

III. Armed conflicts active in 2023

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There were active armed conflicts in at least 52 states in 2023, 3 fewer than in 2021: 11 in the Americas; 9 in Asia and Oceania (1 fewer than in 2022); 4 in Europe (1 more than in 2022); 9 in the Middle East and North Africa; and 19 in sub-Saharan Africa (3 fewer than in 2022)—see figure 2.2 and table 2.8.¹ As in preceding years, most took place within a single country (intrastate) between government forces and one or more non-state armed groups (NSAGs), or between two or more NSAGs. Some of the NSAGs were transnational, fighting in more than one conflict. Only three of the armed conflicts were fought between states: the Russia–Ukraine war and low-level border clashes between India and Pakistan and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This was one less interstate armed conflict than in 2022. Two of the armed conflicts were classified as ‘extrastate’—that is, they were fought between state forces and armed groups representing ‘nations without states’: the conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians (and more specifically the Israel– Hamas war since 7 October 2023) and between Türkiye and armed Kurdish groups.

At least four of the armed conflicts can be classified as ‘major’ (i.e. they resulted in 10 000 or more estimated conflict-related fatalities in the year), one more than in 2022: the Russia–Ukraine war (approximately 31 000 reported fatalities), the Israel–Hamas war (24 100), and the civil wars in Myanmar (15 800) and Sudan (13 100). There were also 20 high-intensity armed conflicts (i.e. resulting in 1000–9999 estimated conflict-related fatalities in the year), 3 more than in 2022. These categorizations should be considered tentative, as information on fatalities can be unreliable.² In the case of Ukraine it may be a severe underestimate (as noted in table 2.8).

All four major armed conflicts and most of the high-intensity armed conflicts were internationalized.³ A second form of internationalization, but done with the consent of the host government, is the deployment of a multilateral peace operation, of which 23 were deployed in the 52 states with armed conflicts in 2023.⁴

¹ A country is treated as being in an armed conflict if there were 25 or more battle-related deaths in a given year or (as was the case of Saudi Arabia in 2023) if fatalities in the ‘explosions and remote violence’ category exceed 100 in a given year.

² Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘FAQs: ACLED fatality methodology’, 27 Jan. 2020. On casualty counting see also Giger, A. and Every Casualty, ‘Casualty recording in armed conflict: Methods and normative issues’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 247–61; and Delgado, C., ‘Why it is important to register violent deaths’, SIPRI Commentary, 30 Mar. 2020.

³ On internationalized armed conflict see Odermatt, J., ‘Between law and reality: New wars and internationalised armed conflict’, *Amsterdam Law Forum*, vol. 5, no. 3 (summer 2013); and International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘Internationalized internal armed conflict’, Online Casebook, [n.d.].

⁴ On peace operations see chapter 3 in this volume.

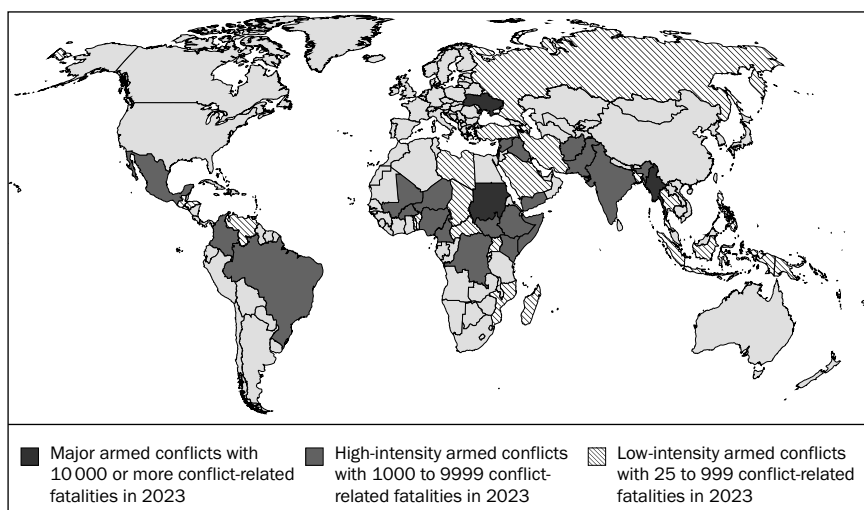


Figure 2.2. Armed conflicts by intensity, 2023

Table 2.7. Conflict-related violence, numbers of events and fatalities, 2021–23

Event type ^a	Events				Fatalities ^b			
	2021	2022	2023	Change, 2022–23 (%)	2021	2022	2023	Change, 2022–23 (%)
Battles	34 893	34 733	39 746	14	89 169	72 173	82 616	14
Explosions/ remote violence	25 414	52 994	64 495	22	25 442	36 730	49 145	34
Protests, riots and strategic developments	193 075	183 728	184 938	1	4 153	4 182	4 078	–2
Violence against civilians	30 336	33 194	31 014	–7	35 734	39 936	34 710	–13
Total	283 718	304 649	320 193	5	154 498	153 021	170 549	11

^a For definitions of event types see Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.

^b These figures include all conflict-related fatalities, irrespective of whether the respective country was classified as being engaged in armed conflict.

Source: ACLED Dashboard, accessed 30 Jan. 2024.

Total estimated conflict-related fatalities increased by 11 per cent in 2023 compared to 2022 and were 25 per cent higher than in 2020 (see table 2.7). Within this total, estimated battle deaths increased by 14 per cent compared to 2022, while those attributed to ‘explosions and remote violence’ increased by 34 per cent. In the ‘violence against civilians’ category, both ‘events’ and ‘fatalities’ declined in 2023 after three consecutive years of increase.

Table 2.8. Armed conflicts active in 2023

The armed conflicts in the table are listed by location, in alphabetical order, within each geographical region. Armed conflict involves the use of armed force between two or more states or non-state armed groups (NSAGs). It is considered 'active' if it resulted in 25 or more battle-related deaths in 2023 or 100 fatalities from 'explosions and remote violence'. The table draws on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

Location ^a	Type ^b	Internationalized ^c		Key parties/dynamics	Start year ^d	Intensity, 2023 ^e	Estimated conflict-related fatalities ^f	
		External actors	Peace operation				2023	Change, 2022–23 (%)
<i>Americas</i>								
Brazil	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	High	6 994	–1
Colombia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, OAS	State forces v NSAGs (esp. ELN, FARC-EMC); inter-NSAG violence; inter-gang violence	1964	High	1 978	–14
El Salvador	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^h	Low	57	–79
Guatemala	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ⁱ	Low	511	–31
Haiti	Subnational intrastate	–	UN	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	High	2 117	46
Honduras	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	Low	647	–7
Jamaica	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	Low	397	4
Mexico	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	1994	High	7 171	–8
Puerto Rico (USA)	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	Low	192	–8
Trinidad and Tobago	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	Low	332	19
Venezuela	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v Colombian NSAGs; inter-gang violence	. ^g	Low	622	–25

Asia and Oceania								
Afghanistan	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v anti-Taliban NSAGs; post civil-war	2022	High	1 127	-72
Bangladesh	Subnational intrastate	Yes	-	State forces v NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence (esp. in Rohingya refugee camps and Chittagong Hill Tracts)	2022	Low	337	9
India	Interstate border, subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v Pakistan (Kashmir, LOC); state forces v NSAGs (esp. north-east, Maoist)	1947	High	1 211	33
Indonesia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	-	States forces v NSAGs (esp. TPNPB-OPM, Islamic State, al-Qaeda)	1962	Low	182	-27
Myanmar	Civil war	Yes	-	State forces v NSAGs (ethnic armed groups); state forces v National Unity Government	1948	Major	15 818	-19
Pakistan	Interstate border, subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	State forces v India (Kashmir, LOC); state forces v NSAGs (esp. TTP and Baluchi separatists)	1947	High	2 319	30
Papua New Guinea	Subnational intrastate	-	-	State forces v NSAGs; inter-communal and clan militia violence	1964	Low	343	51
Philippines	Subnational intrastate	Yes	-	State forces v NSAGs (Moro conflict, NPA); state forces v criminal gang 'war on drugs'	1991	Low	849	-6
Thailand	Subnational intrastate	Yes	-	State forces v NSAG (BRN) in Deep South	2004	Low	57	33
Europe								
Armenia	Interstate border	Yes	EU	State forces v Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict)	2020	Low	24	-89
Azerbaijan	Interstate border	Yes	OSCE, Ad hoc	State forces v Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict)	2020	Low	570	738
Russia	Interstate	Yes	-	State forces v cross-border attacks by Ukraine; state forces v anti-regime NSAGs	2022	Low	249	118
Ukraine	Interstate border	Yes	EU	Russian full-scale invasion Feb. 2022; Russia invasion of Crimea and Donbas 2014; state forces v NSAGs (Russian-backed separatists)	2014	Major	30 673 ^j	-8

Location ^a	Type ^b	Internationalized ^c		Key parties/dynamics	Start year ^d	Intensity, 2023 ^e	Estimated conflict-related fatalities ^f	
		actors	Peace operation				2023	Change, 2022–23 (%)
Middle East and North Africa								
Iraq	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, EU, NATO	Multiple and overlapping; state forces v NSAGs (esp. Iranian-backed militias, Islamic State, PKK)	2013	High	1 342	–30
Iran	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (PJAK; Sistan and Baluchestan insurgency)	2004	Low	214	–71
Israel–Palestine	Extrastate	Yes	EU	Territorial dispute/occupation ^k ; state forces v NSAGs (esp. Hamas, PIJ)	1947 ^l	Major	24 053	9 259
Lebanon	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN	Inter-NSAG violence; sectarian tensions; Hezbollah v Israel	2020	Low	247	366
Libya	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, EU	Limited inter-NSAG violence (since 2020 ceasefire)	2011	Low	90	–46
Saudi Arabia	Subnational intrastate border	Yes	–	Spillover from military intervention in Yemen (esp. cross-border attacks by Houthis)	2014	Low	193	117
Syria	Civil war	Yes	UN	Multiple and overlapping; state forces v NSAGs; external state forces v NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence	2011	High	6 245	5
Türkiye	Extrastate, subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v Kurdish NSAGs (esp. PKK)	1978	Low	140	–20
Yemen	Civil war	Yes	UN	Multiple and overlapping; Houthi forces (in the north) v internationally recognized government (backed by Saudi-led coalition) and STC (in the south and east); AQAP v other NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence	2014	High	3 214	–55

*Sub-Saharan Africa***West Africa**

Benin	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs; inter-NSAG violence	2020	Low	218	20
Burkina Faso	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State and international forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma, ISGS, JNIM) esp. in Liptako–Gourma region; inter-communal violence	2016	High	8 499	100
Mali	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN [#] , EU	State and international forces and Russian PMSCs v transnational NSAGs (esp. Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma, ISGS, JNIM) esp. in Liptako–Gourma region; inter-NSAG violence	2012	High	4 320	–11
Niger	Subnational intrastate	Yes	EU	State and international forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansarul Islam, Katiba Serma, ISGS, JNIM) esp. in Liptako–Gourma region; inter-NSAG violence	2014	High	1 149	16
Nigeria	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State and international forces v NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram, ISWAP); farmer–herder violence; inter-NSAG violence	2009	High	8 759	–19
Togo	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAG (JNIM) in Savanes region	2022	Low	103	27
Central Africa								
Cameroon	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v NSAGs (anglophone separatists in South West and North West regions; Boko Haram and ISWAP in Far North)	2014	High	1 061	6
CAR	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, AU, EU	State forces, Russian PMSCs and Rwandan forces v NSAGs (esp. CPC-affiliated)	2012	Low	583	–33
Chad	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State forces v transnational NSAGs (esp. Boko Haram and FACT); inter-communal violence	2014	Low	264	–64
DRC	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, EAC [#] , SADC	State and international (esp. Rwandan and Tanzanian) forces v multiple NSAGs (domestic and transnational in eastern provinces); inter-communal violence	2005	High	4 110	–35

Location ^a	Type ^b	Internationalized ^c		Key parties/dynamics	Start year ^d	Intensity, 2023 ^e	Estimated conflict-related fatalities ^f	
		External actors	Peace operation				2023	Change, 2022–23 (%)
East and Southern Africa								
Burundi	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs	2018	Low	200	–23
Ethiopia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	AU	State and Eritrean forces v NSAGs (esp. in Amhara region and OLA in Oromia region)	1973	High	3 851	–44
Kenya	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v NSAGs (localized ethnic-based; pastoralist militias; al-Shabab in Somalia border area)	. ^m	High	1 014	45
Madagascar	Subnational intrastate	–	–	State forces v criminal gangs (rural)	2012	Low	515	51
Mozambique	Subnational intrastate	Yes	EU, SADC	State and international forces v NSAGs (Islamist insurgency in Cabo Delgado province; resource conflicts)	2013	Low	303	–67
Somalia	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, AU, EU	State, AU and US forces v NSAGs (esp. al-Shabab); clan-based violence	2003	High	8 367	28
South Sudan	Subnational intrastate	Yes	UN, IGAD	State forces v NSAGs; inter-communal violence; inter-NSAG violence	2011	High	1 262	–47
Sudan	Civil war	Yes	UN [#]	State forces v NSAGs (esp. RSF)	2003	Major	13 147	537
Uganda	Subnational intrastate	Yes	–	State, UN and DRC forces v NSAG (cross-border ADF insurgency)	1996	Low	367	1

ACLED = Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project; ADF = Allied Democratic Forces (Uganda); AQAP = Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; AU = African Union; BRN = Patani Malays National Revolutionary Front (Thailand); CAR = Central African Republic; CPC = Coalition of Patriots for Change (Central African Republic); DRC = Democratic Republic of the Congo; EAC = East African Community; ELN = National Liberation Army (Colombia); EU = European Union; FACT = Front for Change and Concord in Chad; FARC-EMC = Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–Estado Mayor Central; IGAD = Intergovernmental Authority on Development; ISGS = Islamic State in the Greater Sahara; ISWAP = Islamic State–West Africa Province; JNIM = Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo); LOC = Line of Control (Kashmir); NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization; NPA = New People's Army (Philippines); NSAG = Non-state armed group; OAS = Organization of American States; OLA = Oromo Liberation Army (Ethiopia); OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; PIJ = Palestinian Islamic Jihad; PJAK = Kurdistan Free Life Party (Iran); PKK = Kurdistan Workers' Party (Türkiye, Iraq); PMSC = Private military and security company; RSF = Rapid Support Forces (Sudan); SADC = Southern African Development Community; STC = Southern Transitional Council (Yemen); TPNPB-OPM = West Papua National Liberation Army–Free Papua Movement (Indonesia); TTP = Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan; UN = United Nations.

^a Location refers to the state whose government is being challenged by an opposition organization, NSAG or another state or, in the cases of interstate or inter-NSAG conflict, the geographical location of the fighting.

^b There are 3 main types of armed conflict: interstate, intrastate—including subnational intrastate and civil war—and extrastate. An *interstate (international) armed conflict* involves the use of armed force by one or more states against another state or states. Interstate armed conflicts often involve border or territorial disputes. An *intrastate (non-international) armed conflict* usually involves sustained violence between a state and one or more NSAGs fighting with explicitly political goals (e.g. to take control of the state or part of its territory), but can also include armed conflict between NSAGs, sometimes with less clear goals. An intrastate armed conflict can be classified as *subnational intrastate*, typically when confined to particular areas within a sovereign state while economic and social activities in the rest of the country proceed relatively untroubled; or as a *civil war*, when it involves most of the country and results in at least 1000 conflict-related fatalities in a given year. An *extrastate armed conflict* occurs between a state and a political entity that is not widely recognized as a state but has long-standing aspirations of statehood (e.g. the Israeli–Palestinian conflict).

^c An armed conflict is considered *internationalized* if there is significant involvement by a foreign entity that is clearly prolonging or exacerbating the conflict. This may include an armed intervention in support of one or more of the conflict parties or the provision of significant levels of weapons or military training. The involvement may come from a foreign government or non-state actor, including private military companies, or a transnational NSAG. Multilateral *peace operations* are another form of internationalization of a conflict (see chapter 3 in this volume). [#] indicates that the mission closed during the year.

^d This is the year when fighting caused at least 25 battle-related deaths (or 100 fatalities from ‘explosions and remote violence’) for the first time.

^e An armed conflict is categorized as *major* if it resulted in 10 000 or more conflict-related fatalities in the year; *high intensity* with 1000–9999 conflict-related fatalities; or *low intensity* with 25–999 conflict-related fatalities. The classification of intensity comes with the caveat that data on conflict deaths is often imprecise and tentative.

^f Estimated fatality figures are collated from 4 ACLED event types: battles; explosions/remote violence; protests, riots and strategic developments; and violence against civilians. See ACLED, ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019. If the threshold of 25 battle-related deaths has been crossed, the fatalities from the other 3 event types are added to give a total number of ‘Estimated conflict-related fatalities’. Since undercounting and manipulation of fatality data are common in war, the figures are tentative estimates that indicate a trend in a conflict’s form and impact. See ACLED, ‘FAQs: ACLED fatality methodology’, 27 Jan. 2020.

^g The first year for which data on conflicts in this country is available in the ACLED database is 2018; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date. ^h Some armed political and criminal violence continued following the 1979–92 Salvadoran Civil War. The first year for which data on conflicts in El Salvador is available in the ACLED database is 2018; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

ⁱ Some armed political and criminal violence continued following the 1960–66 Guatemalan Civil War. The first year for which data on conflicts in Guatemala is available in the ACLED database is 2018; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

^j This may be a low estimate of fatalities given that other public sources suggest much higher casualty rates. However, all estimates of the number of fatalities in the Russia–Ukraine war, both military and civilian, are particularly difficult to verify due to probable undercounting and manipulation of the data. See e.g. Crawford, N. C., ‘Reliable death tolls from the Ukraine war are hard to come by—the result of undercounts and manipulation’, *The Conversation*, 4 Apr. 2022.

^k Israel describes the conflict as being about 'disputed territory', while a range of authoritative bodies such as the UN Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the International Committee of the Red Cross define it as an occupation to which international humanitarian law applies.

^l The latest phase of the conflict is the Israel–Hamas war that started in Oct. 2023.

^m The first available year for data on conflicts in this country in the ACLED database is 1997; it is not possible to verify the situation prior to that date.

Sources: ACLED Dashboard, accessed 12–30 Jan. 2024; various other sources; and author's assessments.