



Powell, S. R. and Florea, A. (2021) Introducing the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD). *Civil Wars*, 23(2), pp. 177-206.

(doi: [10.1080/13698249.2021.1883334](https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2021.1883334))

This is the Author Accepted Manuscript.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/234067/>

Deposited on: 12 February 2021

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Introducing the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD)

Stephen R Powell^{a*} and Adrian Florea^b

^aSchool of Social & Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom;

^bSchool of Social & Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Contact: *Stephen R Powell Email: s.powell.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Introducing the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD)

Abstract: While research on interstate rivalries is abundant, scholarship examining *nonstate* rivalries remains limited. Rivalry scholars have produced extensive data on militarised disputes between states; by contrast, data on militarised interactions between armed nonstate actors is scarce. This is surprising given that much of the violence in the contemporary international system unfolds between armed nonstate actors rather than between states. To address this shortcoming, in this article we introduce the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD) – a dataset which captures dyadic rivalries and militarised disputes among armed nonstate actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) between 1993 and 2018. We begin by explaining why fine-grained data on militarised interactions between armed nonstate organisations are needed for a comprehensive understanding of conflict. We then provide details of the data collection process and coding practices. Finally, we identify the key contributions that ANARD can make to conflict research.

Key Words: armed nonstate actors; civil war; MENA; rivalry

Word Count: 10,670

Introduction

While research on interstate rivalries is abundant, scholarship examining the dynamics of armed nonstate actor rivalry remains limited. The almost exclusive attention paid to rivalries between states is quite surprising given that, in many regions of the world, competition for power, influence, and territory mainly unfolds between armed nonstate actors. Civil war scholarship has thoroughly examined the range of violent interaction between rebel organisations and the state. Yet, with few recent exceptions, (Sinno 2008; Christia 2012; Hafez 2017; Gade, Hafez & Gabbay 2019; Dorff et al 2020), the violent interactions between armed nonstate actors remain understudied. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), for example, rebel organisations such as ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have engaged in competition not only with sovereign governments but also with one another and a host of other rival groups. Armed nonstate actor rivalries account for a great deal of violence in the MENA region and have important implications for broader conflict processes, such as duration or the institutionalisation of rebel rule over territories that legally belong to recognised states.

The ongoing civil conflict in Syria perfectly illustrates the importance of studying armed nonstate actor rivalry in the MENA region. In this case, the emergence of highly conflictual rivalry relationships between an array of armed groups has contributed to the destabilisation of the host state and diffusion of conflict. The initial fighting between the forces of Bashar al-Assad and the rebels of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was swiftly sidelined by the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in 2013 which quickly declared a transnational caliphate encompassing territory in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. After entering the Syrian conflict following the group's successes in Iraq, ISIS swiftly moved to conquer substantial territory from its more moderate ideological and ethnic rivals, including the Syrian Kurds, elements of the FSA and the Salafist group Ahrar al-Sham before also

turning its guns on jihadist rivals like Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN). So prolific was this targeting of rebel factions that, between 2014 and 2015, ISIS hardly engaged the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), prompting allegations of collusion with the regime (Lister 2015). Instead, during this time, ISIS was primarily focused on eliminating nonstate competitors. The Syrian conflict has also produced substantial spill-over violence across the border with Lebanon, with Sunni groups like the FSA's 313th Brigade, JAN, Jund al-Sham, the Kataib Abdullah Azzam Brigades, and Liwa Aisha al-Mo'minin all taking the fight to the Shia group Hezbollah inside the country (Lister 2015). In each of these dyadic conflicts, the Syrian and Lebanese states have mostly been bystanders.

Syria is not unique in displaying a high incidence of violence produced by clashes between armed nonstate actors. In fact, armed nonstate actor rivalries are a common occurrence across multiple conflicts spanning various time periods. Despite their prevalence, with few exceptions (Sinno 2008; Fjelde & Nilsson 2012; Pischedda, 2018; Ahram 2019; Gade, Hafez & Gabbay 2019), surprisingly little has been written on the factors associated with rivalry escalation and de-escalation among armed nonstate actors. When is armed nonstate actor competition most likely to escalate to violence? When are disputes among nonstate actors most likely to deescalate? Why are some armed nonstate actor rivalry escalations more violent than others? How does rivalry among armed nonstate actors affect larger civil war processes, such as duration, termination, or civilian victimisation? These questions are critical for a comprehensive understanding of conflict processes; yet they cannot be fully explored due to data limitations.

To address this shortcoming, this article introduces the Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD) – a dataset which captures dyadic rivalries and militarised disputes among

armed nonstate actors in the Middle East and North Africa between 1993 and 2018.¹ We begin by providing details on the data collection process and coding protocols. Here, we discuss our new three-category measure of violence severity which relies upon offensive action thresholds to capture the observed level of violence between armed nonstate actors.² Further, we discuss the contribution that ANARD can make to our understanding of conflict.

The Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset

The Armed Nonstate Actor Rivalry Dataset (ANARD) includes 468 dyadic rivalries and 2,489 militarised disputes (MNSDs) between armed nonstate actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during the 1993-2018 period. The initial focus on the MENA region is due to the large number of armed nonstate actors present there and the outsized role that these actors have played in several of the region's most pressing conflicts. Specifically, ANARD presents data for twelve states: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.³ These countries have been selected due to the presence of extensive reporting on armed nonstate actors, which enables us to robustly capture the population of rivalries in each of them. Likewise, the dataset's initial temporal frame has been determined by the availability of robust, verifiable data.

The unit of analysis in ANARD is the *armed nonstate actor dyad*. We define armed nonstate actors as *anti-government or separatist rebels, ethnic militias, terrorist organisations, hybrid groups, or pro-government militias that have access to arms and employ violent or nonviolent means to attain their strategic objectives*. By adopting this

¹ The dataset will be subsequently extended to cover other regions across a longer temporal frame.

² Henceforth, we refer to armed nonstate actors as 'NSAs' and armed nonstate actor rivalries as either 'NSA rivalries' or 'ANARs.'

³ The dataset also provides coverage for Morocco where we did not find sufficient evidence to code for any NSA rivalries during the 1993-2018 period. Due to time constraints and the peculiarities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the first version of the dataset does not include NSA rivalries in Israel/Palestine.

broad conceptualisation, ANARD is able to include the largest population of armed nonstate actors engaged in rivalries across the MENA region between 1993 and 2018. In putting together the dataset and identifying rivalries, we built upon the well-established strategic rivalry framework from research on interstate conflict (Thompson 2001). According to Thompson's conceptualisation, rivalry onset is marked by 'explicit threat, competitor, and enemy perceptions on the part of decision-makers,' while rivalry termination occurs when there is 'evidence of some explicit kind of a significant de-escalation in threat perception and hostility' (Thompson 2001, pp. 563-66). An alternative dispute-density approach in the interstate conflict literature requires six militarised interstate disputes (MIDs) to occur over a period of twenty years for a rivalry to be observed (Klein et al 2006; Diehl & Goertz 2012).

There are at least two key advantages to categorising nonstate actor (NSA) rivalries using Thompson's approach. First, the strategic rivalry lens allows us to focus on armed nonstate actors' perceptions of who their rivals are *independently of and prior to the onset of militarised interactions between rivals*. Thus, we can identify NSA rivalries at an embryonic stage *before* the outbreak of violence and examine the factors that cause rivalry escalation. Much like their interstate rivalry counterparts, we expect rivalries among armed nonstate actors to begin prior to the onset of openly disputatious behaviour akin to a militarised interstate dispute (MID) and possibly continue after such behaviour has concluded. Hence, the strategic rivalry approach helps us determine more accurately the onset, duration, termination, escalation, and de-escalation of armed nonstate actor rivalries. Second, due to its two-dimensional categorisation of rivalry (classified according to *type* and *underlying cleavage*), the strategic rivalry framework affords a more fine-grained enquiry into the dynamics, not just the presence or absence, of a rivalry relationship between armed nonstate actors.

The structure of ANARD

The unit of analysis in ANARD is the armed nonstate actor rivalry dyad. To present our data, ANARD is split into three sections which each provide details pertaining to the dyadic level. The *MENA MNSDs* section presents all of our event data – the 2,489 militarised disputes (MNSDs) that occurred within the 468 NSA rivalries identified between 1993 and 2018. This also includes details of the 236 sources used to code each event and their location. The *ANARs Dyad Years* section presents a detailed yearly breakdown for each of the dyadic rivalries in the dataset, including cumulative and yearly counts of the MNSDs which took place in each year of each rivalry. Finally, the *ANARs by States* section provides an extensive breakdown of the rivalries in each host state. This includes total counts for the number of dyadic disputes which took place and the duration in months of each rivalry dyad. This article provides detailed explanations of our coding practices (i.e., how we categorise rivalries and disputes), while the codebook includes a comprehensive breakdown of the variables provided in each section of the dataset.

Table 1. Structure of ANARD

<i>Sections</i>			
	1. MENA MNSDs	2. ANARs Dyad Years	3. ANARs by States
<i>Data</i>	<i>Event Data - 2,489 MNSDs</i>	<i>Yearly data for each ANAR</i>	<i>468 ANARs by host state</i>
<i>Example variables</i>	MNSD level	MNSD counts per year	Total MNSDs per dyad
	Duration days	MNSD1s total per year	Total duration months
	Location	MNSD2s total per year	Termination cause
	Action type	MNSD3s total per year	Rivalry Type

Data collection procedure: Identifying NSA rivalry onset - explicit & implicit indicators

The identification of NSA rivalry dyads proceeded in several stages. As a first step, we utilised an extensive list of secondary sources on the region of interest (including, but not limited to, Allsopp 2015; Aziz 2015; Lister 2015; Lund 2014; Mansfield 2013; Smyth 2015; Knapp et al 2016; Yesiltas & Yardas 2018) and several existing datasets, including Nonstate

Actors in Civil Wars (Cunningham et al 2013), Minorities at Risk Organisational Behaviour, MAROB (Asal et al 2008), Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, ACLED (Raleigh et al 2010), and Mapping Militant Organisations (Stanford, 2018), to compile a comprehensive list of armed nonstate actors operating in the Middle East and North Africa between 1993 and 2018. Thereafter, following the procedure adopted in the (interstate) strategic rivalry literature (Colaesi, Rasler & Thompson 2007; Thompson & Dreyer 2012), we looked for indicators of *threat* or *enemy perception* among these groups.

By adopting this strategy, rather than a directed dyad approach, we endeavoured to capture the *entire* population of NSA rivalries across the MENA region during our period of interest. With the noted exception of those few states for which we have missing data during specific years, no dyads were deliberately omitted from any state. As a result, the distribution of rivalries in each state is as representative as possible.

Practically, our procedure required that one coder undertake a thorough examination of multiple sources,⁴ to identify instances in which leadership figures within organisations, particularly those responsible for directing the armed group's external and defence policies, either *explicitly* or *implicitly* identified their rivals. *Explicit* indicators of NSA rivalry onset can be found when leadership figures within organisations directly identify rivals in a variety of speech acts, such as fatwas, official statements, or accusations in media outlets. Additionally, rivalry onset can be gleaned from published rebel leader memoirs or private correspondence that was accessible to the coders. For example, the ISIS-Jabhat al-Nusra rivalry dyad's onset date (April 2013) was determined utilising private three-way correspondence between Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, ISIS emir Abu Bakr Baghdadi, and Jabhat al-Nusra leader Adnan Jolani. In this correspondence, each figure outlined key

⁴ See section 5.1 of the codebook which provides all sources that were utilised to identify the NSA rivalry dyads.

points of contention between al-Nusra and ISIS and used accusatory language which revealed a situation of rivalry emerging prior to violence escalation. Note that, while NSAs may not possess a formal state apparatus with foreign and defence ministries that issue formal declarations, many do exhibit complex administrative hierarchies with civil-military structures, official spokesmen, militant commanders, religious authorities, or external affairs units (Lister, 2015). Collectively, these bodies direct relations with other groups, co-ordinate fighting strategy, and provide governance in the territory held by the group. Essentially, these structures are analytically equivalent to the formal apparatus found in internationally recognised rival states. Examining the pronouncements and actions of these actors was thus critical for identifying rivalrous behaviour.

Beyond explicit evidence of NSA rivalry onset through various speech acts, a group's behaviour can also *implicitly* mark a rivalry relationship. For example, when an insurgent group redeploys its militants along a contiguous border with another organisation – an action comparable to military mobilisation by interstate rivals – it is possible to discern a perception of threat. Likewise, if a rebel group imposes checkpoints to detain another organisation's militants, it becomes apparent that a putative state of rivalry exists between them. For instance, the embryonic rivalries between the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and elements of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were identified when each group erected checkpoints against one another in Ras al-Ayn and Sheik Maqsood in June 2012.

A further implicit identifier of NSA rivalry onset can be the emergence of alliance formation among armed nonstate actors – including among pre-existing rivals – when confronted with an external threat. For example, in 2013, as ISIS engaged in the Syrian civil war, disparate groups, including Ahrar al-Sham, the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, elements of the Free Syrian Army, and the Kurdish YPG, constructed several defensive alliances as a means of coping with the new adversary (Lister 2015, p. 201; Lund 2014). This

type of alliance behaviour is indicative of threat perception⁵ and informed our coding of several rivalry onsets.

Coalitions

Importantly, ANARD includes a number of large coalitions such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Islamic Front (Syria), Libya Dawn & the Libya National Army (LNA). We provide data for rivalries involving each of these large factions as well as their constituent units. In the case of the FSA, we have coded constituent dyads for units such as Harakat Hazm, the 13th Division, and the Tawhid Brigades. These factions (and others), while to some degree operationally independent, all pledged allegiance to the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and participated in the FSA's joint-command structures, including the Supreme Military Council (SMC). The dyads involving the FSA thus capture the disputes produced by each of these constituent units as well as instances in which it was not possible to delineate the particular FSA unit involved. By following the same procedure, we coded several similar coalitions in Syria and beyond.

Faction splintering

Faction splintering, rebranding, or group mergers can lead to the initiation of new rivalries, or in some cases, the termination of existing ones. For example, if a splinter group emerges, it may engage in a rivalrous relationship with the original organisation from which it has broken, as when Hurras al-Din split from HTS in July 2019. Likewise, the new or rebranded faction may also inherit the parent group's pre-existing rivalries with other groups, as when the rebranded Arab Movement for Azawad (AMA) continued the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad (FNLA)'s rivalry with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). Conversely, if a faction's rebranding leads to a comprehensive

⁵ Christia (2012 p. 9) highlights that weaker organisations generally balance against stronger groups when a more powerful actor is perceived to pose an existential threat.

restructuring, including a merger with other armed groups, this can signal the conclusion of a rivalry. For example, the ISIS-Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) rivalry terminated in January 2017, when JAN (then operating under the title of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, JFS) merged with several other factions to form Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (Rowan, 2017). Unlike the previous cosmetic rebranding of al-Nusra as JFS, which did not substantially alter the group's hierarchy, this merger saw a radical restructuring of the organisation – an event that was substantial enough for HTS to be considered a new entity. HTS then inherited JAN's rivalry relationships, prompting us to code a new ISIS-HTS dyad which began in January 2017.

NSA rivalry termination: explicit & implicit indicators

To determine armed nonstate actor rivalry termination, we also adopted the strategic rivalry approach from research on interstate conflict (Thompson 2001; Colaresi et al 2007, p. 30). Specifically, we identified termination dates of NSA rivalries when we observed evidence of subsidence in perceptions of hostility, explicit threat, or competition among rival organisations in speech acts, such as fatwas or official statements. The detailed analysis of speeches and written documents produced by NSA leadership figures can yield the direct evidence necessary to identify rivalry termination. If leadership figures simply cease talking about a rival, implying that they are no longer a key policy concern, this may signal rivalry termination (Colaresi et al 2007, p. 30). In some instances, rivals may also formally announce rapprochement and the cessation of hostilities, which would mark the conclusion of a rivalry. For example, the first Jabhat al-Nusra/Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – Ahrar al-Sham rivalry (June 2015-July 2017) was terminated in this manner, with leadership figures in both groups announcing a truce in Idlib (July 2017). Similarly, if the leadership of an organisation announces a change in ideological alignment or formal policy which resolves the issue under contention, this may also denote the end of a rivalry. Further, the announcement of a formal

alliance between rivals, perhaps to combine resources to focus upon an external rival, may also mark rivalry termination (Thompson 2001 pp. 561-563; Thompson & Dreyer 2012, pp. 18-19). For instance, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A)-Justice & Equality Movement (JEM) rivalry concluded in November 2011 when both organisations combined forces and joined the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) to fight against the Sudanese regime.

In the absence of explicit speech acts, *implicit* evidence of rivalry termination may also be gleaned from the actions of NSAs, with changing conditions on the ground often reflecting altering rivalry dynamics. Examples of sudden changes in behaviour towards a rival (which may indicate lower threat perception) can include: the cessation of armed hostilities; removal of armed forces from contiguous borders where previous build-ups occurred; or the implementation of truces on key battlefronts. As is the case with coding interstate rivalry termination, the challenge with this kind of evidence was deciphering whether the cessation of hostilities was genuine or a tactical move and whether the action reflected the termination of a rivalry relationship or merely an interlude in the acrimonious relationship between competitors (Thompson 2001, pp. 564-567). In those cases where a rivalry ceased to produce any kind of dispute and we could not find *explicit* or *implicit* indicators of the continued presence of threat perception, we coded the rivalry as terminated when three years had lapsed after the last dispute. While this three-year threshold might seem arbitrary, it was selected to reflect the much shorter lifespan of NSAs compared to rival states. To clarify, we did not merely code rivalry as terminated when we observed the cessation of hostilities. Rather, our determination of the conclusion of rivalry was contingent upon the absence of threat perception. This fall-back method, in which we utilised inactivity as a proxy for the absence of threat perception, was only used when we could not determine the continuing presence of threat perception by other means.

Categorising NSA rivalries

Following the strategic rivalry approach (Thompson 2001), we categorise NSA rivalries across two dimensions: the *primary issue under contention* (what actors fight for) and the *underlying cleavage* which causes the rivalry to emerge in the first place. Accordingly, the dataset includes the following NSA rivalries: *positional rivalries* in which antagonists fight over influence and prestige in the region where they operate or the international system (e.g. ISIS-Al Qaeda, AQ); *ideological rivalries* in which rivals compete due to the promotion and interpretation of rival belief systems relating to factors such as economics, geopolitics, governance, or religious/societal organisation (e.g. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, HTS-Ahrar al-Sham);⁶ *interventionist rivalries* where NSAs directly intervene in competitions between groups supporting the hegemonic faction⁷ or its competitor (e.g. the Zintan Brigades-Libya Dawn); *spatial rivalries* in which control of territory is contested (e.g. Libyan National Army, LNA-Ansar al-Sharia); *ethnic rivalries* in which groups' rivalrous behaviour is driven by ethnic or sectarian tensions derived from cleavages concerning community identities that encompass factors like religious affiliation (such as sect) and other cultural beliefs and practices (e.g. Jabhat al-Nusra-People's Protection Units, YPG); *resource rivalries* in which the presence of commodities, energy deposits, water, or other valuable resources accentuates territorial competition between rivals (e.g. the Petroleum Facilities Guard, PFG-Libyan National Army, LNA); and *access rivalries* in which competition stems from access to materially, strategically, or symbolically valuable territory (People's Protection Units, YPG-Rojava Peshmerga). Access rivalries differ from spatial rivalries in that groups involved do

⁶ Ideological rivalries also encompass dyads in which armed groups are diametrically opposed on strategic and tactical questions related to their political ideologies. This includes disagreement on contentious tactics like the targeting of civilians, as when AQ censured ISI for its targeting of Shia shrines and worshippers in Iraq, or the decision by rebels to negotiate with the state, as when the Justice & Equality Movement (JEM) and SLM/A: Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Minnawi Faction fought after the latter signed the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement.

⁷ This may sometimes be the state – another recent example is Hezbollah intervening in the conflict between the FSA and the Syrian government.

not contest ‘sovereignty’ or control over a given territory but merely access to it. For instance, such behaviour is visible when Shia factions dispute access to religious shrines and mosques in Iraq which belong to neither faction but fall under the authority of the state and clergy.

The NSA rivalry categories are non-mutually exclusive but jointly exhaustive. As is the case with interstate rivals, NSA rivalry dyads routinely exhibit multiple types of rivalry during the same period. For example, the ISIS-People’s Protection Units (YPG) dyad (2013-ongoing) can be coded as primarily a spatial rivalry but can also be subcategorised as an ethnic rivalry. This is because ISIS embraces a radical jihadist ideology and claims to be the only legitimate representative of Sunni Muslims (Lister 2015, pp. 124-125). Syria’s Kurdish factions, largely mobilised under the aegis of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), seek autonomy and democratic governance for the predominantly Kurdish region of Rojava (Allsopp 2015, pp. 223-230). This underlying ethnic cleavage lies at the heart of the rivalry. At the same time, the main issue the YPG and ISIS fight for is territory. Hence, under the ‘primary issue under contention’ dimension, we are dealing with a spatial rivalry while, at the ‘underlying cleavage’ dimension we are observing an ethnic rivalry. Table 2 presents examples of NSA rivalries from Syria categorised along the two key dimensions (‘primary issue under contention’ and ‘underlying cleavage’).

Table 2. Examples of NSA rivalry categorisations from Syria (2011-2018)

<i>Rivalry</i>	<i>Primary Issue under Contention</i>	<i>Underlying Cleavage</i>
YPG-ISIS	Spatial	Ethnic
YPG-Faylaq al-Rahman	Spatial	Ethnic
YPG-Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN)	Ideological	Ethnic
YPG-Ahrar al-Sham	Ideological	Ethnic
ISIS-Asifat al-Shamal	Spatial	Ideological
ISIS-Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN)	Spatial	Ideological
ISIS-Jaish al-Islam	Spatial	Ideological
Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN)-Harakat Hazm	Spatial	Ideological
ISIS-Al-Qaeda	Positional	Ideological
Hezbollah-ISIS	Interventionist	Ethnic

To accurately categorise rivalries in this way, it is incumbent upon the researcher to best interpret the available data, seeking to identify explicit evidence of the root issues underpinning a rivalry. Such evidence can be cleaved from the speeches and other pronouncements by prominent actors within rival organisations or may be unearthed from recent analysis in secondary sources. Consider, for example, the regular statements issued by religious ideologues from both ISIS and JAN in which their secular, democratic rivals within the Free Syrian Army (FSA) are denounced as apostates (Lister 2015, pp. 167). Such language explicitly identifies ideology as a key factor underpinning the basis of these rivalries. Following this procedure, one coder categorised 468 rivalries utilising such evidence, with advice sought from regional experts to determine the classification of a handful of difficult cases.

The distribution of rivalries in ANARD

ANARD includes 468 NSA rivalries across twelve countries in the Middle East and North Africa between 1993 and 2018 (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen). The distribution of these rivalries across time and space varies greatly. For example, the earliest rivalry onset date in the dataset is the Sudanese

People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M)'s rivalry with the militant wing of the National Islamic Front (NIF) which began in Sudan in 1983⁸ (with six further rivalries emerging in the country during the 1980s). When examining the distribution of NSA rivalries by onset year, Figure 1 reveals that the number of rivalry onsets remained relatively flat throughout the 1990s, aside from a brief spike in 1998. Starting with the early 2000s, however, we notice a steady emergence of new rivalries with 2014 proving to be an exceptional year producing no fewer than 82 new rivalry dyads. The data concerning the period 2011-2014 is very instructive, as this includes the Arab Spring and a series of momentous events in 2014, including ISIS' expansion into Syria and Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA)'s declaration of war on the General National Congress (GNC) and an array of Islamist groups including Ansar al Sharia (Lister 2015; Lacher 2020). These events triggered the onset of substantial inter-NSA conflict which is reflected in the pattern of rivalry onsets.⁹

⁸ Some Sudanese rivalries began between 1983 and 1993 (prior to our temporal frame).

⁹ Not included in Figure 1 are rivalries for which onset year could not be determined based on available data. Most of these came from Sudan where we did not have enough evidence to ascertain when underlying ethnic rivalries began. For example, in the interventionist/ethnic Janjaweed-Masalit Ethnic Militia rivalry, we found evidence of several disputes but could not pinpoint the exact onset date for the rivalry.

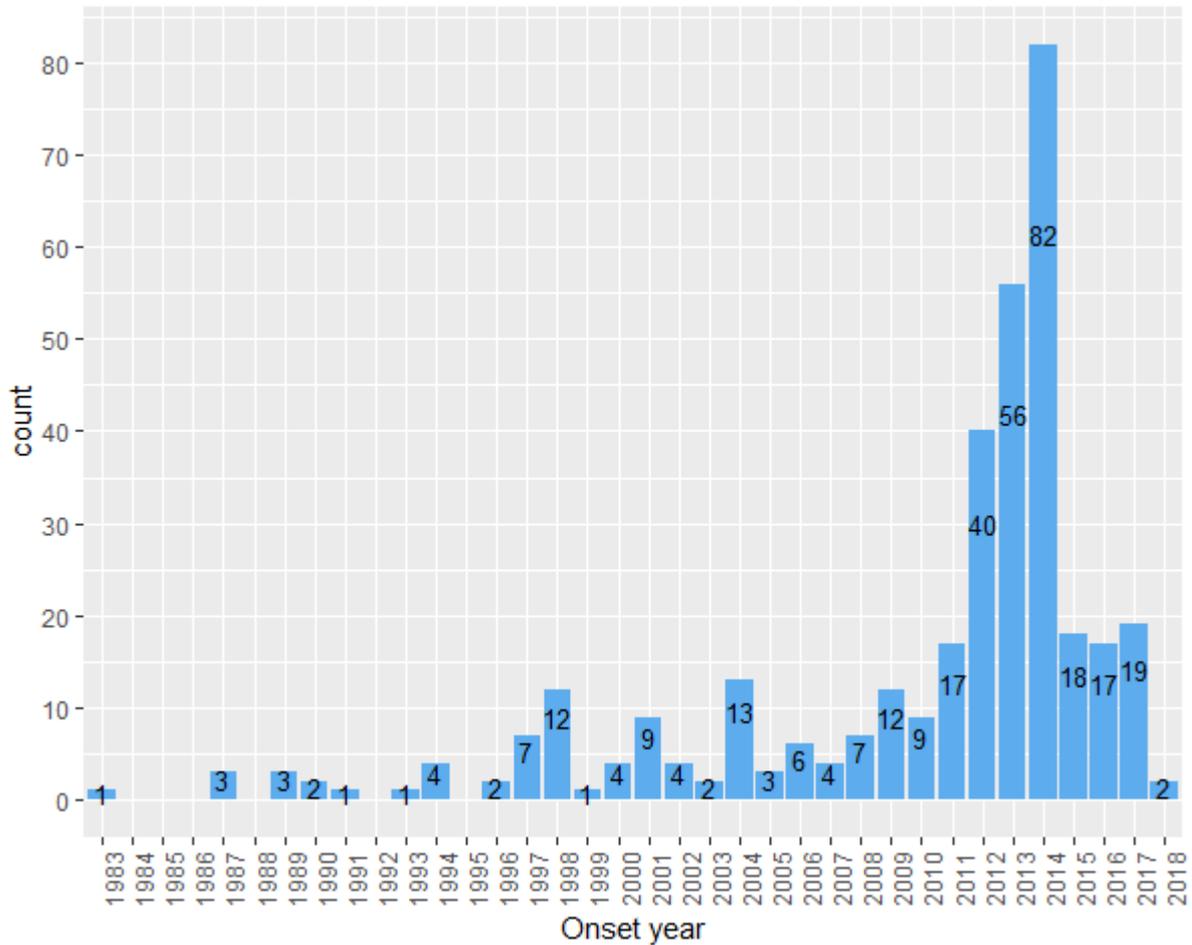


Figure 1. Distribution of NSA rivalries by onset year.

A glance at Figure 2, which displays the total population of NSA rivalries across each year between 1983 and 2018, reveals an apparent trend toward an increase in the number of rivalries active in the region after 2008. The number of dyads captured in the dataset increases from 58 in that year to a peak of 223 in 2015, before declining gradually to 164 in 2018. A portion of this trend may be attributable to the increased severity of the civil conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Mali during this period - with the subsequent decrease in numbers probably influenced by a relative decline in violence across each of those states. However, further investigation is required to determine what factors may influence the fluctuations in the number of rivalry dyads across time.

It is also possible that part of this trend may be attributable to a lack of reporting on inter-NSA relations during the earlier period captured in the dataset. Theoretically, the absence of robust data during the coding process may have precluded the identification of some dyads. However, while it is possible that a small number of dyads may have been omitted for this reason, given what we know of the conflicts in the region, it is highly unlikely that the trend could be explained by the omission of missing dyads alone. Indeed, scholars have already pointed toward an increase in the number and prominence of armed nonstate actors in the region during this period (Durac 2015; Vinci 2009), with Yesiltas and Kardas (2018, pp. 4-5) positing that between 2010 and 2013 there was a 58% increase in the number of active Salafi-Jihadist organisations operating there. Likewise, Lister (2015, p. 386) highlights that, after 2011, Syria alone witnessed the emergence of no fewer than 20 new Sunni and Shia Jihadist factions – including some of the most violent groups in the region. Given what we know of nonstate actors’ relations with one another during civil conflicts, where competition, fragmentation, and rebel fratricide are common (Bakke Cunningham & Seymour 2012; Cunningham 2014; Christia 2012), it is highly probable that an increase in the number of rivalries would accompany any increase in the number of NSAs active in the region.

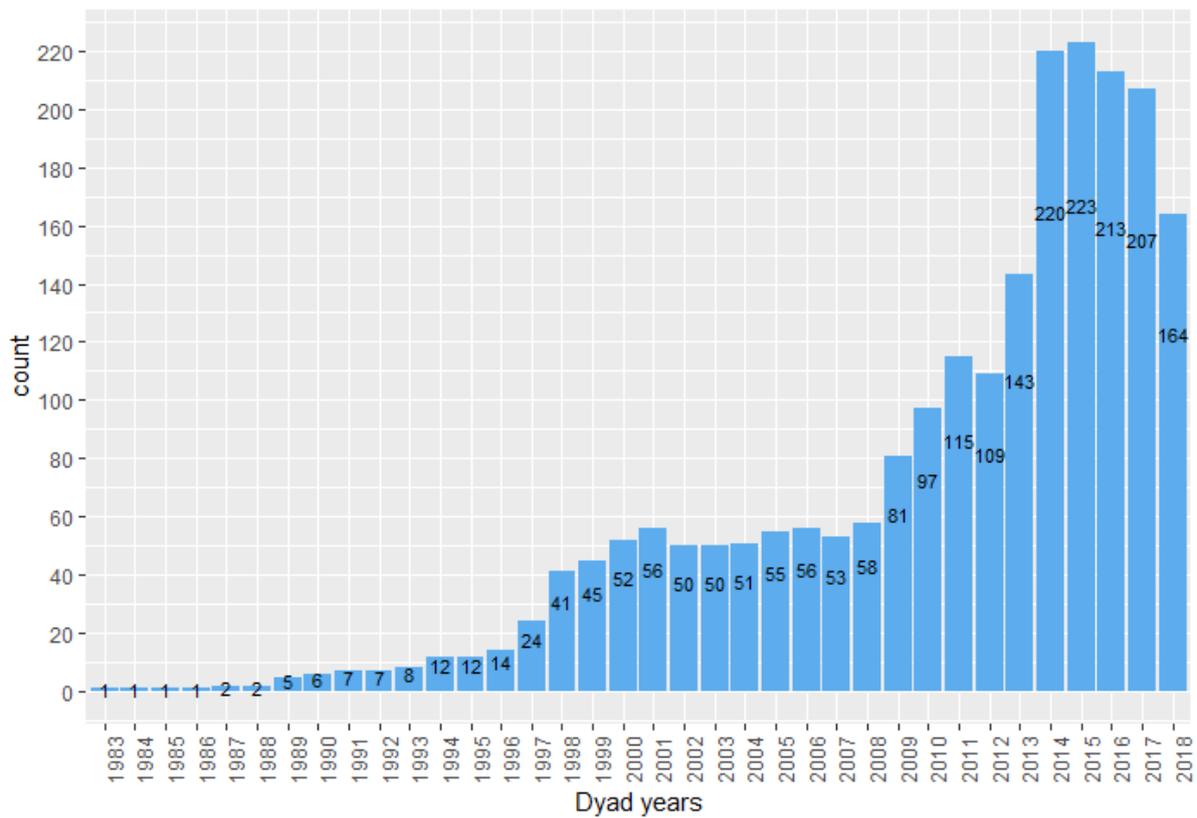


Figure 2. The population of NSA rivalries by dyad year.

When looking at the distribution of NSA rivalries by host state, we also observe intriguing patterns. As Figure 3 shows, Sudan, the home of the oldest rivalries in the dataset and a series of prolonged civil conflicts, hosts almost twice the number of rivalries (190) than any other country in the region. Considering the protracted civil conflicts in both countries, Syria and Libya host the next largest numbers with 98 and 96 rivalries, respectively. The dataset also includes three transnational dyads - these are rivalries that cannot be assigned to just one primary host state and instead compete internationally: ISIS-Al Qaeda (AQ); AQ-Hezbollah; Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-Hezbollah. One might expect contentious interaction between groups that are geographically close, share a host-state, or have a contiguous border, but the emergence of transnational NSA rivalries is a notable development. Groups entering rivalrous relationships divided by large distances marks behaviour analogous to interstate rivals and raises important questions: How might groups

divided by large distances engage in conflict? How does transnational NSA competition affect regional and international security? Tentative links have already been posited between the ISIS-Al Qaeda (AQ) transnational competition for jihadist legitimacy and the increased threat of terror attacks beyond conflict zones (Lister 2015). ANARD provides the data necessary for exploring these questions.

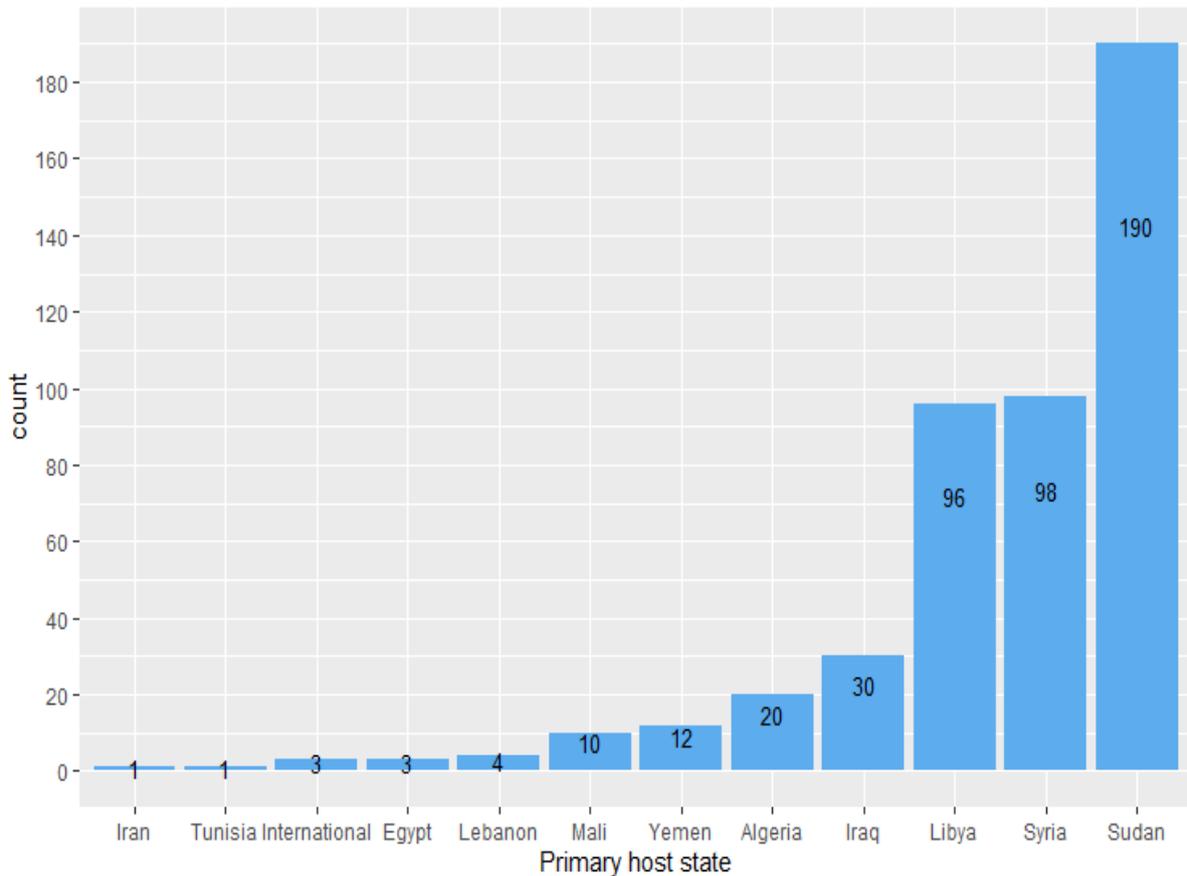


Figure 3. Number of ANARs by host state.

The distribution of NSA rivalry types

Territorial rivalries are the most common type of NSA rivalry in the dataset. As shown in Figure 4, ANARD includes 124 spatial/ideological rivalry dyads, which comprise 26.5% of all ANARs. With a further 62 spatial/ethnic, 25 spatial/interventionist, 10 spatial/resource, two spatial/spatial dyads (these are rivalries for which an underlying cleavage could not be delineated based on existing evidence) and one interventionist/spatial dyad, we find that

around 47.8% of all ANARs included in the dataset centred around territorial disputes. Hence, as is the case with interstate rivals, territory seems to be the most salient factor that leads to competition between armed groups. ANARD also includes 74 interventionist/ideological rivalries, which form the second largest bloc in the dataset. Many of these rivalries capture pro-state militias-rebel groups dyads in which the former actor intervenes on behalf of the government during civil war. An example of this kind of rivalry was the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC)–Patriots Militia dyad (1999-2007) which began when the Patriots Militia emerged to support the government against several jihadist factions during the Algerian civil war.

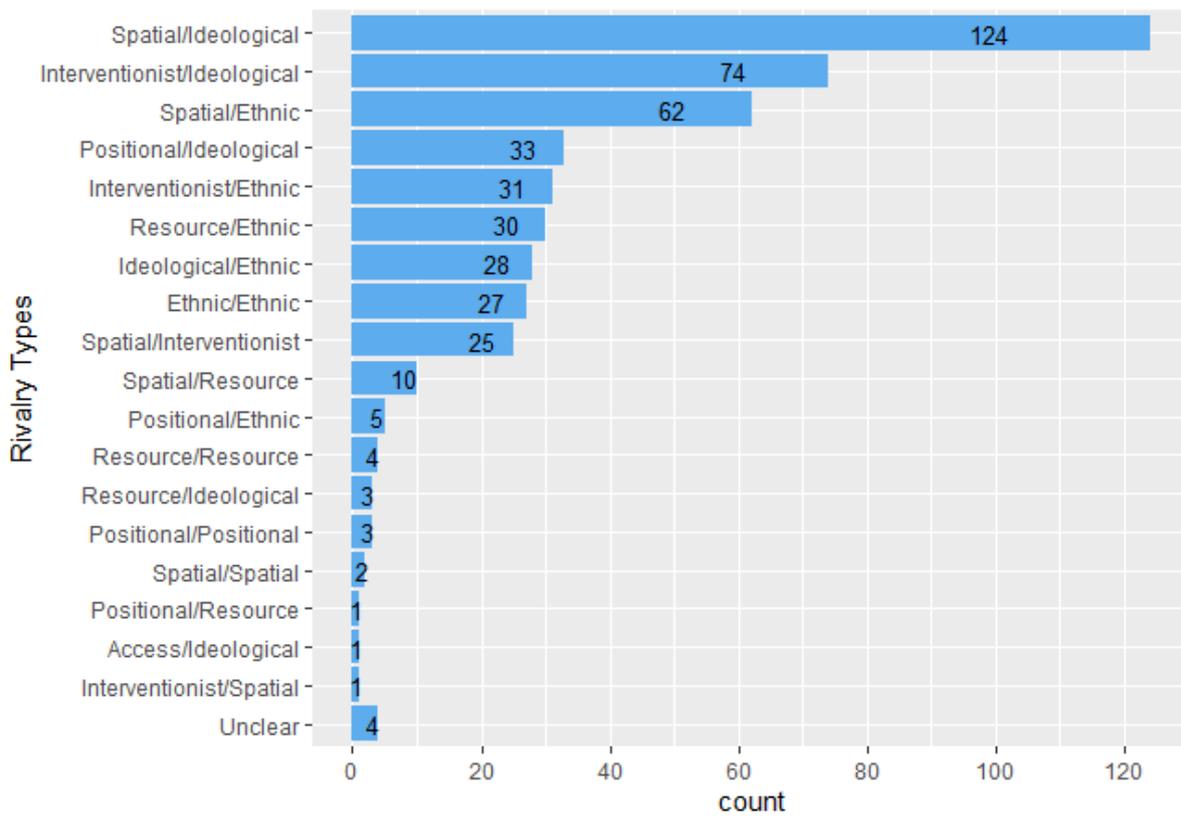


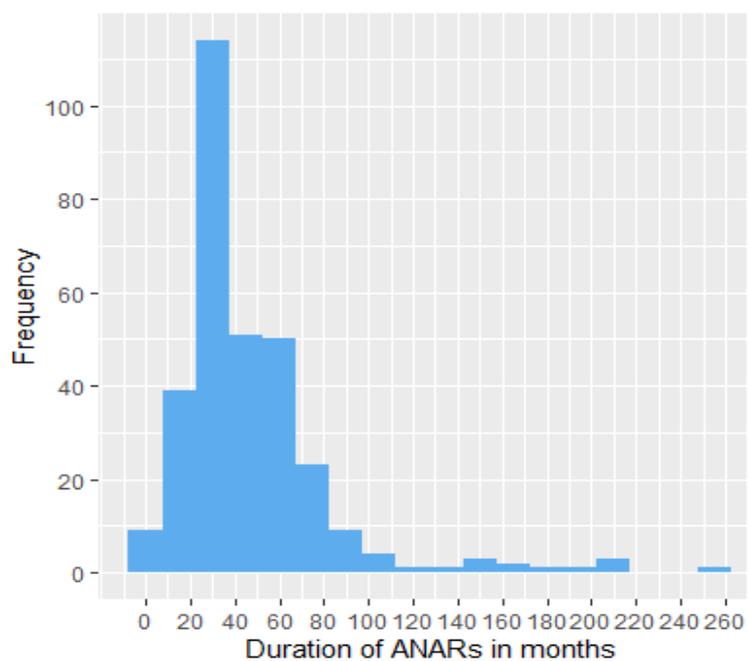
Figure 4. Distribution of NSA rivalries by rivalry type.

The duration of NSA rivalries

Table 3 and Figure 5 below present the duration of ANARs in months. We can observe that the largest cluster of rivalries persisted for 25-36 months, with 18.8% of dyads contained within this bracket. Fully 40.6% of dyads survived between 25 and 60 months. By contrast, just 13.9% of the rivalries identified persisted for more than 61 months. As we can observe from Table 2, the mean duration of an NSA rivalry is 47.54 months. It is worth noting, however, that this estimate is influenced by the existence of several outliers and the fact that we could not determine the precise duration for around 33.1% of rivalries. The two shortest rivalries included in the dataset lasted for only two months. One of these dyads involved the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the Philip Bepan Rebel Group and emerged shortly before South Sudan's independence in July 2011. After this date, the SPLA/M ceased to be an armed nonstate actor, assuming the role of the armed forces of the new state and, so, was no longer included in the population of NSAs. By contrast, the longest rivalry in the dataset, between the SPLA/M and the armed wing of the Sudanese National Islamic Front (NIF) persisted for 260 months between May 1983 and January 2005, terminating with the peace deal between the SPLA/M and the Sudanese government which led to the creation of a unity government and agreement on an independence referendum.

Table 3. Duration of ANARs

<i>Mean</i>	47.54	
<i>Months</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
1-12	22	4.7
13-24	36	7.69
25-36	88	18.8
37-48	51	10.9
49-60	51	10.9
61-72	25	5.34
73-84	17	3.63
85-132	11	2.35
133-192	8	1.71
193-259	3	0.64
260+	1	0.21
Unclear	155	33.12
<i>Total</i>	468	100

**Figure 5.** Histogram of NSA rivalries by duration.

Measuring rivalry escalation: Militarised nonstate disputes (MNSDs)

To gauge rivalry severity and identify periods of (de)escalation, we developed a new measure of disputatiousness: *militarised nonstate disputes* (MNSDs). MNSDs are individual disputes which occur within NSA rivalries. They are coded along a three-level measure of violence severity and are categorised in accordance with their proximate cause (the primary issue under contention). When coding disputes between NSA rivals and placing them in distinct categories based on the degree of observed violence, we relied on evidence of the type of offensive action taken. Specifically, each level of MNSD reflects the severity of violent incidents and is coded on the basis of offensive action thresholds. Hence, our measurement of militarised nonstate disputes indicates not only whether rivalry escalation occurs but also how intense it is.

To identify disputes among armed nonstate actor rivals, we relied on numerous primary and secondary sources, including an array of local and international media outlets such as Al Jazeera, BBC News, The Economist, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, Kurdish

Question, Kurdistan 24, The Libya Herald, Middle East Eye, The New Arab, Now, The Times of Israel and Reuters. We also used a number of articles identified through Lexis-Nexis, as well as reports by prominent think tanks and charities including the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution, The Century Foundation, Chatham House, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the Rand Corporation, The Soufan Center, the Wilson Center, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the International Crisis Group (ICG), and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). Further, we also utilised the extensive coverage and reporting by an array of area specialists, the details of which are provided in the codebook. The conflicts in Mali, Syria and Iraq in particular, have garnered considerable attention from a large number of non-academic pundits and scholars alike, and these kinds of sources have provided considerable data for coding. We also extensively utilised the reporting of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)'s (Raleigh et al, 2010) publicly available data concerning violent incidents. For events in Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Libya, Algeria and Egypt, ACLED proved especially valuable, providing detailed event and location data which informed the coding for a large volume of disputes.

In total, following our procedure, 236 different sources were utilised to code each MNSD in the dataset in accordance with the issue under contention and the observed violence severity level. Once again, guidance was sought from regional experts to help determine the classification of a handful of more difficult cases. In the codebook, we provide the complete list of sources that were consulted, while the *MENA MNSDs* section of the dataset also provides names and links to the sources used to code each individual dispute.

Categorising MNSDs: dispute severity

The lowest level of dispute severity between armed nonstate rivals – MNSD1 – captures minimally violent disputes that typically produce no casualties (see Table 4 below).¹⁰ This measure encapsulates a variety of speech acts and nonviolent actions such as: explicit threats of force, the issuing of fatwas or equally belligerent statements by NSA leaders.¹¹ MNSD1 actions that may be perceived as threatening also include aggressive arms build-ups, cyber-attacks, shows of force, the imposition of blockades, or other types of military mobilisation designed implicitly or explicitly with rivals in mind (e.g. redeployment of militants at contiguous borders with a rival; or the imposition of checkpoints to detain rival fighters). These actions, though less extreme than the overt use of violence against a rival, are indicative of heightened tensions between groups.

The second level of dispute severity – MNSD2 – captures a range of moderately violent actions which include: skirmishes among militants; border incursions; assassination attempts; terrorist attacks using a variety of means including suicide bombings; armed raids; IED and car bombings; indiscriminate rocket attacks; minor mortar strikes; artillery strikes; limited territorial attacks using small forces; attacks against checkpoints and rival headquarters; and comparable forms of violence.

Finally, the third level of dispute severity – MNSD3 – indicates the most severe NSA disputes. Actions coded in this category include: the initiation of open battlefronts; concerted military operations to seize territory; co-ordinated mixed-method assaults including artillery,

¹⁰ We rely on *limited*, *moderate*, and *extreme* forms of offensive actions, rather than casualty thresholds, to determine dispute severity.

¹¹ We include these kinds of non-violent actions since the possession of arms (or cyber capabilities) is a prerequisite for groups to issue credible threats against their rivals, or to impose checkpoints against competitors and arrest other groups' fighters. Within ANARD, we only capture secular or religious threats that are issued by figures belonging to militant organisations' Shura Councils or their leaders. Declarations issued by these actors are analogous to the Ottoman Sultan declaring a Jihad against the Entente powers at the height of World War I in his capacity as nominal leader of the Sunni Ummah.

air strikes, or suicide bombings used in conjunction with infantry-like forces; tank or heavy armoured vehicle engagements; chemical weapons and other WMD attacks; prolonged and violent sieges of territory. These actions enable us to capture extreme forms of escalation within NSA rivalries, i.e., behaviour that is akin to warfare between rival states.

Table 4. Categorisation of MNSD severity by type of offensive action

<i>MNSD Level</i>	<i>Actions</i>
MNSD1	<i>Limited forms of offensive action:</i> explicit threats of force; issuing of fatwas & pronouncements in media; redeployment of forces & arms build-ups; cyber-attacks; the imposition of minor-blockades; use of checkpoints; kidnappings & arrests against rivals.
MNSD2	<i>Moderate forms of offensive action,</i> short of warfare: skirmishes between militants; minor tribal/ethnic clashes; assassination attempts; terrorist attacks (including suicide bombings & car bombings); relatively bloodless seizures of territory; border incursions; random attacks using projectiles including mortar, RPG, or rocket attacks; artillery shelling; air strikes; ambushes by smaller units; resource raids against rivals; minor assaults against checkpoints and military-posts.
MNSD3	<i>Extreme forms of offensive action</i> approximating conditions of warfare: heavy assaults involving multiple fighting units and methods of attack (such as car bombings used in concert with armoured & infantry forces or air strikes in conjunction with ground assaults); opening of battlefronts using large units; sustained aerial bombardment; violent seizures of territory; heavy assaults involving armoured units; seaborne aerial bombardment using naval &/or air forces; WMD attacks.

Note that, if an individual dispute involved more than one type of action, it was categorised based on the most severe action observed. For example, an engagement that included a suicide bombing (an MNSD2 action) being used in conjunction with a territorial assault (an MNSD3 action), would be categorised as an MNSD3.

Coding justification

Our ordinal measure of dispute severity provides a more fine-grained view of armed nonstate actor competition. At the same time, this categorisation requires that a degree of trust be

placed in the interpretation of the coder, who must decide what actions constitute severe escalatory manoeuvres and which denote milder forms of contention in the absence of arbitrary casualty thresholds. We think that our categorisation provides several advantages. NSA disputes in the MENA region (and beyond) frequently occur during interregnum periods or amidst outbursts of extreme violence. Hence, accurately identifying casualty numbers produced by inter-NSA fighting is an extremely difficult undertaking (Ball, 2013). Moreover, were such data available, relying exclusively upon casualty-thresholds to determine dispute initiation and severity might lead to several problems, empirically and theoretically. For example, such thresholds might prevent the identification of minor disputes that did not produce any deaths (using casualty numbers would prevent us from accurately capturing low-intensity disputes, the MNSD1s). In both civil and interstate conflict research, it has become conventionally accepted that 25 battle-related deaths are necessary to code for the presence of warfare (UCDP, 2006). Conceptually, it is difficult to argue that an MNSD producing 26 casualties is consistently different from, or more severe than, a dispute producing 24 deaths. Further, it remains unclear that violence below the 25 battle-related deaths threshold is uniformly less severe in terms of escalatory action or intent: if an armed nonstate actor initiates a territorial assault against a rival but this action results in a half dozen combatant casualties, it would be reasonable to argue that this is indicative of peak escalatory behaviour as it is analytically equivalent to the initiation of open warfare. Conversely, if the attempted assassination of a rebel leader results in more casualties than an armed seizure of territory, we would argue that the former type of action (assassination attempt) indicates a lower form of dispute escalation than the latter (territorial conquest). For these reasons, we think that categorising disputes based on offensive action thresholds, rather than casualty thresholds, provides a more accurate metric of the contentious interactions between NSA rivals.

Distribution of militarised nonstate disputes (MNSDs)

ANARD contains data on 2,489 NSA disputes across the MENA region (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen) between 1993 and 2018.¹² Table 5 reveals the distribution of these disputes: 176 (7.07%) occurred at the lowest level of dispute severity (MNSD1); 1,416 (56.89%) at the intermediate level of dispute severity (MNSD2); and 897 (36.04%) at the highest level of dispute severity (MNSD3). As is also shown in Table 5, the most conflictual state in the dataset is Libya, which hosted 890 disputes during the 2008-2018 period, a figure which represents 35.75% of all disputes in ANARD. The least disputatious state is Egypt, which accounted for only three NSA disputes between 1998 and 2011. Syria is proportionately the most violent state, with 45.08% of its disputes occurring at the highest level of offensive action severity. Sudan follows closely behind with 44.62% of the country's disputes occurring at the MNSD3 level. Alongside the large number of engagements in Libya, the substantial volume of disputes which occurred in both Syria and Sudan (648 and 558 disputes, respectively), reflects a skewed distribution where the bulk of MNSDs occurred in states experiencing civil war. Given the opportunities afforded to nonstate actors for violent action in the absence of strong states, this is not surprising.

¹² Due to initial data availability and time constraints, Yemeni MNSDs cover only the years 2017 and 2018. Similarly, we have incomplete dispute data for the years 2006-2009 in Iraq and 2016-2018 in Libya, Sudan, and South Sudan. We plan to address this missingness in the first update of ANARD.

Table 5. Distribution of MNSDs by state

<i>States</i>													
MNSD Level	Algeria	Egypt	Iran	Iraq	Lebanon	Libya	Mali	Sudan	South Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen	<i>Totals</i>
1	4	1	0	8	7	13	9	5	0	129	0	0	176
<i>state %</i>	8.70	33.33	0	3.96	17.50	1.46	36	0.90	0	19.91	0	0	7.07
2	42	2	2	125	28	616	8	304	1	226	1	61	1416
<i>state %</i>	91.30	66.67	100	61.88	70.00	69.21	32	54.48	100	34.88	100	83.56	56.89
3	0	0	0	69	5	261	8	249	0	293	0	12	897
<i>state %</i>	0	0	0	34.16	12.50	29.33	32	44.62	0	45.22	0	16.44	36.04
Count	46	3	2	202	40	890	25	558	1	648	1	73	2489

When examining the yearly distribution of MNSDs presented in Figure 6, we can also notice a skewed distribution of disputes across time. 2014 saw a major spike in activity, producing 924 engagements (37% of all disputes in the dataset). 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018 also witnessed many events (217, 211, 225, and 193 disputes respectively). By contrast, the entire 1993-2003 period produced only 227 MNSDs. While a portion of this variation may be explained by the absence of data for some countries in specific years, it is still evident that some confluence of factors occurred to induce a spike in violence in 2014. This pattern seems to reflect the increase in the severity of civil conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. As we discussed previously when examining the increase in the population of rivalries observed across time, it is possible that a portion of the trend toward more MNSDs being observed in the latter years of the dataset may be influenced by the absence of reporting on inter-NSA violence in earlier years. However, given that there has been a noted increase in the number of NSAs active in the region during this time (Vinci, 2009; Durac, 2015; Lister, 2015; Yesiltas & Kardas, 2018) and given that more fragmented rebel movements involving multiple factions are generally more prone to infighting (Bakke, Cunningham & Seymour, 2012), it seems unlikely that this trend could be explained by missing data alone. Instead, it is likely that the increased violent activity is symptomatic of an increase in the number of active NSA rivalries in the region resulting from the steady emergence of new rebel groups and militias.

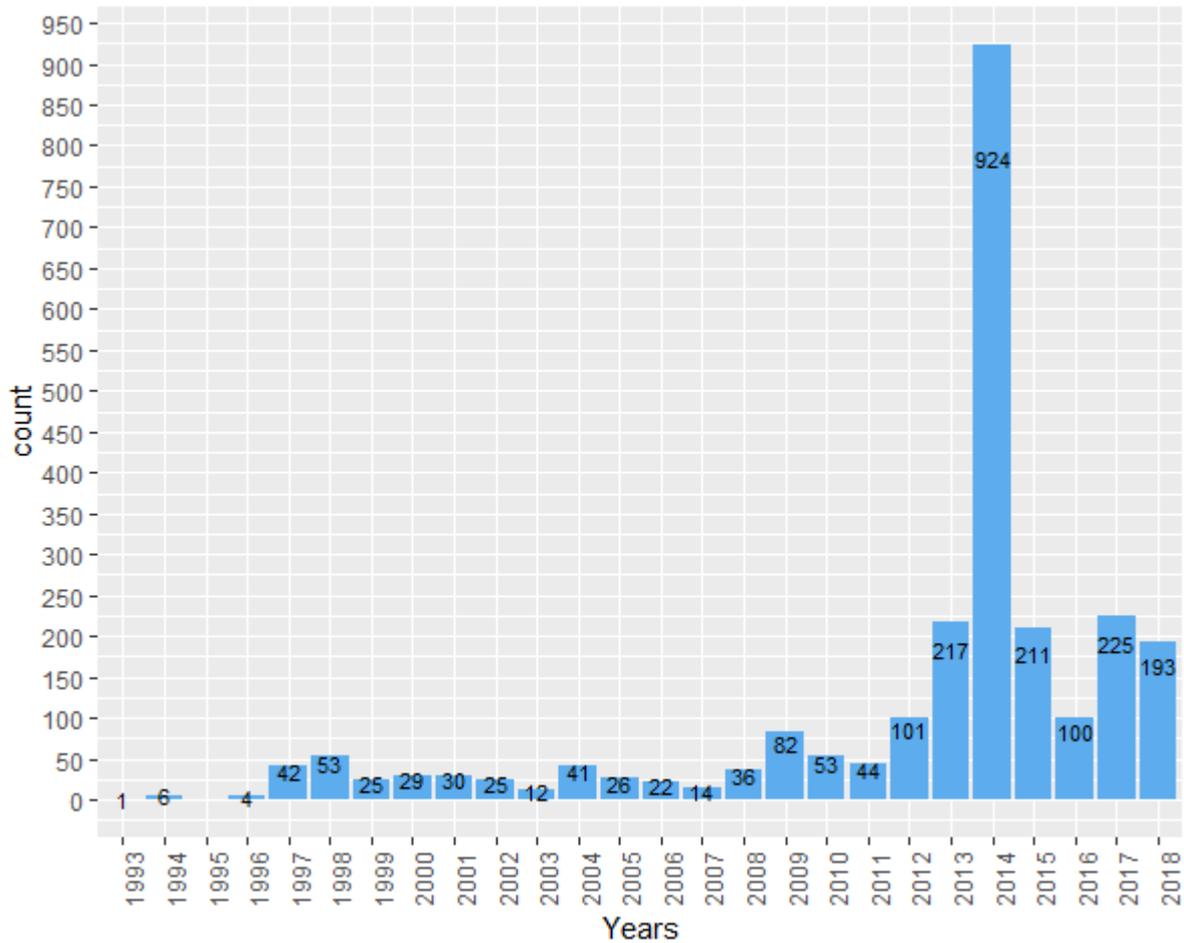


Figure 6. Distribution of MNSDs by year.

Violence escalation & rivalry type

Table 7 presents the distribution of MNSDs by rivalry type.¹³ Spatial/ideological and interventionist/ideological rivalries produced significantly more violence at peak-escalatory levels than non-spatial rivalries (accounting for 296 and 186 MNSD3s, respectively, or 53.7% of all MNSD3 disputes in ANARD). Overall, NSA rivalries that were primarily fought over territory (spatial rivalries) produced 1,351 total disputes, with 511 (37.8%) of these occurring at the highest level of dispute severity (MNSD3). Proportionately, we can also observe that spatial/ethnic rivalries experienced 51.3% (or 174 of 339) of their disputes at the

¹³ The table excludes four MNSDs for which rivalry-type could not be determined.

MNSD3 level. This descriptive evidence suggests that, as is the case with interstate rivals, NSA rivalries where territory is hotly contested tend to be more prone to violence escalation than non-spatial rivalries. The large proportion of MNSD3s produced by spatial/ethnic dyads also highlights the prominent role that underlying ethnic cleavages may play in accentuating territorial violence. As noted, a significant number of the interventionist/ideological rivalries involve pro-state militias that intervene on behalf of the government (e.g., the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)-National Defence Forces (NDF) dyad in Syria). The high proportion of MNSD3s observed in these dyads (44.39%) supports our intuition that NSA rivalries which take opposite sides in civil wars may experience more severe conflict than other types of rivalries. ANARD includes the data necessary to test a host of hypotheses on the causes of violence escalation among NSA rivals.

Table 7. Distribution of MNSD levels by rivalry-type

<i>Primary Rivalry Type</i>	<i>MNSD Levels</i>	<i>Underlying Cleavage</i>						<i>Primary Type Totals</i>	
		Positional	Spatial	Ideological	Ethnic	Interventionist	Access		Resource
Positional	1	0		16	1			1	18
	2	6		65	24			7	102
	3	0		13	5			2	20
	Total	6		94	30			10	140
Spatial	1		0	90	26	1		2	119
	2		2	547	139	23		10	721
	3		0	296	174	24		17	511
	Total		2	933	339	48		29	1351
Ideological	1				17				17
	2				94				94
	3				56				56
	Total				167				167
Ethnic	1				0				0
	2				40				40
	3				8				8
	Total				48				48
Interventionist	1		0	6	14				20
	2		1	227	138				366
	3		2	186	68				256
	Total		3	419	220				642
Access	1			1					1
	2			0					0
	3			0					0
	Total			1					1
Resource	1			0	1			0	1
	2			4	83			3	90
	3			1	42			2	45
	Total			5	126			5	136
<i>Underlying Cleavage Totals</i>		6	5	1452	930	48	0	44	2485

Row totals indicate number of disputes belonging to each primary rivalry type and column totals indicate number of disputes belonging to each underlying cleavage. Within column totals display number of disputes produced per combined rivalry type (e.g., spatial/ideological = 933) and counts for each dispute level (e.g., spatial/ideological MNSD1 = 90).

The ISIS-JAN case

The case of the *spatial/ideological* ISIS-Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) rivalry provides an ideal example of the usefulness of the dataset in exploring trends concerning NSA rivalries in the MENA region. By examining the distribution of the MNSDs that occurred within this rivalry, which involved the two most powerful Sunni jihadist groups in the region, we can get a sense of the potential impact of territorial competition, underlying ideological cleavages, and power asymmetries in influencing conflict between these armed groups. The rivalry began in Syria, in April 2013 when the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared that Jabhat al-Nusra was an extension of his organisation and would henceforth be subsumed into the rebranded Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Rather than accept the forced merger, the commander of JAN, Adnan Jolani, declared his group's fealty to Al Qaeda (AQ) leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, stating that 'the banner of al-Nusra would remain in Syria' (Lister 2015, pp. 122-124). Thereafter, the rivalry continued until its termination in January 2017 (after a duration of 45 months) when JAN merged with Nour Din al-Zinki, Ansar al-Din Front and other hard-line factions to form Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (Rowan, 2017).

By pledging fealty to Ayman al-Zawahiri, JAN remained ideologically aligned with AQ, disagreeing with ISIS over the establishment of the caliphate and over who should lead the Sunni Ummah (religious community) (Lister 2015). Specifically, while ISIS sought the establishment of a transnational caliphate which all Sunnis should owe allegiance to, JAN favoured the creation of a series of Islamic Emirates in Syria and the Levant and saw the establishment of the caliphate as a far-off goal. Jabhat al-Nusra, as a member of AQ, which recognised Ayman al-Zawahiri's authority over all Muslims, also exhibited less interest in attacking Shia Muslims (except for Assad regime supporters and soldiers), believing that it was more important to target non-Muslims and the Syrian regime. By contrast, ISIS, which labels all Shias as apostates, persistently attacked Shia civilians and religious shrines in the

hope of igniting a general sectarian war. Thus, even though the groups shared a similar jihadist worldview, their rivalry was driven by deep underlying ideological cleavages.

The ISIS-JAN rivalry resulted in extensive conflict. After the onset of violence in September 2013, the dyad produced a total of 26 *disputes*. As we can see in Table 8, the bulk of these occurred at the intermediary level, with 42% of all events coded as MNSD2. However, we can also notice that more than 30% of all disputes observed in the dyad escalated to the most severe level of MNSD3. Proportionately, this marks the rivalry out as being highly escalatory. Because of their commitment to establishing different forms of theocratic rule inside Syria, the two rivals also engaged in substantial territorial contestation. This is reflected in the type of MNSDs produced by the dyad. As we can see from Table 8, 75% of the disputes coded which occurred at the MNSD3 level involved territorial contestation. In total, territorial disputes also accounted for 42.3% of all MNSDs observed in the dyad. This provides us with further evidence of the importance of territorial issues in influencing violence escalation between armed nonstate actor rivals.

Table 8. ISIS-JAN MNSDs by proximate cause

<i>MNSD level</i>	<i>MNSD Issues</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Allies</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Territory</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	
MNSD1	0	2	1	1	3	7
%	0	28.57	14.28	14.29	42.85	27
MNSD2	2	2	2	4	1	11
%	18.18	18.18	18.18	36.36	9.09	42.3
MNSD3	1	0	1	6	0	8
%	12.5	0	12.5	75	0	30.7
Count	3	4	4	11	4	26
%	11.54	15.38	15.38	42.31	15.38	100

Instructively, the data also reveals that a majority of the disputes which occurred in the dyad were initiated by ISIS. Table 9 shows that out of 26 disputes, 15 (or 57.7%) were started by ISIS. If we restrict our focus to only the more escalatory events by omitting the MNSD1s, we can see that ISIS initiated eight out of eleven (or 72.7%) MNSD2s and six out of nine (or 75%) MNSD3s. This means that ISIS appears to have been far more likely to initiate the engagements that were coded at the severest level of escalation. Further examination reveals that many of the early Jabhat al-Nusra-initiated disputes in the dyad were of a retaliatory nature or involved al-Nusra coming to the aid of its allies which were threatened by ISIS (Lister 2015, p. 167). We can see in Table 8 that two MNSD2s and one MNSD3 occurred when JAN supported its allies. A contextual examination also reveals that the bulk of the severe escalatory violence that we observed in the dyad (the MNSD3s) occurred following a rapid expansion in the relative material capabilities of ISIS. Reciprocally, during this period, JAN had been dramatically weakened, both by a series of defections by fighters and prominent commanders to ISIS, and the effects of a prolonged period of heavy fighting with the state (Lister 2015).

Table 9. ISIS-JAN MNSDs by initiator

	<i>ISIS</i>	<i>JAN</i>	<i>Totals</i>
MNSD1	1	6	7
%	14.3	85.7	100
MNSD2	8	3	11
%	72.7	27.3	100
MNSD3	6	2	8
%	75	25	100
Totals	15	11	26
%	57.7	42.3	100

This evidence suggests that power asymmetry played some role in contributing to rivalry escalation in the dyad. Throughout the period during January 2014 until June 2015, ISIS enjoyed a rapid expansion in territory: first, in Iraq with the capture of Mosul, and then

subsequently in Syria at the expense of many other rebel and non-aligned organisations including Jaish al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham, the YPG, and the FSA. This expansion was especially evident in the capture of territory in and around *Deir ez Zour*, *Raqqa*, and several other locations across the country (Lister 2015, pp. 221-240). During this time, the group also acquired extensive material resources, including vast quantities of money taken from the captured Mosul treasury, and extensive caches of artillery, tanks, and other heavy weapons that were taken from the fleeing Iraqi army. Collectively, these gains made ISIS the richest and most potent rebel organisation in the world (Ibid), a position not relinquished until 2017. While ISIS had always possessed a material advantage over Jabhat al-Nusra (the rivalry is classed as asymmetric until its conclusion in January 2017), during this period it became substantially more powerful than each of its rivals. As we can observe in Table 9, 65.38% of all MNSDs produced by the dyad occurred during this time. This accounted for 87.5% of all MNSD3s and just over 36% of MNSD2s that the rivalry experienced. It is thus apparent that during this window of opportunity, ISIS made a conscious decision to strike while it had the tactical advantage. This enabled it to seize the initiative from JAN and its allies while they were weak by comparison (Lister, 2015: 221-261). When al-Nusra resisted rather than capitulate, it triggered a period of sustained escalation in the dyad.

Table 10. ISIS-JAN MNSDs 01/2014-06/2015

<i>MNSD level</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Three</i>	Total
Count	6	4	7	17
% of MNSDs	85.7	36.36	87.5	65.38

The descriptive evidence concerning the ISIS-JAN rivalry thus provides us with some initial support for the intuition that territorial competition and power asymmetries can play an important role in influencing NSA rivalry escalation, especially when combined with ideological cleavages. ANARD, with its sample of 468 dyadic rivalries and 2,489 MNSDs

provides us with the necessary data to formally test these hypotheses on a much larger sample of actors.

Other variables in ANARD

In addition to the key variables of interest – rivalry type, MNSD level, and MNSD proximate cause - ANARD also contains further data of relevance to NSA rivalries. For example, at the event level, the characteristics of each MNSD are captured with more than 100 variables, including the dispute duration, location (including coordinates), whether a dispute occurred during civil war, whether the dispute involved a de facto state (e.g., Rojava in Syria or Azawad in Mali), or whether the rivals were contiguous or asymmetric. We also code for the presence of NSA alliances, external joiners, state/external state participation, and military/political support for rivals in MNSDs. Importantly, we also provide disaggregated event data including civilian casualties (where data are available) and the specific method(s) of violence used in each dispute. Finally, we provide the onset month and year, duration in months, onset of conflict date, total MNSDs produced per year, and the termination date of all rivalries.

The utility of the dataset

ANARD is uniquely equipped for systematic inquiries into the causes of violence escalation among NSA rivals. The dataset permits empirical testing of new hypotheses concerning factors like power asymmetries, state support, or contiguity on patterns of conflict (de)escalation among nonstate actors. ANARD also allows for finer-grained analyses of rivalry dynamics among NSAs. For example, we can determine whether contiguous spatial rivalries are more violent than non-contiguous ones or whether interventionist rivalries produce more escalation than ideological ones. Further, the dataset helps analysts identify the factors associated with rivalry onset, duration, and termination, and answer key questions such as: Do spatial/ethnic rivalries persist longer than spatial/ideological ones? Additionally,

ANARD is extremely useful for examining the impact of NSA rivalries on civil conflict processes. For example, we can probe whether certain types of NSA rivalries, or MNSDs, affect the duration of civil wars or the diffusion of violence. With our disaggregated event data, it will also be possible to investigate what impact NSA rivalry escalation might have on civilian victimisation or what kind of rivalry types are most likely to produce terror incidents, including suicide bombings and chemical weapons attacks. Further, the dataset is extremely useful for determining which kinds of disputes are most likely to draw in external state participation.

Moreover, ANARD will make it possible to delve into the processes through which NSA rivalry shapes patterns of rebel and state governance across the MENA region. The dataset is also well-suited for examining what impact the presence of NSA rivalries might have on the extractive capacity of host states. Furthermore, ANARD facilitates a better understanding of rebel strategies; with this dataset, scholars can explore whether the type, or intensity, of NSA rivalries influences rebel incentives to become predatory or stationary (and engage in public goods provision in territory they control). Anecdotal evidence from Syria indicates that rebel governance strategies greatly depend on the behaviour of competitor groups. For example, the Islamic State's declaration of the caliphate fundamentally changed Jabhat al-Nusra's approach to governance in the territory which it controlled. Having previously adopted a gradualist approach focused upon provision of public services and religious education, the group declared its intent to create a series of Islamic Emirates in the wider Levant and moved to implement Sharia law, enforcing strict dress-codes, and banning the sale of cigarettes (Lister, 2015). ANARD allows us to test whether this kind of behaviour extrapolates to the wider population of armed groups in the MENA region.

Conclusion

This article introduced a new dataset (ANARD) on rivalries and militarised disputes among armed nonstate actors in the MENA region between 1993 and 2018. The dataset is uniquely equipped for answering important questions about the causes and consequences of violence (de)escalation among armed groups and about the impact of NSA rivalries on civil conflict processes, including onset, duration, and termination. Overall, ANARD provides a platform for researchers to better understand recurrent patterns of disputes among groups that have thus far eluded systematic inquiry. Finally, ANARD offers the necessary foundation for the collection of data on the conflictual interactions between NSA rivals throughout other regions of the world.

Acknowledgements

Earlier iterations of this paper were presented at the Conflict Research Society's Annual Conference, 16-18 September 2018, University of Birmingham, and the European Political Science Association's 9th Annual Conference, 20-22 June 2019, Queen's University Belfast. We thank attendees for their comments, questions and feedback which aided in the development of the paper.

Disclosure Statement

No conflict of interest to declare.

Data availability statement

The dataset and codebook will be made available on the journal's replication page and the authors' own websites.

Funding

N/A

ORCID

0000-0001-5277-7426

0000-0002-7493-9307

References

- Ahram, A I., 2019. *Break All the Borders: Separatism and the Reshaping of the Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Allsopp, H., 2015. *The Kurds of Syria*. London: IB Tauris
- Asal, V., Pate, A., and Wilkenfeld, J., 2008. Minorities at Risk Organizational Behavior Data and Codebook Version 9/2008 Available From: <http://www.mar.umd.edu/data.asp>
- Aziz, M A., 2015. *The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan*. London: I.B Tauris.
- Bakke, K M., Cunningham, K G., and Seymour, L J M., 2012. A plague of initials: Fragmentation, cohesion, and infighting in civil wars. *Perspectives on Politics*. 10 (2), 265-283.
- Ball, P., 2013. Why Raw Data Doesn't Support Analysis of Violence. *Human Rights Data Analysis Group* (HRDG). Available From: <https://hrdag.org/2013/06/14/why-raw-data-doesnt-support-analysis-of-violence/>.
- Christia, F., 2012. *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Colaresi, M P., Rasler, K., and Thompson, W R., 2007. *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics: Position, Space and Conflict Escalation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, K G., 2014. *Inside the Politics of Self-Determination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Diehl, P F., and Goertz, G., 2012. The Rivalry Process: How Rivalries are Sustained and Terminated. In: John A Vasquez (ed.) *What Do We Know About War?* (Second Edition). Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 83-109.
- Dorff, C., Gallop, M., and Minhas, S., 2020. Networks of Violence: Predicting Conflict in Nigeria. *The Journal of Politics*. 82 (2), 476-493.

- Durac, V., 2015. Crisis and New Agenda of the Arab States: The Role of Non-State Actors in Arab Countries after the Arab Uprisings. *European Institute of the Mediterranean*. Available From: https://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anuari/med.2015/IEMed%20Yearbook%202015_NonStateActors_ArabUprisings_VincentDurac.pdf.
- Fjelde, H., and Nillson D., 2012. Rebels against rebels: Explaining violence between rebel groups. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56 (4), 604-628
- Gade, E K., Hafez, M M., and Gabbay, M., 2019. Fratricide in Rebel Movements: A Network Analysis of Syrian Militant Infighting. *Journal of Peace Research*, 56 (3), 321-335.
- Klein, JP., Goertz, G., and Diehl, P F., 2006. The New Rivalry Dataset: Procedures and Patterns. *Journal of Peace Research*, 43(3), 331-348.
- Knapp, M., Flach, A., and Ayboga, E., 2016. *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan*. London: Pluto Press.
- Lacher, W., 2020. *Libya's Fragmentation: Structure and Process in Violent Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Lister, C., 2015. *The Syrian Jihad: Al Qaeda, The Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Lund, A., 2014. Pushing Back Against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: The Islamic Front. *Carnegie Middle East Center*. Available From: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/54121?lang=en>.
- Mansfield, P., 2013. *A History of the Middle East* (Fourth Edition). London: Penguin.
- Pischedda, Constantino., 2018. Wars within Wars: Why Windows of Opportunity and Vulnerability Cause Inter-rebel Fighting in Internal Conflicts. *International Security*, 43 (1), 138-176
- Raleigh, C., Linke, A., Hegre, H., and Karlsen, J., 2010. Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(5), 651-660.

- Rowan, M., 2017. Al Qaeda's Latest Rebranding: Hay'at Tahrir al Sham. Wilson Center.
Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaedas-latest-rebranding-hayat-tahrir-al-sham>.
- Sinno, A H., 2008. *Organisations at War In Afghanistan and Beyond*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Schmidinger, T., 2018. *Rojava: Revolution, War and the Future of Syria's Kurds*. London: Pluto Press.
- Smyth, P., 2015. The Shiite Jihad in Syria and its Regional Effects. *Washington Institute*.
Available From: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-shiite-jihad-in-syria-and-its-regional-effects>.
- Thompson, W R., 2001. Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics, *International Studies Quarterly*. 45 (4), 557-586.
- Thompson, W R., and Dreyer, D R., 2012. *Handbook of International Rivalries 1494-2010*. London: Sage.
- UCDP., 2006. Definitions, sources and methods for Uppsala Conflict Data Program Battle-Death estimates, *Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)*. Available From: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/old/brd/ucdp-brd-conf-41-2006.pdf>.
- Vinci, A., 2009. *Armed Groups and the Balance of Power: The international relations of terrorists, warlords and insurgents*. London: Routledge.
- Yesiltas, M., and Kardas, T., 2018. Introduction: The Phenomenon of Non-state Armed Actors and Patterns of Violent Geopolitics in the Middle East, in Murat Y & Kardas T (eds). *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 3-21.