ViEWS monthly forecasts, May 2020*

Summary of forecasts

Monday 25th May, 2020

ViEWS
PREDICTING CONFLICT

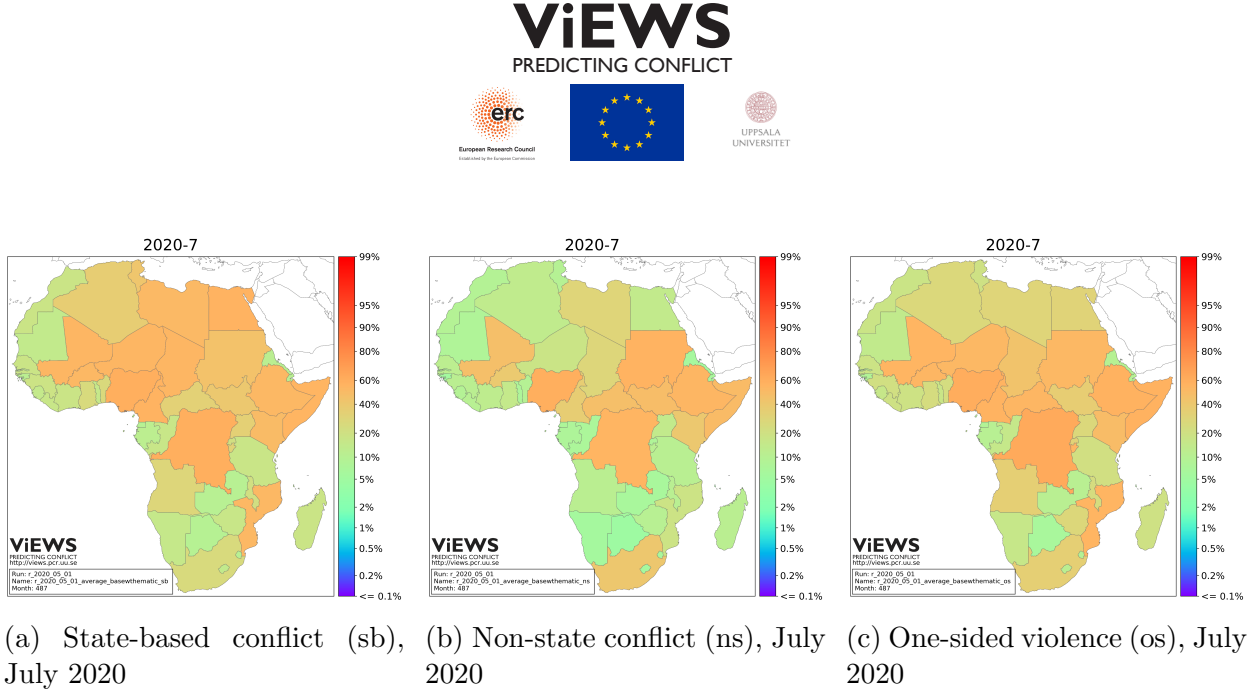| (a) State-based conflict (sb), July 2020 | (b) Non-state conflict (ns), July 2020 | (c) One-sided violence (os), July 2020 |

Figure 1: Ensemble forecasts for July 2020

This report presents ViEWS forecasts at $s = 3$ for July 2020 as of 1 May 2020, which are based on data that are updated up to and including March 2020. The underlying conflict data were produced by the UCDP (`http://ucdp.uu.se`). The ViEWS compilation of these data and data from other sources are available at `https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/vie ws/data/downloads/`.

In the following, we highlight developments in the most recent months. For a discussion of what underlies the forecasts in terms of slowly changing risk factors as well as methodological

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issues, see the ViEWS introductory article.[1] Figure 1 shows our country-level forecasts (*cm*) for July 2020, Figure 5 the corresponding forecasts at detailed geographic locations (PRIO-GRID level, or *pgm*)[2], and Figure 7 shows the most recent observed conflict events. Similar reports for previous months are available at `http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/vie ws/`, along with other information on the ViEWS project.

1 Country-month forecasts for July 2020

The plots in Figure 1 show the ViEWS country-level forecasts for the immediate future – what will happen in July 2020 according to our forecasts? We show the probability of at least one event leading to one or more fatalities in each country in July 2020, based on data up to and including March 2020. Countries with a red color have been assigned with a forecast probability close to 1, whereas purple countries have been assigned with a probability of less than 0.01. When the forecasts indicate that no event is as likely as at least one event, countries are drawn with a light orange color.
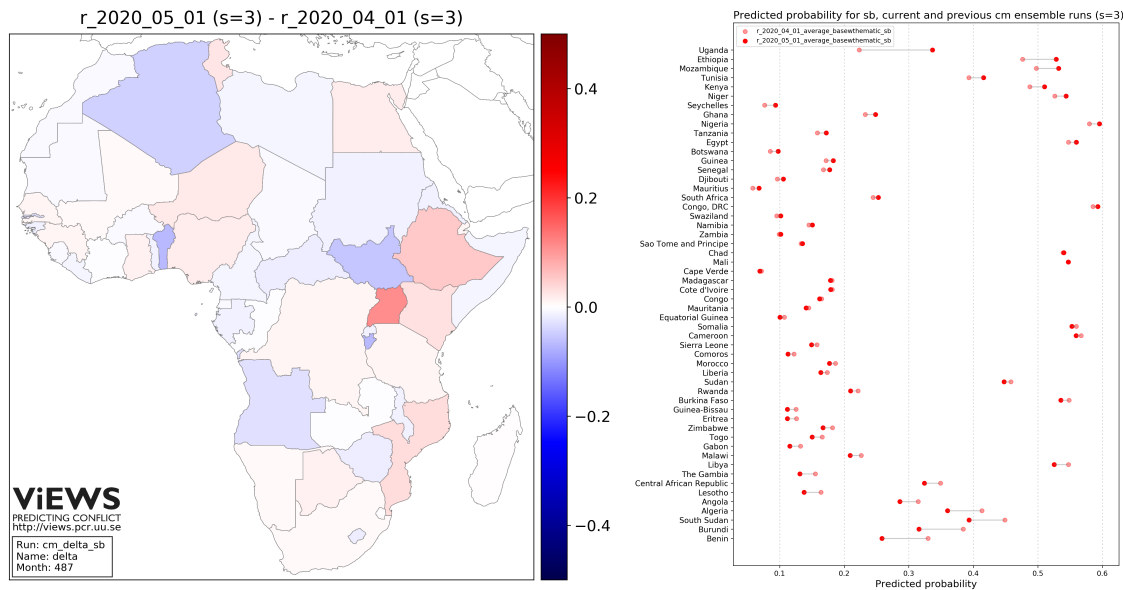

Figure 2: Change in predicted state-based conflict (sb) at $s = 3$

Our forecasts for July 2020 are mostly similar to last month's forecasts. The May 2020 run is using the same set of models as last month, thus only changes to input variables will have affected the forecasts. In the following, we focus on the input of recent violence.

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[1] `https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343319823860`.

[2] PRIO-GRID is a grid structure that divides the terrestrial world into squares of approximately 55 by 55 kilometers. See `http://grid.prio.org/`
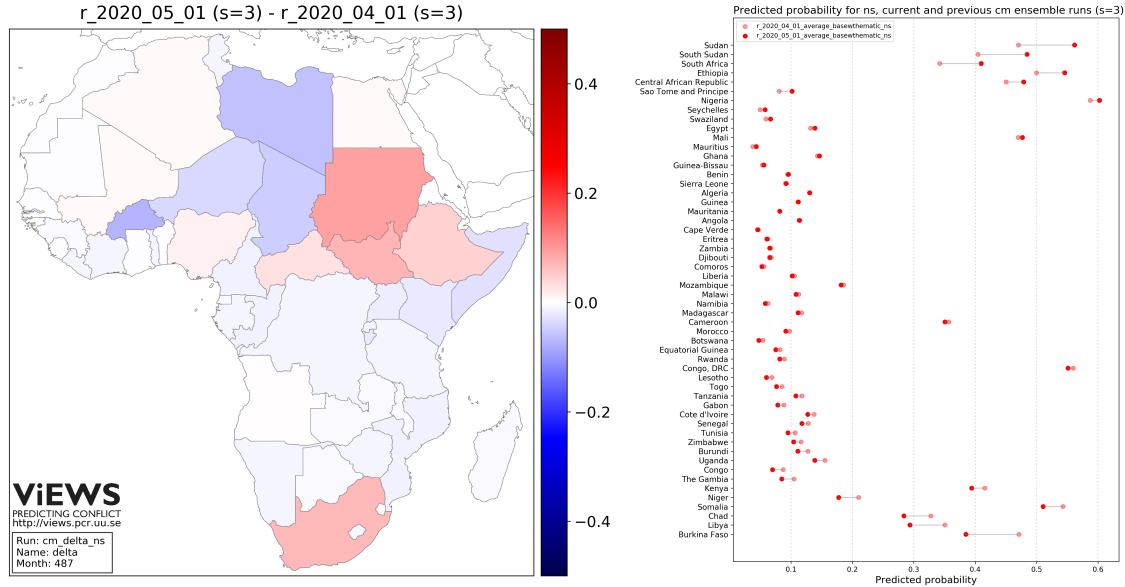
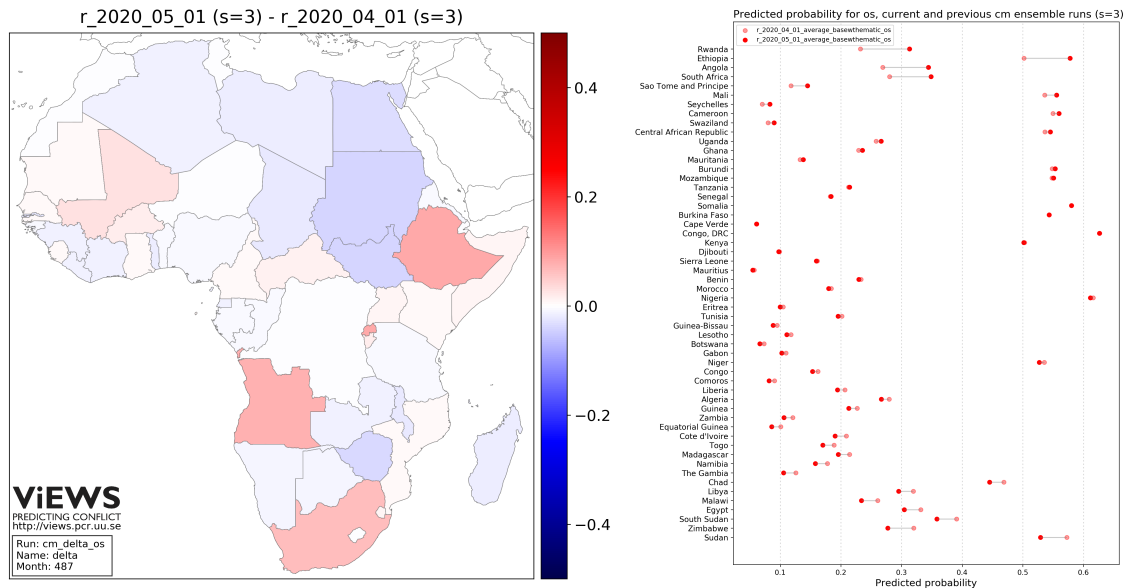Figure 3: Change in predicted non-state conflict (ns) at $s = 3$

Figure 4: Change in predicted one-sided violence (os) at $s = 3$

1.1 State-based conflict (sb)

We continue to forecast a high probability of state-based conflict in countries that have a recent history of conflict or protest events. In Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia, the risk of at least one state-based conflict event is high and over 50%, as illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 2 shows that compared to last month's forecast at $s = 3$, a number of countries have seen a particular elevation of the risk of state-based violence. For Uganda, the risk at

$s = 3$ has increased by over 10 percentage points since last month's forecasts. The increase postdates an attack on an army post close to the north-western border to the Democratic Republic of Congo, which killed over 30 people in early March.

The second-largest risk increase concerns Ethiopia, which over the past few months has suffered state-based violence in the regional states of Oromia and Amhara. Two dozen unarmed civilians – most of them suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) – have been shot and killed by Ethiopian army soldiers during the first quarter of the year in Oromia. In Amhara state, another four were killed in March due to a grendate detonation at a police roadblock.

The third-largest increase is found in Mozambique, as jihadist insurgents continue to operate in the Cabo Delgado province.

Some notable decreases also ought to be highlighted. Benin, Burundi, South Sudan and Algeria all demonstrate a decreased risk of 5 or more percentage points since last month's forecasts, as the former three lack any recorded fatalities from state-based violence in the UCDP candidate event data set for March, and the latter had only one reported death. The predicted probabilities of state-based violence at $s = 3$ consequently range from approximately 25% (Benin) to just shy of 40% (South Sudan).

1.2   Non-state conflict (ns)

For non-state violence, the country-level risks continue to be less pronounced across the African continent compared to the risks of state-based and one-sided violence. The change trends displayed in Figure 3 however look quite different from the other two categories of violence.

For non-state conflict, South Sudan is attributed with the second-largest risk increase – nearly 10 percentage points – causing the predicted risk to surpass 50%. The country suffered a number of conflict events in March 2020 that took the lives of 140 people due to intra- and intercommunal clashes in Lakes, Unity, Warap and East Equatoria state. The greatest increase is however found in Sudan, where the predicted risk of non-state conflict now exceeds 55%. As in South Sudan, the heightened risk is predominantly attributed to intercommunal violence in March 2020, but is further underpinned by the January clashes between the ethnic Dinka and nomadic Misseriya herders in the disputed Abyei region and tribal clashes in the Red Sea state that same month.

Also South Africa, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic (CAR) are subject to a pronounced increase in the conflict forecasts for July 2020. In South Africa, two fatal incidents of gang violence were reported in the North-West province in February and March 2020. In Ethiopia, several incidents of ethnic violence were observed in the northern and

central states over February and March 2020 (the most fatal in March). In CAR, ultimately, violent clashes between armed groups and milia factions continue to contribute to the risk profile, causing the death of more than 40 people in March 2020.

Nigeria remains at highest risk of non-state violence, now 60%, followed by Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC and Somalia, albeit the risk in Somalia has decreased by several percentage points since last month. Other notable decreases concern Chad and Libya (now at less than 30% risk at $s = 3$), and most prominently Burkina Faso. The latter displays a risk decline of nearly early 10 percentage points since last month's forecasts, resulting in a conflict risk of 40% at $s = 3$.

1.3   One-sided violence (os)

With a few exceptions, the risk distribution for one-sided violence in July 2020 is relatively similar to last month's forecasts. DRC and Nigeria remain at over 60% risk at $s = 3$, followed by Somalia (no change) and Ethiopia. The latter displays an increased risk by nearly 10 percentage points compared to last month's forecasts. The uptick is likely due to a state police attack against ethnic Oromo people in the Afar region mid-March, which allegedly left ten dead and gave rise to violent clashes between the Oromo and Afar communities. Anti-government protests also left 6 dead in the SNNP state in February.

Compared to last month's forecasts, the risks of one-sided violence at $s = 3$ increased most for Rwanda (now surpassing 30%), where two civilians were shot dead late March for violating lockdown orders imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19. Another similar incident leading to the death of one person was reported in a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, on 29 March. The South African forecasts were furthermore influenced by a shooting in Khayelitsha township, Cape Town, that killed six people earlier the same month.

Finally, the most notable risk reductions for one-sided violence (in order of significance) are found in Sudan, Zimbabwe and South Sudan.

2   PRIO-GRID-month forecasts for July 2020

Figure 5 presents forecasts at fine-grained sub-national geographical locations for July 2020, for each of the three outcomes. The color mapping is the same as for the country-month forecasts.
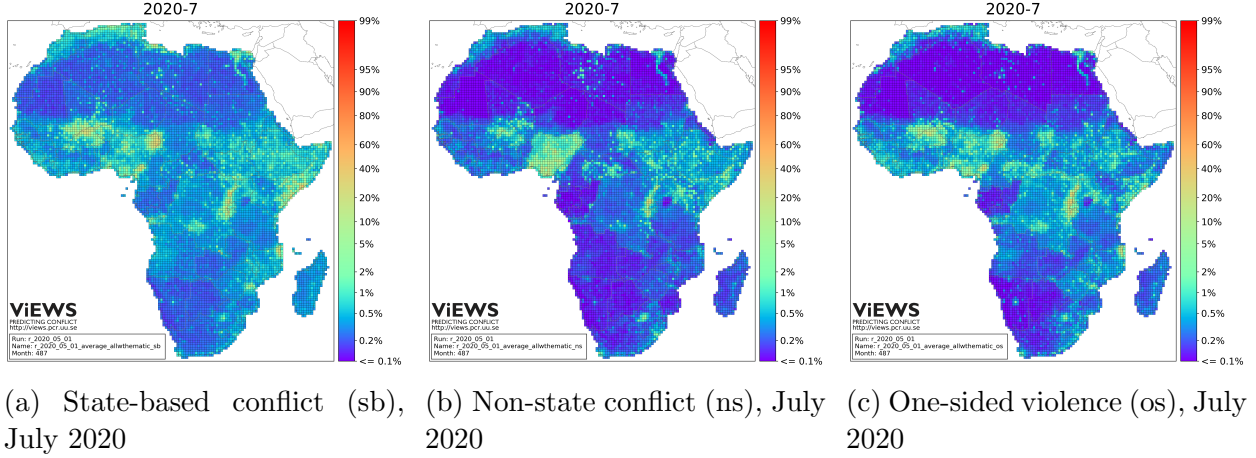
(a) State-based conflict (sb), July 2020

(b) Non-state conflict (ns), July 2020

(c) One-sided violence (os), July 2020

Figure 5: Ensemble forecasts for July 2020

(a) State-based conflict (sb)

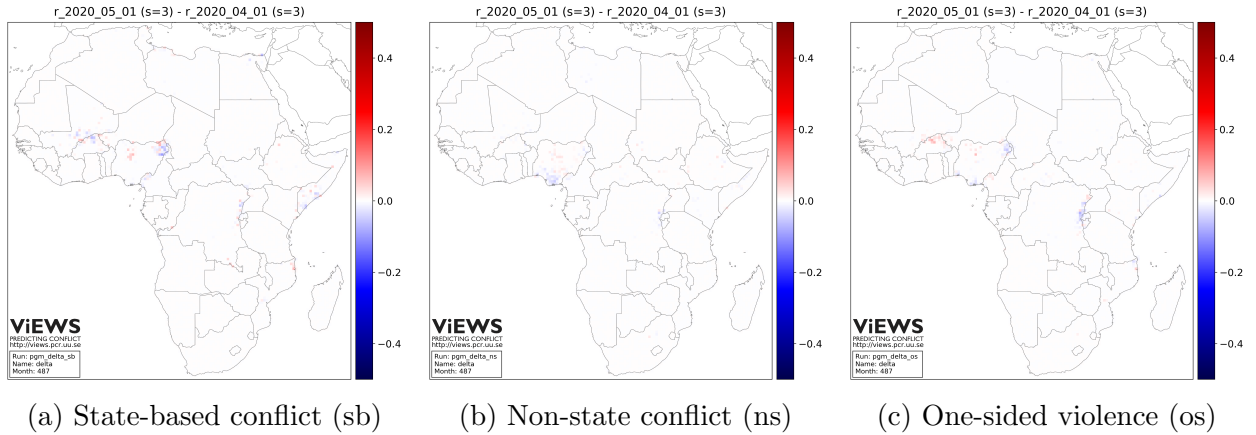(b) Non-state conflict (ns)

(c) One-sided violence (os)

Figure 6: Change in *pgm* predictions at $s = 3$ compared to last month

2.1 State-based conflict (sb)

The densest risk clusters at *pgm* level for state-based conflict at $s = 3$ continue to be found in north-eastern Nigeria, the Anglophone region of Cameroon, the Ituri and Kivu provinces of DRC, southern Somalia, the Niger delta and Sinai in Egypt, around Tripoli in Libya, the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, and in the border areas between central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, and south-western Niger.

Compared to our April forecasts at $s = 3$ (see figure 6a), the most pronounced changes in the risk assessment at the PRIO-GRID level also mostly align with the high-risk clusters. We continue to see both local increases and decreases across Central Mali and northern Burkina Faso, illustrating the local dynamics of the conflicts (Figure 6a).

Only increases are expected in western Niger, where the conflict between the government and IS on the one hand, and the government and Boko Haram on the other, continue to shed lives. Of particular note is also an attack on a military post in the Diffa region mid-

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March, after which the Nigerien government claimed to have killed 50 Boko Haram members (although the attack was later claimed by ISWAP). Its affect on the country's risk profile is illustrated by the bright red grid cells on the south-eastern border to Nigeria.

While north-eastern Nigeria continues to be plagued by both IS and Boko Haram, we see a geographic differentiation in the risk assessment for July 2020. We also see that the UCDP candidate data set has picked up new conflict events in eastern Niger state, where an ambush killed nearly 30 security officials on March 22nd. In Katsina state, in turn, the indicated conflict events concerned the killing of 24 bandits by troops attached to Operation Hadarin Daji a few days earlier. Part of the same operation, two bandits were also neutralised in Zamfara state on March 18th.

Compared to our forecasts of last month, we find grid cells with both increased and decreased risks this month also in the Anglophone region of Cameroon, and the Ituri and Kivu provinces of DRC, and in Somalia's southern-most regions (with decreasing trends notable in and around Kismayo and Mogadishu). The grid cells of increased risk in southern DRC come as a result of clashes between Kata Katanga militiamen and the army in three different towns on March 28th (see Figure 6a and 7a).

2.2 Non-state conflict (ns) and one-sided violence (os)

The forecasts for non-state conflict and one-sided violence depend on the same factors although with somewhat different implications. Nigeria remains a hotbed for non-state conflict, the highest risks of which continue to be found in the southern and central regions, underpinned by continued inter-communal violence of various forms, coupled with criminality and cultist violence. Other dense risk clusters include the Ituri and Kivu provinces of DRC. The Horn of Africa remains a larger general risk cluster, whereas Libya offers an interesting geographic distribution with higher risks predicted in individual and often separated PRIO-GRID cells.

Compared to our forecasts at $s = 3$ last month, there are thus few notable changes in the risk assessment for non-state violence. Most prominent is a general decrease across southern Nigeria given the time lapsed since the last UCDP-coded conflict events there, albeit the risk levels remain relatively high (see Figure 6b and 7b).
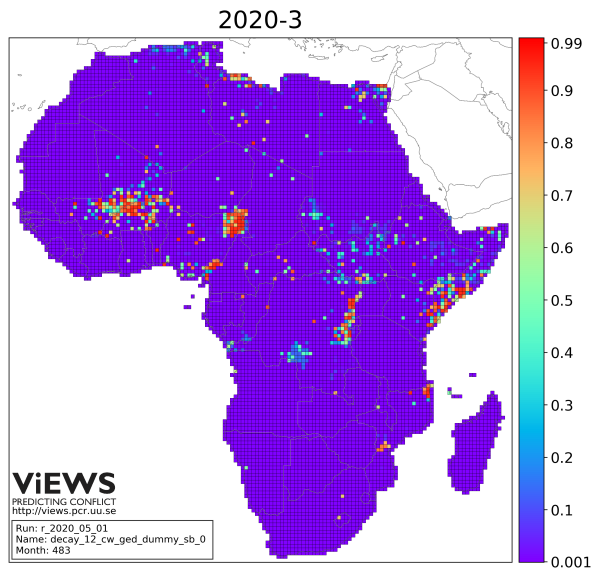
For one-sided violence, Mali and Burkina Faso, north-eastern Nigeria, the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, and the Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo continue to feature the strongest risk clusters. Compared to last month's forecasts at $s = 3$, most visible is an increase in Burkina Faso's Nord region, in which over 40 people were killed by a vigilante self-defence militia in targeted attacks against three Fulani villages in early March. A number of extrajudicial killings were also reported in the Sahel region in March,

coupled with the killing of 19 Fulani civilians in the Soum province on 2 March by suspected Koglweogo.
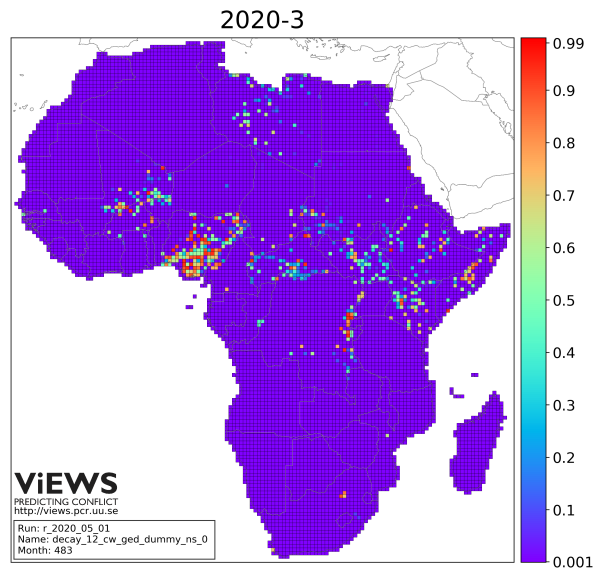
3   History of UCDP organized violence

Figure 7 presents the the recent history of violence in each PRIO-GRID cell. Red cells experienced violence in March 2020, and purple ones have not seen armed conflict in many years.
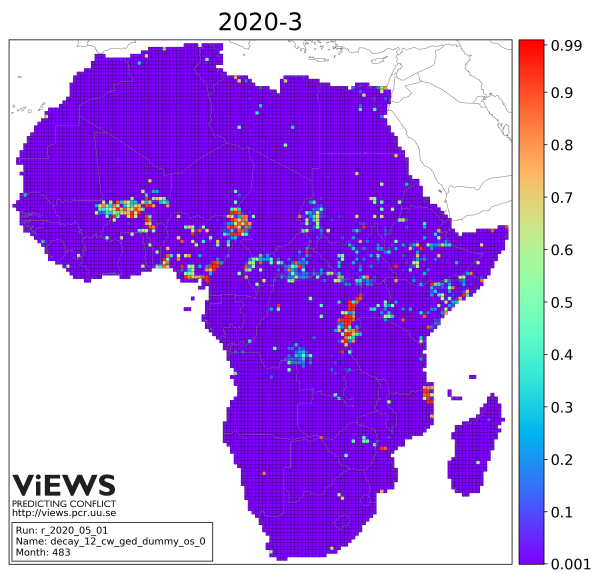
Figures 7a, 7b, 7c show state-based, non-state, and one-sided violence respectively from the UCDP. Figure 7d shows data on protests from ACLED (`https://www.acleddata.com`).
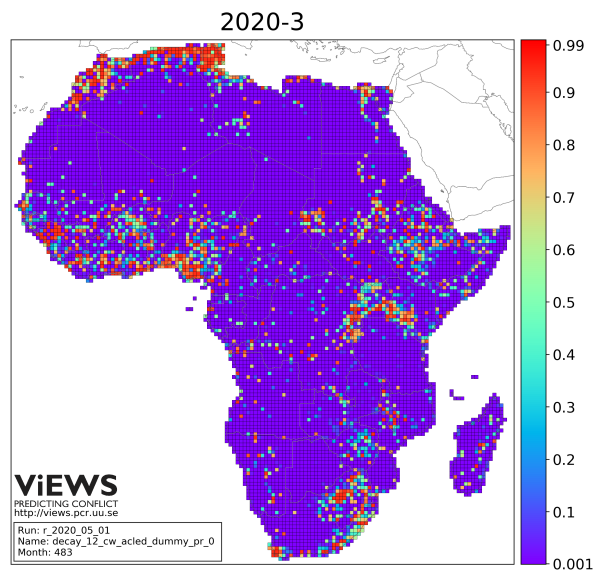
(a) State-based conflict (sb), March 2020

(b) Non-state conflict (ns), March 2020

(c) One-sided violence (os), March 2020

(d) Protests (pr), March 2020

Figure 7: Decay function maps of observed conflict for March 2020