



Third report December 2012

1. Introduction

The Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) gathers, analyses, and reports on armed violence data in Liberia. It is comprised of a working group of 25 stakeholders drawn from governmental agencies, civil society organizations, international NGOs, and donor organizations. The working group members are selected based on the correlation between their core work and the issues of armed violence.

The LAVO was established in early 2011, for the purpose of upholding and implementing the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (GD) to which Liberia is one of the original signatories as well as the Oslo Commitments. The GD calls for a measurable reduction of incidents of armed violence worldwide by the year 2015 and operates on a framework of three pillars.

The LAVO operates mostly in the first and second pillars, advocacy, collecting, analysing, and centralizing data to improve understanding of the scope and scale of armed violence in Liberia. Data providers include the Liberian National Police, UN Police, several hospitals, and several national newspapers. A data expert triangulates all data to ensure that there is no duplication and identifies trends and patterns. This data is then used to inform targeted programming and policies.

Since its establishment nearly two years ago, the LAVO has strengthened the working group and established a two-person secretariat, which runs the daily activities of the observatory. In recent months, the LAVO has focused on strengthening its data collection and sharing capacities, fostering relationships with data providers outside of Monrovia while broadening its scope of work to include advocacy in the form of a 4-city awareness-raising campaign and programming recommendations.

What is Armed Violence?

The Geneva Declaration defines armed violence as: *“the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives against a person, group, community, or state, which undermines people-centered security and/or sustainable development”*.

2. A Collaborative Approach

The LAVO’s success stems from its collaborative approach to data gathering, analysis, and dissemination. By bringing together a cross-section of stakeholders, the LAVO encourages inter-

agency cooperation that better supports the observatory towards achieving its goal of providing a clear picture of armed violence in Liberia.

Box 1 LAVO stakeholders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Foreign Affairs • Ministry of Internal Affairs • Ministry of Health and Social Welfare • Ministry of Defense • Ministry of Justice • Ministry of Gender and Development • Ministry of State • Liberia National Police (LNP) • Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) • Liberia National Commission on Small Arms • World Health Organization (WHO) • United Nations Development Program (UNDP) • United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) • Liberia National Red Cross Society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) • Peace Interaction Network • ActionAid Liberia • Liberia Action Network on Small Arms • Youth Crime Watch • Press Union of Liberia • New Democrat Newspaper • Inquirer Newspaper • Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation • Action on Armed Violence (Landmine Action) <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><i>Observer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberian National Bar Association

While the working group drives the vision of the LAVO, the observatory carries out its work through partnership with other agencies. As a member of the Liberian Early Warning and Early Response working group, the LAVO uses data to track trends in order to inform intervention where early signs of violence or potential conflict are present.

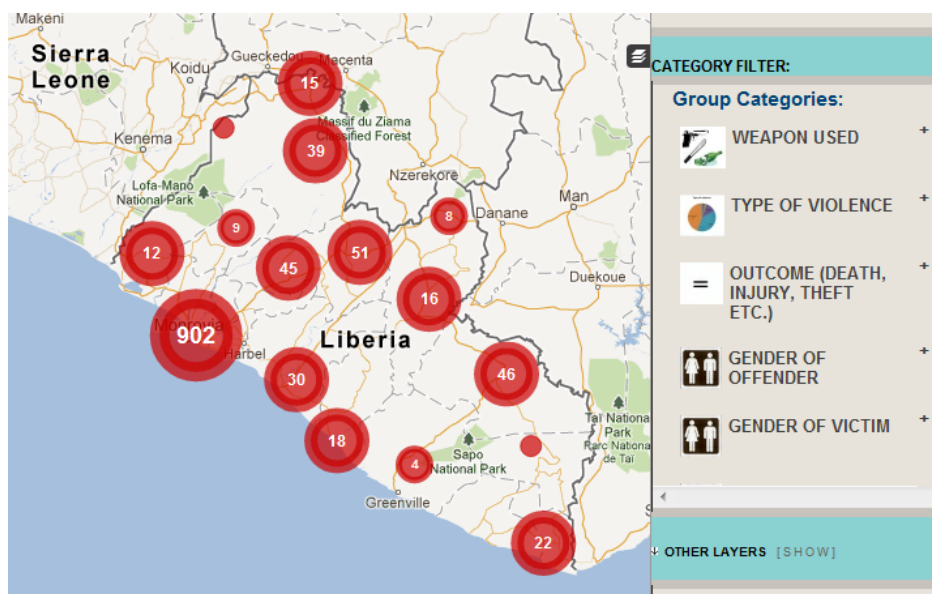
Outside agencies, including the Center for Disease Control and CAERUS Associates, have also worked with the LAVO to improve data collection mechanisms and build on organizational capacity. Action on Armed Violence, a UK-based NGO that was integral to the LAVO’s founding, provides technical support and assistance with fundraising. Local partners, however, are the key to the LAVO’s success. As the LAVO transitions to local ownership, it is these partnerships and collaborations that will ensure long-term sustainability.

<p>LAVO currently collects data on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics of victim(s) and perpetrators (s) (e.g. age, gender and nationality) • Time and place of the incident • Type of violence • Type of weapon used • Outcome of the incident (e.g. death, physical harm, theft etc.)

Whenever possible it also collects data on the cause of violence. However, at the moment only a few data providers hold such information.

In addition to creating a database of armed violence incidents, LAVO also maps each incident using the on-line Ushahidi¹ platform which, as all LAVO data, is free and open to the public <http://lern.ushahidi.com/simplegroups/groupmap/3> On the site the user can zoom in on the map and read individual reports in order to find more detailed information.

¹ Ushahidi is a non-profit tech company that specializes in developing free and open source software for information collection, visualization and interactive mapping. www.ushahidi.com



There is also a filter function which allows the viewer to geographically see for instance where different types of weapons are used and where certain types of crime occur. All data on the platform also feed into the Liberia Early Warning and Early Response network.

In this report, data is displayed using tables and graphs as well as maps taken from the Ushahidi platform.

NOTE: A place called 'Lofa-Mano National Park' appears on the map on the border of Sierra Leone. This area is to date not yet established national park in Liberia. The error must be corrected by Google which provide the maps for LAVO.

What is LAVO?

The Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) is an independent institutional function that regularly gathers, analyzes and reports on armed violence data throughout Liberia, working collaboratively with government, non-governmental organizations, academic and media actors, and international organizations.

In order to create an accurate coherent picture of the situation in Liberia the LAVO receives data from various government and non-government data sources. All datasets are put together in one database where duplicates are identified and combined into one in order not to inflate numbers.

As such, the LAVO primarily uses existing datasets and sources, bringing together those actors with existing data-gathering and analysis capacities, rather than building a new parallel system.

The LAVO was born out of the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development², a diplomatic initiative endorsed by over 100 states and aimed at addressing the interrelationship between armed violence and development, to which Liberia is signatory.

Implementation of the Geneva Declaration is centered on three pillars; advocacy, measurability and programming. The LAVO works firstly in line with the second pillar i.e. monitoring to improve understanding of the scope and scale, of armed violence and its negative impact on development.

In addition to this the aim of the LAVO is also to raise awareness on armed violence in Liberia and internationally as well as to give policymakers a clear view of armed violence in Liberia, supported by empirical data, to develop concrete programs in order to target the causes of armed violence.

LAVO is chaired by the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a co-chair from West Africa Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP).

For a more information about LAVO, contact the secretariat lavo@aoav.org.uk or visit:

Action on Armed Violence <http://www.aoav.org.uk/on-the-ground>

Liberia Early Warning and Early Response Network <http://lern.ushahidi.com/simplegroups/groupmap/3>

3. Data Trends and Analysis

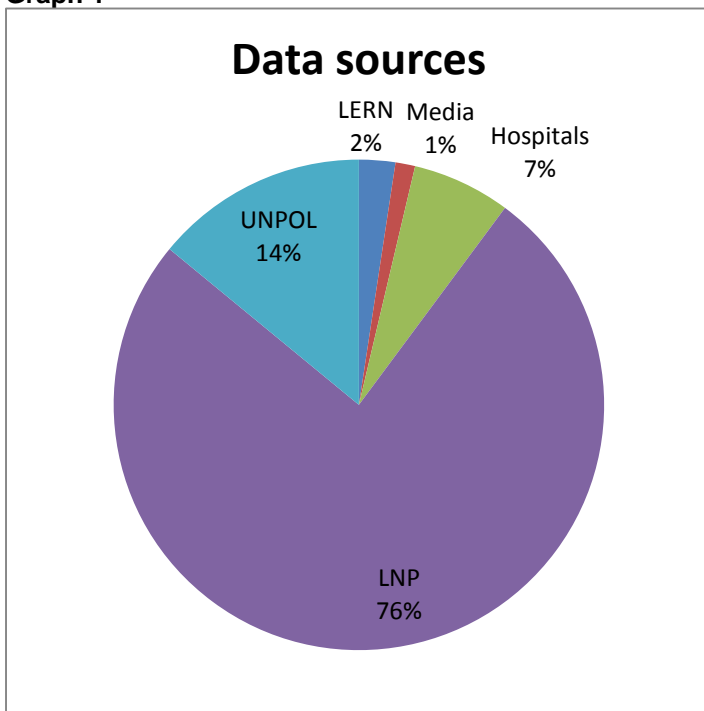
Sources

This report analyses five months of data, collected between May 2012 and September 2012.

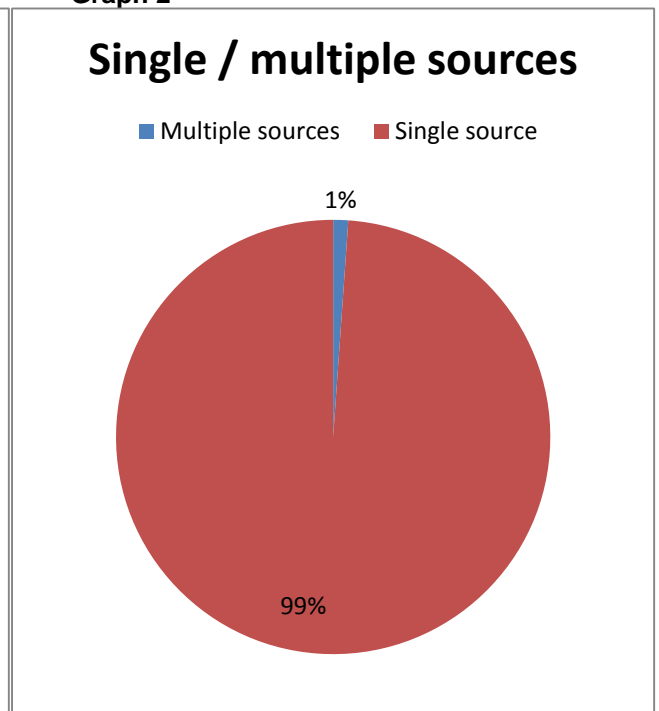
The LAVO gathers data from UN Police (UNPOL), Liberian National Police (LNP), the Liberian Early Warning Early Response Network (LERN), several hospitals, and various newspapers. Graph 1 shows the percentage of data that comes from each data provider. All data is checked for duplicates and is triangulated to ensure that it is accurate. The LAVO receives detailed data containing the name of offender and victim, time, and place of the incident, which makes the success rate of identifying duplicates high. Duplication across providers is rare. As Graph 2 shows, each individual data provider reports unique incidents of armed violence, with little duplication across providers. This highlights the importance of having an observatory that centralizes information.

For this five month reporting period, (May to September 2012), the United Nations Police contributed 14% of the data, LERN (Liberia Early Warning Early Respond Network³) contributed 2% and 72% is from LNP, which has consistently been the highest provider of data to the LAVO.

Graph 1



Graph 2



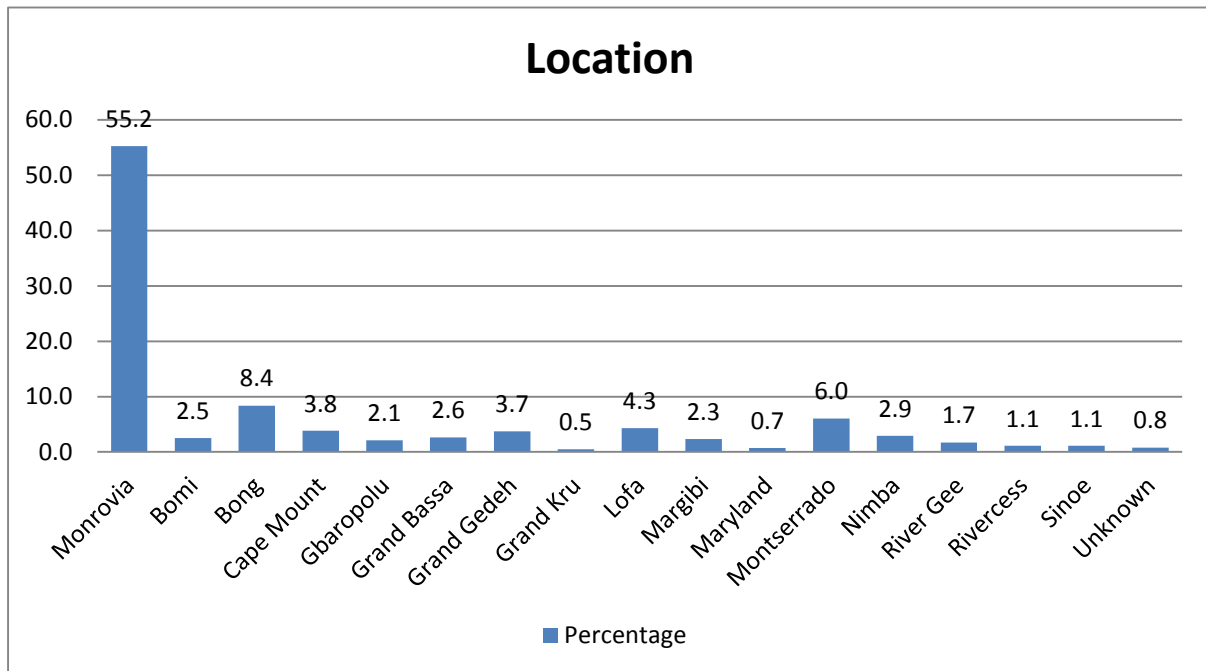
4. Location

Analyzing this five months of data, there are still differences between the capital and rural areas in terms of capacity, communication, and infrastructure. The LAVO, however, noted a small increase in reports from the counties towards the end of the data collection year, which may indicate an

³ LAVO is a member of LERN and contributes all LAVO data to LERN for display on its website

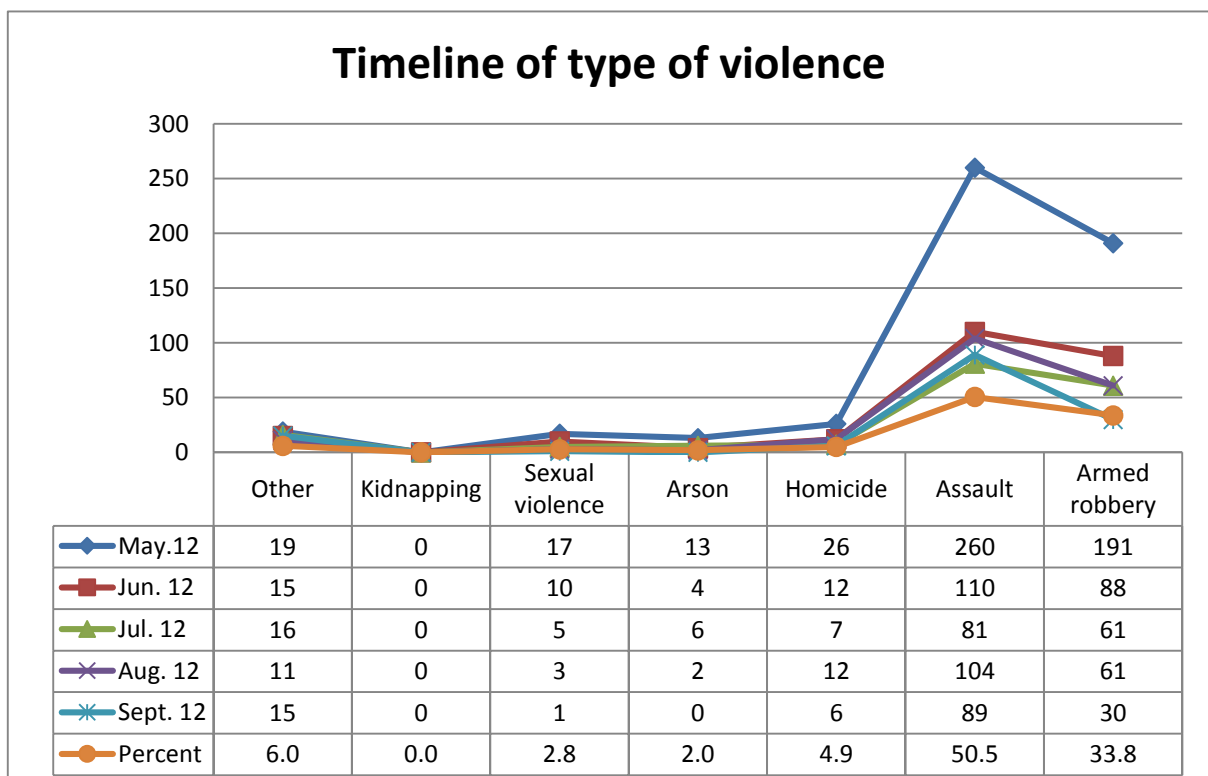
increase in violence but more likely reflects improved data collection. Graph 3 shows that 55.2% of data collected from the LAVO comes from Monrovia.

Graph 3



Graph 4 displays the types of armed violence reported from May to September 2012. While the data suggests a spike in violence later in the year, the increase in incidents is more likely due to more accurate and timely data provision. Notably, reports from areas outside of Monrovia increased during this time.

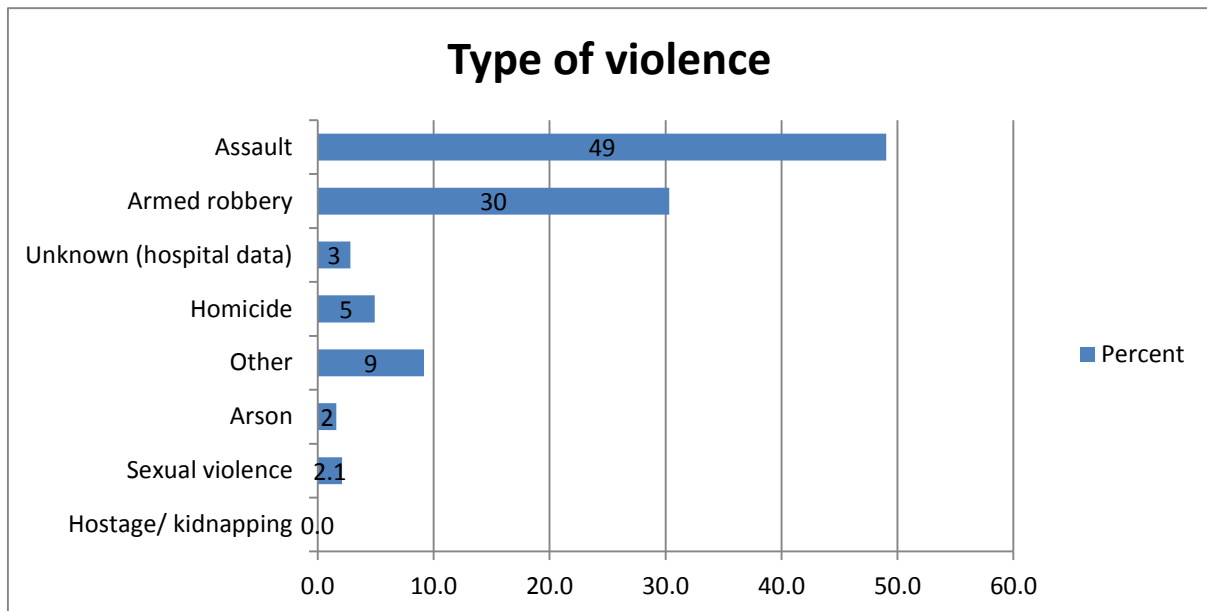
Graph 4



5. Types of Violence

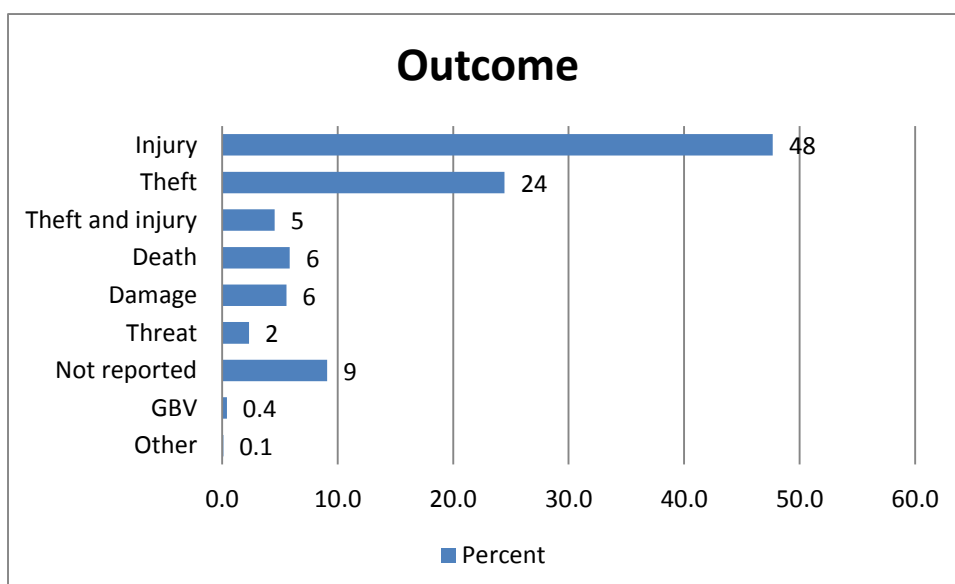
Graph 5 displays the relative prevalence of types of violence reported. The graphs are based on data periods where datasets from all six data providers are available. Note that the line marked “Other” includes different types of violence that are not necessarily armed violence, such as cruelty to animals or accidental suicide.

Graph 5



6. Outcomes

Graph 6



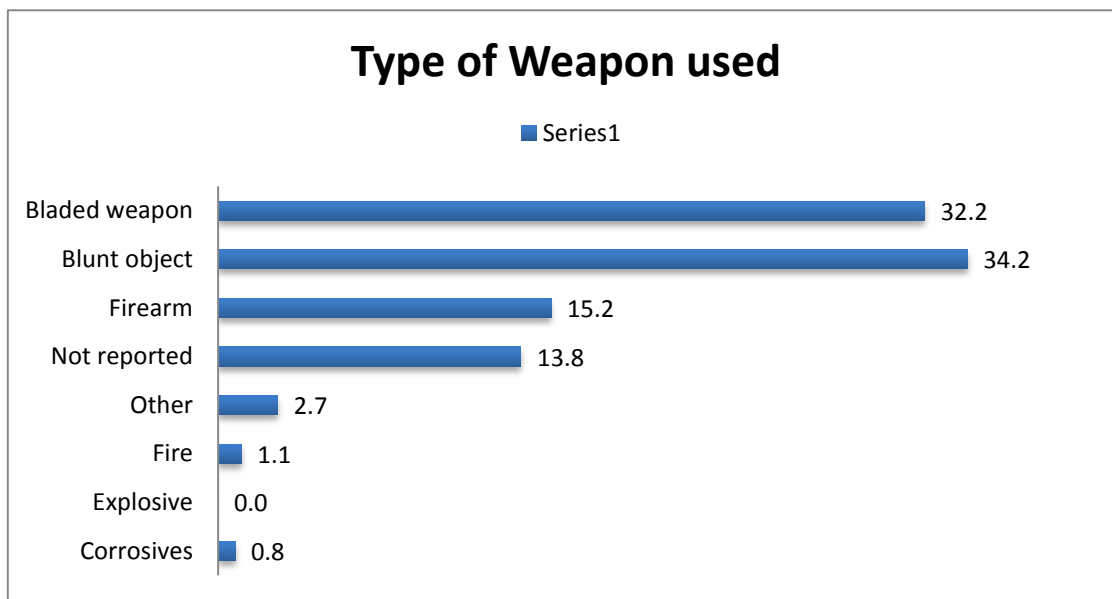
Graph 6, shows that injury and theft are the most common results of armed violence reported. This, could be over-reported, however, since a large majority of the data comes from the LNP, who collect more specific data on injury and theft than other data providers.

Here, the line marked “Other” includes outcomes that the LAVO database had not accounted for, such as fear or mischief. This highlights the need for more research and data collection on the psychosocial implications of violence and suggests possibilities for new programming areas.

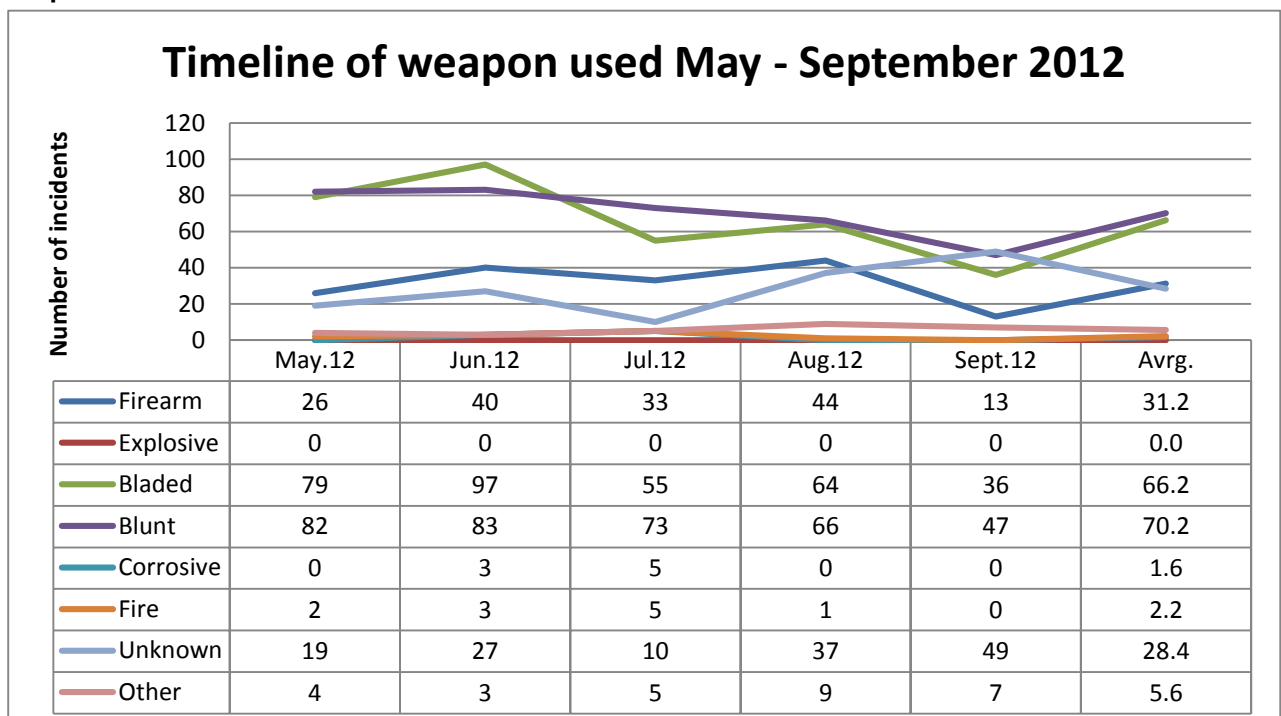
7. Weapon Use

Bladed weapons and blunt objects are the most common weapons used. It may be useful to have more specific categories for future data collection. In this case, bladed weapons includes knives and razor blades, while blunt objects includes sticks, bats, and other commonly found objects. As Graph 8 shows, this is largely consistent over time.

Graph 7



Graph 8

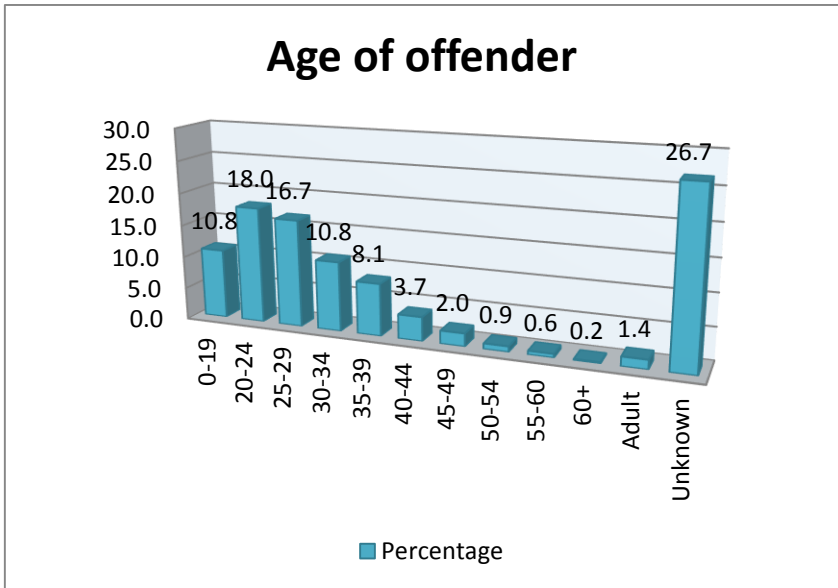


8. Offenders and Victims

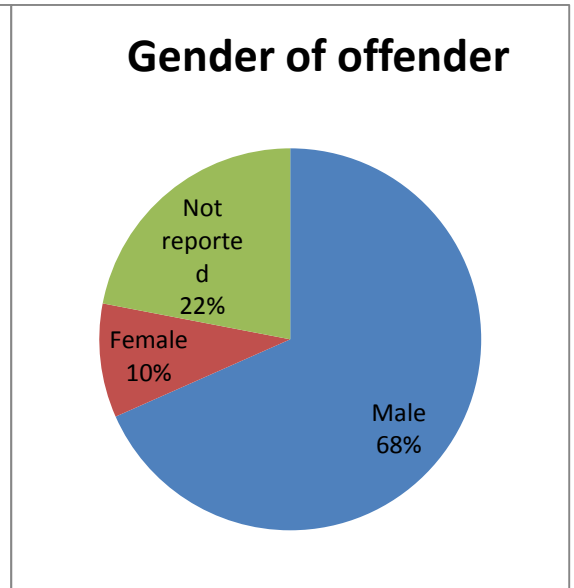
Most perpetrators of armed violence are youth related aged 20-29. Youth are also most likely to be victims of armed violence. Overall Liberia's population is youthful but the age of the offenders is still lower than that of the victims. LNP is the only data provider with substantial data on offenders.

Males tend to be both offenders and victims. However, it is likely that women underreport, especially when it comes to sexual or intimate partner violence.

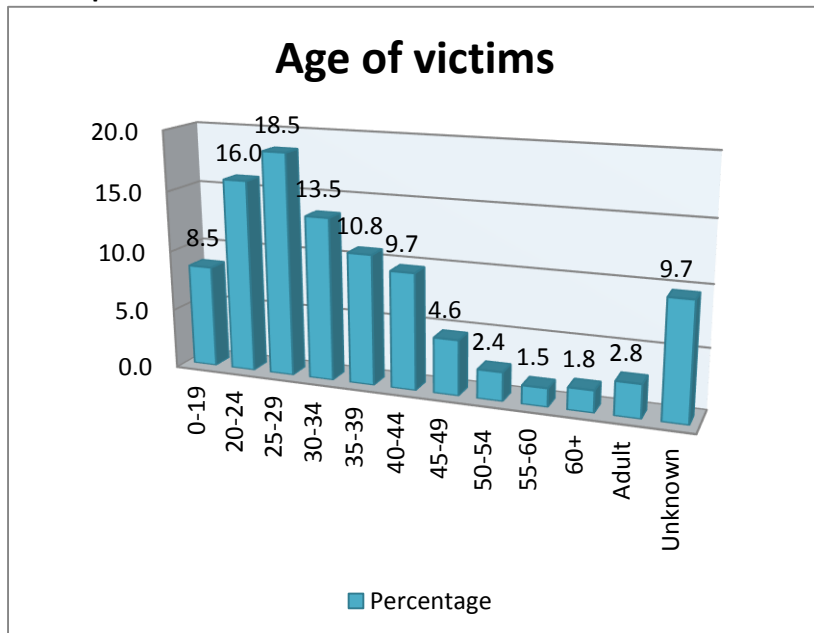
Graph 9



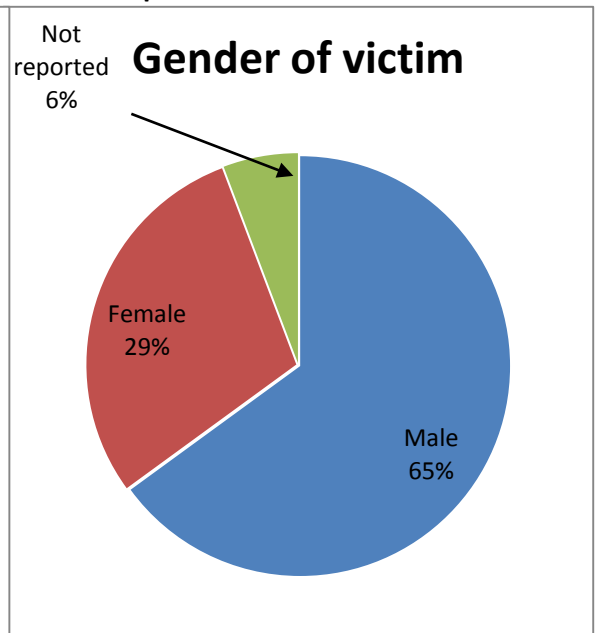
Graph 10



Graph 11



Graph 12

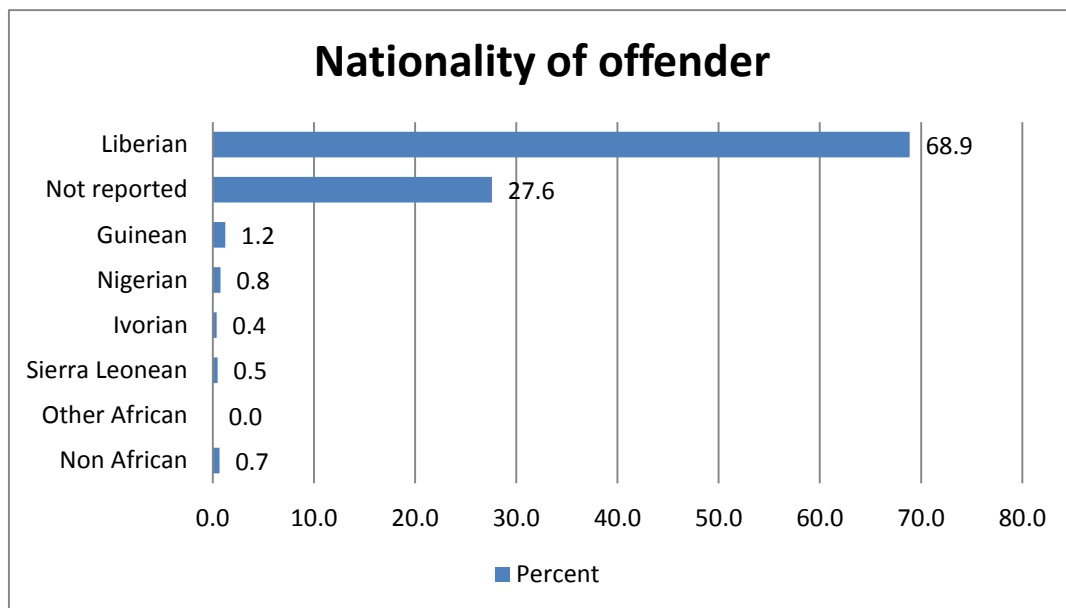


9. Nationality

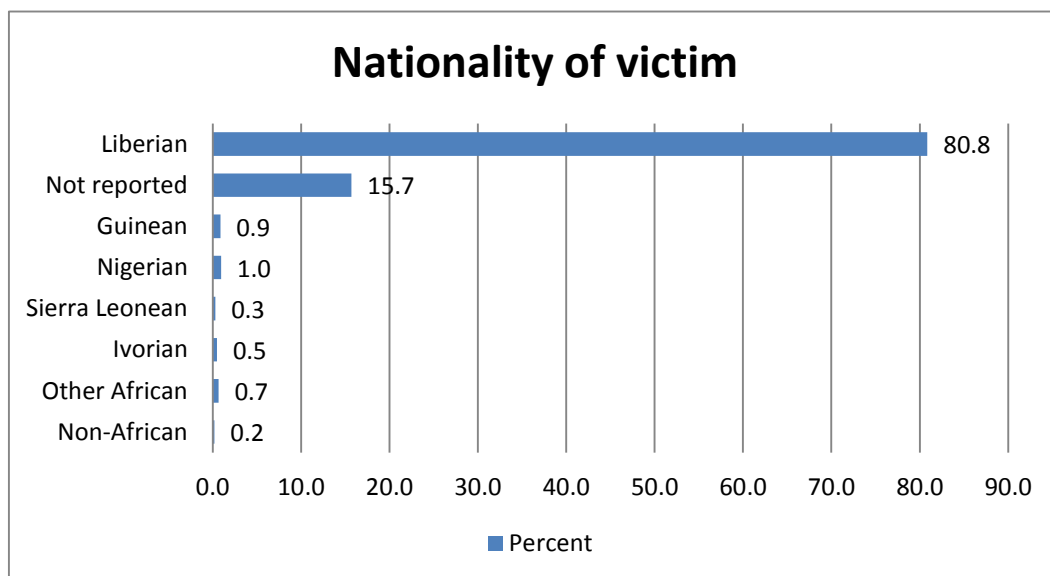
LNP is the only data provider that consistently provides data on nationality, so there are a large number of cases where nationality is unknown. However, the data that is available shows that it is

Largely Liberians committing armed violence against other Liberians.

Graph 13



Graph 14



While there are gaps in data that can be remedied by better and broader data collection, the information available shows a trend for young Liberian males to commit armed violence against other young Liberian males in Monrovia. This information is critical to creating both policy and programming that can better prevent and address armed violence.

10. Four (4) Cities in 4 Days: Raising Awareness in Bong County

The data shows that incident reporting is most common in Monrovia, and there is a need to better engage the rural communities in data reporting and collection to better capture what is happening outside of the capital. To do this, the LAVO, supported by AOVAV, engaged in a 4-day awareness and outreach campaign in late November that aimed to:

1. Educate people about armed violence and its effects on the community
2. Identify appropriate places to report armed violence and seek help
3. Encourage people to report armed violence to the identified data providers

Additionally, the LAVO used the campaign to build and maintain relationships with community organizations, governmental institutions, religious leaders, and others to increase the pool of data providers and to identify potential programming partners.

The campaign used two different strategies to target different populations. Thanks to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare's community mobilizers, nearly 200 participants from community groups, government agencies, and other potential data providers and programming partners were brought together for town hall style meetings where they learned about the LAVO and shared concerns about armed violence in their communities.



Participants at LAVO town hall meeting post for the camera at the end of the of the event in Salala Bong County

Photo: Prince T. Higgins.

In addition to these meetings, 4 street jams were held, targeting the general community, especially youth. Over 2000 people participated in these interactive 2-hour events, hosted by hip co⁴ artist, taking vows of nonviolence, sharing stories about how armed violence has affected them, performing impromptu skits, and singing along to Takun J's "Armed Violence is Not Good".

11. Entertainment Education

The LAVO recognizes that how a message is delivered is as important as the message itself, especially when the goal is to effect behavioural and sociocultural change in a short amount of time. For the awareness campaign, which had different goals for different target populations, traditional

⁴ Hip co is a blend of hip hop and colloquial Liberian English

town hall style meetings were used to engage potential partners and prospective data-providers. The larger prevention and reporting messages, however, were aimed at the general community; especially youth who the data shows are both the main victims and the main perpetrators of armed violence in Liberia.

To best do this, the LAVO utilized entertainment education, a cutting edge best practice that uses different forms of media and entertainment to educate and inform in order to influence behaviour change in communities. Traditional outreach methods depend on single-use materials like fliers and stickers that rely on a stakeholder's ability to read and review the information. Entertainment education, instead, emphasizes sustainability by using techniques with which the target audience is already familiar, thereby speeding the internalization of material.

For the outreach campaign, the LAVO turned to entertainment that is popular and accessible: hip co, a blend of hip hop and colloquial Liberian English, and radio dramas. The LAVO partnered with hip co artist Takun J to create an armed violence reduction song that will play on radio stations and be distributed through CDs throughout Liberia.

Takun J joined the LAVO on the awareness campaign, holding street jams where he engaged the audience- mostly yana boys, market women, and students- in an interactive dialog about reducing armed violence.



Takun "J" engages youths on armed violence during one of four street jams. Photo: Prince T. Higgins

The song was incorporated as theme music for a radio drama produced by Talking Drum Studios. Using colloquial Liberian English, the drama explains armed violence, gives an example of deescalating a potentially violent situation, and talks about places to report violent incidents. The drama will continue to play on radio stations throughout the country for at least 3 months, reinforcing the messaging of the campaign.

Excerpt from Radio Drama

Body Man:	Then weh you call armed violence now? Da this knife in my hand business?
Gobeh:	That's it there too, Body Man. Armed violence is when you decide in your heart and go and harm somebody or even yourself with a cutlass, rock, stick and other objects, just like you are doing right now.
Body Man:	But only knife I ga in my hand.
Gobeh:	So long you use a weapon to harm the person, it means you na take part in armed violence.

12. Moving Towards Independence: Transitioning to the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation

The Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation is one of five academic graduate programs of the University of Liberia. One of its core functions being building human resource capacity, KAICT trains men and women in the areas of conflict transformation, human rights, gender, and peace building through relevant courses.

KAICT has been an active, non-data providing stakeholder of the LAVO. To support the LAVO's independence, the secretariat's offices will be moving from AOAV to the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation, which the working group elected as the LAVO's host last year.

KAICT was chosen as the LAVO's host with the belief that a research institute will provide a neutral, sustainable environment for the secretariat to carry out its work, with the academic dynamics of the institute serving as a conduit for added national and international recognition for this fledgling observatory.

13. Looking Ahead: Beyond Data Collection

The LAVO's move to the KAICT marks its transition towards independence. Plans are in place to strengthen the secretariat and (re)engage working group members so that the observatory can become a fully independent function by the end of 2013.

While data collection, gathering, and analysis will continue, the LAVO will spend 2013 broadening its network of data providers, particularly in the rural areas of Liberia, to offer a more complete understanding of armed violence in Liberia. There are also plans to improve citizen-reporting mechanisms to not only better collect data but to also encourage community involvement with the LAVO. The LAVO plans to use the collected data to inform and influence policy, aiming to address the root causes of armed violence.

Is your organization in need of specific data on armed violence?

LAVO data and analysis are open to public scrutiny – in keeping with the transparency and accountability the observatory itself embodies – such that information and analysis could be checked and corrected.

This means that anyone can contact the secretariat to:

- Report incidences of armed violence
- Challenge or correct LAVO data or analysis
- Request specific data from a particular region, type of violence etc and /or cross referencing different categories.

Contact

lavo@gmail.com

