows the latest range of years in which the conflict has been active without interruption. The start year is found in parenthesis in the 'Incompatibility' column, which indicates when the armed conflict reached 25 battle-related deaths for the first time. If a conflict has been inactive for more than ten years or if there has been a complete change in the opposition side, the start year refers to the onset of the latest phase of the conflict. The column 'Intensity in 2019' displays the aggregated number of battle-related deaths. Thus, if more than one dyad is active in the conflict, the intensity column records their aggregated intensity. Three fatality estimates are given in the table: low, best, and high.

Location	Incompatibility	Opposition organization(s) in 2019	Year	Intensity in 2019		
				Low	Best	High
EUROPE						
Russia	Territory (Islamic State) (2015)	IS	2015–19	26	26	26
Ukraine	Territory (Novorossiya) (2014)	DPR, LPR ²	2014–19	149	234	238
MIDDLE EAST						
Egypt	Territory (Islamic State) (2015)	IS	2015–19	211	406	521
Egypt	Government (2017)	Harakit Sawa'id Misr	2017–19	42	42	48
Iran, Israel	Government (2018)		2018–19	91	93	143
Iran	Government (2005)	Jaish al-Adl	2018–19	29	29	43
Iraq	Government ³ (2004)	IS	2004–19	495	498	518
Israel	Territory (Palestine) (1949)	PIJ	2018–19	50	50	51
Syria	Government ⁴ (2011)	Syrian insurgents	2011–19	6,656	6,782	7,102
Syria	Territory (Islamic State) ⁵ (2013)	IS	2013–19	521	522	635
Turkey	Territory (Kurdistan) (1983)	PKK	2015–19	540	540	607
Yemen	Government (2009)	Forces of Hadi ⁶	2009–19	1,642	1,663	1,829
ASIA						
Afghanistan	Government ⁷ (1978)	Taliban	1978–2019	26,968	28,828	33,284
Afghanistan	Territory (Islamic State) ⁸ (2015)	IS	2015–19	1,045	1,075	1,435
India	Government (1991)	CPI-Maoist	1996–2019	212	213	213
India	Territory (Kashmir) (1990)	Kashmir insurgents ⁹	1990–2019	264	266	274

(continued)

Appendix 1. (continued)

Location	Incompatibility	Opposition organization(s) in 2019	Year	Intensity in 2019		
				Low	Best	High
India, Pakistan	Territory (Kashmir) (2014)		2014–19	125	125	136
Myanmar	Government (2013)	PSLF	2017–19	36	49	91
Myanmar	Territory (Arakan) (2016)	ULA	2016–19	365	480	1013
Myanmar	Territory (Kachin) (2011)	KIO	2011–19	29	29	30
Pakistan	Government (2007)	TTP	2007–19	148	148	153
Pakistan	Territory (Islamic State) (2016)	IS	2016–19	29	29	29
Pakistan	Territory (Balochistan) (2004)	BRAS	2019	37	37	37
Philippines	Government (1969)	CPP	1999–2019	135	138	176
Philippines	Territory (Mindanao) (1972)	ASG	1993–2019	35	35	35
Philippines	Territory (Islamic State) (2016)	IS	2016–19	125	136	140
Thailand	Territory (Patani) (2003)	Patani insurgents ¹⁰	2003–19	54	55	55
AFRICA						
Angola	Territory (Cabinda) (1991)	FLEC-FAC-TN	2019	10	25	53
Burkina Faso	Government ¹¹ (2018)	JNIM	2018–19	180	266	399
Burkina Faso	Territory (Islamic State) ¹² (2019)	IS	2019	73	78	137
Burundi	Government ¹³ (2014)	RED-TABARA	2019	60	60	96
Cameroon	Territory (Ambazonia) (2017)	Ambazonia insurgents	2017–19	557	558	645
Cameroon	Territory (Islamic State) ¹⁴ (2015)	IS	2019	129	135	153
CAR	Government (2018)	UPC (Ali Darass Fulani supporters)	2018–19	48	48	50
Chad	Territory (Islamic State) (2015)	IS	2017–19	184	184	206
DR Congo	Government (2011)	CMC, CNPSC, UPLC	2016–19	177	177	182
Ethiopia	Territory (Amhara) (2019)	Military faction (forces of Asaminew Tsige)	2019	27	27	27
Kenya	Territory (Northeastern Province and Coast) ¹⁵ (2015)	Al-Shabaab	2015–19	60	61	94
Libya	Territory (Islamic State) ¹⁶ (2015)	IS	2015–19	43	43	43
Libya	Government (2014)	Forces of the House of Representatives	2019	1,445	1,652	1,728
Mali	Government ¹⁷ (2009)	JNIM	2012–19	421	422	566
Mali	Territory (Islamic State) ¹⁸ (2017)	IS	2017–19	174	181	195
Mozambique	Government (2018)	Ansar Al Sunnah	2018–19	149	236	250
Mozambique	Territory (Islamic State) (2019)	IS	2019	29	42	59
Niger	Territory (Islamic State) ¹⁹ (2015)	IS	2015–19	295	298	337
Nigeria	Government (2009)	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad ²⁰	2011–19	302	309	365
Nigeria	Territory (Islamic State) ²¹ (2015)	IS	2015–19	861	1,018	1,601
Rwanda	Government ²² (2001)	FDLR, FDLR-RUD, CNRD	2018–19	200	200	279
Somalia	Government ²³ (2006)	Al-Shabaab	2006–19	1,662	1,912	2,396
Somalia	Territory (Islamic State) ²⁴ (2019)	IS	2019	33	33	36
South Sudan	Government (2011)	NAS	2011–19	102	110	188
Uganda	Government ²⁵ (1980)	ADF	2013–19	289	332	339

(continued)

Appendix 1. (continued)

Location	Incompatibility	Opposition organization(s) in 2019	Year	Intensity in 2019		
				Low	Best	High
AMERICAS						
Colombia	Government (1964)	ELN, FARC dissidents	2018–19	124	124	128
USA	Government ²⁶ (2001)	al-Qaida	2019	34	37	56
Total number of battle-related deaths in 2019				47,727	51,096	59,470

¹See Online appendix for definitions.

²Supported by troops from Russia.

³Government supported by troops from France, UK, and USA.

⁴Government supported by troops from Iran and Russia.

⁵Government supported by troops from Iran and Russia.

⁶Supported by troops from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and United Arab Emirates.

⁷Government supported by troops from USA.

⁸Government supported by troops from USA.

⁹E.g. Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hizbul Mujahideen, and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

¹⁰E.g. BRN-C and RKK.

¹¹Government supported by troops from France.

¹²Government supported by troops from France.

¹³Government supported by troops from DR Congo.

¹⁴Government supported by troops from Chad.

¹⁵Government supported by troops from USA.

¹⁶Government supported by troops from USA.

¹⁷Government supported by MINUSMA, involving troops from Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America. France also contributed troops via the French-led counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane, which succeeded Operation Serval (2013–14).

¹⁸As footnote 17.

¹⁹Government supported by troops from Chad, France, and USA.

²⁰Commonly known as Boko Haram.

²¹Government supported by troops from Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

²²Government supported by troops from DR Congo.

²³Government supported by AMISOM, involving troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. Also, USA contributed troops on the side of the government.

²⁴Government supported by USA.

²⁵Government supported by troops from DR Congo.

²⁶Government supported by troops from Afghanistan.

Unclear cases of state-based armed conflict in 2019

Cases that have been completely rejected because they definitely do not meet the criteria of armed conflict are not included in the list below. For the conflicts listed here, the available information suggests the possibility of the cases meeting the criteria of armed conflicts, but there is insufficient information concerning at least one of the three components of the definition: (a) the number of deaths; (b) the identity or level of organization of a party; or (c) the type of incompatibility. The unclear aspect may concern an entire conflict or a dyad in a conflict that is included above.

Location/government	Opposition organization(s)	Unclear aspect
DR Congo	IS	Number of deaths
Indonesia	OPM	Number of deaths
Israel	Hamas	Number of deaths
Israel, Syria		Number of deaths
Sudan	SLM/A	Number of deaths
Tajikistan	IS	Actor

Appendix 2. Non-state conflicts active in 2019

This list includes all non-state conflicts that exceeded the minimum threshold of 25 deaths in 2019 and fulfilled the other criteria for inclusion.¹ The column 'Start year' shows the first year when the non-state conflict caused at least 25 fatalities (since 1989). The column 'Fatalities in 2019' displays the number of people killed, in the low, best, and high estimate.

Location	Side A	Side B	Start year	Fatalities in 2019		
				Low	Best	High
MIDDLE EAST						
Syria	IS	HTS	2017	105	124	132
Syria	IS	SDF ²	2015	1,608	1,663	2,044
Syria	National Front for Liberation	HTS	2018	149	149	149
Syria	National Front for Liberation, SNA ³	SDF	2018	156	156	193
Syria	SNA ⁴	SDF	2019	1,083	1,289	1,338
Yemen	AQAP	Forces of Hadi ⁵	2015	86	90	93
Yemen	AQAP	IS	2018	6	69	69
Yemen	Forces of Hadi	STC	2018	75	75	124
ASIA						
Afghanistan	IS	Taliban	2015	51	51	53
Afghanistan	Taliban	High Council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate	2015	61	62	67
Papua New Guinea	Oi Kuru	Libe Koi	2019	28	28	32
AFRICA						
Burkina Faso	JNIM	Koglweogo	2019	4	28	28
CAR	anti-Balaka	UPC (Ali Darass Fulani supporters)	2014	60	60	140
CAR	FPRC	MLCJ	2019	213	213	213
Chad	Dadjo	Mouro	2019	65	65	65
DR Congo	Alur	Lendu	2002	57	57	57
DR Congo	Hema	Lendu	1999	239	241	241
DR Congo	APCLS	NDC-R	2018	33	33	33
DR Congo	APCLS, CMC	NDC-R	2019	173	173	173
DR Congo	CMC	NDC-R	2019	142	144	181
DR Congo	CNPSC	Ngumino	2019	55	55	255
Ethiopia	Amhara	Gumuz	2019	52	52	228
Ethiopia	Amhara	Oromo	1991	76	76	76
Ethiopia	Amhara	Qimant	2019	31	31	31
Kenya	Borana	Gabra	2005	39	44	46
Kenya	Marakwet	Pokot	2001	8	30	30
Libya	Ahali	Toubou	2019	0	62	67
Libya	DPF	Forces of the House of Representatives	2016	45	48	49
Libya	Forces of the House of Representatives	IS	2015	40	42	45
Mali	CMA	MSA	2019	31	31	34
Mali	Dogon	Fulani	2012	61	61	127
Nigeria	Abugbe (Agatu)	Agbaduma (Agatu)	2019	25	25	25
Nigeria	Bassa Kwomu	Egbura Mozum	2018	6	25	33
Nigeria	Black Axe	Eyie	2011	112	112	124

(continued)

Appendix 2. (continued)

Location	Side A	Side B	Start year	Fatalities in 2019		
				Low	Best	High
Nigeria	Deebam	NDV	2016	26	43	48
Nigeria	Fulani	Kadara	2017	144	151	281
Nigeria	Ikurav (Tiv)	Shitile (Tiv)	2019	37	37	58
Nigeria	Jukun	Tiv	1991	142	167	230
Nigeria	Supporters of APC	Supporters of PDP	2015	32	32	40
Somalia	Al-Shabaab	IS	2019	25	26	30
Somalia	Al-Shabaab	Ma'awisley	2019	29	32	44
Somalia	Biide subclan of Habar Jeclo (Isaaq)	Sa'ad subclan of Habar Yonis (Isaaq)	2018	24	32	32
Somalia	Dir clan	Sa'ad subclan of Habar Gidir clan (Hawiye)	2019	30	53	53
South Sudan	Bul Nuer	Twic Dinka	2019	28	28	28
South Sudan	Dinka	Nuer	2010	39	39	39
South Sudan	Gak Dinka	Manuer Dinka	2019	79	79	79
South Sudan	Gony Dinka	Thiyic Dinka	2011	25	25	25
South Sudan	Jie	Murle	2018	98	98	98
South Sudan	Jikany Nuer	Lou Nuer	1993	36	36	36
South Sudan	Latuka	Pari	2019	22	42	44
South Sudan	Lou Nuer	Murle	2006	50	51	51
Sudan	Beni Amir	Nuba	2019	85	85	97
Sudan	Fur	Newiba, Rizeigat Abbala	2019	27	27	27
AMERICAS						
Brazil	Comando Classe A	Comando Vermelho	2019	62	62	62
Brazil	Comando Vermelho	GDE	2017	1,178	1,178	1,178
Brazil	FDN	PCC	2017	55	55	55
Mexico	Beltrán Leyva Cartel	Sinaloa Cartel	2008	102	133	135
Mexico	Fuerza Anti Unión	La Union de Tepito	2018	38	38	39
Mexico	Gulf Cartel	Los Zetas	2010	43	43	51
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	Los Zetas	2011	1,152	1,152	1,152
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	Sinaloa Cartel	2015	2,716	2,716	2,726
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	La Nueva Familia	2017	953	953	995
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	Nueva Plaza Cartel	2018	1,275	1,275	1,275
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel	2018	2,881	2,881	2,906
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	La Familia	2018	1,535	1,535	1,535
Mexico	Jalisco Cartel New Generation	Los Rojos	2019	86	86	86
Mexico	Juarez Cartel	Sinaloa Cartel	2004	934	934	935
Total number of fatalities in non-state conflicts in 2019				18,963	19,588	21,065

¹See Online appendix for definitions.²SDF was supported with troops from USA and UK.³National Front for Liberation, SNA was supported with troops from Turkey.⁴SNA was supported with troops from Turkey.⁵Forces of Hadi was supported with troops from USA and United Arab Emirates.

Appendix 3. One-sided violence in 2019

This list includes all cases of one-sided violence that exceeded the minimum threshold of 25 fatalities in 2019 and fulfilled the other criteria for inclusion.¹ The column 'Start year' shows the first year when one-sided violence caused at least 25 fatalities (since 1989). The column 'Fatalities in 2019' displays the number of civilians killed, in the low, best, and high estimate.

Location	Actor	Start year	Fatalities in 2019		
			Low	Best	High
MIDDLE EAST					
Iran	Government of Iran	2019	16	46	118
Syria	Syrian insurgents	2012	62	62	77
ASIA					
Afghanistan	Government of Afghanistan	1993	28	28	34
Afghanistan	Taliban	1996	156	167	209
India	CPI-Maoist	2005	77	78	91
India	Kashmir insurgents	1990	34	34	36
Pakistan	TTP	2007	26	26	32
Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso ²	IS	2004	942	1,057	1,199
AFRICA					
Burkina Faso	Government of Burkina Faso	2018	131	183	249
Burkina Faso	Koglweogo	2019	130	287	293
Burkina Faso, Mali	JNIM	2019	217	428	468
Burundi	Government of Burundi	1995	47	47	47
Cameroon	Government of Cameroon	1994	69	69	86
Central African Republic	3R	2016	92	92	106
Central African Republic	UPC (Ali Darass Fulani supporters)	2014	25	25	25
Central African Republic, DR Congo	LRA	1989	11	29	29
DR Congo	Government of DR Congo (Zaire)	1989	76	83	97
DR Congo	ADF	1997	427	436	465
DR Congo	CNPSC	2019	103	103	103
DR Congo	NDC-R	2019	49	49	49
DR Congo	URDPC	2019	133	170	179
Ethiopia	Government of Ethiopia	1989	63	63	70
Mali	Dan na Amassagou	2018	176	186	196
Mali	Dozos (Mali)	2017	98	110	113
Mozambique	Ansar Al Sunnah	2018	254	291	301
Nigeria	Government of Nigeria	1990	20	26	75
Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad ³	2010	313	318	414
Somalia, Kenya	Al-Shabaab	2008	105	117	122
South Sudan	Government of South Sudan	2012	45	83	104
South Sudan	SPLM/A – IO	2013	1	34	35
Sudan	Government of Sudan	1989	182	188	242
Total number of fatalities from one-sided violence in 2019			4,108	4,915	5,664

¹See Online appendix for further information regarding definitions.

²The majority of the violence took place in these five countries. However, killings were also registered in Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Philippines, Syria, Tunisia, and UK.

³Commonly called Boko Haram.