

Violence Against Aid Workers in Conflicts

Headline points from *Necessary Risks*



AID WORKER SECURITY DATABASE

Sources: Agencies, country-level platforms, data scraping

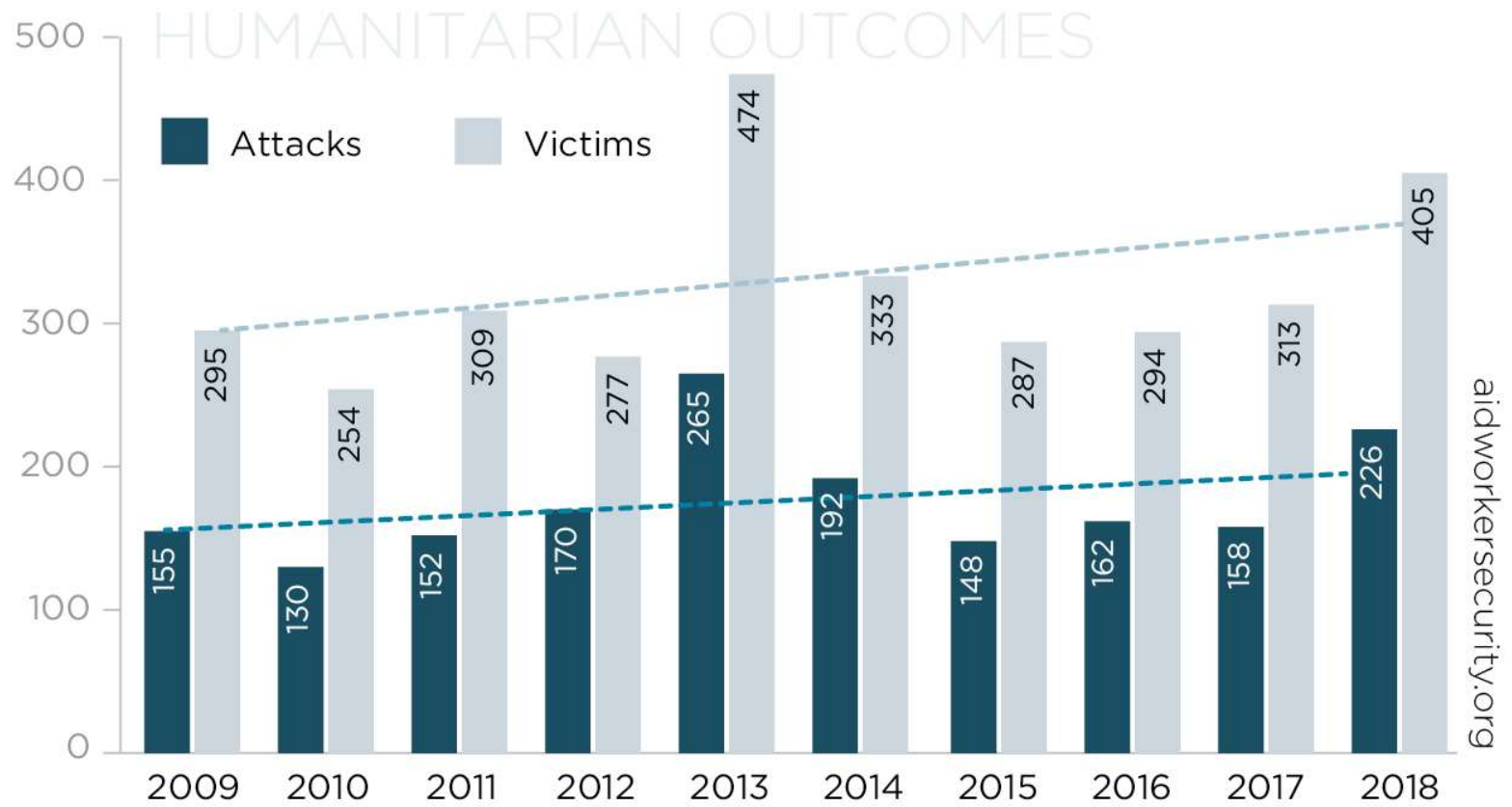
"Major incidents" = killings, kidnappings, and attacks resulting in serious injury

"Aid workers" = employees and associated personnel of not-for-profit aid groups providing material and technical assistance in humanitarian crises.

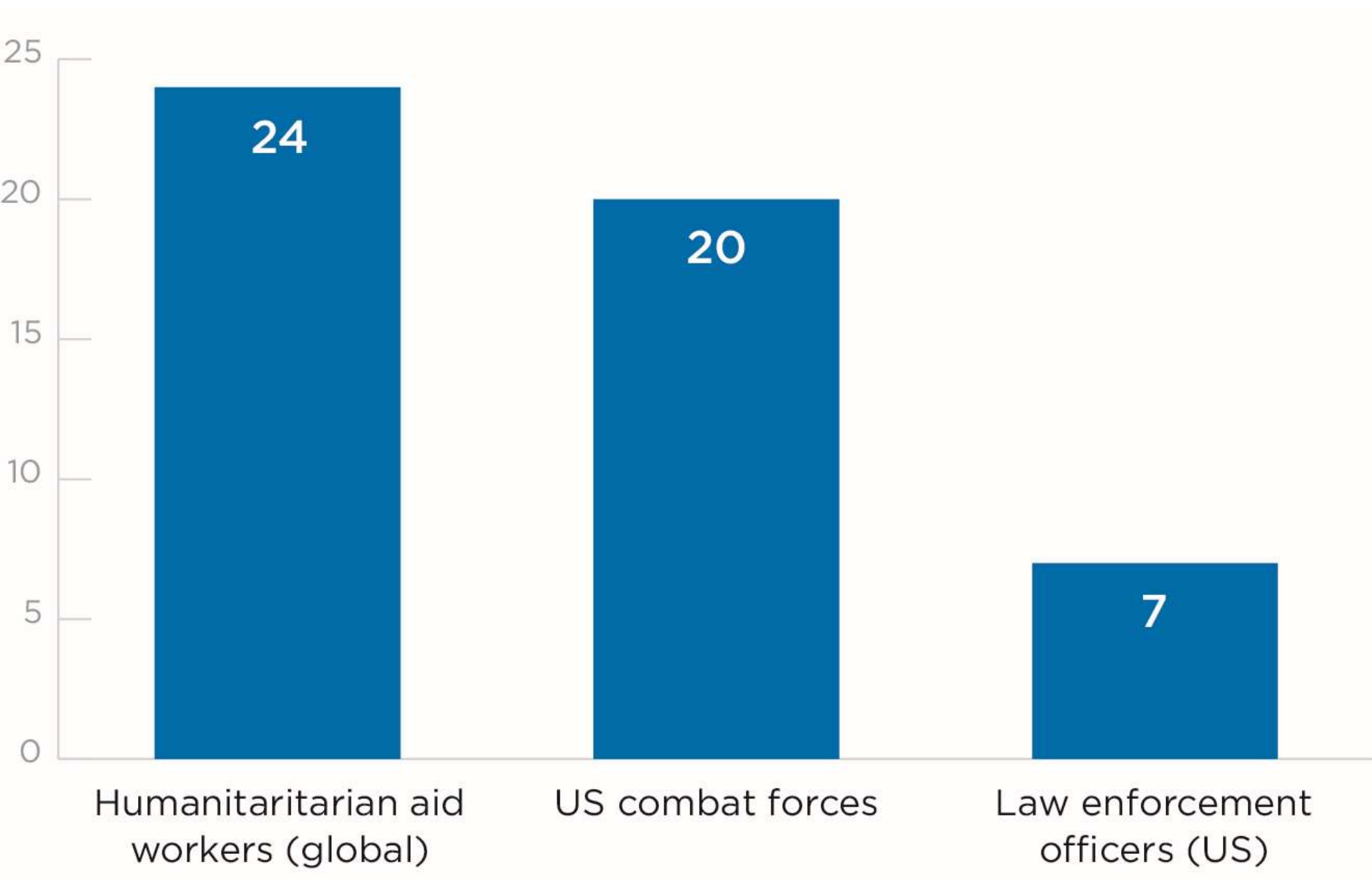
- Date
- Location
- Victims information: gender, institutional affiliation, national or international staff
- Outcome of incident: killed/wounded/kidnapped
- Means of violence: e.g., shooting, IED, airstrike
- Context of attack: e.g., ambush, armed incursion
- **Perpetrator: name and type of armed group, or individual**
- **Motives: economic/political/incidental)**
- Summary report (public details, anonymized)

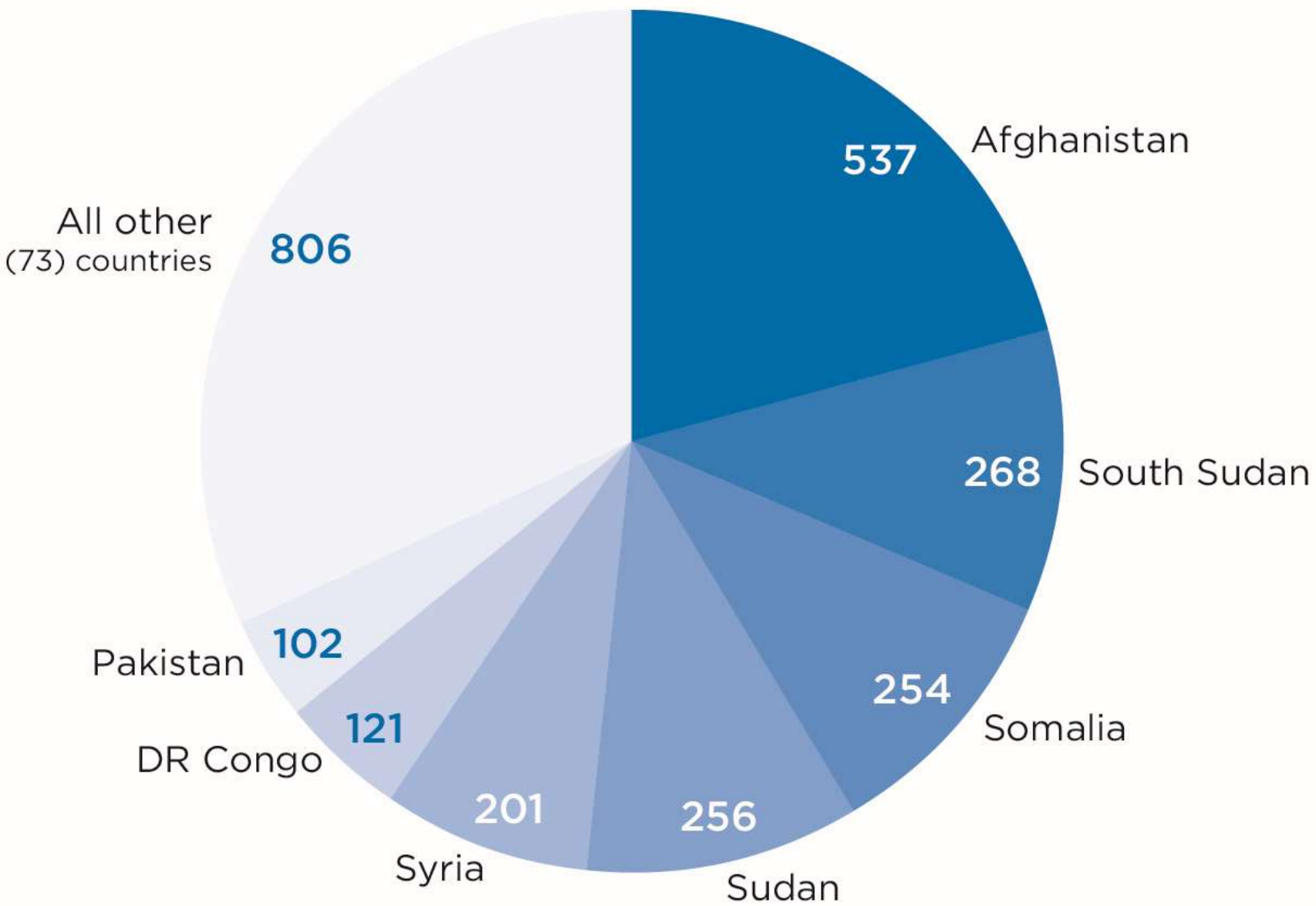
www.aidworkersecurity.org

Figure 1: Major security incidents, 2009–2018

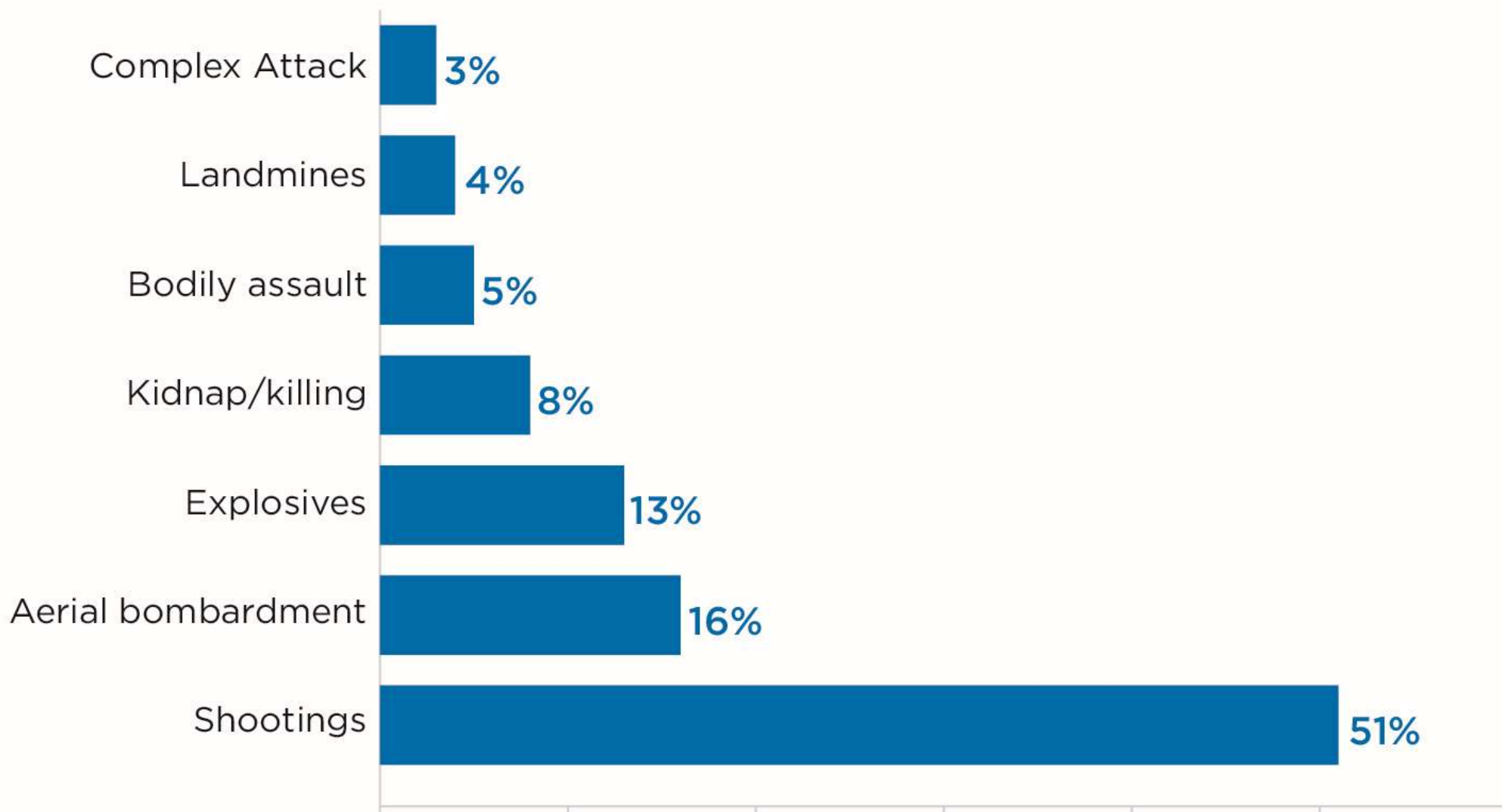


*Figures verified as of 19 June 2019.

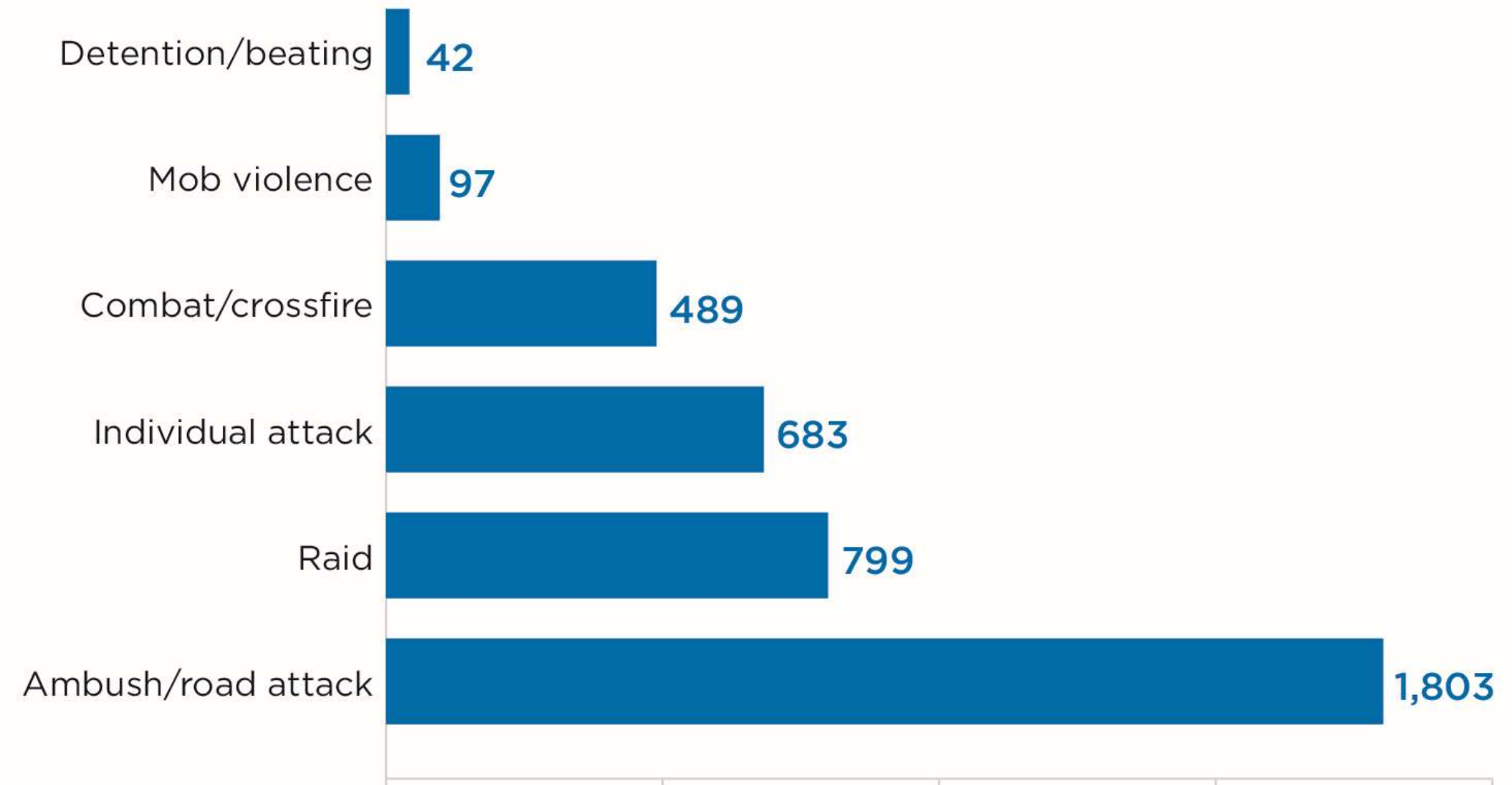




Percent fatalities by means of violence, 1997-2018



Number of victims by tactic/context, 1997-2018



National aid workers

- 90 percent of the victims
- Attack rate climbing relative to internationals
- Fatality rate 3X higher
- Shows reliance on partner organisations and remote ops

Figure 4: National and international victim trends, 2014-2018

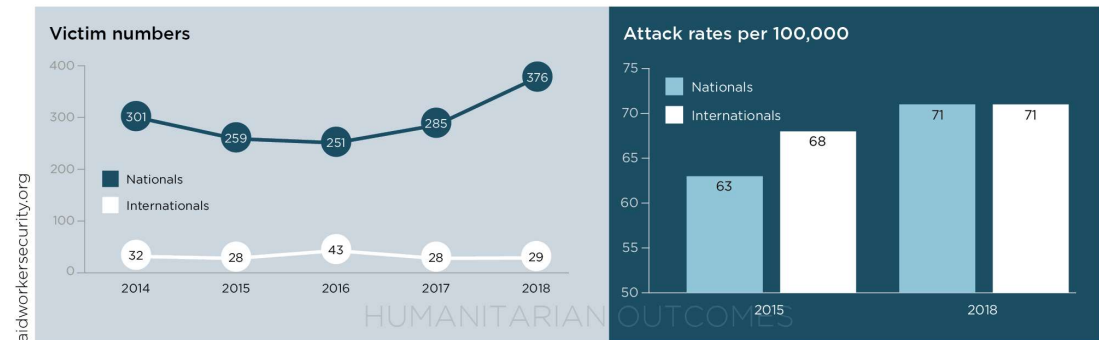
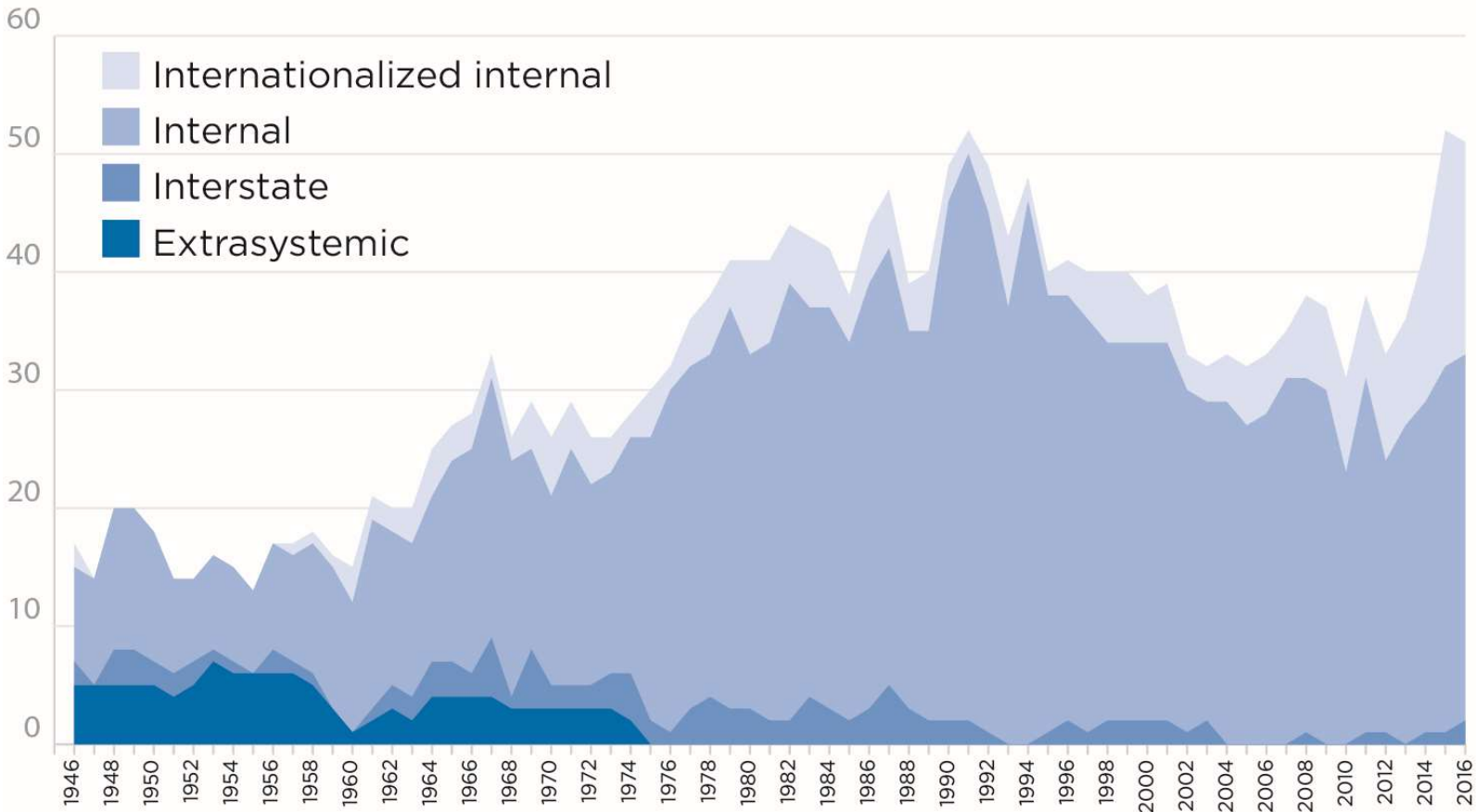


Figure 5: Fatalities and fatality rates, 2014-2018



Conflict types, post World War II



Contending with non-state forces

- Lack entry points for IHL education and advocacy
- Are more decentralized = less cohesion and weaker chain of command
- Equate IHL with Western global order
- Incentives to attack humanitarian operations and personnel
 - Association with the enemy—seen as legitimate targets
 - Control of local populations
 - Political – visibility, propaganda opportunity
 - Economic gain – access to goods, materials and cash
 - Practical – may be the only, or easiest, target to strike

Negotiations - IHL as an instrument, not an ideal

A pragmatic, transactional approach to negotiating access involves:

- Universalizing and localizing the norms and principles (no dogma)
- Understanding the interests and incentives of counterparts, which are not static
- Staff skills-building in negotiation
 - Peer-to-peer learning, e.g. NRC course
 - Centre of Competence case examples

“I can’t think of one situation where IHL was used for a negotiation tactic or strategic framework for dealing with access. MSF has moved to a transactional framework on how, and on what, parties will agree.”

—MSF senior staffer

Organizational impediments to secure access

- Incentives to grow large in organizational size but not scope of operations
- Maturing sector—age and growth often come at the expense of innovation and flexibility
- Fragmented sense of responsibility to meeting needs
- Senior staff devolve responsibility for negotiating access to local staff/partners

What has worked

- Investment in outreach and dialogue with ANSAs. This requires:
 - independent/flexible funding
 - Independent operational capacity that MSF and ICRC have, as well as rep and benefits they provide)
- Staff skills and capacities for practical negotiations
- Acknowledgement that compromise is unavoidable in contested contexts, and clear guidance for making these decisions

What agencies can do

- Do not rely on 'symbolic' protection
- Do not assume risk can ever be reduced to zero
- Be explicit about the level of risk you will accept, for which program activities
- Be systematic in assessing threats and calculating risks
- Continually update your assessments and mitigation measures
- Requires building field staff capacity and staff in situational analysis, outreach and communications and practical negotiation techniques

States' responsibilities

- UN Charter
- Host State Agreements
 - Not articulated in any detail
 - Not operationalized on the ground
- State failure/fragility a major risk factor for aid worker violence
 - Higher numbers of attacks in countries whose governments scored lower in political and economic effectiveness, legitimacy, and RoL
- Aid workers want 'ambient security' not armed protection
- Focus on big picture: resolving conflicts, pressuring state belligerents to adhere to IHL

Professionalism in humanitarian action

- Professionalism ≠ corporatism, bureaucratization, risk aversion
- Mastery of skills and accumulation of knowledge
- Continual improvement
- Principles, practical tools and techniques that can be trained
- Professionalizing security ≠ specialist silo removed from programming/human element
- Professionalism: ethical framework decoupled from the interests of the aid organization or personal altruism of the individual
- Focused on doing the job as well as possible for the people you are serving