

CONFLICT TRENDS (NO. 6)

REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF ASIAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, FEBRUARY 2017

Welcome to the first 2017 Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project’s Conflict Trend Report for Asia. This is the sixth report in our series. The analysis is based on ACLED real-time and historical data on political violence and protests from ten countries in South and Southeast Asia. Monthly data updates are published through our research partners at [Complex Emergencies and Political Stability in Asia](#) (CEPSA) and are also available on the [ACLED website](#).

In February 2017, ACLED released the second annual dataset of South and Southeast Asia political violence and protest data. This set covers events in 2016 across ten South and Southeast Asian states. Historical data from 2010 for each country are in the final stages of review, and Pakistan’s data from January 2010-present are available for download.

Conflict Trend Report No. 6 includes a general overview of the violence recorded in South and Southeast Asia throughout 2016. Following a review of the 2016 data, the

report continues by focusing on different conflict subjects throughout the region. These include: **regional violence in Pakistan**, the **effects of the capture of Osama Bin Laden**, **insurgency in India**, and a special focus on **India and Pakistan relations in 2016**.

A Review: Violence in South and Southeast Asia 2016

In 2016, ACLED recorded 14,196 events of political violence and protests in South and Southeast Asia, an increase of 39.3% compared with 2015 (see Figure 1). The increase in events was mostly seen in India, and driven by protest (see Figures 2 and 3). Similar to 2015, India accounted for well over half of the events for the region. While the event count for the region as a whole increased, only Cambodia, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand had an increase in event count, but the magnitude of the Indian count far surpasses the others.

Riots and protests accounted for 83.7% of total conflict events, an increase of 6.9% from 2015. Riots and protests decreased in every country besides Cambodia, India, and

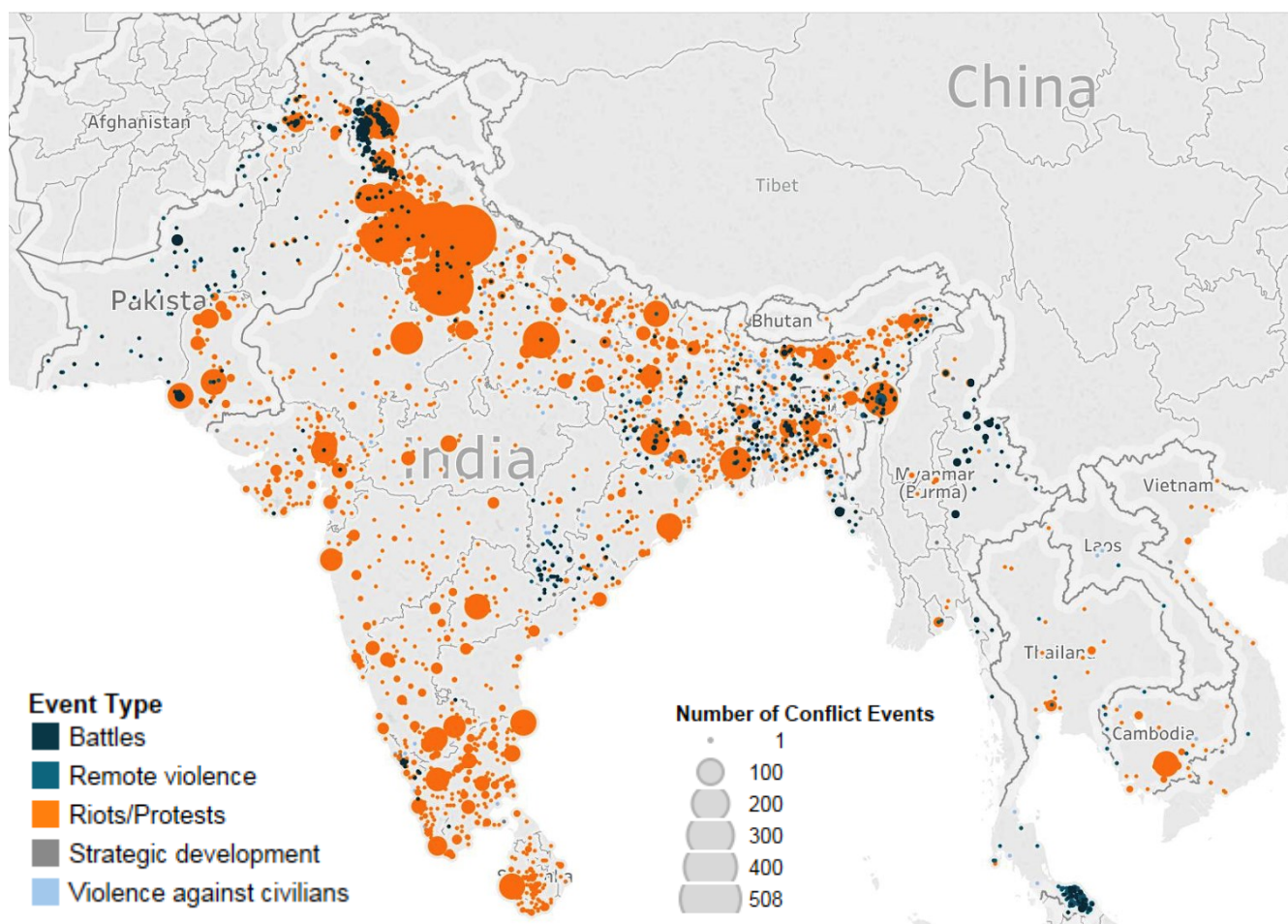


Figure 1: Political Violence and Protests by Location in South and Southeast Asia, from January - December 2016.

A Review: Violence in South and Southeast Asia 2016

Sri Lanka. India demonstrated the largest increase, more than doubling from 2015 to 2016. Large demonstration movements included targeting of the Dalit community - a topic explored in our [September 2016 Trend Report](#), as well as the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, which is explored in the India and Pakistan relations section of this trend report.

The other major event types that ACLED recorded consisted of battles between armed groups, violence against civilians, and remote violence comprising only 7.1%, 5.2%, and 2.7% of the event count for 2016 respectively. Geographically, most battles are clustered in the following areas: along the line of control (LOC) between Pakistan administered Azad Kashmir and Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir; in the Shan and Kachin states in Myanmar (see the previous trend report for the [ongoing conflict in the northeastern states of Myanmar](#)), despite a large decrease from 237 to 100 battles from 2015 to 2016;

several states in eastern India also saw clusters of battles throughout 2016. Levels for violence against civilians stayed relatively stable for the region from 2015-2016. Yet, they remain significant at 28 % of total reported fatalities.

The number of conflict-related fatalities for the region decreased by 40% from 2015. This decrease was mainly due to declining fatalities in Pakistan from 2,791 to 1,196. While Pakistan accounted for a little over half of total fatalities in 2015 at 57.3%, it still accounted for almost half of total fatalities in 2016 at 40.7%. India and Thailand experienced an increase in reported fatalities, with India almost doubling its reported fatalities from 2015 (see Figure 4). However, these increases were clearly not enough to counteract the major decrease in fatalities from Pakistan, as Pakistan remained the largest contributor to the count of reported fatalities.

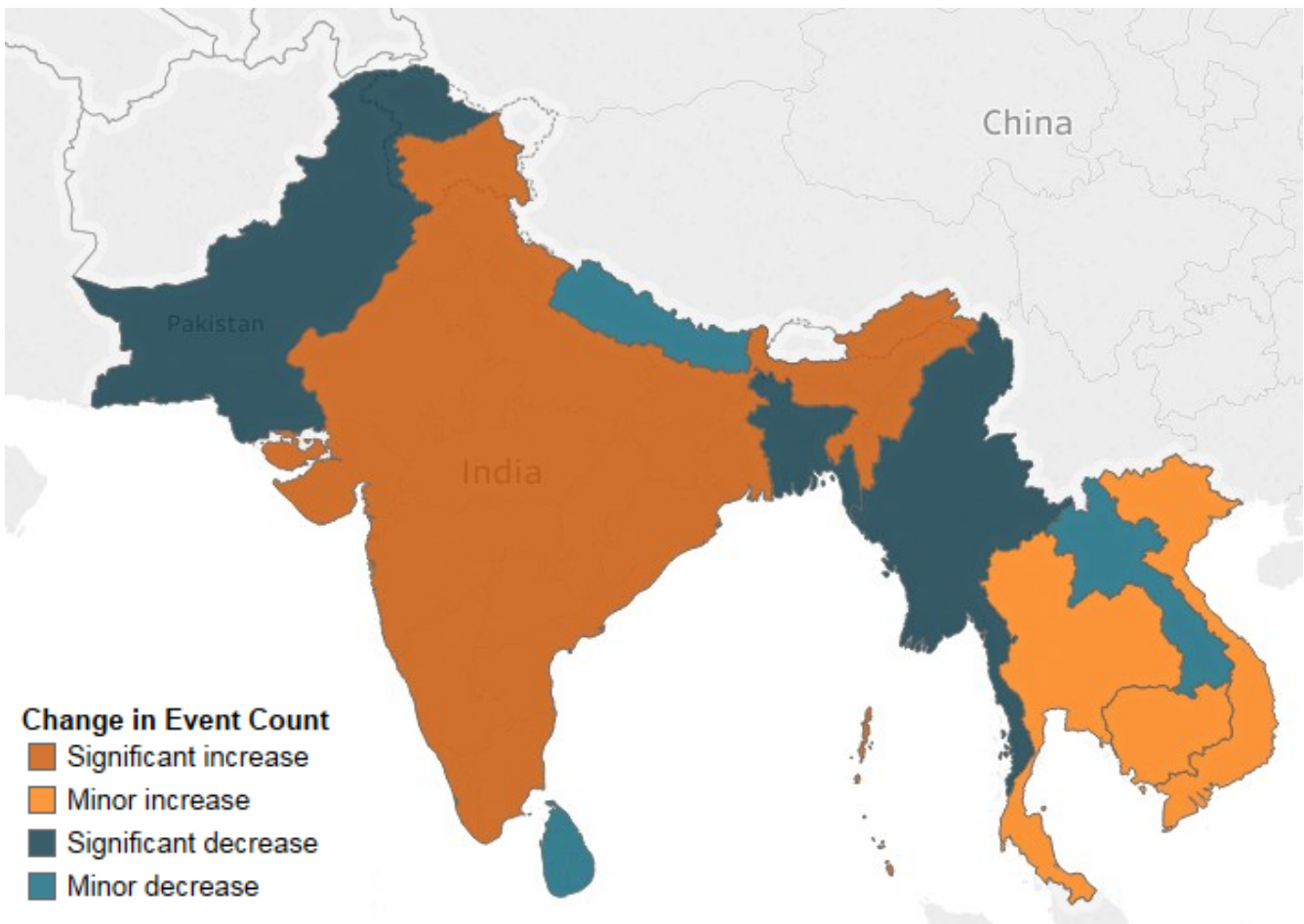


Figure 2: Increase or Decrease in Event Count for Political Violence, from 2015 - 2016.

A Review: Violence in South and Southeast Asia 2016

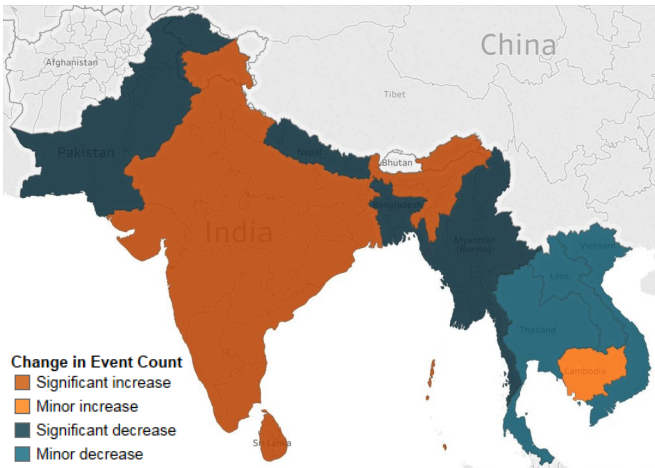


Figure 3: Increase or Decrease in Event Count for Riots and Protest, from 2015 - 2016.

In summary, while the overall event count in South and Southeast Asia has increased from 2015 to 2016, this mostly has been due to a large increase in the number of riots and protests throughout India. Without riots and

protests, the event count for political violence in South and Southeast Asia actually slightly decreased from 2,358 events to 2,310 events from 2015-2016, suggesting that political violence has remained stable in the region.

Over the past two years, topics that ACLED Asia Trends covered include: [the recent increase in ISIS activity in Bangladesh with a focus on the hostage crisis from July](#); [the large-scale protests by the Dalit caste occurring in India](#); [an overview of data collected from the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir](#); [electoral violence in West Bengal and Bangladesh](#); [targeting of religious minorities in Pakistan](#); [a focus on Pakistan’s most violent spaces](#); [the rise of conservatism in India](#); [Myanmar’s tenuous peace with rebel groups](#); [Thailand’s conflict environment from 2010-2015](#); [large scale attacks on civilians in 2015](#); [protests on issues surrounding the quality of life in Cambodia and Vietnam](#); [a review of violent groups who target civilians, as opposed to military targets](#); [Operation Zarb-e-Azb](#); [land conflict in India](#).

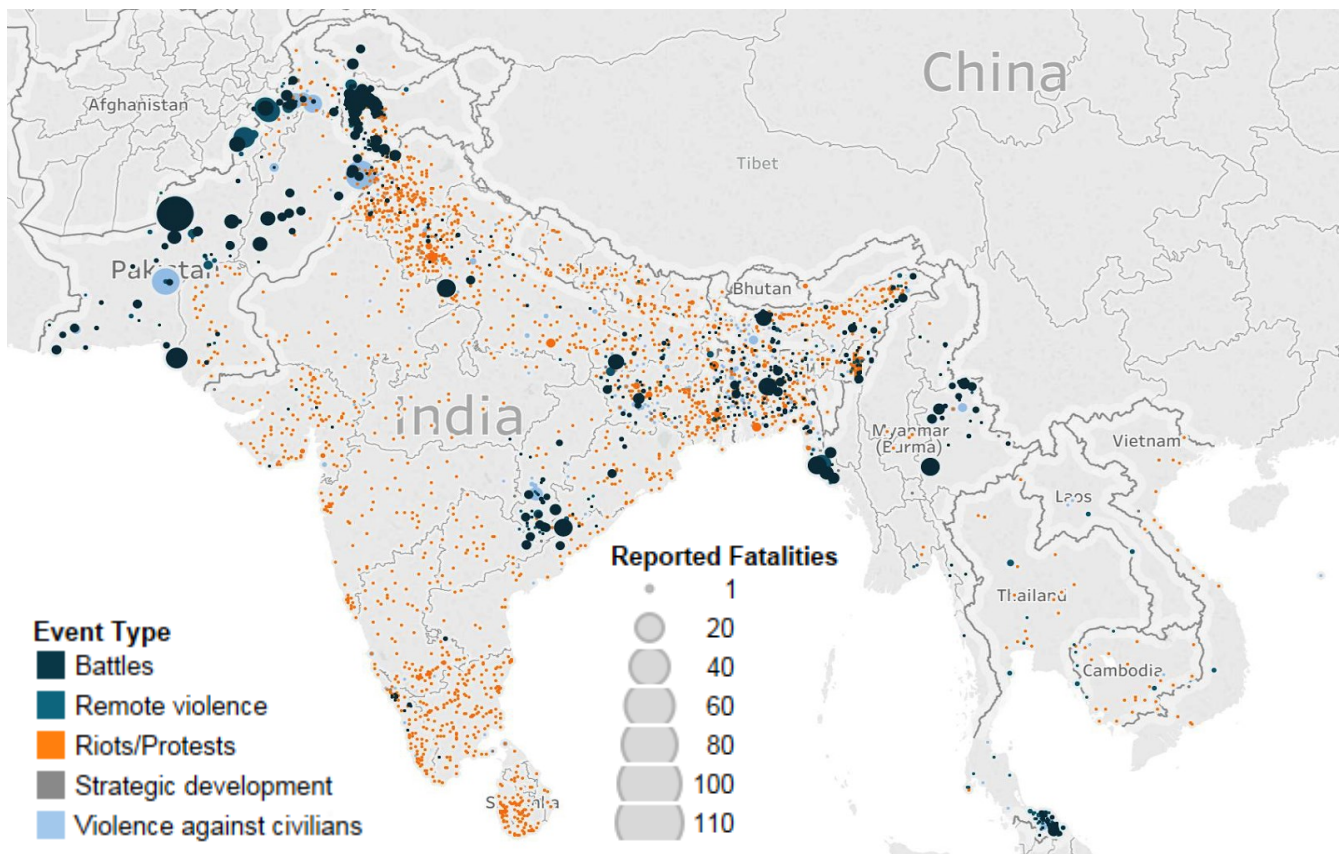


Figure 4: Number of Reported Fatalities by Event Type and Location, from 2015 - 2016.

Regional Violence in Pakistan

Pakistan’s five provinces contain very different conflict environments (see Figure 5). This piece reviews data collected on armed, organized violence, riots and protests from 2010-2016. It demonstrates the multifaceted nature of conflict across the country, and the difficulty in establishing peace across the state. Pakistan’s most populous provinces, Punjab and Sindh, generally see less armed, organized violence but a large number of riots and protests. Yet the large cities, especially Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad-Rawalpindi, are periodically targeted by groups such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda, or their affiliates in mass-casualty attacks.

In contrast, Balochistan, which hosts a long running separatist conflict, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas

(FATA), the main recruitment base and operational area of the TTP, both possess highly disproportionate rates of violence per capita compared to Sindh and Punjab. Balochistan sees a relatively large number of battles, incidents of remote violence (bombing), and violence against civilians, but also riots and protests over various issues. FATA experiences the highest rate of battles, bombings, and violence against civilians, with drone strikes predominantly clustered in North and South Waziristan. Its is often the site of periodic offensives by Pakistan’s military to disrupt militant networks ([Daily Mail, 29 January 2015](#)).

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is a frontier between the more violent areas of Pakistan and the more stable and secure provinces of Punjab and Sindh. KPK sees considerable vio-

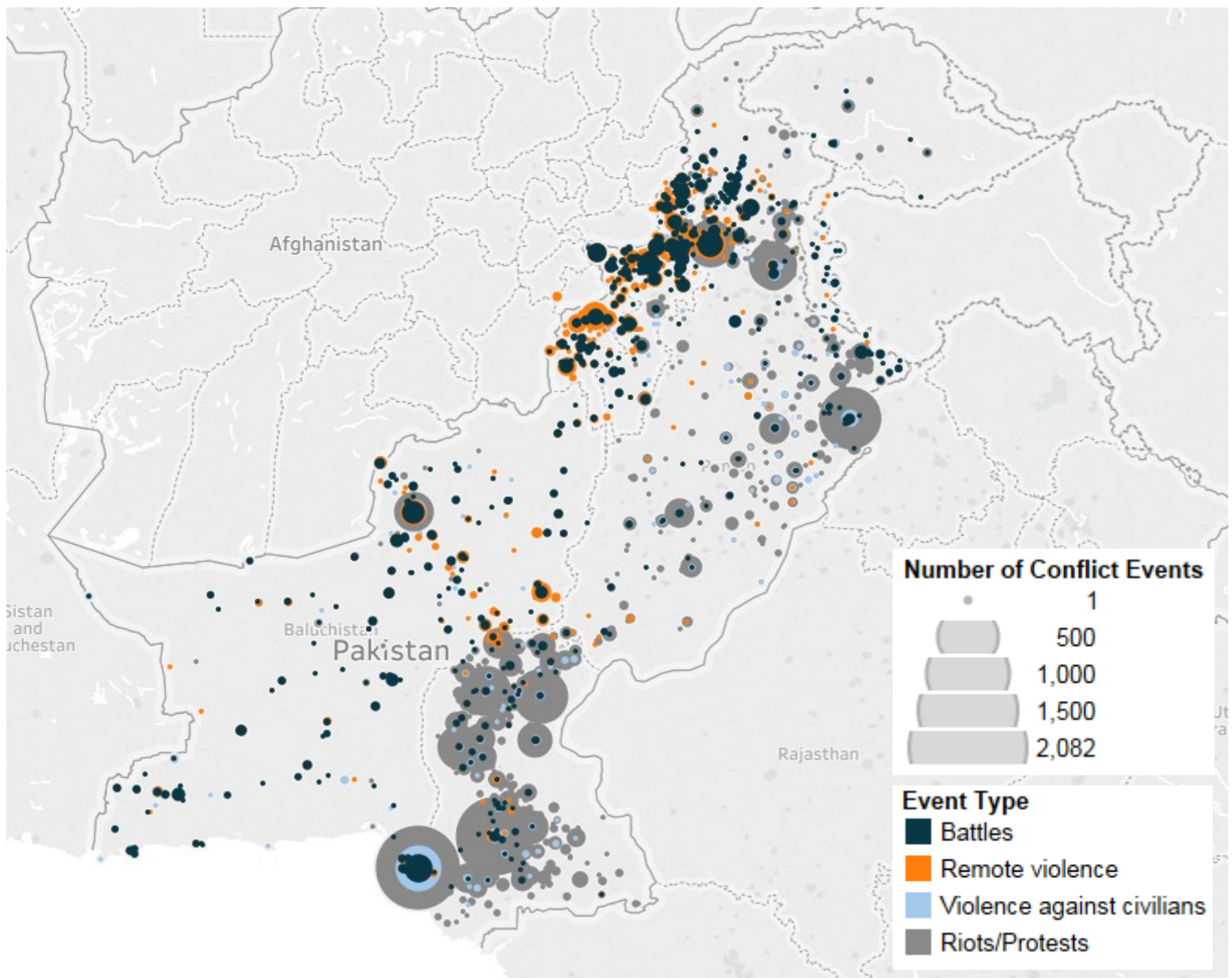


Figure 5: Regional Violence in Pakistan by Event Type and Location, 2016.

Regional Violence in Pakistan

lence in Peshawar, its capital, which lies close to the border with FATA. The city is the site of many attacks on police and military personnel, as well as bombings of markets and shops. Outside Peshwar, the Malakand/Swat area has been the most eventful area of KPK over 2010-2016, despite the various military offensives prior to 2010 which diminished the operational capacity of groups like the TTP in the region ([Al Bawaba, 4 June 2016](#)).

In FATA, a relatively steady level of violence throughout 2013 and the first half of 2014 concluded with a dramatic spike in both events and fatalities in June 2014 (see Figure 6), which marked the beginning of Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Sharp Strike) ([Economic Times – India, 15 June 2016](#)), a military offensive commenced after the June 8, 2014 attack on Jinnah International Airport ([Reuters, 12 June 2014](#)). This highly-publicized attack by a group of TTP and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants left at least 21 people dead (see Figure 6). Violence decreased in the following months overall in FATA, but resumed with another highly-publicized attack on December 16, 2014 on an Army Public School in Peshawar ([CNN, 17 December 2014](#)) where militants killed 132 schoolchildren and 9 teachers (see Figure 6). This attack is infamous for being one of the deadliest in Pakistan’s history, and the most brutal in terms of psychological impact.

Following the Army Public School attack, the government announced the creation of the National Action Plan ([Link](#)) in January 2015; this was a government-wide supplement to the military approach of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The plan allowed for the deployment of a federal armed force-

-the Pakistan Rangers - in Karachi and other large cities, the creation of a new anti-terrorism force, enhanced power for the Foreign, Finance, and other ministries to crack down on terrorist financing, and the expelling of Afghan refugees. By March 2016, violence in FATA had reached the lowest point since the beginning of 2010 (see Figure 6), and it is at this point that Operation Zarb-e-Azb shifted into its “clearance phase” after the army reported that 90% of North Waziristan had been cleared ([Dunya News, 16 November 2014](#)).

Together Operation Zarb-e-Azb and the National Action Plan are the main drivers of the significant decrease in both fatalities and events in FATA over the course of 2015 and 2016 (see Figure 6). This trend of decreasing violence was also mirrored to some extent in Pakistan’s most populous regions, Punjab and Sindh, although periodic mass-casualty attacks in both provinces over 2015 and 2016, are reminders that soft targets remain vulnerable despite the success of offensives in the Tribal Areas. This to some extent has also been recorded in Balochistan (see Figure 7), although other dynamics are also at play in that region which suggest more is going on under the surface.

Balochistan has generally seen fluctuating violence over the years. Following the beginning of Operation Zarb-e-Azb and the implementation of the National Action Plan, a broad downward trend in violence is evident (see Figure 7). But similar to Sindh and Punjab, Balochistan has witnessed increases in mass-casualty attacks, with three in the second half of 2016. The most significant was the August 2016 Quetta Government Hospital bombing which

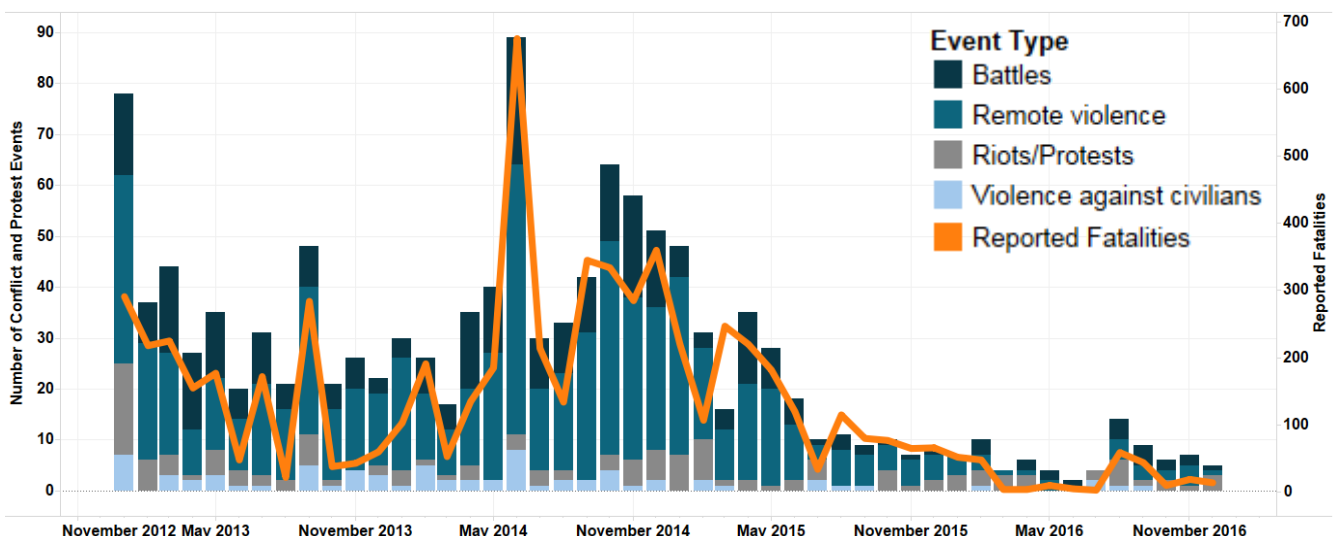


Figure 6: Number of Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in FATA, from January 2013 - December 2016.

Regional Violence in Pakistan

killed 93 people ([India Today, 8 August 2016](#)), making it one of the deadliest attacks in Balochistan’s history and the deadliest recorded attack in the region. There are two main factors which explain the recent rise in frequency of mass-casualty attacks, and suggest that violence is likely to begin to rise overall in Balochistan.

The first factor is directly related to Operation Zarb-e-Azb: the diminishing violence in FATA is correlated with secondary effects of increased mass-casualty attacks in large cities outside the region, including Karachi, Lahore and Quetta, respectively the most populous cities in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan (see Figure 7). This suggests that militants have been pushed out of the tribal regions into the cities, retaining their capabilities to carry out large-scale attacks on soft targets ([Awaz.TV, 10 August 2015](#)). Although the Operation disrupted networks, which is reflected by the diminished number of events and fatalities overall since 2014, the spike in fatalities since August 2016 suggests that militants are overcoming this disruption (see Figure 7). Further, new actors may be gaining ground as the three major attacks in the second half of 2016 were either claimed by groups affiliated with ISIS or by ISIS itself.

The second factor is the beginning of activity along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which links the deep sea port at Gwadar to China’s Xinjiang region ([Al Jazeera, 12 November 2016](#)). Although CPEC was announced in 2013, only in November 2016 did the first con-

voy of exports arrive at Gwadar. As it has come online, the CPEC disrupted the region’s traditional power relationships by introducing the possibility of new development and considerable prosperity to the region ([The Diplomat, 16 November 2016](#)). This will likely lead to a diminishing of Balochistan’s status as a frontier region and an increase in stability as economic incentives motivate the need for greater security in the region. However, desires by local actors to shift the balance of power in their favour coupled with the increased presence of militants from FATA are likely to mean considerable instability over the short-term.

While FATA and Balochistan will clearly be important regions to watch in the coming years, as shown above it will be just as important to monitor Pakistan as a whole. Each province’s violence suggests the highly regionalized nature of conflict and risk in Pakistan, but also the key linkages between its regions. ACLED recorded a large decrease both in event count and reported fatalities in Pakistan from 2015 to 2016. As laid out above, much of this shift can be accounted for by the targeting of militants in the frontier regions, which has pushed many of them to the cities. As 2016 has demonstrated, this has meant an increase in large-scale attacks in the Pakistan’s major cities, including Karachi, Lahore and Quetta, which will likely lead to a shift in the focus of the security forces back to these cities which are increasingly at the centre of Pakistan’s economy and politics.

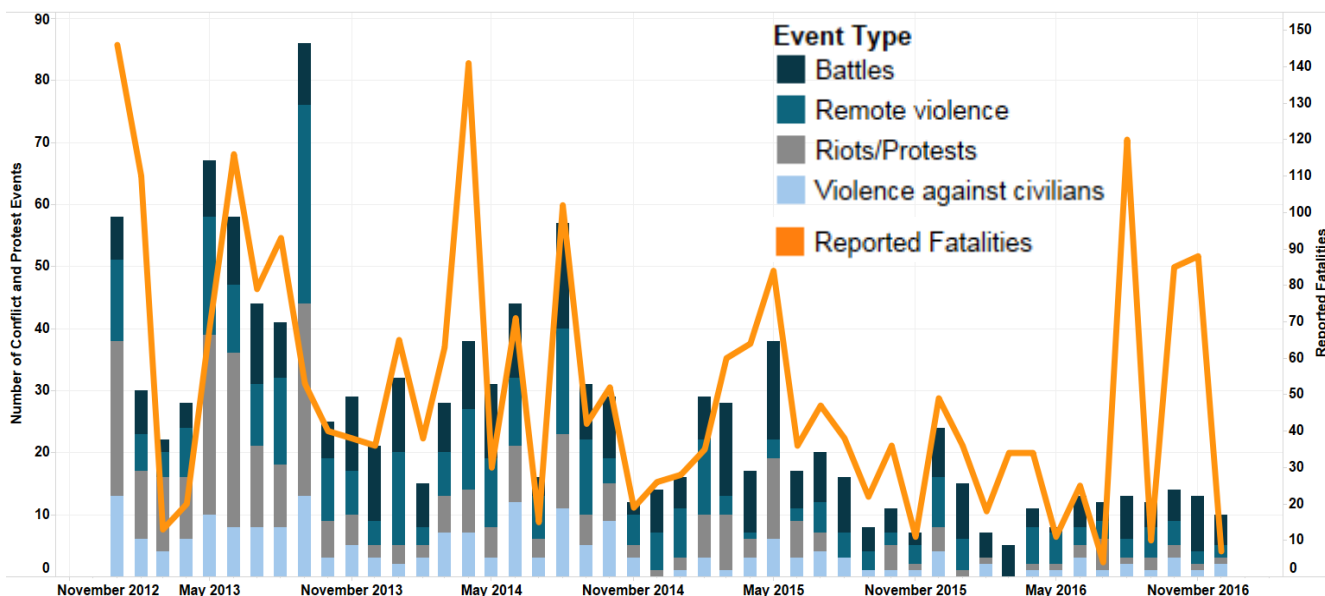


Figure 7: Number of Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in Balochistan, from January 2013 - December 2016.

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REAL-TIME ANALYSIS OF ASIAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE, FEBRUARY 2017

The Effects of Capturing Osama Bin Laden

Operation Neptune Spear was a US offensive aimed at capturing Osama Bin Laden (OBL). It was launched out of Afghanistan and carried out in Abbotabad, Pakistan in the early hours of May 2, 2011. The operation was successful, and has had both short and long term effects on the political, social, and military landscape of Pakistan. The operation not only put into question Pakistan’s role in harbouring the world’s most wanted man, but also unravelled Pakistan’s narrative of the War on Terror. In addition to changes in global relations as well as relations with militant groups active in Pakistan, an unintended consequence of the operation has been the inability to curtail the spread of polio due to the connection between vaccination programs and the OBL raid.

The operation resulted in 5 fatalities on Pakistani soil (including OBL) and the capture of key Al Qaida informants including wives and children of OBL. Pakistani intelligence and military organizations claim to have been blindsided, both by the presence of OBL on Pakistani soil, as well as by the raid itself. The fallout from the raid was both international and local: internationally, already difficult relations between the USA and Pakistan were further reduced. There was no communication for the months that followed the raid, and a closure of supply routes for NATO troops in Afghanistan ([Spiegel Online 12 May 2012](#)).

On a local level, the immediate consequence was several retaliatory attacks by the Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP) and affil-

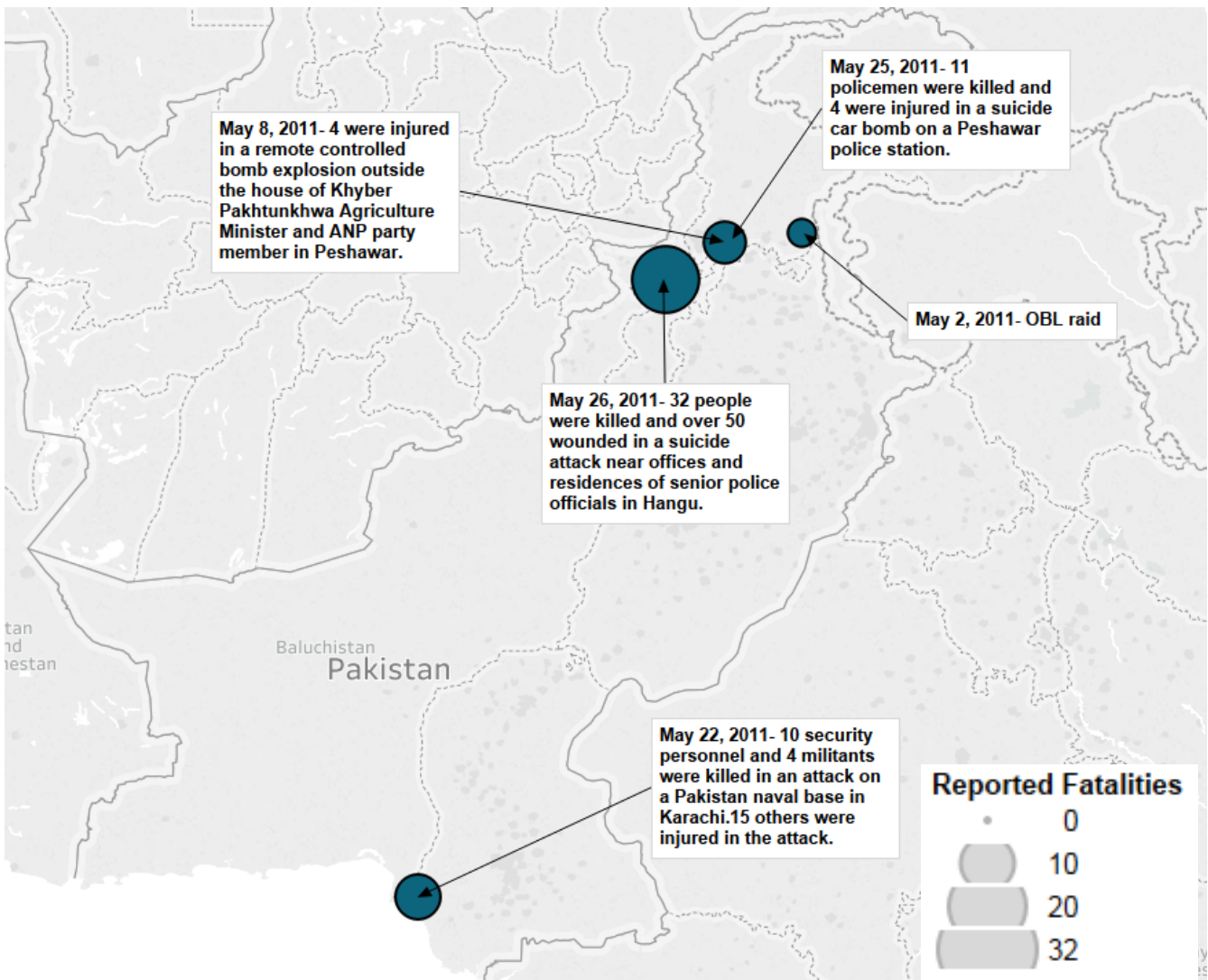


Figure 8: Location of Conflict Events in Response to the Osama Bin Laden Raid, in Pakistan, 2011.

The Effects of Capturing Osama Bin Laden

iates on civilians and military officials alike. Between May 8th and May 26th in 2011, the TTP and affiliates carried out attacks in Karachi and the state of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see Figure 8), resulting in 63 fatalities. These attacks including three bombings and one battle at a Naval Air Base.

Civilian protests emerged around the issue. The main opposition comes from religious political parties, particularly the Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Both parties protested in Quetta and Peshawar after the raid, demanding explanations as to how Pakistani sovereignty was challenged, and claiming OBL as a martyr ([The Express Tribune, 6 May 2011](#)). The JUI, JI, and their affiliates are some of Pakistan’s largest political parties, with strong Wahabi, Sunni Muslim roots, and indirect links to militant groups in the country.

Pakistan has also faced a spread of the poliovirus since the raid. Vaccination programs in the nation are routinely threatened and attacked by militant groups due to their connection with the OBL raid. The CIA covert mission to locate OBL included a fake immunization program that managed to collect DNA samples proving that those living in the compound were OBL’s kin. When this information was released, there was local distrust of vaccinations and blow-black by militant groups. Before the raid, there were no attacks on polio vaccination teams in the country, who never travelled with security. However, since May 2011,

militant groups have killed a total of 111 polio-vaccinators, their team members, or those providing security. The TTP has carried out most of these attacks, but Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Jandallah have also claimed responsibility for such attacks (see Figure 9).

Further, local anti-American sentiment and the revelation that the OBL immunization program was fake, led to a distrust of vaccination drives. Parents were unwilling to take their children to be immunized. There is the additional fear that anywhere polio-vaccinators are seen, there is a chance of violence breaking out, leading to low event turnout. Furthermore, the lack, and misappropriation, of funds means that workers are often not paid, leading to strikes and nation-wide protests. Since May 2011, 37 protests have taken place in every province in Pakistan over lack of security and funds provided to polio-vaccination teams across the nation.

The capture of Osama Bin Laden changed several gears for the Global War on Terror, and its impact on Pakistan cannot be understated. From affecting the nation’s international relations, to local socio-health programs, the raid on 2 May 2011 changed not only the lens through which Pakistan was perceived by the rest of the world, but it also forced Pakistan to change internal policies and contributed greatly to the growing violent landscape of the state.

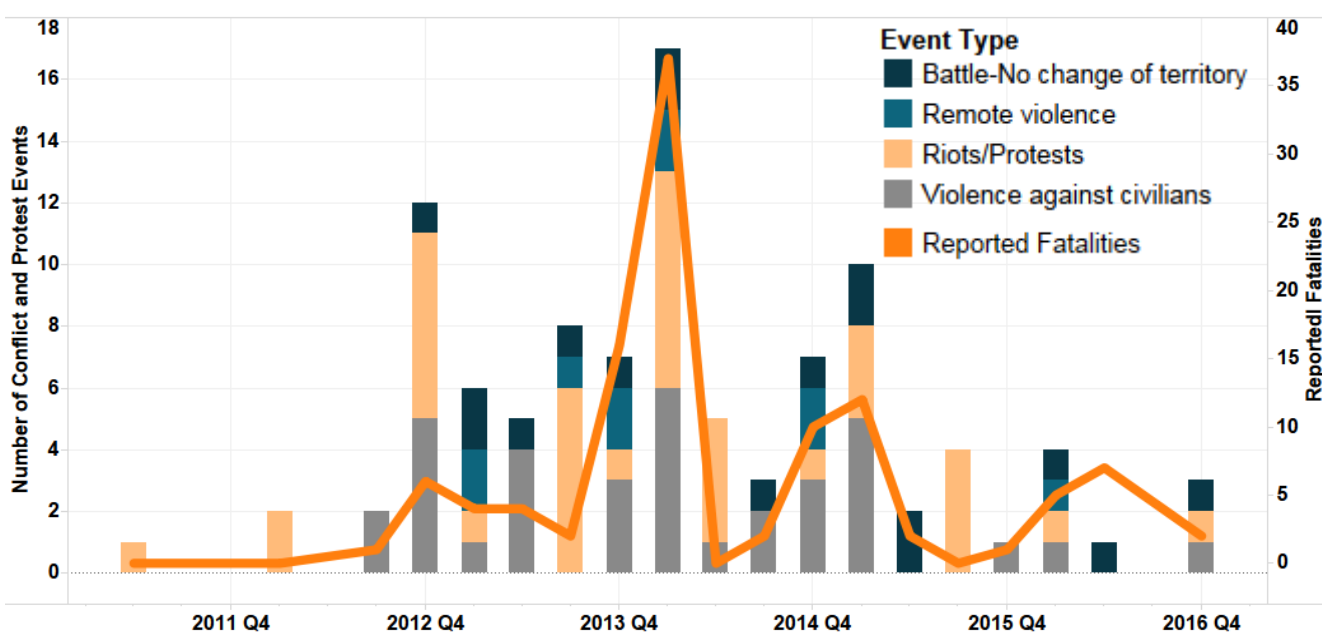


Figure 9: Number of Polio-related Conflict and Protest Events by Type and Reported Fatalities in Pakistan, from 2011 - 2016.

Insurgency in India

The Northeast and the Maoist insurgencies have posed major security threats to the Indian state since the 1950s and late 1960s. In 2012, the Home Minister of India declared the Maoist insurgency as the ‘most formidable security challenge facing the country’ ([BBC News, 16 April 2012](#)). In the last few years, however, levels of violence have declined.

Northeast Insurgencies

Northeast India consists of seven states, also known as the Seven Sister States. The area is connected to the rest of India through a narrow land-corridor only, sharing large borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar. This year, at least 24 organised militant groups were ac-

tively involved in 158 violent events in the area (see Figure 10). Most of these groups were fighting either for regional autonomy, a separate state, or complete regional independence.

Battles between armed groups accounted for 41% of events, remote violence accounted for 33% of events, violence against civilians for 18%, and damage of property for 8%. Most of the violent events were recorded for the states of Assam and Manipur, while the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA), located in Meghalaya, was the single most active group.

For Assam, the data suggest that ten militant groups were involved in at least 44 violent events, mostly in battles

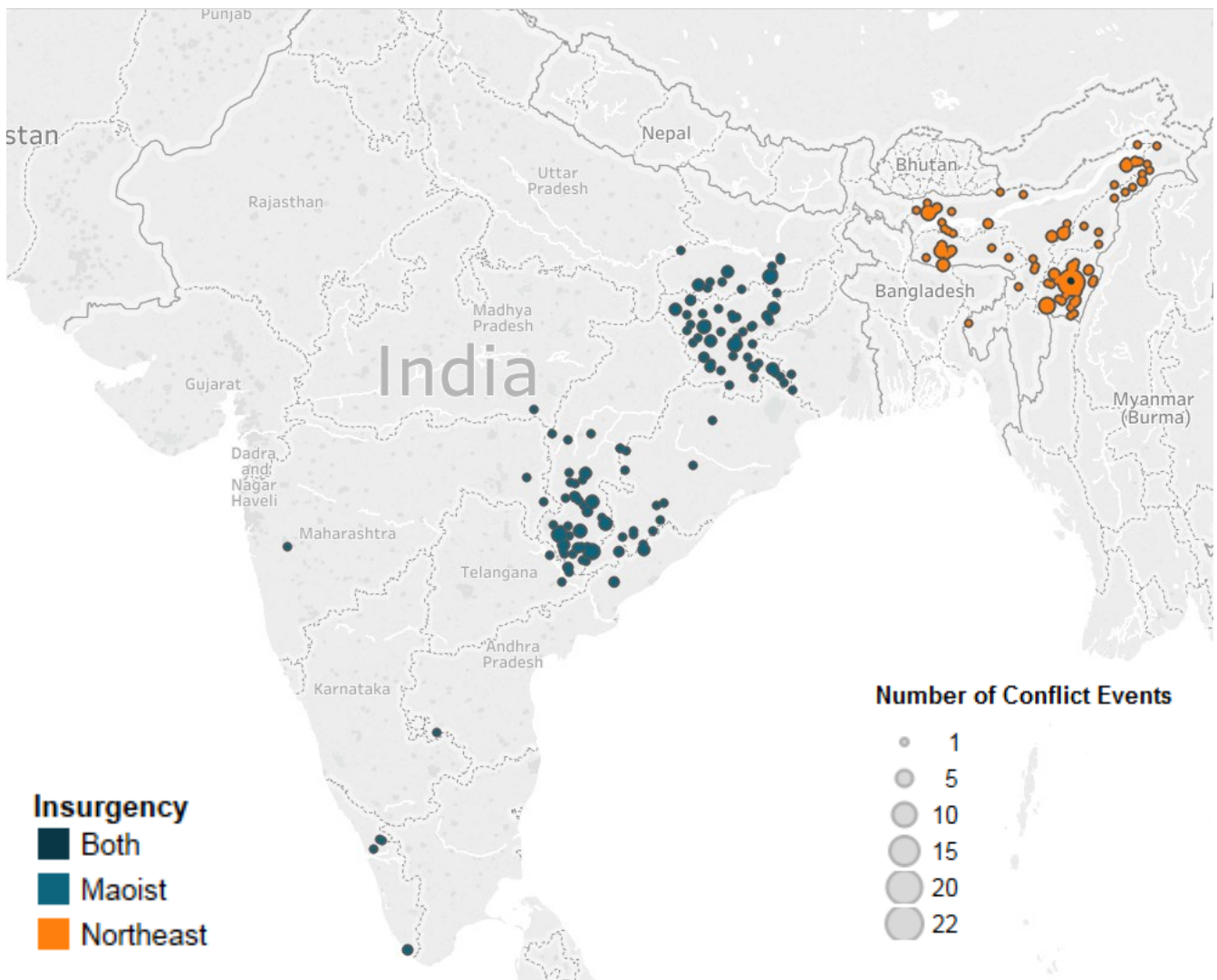


Figure 10: Number of Northeast and Maoist Insurgency Conflict Events by Location in India, 2016.

Insurgency in India

with Indian security forces. The most active groups in the state were the United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit) (NDFB-S). ULFA-I accounted for twelve violent events, mostly remote violence, and NDFB-S for eleven violent events, all of which were battles.

In Manipur, 18 militant groups were involved in 79 violent events, most of which fell under the category of remote violence. The most active group, the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) accounted for at least 8 of those events, five of which were battles, and three of which were violence against civilians.

Maoist Insurgency

The Naxal movement took shape end-1960s in Naxalbari in West Bengal. From there, it advanced into other states. In their fight against the Indian Government, the Naxals follow the Maoist ideology of communism. In 2008, Maoists controlled 223 of 640 Indian districts, an area also known as the ‘red corridor’, which amounted to about 40% of India’s landmass (SATP, 2012). In 2009, the Indian government launched ‘Operation Green Hunt’, a large military operation which led to the number of districts controlled by the Maoists shrinking to 106 districts across

10 states in 2015 (SATP, 2016).

For 2016, 186 violent events involving Maoist groups in 11 states in India were recorded (see Figure 10). A majority of the violence, took place in two states – Chhattisgarh with 37% of the events, Jharkhand with 32%. Within Chhattisgarh, the Bastar division in the south was most violent prone, accounting for 97% of all recorded events in the state.

The majority of events were battles, 52%, mostly with Indian security forces. Violence against civilians also accounted for 20%, reflecting a continuation of the frequent killings of alleged police informers by Maoists. Remote violence accounted for 19%, bomb blasts that targeted primarily Indian security forces. Damage of property, e.g. of mobile towers and railway tracks, accounted for another 9% of events (see Figure 11).

These developments suggest a continuation of the North-east and Maoist insurgencies in India in 2016, albeit at much lower levels compared to the earlier years. One aspect that stood out this year, and that might influence future levels of violence, was the high number of surrenders by Maoists. While it might be too early to say, these surrenders could indicate an at least temporary weaken-

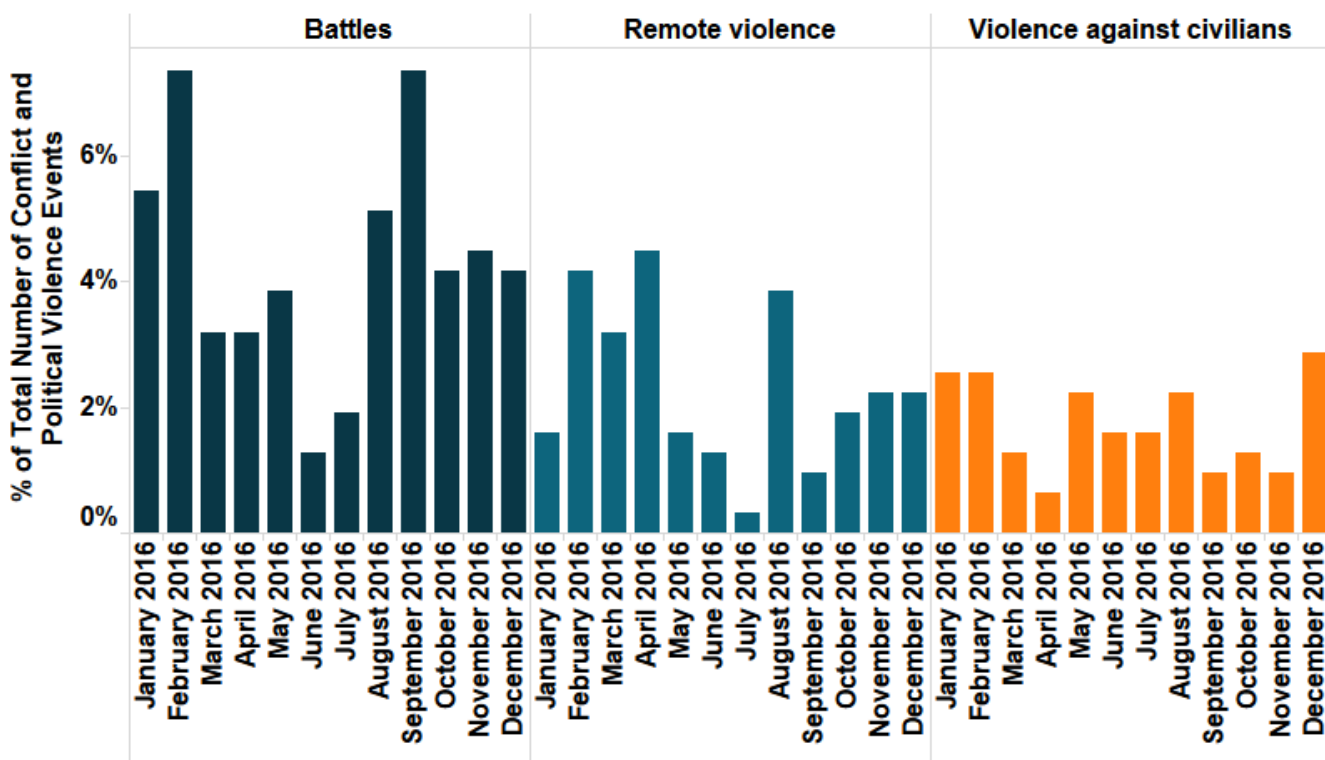


Figure 11: Percentage of Northeast and Maoist Insurgency Conflict Events in India, from January - December 2016.

India-Pakistan Relations: 2016 in Review

The end of 2015 signalled a high note in India-Pakistan relations with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying a historic visit on December 25 to his Pakistani counterpart, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ([BBC News, 1 January 2016](#)). This was the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan in over a decade. However, hopes for peace between the two rival countries have since been shattered by the precipitous deterioration in India-Pakistan relations during 2016. The most dramatic catalyst was a deadly attack in September by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JM) militants on an Indian army base in the Uri region of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian army responded later that month with ‘surgical strikes’ in Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir. With the current tensions along the border and mutual distrust between the governments on either side, an analysis of ACLED data since 2015 can offer both insight and perspective on the current situation.

Jammu and Kashmir in 2016

A main obstacle to peace between the two countries remains their dispute over the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) region. Early 2016 was fairly stable with a relatively low number of events and fatalities. However, the region began to see an upward trend in fatalities and events starting in May and continuing throughout the Summer. This included a significant rise in incidents of riots and

protests in July, including incidents of violence against protesters. This unrest was touched off by the July 8 killing by Indian security forces of a Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militant, Burhan Wani, who was well-known in the region due to his social media presence. Riots and protests following Burhan Wani’s death, along with the police actions in response, became a major driver of violence in the region, with as many as 85 people killed and a large number injured (11,000 people injured according to the Times of India), during riots and protests in July and August 2016 alone ([Times of India, 27 August 2016](#)).

It was within this environment of instability and rising tensions that the Uri attack took place, shifting the main driver of violence in the region towards active military confrontations while also bolstering the existing upward trends in the event count and fatalities. On September 18 a number of heavily-armed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militants staged an assault on the Indian army brigade headquarters at Uri, near the Line of Control (LoC), which resulted in the deaths of at least 17 soldiers and 4 militants. This was reported to be the deadliest attack by militants in Kashmir in over two decades ([BBC News, 18 September 2016](#)), and touched off significant tensions both within the J&K region and internationally between India and Pakistan. Following the incident, the Indian government made it clear it held Pakistan responsible for the attack, with the Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh ac-

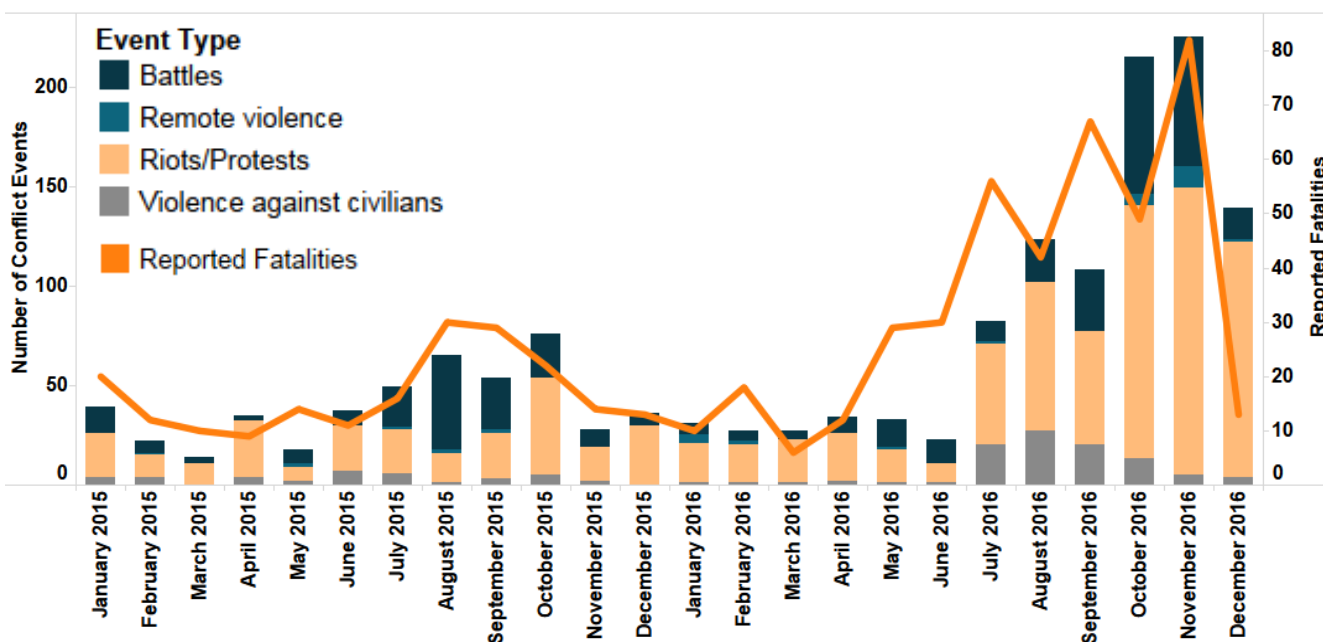


Figure 12: Number of Conflict and Protest Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in J&K, from 2015 - 2016.

India-Pakistan Relations: 2016 in Review

cusing Pakistan of giving “direct support to terrorism and terrorist groups” in reference to the Uri incident ([NDTV, 18 September 2016](#)).

Following the Uri attack, on September 29 India claimed to have executed ‘surgical strikes’ against suspected militant targets within Pakistan-administered Azad J&K, raising concerns about a serious escalation between the two countries. The Indian government claimed the strikes were ground operations that involved 70-80 special forces members ([Indian Express, 1 October 2016](#)), while news sources carried unconfirmed reports that around 30 militants were killed ([BBC News, 30 September 2016](#)). However, the Pakistani government dismissed these claims, contending that Indian forces had instead crossed the LoC in

several areas but had been driven back in most cases resulting in two Pakistani soldiers killed, and that no surgical strikes on militant bases had taken place ([BBC News, 23 October 2016](#)).

Violence Across the Line-of-Control

To gain some perspective on this recent bout of tensions, it is useful to look at the data from 2015 for comparison. In 2015, August was the most eventful month in J&K with 83 events recorded by ACLED, while October was the deadliest month with 30 reported fatalities. By comparison, November 2016 more than doubled both numbers with ACLED recording over 220 events and more than 80 fatalities (see Figure 12). This represents a relatively steep rise in the level of violence in the J&K region, representing

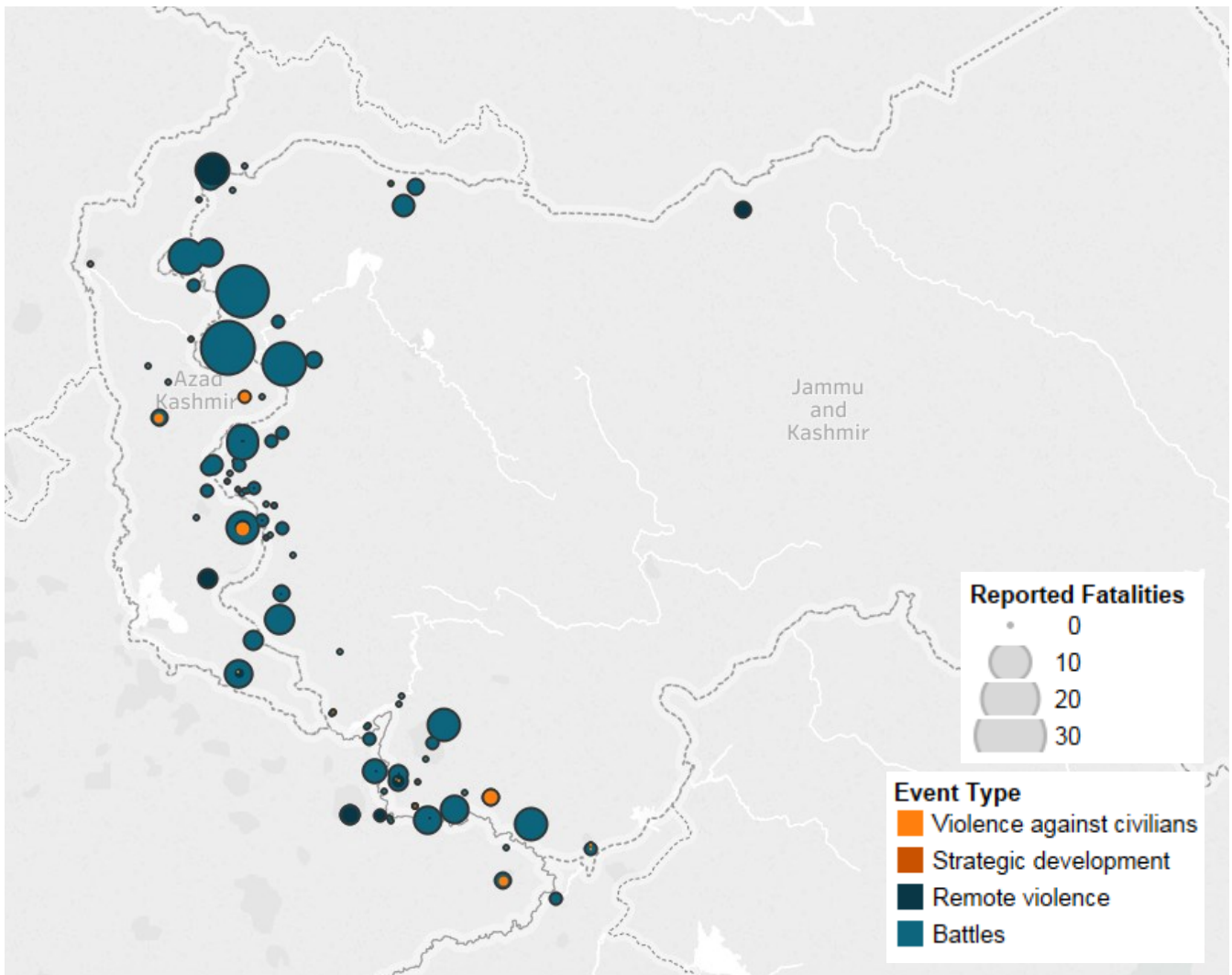


Figure 13: Number of Reported Fatalities by Event Type on the India-Pakistan Border in 2016.

India-Pakistan Relations: 2016 in Review

serious destabilization which historically has strongly correlated with declining India-Pakistan relations ([The National, 20 September 2016](#)).

Deeper analysis of violence along the LoC also shows that a large proportion of the fatalities from battles shown in Figure 13 are the result of either direct military confrontations between Indian and Pakistani forces or what Indian media refer to as ‘infiltration attempts’ across the LoC by allegedly Pakistan-supported militants. Furthermore, contrasts between the two years can be found in the trends around violence focusing on the LoC. For example, October and November 2016 alone saw as much violence across the LoC as 2015 as a whole. In 2015, August represents a peak which then saw rapid de-escalation until October. This can be contrasted with the sudden and sustained level of violence in 2016 following the ‘surgical strikes’ in October and November (see Figure 13).

However, looking to the data ACLED has recorded for December, this violence also appears to have dropped just as suddenly as far fewer incidents of cross-LoC violence have been reported for the month of December. Another relatively high-fatality attack on November 29 which targeted Indian soldiers at Nagrota in Indian-administered J&K and resulted in the deaths of at least 7 soldiers and 3 attackers ([Indian Express, 30 November 2016](#)). Although it is not

immediately clear why violence along the LoC fell off in December as compared to its initial rapid rise, although international pressure to de-escalate the situation is believed to have played an important role ([The Nation, 14 December 2016](#)), including UN efforts requested by Pakistan ([Indian Express, 7 December 2016](#)). This shows the danger presented when volatile regions such as J&K see significant destabilization. In this case, the unrest following Burhan Wani’s killing created the perfect tinderbox which was then set alight by the Uri attack and maintained the continuous addition of fuel in the form of attacks across the LoC carried out by both sides.

Civil Society

The current tensions in J&K and the continuous ceasefire violations across the LoC are matched by an increasing mobilization of the civil society of India and Pakistan, particularly during the summer months of 2016 (see Figures 14 and 15). With the escalation of the situation in J&K in July, ACLED recorded just over 30 anti-India demonstrations all across Pakistan in 2016 by civil society groups and political parties protesting the approach India took in suppressing civil unrest in India-administered J&K (see Figure 14). Protests in October and November also focused on India’s actions along the LoC as well as India’s support for separatist movements in Balochistan. (An important note

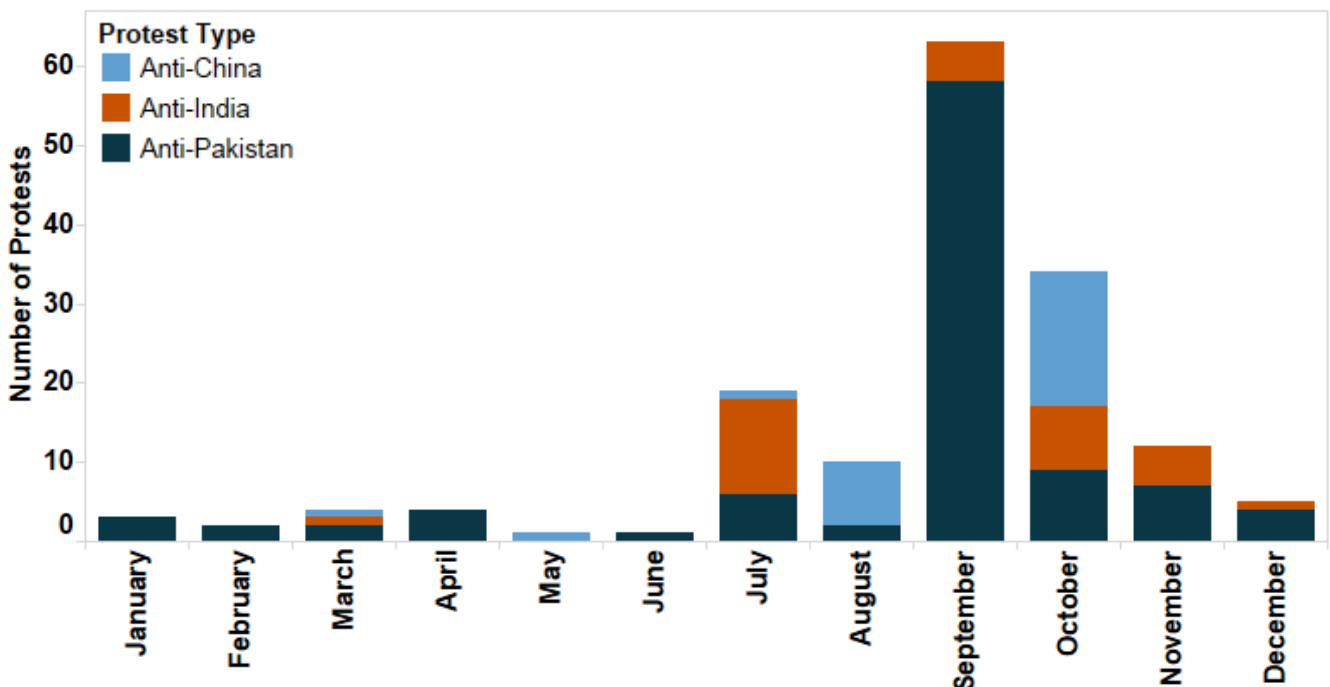


Figure 14: Number of Protests by Type in India and Pakistan, from January - December 2016.

India-Pakistan Relations: 2016 in Review

that as this analysis is focused on India-Pakistan relations, only anti-India protests in Pakistan have been included in Figures 14 and 15 while anti-India protests in Indian-administered J&K have not been included so as not to skew the data.)

In India, ACLED recorded more than 90 anti-Pakistan protests which significantly spiked in the aftermath of the Uri attack (see Figure 14). The Uri attack and Pakistan’s perceived involvement led to an outcry by all major parties across the political spectrum as well as several by Muslim organisations, condemning the Uri attack but also demanding decisive government action against alleged Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Calls for an ‘appropriate response’ to the Uri attack also came from opposition parties and from within Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),

putting further pressure on the government to take a hard stance against Pakistan ([Firepost, 19 September 2016](#)). While the Indian media widely endorsed the so-called ‘surgical strikes’, these actions did not reduce the mounting anti-Pakistan sentiments in India, which found an outlet in October through the burning of effigies representing Pakistan and Pakistani political figures in many parts of India during the Dussehra celebrations, the mythological victory of good over evil in the Hindu religion ([DNA, 11 October 2016](#)). Related to the events in J&K, anti-China protests also flared up across India prior to the Diwali festivities in October, the most important holiday in Hindu religion (see Figure 14).

The highly visible demonstrations of anti-India, anti-Pakistan and anti-China sentiments and nationalist feel-

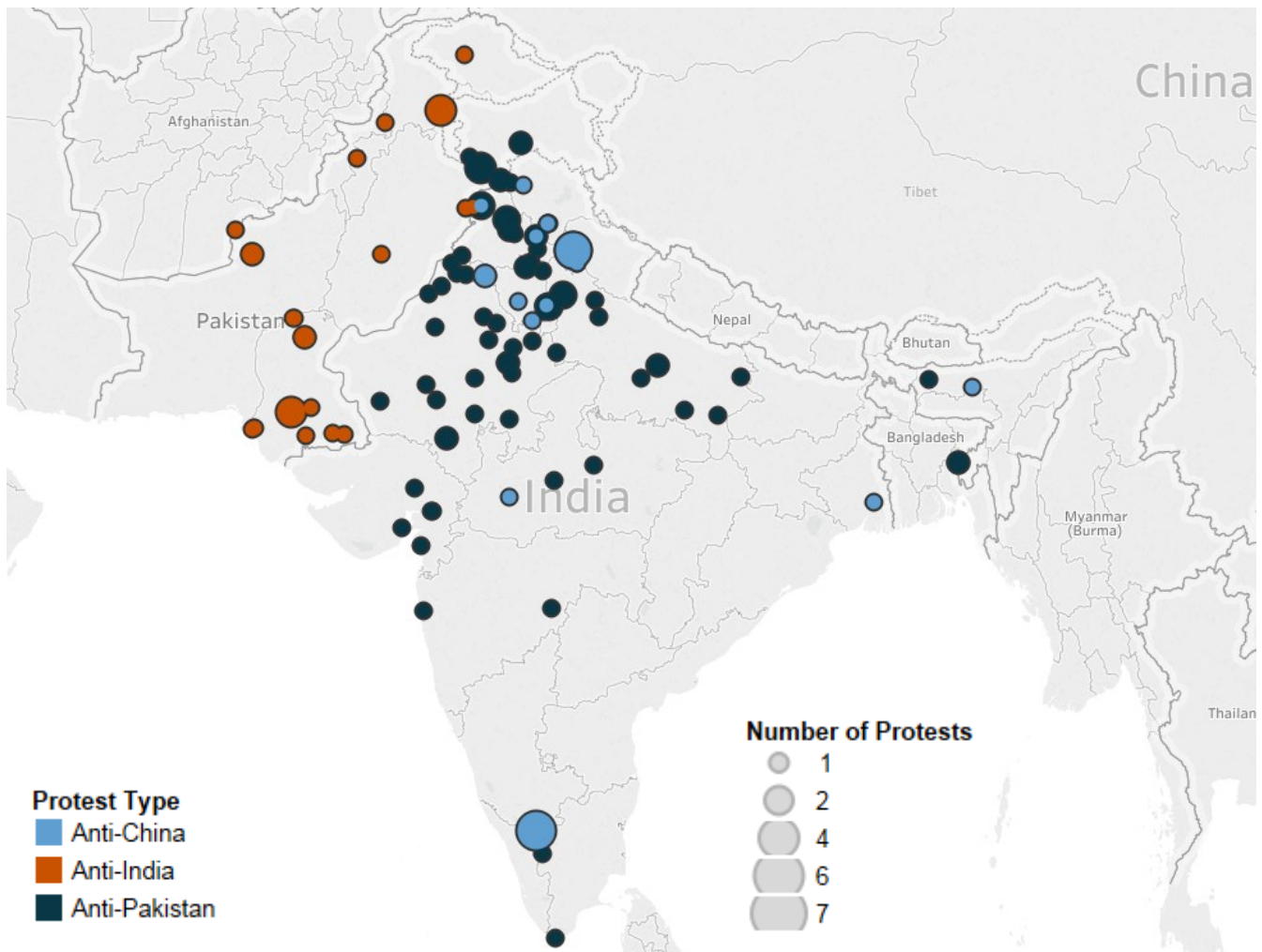


Figure 15: Number of Protests by Protest Type and Location in India and Pakistan, in 2016.



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ings by Indian and Pakistani civil society groups arguably put considerable pressure on the respective governments to take a hard stance. This can be seen as an important factor in the considerable increase in tensions in late 2016 which have complicated the prospects for peace and regional security. Despite the de-escalation that appears to have occurred in December, the underlying anger represented by these protests may be reignited by a future attacks by military forces or militants.

Bilateral Relations

The second half of 2016 also witnessed a collapse in diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan. Both prime ministers used the occasion of their respective Independence Day celebrations in August to publicly stoke tensions between the two countries. In Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif dedicated the day to the “freedom of Kashmir”, while India’s Narendra Modi again denounced alleged Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India ([The Diplomat, 17 August 2016](#)).

The Uri attack in particular marked a rise in diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan. During a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Nawaz Sharif personally spoke out against alleged human rights abuses by Indian forces in Kashmir, a move that was reciprocated when the Indian envoy denounced Pakistan as the host of the “Ivy League of terrorism” ([Hindustan Times, 22 September 2016](#)).

In the aftermath of September’s violence in J&K, Modi fought a political war against Islamabad by publicly backing separatist rebels in the insurgency-prone Pakistani province of Balochistan, questioning a key cross-border river treaty and actively working toward diplomatically isolating Pakistan within the region ([The Guardian, 28 September 2016](#)). This strategy proved to be successful when the 19th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 15 – 16 November 2016, had to be called off after India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan pulled out of the conference stating that the environment

was “not conducive” to holding the summit ([BBC News, 28 September 2016](#)). Pakistan’s isolation was further illustrated in the course of the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia in Amritsar, India on the first December weekend which was attended by 14 partner countries and more than 30 supporting countries and international organisations. The conference was characterized by an Indo-Afghan partnership which heavily focused on terrorism and Pakistan’s alleged role as a safe haven for terrorist activities in the region ([Indian Express, 4 December 2016](#)).

By the end of October, the diplomatic spat between India and Pakistan had further escalated with a tit-for-tat naming of diplomatic staff over accusations of espionage by both sides and plans to temporarily recall their high commissioners and scale down the size of each ones’ diplomatic missions ([Firepost, 4 November 2016](#)). Despite the decline in active military confrontations across the LoC, the diplomatic proxy war between the two governments shows little sign of abating ([IBT, 30 December 2016](#)). This is particularly true in the context of recent Indian nuclear tests which, although broadly seen as conducted with deterring China in mind, will likely further exacerbate India-Pakistan tensions ([CNN, 27 December 2016](#)).

Conclusion

The fluctuations in India-Pakistan relations over the past year demonstrates how an event in an isolated sector of the Kashmir Valley can have significant geopolitical ramifications which affect the entire region. The military, political, and diplomatic fallout of the Uri attack rippled out in waves, eventually affecting high-level conferences and pushing both India and Pakistan’s partners and the international community to get involved over fears of escalation between the two nuclear-armed rivals. Before this, the death of Burhan Wani laid the groundwork for this destabilization of the entire region by first increasing the volatility in J&K. This suggests that generalized destabilization of the J&K region can be seen as a key early-warning indicator for rising tensions between India and Pakistan, and thus should be watched for keenly by those concerned about the stability of the South Asian region.

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Sources

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