

# **Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians**

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

- ❖ Between July to September 2022, UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) recorded 142 incidents of violence affecting 745 civilians: 285 killed, 308 injured, 60 abducted, and 92 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).
- ❖ This represents a 60 per cent decrease in violent incidents (from 351 to 142) and a 23 per cent decrease in victims (from 969 to 745) in comparison to the same reporting period in 2021.
- ❖ The proportion of the civilians killed compared to the same period in 2021 decreased by 50 per cent (from 574 to 285), while injuries increased by 111 per cent (from 146 to 308). Abductions decreased 60 per cent (from 149 to 60), and conflict-related sexual violence decreased by eight per cent (from 100 to 92).
- ❖ In comparison to the previous reporting period, April to June 2022, there is a 25 per cent decrease in violent incidents (from 188 to 142) and a 19 per cent decrease in civilian casualties (from 922 to 745).
- ❖ 31 per cent of civilian casualties are attributed to community-based militias and civil-defence groups, while conventional parties were responsible for 62 per cent of civilian casualties.
- ❖ The scope of the brief of UNMISS HRD includes data on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

## **CONTEXT**

This brief presents an overview of trends in violence affecting civilians between July and September 2022, by assessing four major forms of individual harm (killing, injury, abduction, and conflict-related sexual violence) experienced throughout the conflict. While the impact of violence extends beyond these forms of harm, they have been the most common incidents documented throughout the conflict in South Sudan.

In addition, the brief highlights key human rights concerns monitored by UNMISS Human Rights Division during the third quarter of 2022, including incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.

South Sudan is a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and has ratified three core international human rights treaties. Under this framework, South Sudan is legally bound to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the human rights of all persons within its territory or under its jurisdiction or control.

International human rights law applies both in times of peace and armed conflict. South Sudan is also bound by norms of international human rights law that have attained the status of customary law.

International humanitarian law applies to the non-international armed conflict in South Sudan. All parties to the conflict are obligated to abide by the relevant rules of customary international law applicable in non-international armed conflicts, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. In addition, in 2012, South Sudan incorporated the provisions of the Four Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols into domestic law. As a result, there can be prosecutions for acts that have a nexus with a non-international armed conflict before the South Sudanese courts for breaches of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.

## METHODOLOGY

The UNMISS Human Rights Division (HRD) has developed an incident-based tracking mechanism to document conflict-related violations and abuses. This data is disaggregated by the sex and age of victims. Sources of information include victim and eyewitness accounts, as well as reports from secondary sources identified during field missions, including service providers, community leaders and local authorities. All incidents, particularly those involving intercommunal violence, are deconflicted with incidents documented by the UNMISS Civil Affairs Division (CAD). Incidents determined as cases of conflict-related sexual violence are corroborated in consultation with the Office of the Senior Women's Protection Advisor.

Nevertheless, the data presented in this brief should not be considered as comprehensive due to challenges faced by HRD in monitoring and reporting on violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. These include limited access to various locations due to security considerations, access denials by parties to the conflict, as well as inaccessibility due to road conditions. Challenges also include victims and eyewitnesses' unwillingness to speak due to fear of reprisals and underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence due to associated stigma.

## GENERAL TRENDS

Between July and September 2022, HRD documented more than 142 incidents involving at least 745 civilians who were subjected to one of the four major forms of harm (285 killed, 308 injured, 60 abducted, and 92 subjected to conflict-related sexual violence).

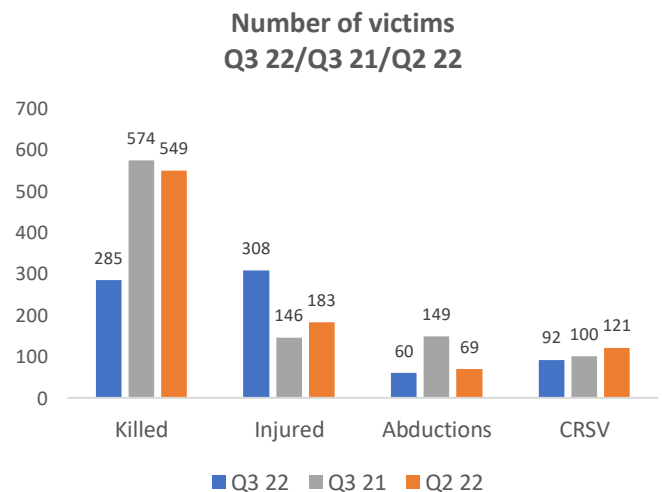
By comparison, between July and September of the same reporting period in 2021, 351 incidents were documented, involving at least 969 civilian victims (574 killed, 146 injured, 149 abducted, and 100 subjected to CRSV). The 60 per cent decrease in violent incidents (from 351 to 142) and a 23 per cent decrease in the number of victims (from 969 to 745) between the third quarter of 2022 and the same period in 2021 can be largely attributed to a decrease in civilian casualties from the armed conflict in Greater Equatoria States.

In comparison to the previous quarter, between April and June 2022, there is a 25 per cent decrease in violent incidents (from 188 to 142) and a 19 per cent decrease in the number of victims (from 922 to 745).

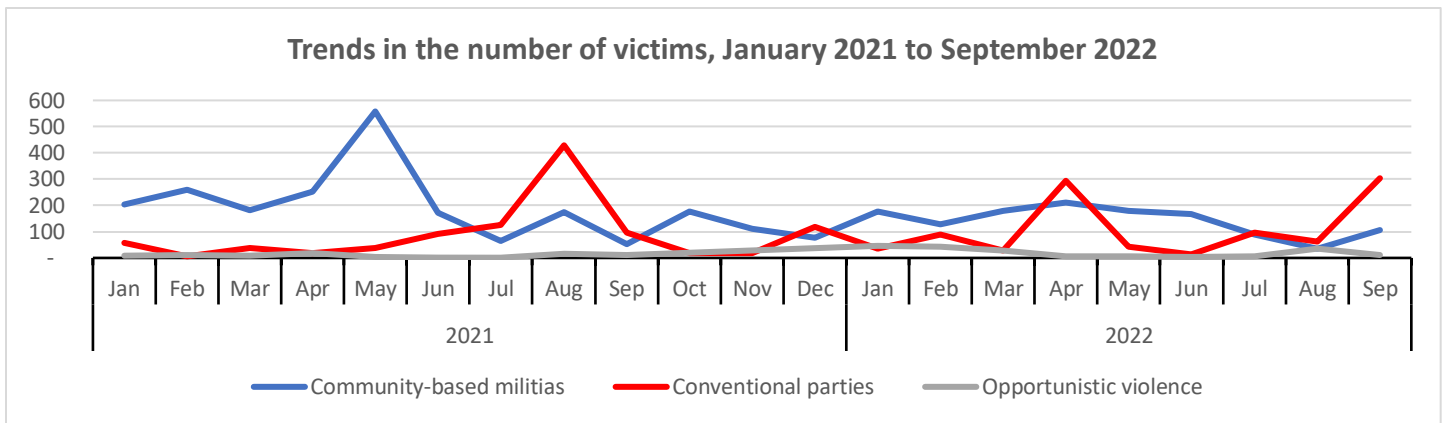
### ✓ *Conventional parties*

Previously, as a result of the widespread adherence to the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the overall number of civilian casualties attributed to conventional parties to the conflict had declined due to the relatively lower number of clashes between Government forces and organized armed groups. Relatively, during the third quarter of 2022, the incidents of violence involving the conventional parties decreased by 76 per cent (from 242 to 59) as compared to the same period in

2021 and decreased by two per cent (60 to 59) in comparison to the second quarter of 2022. These groups were responsible for the 62 per cent of civilian casualties, involving 463 victims (120 killed, 234 injured, 30 abduction and 79 subjected to CRSV) and accountable for 62 per cent of the overall civilian casualties.



The incidents documented include violence linked to the government security forces' response to the 25 June 2022 armed clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the armed Rual-Bet youths in Tonj North County which resulted in the killing of 39 civilians, including three women and two children, injury of one other, and 37 cases of CRSV including 29 women and eight girls, between July and August 2022.



Separately, the conflict dynamics and expansion of the renewed fighting, notably in areas along the river basin of Greater Upper Nile between the main opposition, the pro-Riek Machar Sudan People’s Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO (RM)) and its splinter groups, the Agwelek Forces led by Gen. Johnson Olony and the Kitgwang faction headed by Gen. Simon Gatwech Dual, in Greater Upper Nile which started in Tonga on 10 August and spread to other areas in Panyikang County (Upper Nile State) and Fangak County (Jonglei State) claimed the lives of 58 individuals (including one child), injury of 202 individuals and at least 15 others subjected to sexual violence. HRD is also investigating reports of abductions of at least 273 civilians who were reportedly held hostage by the SPLA-IO (RM) in Fangak during the fighting.

Allegations of abductions for forced conscription to boost troops strength remain a concern in the southern part of Central Equatoria. Between July and September, abductions by the National Salvation Front (NAS) operating in the areas of Otego and Lasu payams accounted for 21 per cent of abduction incidents (29 victims) during the period. SSPDF operations in Central Equatoria State, particularly in Yei River County, aimed at dislodging NAS elements from the area, continue to undermine the human rights and protection situation, and resulted in two civilians killed (including one child), one child injured, and three subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (two women and one child).

✓ ***Community-based militias and civil-defense groups***

Entrenched patterns of violence affecting civilians have persisted in South Sudan. These include incidents commonly referred to as “intercommunal violence,” which are often perpetuated by community-based militias

and civil-defence groups, continue to have devastating consequences on local populations. Although violence among ethnic groups, tribes, and sub-clans is historically rooted in traditional societal practices particularly among pastoralist societies, over the years, it has taken on an increasingly militarized character, with the involvement of conventional parties to the conflict. Furthermore, political and administrative elites at local and national levels have contributed to this intensification of violence, including through instigating and/or participating in the planning of attacks, financial and logistical support, as well as provision of weapons and ammunition. Subnational or intercommunal violence, therefore, cannot be dissociated from local and national political and military dynamics.

During the third quarter of 2022, intercommunal violence by community-based militias accounted for more than 31 per cent (228) of civilian casualties. This reflects the evolving nature of intercommunal conflict, which is often carried out with military-style tactics and military-grade weapons.

Persistent cattle raiding, incidents of violent attacks and revenge attacks in Warrap State between Dinka sub-clans, including extended intercommunal fighting between the Dinka Twic Mayardit and Dinka Ngok communities in the Abyei Administrative Area (AAA) over the border dispute resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties (49 killed and 21 injured). The clashes between the Dinka Twic Mayardit and Dinka Ngok communities accounted for 34 per cent of civilian casualties in the region, a clear failure to adhere to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed between the two communities in April 2022. Despite an ongoing disarmament campaign led by Warrap State authorities in the Greater Tonj area, casualties from Tonj North, South and East Counties resulting from intercommunal violence made up 12 per cent of civilian casualties in Warrap (24 out of 104).

In Eastern Equatoria, intercommunal violence involving armed Dinka Bor cattle keepers and Murle from Jonglei and Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), and the Toposa, Buya, and Tenet from the area remained a concern. Tensions between these armed groups have resulted in the killing of 18 civilians (including five women and three boys), 15 injuries, and two abductions. A particular attack in Kapoeta on 6 July 2022 resulted in the killing 10 civilians and injury of 10 others.

Cattle raiding and small-scale attacks in Jonglei and GPAA primarily perpetrated by the Murle armed elements continue to persist. HRD documented 13 attacks, resulting in 16 civilians killed, 10 injured, and seven abductions.

✓ **Sexual and gender-based violence**

In the third quarter of 2022, HRD documented at least 20 incidents of rape or gang rape in seven states, which affected 20 victims (five women and 15 girls). In comparison to Q2 2022, this represents a 62 per cent increase in SGBV incidents. These 20 incidents (20 victims) are in addition to 34 conflict-related sexual violence incidents (92 victims, including 21 girls) affecting a total of 112 civilians, in which cases of sexual violence are linked to the ongoing armed conflict.

At least 47 per cent of the alleged perpetrators of SGBV were family members, fellow community members or neighbors well known to the victims and usually trusted by the families. This demonstrates that victims and potential victims require more protection in family and community settings, where they remain vulnerable due to the lower status of women and girls in South Sudanese society exacerbated by harmful traditional practices.

HRD considers that cases and incidents of SGBV are underreported due to various factors, including stigma, trauma, and fear of retaliation, that prevent victims and families from reporting. The dearth of formal justice structures across most of South Sudan impedes survivors' access to justice. Consequently, many families are compelled to instead resort to adjudication by traditional leaders. Furthermore, intersectional vulnerabilities faced by the victims often result in families preferring the immediate economic benefits from compensation ordered through customary courts and the perceived reduced stigma by addressing sexual violence through marriage between the perpetrator and victim rather than filing criminal charges for the prosecution of offenders.

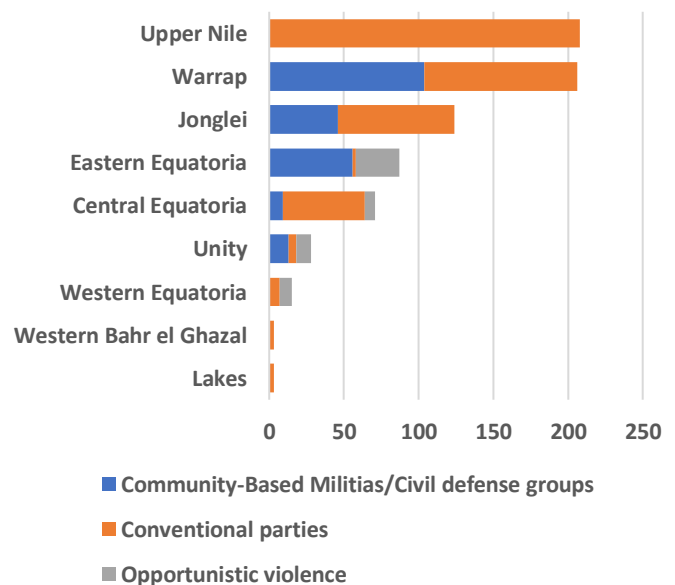
## GEOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

During the third quarter of 2022, Upper Nile and Warrap States were most affected by the violence, accounting for 56 per cent of the victims recorded throughout South Sudan, followed by Jonglei, Eastern Equatoria and Central Equatoria States, which together accounted for approximately 38 percent of the victims.

Upper Nile continues to remain in a fragile and unpredictable situation due to the conflict that broke out between the SPLA-IO (RM) and its splinter groups. Notably, four payams in areas along the river basin of Greater Upper Nile (between Upper Nile and Jonglei) were devastated by intense violence, which led to killing, wounding, and sexual violence by parties to the conflict, resulting in at least 275 civilian casualties, including 13 women, two girls and one boy.

Warrap State continues to be volatile following the armed confrontation between the SSPDF and armed Rual-Bet

States most affected by violence



youths and the longstanding intercommunal violence among Dinka sub-clans. The region remains the most affected area of sub-national violence involving community-based militia and civil-defense groups followed by Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria. However, it is important to note that these incidents of violence were concentrated in specific counties, affecting 39 (out of 540) payams and accounting for more than 37 per cent of victims. Some of the violence also occurred in areas where longstanding grievances persist among communities and where pastoralists compete for vital grazing areas and access to water.

Despite overarching respect of the ceasefire throughout the country, conventional parties to the conflict remain active in Yei (Central Equatoria) and Maridi (Western Equatoria) near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the incidents primarily involved government forces and elements of NAS.

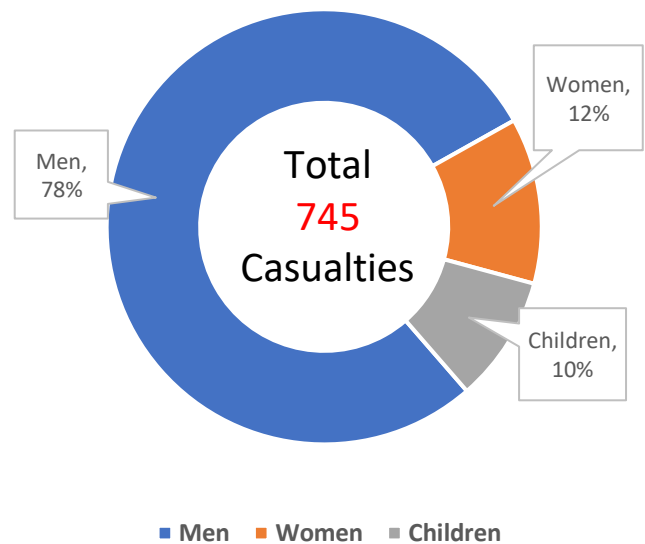
Notwithstanding, military operations and activities involving government forces, organized armed groups and their respective proxy armed elements, have continued to place civilians at risk in these areas, as well as in parts of Unity and Western Bahr el Ghazal States.

## VICTIMS

HRD established that men, particularly young men, comprise the majority of victims (78 per cent, or 583 individuals); followed by women at 12 per cent (92 individuals); while children account for the remaining nine per cent (70 individuals). However, beyond the direct impact of violence, women and children are disproportionately affected by the effects of conflict, particularly in terms of access to health care, education, and livelihoods in volatile areas.

According to HRD’s findings, most adult male victims (99 per cent) were either killed, injured, or abducted largely in the context of armed confrontations and violence attributable to the parties to the conflict and splinter groups. Women were primarily subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (73 per cent) and killing (14 per cent). Most of the cases of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, occurred during the hostilities in Warrap State. Children were primarily killed (26 per cent) or abducted (30 per cent). According to HRD’s findings, 21 girls (30 per cent of children casualties) were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence.

Victims by gender



## PERPETRATORS

HRD's investigations have identified three major categories of perpetrators involved in conflict-related violence affecting civilians: i) conventional parties to the conflict; ii) community-based militias and civil-defence groups; and iii) unidentified (but related) armed elements.

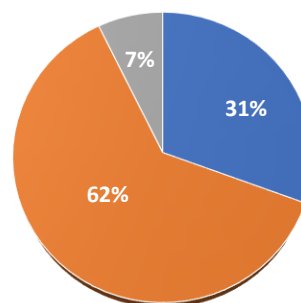
In the third quarter of 2022, HRD investigations attributed responsibility for 62 per cent of victims to conventional parties to the conflict. This category of perpetrators includes government security forces, as well as organized opposition armed groups, and their allied militias or groups. These allied militias are categorized as conventional parties as military and government officials were involved in the mobilization and direct command and control of these armed militia/groups, a marked difference from the existing trend of political and military elites supporting community-based militias and civil-defence groups through indirect means, such as instigation of violence, political backing, and provision of ammunition and financial incentives.

Amongst government forces, acts of violence targeting civilians were mainly attributed to the SSPDF, the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) and the National Security Service (NSS). In addition, NAS -, which is not a signatory to the R-ARCSS, also committed abuses against civilians, primarily in the areas of Yei in Central Equatoria, and Mundri in Western Equatoria. SPLM/A-IO splinter groups, the Agwelek Forces led by Gen. Johnson Olony and the Kitgwang faction headed by Gen. Simon Gatwech Dual, as well as the South Sudan Patriotic Movement/Army (SSPM/A) led by Gen. Stephen Buay Rolnyang, were responsible for major violent incidents in Greater Upper Nile region.

The distinction between government forces and organized armed groups should not obscure the extreme fluidity between and within these entities, whose loyalties may shift according to the formation of alliances of convenience, defections, and buy-offs.

During the reporting period, the second category of perpetrators, community-based militias and civil-defence groups, were responsible for 31 per cent of civilian victims. These groups are a longstanding feature of pastoralist communities across South Sudan. Traditionally, their main objective was to protect herds of cattle from external attack. However, as a result of years of armed conflict and the resultant illicit proliferation of

Civilian casualties by type of perpetrators



- Community-Based Militias/Civil defense groups
- Conventional parties
- Opportunistic violence

small arms amongst local communities, members of these community-based militias and civil-defence groups have been co-opted, armed, and used as proxy armed elements by all parties to the conflict and by local actors, which has contributed to the progressive militarization of intercommunal violence.

A third category is comprised of unidentified but related armed elements. These actors, who often have a historical affiliation with community-based militias and civil-defence groups, have acquired a progressive autonomy from their sponsors and now carry out acts of violence against civilians from their own or rival communities, without any clear strategic or military objectives. In a context of extreme economic deprivation, coupled with the breakdown of the rule of law and the loss of power of traditional institutions, these unchecked elements contribute to a normalization of insecurity, affecting civilians in their daily lives.

# Violence Affecting Civilians in South Sudan

## Jul – Sep 2022



### Legend

- ★ Country capital
- State capital
- County capital
- Major city/town
- Major river
- Canal
- Primary road
- Secondary road
- International boundary
- Undetermined boundary
- State boundary
- County boundary
- Administrative boundary
- Abyei region

\* State and county boundaries and administrative centres as of 4 October 2015  
 \*\* Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been confirmed.  
 \*\*\* 11 km² within the Abyei area is not yet demarcated.

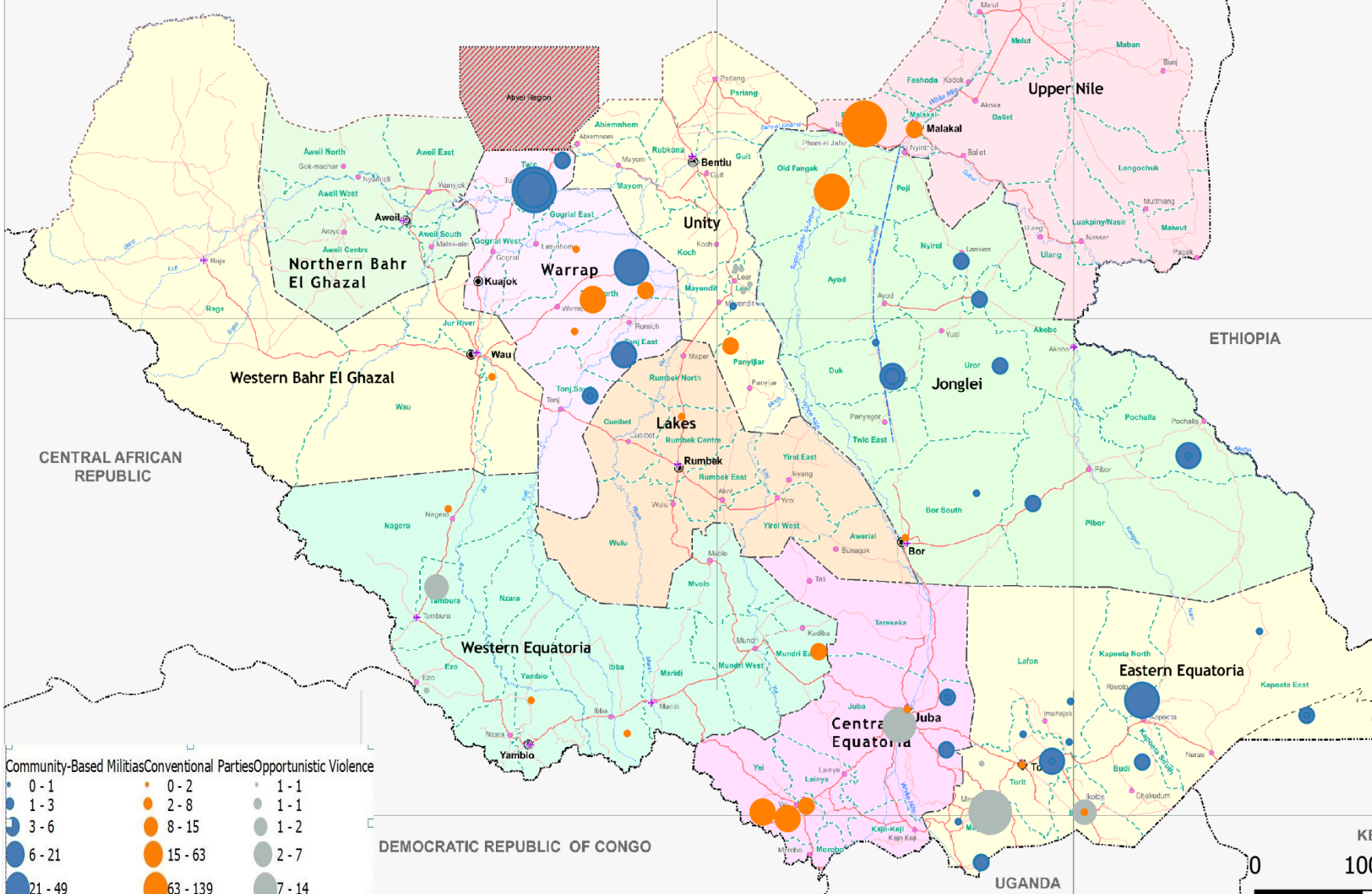


Scale 1:2,000,000  
 0 50 100 150 Km

Datum: WGS 84  
 Projection: Geographic  
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Community-Based Militias	Conventional Parties	Opportunistic Violence
● 0 - 1	● 0 - 2	● 1 - 1
● 1 - 3	● 2 - 8	● 1 - 1
● 3 - 6	● 8 - 15	● 1 - 2
● 6 - 21	● 15 - 63	● 2 - 7
● 21 - 49	● 63 - 139	● 7 - 14

