# Hierarchical Violent Event Taxonomy for African Conflicts

## Version 1.0 - Draft for Stakeholder Review

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**Purpose:** Systematic classification framework for automated violent event extraction from news text  
**Context:** African Union Continental Early Warning System (AU-CEWS)

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## 1. Introduction and Overview

### 1.1 Purpose of This Taxonomy

This hierarchical taxonomy provides a standardized framework for classifying violent events extracted from news media in the African context. It supports:

* **Consistent categorization** across different analysts and time periods
* **Multi-level querying** from broad categories to specific event types
* **Automated classification** using machine learning with clearly defined features
* **Statistical aggregation** and trend analysis at multiple granularities
* **Operational decision-making** for early warning and crisis response

### 1.2 Scope

**Included:** - All forms of physical violence resulting in death, injury, or coercion - State and non-state perpetrated violence - Political, criminal, and communal violence - Events affecting civilians and combatants

**Excluded:** - Structural violence (poverty, discrimination) unless manifested in physical acts - Natural disasters (unless triggered by human action) - Accidents (unless deliberate) - Non-violent protests and demonstrations - Threats of violence without physical action (captured separately if needed)

### 1.3 Geographic Context

This taxonomy is optimized for African conflict patterns, including: - State repression and authoritarian violence - Rebellion and insurgency - Terrorism and extremist violence - Communal conflicts (ethnic, religious, resource-based) - Criminal violence and organized crime - Election-related violence - Cross-border conflicts

### 1.4 Hierarchical Structure

The taxonomy consists of **4 hierarchical levels**:

* **Level 1:** Broad violence categories (4 main types)
* **Level 2:** Intermediate violence types (15-20 categories)
* **Level 3:** Specific event types (40-60 categories)
* **Level 4:** Detailed subtypes (where applicable, 80+ total categories)

**Total Categories:** Approximately 95 distinct event types across all levels

## 2. Taxonomy Design Principles

### 2.1 Core Design Principles

1. **Mutual Exclusivity (where possible):** Events should ideally fit into one primary category, though multi-labeling is permitted for genuinely ambiguous cases
2. **Hierarchical Consistency:** Child categories must be proper subsets of parent categories
3. **Operational Utility:** Categories reflect operational needs of AU-CEWS and align with policy responses
4. **Linguistic Distinguishability:** Categories should be distinguishable based on linguistic features extractable from news text
5. **Contextual Appropriateness:** Categories reflect African conflict patterns and actors
6. **Extensibility:** Structure allows adding new categories as violence patterns evolve

### 2.2 Classification Dimensions

Events are classified along multiple dimensions:

**Primary Dimension: Violence Type** - The main hierarchical structure

**Secondary Dimensions (captured as attributes):**

- **Actor Type:** State/Non-state/Communal/Criminal/Unknown

- **Target Type:** Civilian/Combatant/Infrastructure/Symbolic

- **Lethality:** Deaths involved (None/Low 1-5/Medium 6-25/High 26+/Mass 100+)

- **Scale:** Individual/Small group/Mass

- **Political Context:** Election-related/Resource conflict/Ethnic-religious/Other

## 3. Hierarchical Structure Summary

### Level 1: Broad Categories (4)

1. **POLITICAL VIOLENCE** - Violence motivated by political objectives to influence governance, contest state authority, or achieve political change
2. **CRIMINAL VIOLENCE** - Violence motivated primarily by economic gain, territorial control by criminal organizations, or criminal activity
3. **COMMUNAL VIOLENCE** - Violence between identity-based groups (ethnic, religious, clan) over resources, territory, or social dominance, not primarily directed at the state
4. **STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS** - Violence perpetrated by state security forces against non-combatant civilians outside of armed conflict contexts

### Level 2: Intermediate Types (18)

**Under POLITICAL VIOLENCE:** 1. Rebellion/Armed Insurgency 2. Terrorism 3. Coup and Regime Change Violence 4. Election Violence 5. Political Repression

**Under CRIMINAL VIOLENCE:** 6. Organized Crime Violence 7. Armed Robbery/Banditry 8. Kidnapping for Ransom 9. Criminal Gang Violence

**Under COMMUNAL VIOLENCE:** 10. Ethnic/Tribal Conflict 11. Religious Violence 12. Resource-Based Conflict 13. Pastoralist-Farmer Clashes

**Under STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS:** 14. Extrajudicial Killings 15. State Repression of Protests 16. Mass Atrocities by State Forces 17. Forced Displacement by State 18. Arbitrary Detention with Violence

## 4. Detailed Taxonomy by Category

## LEVEL 1: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

**Definition:** Violence motivated by political objectives including contesting state authority, influencing governance, achieving political change, or advancing ideological agendas. Perpetrators may be non-state armed groups, state forces engaged in internal conflict, or political actors.

**Key Characteristics:** - Political objectives and motivations - Organized violence (not spontaneous) - Often targets state institutions, government forces, or political opponents - May involve territorial control aspirations

### LEVEL 2: Rebellion/Armed Insurgency

**Definition:** Organized armed resistance against a government by non-state groups seeking to overthrow the government, achieve autonomy/independence, or force political change.

**Key Features:** - Sustained armed campaign - Organized rebel/insurgent groups - Often involves territorial control - Military-style operations

**Typical Actors:** Rebel groups, insurgent movements, separatist organizations

#### LEVEL 3: Armed Clash/Battle

**Definition:** Direct armed combat between organized armed groups and government forces, or between opposing armed groups.

**Classification Criteria:** - Both sides engaged in fighting (not one-sided) - Use of military weapons - Combat typically involves exchange of fire - Usually involving combatants on both sides

**Distinguishing Features:** - Reciprocal violence (both sides shooting) - Military confrontation - Territory may change hands

**Typical Keywords in News:** “battle,” “clash,” “firefight,” “combat,” “exchange of fire,” “fighting between”

**Examples:** - Government forces clash with Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle, Somalia - Oromo Liberation Army battles with Ethiopian forces in Oromia - M23 rebels fight FARDC forces in Eastern DRC

#### LEVEL 3: Ambush

**Definition:** Surprise attack from concealed positions on government forces, typically on patrols or convoys.

**Classification Criteria:** - Element of surprise - Attackers hidden/concealed - Target is moving (patrol, convoy) - Often hit-and-run tactics

**Distinguishing Features:** - One-sided initiation - Tactical advantage through surprise - Target typically military/security forces

**Typical Keywords:** “ambush,” “attacked convoy,” “attacked patrol,” “surprise attack,” “roadside attack”

**Examples:** - Armed group ambushes military convoy in Burkina Faso, killing 12 soldiers - Rebels ambush police patrol in northern Mozambique - Insurgents attack army vehicle in Mali’s Gao region

**Level 4 Subtypes:** - **Roadside Ambush:** Attack on road/highway - **IED Ambush:** Improvised explosive device combined with gunfire - **Complex Ambush:** Multi-phase attack with coordinated elements

#### LEVEL 3: Rebel Attack on Government Position

**Definition:** Assault on fixed government military installations, checkpoints, or controlled positions.

**Classification Criteria:** - Target is stationary government position - Rebel/insurgent forces as attackers - Often aims to capture territory or weapons - May involve siege tactics

**Distinguishing Features:** - Fixed target (base, checkpoint, outpost) - Offensive operation by rebels - May result in territorial gain

**Typical Keywords:** “attacked base,” “raided checkpoint,” “assault on outpost,” “overran position”

**Examples:** - Boko Haram attacks military base in Borno State, Nigeria - Allied Democratic Forces overrun army post in Ituri, DRC - AQIM militants assault security checkpoint in Niger

**Level 4 Subtypes:** - **Base Assault:** Attack on military base/barracks - **Checkpoint Attack:** Assault on roadside security position - **Overrun Operation:** Successful capture of government position

#### LEVEL 3: Forced Recruitment

**Definition:** Coercive conscription of individuals (including children) into armed groups through abduction, threats, or violence.

**Classification Criteria:** - Involves physical coercion or abduction - Purpose is recruitment into armed group - Victims typically young males or children - Part of insurgent capacity building

**Typical Keywords:** “forcibly recruited,” “abducted for conscription,” “kidnapped boys,” “child soldiers taken”

**Examples:** - LRA abducts 30 youths in Central African Republic - Al-Shabaab forcibly recruits teenage boys in Bay region - Armed group kidnaps students for recruitment in South Sudan

### LEVEL 2: Terrorism

**Definition:** Deliberate violence targeting civilians or symbolic targets to instill fear, achieve political/ideological objectives, or coerce governments/populations.

**Key Features:** - Targets primarily civilians or symbolic locations - Intended to create fear/terror - Political or ideological motivation - Often indiscriminate violence

**Typical Actors:** Terrorist organizations, extremist groups, jihadist movements

#### LEVEL 3: Bombing/Explosive Attack

**Definition:** Use of explosive devices to kill, injure, or destroy, including bombs, IEDs, grenades, and similar weapons.

**Classification Criteria:** - Primary weapon is explosive device - May target people, vehicles, or structures - Can be remote-detonated, timed, or direct placement

**Typical Keywords:** “bomb,” “explosion,” “blast,” “IED,” “explosive device,” “detonated”

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Suicide Bombing**

* **Definition:** Attack where perpetrator deliberately detonates explosives killing themselves
* **Key Feature:** Bomber dies in attack
* **Examples:** Suicide bomber targets market in Maiduguri; SVBIED attacks checkpoint in Mogadishu
* **Keywords:** “suicide bomber,” “suicide attack,” “blew himself up”

##### **Car/Vehicle Bombing (VBIED)**

* **Definition:** Explosive device placed in/on vehicle
* **Key Feature:** Vehicle as delivery mechanism
* **Examples:** Car bomb explodes outside hotel in Mogadishu; truck bomb hits police station in Somalia
* **Keywords:** “car bomb,” “vehicle bomb,” “VBIED,” “truck bomb”

##### **Roadside IED**

* **Definition:** Improvised explosive planted along roads targeting passing vehicles
* **Key Feature:** Victim-activated or remote-detonated; targets movement
* **Examples:** IED kills peacekeepers in Mali; roadside bomb hits military convoy in Somalia
* **Keywords:** “IED,” “roadside bomb,” “landmine,” “improvised explosive”

##### **Grenade Attack**

* **Definition:** Hand-thrown or launched grenades
* **Key Feature:** Small-scale, portable explosive
* **Examples:** Grenade thrown into bar in Bujumbura; attackers lob grenades at police in Kenya
* **Keywords:** “grenade,” “hand grenade,” “grenade attack”

##### **Building/Infrastructure Bombing**

* **Definition:** Explosives targeting structures
* **Key Feature:** Aim to destroy buildings or infrastructure
* **Examples:** Bomb destroys school in northeast Nigeria; explosives damage power station in Mozambique
* **Keywords:** “bombed building,” “explosive destroyed,” “blast damaged”

#### LEVEL 3: Armed Assault

**Definition:** Armed attack on civilians, public places, or soft targets using firearms or other weapons (not explosives).

**Classification Criteria:** - Primary weapons are firearms, knives, or similar - Targets typically civilians or undefended locations - Direct confrontation (not remote)

**Typical Keywords:** “armed attack,” “gunmen,” “shooting,” “opened fire,” “assault”

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Mass Shooting/Rampage**

* **Definition:** Indiscriminate shooting in public place aimed at mass casualties
* **Examples:** Gunmen shoot worshippers in church in Burkina Faso; attackers kill civilians in Malian village
* **Keywords:** “mass shooting,” “shooting spree,” “gunmen killed,” “opened fire on crowd”

##### **Coordinated Multi-Site Attack**

* **Definition:** Simultaneous or sequential attacks at multiple locations
* **Examples:** Al-Shabaab launches attacks on three hotels in Mogadishu
* **Keywords:** “coordinated attack,” “simultaneous attacks,” “multiple sites”

##### **Lone Actor Attack**

* **Definition:** Single individual conducts attack
* **Examples:** Lone attacker stabs soldiers in Tunisia
* **Keywords:** “lone attacker,” “single assailant,” “individual carried out”

##### **Armed Raid**

* **Definition:** Organized incursion into area to kill, loot, or destroy
* **Examples:** Armed group raids village in CAR, killing 20
* **Keywords:** “raid,” “incursion,” “armed men attacked”

#### LEVEL 3: Kidnapping/Hostage-Taking (Terrorism)

**Definition:** Abduction of individuals by terrorist groups for political purposes, ransom (funding terrorism), or leverage.

**Classification Criteria:** - Perpetrator is terrorist/extremist group - Political or ideological motivation - Often involves demands or publicity

**Distinguishing Feature:** Differs from criminal kidnapping by political motive and actor type

**Examples:** - Boko Haram abducts schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria - AQIM kidnaps Western hostages in Mali - Al-Shabaab abducts aid workers in Somalia

**Typical Keywords:** “kidnapped by,” “abducted,” “taken hostage,” “seized”

#### LEVEL 3: Assassination (Terrorism)

**Definition:** Targeted killing of specific individuals (politicians, activists, religious leaders, journalists) for political/ideological purposes.

**Classification Criteria:** - Specific named victim targeted - Victim has public/political role - Political or ideological motivation - Often intended to send message

**Examples:** - Al-Shabaab assassinates government official in Mogadishu - Suspected Islamists kill journalist in Mali - Armed group murders village chief in Burkina Faso

**Typical Keywords:** “assassinated,” “targeted killing,” “gunned down,” “murdered”

#### LEVEL 3: Attack on Symbolic/Soft Targets

**Definition:** Deliberate attacks on locations or institutions with symbolic, religious, cultural, or economic significance.

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Attack on Religious Site**

* **Examples:** Bombing of mosque in Nigeria; attack on church in Burkina Faso
* **Keywords:** “church,” “mosque,” “cathedral,” “temple,” “religious site”

##### **Attack on Educational Institution**

* **Examples:** School attacked in Cameroon; university bombed in Kenya
* **Keywords:** “school,” “university,” “college,” “students”

##### **Attack on Healthcare Facility**

* **Examples:** Hospital bombed in Somalia; clinic attacked in DRC
* **Keywords:** “hospital,” “clinic,” “health center,” “medical facility”

##### **Attack on Humanitarian/Aid Workers**

* **Examples:** Aid convoy attacked in South Sudan; UN workers killed in CAR
* **Keywords:** “aid workers,” “humanitarian,” “NGO,” “UN personnel”

##### **Attack on Transportation**

* **Examples:** Bus attacked in Kenya; train bombed in Egypt
* **Keywords:** “bus,” “train,” “airport,” “airplane,” “transport”

##### **Attack on Commercial/Economic Target**

* **Examples:** Market bombing in Chad; hotel attack in Mali
* **Keywords:** “market,” “hotel,” “restaurant,” “shopping,” “business”

### LEVEL 2: Coup and Regime Change Violence

**Definition:** Violence associated with attempts to illegally seize state power or forcibly change government through non-constitutional means.

**Key Features:** - Targets government leadership or institutions - Aims to seize state power - Often involves military or security forces - May be swift or involve sustained violence

#### LEVEL 3: Military Coup (Violent)

**Definition:** Seizure of power by military or security forces involving armed conflict, violence, or casualties.

**Classification Criteria:** - Military as primary actor - Violence occurs during power seizure - Targets government leadership or loyalist forces - May include palace siege, arrests with violence

**Examples:** - Military faction attacks presidential palace in Guinea - Soldiers clash with presidential guard during coup in Burkina Faso - Armed forces overthrow government with violence in Sudan

**Typical Keywords:** “coup,” “military seized power,” “overthrew government,” “ousted president”

#### LEVEL 3: Coup-Related Violence

**Definition:** Violence associated with resisting a coup, aftermath violence, or purges following coup.

**Examples:** - Pro-government forces clash with coup plotters in Chad - Post-coup violence targets opposition in Mali - Loyalist forces resist coup attempt in Niger

#### LEVEL 3: Assassination (Regime Change)

**Definition:** Targeted killing of head of state, senior government officials, or political leaders as part of regime change effort.

**Classification Criteria:** - Victim is head of state or very senior official - Killing aims at or achieves regime change - May be by state or non-state actors

**Examples:** - President assassinated in Chad - Prime minister killed in targeted attack in Somalia - Military commander murdered during political crisis in Burundi

### LEVEL 2: Election Violence

**Definition:** Violence directly related to electoral processes including campaigns, voting, post-election disputes, or attempts to influence electoral outcomes.

**Key Features:** - Temporal link to elections (before, during, after) - Motivated by electoral competition - Targets candidates, voters, or election infrastructure - May be by state, political actors, or supporters

#### LEVEL 3: Campaign Violence

**Definition:** Violence targeting candidates, political party members, or campaign activities during election campaign period.

**Classification Criteria:** - Occurs during campaign period - Targets political actors or campaign events - Aims to intimidate or eliminate competition

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Attack on Candidate/Political Figure**

* **Examples:** Opposition candidate assassinated in DRC; politician attacked in Zimbabwe
* **Keywords:** “candidate attacked,” “politician killed,” “party leader”

##### **Attack on Campaign Event**

* **Examples:** Grenade thrown at rally in Burundi; shooting at political gathering in Kenya
* **Keywords:** “rally,” “campaign event,” “political gathering”

##### **Violence Against Party Members/Supporters**

* **Examples:** Ruling party supporters attack opposition members in Uganda
* **Keywords:** “party members,” “supporters attacked,” “political violence”

#### LEVEL 3: Voting Day Violence

**Definition:** Violence occurring on election day targeting voters, polling stations, or electoral process.

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Attack on Polling Station**

* **Examples:** Armed group attacks polling center in Mali; bomb targets voting location in Nigeria
* **Keywords:** “polling station,” “voting center,” “ballot box”

##### **Voter Intimidation with Violence**

* **Examples:** Armed men threaten voters in CAR; militia blocks access to polls in DRC
* **Keywords:** “voters intimidated,” “prevented voting,” “blocked polling”

#### LEVEL 3: Post-Election Violence

**Definition:** Violence erupting after election results, often related to disputes, protests against outcomes, or revenge attacks.

**Level 4 Subtypes:**

##### **Election Protest Violence**

* **Examples:** Opposition supporters clash with police over results in Kenya; protests turn violent in Gabon
* **Keywords:** “election protest,” “disputed results,” “post-election unrest”

##### **Targeted Violence Against Opposing Group**

* **Examples:** Ethnic violence erupts after elections in Kenya; revenge attacks following vote in Côte d’Ivoire
* **Keywords:** “ethnic clashes,” “revenge attacks,” “post-election violence”

### LEVEL 2: Political Repression

**Definition:** State use of violence to suppress political opposition, civil society, dissent, or freedom of expression.

**Key Features:** - State as perpetrator - Targets perceived political threats - Aims to maintain power or suppress dissent - May be systematic or selective

#### LEVEL 3: Violent Suppression of Protests

**Definition:** State security forces using violence against protesters, demonstrators, or public gatherings.

**Classification Criteria:** - Protesters are largely non-violent or minimally violent - State forces initiate lethal/severe violence - Excessive force beyond crowd control

**Examples:** - Police shoot protesters in Sudan, killing dozens - Security forces violently disperse demonstration in Eswatini - Army opens fire on protesters in Guinea

**Typical Keywords:** “police shot protesters,” “troops fired on demonstrators,” “crackdown,” “violent dispersal”

**Note:** Classified here if state force is excessive; classified under “Riots” in Communal Violence if protesters initiate significant violence

#### LEVEL 3: Targeted Killings of Political Opponents

**Definition:** Selective assassination or murder of opposition politicians, activists, journalists, or civil society figures by state or state-affiliated actors.

**Classification Criteria:** - Victim is opposition figure, activist, or critic - Evidence or suspicion of state involvement - Political motivation

**Examples:** - Journalist investigating corruption found murdered in Tanzania - Opposition activist killed by suspected state agents in Rwanda - Human rights defender assassinated in Burundi

**Typical Keywords:** “opposition killed,” “activist murdered,” “journalist assassinated,” “political killing”

#### LEVEL 3: Mass Arrests with Violence

**Definition:** Large-scale arrest operations involving violence, injuries, or deaths of those detained.

**Examples:** - Police violently arrest hundreds of opposition supporters in Zimbabwe - Security forces injure dozens during mass detention in Egypt - Violent crackdown on activists results in injuries and arrests in Ethiopia

## LEVEL 1: CRIMINAL VIOLENCE

**Definition:** Violence motivated primarily by economic gain, criminal enterprise, territorial control by criminal organizations, or criminal activities not primarily political.

**Key Characteristics:** - Economic motivation (profit, theft, ransom) - Perpetrators are criminal groups or individuals - May involve territorial control by criminal gangs - Not primarily aimed at political change

### LEVEL 2: Organized Crime Violence

**Definition:** Violence perpetrated by organized criminal networks including drug cartels, trafficking networks, and sophisticated criminal enterprises.

**Key Features:** - Organized criminal groups as actors - Often related to illicit trade (drugs, weapons, humans) - May involve territorial control - Systematic rather than opportunistic

#### LEVEL 3: Gang Warfare/Turf Violence

**Definition:** Violent conflicts between criminal gangs over territory, markets, or control.

**Examples:** - Gang clashes in Cape Town, South Africa result in 12 deaths - Rival criminal groups battle in Lagos, Nigeria - Turf war between trafficking networks in Kenya

**Typical Keywords:** “gang violence,” “gang clash,” “turf war,” “criminal groups fought”

#### LEVEL 3: Assassination (Criminal)

**Definition:** Targeted killing by organized crime, often of rivals, informants, or witnesses.

**Classification Criteria:** - Criminal organization as perpetrator - Victim is rival, informant, witness, or obstruction to criminal enterprise - Execution-style killing

**Examples:** - Suspected informant found executed in South Africa - Rival gang leader assassinated in Nairobi - Witness against cartel murdered in West Africa

#### LEVEL 3: Violence Against Law Enforcement

**Definition:** Deliberate attacks by organized crime against police, prosecutors, or judges.

**Examples:** - Drug traffickers ambush police convoy in Nigeria - Criminal gang attacks police station in South Africa - Organized crime assassinates prosecutor in Kenya

### LEVEL 2: Armed Robbery/Banditry

**Definition:** Theft using weapons and violence, ranging from opportunistic robberies to organized banditry.

**Key Features:** - Primary motivation is theft/robbery - Use of weapons and violence or threat thereof - May be organized or opportunistic

#### LEVEL 3: Highway Robbery/Banditry

**Definition:** Armed robbery on roads and highways, often targeting travelers, trucks, or vehicles.

**Examples:** - Armed bandits attack travelers on road in northern Nigeria - Highway robbers kill truck driver in Kenya - Bandits rob passengers on bus in Tanzania

**Typical Keywords:** “highway robbery,” “armed bandits,” “roadside attack,” “robbers attacked”

#### LEVEL 3: Bank/Business Robbery

**Definition:** Armed robbery of financial institutions, businesses, or commercial premises.

**Examples:** - Armed gang robs bank in Johannesburg, kills guard - Robbers attack gold dealer in Uganda - Armed men rob mobile money vendor in Kenya

#### LEVEL 3: Home Invasion/Residential Attack

**Definition:** Armed robbery or violent attack on private residences.

**Examples:** - Armed robbers invade home in Lagos, kill resident - Burglars attack family in Nairobi suburb - Home invasion results in deaths in Zimbabwe

#### LEVEL 3: Cattle Raiding (Criminal)

**Definition:** Armed theft of livestock by criminal groups or bandits (not communal/traditional raiding).

**Classification Criteria:** - Primary motivation is theft for profit - Perpetrators are criminals or bandits - Violence used in theft - Differs from communal cattle raiding (see Communal Violence)

**Examples:** - Armed bandits steal cattle, kill herders in Kenya - Criminal gang raids livestock in northern Nigeria - Bandits attack village, steal animals in Tanzania

### LEVEL 2: Kidnapping for Ransom (Criminal)

**Definition:** Abduction of individuals by criminal actors for financial ransom.

**Classification Criteria:** - Primary motivation is monetary gain - Perpetrator is criminal (not terrorist or political group) - Ransom demanded or implied

**Distinguishing Feature:** Economic vs. political motivation distinguishes from terrorist kidnapping

#### LEVEL 3: Individual/Family Kidnapping

**Definition:** Abduction of private individuals or families for ransom.

**Examples:** - Businessman kidnapped in Nigeria, ransom demanded - Family abducted in South Sudan by armed criminals - Wealthy individual seized in Ethiopia

**Typical Keywords:** “kidnapped for ransom,” “abducted,” “ransom demanded,” “seized”

#### LEVEL 3: Maritime Kidnapping/Piracy with Violence

**Definition:** Kidnapping associated with piracy or maritime crime.

**Examples:** - Crew members kidnapped from ship off Nigeria - Piracy attack results in hostage-taking in Gulf of Guinea - Fishermen abducted by pirates off Somalia

### LEVEL 2: Criminal Gang Violence

**Definition:** Violence by criminal gangs that doesn’t fit other criminal categories, including initiation violence, enforcement, and spontaneous criminal violence.

**Examples:** - Gang initiation killing in Cape Town - Criminal gang enforces “protection” with violence in Lagos - Gang violence over prostitution territory in Nairobi

## LEVEL 1: COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

**Definition:** Violence between identity-based groups (ethnic, religious, clan, tribal) over resources, territory, social dominance, or identity conflicts, not primarily directed at the state.

**Key Characteristics:** - Identity-based mobilization (ethnicity, religion, tribe, clan) - Often over resources, land, or social issues - Typically involves civilian populations - May have historical grievances - Not primarily targeting state power

### LEVEL 2: Ethnic/Tribal Conflict

**Definition:** Violence between ethnic or tribal groups over territory, resources, political power, or historical grievances.

**Key Features:** - Ethnic/tribal identity as mobilizing factor - Often involves community-level violence - May involve revenge cycles - Territory or resources often at stake

#### LEVEL 3: Ethnic Clash/Battle

**Definition:** Armed confrontation between ethnic groups, often organized at community level.

**Examples:** - Ethnic militias clash in eastern DRC, dozens killed - Tribal fighting erupts in South Sudan, villages burned - Ethnic groups battle over land in Ethiopia

**Typical Keywords:** “ethnic clash,” “tribal fighting,” “ethnic violence,” “communities fought”

#### LEVEL 3: Ethnic Massacre

**Definition:** Mass killing of members of one ethnic group by another, often targeting civilians.

**Classification Criteria:** - Large number of casualties (typically 10+) - Victims primarily or entirely one ethnic group - Often indiscriminate within target ethnic group - May involve village attacks

**Examples:** - Armed group massacres ethnic community in CAR, killing 40+ - Militia attacks village of rival ethnic group in DRC - Ethnic massacre in western Ethiopia claims dozens of lives

**Typical Keywords:** “massacre,” “ethnic cleansing,” “mass killing,” “slaughter”

#### LEVEL 3: Ethnic Revenge Attack

**Definition:** Violence as retaliation for previous attack by another ethnic group.

**Classification Criteria:** - Explicit or implicit retaliation for prior violence - Targets ethnic group responsible for earlier attack - Often part of revenge cycle

**Examples:** - Community retaliates for previous raid in Nigeria - Revenge attack following ethnic killing in Kenya - Counter-attack after village burning in South Sudan

**Typical Keywords:** “revenge attack,” “retaliation,” “retaliatory violence,” “in response to”

### LEVEL 2: Religious Violence

**Definition:** Violence between religious communities or targeting religious groups.

**Key Features:** - Religious identity as primary mobilizing factor - Often involves attacks on religious sites or events - May involve sectarian dimensions

#### LEVEL 3: Sectarian Violence

**Definition:** Violence between different sects within or across religions (e.g., Christian-Muslim, Sunni-Shia).

**Examples:** - Christian-Muslim violence in CAR - Sectarian clashes in northern Nigeria - Religious violence in Kaduna, Nigeria

**Typical Keywords:** “sectarian violence,” “religious clash,” “Christian-Muslim violence”

#### LEVEL 3: Attack on Religious Community

**Definition:** Targeted violence against religious community members, often outside of worship.

**Examples:** - Muslim community attacked in CAR - Christian villages targeted in northern Nigeria - Religious minority attacked in Ethiopia

#### LEVEL 3: Religious Site Desecration with Violence

**Definition:** Violent attacks on places of worship involving destruction and casualties.

**Examples:** - Mosque burned, worshippers killed in CAR - Church attacked during service in Nigeria - Violence at religious site in Ethiopia

### LEVEL 2: Resource-Based Conflict

**Definition:** Violence over control, access to, or distribution of natural resources including land, water, minerals, or forests.

**Key Features:** - Resource competition as primary driver - Often between communities with different livelihoods - May be seasonal or linked to scarcity - Territory often disputed

#### LEVEL 3: Land Conflict

**Definition:** Violence over land ownership, boundaries, or access.

**Examples:** - Land dispute turns violent in Kenya, multiple killed - Communities clash over territory in Tanzania - Boundary conflict results in deaths in Ethiopia

**Typical Keywords:** “land dispute,” “boundary conflict,” “territorial violence”

#### LEVEL 3: Water Conflict

**Definition:** Violence over water sources, water rights, or access to water.

**Examples:** - Communities clash over water point in Niger - Violence erupts over well in Chad - Water access dispute leads to killing in Kenya

#### LEVEL 3: Mining/Resource Extraction Violence

**Definition:** Violence over mining areas, mineral resources, or resource extraction sites.

**Examples:** - Conflict over gold mine in DRC kills miners - Violence over illegal mining in South Africa - Resource conflict in diamond area of CAR

### LEVEL 2: Pastoralist-Farmer Clashes

**Definition:** Violence between pastoral (herding) communities and agricultural (farming) communities, typically over land use, grazing rights, or crop damage.

**Key Features:** - Distinct livelihood groups (herders vs. farmers) - Often seasonal (linked to migration, planting) - May involve cattle raiding with violence - Land use competition as primary driver

#### LEVEL 3: Grazing Conflict

**Definition:** Violence over grazing lands, grazing rights, or crop damage by livestock.

**Examples:** - Farmers kill herders over crop damage in Nigeria - Herders attack farming community in Mali - Grazing dispute leads to deaths in Burkina Faso

**Typical Keywords:** “farmer-herder,” “grazing conflict,” “pastoralist,” “crop damage”

#### LEVEL 3: Cattle Raiding (Communal)

**Definition:** Traditional or communal cattle raiding involving violence, often between pastoral groups.

**Classification Criteria:** - Perpetrators are communal/ethnic groups or pastoralists - Raiding has communal/cultural context (not purely criminal) - Often involves ethnic dimension - May be retaliatory or cyclical

**Distinguishing Feature:** Communal/traditional context vs. purely criminal cattle theft

**Examples:** - Turkana raiders attack Pokot community in Kenya, steal cattle - Inter-communal cattle raid in South Sudan kills herders - Traditional cattle raiding turns deadly in Ethiopia

#### LEVEL 3: Revenge Raid (Pastoralist)

**Definition:** Retaliatory cattle raid or attack following previous raid or killing.

**Examples:** - Counter-raid following cattle theft in Kenya - Pastoralist revenge attack in South Sudan - Retaliatory violence between herding communities in Ethiopia

## LEVEL 1: STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

**Definition:** Violence perpetrated by state security forces (military, police, intelligence) against non-combatant civilians outside of armed conflict contexts, including extrajudicial killings, excessive force, and mass atrocities.

**Key Characteristics:** - State security forces as perpetrators - Victims are civilians (not combatants) - Often systematic or organized - Violates human rights norms and laws - Distinct from legitimate law enforcement

**Note:** This category is for clear state violence against civilians. Violence by state forces against armed groups is classified under Political Violence categories (if fighting rebels) or appropriate conflict categories.

### LEVEL 2: Extrajudicial Killings

**Definition:** Deliberate killing of individuals by state forces outside legal process, without trial or due process.

**Key Features:** - State forces as perpetrators - Victims denied legal process - Often targeted at suspects, dissidents, or marginalized groups - May be disguised as “encounter killings” or “shootouts”

#### LEVEL 3: Summary Execution

**Definition:** Immediate execution without trial or legal process.

**Examples:** - Police execute suspected criminals in South Africa - Military summarily kills detainees in Ethiopia - Security forces carry out execution of suspects in Nigeria

**Typical Keywords:** “executed,” “summary execution,” “shot and killed,” “extrajudicial killing”

#### LEVEL 3: Enforced Disappearance Leading to Death

**Definition:** State forces abduct individuals who are later found dead or never found.

**Examples:** - Activist disappears after arrest, body found later in Burundi - Opposition member vanishes after detention in Rwanda - Disappeared person confirmed killed in custody in Egypt

**Typical Keywords:** “disappeared,” “enforced disappearance,” “vanished after arrest”

#### LEVEL 3: Torture Resulting in Death

**Definition:** Killing through torture in state custody or detention.

**Examples:** - Detainee dies from torture in police custody in Zimbabwe - Prisoner tortured to death in Ethiopia - Suspect dies from injuries inflicted during interrogation in Kenya

### LEVEL 2: State Repression of Protests

**Definition:** State use of excessive or lethal force against protesters, resulting in deaths or serious injuries.

**Key Features:** - Protesters are largely unarmed or minimally armed - State response involves lethal force - Force is excessive relative to threat - Mass casualties common

**Note:** See also “Violent Suppression of Protests” under Political Violence > Political Repression

#### LEVEL 3: Shooting of Protesters

**Definition:** State forces shooting live ammunition at protesters.

**Examples:** - Police shoot protesters in Zimbabwe, killing 17 - Military opens fire on demonstrators in Sudan - Security forces use lethal force against protesters in Guinea

**Typical Keywords:** “shot protesters,” “fired on demonstrators,” “live ammunition,” “troops shot”

#### LEVEL 3: Violent Dispersal Resulting in Deaths

**Definition:** Use of force to disperse protests that results in deaths, including beatings, trampling, or excessive chemical agents.

**Examples:** - Police beatings kill protesters in Uganda - Stampede during violent dispersal in Ethiopia results in deaths - Tear gas in confined space kills protesters in Egypt

### LEVEL 2: Mass Atrocities by State Forces

**Definition:** Large-scale, systematic violence by state forces against civilian populations, potentially including crimes against humanity.

**Key Features:** - Large number of victims - Systematic or widespread - State forces as perpetrators - Often targets specific ethnic, political, or regional group

#### LEVEL 3: Massacre by State Forces

**Definition:** Mass killing of civilians by state military or security forces.

**Classification Criteria:** - State forces as perpetrators - Large number of civilian casualties (typically 10+) - Victims largely unarmed - Often indiscriminate within target group

**Examples:** - Army massacres civilians in village in South Sudan - Security forces kill dozens in community in DRC - Military operation results in civilian massacre in Myanmar (example outside Africa)

**Typical Keywords:** “massacre,” “mass killing,” “slaughter,” “troops killed civilians”

#### LEVEL 3: Ethnic Cleansing by State

**Definition:** Systematic forced removal or killing of ethnic group by state forces.

**Examples:** - Military drives ethnic group from region in Myanmar - Systematic violence to remove ethnic community in Ethiopia - State-organized ethnic cleansing in Darfur, Sudan

### LEVEL 2: Forced Displacement by State

**Definition:** State use of violence to forcibly remove populations from their homes or land.

**Key Features:** - State forces compel movement through violence - Victims forced from homes/land - Often linked to land seizure or political motives

#### LEVEL 3: Violent Eviction

**Definition:** State forces violently evict people from homes or settlements.

**Examples:** - Police violently evict slum residents in Kenya, deaths occur - Forced removal of community with violence in Zimbabwe - Military evicts villagers at gunpoint in Ethiopia

#### LEVEL 3: Village Burning/Destruction by State

**Definition:** State forces burn or destroy villages to force population movement.

**Examples:** - Army burns villages in Darfur, Sudan - Military destroys settlements in South Sudan - Security forces raze villages in Ethiopia

### LEVEL 2: Arbitrary Detention with Violence

**Definition:** Mass arrests or detention operations involving significant violence.

**Key Features:** - State forces conduct mass arrests - Violence used in detention process - Often arbitrary or politically motivated - Injuries or deaths result

#### LEVEL 3: Violent Mass Arrest Operation

**Definition:** Large-scale arrest operation involving violence, injuries, or deaths.

**Examples:** - Police violently round up hundreds in Ethiopia, several injured - Mass detention with violence in Zimbabwe - Crackdown results in injuries and arrests in Egypt

## 5. Classification Decision Rules

### 5.1 Primary Classification Logic

**Step 1: Identify Actor Type** - **State forces perpetrator + civilian victims** → Consider STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS - **State forces vs. armed opposition** → POLITICAL VIOLENCE (Rebellion) - **Non-state armed group** → Likely POLITICAL VIOLENCE (if political motive) or CRIMINAL VIOLENCE - **Community groups** → Likely COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

**Step 2: Identify Primary Motivation** - **Political change/power** → POLITICAL VIOLENCE - **Economic/profit** → CRIMINAL VIOLENCE - **Identity/resources** → COMMUNAL VIOLENCE - **State repression** → STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS or POLITICAL VIOLENCE (Political Repression)

**Step 3: Identify Target** - **Civilians (by state)** → STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS - **Government/state institutions** → POLITICAL VIOLENCE - **Symbolic/terror targets** → POLITICAL VIOLENCE (Terrorism) - **Economic targets (for theft)** → CRIMINAL VIOLENCE - **Other community** → COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

### 5.2 Handling Ambiguous Cases

**Case: State violence that could be Political Repression or State Violence Against Civilians**

**Decision Rule:** - If victims are engaged in political activity (protesters, opposition) → POLITICAL VIOLENCE > Political Repression - If victims are civilians not engaged in political activity → STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS - If unclear → Tag both; prefer STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS if force is clearly excessive

**Case: Kidnapping - Criminal vs. Terrorism**

**Decision Rule:** - Perpetrator is known terrorist group → Terrorism - Purely ransom motivation + criminal actor → Criminal Violence - Ambiguous actor → Check for political demands; if present → Terrorism; if absent → Criminal

**Case: Cattle Raiding - Criminal vs. Communal**

**Decision Rule:** - Perpetrator is criminal gang/bandits + pure theft motive → Criminal Violence - Perpetrator is ethnic/communal group + traditional/ethnic context → Communal Violence - Ambiguous → If violence is part of inter-communal conflict pattern → Communal; if isolated criminal act → Criminal

**Case: Assassination - Terrorism vs. Political Repression vs. Criminal**

**Decision Rule:** - Perpetrator is terrorist group → Terrorism - Perpetrator is state or state-linked → Political Repression or State Violence - Perpetrator is criminal organization → Criminal Violence - Check victim: government official → likely Political Violence; rival criminal → Criminal

**Case: Ethnic violence that may also be political**

**Decision Rule:** - If ethnic groups fighting over resources/territory without state involvement → Communal Violence - If one ethnic group is rebelling against state → Political Violence (Rebellion) - If state targeting ethnic group → State Violence Against Civilians (or Ethnic Cleansing) - Hybrid: Can tag multiple categories if genuinely ambiguous

### 5.3 Multi-Labeling Guidance

**When to assign multiple categories:** - Event genuinely spans categories - Primary and secondary classifications both valid - Ambiguity cannot be resolved from available information

**How to handle:** - Assign primary category (most prominent/central) - Assign secondary category (also applicable) - Document reasoning

**Example:** - Election violence by ethnic militia could be: Primary: Election Violence; Secondary: Communal Violence

## 6. Examples and Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Complex Attack in Mali

**News Excerpt:** “Armed militants believed to be linked to JNIM attacked a military base in Gao region, Mali on Thursday. The attackers used vehicle-borne explosives and small arms. 15 soldiers were killed and the base was temporarily overrun before reinforcements arrived. The group has been fighting the Malian government since 2017 seeking to impose strict Islamic law.”

**Classification:** - **Level 1:** Political Violence - **Level 2:** Rebellion/Armed Insurgency (JNIM is insurgent group) - **Level 3:** Rebel Attack on Government Position - **Level 4:** Base Assault

**Alternative perspective:** Could be classified under Terrorism if emphasis is on the terrorist designation of JNIM, but given context of insurgency and military target, Rebellion is more accurate.

### Case Study 2: Market Bombing in Nigeria

**News Excerpt:** “A suicide bomber detonated explosives at a crowded market in Maiduguri, northeastern Nigeria on Saturday, killing at least 32 civilians and injuring dozens more. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the attack, which targeted innocent shoppers including women and children.”

**Classification:** - **Level 1:** Political Violence - **Level 2:** Terrorism - **Level 3:** Bombing/Explosive Attack - **Level 4:** Suicide Bombing

**Rationale:** Target is civilians, intent is terror, method is suicide bombing, perpetrator is designated terrorist group.

### Case Study 3: Pastoralist-Farmer Violence in Nigeria

**News Excerpt:** “At least 20 people were killed in clashes between Fulani herders and farming communities in Benue State, Nigeria. The violence erupted after cattle allegedly destroyed crops. Farmers attacked herders, who then retaliated. Several villages were burned.”

**Classification:** - **Level 1:** Communal Violence - **Level 2:** Pastoralist-Farmer Clashes - **Level 3:** Grazing Conflict

**Rationale:** Livelihood-based conflict, communal actors, resource competition (land use), no political or criminal primary motivation.

### Case Study 4: Protest Shooting in Zimbabwe

**News Excerpt:** “Police opened fire on opposition protesters in Harare on Monday, killing at least 6 people and injuring scores. The protesters were demonstrating against fuel price increases when security forces used live ammunition to disperse the crowd. Opposition leaders condemned the ‘brutal crackdown.’”

**Classification:** - **Level 1:** State Violence Against Civilians OR Political Violence - **Level 2:** (If State Violence) State Repression of Protests OR (If Political Violence) Political Repression - **Level 3:** Shooting of Protesters OR Violent Suppression of Protests

**Rationale:** Ambiguous between two Level 1 categories. Given the political context (opposition protest), Political Violence > Political Repression > Violent Suppression of Protests may be most appropriate. However, State Violence Against Civilians is also valid given state forces killing unarmed civilians.

**Decision:** Primary: Political Violence > Political Repression > Violent Suppression of Protests; Secondary: State Violence Against Civilians

### Case Study 5: Armed Robbery in Kenya

**News Excerpt:** “Armed robbers attacked a commercial bank in Nairobi on Tuesday morning, killing a security guard and escaping with an undisclosed amount of money. Police are searching for the gang believed to be behind multiple bank robberies in the region.”

**Classification:** - **Level 1:** Criminal Violence - **Level 2:** Armed Robbery/Banditry - **Level 3:** Bank/Business Robbery

**Rationale:** Primary motivation is theft, perpetrators are criminals, no political or communal dimension.

## 7. Edge Cases and Ambiguous Events

### Edge Case 1: State forces attacking armed opposition

**Question:** State military attacks rebel base - is this Political Violence or State Violence Against Civilians?

**Answer:** Political Violence > Rebellion > Armed Clash (if rebels fight back) or Government Attack on Rebel Position. NOT State Violence Against Civilians because targets are combatants.

### Edge Case 2: Criminal gang with political connections

**Question:** Gang violence where gang is allied with political party or government faction

**Answer:** - If violence is primarily criminal (turf, profits) → Criminal Violence - If violence is on behalf of political objectives → Political Violence - Document political connection as attribute but classify by primary motivation

### Edge Case 3: Terrorism vs. Rebellion

**Question:** How to distinguish between terrorist attacks and rebel attacks?

**Answer:** - **Terrorism:** Primarily targets civilians or soft targets; aims to create terror; indiscriminate - **Rebellion:** Targets government forces or infrastructure; aims for territorial control or political change; more discriminate - **Hybrid groups:** JNIM, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab engage in both - classify each event by its specific characteristics

**Example:** - Al-Shabaab attacks military base → Rebellion > Rebel Attack on Government Position - Al-Shabaab bombs market → Terrorism > Bombing > Suicide Bombing

### Edge Case 4: Protest violence - who initiated?

**Question:** Violence during protests - when is it state repression vs. riot?

**Answer:** - If state forces initiate lethal violence against largely peaceful protesters → Political Repression or State Violence - If protesters initiate significant violence and state responds → May be riot (though if state response is grossly excessive, still repression) - Judgment call based on proportionality and who escalated to lethal force

### Edge Case 5: Communal violence with state backing

**Question:** Ethnic militia attacks rival ethnic group, but militia is armed/supported by government

**Answer:** - If state clearly directs/orchestrates → State Violence Against Civilians (possible Ethnic Cleansing) - If state provides arms but violence is communally driven → Communal Violence (note state involvement as attribute) - Document state role but classify by primary dynamic

## 8. Visual Hierarchy Diagram

VIOLENT EVENTS TAXONOMY  
│  
├── POLITICAL VIOLENCE  
│ ├── Rebellion/Armed Insurgency  
│ │ ├── Armed Clash/Battle  
│ │ ├── Ambush  
│ │ │ ├── Roadside Ambush  
│ │ │ ├── IED Ambush  
│ │ │ └── Complex Ambush  
│ │ ├── Rebel Attack on Government Position  
│ │ │ ├── Base Assault  
│ │ │ ├── Checkpoint Attack  
│ │ │ └── Overrun Operation  
│ │ └── Forced Recruitment  
│ │  
│ ├── Terrorism  
│ │ ├── Bombing/Explosive Attack  
│ │ │ ├── Suicide Bombing  
│ │ │ ├── Car/Vehicle Bombing (VBIED)  
│ │ │ ├── Roadside IED  
│ │ │ ├── Grenade Attack  
│ │ │ └── Building/Infrastructure Bombing  
│ │ ├── Armed Assault  
│ │ │ ├── Mass Shooting/Rampage  
│ │ │ ├── Coordinated Multi-Site Attack  
│ │ │ ├── Lone Actor Attack  
│ │ │ └── Armed Raid  
│ │ ├── Kidnapping/Hostage-Taking (Terrorism)  
│ │ ├── Assassination (Terrorism)  
│ │ └── Attack on Symbolic/Soft Targets  
│ │ ├── Attack on Religious Site  
│ │ ├── Attack on Educational Institution  
│ │ ├── Attack on Healthcare Facility  
│ │ ├── Attack on Humanitarian/Aid Workers  
│ │ ├── Attack on Transportation  
│ │ └── Attack on Commercial/Economic Target  
│ │  
│ ├── Coup and Regime Change Violence  
│ │ ├── Military Coup (Violent)  
│ │ ├── Coup-Related Violence  
│ │ └── Assassination (Regime Change)  
│ │  
│ ├── Election Violence  
│ │ ├── Campaign Violence  
│ │ │ ├── Attack on Candidate/Political Figure  
│ │ │ ├── Attack on Campaign Event  
│ │ │ └── Violence Against Party Members/Supporters  
│ │ ├── Voting Day Violence  
│ │ │ ├── Attack on Polling Station  
│ │ │ └── Voter Intimidation with Violence  
│ │ └── Post-Election Violence  
│ │ ├── Election Protest Violence  
│ │ └── Targeted Violence Against Opposing Group  
│ │  
│ └── Political Repression  
│ ├── Violent Suppression of Protests  
│ ├── Targeted Killings of Political Opponents  
│ └── Mass Arrests with Violence  
│  
├── CRIMINAL VIOLENCE  
│ ├── Organized Crime Violence  
│ │ ├── Gang Warfare/Turf Violence  
│ │ ├── Assassination (Criminal)  
│ │ └── Violence Against Law Enforcement  
│ │  
│ ├── Armed Robbery/Banditry  
│ │ ├── Highway Robbery/Banditry  
│ │ ├── Bank/Business Robbery  
│ │ ├── Home Invasion/Residential Attack  
│ │ └── Cattle Raiding (Criminal)  
│ │  
│ ├── Kidnapping for Ransom (Criminal)  
│ │ ├── Individual/Family Kidnapping  
│ │ └── Maritime Kidnapping/Piracy with Violence  
│ │  
│ └── Criminal Gang Violence  
│  
├── COMMUNAL VIOLENCE  
│ ├── Ethnic/Tribal Conflict  
│ │ ├── Ethnic Clash/Battle  
│ │ ├── Ethnic Massacre  
│ │ └── Ethnic Revenge Attack  
│ │  
│ ├── Religious Violence  
│ │ ├── Sectarian Violence  
│ │ ├── Attack on Religious Community  
│ │ └── Religious Site Desecration with Violence  
│ │  
│ ├── Resource-Based Conflict  
│ │ ├── Land Conflict  
│ │ ├── Water Conflict  
│ │ └── Mining/Resource Extraction Violence  
│ │  
│ └── Pastoralist-Farmer Clashes  
│ ├── Grazing Conflict  
│ ├── Cattle Raiding (Communal)  
│ └── Revenge Raid (Pastoralist)  
│  
└── STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS  
 ├── Extrajudicial Killings  
 │ ├── Summary Execution  
 │ ├── Enforced Disappearance Leading to Death  
 │ └── Torture Resulting in Death  
 │  
 ├── State Repression of Protests  
 │ ├── Shooting of Protesters  
 │ └── Violent Dispersal Resulting in Deaths  
 │  
 ├── Mass Atrocities by State Forces  
 │ ├── Massacre by State Forces  
 │ └── Ethnic Cleansing by State  
 │  
 ├── Forced Displacement by State  
 │ ├── Violent Eviction  
 │ └── Village Burning/Destruction by State  
 │  
 └── Arbitrary Detention with Violence  
 └── Violent Mass Arrest Operation

## 9. Validation Checklist

### 9.1 Stakeholder Validation Process

**Step 1: Expert Review (Week 1-2)** - [ ] Present taxonomy to AU-CEWS analysts - [ ] Present to conflict researchers/academics - [ ] Present to field staff with ground-level knowledge - [ ] Gather feedback on category definitions - [ ] Assess coverage of real-world events - [ ] Identify missing categories - [ ] Identify problematic categorizations

**Step 2: Historical Event Coding (Week 3)** - [ ] Select 200-300 diverse historical events from AU-CEWS records - [ ] Have 2-3 coders independently classify events using taxonomy - [ ] Measure inter-coder agreement (Cohen’s Kappa) - [ ] Target: Kappa > 0.75 for Level 1, > 0.70 for Level 2, > 0.65 for Level 3 - [ ] Analyze disagreements - [ ] Identify categories with low agreement - [ ] Refine problematic categories

**Step 3: Coverage Assessment (Week 3)** - [ ] Check if all historical events fit into taxonomy - [ ] Identify events that don’t fit cleanly - [ ] Determine if new categories needed - [ ] Assess if granularity is appropriate

**Step 4: Refinement (Week 4)** - [ ] Revise category definitions based on feedback - [ ] Add missing categories - [ ] Merge overly similar categories - [ ] Clarify ambiguous boundaries - [ ] Update decision rules

**Step 5: Re-validation (Week 5)** - [ ] Re-code sample events with refined taxonomy - [ ] Measure improved inter-coder agreement - [ ] Iterate if necessary

**Step 6: Finalization** - [ ] Document all changes from initial version - [ ] Create Version 2.0 with stakeholder input incorporated - [ ] Get formal sign-off from key stakeholders

### 9.2 Taxonomy Quality Criteria

**Completeness:** - [ ] Covers >95% of violent events in African news corpus - [ ] No major violence types missing - [ ] Sufficient granularity for operational needs

**Consistency:** - [ ] Clear, non-overlapping category definitions - [ ] Hierarchical relationships are logical - [ ] Child categories are proper subsets of parents

**Usability:** - [ ] Categories are understandable to domain experts - [ ] Classification criteria are operational (not abstract) - [ ] Decision rules handle common ambiguities - [ ] Examples are clear and diverse

**Distinguishability:** - [ ] Categories can be distinguished from linguistic features in text - [ ] Annotators can reliably classify events - [ ] Inter-annotator agreement is acceptable

**Operational Utility:** - [ ] Categories align with AU-CEWS reporting needs - [ ] Enables required aggregations and queries - [ ] Supports policy-relevant analysis

### 9.3 Validation Metrics

**Inter-Annotator Agreement Targets:** - Level 1 (Broad Categories): Cohen’s Kappa ≥ 0.75 - Level 2 (Intermediate Types): Cohen’s Kappa ≥ 0.70 - Level 3 (Specific Types): Cohen’s Kappa ≥ 0.65 - Level 4 (Detailed Subtypes): Cohen’s Kappa ≥ 0.60

**Coverage Metrics:** - ≥95% of events fit into taxonomy - ≤5% require “Other” or new category - All major African conflict patterns represented

**Stakeholder Approval:** - Positive assessment from ≥80% of AU-CEWS reviewers - No critical flaws identified - Formal approval for use in annotation

## 10. Revision History

**Version 1.0 (October 2025)** - Initial taxonomy draft - 4 Level 1 categories, 18 Level 2, ~95 total categories - Based on literature review (ACLED, UCDP, GDELT) and initial requirements analysis - Awaiting stakeholder validation

**Future Revisions:** - Version 1.1: Minor refinements from initial feedback - Version 2.0: Major revision incorporating stakeholder validation - Version 3.0+: Ongoing updates as new violence patterns emerge

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Quick Reference - Common Event Types

**Most Common Event Types in African Conflicts (for quick lookup):**

1. Armed Clash/Battle (Rebellion)
2. Suicide Bombing (Terrorism)
3. Ethnic Clash (Communal Violence)
4. Violent Suppression of Protests (Political Repression)
5. Armed Assault/Armed Raid (Terrorism)
6. Ambush (Rebellion)
7. Extrajudicial Killing (State Violence)
8. Kidnapping for Ransom (Criminal)
9. Pastoralist-Farmer Clashes (Communal)
10. Armed Robbery (Criminal)

### Appendix B: Actor Type Reference

**Common Actor Types in African Violence:**

**State Actors:** - National military - Police forces - Intelligence services - Paramilitary/gendarmes - National guard

**Non-State Armed Groups (Political):** - Rebel movements (e.g., M23, FDLR) - Insurgent groups (e.g., Oromo Liberation Army) - Terrorist organizations (e.g., Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, AQIM, JNIM) - Separatist movements

**Communal Actors:** - Ethnic militias - Tribal groups - Pastoralist communities - Farmer communities - Religious groups

**Criminal Actors:** - Criminal gangs - Organized crime networks - Bandits - Pirates - Traffickers

### Appendix C: Linguistic Indicators

**Common Keywords by Category (to aid automated extraction):**

**Terrorism Indicators:** - “suicide bomber,” “terrorist attack,” “IED,” “claimed responsibility” - “militants,” “extremists,” “jihadists” - Terrorist group names

**Rebellion Indicators:** - “rebels,” “insurgents,” “armed group” - “clash,” “battle,” “ambush” - “government forces,” “army,” “troops”

**Communal Violence Indicators:** - Ethnic group names - “ethnic clash,” “communal violence,” “tribal fighting” - “herders,” “farmers,” “pastoralists” - “land dispute,” “resource conflict”

**Criminal Violence Indicators:** - “armed robbers,” “bandits,” “gang” - “robbery,” “ransom,” “kidnapped” - “criminal,” “theft”

**State Violence Indicators:** - “police shot,” “troops opened fire” - “protesters,” “demonstration” - “extrajudicial,” “execution” - “state forces,” “security forces”

## Next Steps

1. **Review and Feedback:** Share this taxonomy with your advisor and AU-CEWS stakeholders for initial feedback
2. **Validation Process:** Implement the validation checklist (Section 9) to refine the taxonomy
3. **Annotation Guidelines:** Once taxonomy is validated, develop detailed annotation guidelines showing annotators exactly how to apply these categories
4. **System Implementation:** Use this taxonomy structure to:
   * Design database schema
   * Create training data annotation templates
   * Build classification features
   * Develop user query interfaces
5. **Living Document:** This taxonomy should evolve based on:
   * Validation feedback
   * Annotation experiences
   * New violence patterns
   * Operational lessons learned

**Document Status:** DRAFT v1.0 - Awaiting Stakeholder Review  
**Contact:** Binalfew Kassa Mekonnen  
**Prepared for:** Master’s Thesis - Knowledge Discovery from Free Text: Extraction of Violent Events