

COVID-19 Lockdowns and Political Violence

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1. Framing: Lockdowns, Non-State armed Group Activity and State Violence Against Civilians

This study explores the relationship between COVID-19 lockdowns, conflict and political violence. It tests two assumptions that have been prolific in academia and policy throughout the crisis:

1. Lockdowns provide an enabling environment for non-state armed groups (NSAGs) to expand activity for example, due to drawdown of state security services to police lockdowns.
2. Lockdowns are characterised by a rise in state violence against civilians (SVAC), for example due to excessive enforcement during lockdown policing.

This yields two hypotheses to test:

H1. The stringency of lockdowns is related to violence involving non-state armed groups.

H2. The stringency of lockdowns is related to state violence against civilians.

2. Methodology: Data Sources and variables

Independent variable: Lockdown Stringency

Lockdown Stringency was measured with the Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) 'Stringency Index', which combines the indicators in the table below to produce an overall daily lockdown stringency score for each country.

ID	Description
C1	School closing
C2	Workplace closing
C3	Cancel public events
C4	Restrictions on gathering size
C5	Close public transport
C6	Stay at home requirements
C7	Restrictions on internal movement
C8	Restrictions on international travel
H1	Public information campaign

3. Methodology: Data Sources and variables

Dependent variables: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)

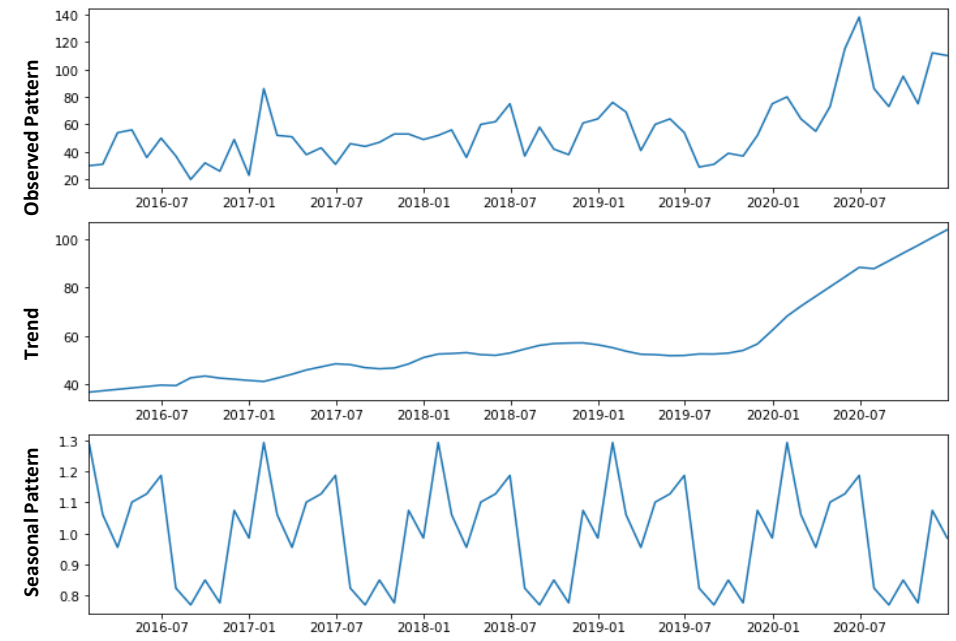
ACLED produces time-series political violence event data with near-global coverage. Each data point is a specific political violence event (e.g. protests, battles, remote violence).

This study used ACLED data by:

- Taking event counts – weekly for 1 year analysis and monthly for 5 years.
- Deseasonalising data – removing seasonal conflict patterns to reveal significant changes in violence (see below)

For H1: Several of ACLED's actor definitions to create a category of NSAGs. All events involving NSAGs were counted

For H2: ACLED's 'State Forces' actor definition was used, and only events categorised as 'violence against civilians' were counted



4. Methodology: Country Selection

It was beyond the scope of this study to conduct a global assessment. This study selected a sample of countries from across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, with different levels of fragility and economic income, and with good OxCGRT and ACLED data availability.

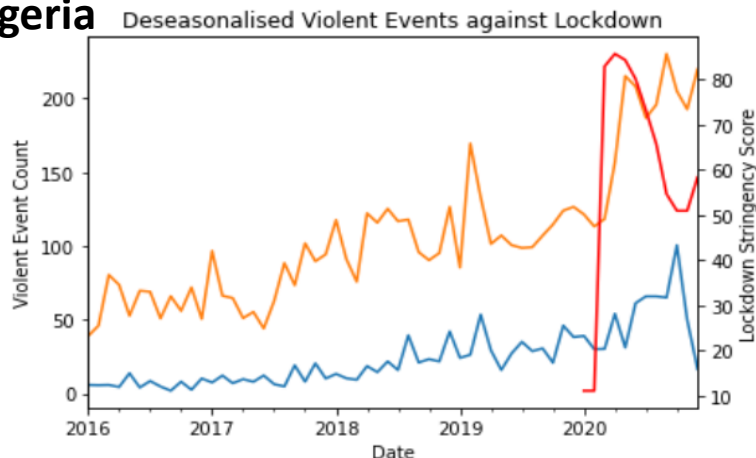
Country	Region	OECD Fragility	Economy (WB classification)
Afghanistan	Central Asia	Highly Fragile	Low Income
DRC	Central Africa	Highly Fragile	Low Income
Ethiopia	East Africa & Horn	Fragile	Low Income
India	South Asia	N/A	Lower-Middle Income
Indonesia	South East Asia	N/A	Upper Middle Income
Iraq	Middle East & North Africa	Highly Fragile	Upper Middle Income
Mozambique	Southern Africa	Fragile	Low Income
Myanmar	South East Asia	Fragile	Lower-Middle Income
Nigeria	West Africa	Fragile	Lower-Middle Income
Philippines	South East Asia	N/A	Lower-Middle Income
Somalia	East Africa & Horn	Highly Fragile	Low Income
Syria	Middle East & North Africa	Highly Fragile	Low Income
Yemen	Middle East & North Africa	Highly Fragile	Low Income

5. Findings: Exploratory analysis with visualisation

This study began with data visualisation to identify observable patterns. It identified three broad types:

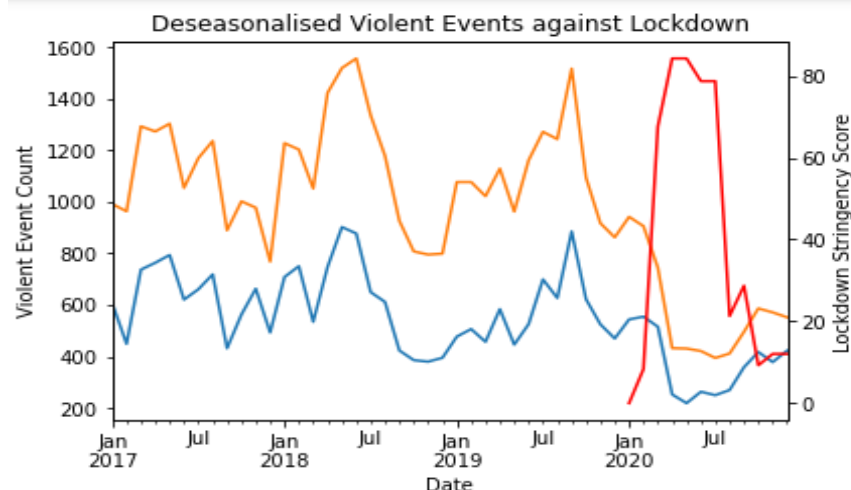
1. Positive Relationship: Where increased lockdown stringency appeared related to increases in violence

Nigeria



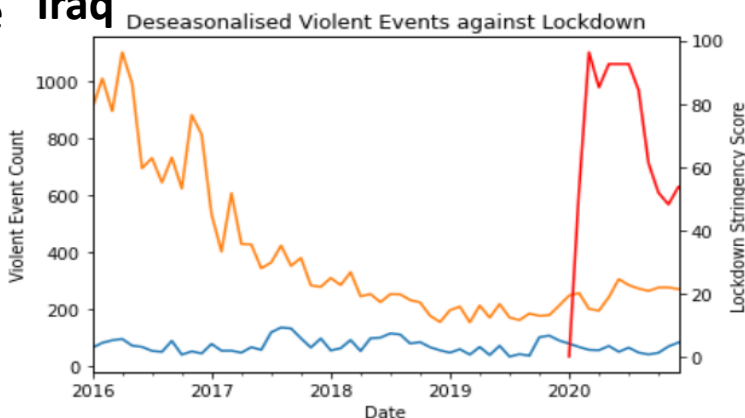
2. Inverse Relationship: Where increased lockdown stringency appeared related to decreases in violence.

Afghanistan



3. Little to no relationship: Where increased lockdown stringency did not appear to be related to changes in violence

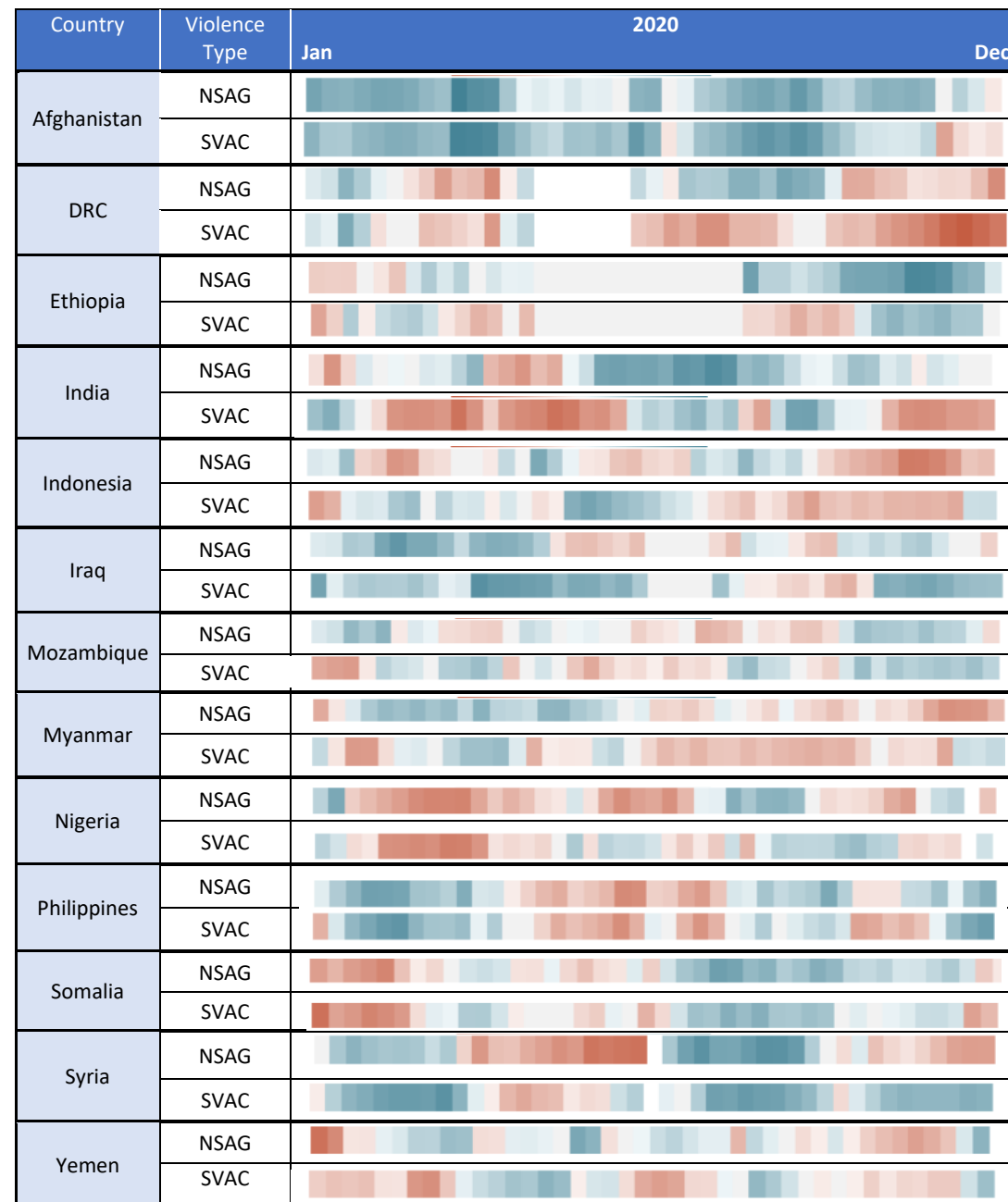
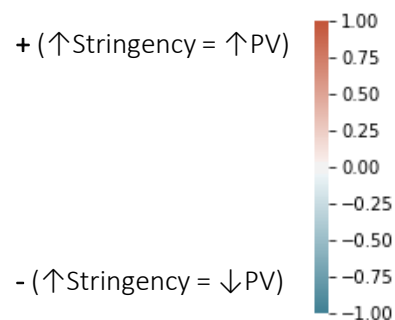
Iraq



6. Findings: Rolling correlation

This study deployed a rolling correlation to test how far political violence types were related to lockdown stringency. It used a moving window of 10 weeks over 2020. The results corroborated those of the data visualisation and added detail:

- There were both positive and negative relationships and, in some cases, weak relationships.
- Many contexts fell into 'types' – where either positive or negative relationships were most common
- In some cases, relationships can shift from negative to positive suddenly (Syria).



7. Findings: Granger Causality

This study used a Granger Causality test to determine how far there were *lagged* relationships between changes in lockdown stringency and political violence.

- Statistically significant relationships tended to fall between 1-3 weeks lag or 7-10 weeks lag, with none falling within 4-6 weeks. This suggests later lagged relationships *could* be spurious and may be the result of later changes in lockdown measures (or exogenous variables).
- The most common lag was 1 week, suggesting that changes in political violence can come relatively quickly following changes in lockdowns.

Country	Lockdown – NSAG activity	Lockdown – SVAC
Afghanistan	1, 8, 9 ,10	1, 8, 9
DRC	None	1, 2
Ethiopia	None	None
India	None	None
Indonesia	None	None
Iraq	None	1
Mozambique	None	None
Myanmar	1	None
Nigeria	1	1
Philippines	1	8, 9, 10
Somalia	None	None
Syria	None	1, 2, 3
Yemen	None	7, 8, 9, 10

7. Conclusions and lessons for Policy

This study has two clear findings: (i) that relationships between lockdown stringency and political violence exist and (ii) they are not the same everywhere. We can however draw broad conclusions:

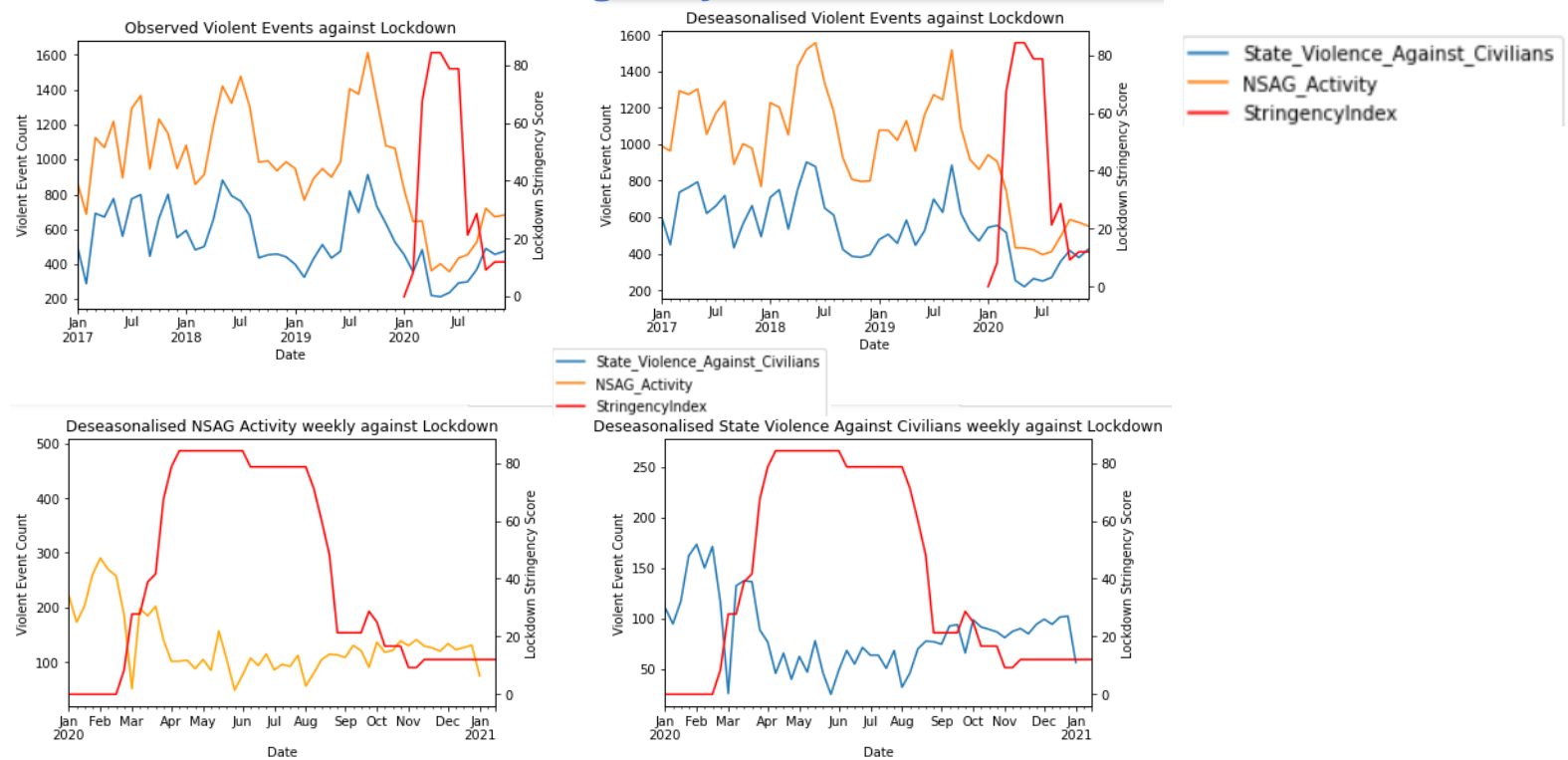
1. **Two of the most violent and fragmented contexts saw political violence reduce with heightened lockdown stringency** including Afghanistan for both violence types and Syria for SVAC. This suggests that in some conflict-affected contexts, lockdowns can provide for breaks in violence which can allow for aid provision and even mediation and reconciliation.
2. **Some fragile contexts with significant insurgencies/VEO activity saw a strong relationship between increased NSAG activity and increased lockdown stringency.** This was most clear in Nigeria and Syria. This study confirms that these contexts of significant insurgencies/VEO activity can be at high risk of increased NSAG violence during lockdown.
3. **Across several fragile contexts, there were higher levels of state violence against civilians during lockdowns than in the last five years,** including Somalia, Mozambique and DRC. contexts saw a positive relationship between lockdown stringency and SVAC at some point in 2020. While there was often a sustained increase throughout lockdown, there were many spikes as lockdown stringency *changed, particularly when it loosened*. This often coincided with large protests. This suggests that fragile contexts are at high risk of escalating protests and a violent state response as they come out of lockdown.
4. **Political violence sometimes lagged lockdowns, but not by much.** Given the judgement that lags of 7 weeks plus are likely spurious, it seems that changes in levels of violence will tend to follow lockdown within one week for NSAG activity and three for SVAC. This demonstrates that violence mitigation strategies must be ready *before* lockdown is implemented.
5. **The relationship between lockdowns and political violence can change over time.** In Syria, the lockdown stringency - NSAG activity relationship shifted from positive to negative suddenly. This demonstrates that prior experience does not provide certainty of the future, and we must maintain a live picture of the context as it develops to keep our analysis up to date and relevant.

COVID-19 Lockdowns and Political Violence

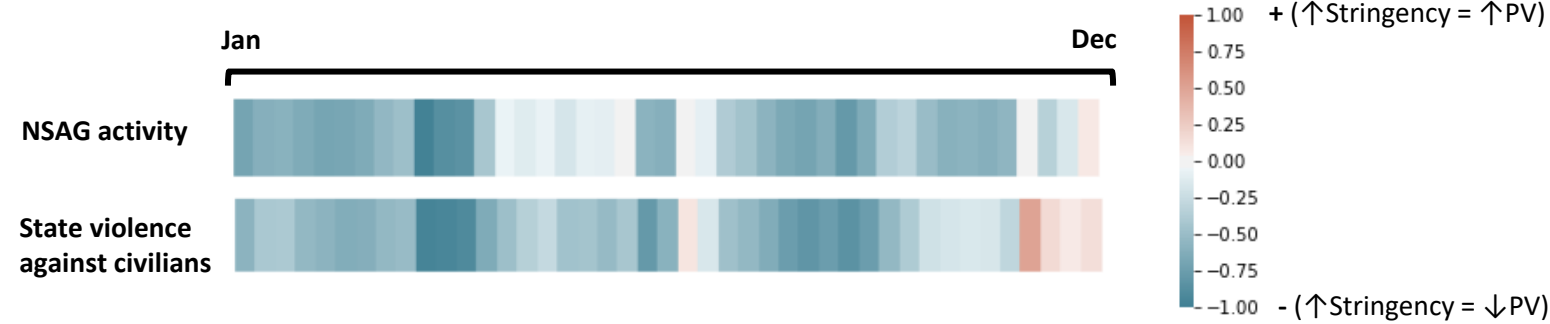
Annex: Country Results

Country Results - Afghanistan

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV Correlation



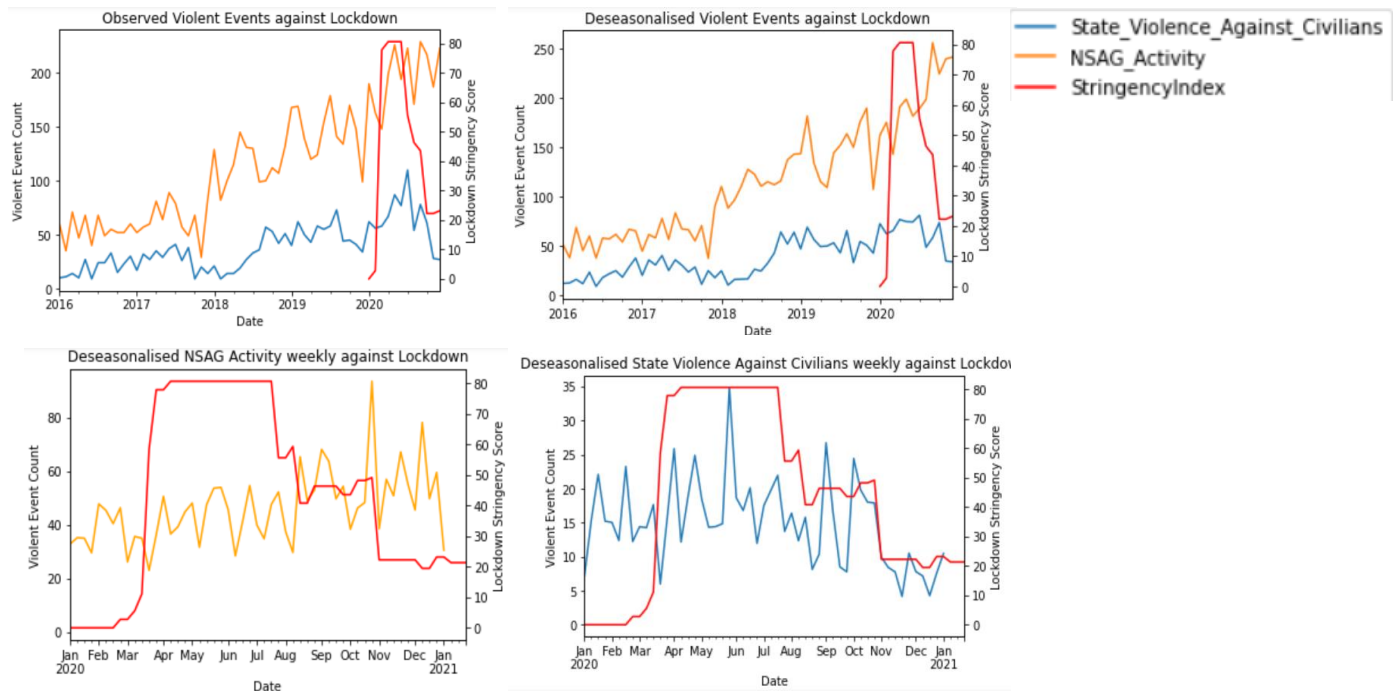
Granger Test: Lockdown – PV lagged change significance

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	Significance	Strong significance
2	No significance	Significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	Significance
8	Strong Significance	Strong significance
9	Strong Significance	Strong significance
10	Strong Significance	No significance

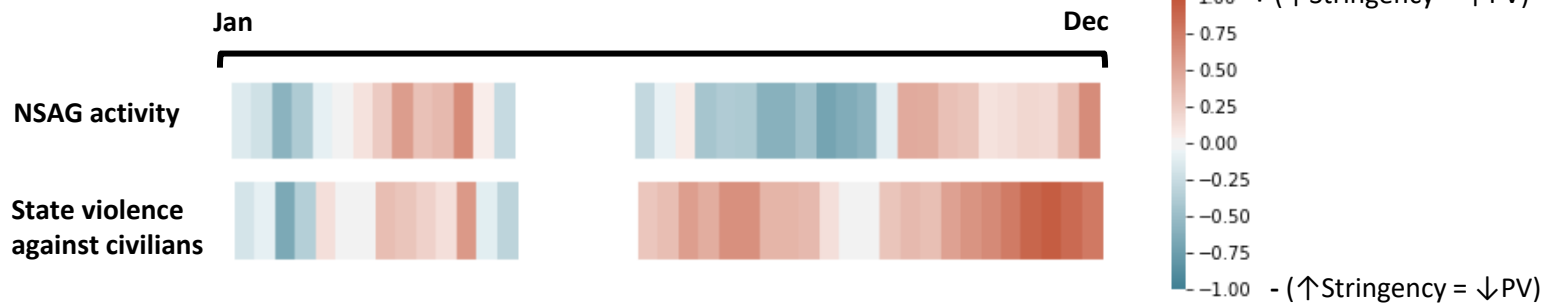
Significance Definitions
Strong = P-value <0.01
Significance = P-value <0.05
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results – DRC

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV Correlation



Granger Test

Weeks from change in lockdown stringency	Correlated change in NSAG activity	Correlated change in state violence against citizens
1	No significance	Significance
2	No significance	Significance
3	No significance	Significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	Strong significance
9	No significance	Strong significance
10	No significance	Strong significance

Significance Definitions

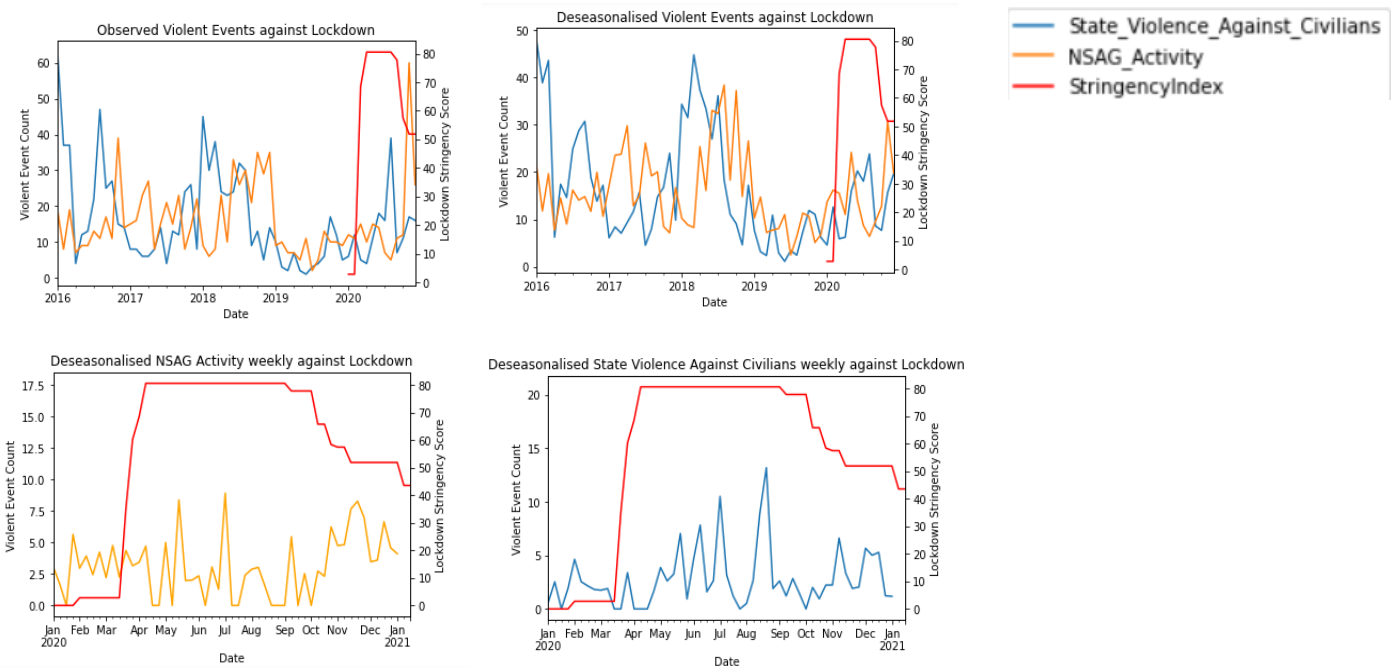
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Country Results - Ethiopia

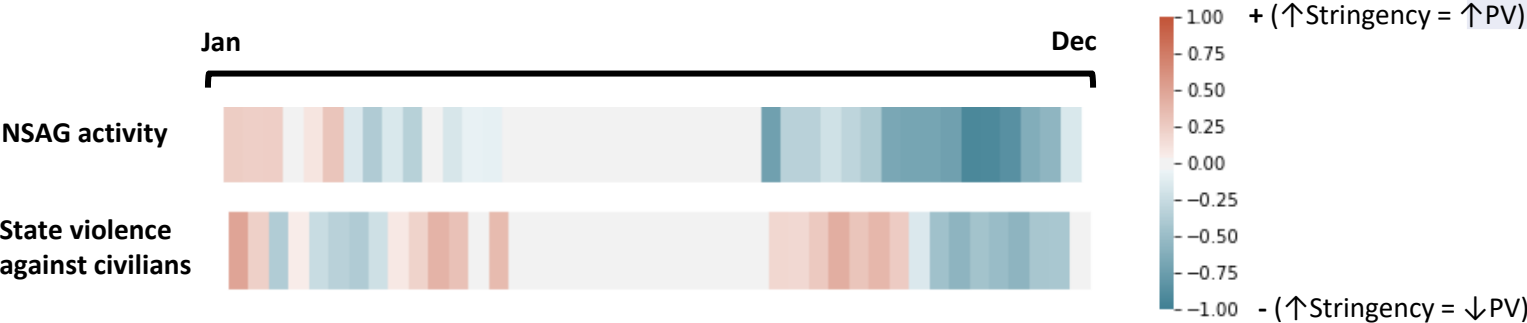
Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
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3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

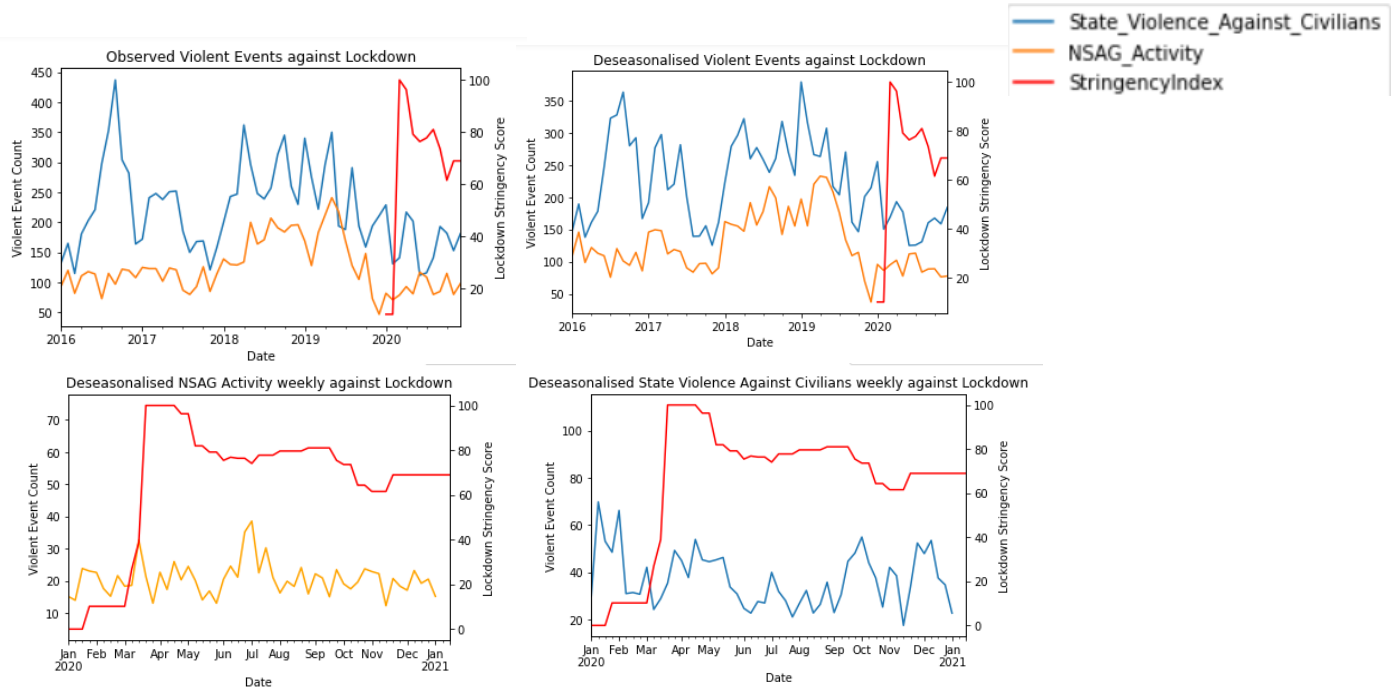
Lockdown – PV correlation



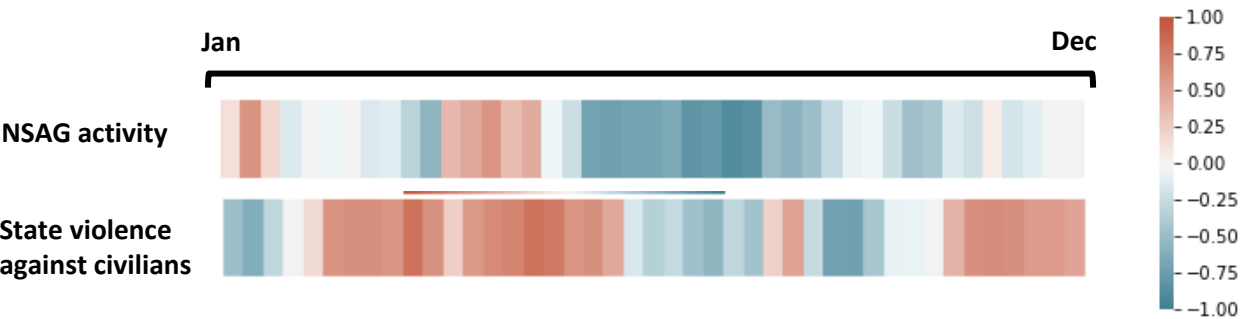
Significance Definitions
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No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - India

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	No significance	No significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

Significance Definitions

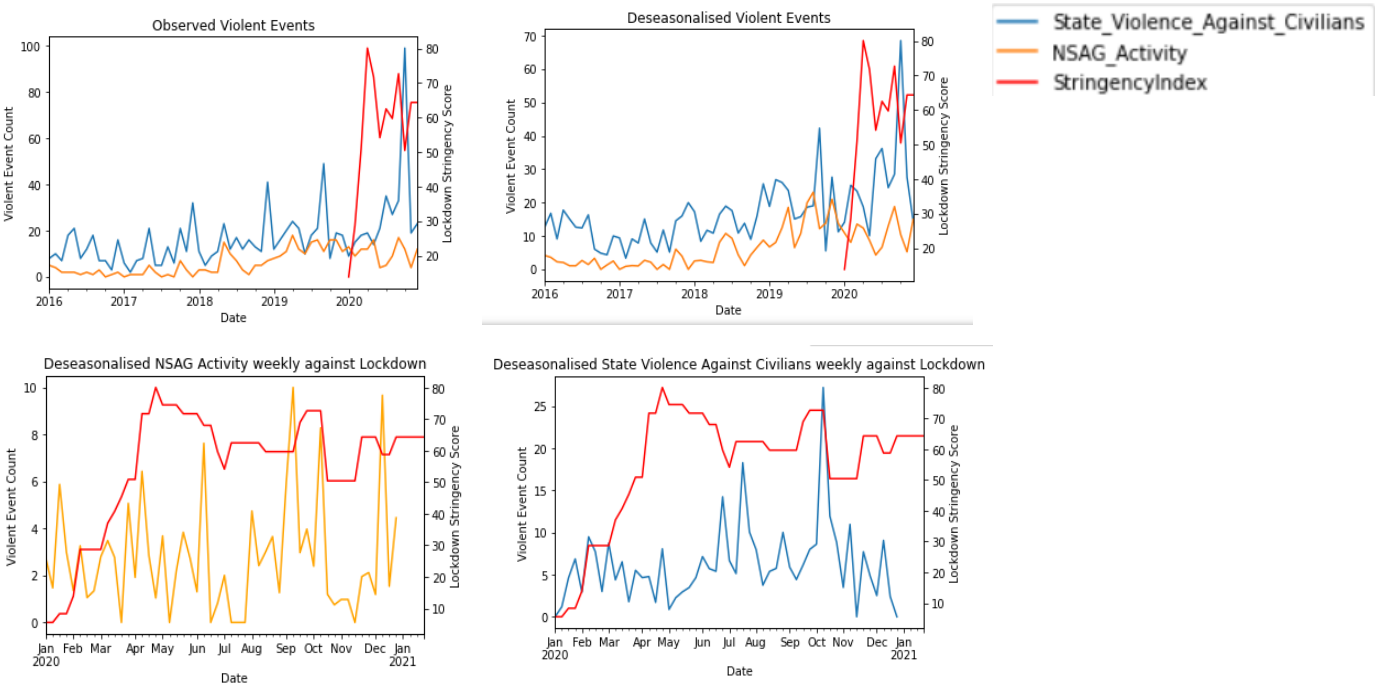
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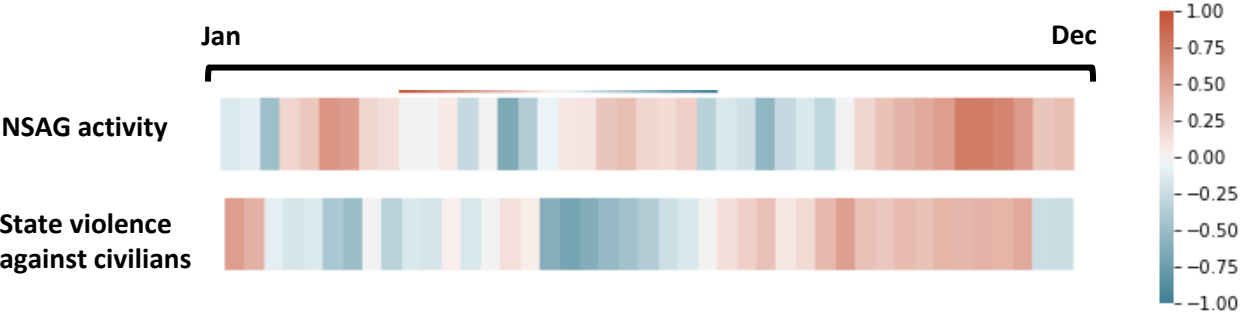
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Indonesia

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



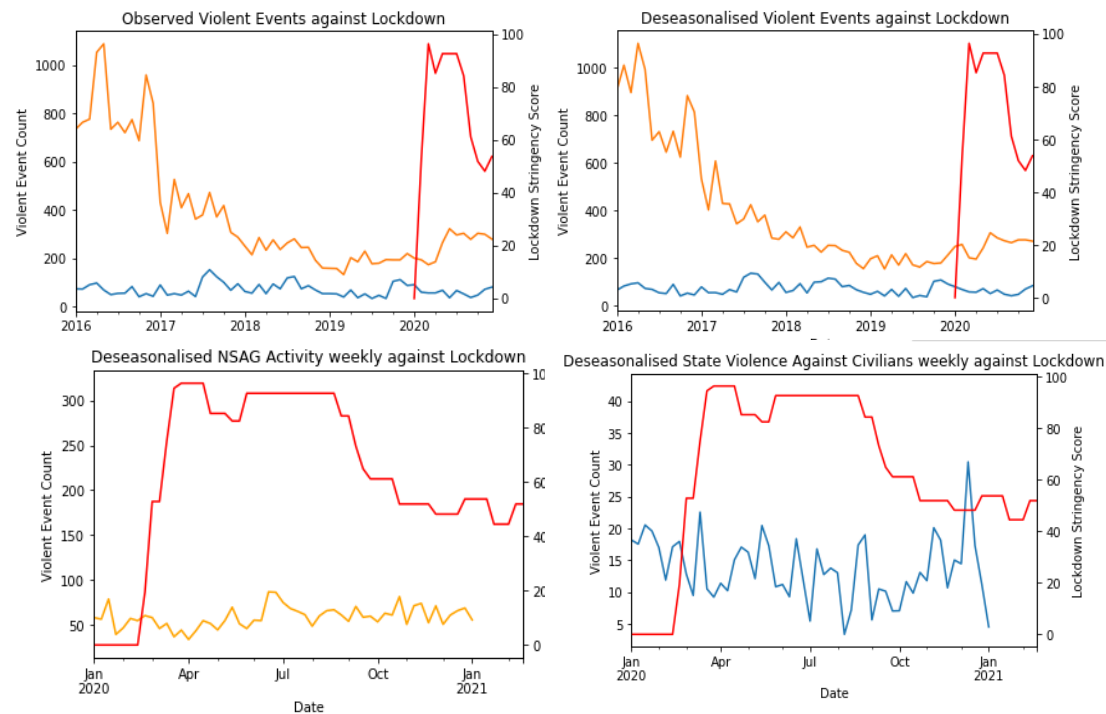
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7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

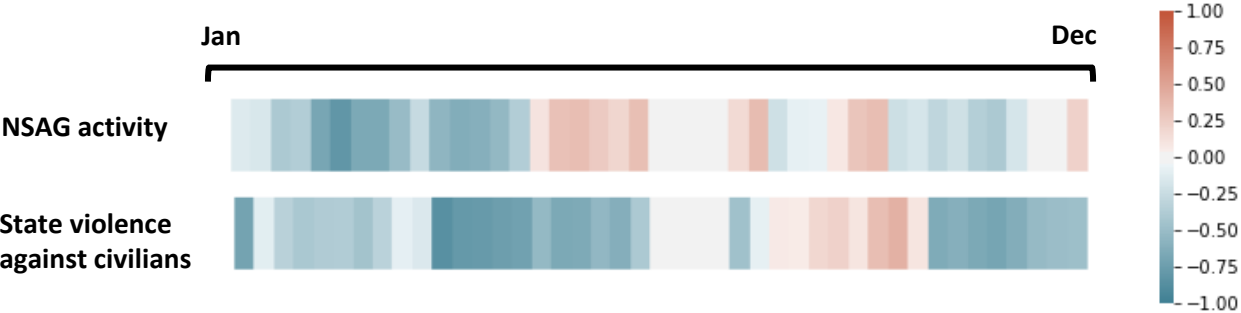
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No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Iraq

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	No significance	Significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
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8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
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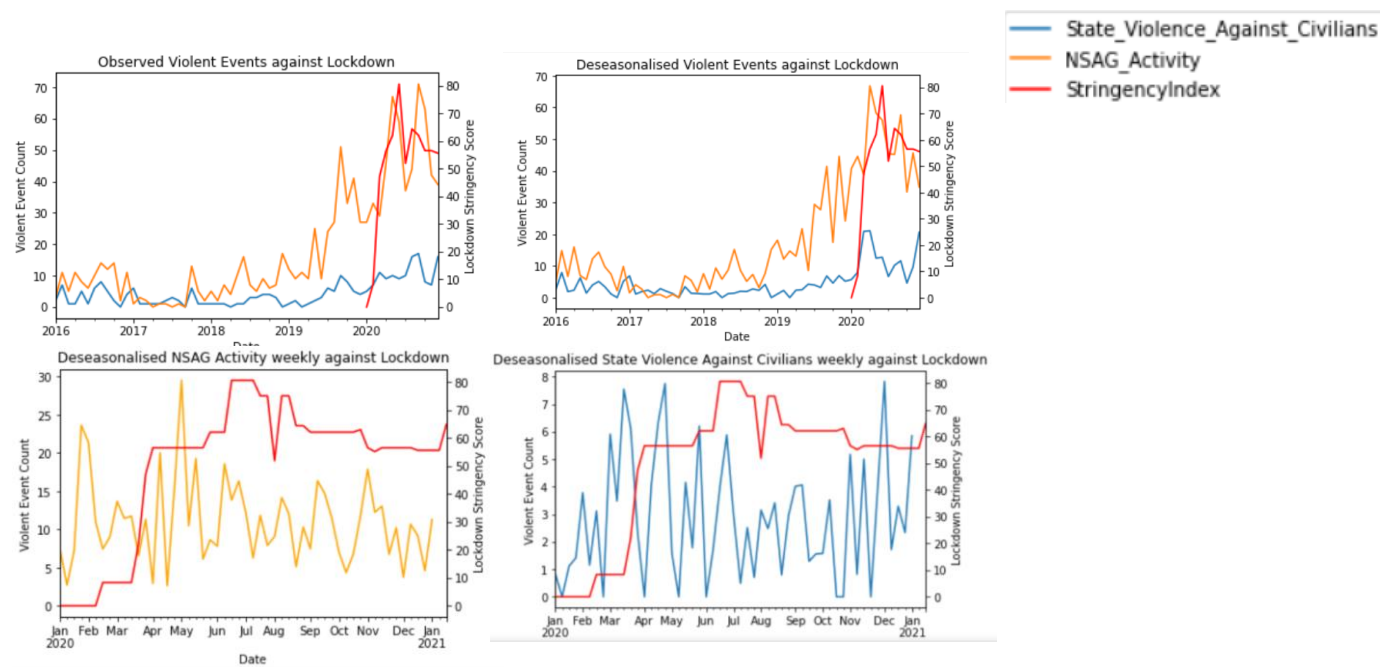
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Country Results – Mozambique

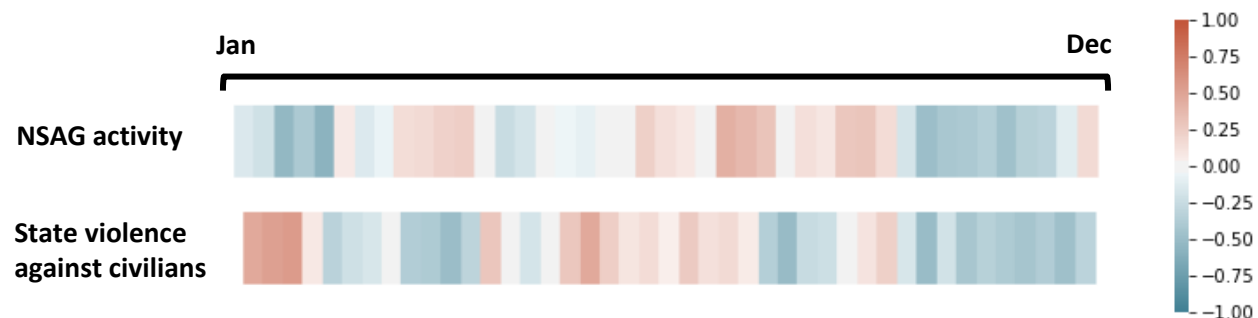
Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
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2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

Lockdown – PV correlation



Significance Definitions

Strong = P-value <0.01

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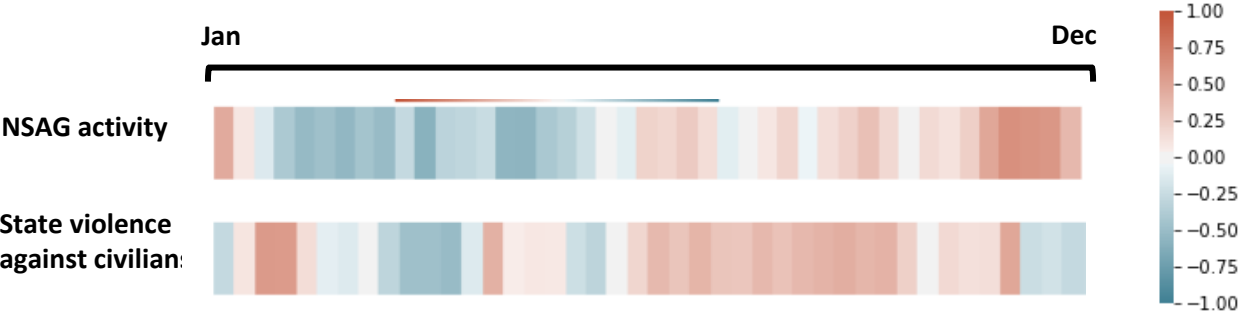
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Myanmar

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	Significant	No significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

Significance Definitions

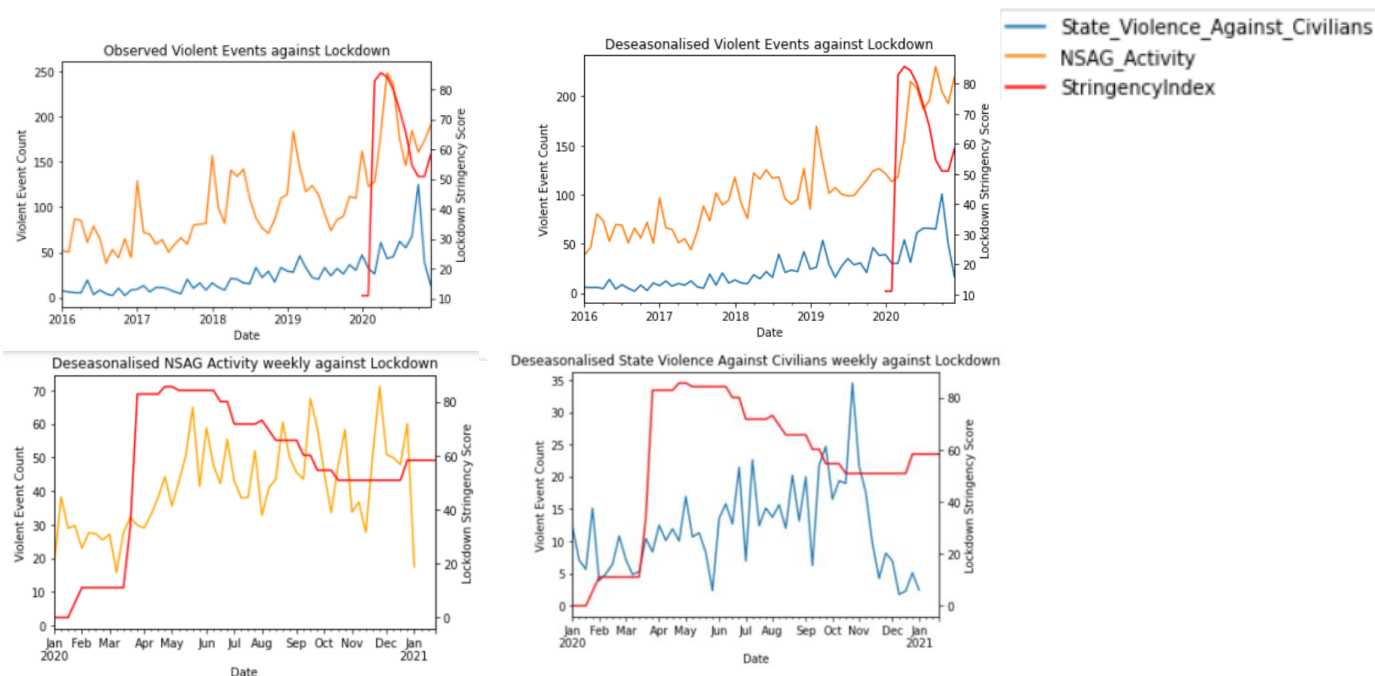
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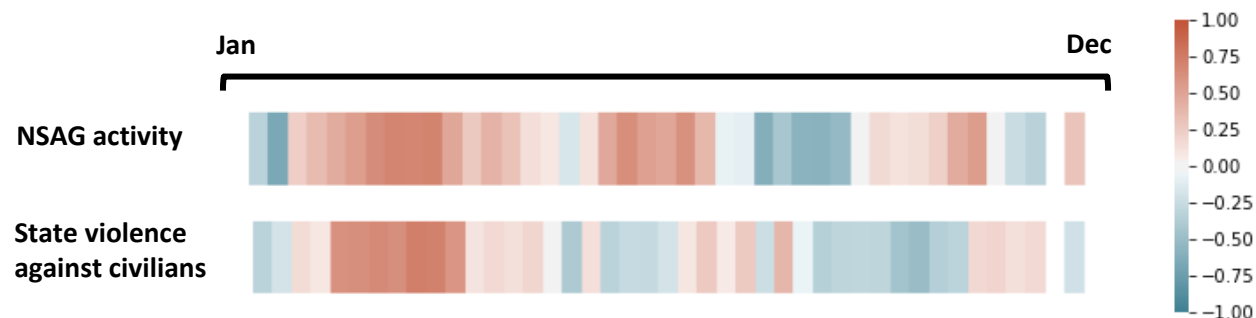
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results – Nigeria

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	Significance	Significance
2	Significance	No Significance
3	No Significance	No Significance
4	No Significance	No Significance
5	No Significance	No Significance
6	No Significance	No Significance
7	No Significance	No Significance
8	No Significance	No Significance
9	No Significance	No Significance
10	No Significance	No Significance

Significance Definitions

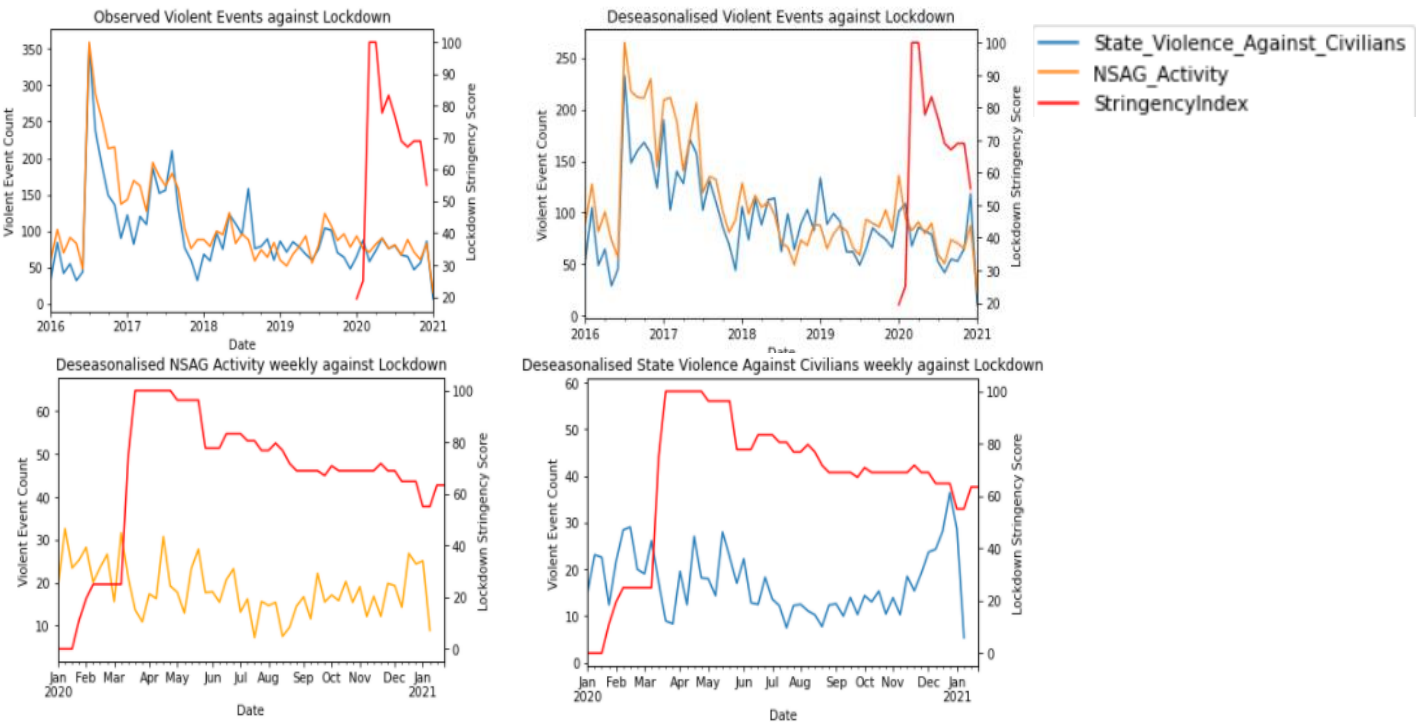
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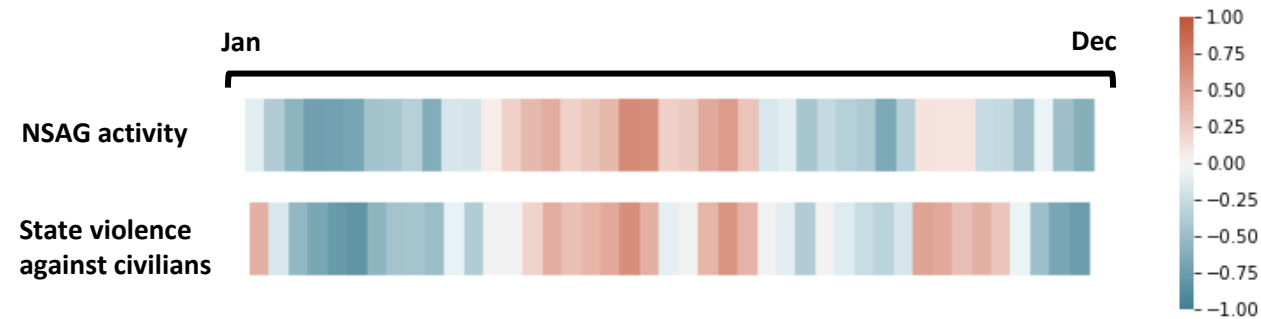
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Philippines

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	Significance	No significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	Significance
9	No significance	Significance
10	No significance	Strong Significance

Significance Definitions

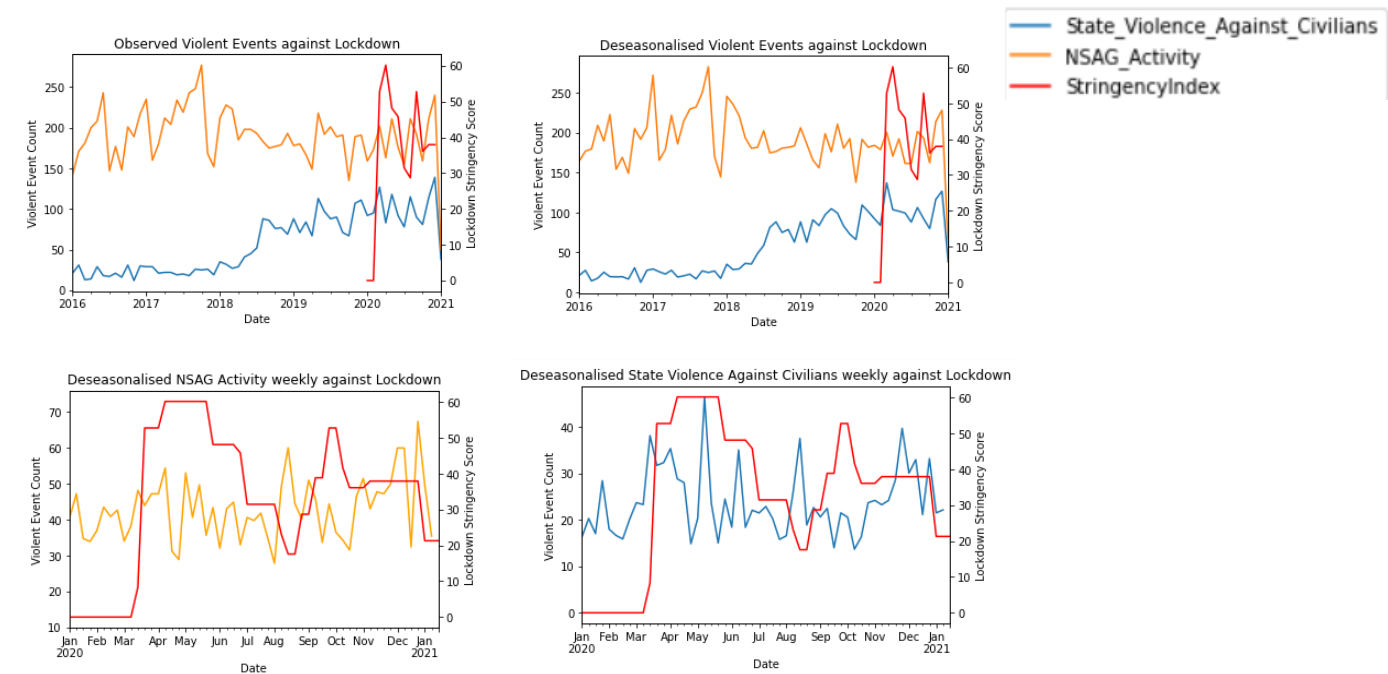
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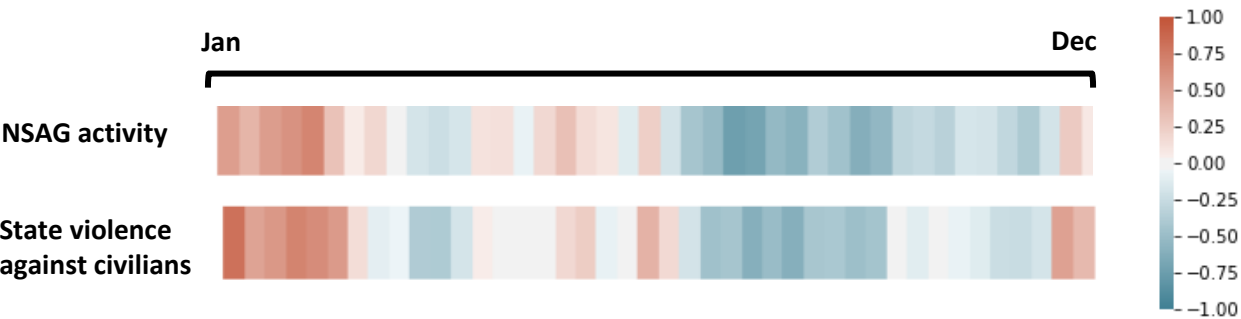
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Somalia

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	No significance	No significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

Significance Definitions

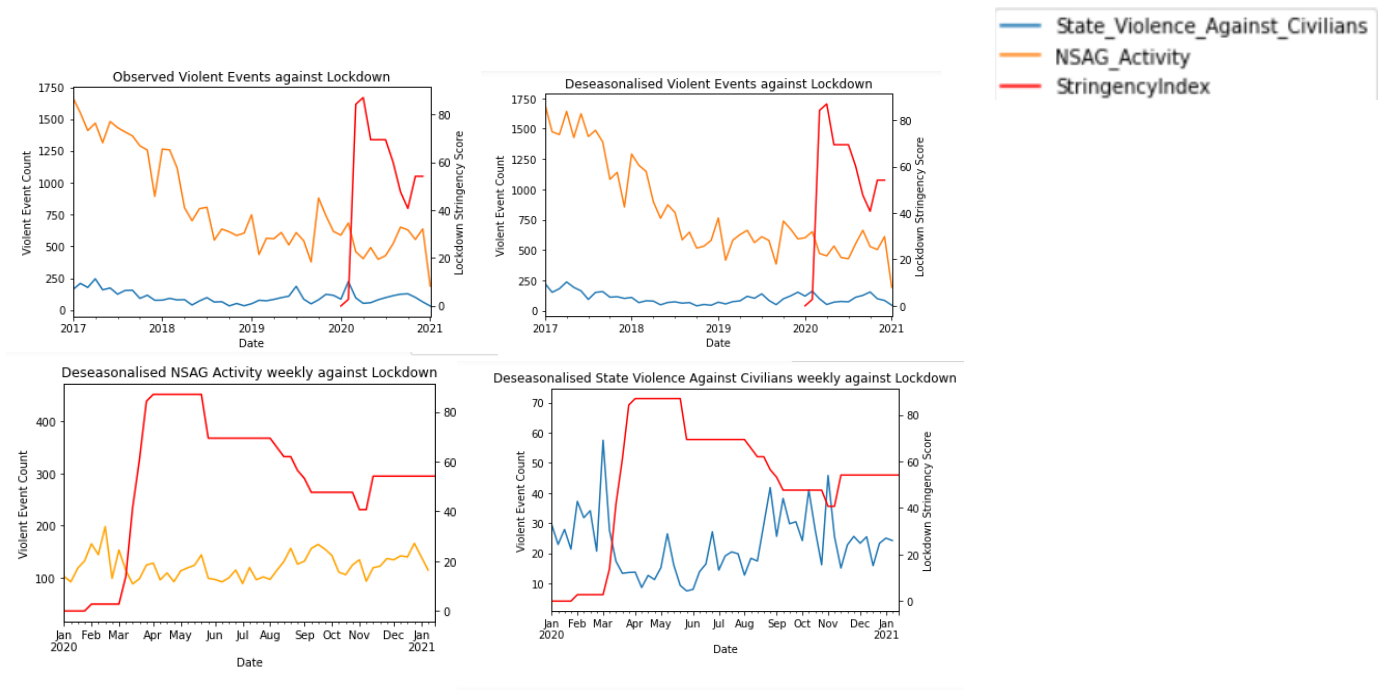
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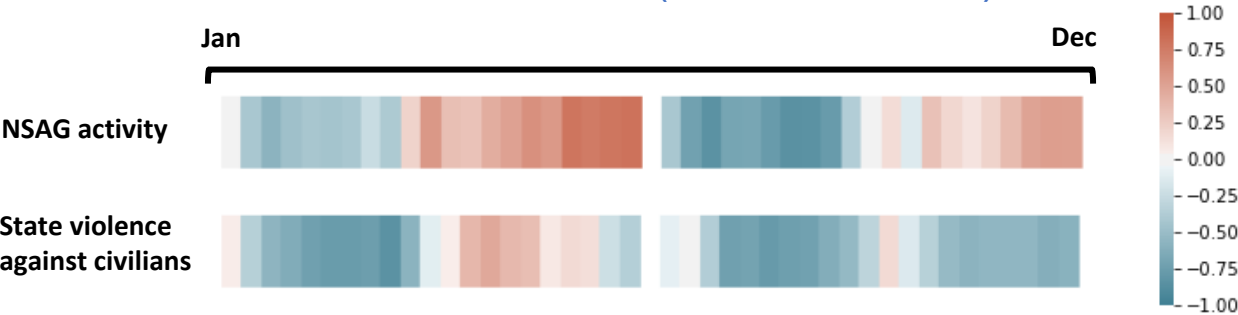
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results - Syria

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation (in same month)



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	No significance	Significance
2	No significance	Significance
3	No significance	Significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	No significance
8	No significance	No significance
9	No significance	No significance
10	No significance	No significance

Significance Definitions

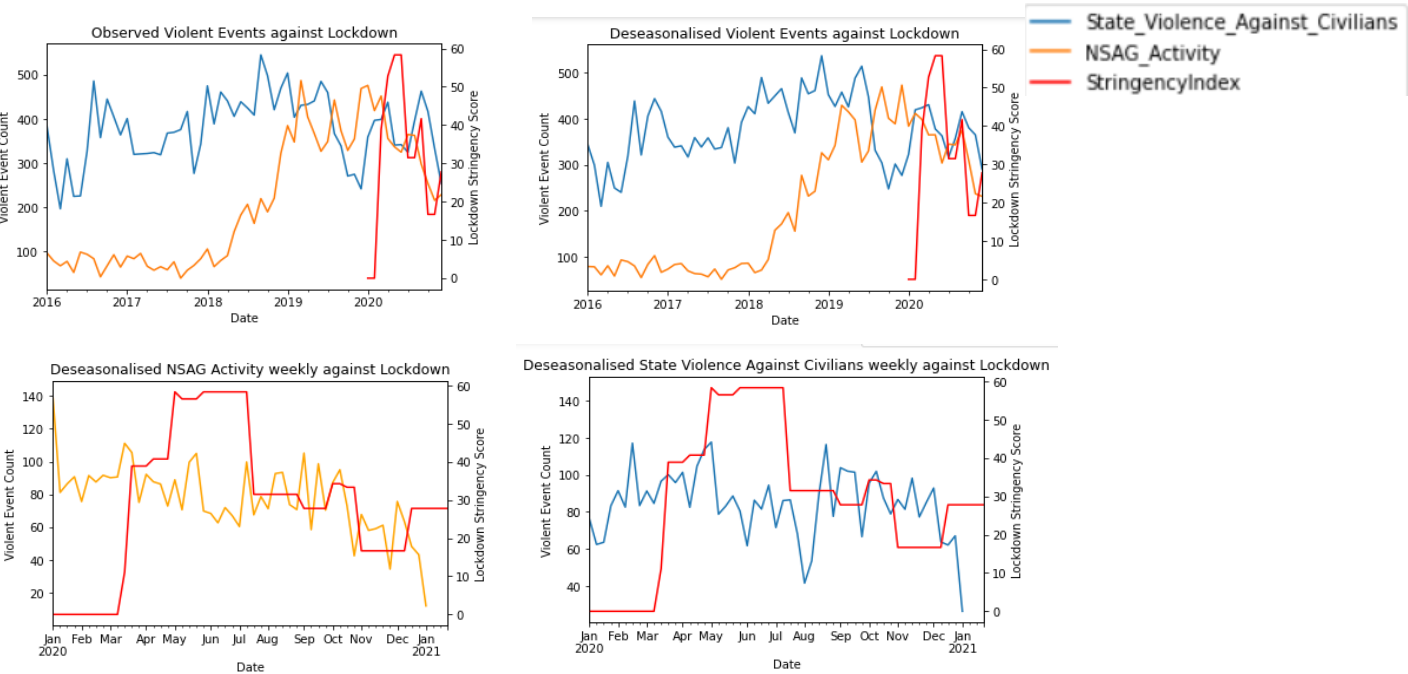
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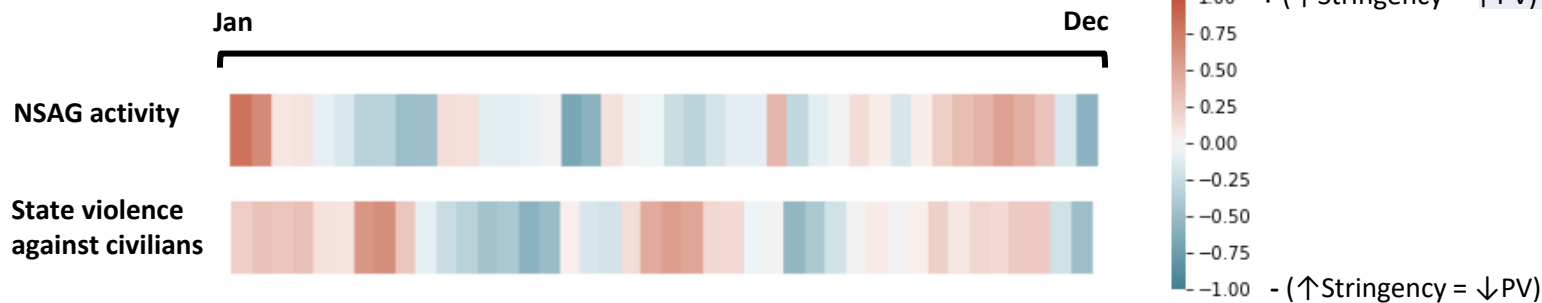
No significance = P-value >0.05

Country Results – Yemen

Trends – Lockdown Stringency and Political Violence



Lockdown – PV correlation



Granger Test

Lags (weeks) from lockdown stringency change	NSAG activity change	State violence against citizens change
1	No significance	No significance
2	No significance	No significance
3	No significance	No significance
4	No significance	No significance
5	No significance	No significance
6	No significance	No significance
7	No significance	Strong Significance
8	No significance	Strong Significance
9	No significance	Strong Significance
10	No significance	Significance

Significance Definitions

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Significance = P-value <0.05

No significance = P-value >0.05