Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2022

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1. Introduction

In 2022, battle-related deaths from state-based conflicts more than doubled from the previous year. Such a substantial global increase requires a re-examination of the trends and contexts in which conflict occurs. In this PRIO Paper, we provide an empirically grounded overview of global conflict trends which we hope can help policy and decision makers, practitioners, and regional and country experts to further understand the contexts they are working in.

The analyses in this paper are based on the rich conflict data that is annually collected and published by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). We provide an overview of various aspects of conflict trends at the global level, particularly since 1989. We examine three types of violence that the UCDP collects data on: state-based conflicts, non-state conflicts, and one-sided violence. More specific definitions of these terms are laid out in Section 1.1.1.

1.1. Definitions

State-based conflict: A contested incompatibility over government and/or territory, where at least one party is a state and the use of armed force results in at least 25 battle-related deaths within a calendar year.

Non-state conflict: The use of armed force between organized groups, none of which is the government of a state, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths within a year.

One-sided violence: The use of armed force against civilians by the government of a state or by a formally organized group, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths. Extrajudicial killings in custody are excluded.

Battle-related deaths: Fatalities caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat, including civilian losses.

War: A conflict or dyad which reaches at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a calendar year.²

1.2. Executive Summary

State-based conflict

In 2022, there were more battle-related deaths from state-based conflicts than in any year since 1984. Two wars were the primary contributors to the more than 204,000 battle-related deaths in 2022: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the war between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine accounted for more than 81,500 state-based battle-related deaths in 2022. While the war between the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF receives much less international attention, this war accounted for more than
100,000 battle-related deaths. This is the highest number of battle-related deaths in a single conflict-year since the Iraq government offensive towards Kurdistan in 19881 (Lacina and Gleditsch, 2006; Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming). While 2022 saw a significant increase in battle-related deaths from state-based armed conflicts, the number of state-based armed conflicts has remained consistently high over the past eight years. In 2022, 55 conflicts were recorded in 38 conflict-affected countries. Of these 55 conflicts, 8 were classified as wars (i.e., these 8 conflicts resulted in more than 1,000 battle-related deaths within the calendar year).

**Non-state conflict**

There were 82 non-state conflicts in 2022, which represents an increase from the 76 non-state conflicts in 2021. Despite the increase in the number of non-state conflicts, battle-related deaths from such conflicts decreased to just over 20,800 – a decrease of more than 4,000 from the previous year. This suggests that there has been an increase in more low-intensity non-state conflicts. Africa is home to the greatest number of non-state conflicts, followed by the Americas. Mexico remains one of the most violent countries in terms of non-state conflicts, with more than 24 cartels or cartel factions recorded in dyads, resulting in more than 14,000 battle-related deaths. The 82 non-state conflicts recorded in 2022 affected 19 countries.

**One-sided violence**

More than 11,800 fatalities from one-sided violence were recorded across 30 countries in 2022, a slight increase from the 10,700 such fatalities in 2021. Non-state actors were responsible for the majority of fatalities from one-sided violence in 2022; 7,231 fatalities resulted from non-state actor perpetrated one-sided violence compared to 4,615 from government actors. While this continues an already existing trend, the gap between the number of fatalities from one-sided violence perpetrated by non-state actors and that by state-based actors has widened. Despite this, sixteen governments were still responsible for violence against civilians in 2022.
2. State-Based Conflict

The UCDP categorizes four different types of state-based conflicts: colonial conflict; interstate conflict; civil conflict; and internationalized civil conflict. Of these, civil conflicts are the most common. Alongside state-based conflicts, conflicts waged between non-state actors have become increasingly common in the past decades. We discuss non-state conflicts in Section 3.

To be included in the data as a state-based conflict, there must be a contested incompatibility that concerns government control (for example between the Government of Mali and Jama‘at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)) and/or territory (for example between the Government of Israel and Hamas over Palestine), where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year. Battle-related deaths account for fatalities caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat. This measurement is important, as it provides us with information about the severity of a conflict and allows us to differentiate between conflicts and wars.

2.1. Global Trends in State-Based Conflict

The level of state-based conflicts has fluctuated over time. Figure 1 depicts the number and type of state-based conflicts between 1946 and 2022. The black line shows the number of battle-related deaths per year.

Based on an analysis of state-based armed conflicts over time, we can identify three main trends. First, while the number of battle-related deaths declined between 2015 and 2020, there were more state-based battle-related deaths in 2022 than in any year since 1984. Following 2021, which saw a 56% increase in battle-related deaths from 2020, the increase in 2022 was 142%, with more than 204,000 battle-related deaths. This increase is driven by two wars: the war between the
Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, which resulted in more than 100,000 deaths, and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which resulted in more than 81,500 battle-related deaths in 2022.

There were more state-based battle-related deaths in 2022 than in any year since 1984.

Second, following a decrease in state-based conflicts in the 1990s, there has been a worrying increase in state-based conflicts over the past decade. More than 50 state-based conflicts have been recorded each year for the past eight years. The only other period since 1946 when more than 50 state-based conflicts have been recorded was during the early 1990s. This increase has two main explanations. Firstly, due to the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union often supported different sides in civil wars. Thus, the warring parties had easier access to funding, and we see an accumulation of civil conflicts during the 1980s and early 1990s (Mumford, 2013). Secondly, we saw a number of conflicts as a consequence of the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. However, with the end of the Cold War, the funding for civil wars dried up, and many of the conflicts related to the former Soviet Union were short lived, leading to a substantial decrease in conflict in the late 1990s and 2000s.

There has been a worrying increase in state-based conflicts over the past decade. More than 50 state-based conflicts have been recorded each year for the past eight years.

The increase in state-based conflicts since 2015 can in part be attributed to the expansion of the Islamic State (IS) across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In many cases, IS has become involved in already ongoing conflicts, such as in the Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria, or the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines. However, these are recorded as separate conflicts in the UCDP dataset, meaning that the number of conflicts increases substantially. In 2022, IS was involved in conflicts in 15 different countries.

The third main trend we identify from our analysis is that, while the dominant type of state-based conflict is civil conflict, over the past decade, civil conflicts have become increasingly internationalized. A civil conflict is regarded as internationalized if one or more third-party governments are involved in the conflict through contributing or deploying combat personnel in support of the objective of either side. The UN or regional Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) could count as such, depending on their mandates, but do not automatically make a conflict internationalized. In 2022, there were 55 state-based conflicts, 22 of which were internationalized civil conflicts, as shown in Figure 2. In comparison, in 2000, there were 37 civil conflicts, only 4 of which were internationalized. Since 2015, internationalized civil conflicts have killed more people per year than civil conflicts without international involvement. This could either be due to internationalization increasing the intensity of conflicts, or because more intense conflicts are more likely to become internationalized.
Over the past decade, civil conflicts have become increasingly internationalized.

As shown in Figure 2, there is a clear increase in both the number of internationalized civil conflicts and battle-related deaths from internationalized civil conflicts. However, states are no longer the only actors involved in foreign conflicts. In the past decade, we have seen an increase in rebel group involvement in foreign conflicts, such as IS, as well as other armed actors, including private militaries like the Russian paramilitary organization Wagner Group. These groups alter conflict dynamics within and across conflict-affected countries. For example, the increased activity of the Wagner Group in the Sahel may lead to an increase in recruitment by local rebel groups. A re-examination of what it means for a conflict to be internationalized is needed, as the involvement of non-state armed actors as third parties in state-based conflicts is growing increasingly common.

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One country can have several conflicts. Figure 3 shows the total number of conflicts (blue line) and the number of countries affected by conflict per year (pale blue bars). Between 1997 and 2012, the ratio of countries and conflicts is rather stable, with the number of conflicts slightly higher than the number of countries, indicating that some countries experience more than one conflict per year. However, after 2012, we see an increase in the gap between the two, with a greater number of conflicts per year. In 2022, 55 conflicts affected 38 countries.

Figure 2: Civil conflicts with and without international involvement, including battle-related deaths, 1989–2022. Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset and UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)
2.2. Trends in Conflict Intensity

Typically, the cumulative number of battle-related deaths globally is driven by a few high-intensity conflicts, which we refer to as wars. While there are significantly more conflicts than wars, the number of battle-related deaths from wars far exceeds the number of battle-related deaths from conflicts. Additionally, for the second year in a row, the number of battle-related deaths from wars has increased significantly.

In Figure 4 we differentiate between conflicts and wars. Since 2018, the proportion of wars has been in decline. However, in 2022, wars accounted for 17% of all conflicts, up from just 9% in the previous year. These eight wars spanned Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Mali, Nigeria, Russia and Ukraine, Somalia, and Yemen. Notably, after several years of intense warfare between
the Government of Syria and Syrian insurgents, the conflict is no longer classified as a war and has deescalated to a low-intensity conflict. This marks a significant change from it being one of the two deadliest conflicts for several consecutive years.

In Figure 5 we differentiate between battle-related deaths in 2021 from those in 2022. This highlights the significant increase in the number of battle-related deaths in 2022 as well as the shift in the most intense conflicts. In 2021, Afghanistan (pale blue) and Yemen (yellow) were the two most dominant conflicts, whereas in 2022 Ethiopia (dark blue) and Ukraine (orange) escalated to be the two conflicts with the greatest number of battle-related deaths.

![Figure 5: Share of battle-related deaths in 2021 and 2022. Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, forthcoming)](image)

### 2.3. Spotlight: Wars in 2022

In this section, we analyse conflict trends across the eight wars witnessed in 2022 and take a closer look at the specific contexts in which these wars have occurred.

#### Ethiopia

The internationalized civil war between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) continued for the third consecutive year and resulted in more battle-related deaths in 2022 than the other seven wars combined. The struggle to establish an independent Tigray nation dates back to the 1200s, and in 1991, the TPLF overthrew the government and took control of the capital. After being ousted from power in 2018, the TPLF were isolated from Ethiopia’s political scene, leading to increased tensions between the TPLF and the central government. By 2020, the TPLF was engaged in a war with the central government. While 2022’s conflict was mostly confined to the Tigray region in Ethiopia, the continued power struggle between the government and TPLF exacerbated an already devastating humanitarian situation throughout
Ethiopia. The war, which is over governmental control after the TPLF was pushed out as the ruling party in 2018, is also characterized by one-sided violence against civilians. Both the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF have committed one-sided violence during 2022, which we discuss in Section 4.1.

The internationalized civil war between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front resulted in more battle-related deaths in 2022 than the other seven wars combined.

A ceasefire agreement was signed in November 2022. However, the agreement does not provide tangible steps outlining its implementation. Moreover, while Mekelle – the main city in the Tigray region – was reconnected with the national power grid following the agreement, other services remained offline in Tigray until March 2023, for what amounted to the longest period of internet shutdown. This type of communication disconnection has widespread consequences, including a likely underreporting of human rights abuses and fatalities resulting from the conflict (HRW, 2020; Ethiopia, 2022). Therefore, the more than 100,200 battle-related deaths recorded by the UCDP should be understood as a baseline figure.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 represents the second deadliest conflict in 2022. The war has resulted in at least 81,500 state-based battle-related deaths and the largest refugee flow within Europe since the breakup of Yugoslavia and subsequent conflicts. UCDP estimates that in the first month of the conflict, at least 10,000 civilians were killed in Mariupol as well as 2,300 civilians in the rest of Ukraine.

The war between the governments of Russia and Ukraine is one of only three interstate wars witnessed during that year, the other two being low-intensity conflicts between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the governments of Iran and Israel. Russia and Putin’s ambitions in Ukraine span both territorial and governmental control. However, Ukraine has mounted a strong and sustained defence.

Somalia

The Government of Somalia’s fight against Al-Shabaab has been ongoing since 2008 and has – with the exception of 2013 – consistently been categorized as a war. In 2022, the war resulted
in more than 3,000 battle-related deaths. Al-Shabaab, an Islamist insurgency group active in Somalia and Kenya, has progressively gained control of much of rural south and central Somalia and seeks to establish a global caliphate. Originally, Al-Shabaab operated with the objective of conquering territory, whereas it now practices guerrilla-style attacks in response to growing opposition.

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Al-Shabaab also exerts its control by providing judicial services, conducting taxation, and controlling supply routes. In the absence of a strong central government, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) was tasked with security provision. However, with the mission’s winddown in April 2022 and its replacement by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the state of security in the country is especially fragile. The war with Al-Shabaab was the only state-based conflict recorded in Somalia in 2022.

Yemen

2021 marked the deadliest year in Yemen’s civil war, which began in September 2014. In 2021, 23,256 battle-related deaths were recorded in the fight between the Government of Yemen and the Forces of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC).

In Yemen, while the conflict itself has significantly de-escalated, the humanitarian situation remains in a dire state.

In April 2022, the conflict parties agreed to a UN-mediated ceasefire. During the same month, Interim President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi formed the eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, effectively transferring his power to the Council. Following two ceasefire extensions during the year, the ceasefire lapsed in October. Despite this, both sides have been mostly maintaining their parts of the agreement, and by the end of 2022, the conflict had resulted in 2,899 battle-related deaths, a significant decrease from the previous year. While the conflict itself has significantly de-escalated, the humanitarian situation remains in a dire state. Largely referred to as the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, Yemen also faces climate shocks, mass displacement, widespread outbreaks of preventable diseases, and extremely weak socioeconomic services (UNICEF, 2023).

Burkina Faso

The conflict situation in Burkina Faso has changed dramatically in recent years. For decades, organized conflict was not recorded in the country under authoritarian President Compaore.
However, mass civil disobedience erupted following then-President Compaore’s plan to extend his rule by changing the constitution; he later stepped aside in response to the demonstrations. Subsequently, democratic elections were held in 2015 – the first in the country’s history. Since then, Burkina Faso has been home to two state-based conflicts and many incidents of one-sided violence. Instability following a transition from authoritarian rule is not uncommon; another example of this is the mass demonstrations and proliferation of militias that followed Saddam Hussein’s ousting from power in 2003.

In 2022, in addition to a military coup d’état, the two state-based conflicts continued between the Government of Burkina Faso and JNIM, an al-Qaida-loyal jihadist group, and between the government and IS. The conflict with JNIM has been growing in intensity since it was first recorded in 2018 and is now classified as a war, resulting in more than 1,600 battle-related deaths in 2022. JNIM seeks to oust foreign military powers from the country, in particular, the French and the UN. Al-Qaeda-aligned JNIM’s rival IS also operates within the country, and the two groups are in an active non-state conflict with each other, which resulted in more than 400 battle-related deaths in 2022. Likewise, the conflict between the government and IS is sustained at a low level, accounting for just over 400 battle-related deaths in 2022.

The conflict between the Government of Burkina Faso and JNIM, an al-Qaida-loyal jihadist group, has been growing in intensity since it was first recorded in 2018 and is now classified as a war, resulting in more than 1,600 battle-related deaths in 2022.

The increase in conflict intensity in Burkina Faso is in part due to JNIM’s growing reach within the formally stable country. As the group’s resources are spread across an increasingly large territory, which includes Mali, their expansion may be difficult to control and sustain. However, this may be mediated by the group’s seeming disinterest in maintaining strict territorial control in favour of perpetuating a sense of fear amongst local populations (Guiffard, 2023). The situation is complicated by the armed forces’ lack of resources, instability in neighbouring Mali, and changing dynamics in the Sahel overall.

**Mali**

Much like Burkina Faso, the Government of Mali was also engaged in state-based conflicts with both JNIM and IS in 2022. JNIM challenged the government for control over governmental power, while IS was engaged in conflict with the government over territory. The conflict with JNIM escalated in 2022 to the highest point since the conflict was first recorded in 2017, accounting for at least 1,100 battle-related deaths. Not only did the civilian government face challenges by JNIM, it also saw a military coup d’état in 2020. A military government was installed in August 2020 with the promise of elections and an 18-month transition to civilian rule. However, only nine
months later in May 2021, tensions escalated between the civilian transitional government and the military, resulting in a second coup and extension of military rule.

The conflict between the Government of Mali and JNIM escalated in 2022 to the highest point since the conflict was first recorded in 2017.

In Mali, state-based violence is intertwined with both non-state and one-sided violence. JNIM and IS were significant actors in the five non-state armed conflicts active in 2022 in Mali. Additionally, the Government of Mali perpetrated one-sided violence during that year. Due to the political and conflict crises in Mali, more than 412,000 Malians were internally displaced as of December 2022, many of whom face food insecurity (UNHCR, 2023).

**Myanmar**

February 2022 marked one year since the military coup d’état in Myanmar. Subsequently, several ceasefires and truces have failed and a proliferation of conflicts has reoccurred, reshaping the country’s conflict landscape. For example, in 2020, one state-based conflict was recorded between the government and the United League of Arakan (ULA) over the Arakan territory. The number of conflicts escalated to five in both 2021 and 2022 as several previously dormant conflicts reignited amidst the unstable situation. One conflict, between the military government and the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG), was classified as a war, and resulted in more than 1,200 battle-related deaths. The increase in conflict intensity follows the NUG’s declaration of war against the regime in September 2021, with the aim of ending military rule. The NUG’s leader requested local anti-coup resistance groups – or People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) – to increase their activities, and clashes between the parties increased in both intensity and frequency.

The number of conflicts in Myanmar escalated to five in both 2021 and 2022 as several previously dormant conflicts reignited amidst the unstable situation.

The Sit-Tat, the military junta associated with the military government, has stated that it will subjugate anyone unwilling to live under military rule; the UCDP recorded 616 fatalities from one-sided violence by the military government of Myanmar in 2022.

**Nigeria**

As a result of several IS victories and territorial expansion efforts in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region in 2021, IS became the most dominant non-state actor in the region. In 2022, three state-based conflicts were recorded in Nigeria, but only one – that between IS and the government
— was classified as a war, with at least 1,030 battle-related deaths. The Islamic State West Africa Province has been active in Nigeria since 2015. In an effort to counter the expansion and dominance of IS in the region, the Government of Nigeria has aligned with the governments of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

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Additionally, the government was engaged in low-intensity conflicts with the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram.

2.4. Conflict De-Escalation

In 2022, two major conflicts from the past decade declined in intensity: the conflict in Afghanistan and the conflict in Syria. The decline in battle-related deaths resulted in the recategorization of these from ‘war’ to ‘conflict’.

**Afghanistan**

In 2021, the war between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban was the deadliest conflict in the world for the third consecutive year, resulting in nearly 35,000 battle-related deaths in that year alone. However, the conflict was transformed when the Taliban rapidly captured territory and eventually the capital in August 2021. Since taking control of the government, the Taliban has imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law, barring women and girls from public spaces and effectively eliminating women’s rights. In 2022, the Government of Afghanistan was recorded in conflicts with IS, the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF), and National Resistance Front (NRF), which was aligned with the former government. Additionally, the Taliban government perpetrated one-sided violence during 2022.

While battle-related deaths have significantly decreased in Afghanistan, this decline has not extended to other forms of violence. Amnesty International described extrajudicial killings, which are not counted by UCDP, as “widespread and systematic”.

While battle-related deaths have significantly decreased in Afghanistan, this decline has not extended to other forms of violence. Amnesty International described extrajudicial killings, which are not counted by UCDP, as “widespread and systematic” (Amnesty International, 2022). Moreover, Amnesty also reported that the Taliban government removed security measures previously
in place to protect minority populations, including religious and ethnic minorities (Ibid, 2022). With Taliban rule once again imposed in Afghanistan, other groups such as Al-Qaida have found a “safe haven” in the country (UNSC, 2022).

**Syria**

The conflict between the Government of Syria and the Syrian insurgents continued in 2022 for the eighth consecutive year. However, 2021 and 2022 are the only two years when the conflict was not classified as a war. This follows a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey in March 2020 with the hopes of halting the government from retaking Idlib. Despite the overall de-escalation in the following two years, the ceasefire was not sustained. Similar to the case of Afghanistan, Syrians face severe hardship at the hands of their government. The Government of Syria is backed by Russian military and diplomatic support. However, with the invasion of Ukraine, the Government of Russia has decreased its military presence in Syria.

2021 and 2022 are the only two years when the conflict in Syria was not classified as a war. This follows a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey in March 2020 with the hopes of halting the government from retaking Idlib. Despite the overall de-escalation in the following two years, the ceasefire was not sustained.

**2.5. Regional Variation in State-Based Conflict**

To gain a more historical perspective of the relative share of state-based conflicts in the world, we show regional variation in state-based conflict trends between 1946 and 2022 in Figure 6.

![Figure 6: Number of state-based armed conflicts by region, 1946–2022. Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)](image-url)
Africa remains the region with the most state-based conflicts per year in 2022 (26), followed by Asia (17), the Middle East (8), Europe (3), and the Americas (1). Compared to ten years ago, the number of conflicts in Africa has nearly doubled, from 15 in 2013 to 26 in 2022. During the same time period, battle-related deaths increased by more than five times. The continued decrease in the number of conflicts in the Middle East is noteworthy, declining from a peak at 12 in 2018 to 8 in 2022, but this number is still high compared to the early 2000s. Alongside the declining number of conflicts in the Middle East, battle-related deaths in the region are also in decline. In 2022, slightly more than 5,000 battle-related deaths were recorded, far lower than in previous years when Syria was home to some of the deadliest conflicts in the world. In Asia, the number of state-based conflicts has remained relatively steady for the past decade.

Figure 7: State-based conflict events and conflict-affected countries, 2022. Source: UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)
3. Non-State Conflicts

Conflicts do not have to involve the government of a state to cause considerable human suffering. In fact, a significant level of contemporary violence takes place between groups that are not linked to the government. Organized groups come in multiple forms, as discussed in Section 3.1.

3.1. Global Trends in Non-State Violence

There has been an increase in non-state conflicts throughout the past ten years, as shown in Figure 8. In 2022, 82 non-state conflicts occurred, an increase from 2021’s 76. As Figure 8 indicates, the number of non-state conflicts has stabilized at a considerably higher level than we saw a decade ago. The UCDP categorizes three types of non-state groups: (i) formally organized groups, which refer to any non-governmental group of people who have announced a name for their group and use armed force against another similarly organized group; (ii) informally organized groups, which are composed of supporters of political parties; and (iii) informally organized groups that engage in what are commonly called communal conflicts, which are organized around a common identity such as along religious, ethnic, national, tribal or clan lines.

The rise in non-state conflicts is driven by a substantial increase in the number of conflicts between formally organized groups. The number of communal conflicts has also increased gradually in recent years, while the number of non-state conflicts between informally organized groups is stable and remains at low levels (fewer than two per year generally). Figure 8 shows the number of battle-related deaths per non-state group organization type. In total, more than 20,800 battle-related deaths from non-state conflicts were recorded in 2022, nearly 4,500 fewer than in 2021.

One contributing factor in the decline of non-state battle-related deaths overall is the decrease in battle-related deaths attributed to formally organized groups, like the Jalisco Cartel New
Generation in Mexico. Battle-related deaths in most dyads the Jalisco Cartel New Generation was involved in in 2022 declined compared to the previous year. However, this may have been due to fractioning and infighting within the cartel rather than a change in cartel tactics (Appleby, 2022). See Section 3.3 for a more in-depth discussion of non-state violence in Mexico.

3.2. Regional Variation

Figure 9 shows the variation in the number of non-state conflicts by region between 1989 and 2022. Africa is the region most severely affected by non-state conflicts today. The Middle East, which experienced the largest relative increase in the 2010s, has since seen a sharp decline in the number of non-state conflicts. Meanwhile, the Americas has experienced a steady increase in the number of non-state conflicts since 2017.

![Figure 9: Total number of non-state conflicts by region, 1989–2022. Source: UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)](image)

While Africa and the Americas are both home to the highest number of non-state conflicts, they are characterized by different types of non-state actors. Non-state conflict in the Americas is most likely to be between highly organized actors, while in Africa we see a higher number of communal conflicts.

3.3. Spotlight: Non-State Violence in Mexico

Mexico stands out as the country with both the greatest number of non-state conflicts and the deadliest non-state conflicts in 2022. The 17 non-state conflicts in Mexico resulted in more than 14,125 battle-related deaths during the year, involving 24 cartels or cartel factions. Six of these dyads were classified as wars by the UCDP, or conflicts resulting in more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in a calendar year. Cartels, such as the Sinaloa Cartel, Juarez Cartel, and Los Zetas,
fight each other for control of drug trafficking routes and often use violence to settle disputes, as credible threats of future violence, or to coerce cooperation (Beittel, 2022). Several scholars estimate that 40–60% of all homicides in Mexico are related to organized crime (see Rodríguez Ferreira, 2016; Ríos, 2020), making cartel-related violence a familiar phenomenon throughout Mexico. Unlike other non-state actors, very few actors in Mexico claim responsibility for deaths. Therefore, the UCDP does not include deaths which are not clearly associated with a perpetrator belonging to an organized group. As a result, both the recorded number of non-state conflicts in Mexico and non-state battle-related death estimates are likely lower than in reality. Despite legal reforms in 2017 and 2018, cartel violence is often met with impunity or aided by the collusion of state officials.

Mexico stands out as the country with both the greatest number of non-state conflicts and the deadliest non-state conflicts in 2022.

Figure 10 depicts two main spikes in battle-related deaths from non-state conflicts in Mexico. First, battle-related deaths increased steadily between 2007 and 2011. This is primarily due to the breakdown in the truce between the Juarez Cartel and Sinaloa Cartel in 2007, leading to more than 8,700 battle-related deaths during this period between the two cartels. The Juarez Cartel was weakened in mid-2010 after it reportedly suffered a loss to the Sinaloa cartel in Ciudad Juarez, yet despite decreasing levels of battle-related deaths in the subsequent years, violence continued.

Second, battle-related deaths in Mexico have increased dramatically in the past five years. In fact, 75% of all the recorded battle-related deaths from non-state conflicts in Mexico are from 2018 and
onwards. In addition to the spike in battle-related deaths, we’ve seen a proliferation in the number of cartels or cartel factions involved in dyads – from just five cartels in 2009 to 24 in 2022. Many observers point to increased militarization as one factor exacerbating the deadly situation in the country, citing increases in violence following military operations (see Sheridan, 2022; CFR, 2023).
4. One-Sided Violence

Civilians are often the hardest hit by violence in ongoing conflicts, regardless of whether the conflict is state-based or non-state. As the UCDP excludes extrajudicial killings in their definition of one-sided violence, government-perpetrated violence is likely to be under reported.

4.1. Global Trends in One-Sided Violence

Overall, fatalities from one-sided violence increased in 2022 compared to previous years. Figure 11 shows the number of actors who perpetrated one-sided violence per year by actor type, categorized as either government or non-state actor (left), as well as the number of fatalities resulting from one-sided violence (right). While there has been an increase in both the number of fatalities and the number of actors committing one-sided violence, this is driven by non-state actors. Fatalities from non-state actors increased in 2022 and are at the highest point since 2015, reaching more than 7,200 fatalities, compared to more than 4,600 by government actors.

While the number of non-state actors who perpetrated one-sided violence is higher, we have seen an increase in the number of governments who are responsible for one-sided violence. In 2022, sixteen governments committed one-sided violence.8 This increase is linked to the wars that have been active throughout the year; the governments of Russia and Eritrea are both responsible for more than 1,000 one-sided fatalities in Ukraine and Ethiopia, respectively.

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Figure 11: Incidents of one-sided violence, including number of perpetrators and fatalities, 1989–2022.9 Source: UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)
Alongside government-perpetrated one-sided violence and state-based conflict, non-state groups perpetrated one-sided violence in several countries, including in Ethiopia. The Omoro Liberation Army (OLA) belonging to Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, Fano, an Amhara militia group, and the TPLF are all responsible for one-sided violence in Ethiopia.

4.2. Regional Variation

There is variation in the use of one-sided violence between the five regions. Figure 12 shows the number of groups that conducted one-sided violence in each region between 1989 and 2022. We can see that, similar to the number of non-state conflicts, Africa hosts the greatest number of such groups (30). Comparatively, the Americas (9), Asia (4), Europe (1), and the Middle East (1) are home to very few groups which perpetrated one-sided violence. However, this does not account for the scale at which they do so.

The number of groups using one-sided violence decreased in both the Middle East and Asia between 2021 and 2022. Conversely, the number of armed groups using one-sided violence increased in Africa (from 28 to 30), the Americas (5 to 9) and in Europe (0 to 1).

The Islamic State is the actor responsible for the greatest number of fatalities from one-sided violence. However, one actor in Europe is responsible for the second greatest number of one-sided fatalities: the Government of Russia.

Figure 13 shows the number of fatalities from one-sided violence in each region in 2022 (left) as well as the number of groups responsible for those fatalities (right). As we can see from Figure 13, both the majority of groups as well as the majority of fatalities were recorded in Africa. IS is
the actor responsible for the greatest number of fatalities from one-sided violence. However, one actor in Europe is responsible for the second greatest number of one-sided fatalities: the Government of Russia.

![Figure 13: Fatalities from one-sided violence in 2022, and the number of groups per region. Source: UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)](image)

### 4.3. Spotlight: Russian One-Sided Violence in Ukraine

In 2022, one-sided violence was recorded for the first time in Europe in a decade, and for the first time by a state actor since 2002. One-sided violence was recorded by the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) in nine of the 24 oblasts (provinces) in Ukraine. Incidents of deaths resulting from one-sided violence are primarily recorded in the first month and a half of the war, spanning February and March 2022. Nearly 300 one-sided fatalities were recorded in February following the invasion on 24 February, while 128 fatalities were recorded in March.

Fatalities from one-sided violence declined in the subsequent months but were recorded in every month except August and December. The greatest number of events took place in Bucha, where nearly 190 fatalities were recorded. However, more than 400 fatalities resulted from just three events in Kherson Oblast.

*In 2022, one-sided violence was recorded for the first time in Europe in a decade*

News of Russia’s war in Ukraine has dominated headlines since the invasion in February 2022. While the UCDP only collects data on one-sided violence that leads to at least one fatality, Russian forces are also responsible for other types of war crimes, including rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence and threats against civilians (HRW, 2022). There have been
several reports of executions of civilians in Russian controlled areas, including men, women, and children (HRW, 2022; OHCHR, 2022).

Fatalities from one-sided violence are widespread, but there are some areas where one-sided violence was more prolific, including in the Kherson, Kyiv, and Donetsk Oblasts, as well as Bucha and around Sloviansk.

Figure 14 shows one-sided violence events and battle-related deaths from state-based conflict in Ukraine in 2022. We can see that fatalities from one-sided violence are widespread, but there are some areas where one-sided violence was more prolific, including in the Kherson, Kyiv, and Donetsk Oblasts, as well as Bucha and around Sloviansk.

Figure 14: State-based and one-sided violence events in Ukraine, 2022. Source: UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, forthcoming)
5. Conclusion

In this PRIO Paper, we have provided an overview of trends in state-based conflicts, non-state conflicts, and one-sided violence at the global level between 1946 and 2022. We have disaggregated the global data to the regional and country level to gain a better understanding of today’s conflict patterns.

What does the data tell us about state-based conflicts in 2022? 55 state-based conflicts were recorded in 38 conflict-affected countries, resulting in more than 204,000 battle-related deaths throughout the year. 2022 saw a significant increase in the number of battle-related deaths from state-based conflicts. Two wars were the driving forces behind this increase: the war between the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While Russia’s geostrategy and expansionist ambitions dominated news headlines, the war in Ethiopia drew significantly less attention despite the scale of the war. The war in Ethiopia accounted for more than 100,000 fatalities, nearly half of all the state-based battle-related deaths in the world in 2022.

We saw an increase in the number of non-state conflicts, from 76 in 2021 to 82 in 2022. Despite the increase in the number of such conflicts, battle-related deaths from non-state conflicts decreased to just over 20,800 – a decline of more than 4,000 from the previous year. While Africa remains the region most affected by non-state conflicts, Mexico is the country home to the greatest number of non-state conflicts. Moreover, battle-related deaths in Mexico accounted for two thirds of all non-state battle-related deaths in 2022, with more than 14,120. These deaths are related to the high levels of violence between drug cartels in the country.

More than 11,800 fatalities from one-sided violence were recorded in 30 countries in 2022. While non-state actors were responsible for the majority of fatalities from one-sided violence, sixteen governments perpetrated one-sided violence as well. One-sided violence is often committed alongside state-based conflicts, which was the case in both Ethiopia and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, where the governments of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Russia were responsible for one-sided violence. Additionally, 29 non-state actors perpetrated one-sided violence, which is the greatest number of groups to do so in a single year since 2004.
Given the drastic increase in battle-related deaths recorded by the UCDP, regional and humanitarian actors face an increasingly challenging environment. The heightened violence has severely impacted the ability of these actors to operate effectively and provide much-needed assistance to vulnerable populations. The mounting complexities posed both by increased conflict intensity and conflict between states signals the need for regional cooperation to mitigate the impact of conflict and address grievances between conflicting parties. The escalation of conflicts over the past year demands increased attention by policy makers to mitigate both the impact of existing conflicts and the proliferation of new and frozen conflicts.
Annex

Figure 15: State-based, non-state, and one-sided conflict events globally, 2022. Source: UCDP GED (Davies et al., forthcoming)
Figure 15 provides a global overview of conflict events related to all three types of conflict (state-based, non-state, and one-sided violence). State-based conflict events (dots on the top map) are concentrated in Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Ukraine, as well as several other African countries. We can see that non-state conflicts are more common in the Americas and Africa (dots on the middle map), than in Asia. Mexico stands out quite clearly here, with a large number of non-state events, but no state-based conflict. One-sided violence (dots on the lower map) is widespread in the conflict areas in Africa as well as Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. It is worth noting that one-sided violence is often linked to the same geographical areas that experience state-based conflicts.

**State-Based Conflict-Affected Countries by Region**

**Africa**
- Angola
- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Mali
- Mozambique
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Togo
- Uganda

**Americas**
- Colombia

**Asia**
- Afghanistan
- India
- Indonesia
- Kyrgyzstan
- Myanmar
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Tajikistan
- Thailand

**Europe**
- Azerbaijan
- Ukraine
- Russia

**Middle East**
- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Syria
- Turkey
- Yemen
Notes

1. We should note the limitations of our PRIO Papers in the Conflict Trends Reporting series. We rely on UCDP data because it is the best available data when it comes to armed violence, yet some caveats remain. First, while we provide an overview of trends in data, we do not provide causal explanations for particular trends (although we highlight existing research results). Second, UCDP’s data on one-sided violence faces two criticisms: coding source bias and inaccuracy in reported numbers, both of which present limitations to the data. Coding is based on news reports as well as reports from human rights organizations and UN reports. Open-source information can be subject to manipulation by governments. Moreover, it is difficult to obtain quality data on violence in detention centres and on extrajudicial killings, and thus such deaths are by definition excluded from UCDP’s data on one-sided violence. Additional information on extrajudicial killings can be found in the Political Terror Scale (PTS), which is the most widely used data source on this topic. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch should be consulted for country-specific reports.

2. Unless otherwise noted, we often use the term ‘conflict’ to refer to both armed conflicts (with a minimum of 25 battle-related deaths per year) and wars (armed conflicts with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths per year) for simplicity’s sake. The exception is when we examine conflict intensity, which is when we distinguish between ‘conflict’ and ‘war’.

3. The Genocide in Rwanda in 1994 surpasses this number (more than 700,000 killed according to the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) v23 data); however, this is registered as one-sided violence and not as state-based violence).

4. Battle-related deaths do not account for the significant number of indirect deaths from conflict, such as those resulting from famine, lack of health facilities or collateral damage. Numbers from indirect deaths are difficult to verify due to the lack of reliable data.

5. For more on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, see prio.org/research/topics/ukraine-war.

6. In UCDP, this group was formerly known as the Forces of Hadi when it was led by President Hadi prior to January 2015. Following Hadi’s resignation and replacement in January 2015, his forces became the PLC and the primary military faction fighting against the Ansarallah Government of Yemen.

7. For more information, see the latest regional PRIO Papers on Conflict Trends Reporting: www.prio.org/projects/1894.

8. In 2022, governments in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Russia, Rwanda, South Sudan and Sudan were all responsible for fatalities from one-sided violence.

9. Figure 11 excludes one-sided fatalities related to the genocide in Rwanda due to the magnitude of the one-sided violence. The UCDP one-sided violence data has registered 768,619 fatalities in Rwanda in 1994 at the hands of the Rwandan Government.
10. Prior to 2022, the last time one-sided violence was recorded in Europe was in Russia by the Forces of the Caucasus Emirate in 2013.
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This PRIO Paper examines global conflict trends between 1946 and 2022 using data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). In 2022, 55 state-based conflicts were recorded in 38 countries, and 8 of these conflicts were classified as wars. The wars in Ethiopia and Ukraine were the primary contributors to the more than 204,000 battle-related deaths in 2022. There were more state-based battle-related deaths in 2022 than in any year since 1984. Non-state conflicts also increased compared to previous years. In 2022, 82 non-state conflicts were recorded resulting in 20,800 battle-related deaths. Mexico remains one of the most violent countries in terms of non-state conflicts, with more than 14,000 battle-related deaths from non-state conflicts during the year. One-sided violence against civilians was recorded in 30 countries in 2022. Non-state actors remain the drivers behind fatalities resulting from one-sided violence, however, sixteen governments were responsible for one-sided violence against civilians in 2022. The escalation of conflicts over the past year demands increased attention by policy makers to mitigate both the impact of existing conflicts and the proliferation of new and frozen conflicts.