



Current Path

Stability

Jakkie Cilliers

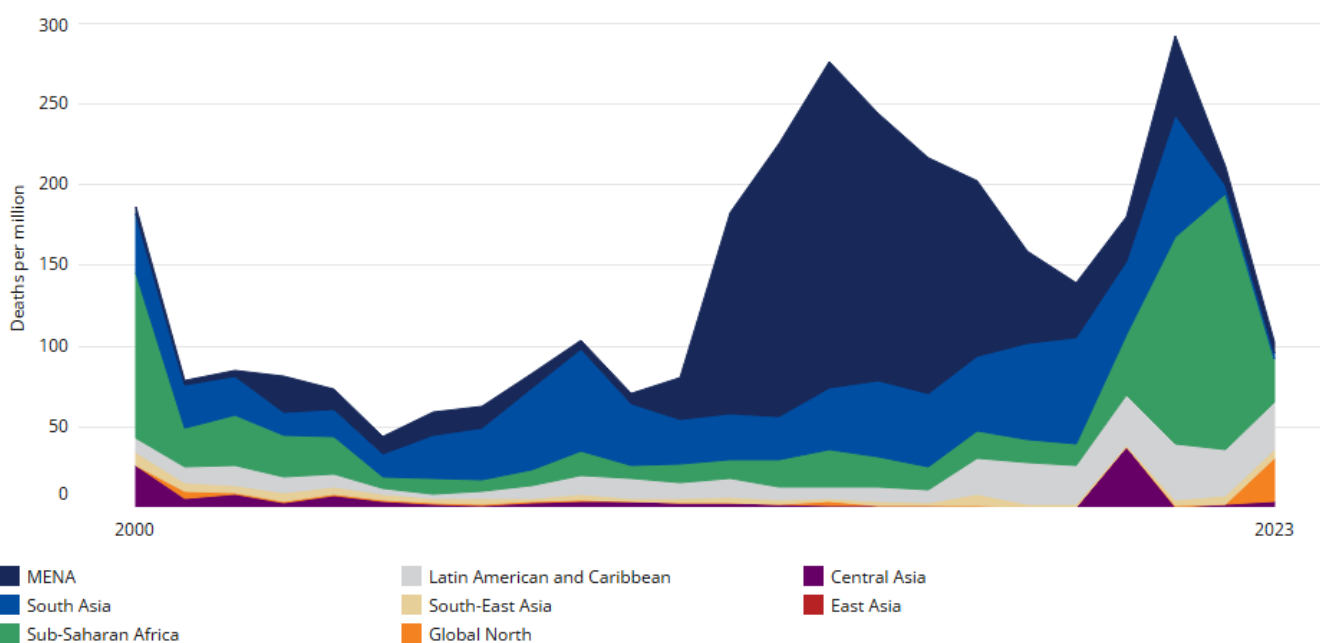
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Stability

A more crowded world will inevitably evidence more fatalities from violence since a larger population almost inevitably translates into more violence in absolute terms. This is particularly true in Sub-Saharan Africa given its rapid population growth, large youth bulge and rapid rates of urbanisation.

Following the peace dividend that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the associated end in global tension, the world has experienced a general increase in the fatality burden since 2005 with a particularly large increase in the Middle East and North Africa from 2011 to 2019 (mostly in Syria and in 2021 Yemen), and in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2019 to 2022. The increase in the latter group is almost entirely due to the civil war in Ethiopia.

Chart 10: Fatalities from armed conflict per million people, 2000-2023



Source: Sundberg, Ralph, and Erik Melander, 2013, "Introducing the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset", Journal of Peace Research, vol.50, no.4, 523-532

The category of armed conflict that is responsible for the most growth in the conflict burden (average across all regions) is overwhelmingly state-based violence^[x], although there is also some growth in the fatality burden from non-state fatalities (Chart 12). Governments are therefore increasingly responsible for (more) fatalities than fighting between non-government groups, which the UCDP refers to as non-state violence. The reasons are not necessarily more deadly actions by governments but could reflect the enhanced ability of the government to enforce stability with more resources.

Since 2013 Sub-Saharan Africa has been the region with the most state-based armed conflicts with wars in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Burkina Faso and Nigeria where governments are fighting terrorism.

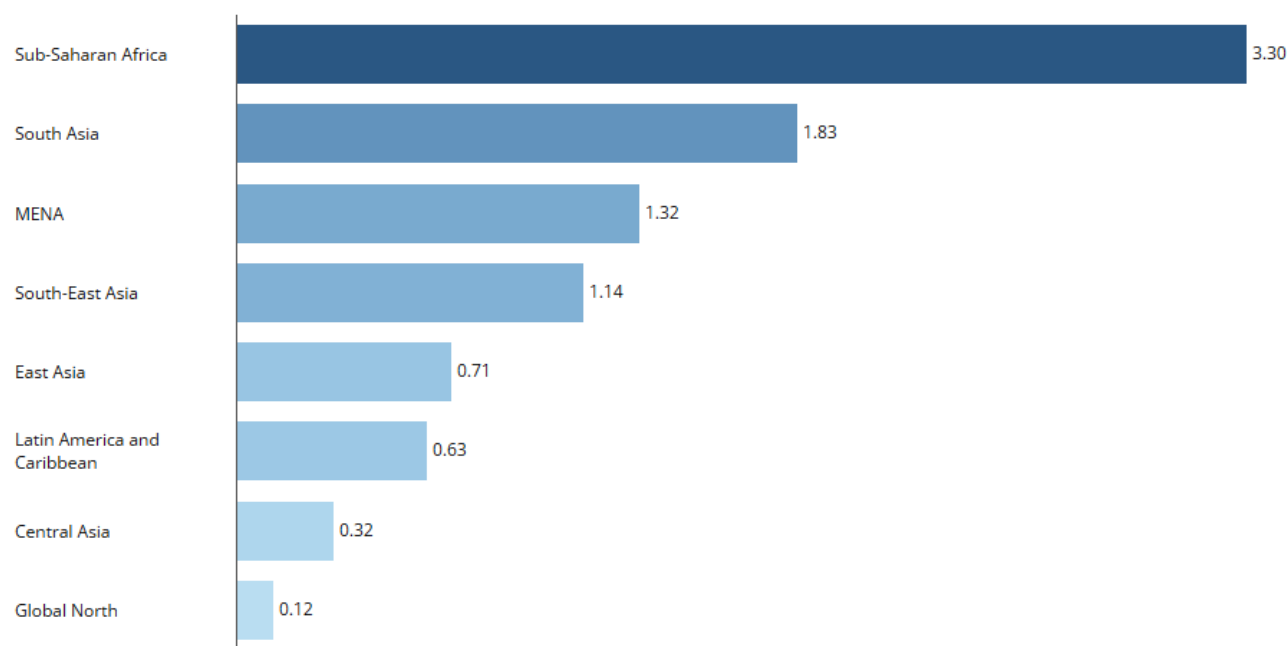
Releasing their annual data update in July 2024, the UCDP team summarised the situation as follows:

Analysis of non-state conflict data spanning the past decade reveals that it comprises the ten most violent years on record. Organized crime groups have predominantly fueled this escalation. Unlike rebel groups, organized crime groups do not have political goals and are primarily motivated by economic gain. Conflicts between these groups tend to intensify around drug smuggling routes and in urban areas, driven by shifts in alliances and leadership dynamics among the actors.^[x]

Rather than seeking to replace a government, the UCDP finds that ‘organised crime groups tend to establish parallel governance structures in areas of limited state presence, often through co-option, intimidation, and bribery of political actors and state institutions to facilitate their illicit activities.’ In Sub-Saharan Africa, the DR Congo, Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya are considered to have the highest rates of criminality, while Sao Tome & Principe, Rwanda, Seychelles and Comoros have the lowest.

If rapid urbanisation is a potential indicator of high levels of organised criminal violence, Chart 11 compares a forecast of the average urbanisation rate for the 25 years from 2025 for each region. It points to the challenges that are likely to be encountered particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and to a lesser extent in South Asia and the MENA region with urbanisation rates in these three regions significantly higher than elsewhere. With its rapidly urbanising and growing population, it seems inevitable that Sub-Saharan Africa will be more violent (i.e. experience an increase in fatality rates per million people) than any other region. Within Sub-Saharan Africa, the countries with the most rapid rates of urbanisation are Uganda, Tanzania, Mali, Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia, DR Congo, Niger, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Chad, Angola, Madagascar, Zambia, Malawi and Mauritania - all with annual rates of urbanisation above 4%.

Chart 11: Average urbanisation rate, 2020-2050



Source: IFs 8.34 initialising from WDI data

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About the authors

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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