

# Mapping “(Mis)Information Politics in Civil War” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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## Introduction

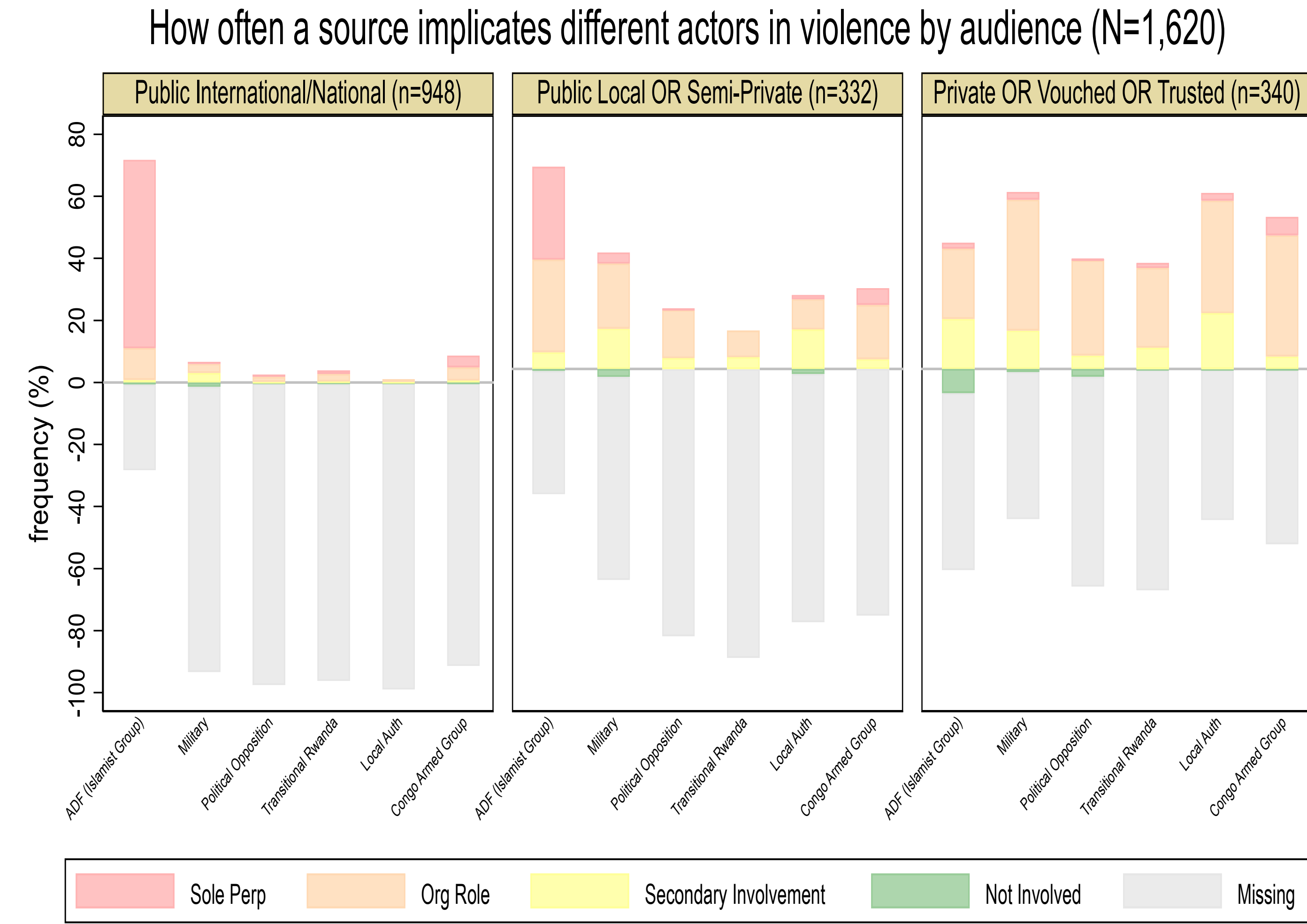
Scholars studying violence and civil war are often faced with the dilemma that the data used to draw conclusions about violence is often unreliable. Armed actors distort data which can undermine humanitarian aid, human rights causes, and development efforts geared toward supporting communities regularly affected by violence. The following poster presents original data gathered from sources involved in or covering a series of mass killings in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to further illustrate factors contributing to the complexity of misinformation in civil war. Collection efforts heavily relied on a trusted and vetted network of contacts responsible for gathering information through interviews and meetings with key informants. In addition, source material from outcome documents, testimonials, and news reports were harvested. Information on killings was collected by a team of researchers over a four year period. Data analysis highlight (1) discrepancies in perpetrator identification (2) the critical importance that trust has for sources and (3) the importance of qualitative and ethnographic study when looking at the complexity of war.

## Methodology

Qualitative data synthesis coded information collected in the field from 2013-2017. The resulting dataset (384 interviews, 76 meetings, 2 tribunals, 151 reports, 1007 news articles) was analyzed in Stata where researchers produced a series of graphs and tables to illustrate trends. A series of symbology were created using ArcMap GIS. Spatial data was incorporated into reference shapefiles taken from the Database of Global Administrative Areas (GADM).

## Results and Discussion

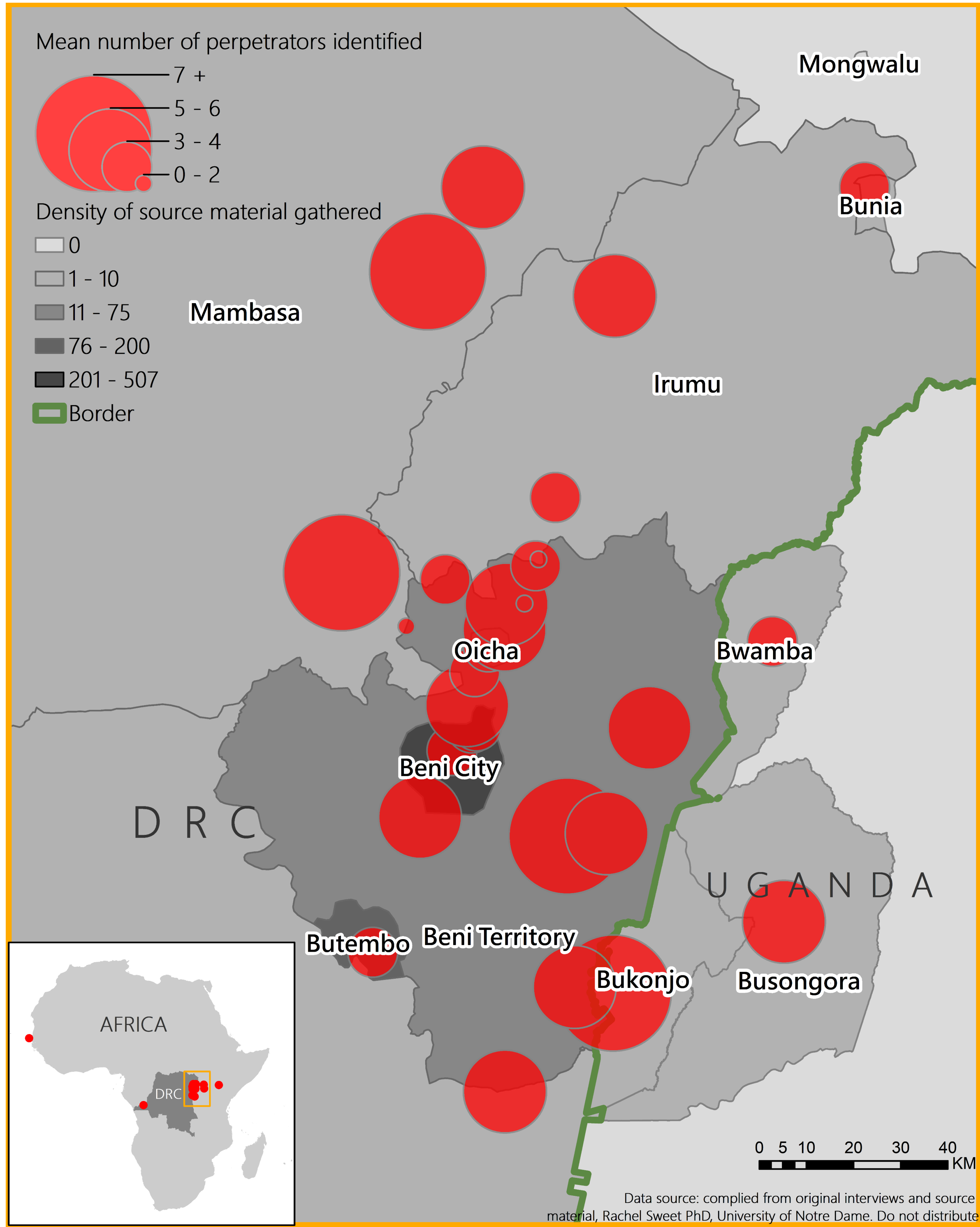
Stata analysis created three float plots illustrating source implications based on audience. Clear trends demonstrate that public sources, both international and national, are reporting one actor to be the sole perpetrator over 60% of the time. As information becomes more private (i.e. behind closed doors), the dispersion of responsibility increases and sources start to identify other perpetrators indicating that information changes based on trust level and audience. Public spheres (i.e. press conferences, public events, briefings) reveal only part of the story.



A series of maps in the center display (Figures 1, 2, and 3) the mean number of perpetrators identified in North Kivu, Goma, and Kinshasa. Most data coming out of Kinshasa and Goma are news reports, whilst data collected in North Kivu (primarily Beni) are a mix of interviews and reports. Findings here spatially reinforcing findings from data analysis. 344 observations were made in Beni City, 507 were made in Goma and 637 were made in Kinshasa. Most articles, interviews, and meetings coming out of cities further away from the conflict cite less perpetrators. The mean number of perpetrators identified in North Kivu was closer to 3 perpetrators while in Goma and Kinshasa identify 1 perpetrator on average. Sources in Goma and Kinshasa blame an Islamist group called the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) between 70-80% of the time for the mass killings. Sources in Beni City and Beni territory identify the ADF as being the sole perpetrator about 45% of the time.

A subsequent series of maps adjacent (Figures 4, 5, and 6) display the three different perpetrators identified most frequently in North Kivu, the ADF, the FARDC (national military) and Congolese armed groups. The data here spatially illustrate the complexity of the conflict in Beni and reinforce the need for more data collection in this area.

Figure 1: Mean number of perpetrators identified in mass killings by source density (North Kivu and Ituri, DRC 2013-17)



Frequency maps below illustrate how often all sources in North Kivu and Ituri provinces implicate the ADF, FARDC (the Congolese military), or a Congolese armed group in mass killings.

Figure 4: Frequency that sources identify the ADF as the sole perpetrator in mass killings (North Kivu and Ituri, DRC 2013-17)

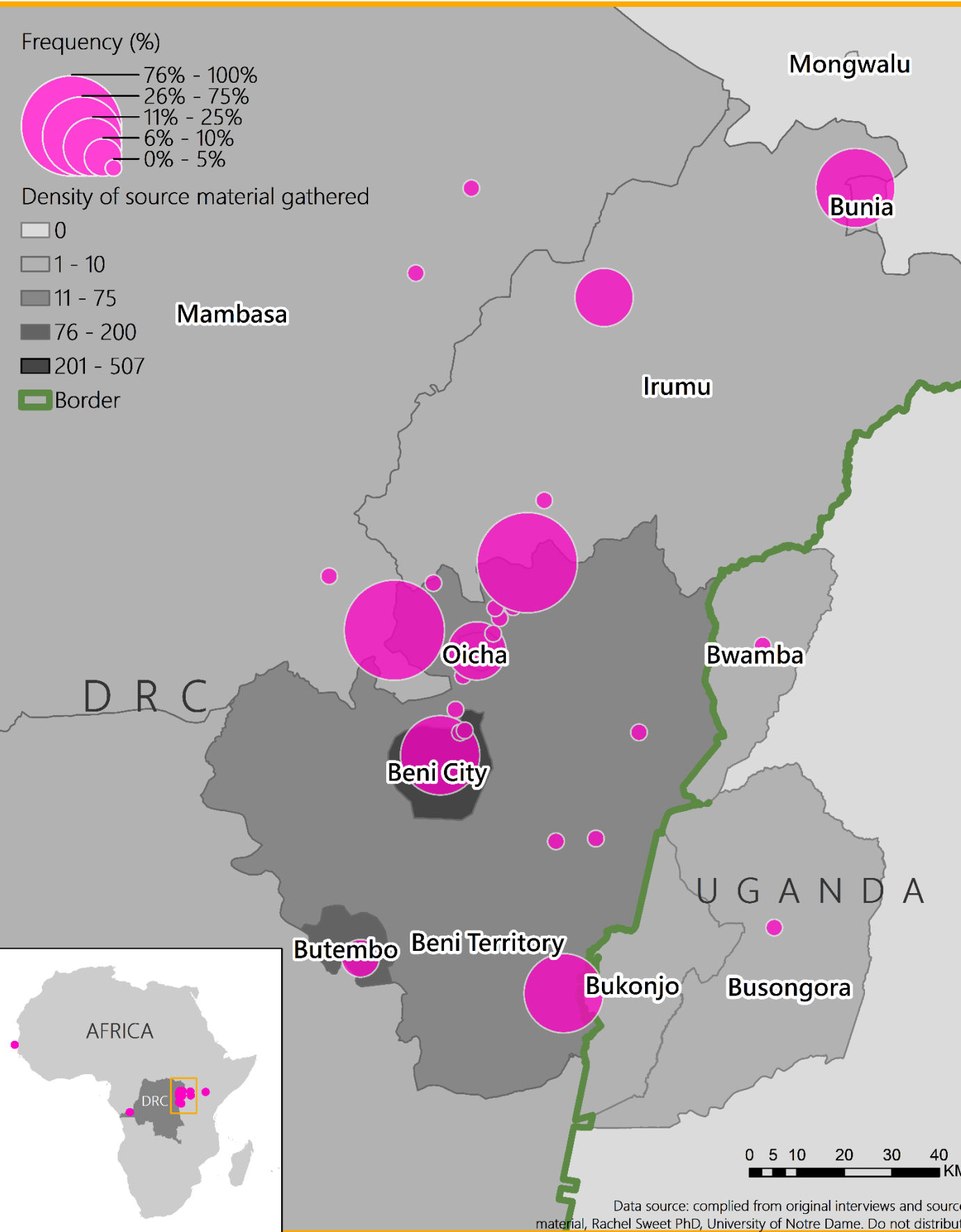


Figure 5: Frequency that sources identify the military as the sole perpetrator in mass killings (North Kivu and Ituri, DRC 2013-17)

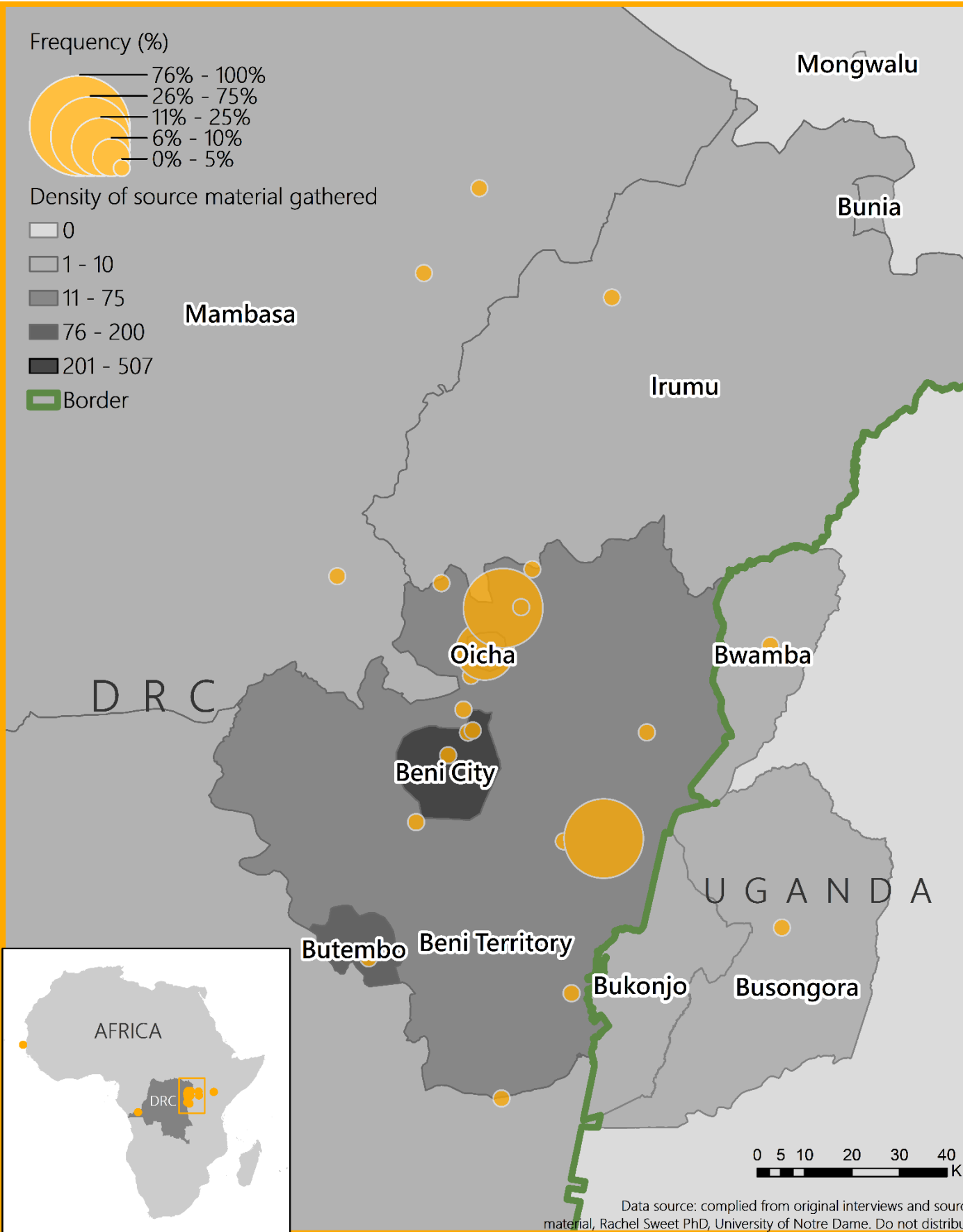


Figure 6: Frequency that sources identify a Congolese armed group as the sole perpetrator in mass killings (North Kivu and Ituri, DRC 2013-17)

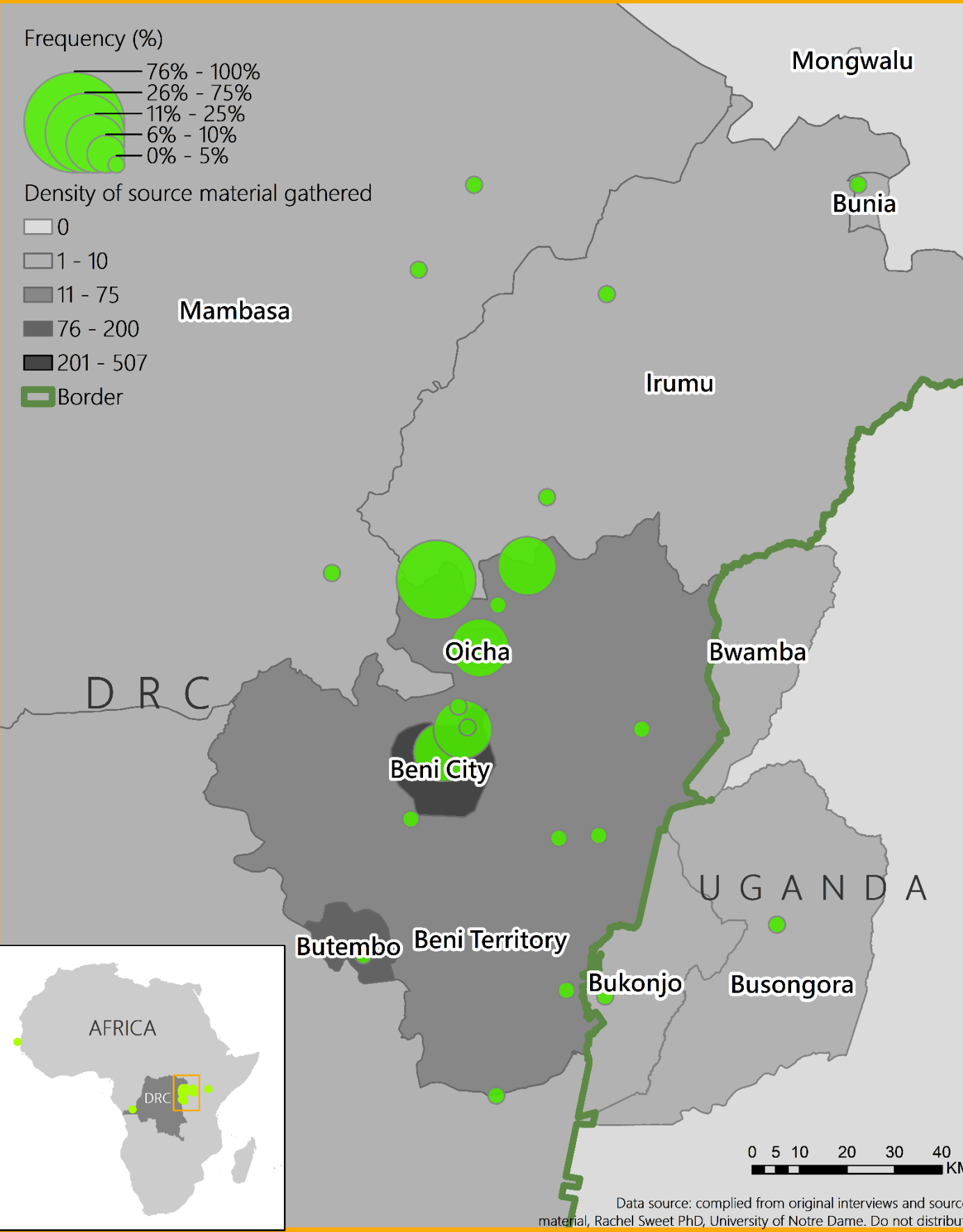


Figure 2: Mean number of perpetrators identified in mass killings by source density (Kinshasa, DRC 2013-17)

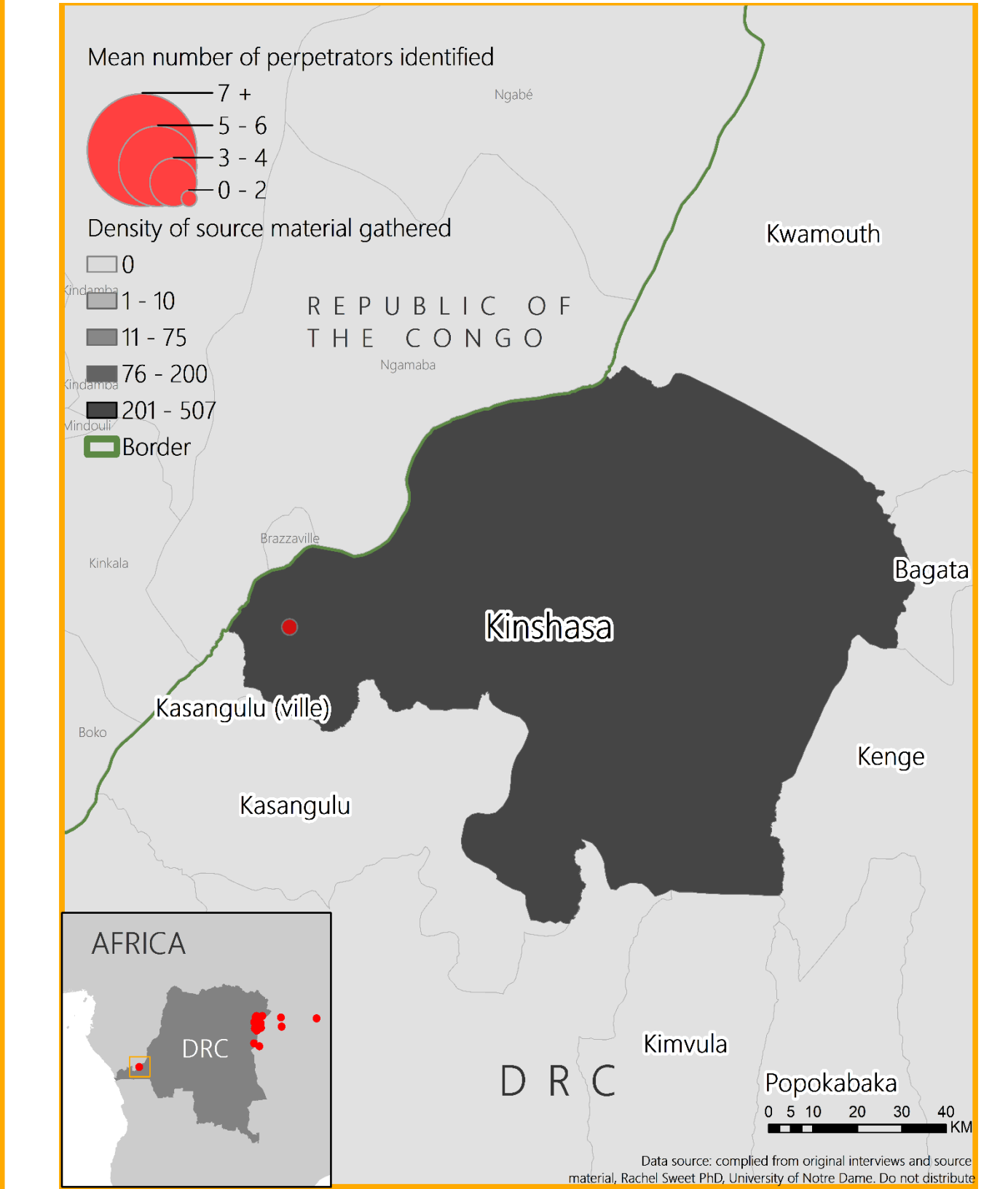
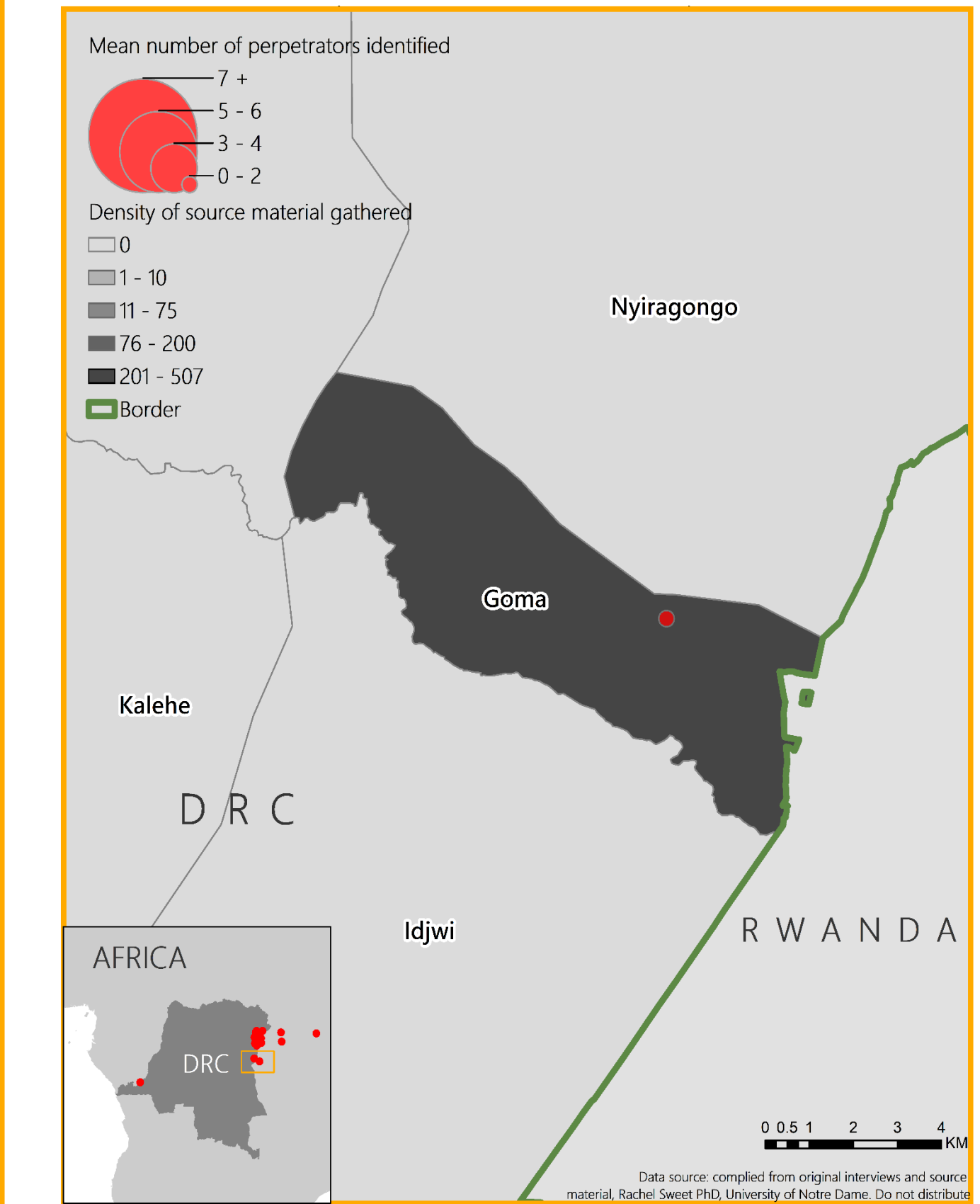


Figure 3: Mean number of perpetrators identified in mass killings by source density (Goma, DRC 2013-17)



## Policy Recommendations

Data collection gathered from the community level is necessary to aid in transparency and accuracy in conflict zones. Several policy recommendations geared toward the international and national communities are provided to aid in data collection and accuracy.

1. **Generate partnerships between community leaders frequented by violence using trusted networks as a means to hire and train locals about proper investigative methods.**
2. **Systematically review policy decisions' data sources to determine accuracy of information flows.**
3. **Rank source accuracy using standardized and stricter investigative metrics.**

## Conclusion

The visuals here illustrate the complexity of war and the various implications that misinformation can have at the national and local levels in DRC. One thing is for certain, the nature of addressing policy to promote peace and abate violent conflict in fragile states is one that comes with immense challenges. The consequences of misattributing violence to actors are grave, coming with a price tag of life or death in some circumstances. Armed actors in DRC deliberately misinform the public and in doing so create terror. The reasoning behind their motives vary. Often actors have unforeseen benefits from attribution to larger terrorist networks (such as ISIS or Al Qaeda). Today, the ADF has been rebranded by the international security community as ISIS-DRC. In circumstances where sentiment against Western powers is high, attribution to ISIS can carry immense weight. Sourcing for accurate information about violent conflict is a practice that is woefully missing in many fields including development and political science. This is particularly true and critical when considering how development funds are guided. Larger development agencies such as various branches of the UN and development banks work with states to issue funds. Ensuring that states are not complicit nor active in attributing to intrastate or interstate conflict is fundamental to avoid conflict financing. More research in this field is critical to ensure that all those truly responsible for killings are brought to justice.