



LRA CRISIS TRACKER

UPDATE:

THE STATE OF THE LRA IN 2015

SEPTEMBER 2015

**INVISIBLE
CHILDREN**

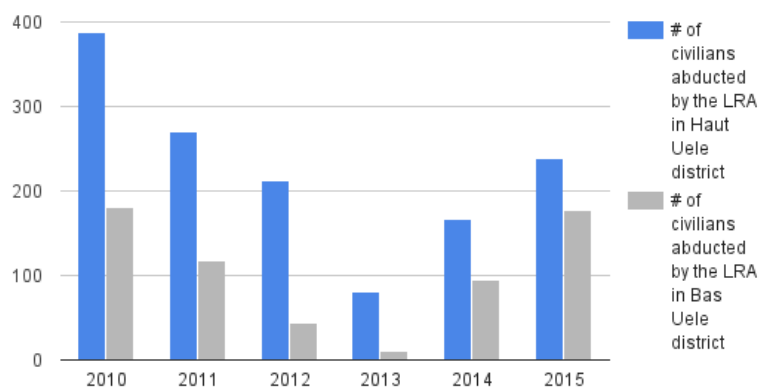
THE RESOLVE
LRA CRISIS INITIATIVE

Trends in Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) violence in eastern Central African Republic (CAR) and northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) diverged sharply in the first eight months of 2015. In Congo, LRA groups utilized bold tactics rarely employed in recent years, killing at least six Congolese soldiers and conducting a series of large-scale looting raids that led to a surge in civilian abductions. In eastern CAR, LRA abductions dropped to their lowest point in several years as rebel fighters have increasingly relied on extortion and threats to procure food and other supplies from local communities. In June, the LRA suffered its most significant loss of the year when seven bodyguards defected from the group of LRA leader Joseph Kony.

1. TOTAL LRA ABDUCTIONS IN CONGO ARE AT THEIR HIGHEST LEVEL IN FOUR YEARS

The LRA [abducted 417 Congolese civilians](#) in the first eight months of 2015, a significant increase compared to the first eight months of 2014 (262 abductions), 2013 (90 abductions), and 2012 (255 abductions). Abductions were particularly high in Congo's Bas Uele district, where LRA forces abducted more people in the first eight months of 2015 than in the same periods of the previous three years combined. LRA forces operate with impunity in Bas Uele, where there are few Congolese military forces and no permanent deployments of United Nations peacekeepers, African Union counter-LRA troops, or US military advisers.

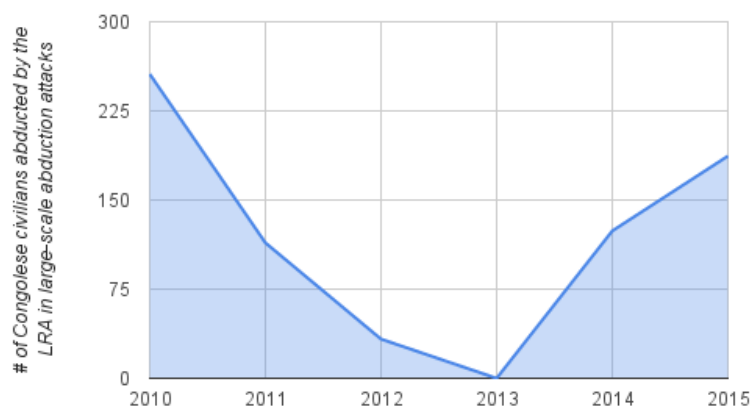
At least 78% of Congolese abductees in 2015 have escaped or been released by the LRA within three days of being abducted, indicating they were likely abducted for the purpose of portering looted goods.



Note: The graph includes data for January–August of each year depicted.

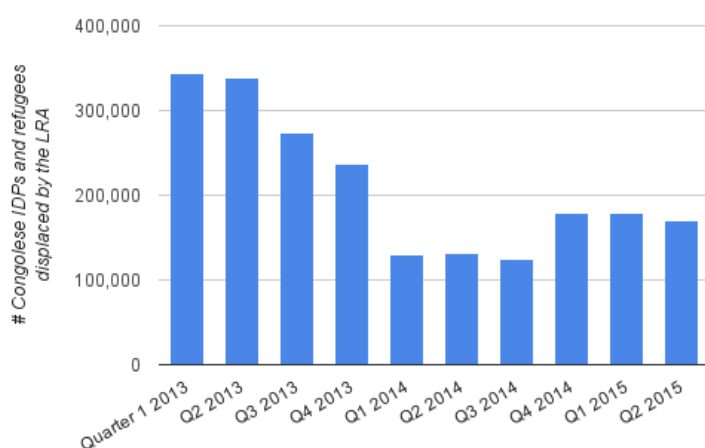
2. SURGE IN LARGE-SCALE LRA ABDUCTIONS IN CONGO

There has been an increase in total abductions in Congo, even though the number of LRA attacks in the first eight months of 2015 was roughly comparable to levels of LRA attacks at similar points in previous years. This is due to an increase in large-scale LRA abduction raids, which began to rise in mid-2014 and have continued to rise in 2015. LRA forces committed 12 attacks in which they abducted 10 or more people in the first eight months of 2015, equal to the number of such attacks in the previous two years. The increase in large-scale LRA abductions in Congo since mid-2014 may be linked to the presence of LRA groups who have been tasked to acquire ivory from Congo's Garamba National Park and send it to Kony, who operates along the border of eastern CAR and the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave.



Note: The graph includes data for January–August of each year depicted. [The LRA Crisis Tracker Codebook](#) defines “large-scale abduction attack” as an attack in which 10 or more people are abducted.

3. CIVILIAN DISPLACEMENT IN CONGO STEADIES

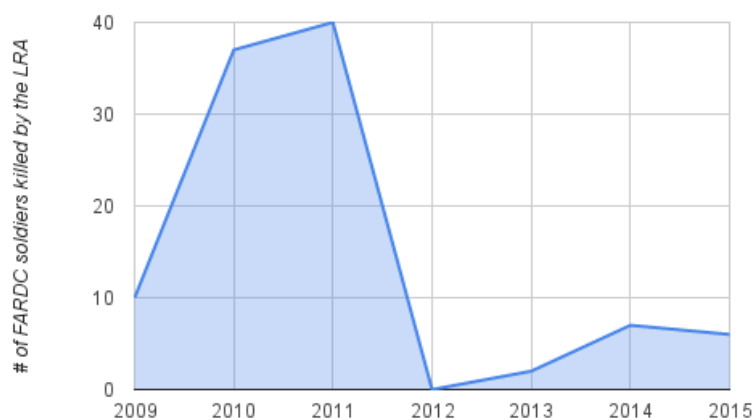


Note: Displacement statistics taken from OCHA quarterly reports on LRA activity.

From 2010 through mid-2013, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that the number of internally displaced persons and refugees from LRA-affected areas of Congo consistently hovered between 317,000 and 369,000. Displacement estimates dropped by more than 60% over the next nine months as LRA attacks became less frequent and less violent, reaching a low of 130,628 in March 2014. Displacement of Congolese civilians in LRA-affected areas began to rise again in late 2014 as LRA abductions increased, and [remained relatively steady throughout the first half of 2015](#).

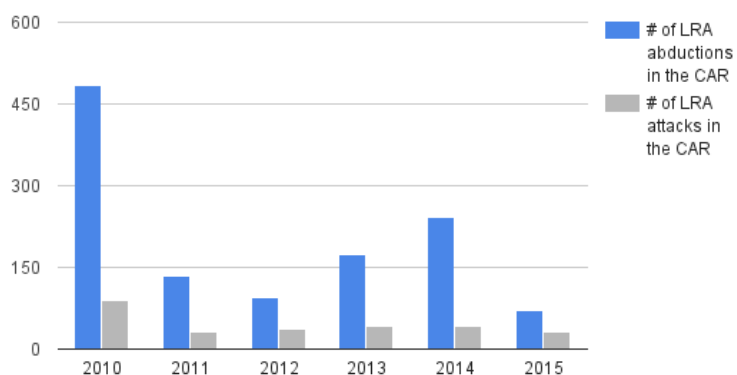
4. LRA KILLINGS OF CONGOLESE SOLDIERS INCREASE

LRA killings of civilians in northeastern Congo have dropped dramatically, from 475 in the first eight months of 2010 to five in the first eight months of 2015. But the boldness LRA groups have shown in committing more large-scale abductions in 2015 has also been reflected in a spate of killings of soldiers from the Congolese military (FARDC). In the 11 months since November 2014, the LRA has killed at least 12 Congolese soldiers, more than the total of the previous three years combined. This recent trend of aggression towards the FARDC pales, however, in comparison to LRA activity in 2010 and 2011, when LRA forces killed a total of 77 Congolese soldiers.



5. LRA VIOLENCE DROPPED SIGNIFICANTLY IN EASTERN CAR

The LRA was responsible for only 31 attacks and 70 abductions in eastern CAR in the first eight months of 2015, the lowest levels of LRA violence in that area at commensurate periods since 2011. LRA violence was particularly muted in Haut Mbomou prefecture, where LRA attacks in 2015 dropped by 71% and abductions by 77%, compared to 2014.



Note: This graph includes data for January–August of each year depicted.

6. LRA GROUPS IN EASTERN CAR EMPLOY MIX OF VIOLENCE AND EXTORTION TO ACQUIRE FOOD



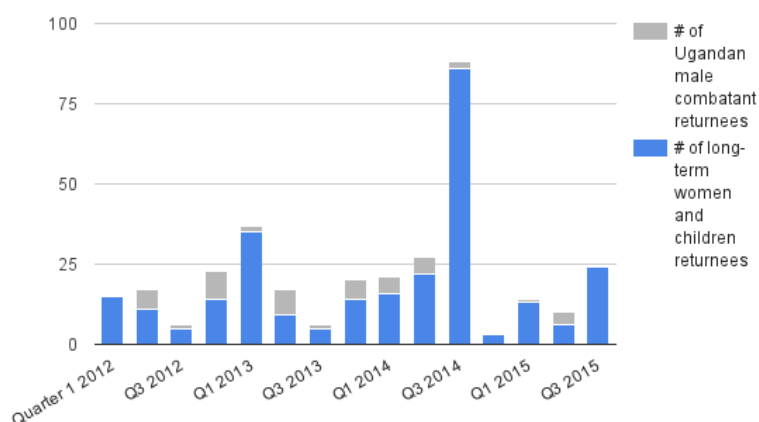
Seven LRA defectors who escaped in eastern CAR, pictured with US military and African Union troops (photo credit: New Vision)

LRA groups operating in eastern CAR have long relied on looting civilians by force to acquire needed supplies, but in recent years they have [increasingly sought less violent ways to survive](#). They have employed innovative tactics that have included seeking permission from local leaders for safe passage to local markets, purchasing food from civilians using cash they looted during previous raids, and extorting travelers at roadblocks. Though the LRA's use of such tactics is not unprecedented, the splintering and shrinking of LRA groups may be forcing them to take a less aggressive approach to civilians more frequently. LRA forces have also had periodic contact with Seleka

forces, whom they have met on at least 12 occasions near the towns of Nzako and Bria since September 2013. On several occasions, Seleka officers have worked with community leaders to provide food to LRA groups in an attempt to minimize looting raids on civilians. Most recently, Seleka officers and local authorities met LRA commanders Angola Onen Unita and Olorworo in the village of Ngoundja, east of Bria, in June 2015. They reportedly gave the LRA group food and encouraged them to defect. Though LRA forces camped near the village for several days, they eventually departed.

7. KONY'S ERODING GRIP ON THE LRA COMMAND STRUCTURE

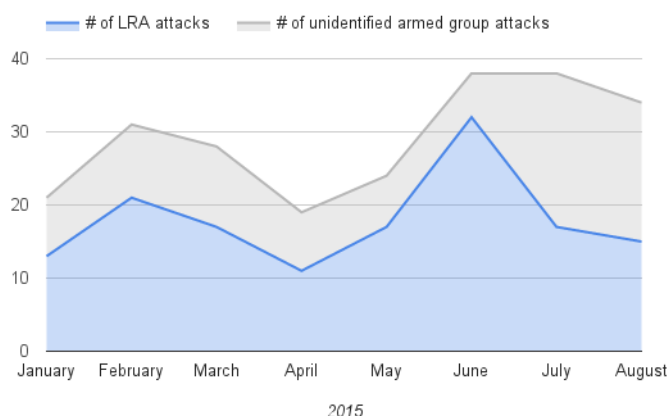
The isolation of LRA groups, on which LRA leader Joseph Kony has long relied to maintain his grip on power, is being eroded by the increasingly complicated web of relationships connecting LRA groups to local civilians and authorities. Peaceful interactions between LRA fighters and civilians help LRA groups survive without having to operate directly under Kony's control, and can even lead to personal friendships that help LRA fighters defect. The LRA group led by Onen Unita and Olorworo that established contact with Seleka officers near Ngoundja, CAR in June 2015, has been operating independently of Kony since being attacked by Ugandan military forces in April 2014.



Recent defections from Kony's group could signal that Kony is having difficulty maintaining control over even his immediate entourage. In December 2014, LRA combatants helped Dominic Ongwen defect despite Kony's orders that he be closely supervised. In May 2015, [seven LRA fighters who served as bodyguards to Kony or his inner circle](#) dared to fire upon their bosses as they made a dramatic escape. They subsequently fended off several attempts by Kony loyalists to recapture them.

Despite these challenges to his authority, Kony has succeeded in preventing most Ugandan male fighters from defecting, reflecting his continued influence over the group. Long-term women and children abductees, those who have spent at least six months in the LRA, are also escaping LRA captivity at slower rates in 2015 than they did in 2014. The spike in long-term women and children returnees in 2014 was directly linked to [Kony's orders to release dependents](#) who may have been slowing LRA groups down as they struggled to cope with the slow attrition of male LRA fighters. The fact that Kony hasn't ordered the release of similarly large groups of women and children in 2015 may indicate that the ratio of combatants to dependents within the LRA has reached an equilibrium.

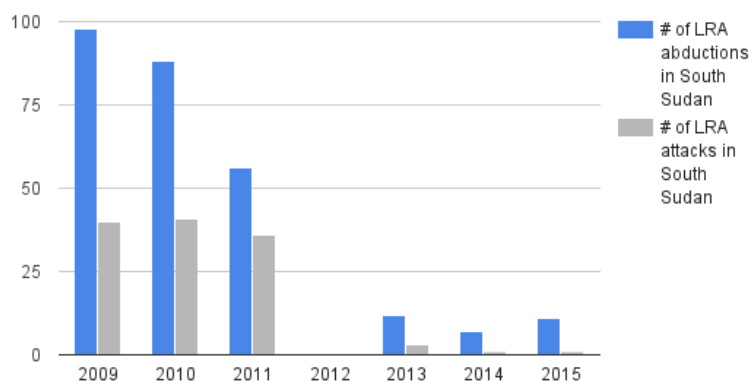
8. UNIDENTIFIED ARMED GROUPS CONTINUE TO TARGET CIVILIANS



Civilians in LRA-affected areas continue to suffer from attacks by a wide range of armed groups in addition to the LRA, including poachers, armed bandits, rebel groups, and rogue military forces. In some attacks, the perpetrators remain unidentified. In total, the LRA Crisis Tracker recorded a total of 90 attacks on civilians in LRA-affected areas in the first eight months of 2015 by unidentified groups: 51 in northeastern Congo, 35 in eastern CAR, and four in western South Sudan. In Congo, many such attacks occurred near Garamba National Park, where armed groups travel to illegally poach ivory. In the CAR, such attacks were particularly concentrated in Mbomou prefecture, near the towns of Bakouma, Rafai, and Derbissaka.

9. COMMUNAL TENSIONS AND ARMED GROUP ATTACKS IN SOUTH SUDAN

LRA groups frequently targeted South Sudan's Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el-Ghazal States from 2007–2011, but have only attacked civilians there on five occasions since 2012. Despite the drop in violence, the LRA's record of brutality in South Sudan continues to have ripple effects on the region. In recent months, [tensions have mounted](#) between the predominant Zande ethnic group in Western Equatoria State and Dinka herders and members of the South Sudanese military (SPLA). Though conflict between the two groups predates the arrival of the LRA in the region, years of Zande frustration at the SPLA's unwillingness to protect Zande communities from LRA attacks has greatly exacerbated tensions.



The LRA's legacy of brutality has also been politicized by the opposing sides of South Sudan's civil war. In January 2015, [unidentified armed groups killed 15 people in three separate attacks in Western Bahr el-Ghazal](#). Several South Sudanese government officials blamed the attacks on LRA forces, while other analysts determined fighters from the South Sudanese opposition forces were responsible. In September 2015, South Sudanese officials [linked the LRA to another attack in Central Equatoria State](#) for which South Sudanese opposition forces also allegedly claimed responsibility. LRA forces last committed an attack in Central Equatoria State in March 2009, making their involvement in the September 2015 attack highly unlikely.



ABOUT THE LRA CRISIS TRACKER

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

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

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