



# THE STATE OF THE LRA IN 2015

## *8 key trends in LRA activity*

### *PRINT VERSION*

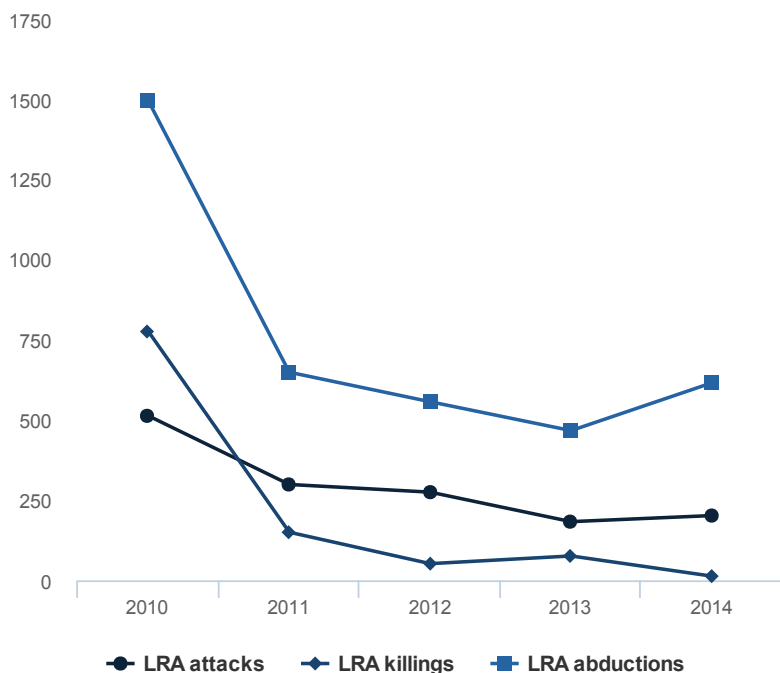
The State of the LRA in 2015: 8 key trends in LRA activity is designed to be viewed online in an interactive format at <http://reports.lracrisistracker.com/en/state-of-the-lra-2015/>. The design of this print version is more limited and is intended as a secondary copy for users with minimal internet access.

*A publication of:*



*February 2015*

## 1. Total LRA attacks and abductions increased in 2014, reversing years of decline



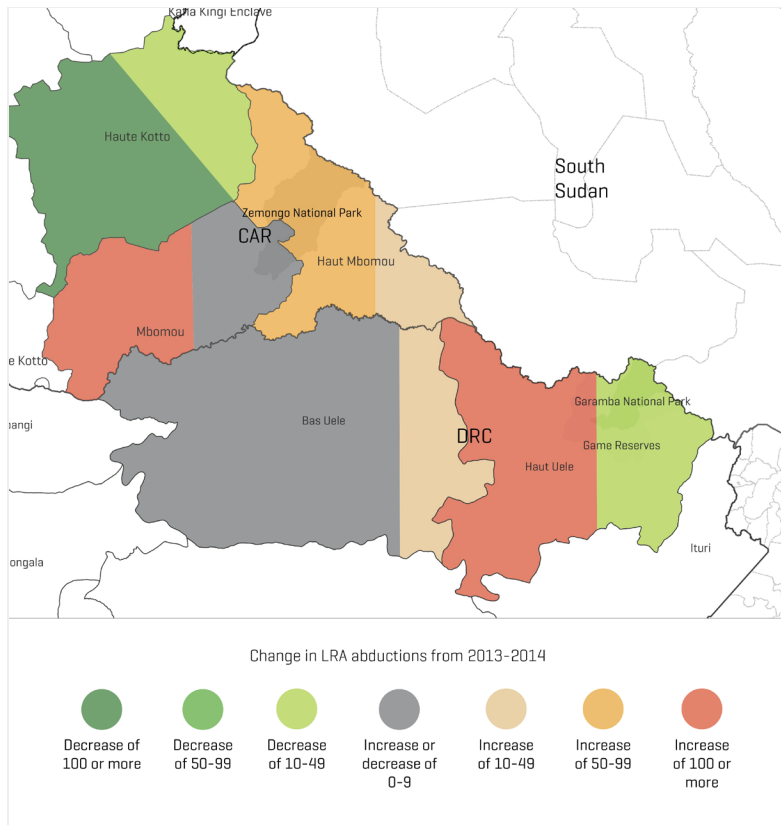
**SUMMARY** In 2014, total LRA attacks rose 10% and abductions 32% compared to 2013.

LRA attacks and abductions declined each year from 2011–2013, reflecting the group's reduced fighting capacity and Joseph Kony's intentional strategy to minimize large-scale attacks that attract international attention. This trend reversed in 2014, with attacks increasing by 10% and abductions increasing by 32% compared to 2013. Killings by the LRA, however, continued to drop [see Section 6 for more analysis].

Despite the uptick in violence in 2014, nearly all LRA attacks remained focused on looting basic goods the group needs to survive, a trend consistent with recent years. LRA abductees were mostly adults used to porter looted goods into the bush who either escaped or were released within days. There remains little evidence that the LRA is abducting young children in order to rebuild its fighting capacity, though at least one LRA defector in 2014 reported Kony ordered the abduction of young boys for that purpose.

*Note: Hover your mouse over individual data points on the graph to see their exact value.*

## 2. Trends in LRA violence varied dramatically at the local level



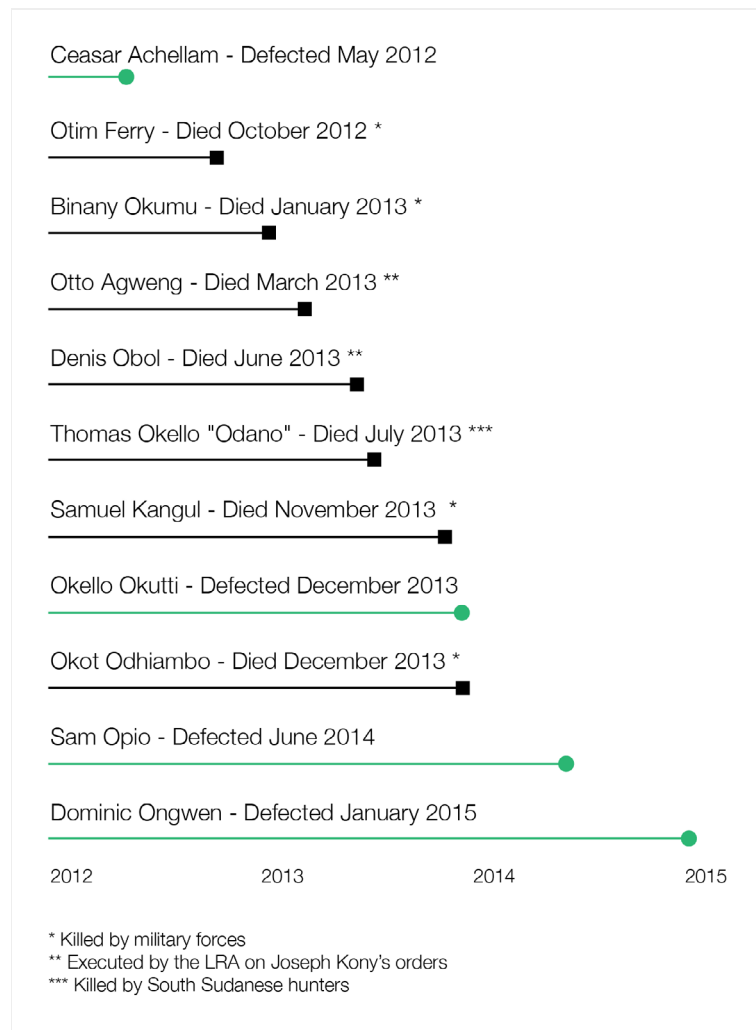
**SUMMARY** Attacks and abductions in 2014 rose significantly in some areas, such as western Haut Uele district and western Mbomou prefecture, and decreased dramatically in others.

The overall increase in LRA violence in 2014 masks significant variations at more local scales. In the Democratic Republic of Congo's Haut Uele district, the LRA abducted more people in communities west of Garamba National Park in 2014 than they had since 2011. Communities south and east of the park experienced only two attacks in the first 11 months of 2014, a dramatic drop that may be linked to the destruction of LRA camps in Garamba National Park by African Union Regional Task Force (AU RTF) troops and US military advisers in late 2013. However, these communities saw a spike of 10 LRA attacks between December 2014 and February 2015.

Similar variations emerged in eastern Central African Republic. LRA forces abducted 134 people in western Haut Kotto prefecture in 2013 and none in 2014. In western Mbomou prefecture, LRA groups had peaceful interactions with civilians and abducted no people in 2013, but abducted over 100 people in a series of seven attacks from April–July 2014.

The unpredictability of LRA attacks from year-to-year is partly why the LRA is able to destabilize such a vast swath of territory despite its reduced fighting capacity. Farmers become discouraged from planting crops in rural areas even if LRA attacks drop, knowing they may increase in just a few months. Meanwhile, humanitarian groups may reduce operations in one area only to find needs later increase as LRA attacks rise, as happened in western Haut Uele following the withdrawal of over half of all international aid groups operating in the region between January 2013 and February 2014.

### 3. The LRA's command structure is in upheaval



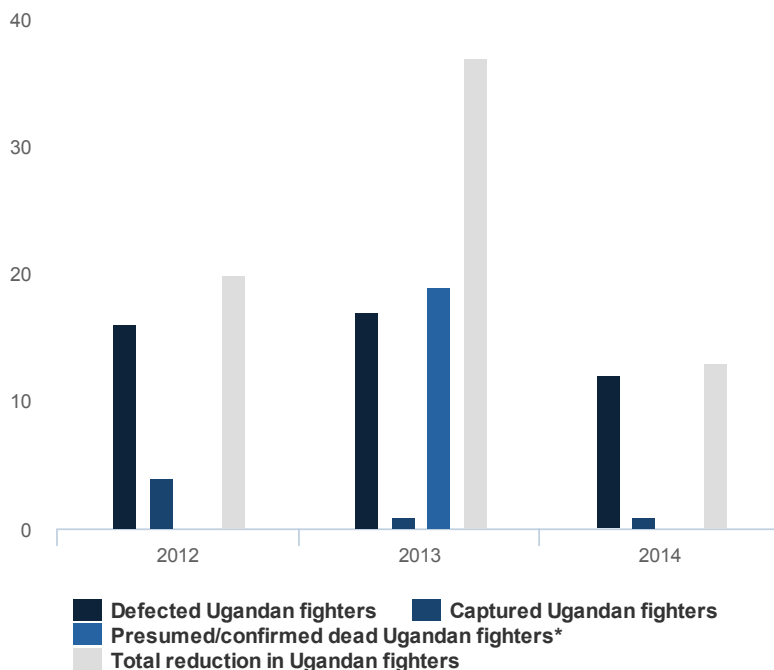
**SUMMARY** *The LRA has lost at least a dozen senior officers since 2012, but Kony has compensated by promoting younger commanders, including his sons.*

Since 2012, a significant number of the LRA's senior commanders have defected, been killed by the UPDF and other forces, or been executed on Kony's orders. Their loss, combined with losses in the LRA's rank-and-file, poses a major threat to Kony's ability to motivate and control remaining fighters.

Still, Kony is a master manipulator who frequently reshuffles the LRA command hierarchy to compensate for losses at the top. He has promoted his two oldest sons, Ali and Salim, who have key roles in planning operations and tracking the LRA's finances and logistics. He has also elevated young loyalists who were once his bodyguards, such as Aligac, who was promoted to help fill the gap left when Okot Odhiambo was killed in December 2013.

Kony has promoted other commanders after they successfully completed missions, including Owila, who delivered approximately 50 elephant tusks poached from Garamba National Park to Kony in late 2014. In some cases, Kony has even promoted marginalized older commanders, such as Alphonse Lamola, who he had placed under the supervision of junior officers in 2011. In early 2014 Kony placed Lamola in command of several groups near Nzako, CAR, that had been operating under Samuel Kangul, who was killed by Ugandan troops in November 2013.

#### 4. The LRA's fighting capacity is dropping (slowly)



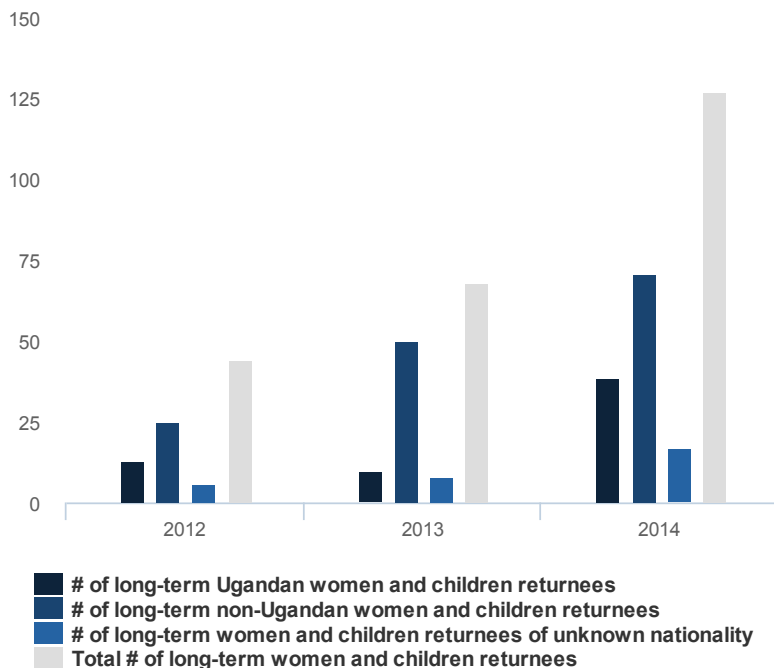
**SUMMARY** 13 Ugandan male fighters defected or were captured in 2014, reducing the LRA's group's core fighting capacity to approximately 150 combatants and spurring the continued integration of non-Acholi abductees into the LRA's junior officer ranks.

Kony commanded over 2,000 fighters during the LRA's peak in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many armed with sophisticated weaponry and communications equipment. By 2008, military operations, internal divisions, and defections had reduced the LRA's fighting force to 800. In 2013, 18 Ugandan male fighters, who comprise the core of the group, defected or were captured. 19 more were confirmed or presumed to have died, mostly killed by Ugandan troops or executed on Kony's orders. In total, approximately 165 Ugandan male fighters remained within the LRA by the end of 2013.

Of those 165 Ugandan fighters, at least 13 defected or were captured in 2014, with no reported deaths. This reduction is significantly smaller than the 37 fighters the LRA lost in 2013. To offset the LRA's losses, in recent years Kony has been integrating between approximately 30–50 non-Ugandan abductees within the group's junior officer ranks. Several of these abducted fighters have reportedly been promoted to 2nd Lt., including a woman abducted from Congo in 2009 and forced to become one of Kony's wives.

*\*No data available for 2012*

## 5. The LRA is losing its most experienced women and children captives

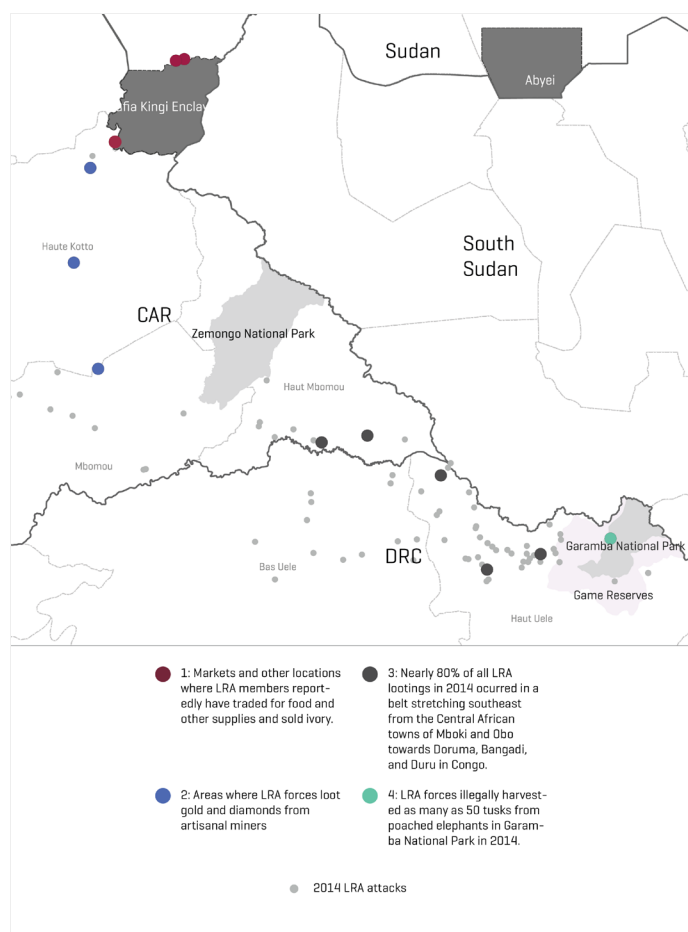


**SUMMARY** 127 women and children who spent at least six months in LRA captivity returned home in 2014, almost double the number in 2013.

Senior LRA officers rely heavily on women and children, many abducted and others born in the bush, for their day-to-day survival. Women and children collect food and water, cook, carry possessions from camp to camp, and serve as forced wives and occasionally combatants. In mid-2014, Kony ordered the release of over 70 such long-term abductees in a remote village in northern Congo, the same location where the LRA released 28 women and children in March 2013.

In total, 127 women and children who spent at least six months in the LRA returned home in 2014. This number represents a significant proportion of the long-term abductees who began 2014 in LRA captivity, and is almost double the number who returned home from the LRA in 2013. Their loss may allow LRA groups to move faster and better evade Ugandan troops, but it will also make life more difficult for senior LRA officers and may contribute to their desire to defect.

## 6. The LRA is using collaborators to traffic illicit resources



**SUMMARY** *In addition to looting small communities, the LRA acquires needed supplies by trafficking illicit ivory, gold, and diamonds with a network of collaborators.*

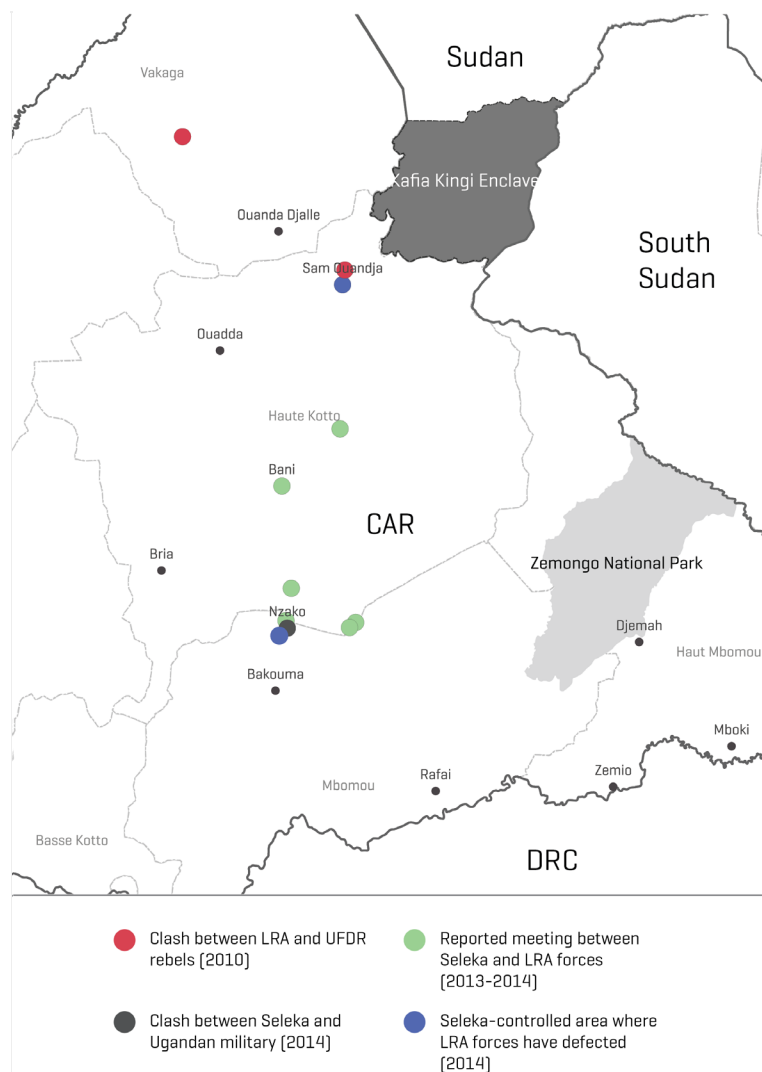
The LRA has been remarkably resilient to military pressure, utilizing a sophisticated network of camps and resupply routes to crisscross the porous borders and remote forests that restrict the movements of pursuing Ugandan and US troops. Broken into small groups, many LRA members primarily survive by looting small communities and farming and foraging where possible.

Some LRA groups, particularly those in eastern CAR and the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave, also obtain needed goods by trading with civilian and military contacts. In some cases, LRA groups use civilians, often threatened with violence, to go into local markets and purchase petty goods. LRA defectors also report that Seleka forces and Sudanese troops periodically trade, or give, supplies to the rebel group. LRA groups also exchange goods with traders that travel between northeastern CAR, Kafia Kingi, and South Darfur.

Such contacts have been essential to another key LRA livelihood strategy, [trafficking illegal ivory, gold, and diamonds](#). In mid-2014, an LRA group collected approximately 50 ivory tusks poached from elephants in Congo's Garamba National Park. Kony has tasked other groups with looting gold and diamonds from artisanal mining sites in eastern CAR. Ivory and most gold and diamonds are delivered to Kony's group, which operates along the border of northeastern CAR, Kafia Kingi, and South Darfur and can arrange to sell or trade illicit materials to military interlocutors and traders.

The LRA's reduction in civilian killings, from 1,200 in 2009 to 13 in 2014, also reflects the group's less aggressive approach to survival in recent years. From 2008–2010, LRA fighters often killed civilians in large numbers as a tactic to control their behavior and even depopulate certain areas. As international attention on the LRA intensified and the group's fighting capacity declined, Kony issued orders to reduce killings. In recent years, dozens of LRA looting victims have reported that LRA fighters told them to inform community members that the LRA does want to harm them, but only wants enough food to survive.

## 7. The LRA and Seleka have a complicated relationship



**SUMMARY** Seleka forces in eastern CAR have a complicated relationship with the LRA, sometimes facilitating defections and sometimes giving the LRA supplies.

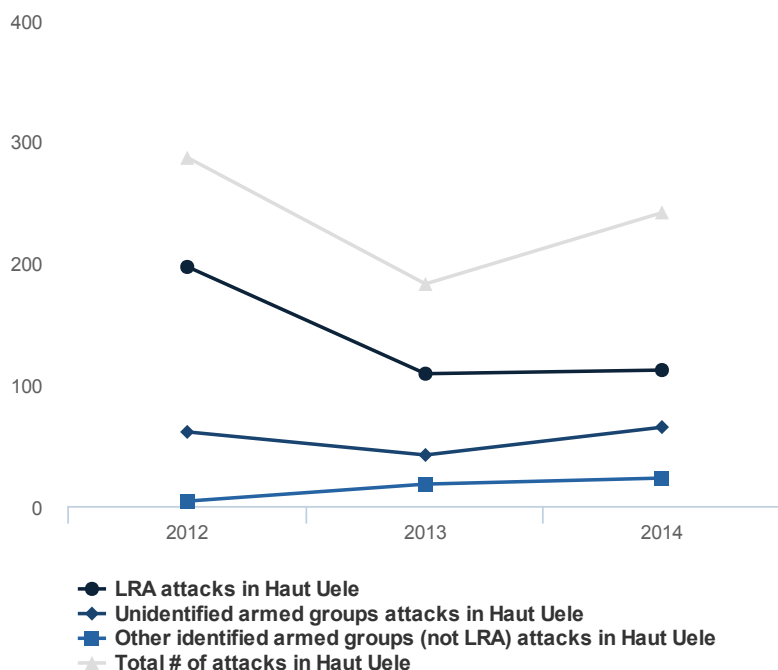
The role of Seleka rebels in the defection of senior LRA commander Dominic Ongwen was simply the latest chapter in a rollercoaster relationship between the two groups. They first came into contact in 2010, when LRA forces clashed repeatedly with UFDR rebels (one of the groups that later joined Seleka) as the LRA pushed north into the Kafia Kingi enclave to establish contact with Sudanese troops.

After taking power in a coup in March 2013, Seleka forces faced pressure to address community concerns about LRA violence in eastern CAR. Lacking the military capacity to defeat the LRA, Seleka officers met with LRA groups periodically in late 2013 and into 2014, forcing local communities on several occasions to give LRA groups food in an attempt to discourage attacks and encourage defections. LRA defectors report that in some cases such contact eventually morphed into fragmented and opportunistic trading relationships, with Seleka forces giving basic supplies to the LRA in exchange for gold and diamonds looted in remote mining sites.

Allegations of Seleka-LRA cooperation contributed to tension between Seleka and Ugandan troops, which have pushed increasingly west from their primary base in Obo as they pursue the LRA. In June 2014, these tensions culminated in a clash between the two forces, which reportedly left 23 Seleka soldiers dead.



## 8. The LRA is not the only armed group attacking civilians



**SUMMARY** *The increase in total LRA attacks and abductions in 2014 was accompanied by an increase in attacks by unidentified armed groups, particularly in Congo's Haut Uele district.*

The LRA Crisis Tracker publicly reports statistics on violent incidents in LRA-affected areas perpetrated by both LRA forces and other non-state armed actors ([see more on our methodology](#)). The perpetrator of each attack is categorized as either the "LRA," an "unidentified armed group," or an "other armed group." "Unidentified armed group" is used for attacks for which sources do not provide enough details to accurately identify the perpetrator. The assailants in these attacks could be rogue security forces, poachers, Mbororos, LRA, or a different armed group. "Other armed group" is used for attacks for which there are enough details to definitively identify the perpetrator as an armed actor other than the LRA. Incidents of abuses against civilians in which state security forces are clearly identified as the perpetrator are recorded separately and not included in these three categories.

In recent years the LRA has begun attacking civilians in smaller groups and abducting and killing few people per incident, a modus operandi that more closely resembles that of bandits, rogue security forces, and poachers. Due to the increased difficulty of differentiating perpetrators of attacks in LRA-affected areas, over the past three years Crisis Tracker analysts have increasingly categorized perpetrators as "unidentified armed groups" for attacks in which information is missing or inconclusive.

In LRA-affected areas of Haut Uele, 46% of all attacks in 2014 recorded by the Crisis Tracker were categorized as LRA attacks, down from 60% in 2013 and 69% in 2012. Even though LRA attacks in Haut Uele comprised a smaller proportion of overall attacks in 2014, the Crisis Tracker still reported more LRA attacks there than in 2013 and 2012. There was also an increase in attacks by unidentified and other armed groups, indicating an overall increase of 32% in attacks in 2014 compared to 2013.

## Background & Contributors

Data reflected in this brief was collected as part of the LRA Crisis Tracker, a project of Invisible Children + The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative. The Crisis Tracker is a geospatial database and reporting project which aims to track incidents of violent conflict in areas of Central Africa affected by the Lord's Resistance Army. Through publication of regular reports and open-source sharing of collected data, the LRA Crisis Tracker aims to help overcome the current deficit of relevant and timely information related to the LRA crisis and to support improved policy and humanitarian responses.

In the interest of continually strengthening the LRA Crisis Tracker dataset, The Resolve and Invisible Children welcome new sources of current or historical reports of LRA activity. To contribute information to the LRA Crisis Tracker project, please contact The Resolve at [paul@theresolve.org](mailto:paul@theresolve.org).

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