

Syria Crisis Data Insights: **The Changing Face of Sniper Attacks**

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Changing dynamics of modern warfare

In the history of global conflict, women have been typically seen as bystanders of war, killed as a result of collateral damage along-side children and the elderly. But how much of this is true in modern times? Our analysis of data collected by [Syria Tracker](#) shows that perhaps not all women's deaths in the Syria conflict are simply 'accidental'.

From our previous report, "[Rising Proportion of Female Deaths in Syria](#)", we learned that a total of 528 deaths from sniper fire have occurred from March 2011 to March 2014. Compared to men, the proportion of women killed by sniper fire is similar - 4.1% of men and 5.0% of women deaths were the result of sniper fire. Though it is still early to pinpoint the exact reasons or motivations behind these deaths, we have uncovered some initial findings below by analysis of data from Syria Tracker.

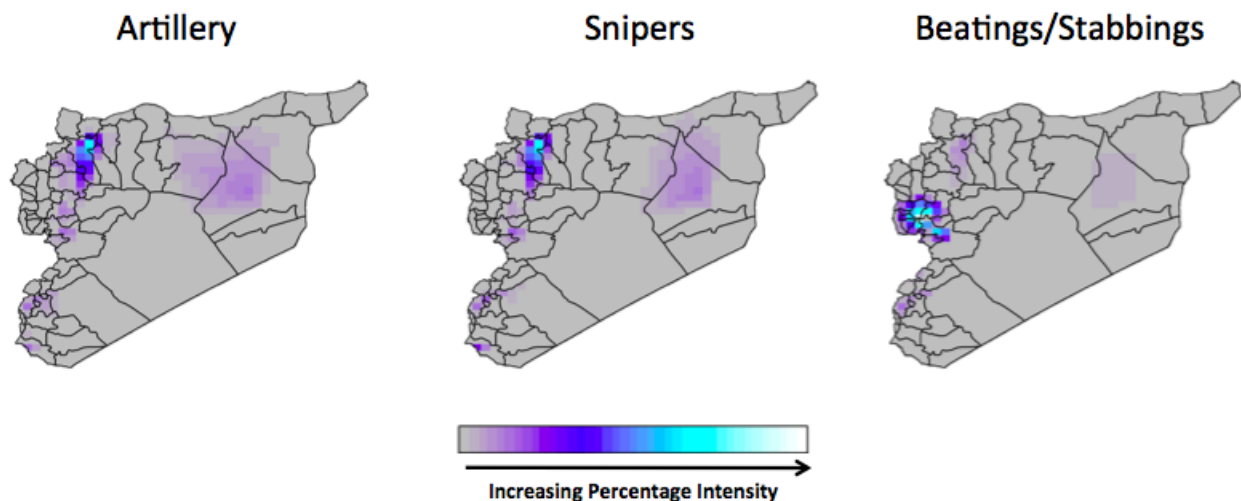
Could sniper fire be the new weapon of terror?

In terms of warfare, sniper fire is by its nature a very specific targeting event and therefore casualties caused by sniper fire are generally considered to be a result of focused killing. This is in contrast to more indiscriminate forms of warfare such as artillery (shelling, etc) and air bombardments such that the ability to focus on specific targets is greatly reduced, and the risk for collateral civilian deaths is high.

To better understand the relationship between the high number of female deaths by sniper fire and the female deaths by artillery and air bombardments, we performed a simple correlation study. This analysis compared the percentage of female deaths caused by sniper fire to other top causes, across 98 geographic districts.

We found that the percentage of females killed by snipers were more highly correlated to Artillery (92.0%) and Air Bombardment (80.7%) than Gun Shots (57.9%) or Beatings and Stabbings (23.8%). This implies that the female deaths due to sniper fire are statistically occurring in a manner more consistent with indiscriminate methods of warfare than focused killings.

Figure 1. Percentage of Female Death Intensity



This begs the question - why are snipers indiscriminately killing rather than targeting those directly involved in active combat? It is possible that these casualties by sniper fire are not simply chance occurrences. Perhaps snipers are purposefully behaving in such a way to instill a sense of terror and fear amongst civilians caught within the active conflict zone.

Syria - in a league of its own

There have been many instances where the use of snipers has had a dramatic impact, even as a turning point in unrest as in [Thailand in 2010](#). Recently, snipers have been implicated in [five deaths in Lebanon](#), and [at least nine people in Ukraine were also killed by snipers in an anti-government protest](#). In longer term engagements, snipers also have been a key component as warfare, killing 225 in [Sniper Alley during the Siege of Sarajevo](#).

Comparatively in Syria, there have been approximately 4,375 deaths by sniper as of May 18, 2014, and 548 of those were women.

A key difference between Syria and some of the above events is that instead of a series of isolated occurrences or those that last several days to weeks, snipers have killed women in Syria consistently throughout the war (Figure 2). Media outlets have also reported the targeting of [pregnant women and children](#), implying a motive to instill terror. Between June 2012 and February 2014, at least 10 women have been killed per month, rising to a height of 45 women during the month of January 2013. These types of deaths were more common than other focused means of killing like beating or stabbing. In fact, the cumulative number of deaths that resulted from snipers were four times more than that of beating or stabbing (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Female Death by Snipers

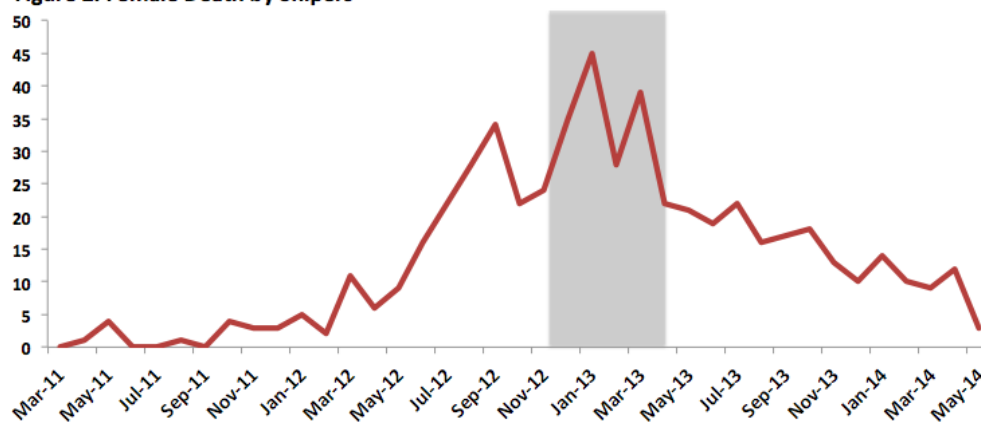
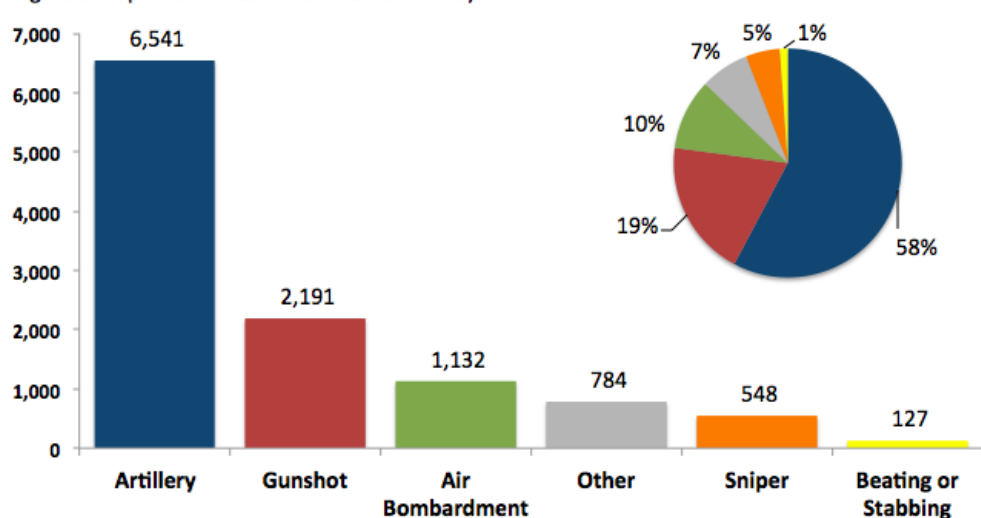


Figure 3. Top Five Causes of Female Death in Syria



The scale and severity of snipers and women in Syria differ from other conflicts where snipers have been a strategic element, or where the reported use of snipers was for a short duration. The truth is -- we're only at the tip of the iceberg when it comes to

understanding the conflict in Syria. If sniper fire is being used indiscriminately across Syria instead of for specifically targeting active combat personnel, it becomes a form of terrorism against not just the female population but all civilians caught within the active conflict zone.

To view the SumAll.org monthly interactive dashboard, please go to:

<http://bit.ly/1cX3tJH>

To learn more about Syria Tracker, its data, and methodology, please go to:

www.humanitariantracker.org