



Africa Research Institute

understanding Africa today

EVENT: URBAN VIOLENCE IN AFRICA **Understanding civic conflict**

UGANDA // SOUTH AFRICA // NIGERIA

Wednesday 8th October 2014 6-8pm

EMAIL INFO@AFRICARESEARCHINSTITUTE.ORG TO REGISTER

#civicconflict

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Around three times more people die each year from interpersonal violence (homicides) than from war.

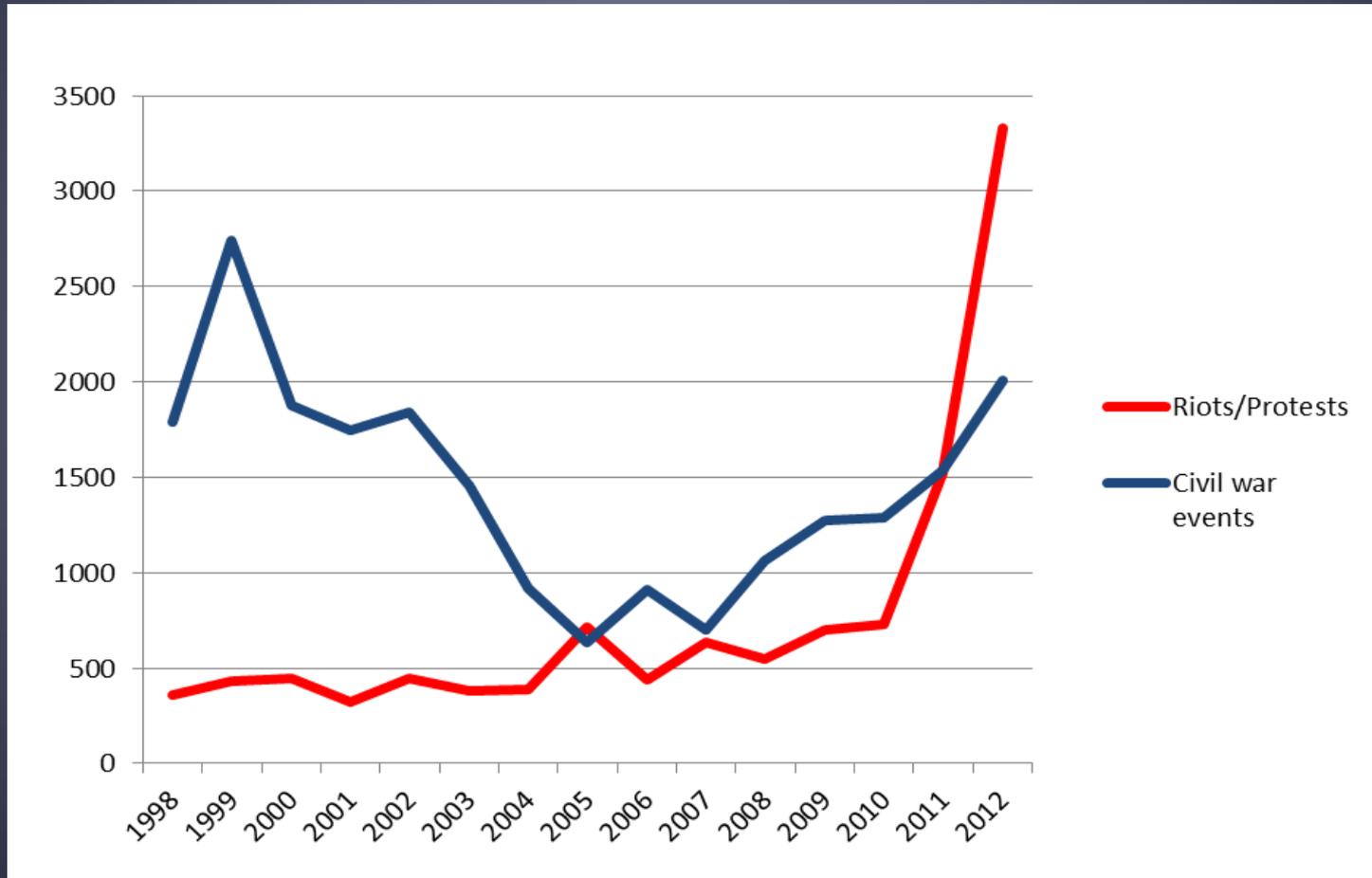
The challenge of urban violence

- Are cities **inherently** violent?
- Why are some cities so much **more** violent than others?
- When does urban **conflict** become **violence**, and why?
- What determines the **visibility** of violence?

Some emerging research themes:

- Beyond 'social', 'political' and 'criminal'
- From **civil** to **civic** conflict? Violence transformations
- Role of *level* of urbanisation, *city size* and urban *growth rate*
- Contesting the role of **youth**
- Explaining dramatic reductions in urban violence
- Critical roles of **land, space, gender, employment**
- Relationship between urban violence & **politics**:
 - Governance, party competition, freedom of speech and assembly

Changing violence trends in Africa, 1998-2012



Source: ACLED dataset, 2013

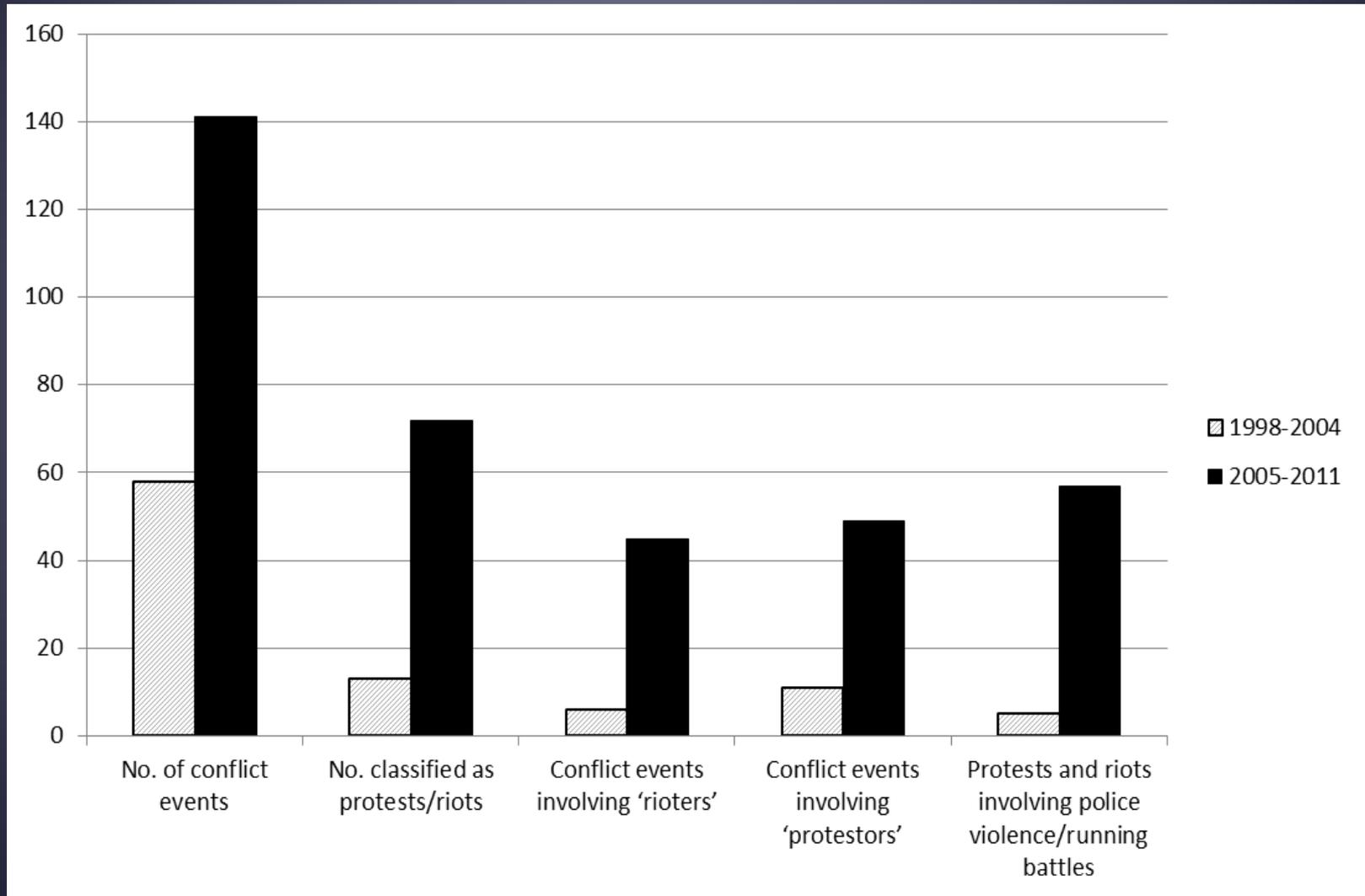


The politics of violent urban protest in Uganda

Tom Goodfellow, University of Sheffield

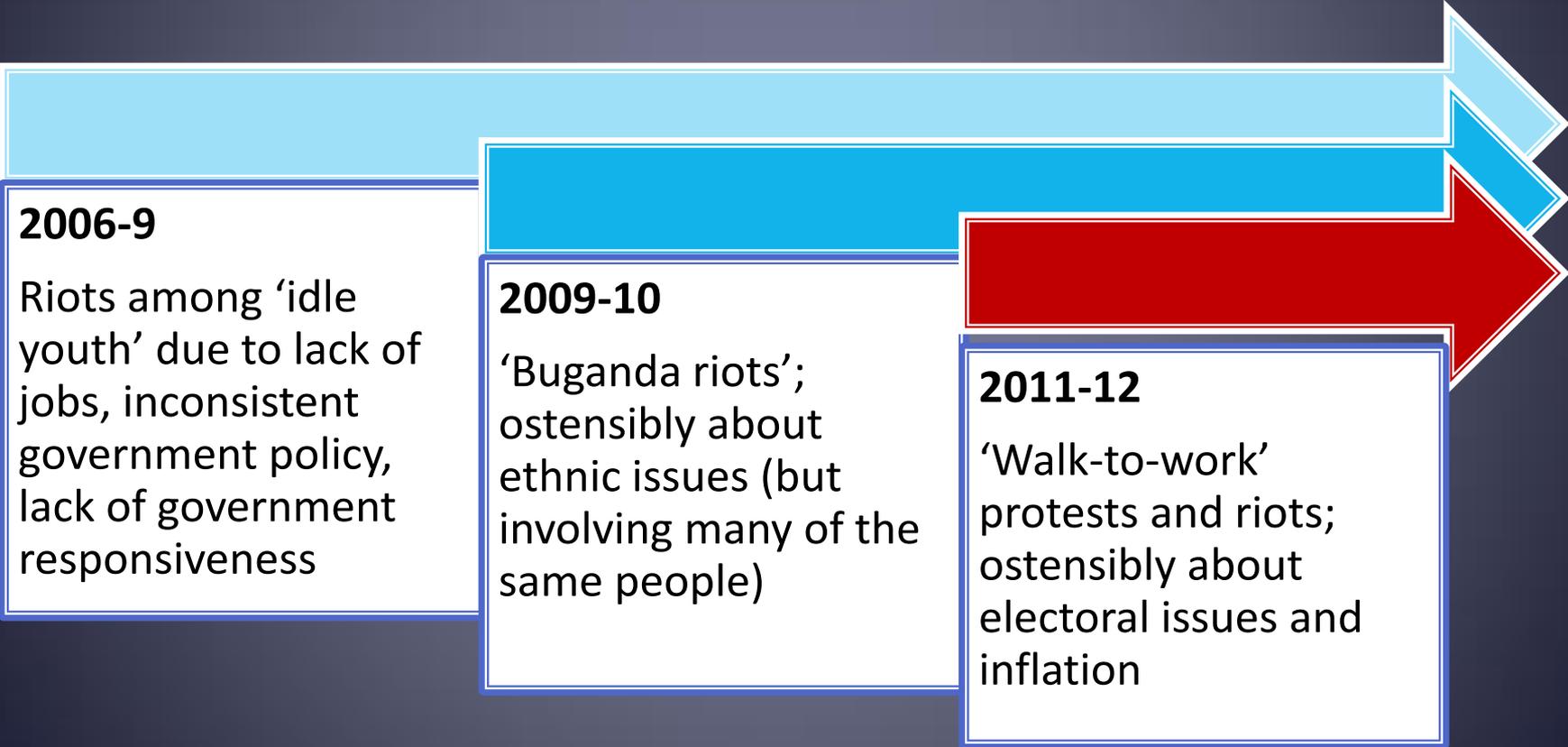
Exit, voice and 'noise' in urban Africa

Violent conflict events in Kampala, 1998-2011



The rise of urban protest in Uganda

- Twenty years of relative calm in Kampala up to 2005



2006-9

Riots among 'idle youth' due to lack of jobs, inconsistent government policy, lack of government responsiveness

2009-10

'Buganda riots'; ostensibly about ethnic issues (but involving many of the same people)

2011-12

'Walk-to-work' protests and riots; ostensibly about electoral issues and inflation

'Parallel participation'

- Marketplace traders resorted to rioting when they realised politicians were playing them and they 'had no voice' in relation to the City Council
- Emerging **norm** of civic conflict as a means of participating in urban political process
 - 'Like has been the norm, the Activists for Change led by FDC President Kizza Besigye left the venue and within a few seconds the charged youth began hurling stones at the police [and] police responded by firing tear gas

Protest and partial democratisation

- Unpacking the link between civic violence and 'hybrid' / 'semi-authoritarian' regimes
- An explosive coexistence of **the promise of democracy** (through the existence of multiple parties and a relatively free media) and **the reality of authoritarian repression**
- Uganda under President Museveni: the master manipulator of democratic process

Uses of the legislature in a 'semi-authoritarian' regime

- Drafting of **intentionally contentious laws** since multi-party competition was reintroduced in 2005
 - Part of a broader strategy to provoke, divide & manipulate opposition in the face of new political environment
- Particularly in relation to escalating ethnic tension over the 'Buganda question'
- Three 'contentious bills':
 - The Land (Amendment) Bill (2007)
 - The Regional Governments Bill (2009)
 - The Kampala Capital City Bill (2009)

Legal manoeuvres

- Deliberately inflaming ethnic tensions by tapping into long-standing (colonial) resentment against Baganda
- Divide and rule: sacrificing support among Baganda in order to bolster support among other ethnic groups
- The Bills themselves were mostly 'legal nonsense'
- Tactical use of legislative process: **debating, amending, passing & shelving** at strategic points in electoral cycle
- Timing of these processes to aimed to **sanction and divide** opposition groups at key moments

Feeding urban political instability

- All this had a hugely destabilising impact on urban political arena
- Protracted legislative debates without meaningful change for the poor:
 - ‘When you see people running round and sacking shops, burning down police stations it is not because they have been commanded [but] because they think you are going to do **nothing more than talking**’*
- September 2009 ‘Buganda riots’
 - Most violent urban episode since 1986; over 40 people killed (mostly by government) & hundreds injured
 - Some rioters explicitly referred to these legal debates

Beyond the Buganda case: Legal debates fuelling urban violence

- **Public Order Management Bill**
 - Played important political role as ‘looming threat’ (2009-13)
 - In the meantime, the controversial bill fuelled urban protest and exacerbated ‘walk-to-work’ protests of 2011-12
- **‘Anti-Homosexuality Bill’**
 - Draft bill served clear political functions at key points from 2010-2014, both domestically and internationally
 - Instrumentalization of legal debate over the bill: *‘The longer it takes, the better for Museveni’* (Kapyia Kaoma)
 - In the meantime, there were at least five violent protests directly linked to the bill, several involving fatalities

Conclusions

- **New threats** to the ruling party since 2005 have led to **new strategies** to manipulate democratic institutions
- Among these is the debating of **contentious laws** (which are often not even implemented) as a tool for dividing opposition and controlling political discourse
- Whether deliberately or as a side-effect, this has stimulated urban unrest and consequent government crackdowns
- Dynamics such as these, and more generally the **tactics and strategies employed by authoritarian governments facing pressures to democratise**, may partly explain why 'hybrid' regimes tend to have high levels of civic conflict