Kivu Security Tracker: Methodology

Introduction

The goal of the Kivu Security Tracker (KST) is to map violence by state security forces and armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to better understand patterns, trends, causes of insecurity and serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The KST uses a network of dedicated and trained researchers based throughout North and South Kivu provinces to provide timely information on this violence. We verify this data with numerous reliable sources before publishing on our website, providing comprehensive and up-to-date accounts that are revised as necessary.

The KST is a joint project of the Congo Research Group, based at New York University's Center on International Cooperation, and Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch provides training and other support to KST researchers, but does not independently verify all incidents reported on the KST.

This document provides a summary of the types of incidents included on the KST, the definitions of these incidents, the means of verification of this information, and standards of evidence.

What is the geographic scope?

The scope for the KST is North Kivu and South Kivu provinces in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

What period is being mapped and how often is it updated?

The first incident we published was on June 1, 2017. We publish incidents as soon as we can verify them, which can take up to several weeks. Incidents that have been published by credible public sources, such as the United Nations, may be published as soon as the information is available. We then add more details to incident reports when possible.

What kinds of incidents are mapped?

The KST records violent incidents committed by armed groups and members of the Congolese security forces, both in the context of armed conflict and political violence.

To be included in the armed violence dataset, the armed group or security force responsible for the incident must (a) have a structure and an identity; (b) seek to assert control over a geographically defined area; and (c) employ violence regularly. This definition includes state security forces, as well as armed groups supported by the state and collocated in areas of state control.

Incidents that are committed by armed bandits or members of a criminal gang that does not seek to assert control over an area are not logged in the KST. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between criminal violence and violence committed by members of armed groups or security forces. In these cases, we assess the incident based on the context.

The KST does not include every kind of armed violence by armed groups and security forces. We focus on cases of deadly violence, clashes between armed groups, abduction, and sexual violence, as they constitute the most defining and significant types of violence. We also gather information on the excessive use of force by law enforcement during demonstrations, which helps to understand the extent of political turmoil in eastern Congo.

There are some kinds of violent incidents that we do not document or publish, either because they would be too onerous to gather information on, because they are too difficult to define, or because other organizations are already doing so in a more comprehensive fashion.

Below is a list of the incidents on which we gather information, as well as some types of violence that we have purposely excluded.

The KST gathers information on:

- **Violent death:** The victim must be a civilian, the death must be violent, and the perpetrator must be a member of an armed group or state security force, or their agents, as defined above. This includes civilian casualties during armed conflict, including where there is no IHL violation.
- **Abduction:** Taking a person away by means of persuasion, fraud, or force.
  - **Forced recruitment:** The coerced, compulsory, or involuntary recruitment into either a state's armed forces or a non-state armed group, to act as soldiers or fighters, porters, cooks, or sexual slaves. The recruitment of children (persons under 18 years of age) is always involuntary.

- o **Carrying goods:** The short-term abduction of civilians for the purpose of carrying the armed group's equipment or goods.
  - o **Unknown purpose:** Civilians may be abducted without a known purpose or destination.
- **Kidnap for ransom:** The forced abduction or detention of a civilian against his or her will with the intent of demanding ransom.
- **Clash:** Any violent clash between two armed groups or between an armed group and the security forces, including within those groups. These incidents do not necessarily represent IHL violations.
- **Mass rape:** While there is no agreed upon legal definition of mass rape, for the purposes of our reporting a mass rape is more than five people raped by the same group about the same time in the same vicinity.
- **Destruction of property:** The destruction of civilian property by an armed group or security forces that results in the destruction of a substantial part of the structure, vehicle, or infrastructure. We do not log incidents in which fewer than five structures are destroyed.
- **Political repression:** The demonstration must be largely peaceful, consist of at least 10 people, and it must be significantly disrupted through arbitrary arrests and/or the excessive use of force by security forces.

The KST goes not gather information on:

- **Illegal taxation or extortion:** This is perhaps the most prevalent kind of violence in the Kivus. Soldiers and members of armed groups extort money from thousands of people each day across the Kivus, at roadblocks, in the fields, and in markets. While important, it would be impossible to provide an accurate accounting of this kind of abuse.
- **Arbitrary arrest and detention; torture or ill-treatment; violations of the rights to freedom of speech, religion, association, peaceful assembly, and movement:** Other organizations, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, attempt to track these human rights abuses, which would be too numerous for the KST to be able to report.
- **"Popular" or vigilante justice:** This involves civilians taking law into their own hands to attack, beat, or kill individuals they deem guilty of an offense, and is not inherently political or part of armed conflict.
- **Sexual violence:** While we publish information on mass rape (as defined above) and forced recruitment for sexual slavery, we do not currently publish individual incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by members of armed groups and the security forces. This is for two main reasons: Our reporting could be misleading, as many rapes go unreported, so we could give the impression that the phenomenon is far less prevalent than it is. Secondly, other organizations such as United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have already established a comprehensive network of health centers and NGOs that report on sexual violence in a more comprehensive fashion than we could.

What information is published on each incident?

For each incident, we aim to publish the following information that meets the data collection standards (see below):
- Date and time of incident;
- Location (closest approximation, including *province, territoire, ville/chefferie, groupement, commune/localité, quartier/village*, as well as GPS coordinates). In most cases, we establish the GPS coordinates by locating the incident on Google Maps after speaking with local sources, unless a KST staff member can visit the site with a GPS device. This means that the GPS coordinates are often an approximation and not an exact location of the incident.
- Type of incident (violent death, abduction, kidnap for ransom, clash, mass rape, destruction of property, political repression)
- Basic description of the incident
- Armed group or security force responsible for the incident, if known
- Media (pictures, video, documents)

Data collection

The KST has researchers in each territory of the Kivus, with the exception of Idjwi (which is covered from Kalehe territory). These focal points were recruited for their extensive networks of reliable sources, their status in the community, and their experience conducting similar work. CRG and Human Rights Watch provided training for the researchers.

Every day, data is gathered and entered in the database with the essential information on each incident. Any report of an incident is used as the basis of further triangulation by the focal points and the field manager.

We conduct a review of Congolese and foreign media, including community radio stations. This information is also used as the basis of further triangulation.

We are also in touch on a weekly basis, or as needed, with other organizations covering the humanitarian and security situation, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO), the Catholic dioceses, Congo's National Intelligence Agency (ANR), Congo's national army, the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This information is used to corroborate existing claims and to initiate new cases.

We also compare the data collected with other reporting on armed violence in the Kivus, including the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), public Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reports, and other NGO reporting.

Each incident requires independent confirmation. We assess the independence and reliability of the sources in evaluating whether the incident can be published or not. Each incident requires confirmation from multiple sources to be included in the dataset.

Assessing the quality of the information

There is no standard of how many independent and reliable sources are needed to publish information—on rare occasions, one credible eyewitness testimony can be enough to publish information, although in most cases at least two to three sources are needed. There are no globally accepted standards of evidence for either NGO investigations or investigations by UN bodies.

Drawing on their assessments of the reliability and independence of their sources, KST researchers evaluate the evidence as follows:

Incident Verification:

- **Overwhelming evidence (4,5): Conclusive or highly convincing evidence to support a finding. This is most similar to "beyond reasonable doubt" in the legal system. This standard is difficult to uphold in international investigations, which rarely have the power of subpoena, cross-examination, or the ability to issue warrants, and due to security and time constraints. This is the standard required for KST to cite the name of an armed group or security force responsible for a specific incident;**
- **Clear and convincing evidence (2,3): Very solid support for the finding, or significantly more evidence that supports the finding than suggests the contrary. This is the standard required for KST to include the incident in the public database and map. There can be still be uncertainty with regards to the number of casualties or victims; here, the lowest available number is used for the map;**
- **Balance of probabilities (1): More evidence supports the finding than contradicts it. This is a 50 per cent plus one approach to evidence. This cannot be used to pin down specific incidents, but can be used as a basis for further investigation.**

Verifying the armed group or force responsible for the incident:

A simplified scale will be used for identifying the armed group or force responsible for the incident:

- **Sufficient evidence (3,4,5): Conclusive or highly convincing evidence to support uncovering the identity of the armed group or force responsible for the incident. This is most similar to "beyond reasonable doubt" in the legal system. This is the standard required for KST to cite the name of an armed**

group or security force responsible for a specific incident;

- **Insufficient evidence (1,2): An absence of information regarding the armed group or force responsible, not enough evidence to confirm the identity, or contradictory evidence. The armed group or force responsible for the incident is classified as "unknown."**

Mapping areas of influence of armed groups

The KST website will feature a map of the areas of influence of armed groups. This map will inevitably involve imprecisions, as new armed groups appear every month, and deployments are in constant flux. The first map was published in November 2017. The KST will officially announce subsequent updates.

This map is the result of extensive fieldwork conducted by a network of researchers based throughout North and South Kivu, and has benefited from several rounds of internal and external reviews by experts on conflict dynamics in this region.

The map depicts 'areas of influence' rather than absolute control. While some armed groups exert effective control over an area, others may be able to exert substantial influence over larger zones but lack full control over those areas. Influence consists of the frequent deployment of troops and the ability to carry out significant attacks.

Confidentiality of sources and victims

All KST sources remain confidential. Identifiers are gathered and safeguarded for internal accountability and verification, but this information is not shared publicly. Sources are informed of this process and are asked to provide informed, oral consent for providing information.

The names and identifiers of victims—including pictures, videos, and names—are gathered and safeguarded but are not shared publicly. The KST withholds any information that could compromise the safety of sources or victims.

KST staff members have been provided with training in the ethics of gathering data involving human subjects.

Errata

We make every effort to ensure accuracy in our reporting. In case a mistake is made and incorrect information in published, we will issue an erratum on the website and correct the initial report.