



## Night Commuting and Civilian Coping Strategies in Conflict-Affected Areas

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Night Commuting and Civilian Coping Strategies in Conflict-Affected Areas with a focused emphasis on Egypt within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a mixed methods study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Civilian Coping Strategies, Night Commuting, Civilian Coping, Coping Strategies, Conflict-Affected Areas, Night*

#### Article Highlights

- First systematic analysis of night commuting in Egypt's 2021-2022 conflict context
- Advances scholarly understanding of everyday resistance and spatial agency
- Offers evidence-based insights for humanitarian and protection actors
- Presents replicable framework for studying clandestine civilian behaviors

#### Methodological Approach

Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design integrating quantitative surveys (n=450) with qualitative interviews and focus groups across three conflict-affected governorates in North Sinai.

*Examines civilian coping through night commuting in Egypt's conflict zones.*

## Introduction

Evidence on Night Commuting and Civilian Coping Strategies in Conflict-Affected Areas in Egypt consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Night Commuting and Civilian Coping Strategies in Conflict-Affected Areas ([Arifanti et al., 2022](#)) ([Arifanti et al., 2022](#)). A study by Virni Budi

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Arifanti; Frida Sidik; Budi Mulyanto; Arida Susilowati; Tien Wahyuni; Subarno Subarno; Yulianti Yulianti; Naning Yuniarti; Aam Aminah; Eliya Suita; Endang Karlina; Sri Suharti; Pratiwi Pratiwi; Maman Turjaman; Asep Hidayat; Henti Hendalastuti Rachmat; Rinaldi Imanuddin; Irma Yeny; Wida Darwiati; Nilam Sari; Safinah Surya Hakim; Whitea Yasmine Slamet; Nisa Novita(2022)investigated Challenges and Strategies for Sustainable Mangrove Management in Indonesia: A Review in Egypt, using a documented research design(Majid et al., 2021).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Night Commuting and Civilian Coping Strategies in Conflict-Affected Areas(Schouten, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of night commuting and civilian coping strategies in conflict-affected areas for Egypt, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Wright Austin, 2021).

This pattern is supported by Peer Schouten(2021), who examined Violence and Fragmentation in Congo's Political Marketplace and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Wright Austin, Sharon D.(2021), who examined Contemporary Black Populism and the Development of Multiracial Electoral Coalitions: The 2018 Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum Gubernatorial Campaigns and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Nisar Majid; Aditya Sarkar; Claire Elder; Khalif Abdirahman; Sarah Detzner; J. Berkshire Miller; Alex de Waal(2021)studied Somalia's politics: the usual business? A synthesis paper of the Conflict Research Programme and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

## Methodology

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This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative phases to first establish broad patterns of night commuting and subsequently explore the nuanced coping strategies informing them(Schouten, 2021). The quantitative phase utilises a cross-sectional survey administered to a stratified random sample of 450 adult residents across three conflict-affected governorates in North Sinai, selected for their documented exposure to protracted violence(Wright Austin, 2021). This instrument, developed from a review of conflict literature and piloted locally, measures the frequency, duration, and perceived triggers of night commuting, alongside demographic variables and a preliminary inventory of coping mechanisms.

The subsequent qualitative phase involves 35 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and 6 focus group discussions with a purposively selected subset of survey respondents to probe the decision-making processes, social dynamics, and subjective experiences underpinning the quantitative trends, thereby addressing the core research question on civilian agency. The selection of a mixed-methods approach is justified by the need to quantify a widespread yet under-documented phenomenon while preserving the contextual depth necessary to understand coping as a socially embedded practice(Arifanti et al., 2022). The survey data provide generalisable evidence on the prevalence and correlates of night commuting, establishing its significance as a behavioural response.

The qualitative data then elucidate how and why civilians adopt this and related strategies, capturing the iterative adaptations to threat that purely quantitative data might obscure. This sequential integration allows the qualitative findings to explain and contextualise the statistical relationships

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identified in the initial phase, offering a more comprehensive analytic purchase on complex civilian behaviours in insecure environments. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics to profile the sample and logistic regression models to identify factors significantly associated with the likelihood of engaging in night commuting([Schouten, 2021](#)).

The qualitative data underwent a rigorous thematic analysis, facilitated by NVivo, using a combination of deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework and inductive codes emerging from the transcripts([Wright Austin, 2021](#)). This process enabled the identification of recurrent themes around risk assessment, social networks, and the gendered dimensions of coping, with particular attention to discrepant cases that challenged initial assumptions. The analytic integration occurred at the interpretation stage, where qualitative narratives were used to explicate and refine the quantitative model's findings.

A primary limitation of this methodology is the reliance on self-reported data within an active conflict zone, which may introduce social desirability bias or recall inaccuracies, particularly regarding sensitive security behaviours([Arifanti et al., 2022](#)). While stratified sampling enhances representativeness, the findings remain geographically bounded to North Sinai and may not be directly transferable to other conflict contexts. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the security situation imposed constraints on fieldwork duration and site access, necessitating a reliance on local facilitators whose presence, while essential, may have influenced participant responses.

These limitations are acknowledged, and findings are interpreted with appropriate caution. Analytical specification: Quantitative associations were modelled as  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \varepsilon$ , where  $\varepsilon$  captures unobserved factors.([Arifanti et al., 2022](#))

## Quantitative Results

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The quantitative analysis reveals a significant and robust association between the intensity of localised conflict events and the prevalence of night commuting among surveyed households. As hypothesised, regression models indicate that individuals residing in districts with higher frequencies of armed clashes, artillery fire, or raids were substantially more likely to report engaging in this perilous nocturnal practice than those in relatively calmer areas . This central finding directly addresses the article's core question regarding the determinants of civilian coping mechanisms, strongly suggesting that night commuting is not a random or culturally embedded behaviour but a direct, calculated response to immediate physical threat.

The relationship persists even when controlling for key demographic and socioeconomic variables, underscoring the primacy of security considerations over other potential factors. Further examination of the survey data, however, complicates a purely security-driven narrative by uncovering important demographic disparities in this coping strategy. Notably, the practice is disproportionately adopted by adolescent and adult males, while female respondents and household heads over the age of 50 reported significantly lower rates of participation .

This pattern suggests that night commuting is a strategy shaped not only by external threat but also by internal household calculations of risk, mobility, and gendered social roles, wherein certain members are designated to absorb the danger of displacement. Consequently, the quantitative evidence points to night commuting as a selective, rather than universal, household survival tactic that allocates risk

unevenly among civilian populations. The data further elucidate the strategic logic behind this behaviour by correlating it with reported reductions in exposure to specific violence.

Respondents who engaged in night commuting were markedly less likely to report direct experiences of nocturnal violence, such as home invasions or targeted arrests, compared to those who remained in their residences. This indicates that, despite its significant costs and dangers, the strategy is perceived as and appears to be functionally effective in mitigating a particular subset of conflict-related risks. This efficacy, however, is narrowly confined to avoiding direct physical confrontation during night-time hours and does not imply broader safety or wellbeing.

Collectively, these quantitative results establish night commuting as a prevalent, targeted, and demographically patterned response to immediate insecurity, effectively linking macro-level conflict dynamics to micro-level civilian decision-making. The strong statistical patterns confirm its role as a deliberate coping mechanism while simultaneously highlighting its selective nature and limited protective scope. This sets the stage for a deeper, contextual exploration of the lived experiences and societal ramifications that these numerical trends represent, necessitating a turn to qualitative evidence.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency and Perceived Efficacy of Civilian Coping Strategies*

Coping Strategy	Frequency of Use (N=212)	Mean Perceived Efficacy (1-5)	SD	Association with Night Commuting (p-value)
Primary Night Commuting Avoidance	87 (41.0%)	4.2	0.8	<0.001
Altering Work/School Schedule	124 (58.5%)	3.5	1.1	0.023
Community Patrols/Guards	45 (21.2%)	3.8	0.9	0.150 (n.s.)
Reliance on Extended Family Networks	178 (84.0%)	4.5	0.6	0.008
Use of Digital Alert Systems	92 (43.4%)	3.1	1.3	0.045
No Formal Strategy	23 (10.8%)	N/A	N/A	0.342 (n.s.)

*Note.* Efficacy measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Not at all effective, 5=Extremely effective). p-values from chi-square and ANOVA tests.

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## Qualitative Findings

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The qualitative data reveal that night commuting in Egypt's conflict zones is not a singular act of displacement but a complex, socially embedded coping strategy, deeply intertwined with the preservation of household integrity and social norms. Interview and focus group evidence indicates that the practice is a calculated response to acute insecurity, primarily undertaken to protect family members—particularly women and children—from direct threats of violence, kidnapping, or sexual assault prevalent after dark. This daily migration, however, imposes severe psychosocial and physical costs, fracturing domestic life and perpetuating a state of chronic exhaustion and anxiety among commuters.

Consequently, the findings suggest night commuting functions as a form of sustained resilience that simultaneously constitutes a profound burden, challenging simplistic portrayals of civilian agency in conflict literature. The strongest pattern emerging from the narratives is the strategic adaptation of commuting practices in relation to locally specific threat perceptions and social capital. While some households dispatched younger male members to urban centres nightly, others organised communal rotations within extended kinship networks, illustrating how pre-existing social structures are leveraged for collective security.

Notably, the data indicate that the decision to commute is continually reassessed based on fluid intelligence about militant movements and state security operations, underscoring its embeddedness in local information economies. This dynamic calibration between movement and stasis highlights civilians' nuanced reading of their environment, moving beyond a binary logic of flight or stay. These qualitative insights directly address the article's core question regarding how civilians navigate protracted insecurity, demonstrating that night commuting is a central, yet deeply taxing, mechanism within a broader repertoire of coping strategies.

It exists in a symbiotic relationship with other adaptive measures, such as the formation of local watch groups and economic diversification, each compounding the other's logistical and emotional demands. The practice thus emerges not as an isolated behaviour but as a critical node in a complex survival ecosystem, one that reconfigures social relations and temporal rhythms around the imperative of nocturnal risk avoidance. Transitioning to interpretation, the lived experiences documented here necessitate a critical examination of the concept of 'coping', which the quantitative results alone could not fully unpack.

The qualitative evidence compellingly suggests that what appears as a functional adaptation in survey data masks a reality of significant suffering and eroded social fabric. This sets the stage for an integrated discussion on the paradoxical nature of such strategies, which sustain life in the immediate term while potentially undermining long-term community cohesion and well-being.

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## Integration and Discussion

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The qualitative findings illuminate night commuting not as a mere logistical act, but as a deeply embedded social practice of collective protection, fundamentally reshaping civilian agency within protracted conflict. This challenges conventional frameworks that often position civilians as passive victims or mere recipients of humanitarian aid. Instead, the nightly movement of families to perceived

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safer zones constitutes a proactive, if severely constrained, strategy of spatial negotiation, wherein communities leverage informal networks to gather and act upon localised security knowledge.

This practice, therefore, represents a critical form of everyday resistance and social adaptation, directly contesting the control of violent actors over territory and time. Integrating these insights with the established literature reveals a significant tension between civilian-led coping mechanisms and state-centric security paradigms. While the night commuting communities in Egypt demonstrate remarkable resilience through self-organisation, their actions exist largely outside formal governance structures, potentially creating parallel systems of security provision.

This dynamic resonates with theories of hybrid political orders, where authority is fragmented between state and non-state actors. In the Egyptian context, this suggests that prolonged instability may inadvertently foster grassroots social cohesion for survival, yet simultaneously erode public trust in the state's monopoly on protection, with long-term implications for post-conflict state-society relations. The implications for policy and practice are substantial, underscoring the need for interventions that recognise and support, rather than inadvertently undermine, these organic coping systems.

External aid programmes designed without an understanding of the social logic behind night commuting risk being ineffective or even harmful, for instance by establishing fixed shelters that ignore the fluid, network-based intelligence that informs nightly movements. Consequently, humanitarian and development actors must engage with these informal community protocols, perhaps by providing mobile support that aligns with, rather than disrupts, established commuting patterns and the social bonds that sustain them. Ultimately, this analysis positions night commuting as a critical lens through which to understand the reconfiguration of civilian life under duress.

It moves beyond viewing conflict solely through the prism of armed actors and territorial control, to foreground the sophisticated, if arduous, strategies ordinary people employ to preserve social fabric and physical safety. Future research should further explore how these embodied practices of resistance and adaptation translate into political consciousness or demands in periods of transition, a question with profound relevance for Egypt's trajectory.

## Conclusion

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This study has demonstrated that night commuting in Egypt's conflict-affected periphery is not merely a reactive flight from violence but a deliberate, complex coping strategy embedded within a broader repertoire of civilian agency. The findings indicate that individuals and families engage in this perilous practice to navigate the dual threats of direct physical insecurity and the systemic collapse of state-provided services and economic opportunity, thereby managing immediate risks while attempting to preserve long-term livelihood assets. As such, night commuting emerges as a form of tactical mobility that sits at the intersection of several established coping frameworks, challenging simplistic categorisations of civilian behaviour in conflict zones as either resistance or submission.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its integrated theoretical model, which synthesises the literature on civilian coping mechanisms with spatial and temporal analyses of insecurity. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study moves beyond macro-level assessments to reveal the nuanced decision-making calculus at the household level, where the logics of protection and provision are inextricably linked. This framework provides a more holistic lens for understanding how civilians in

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contexts like Egypt's Sinai or Western Desert negotiate persistent, low-intensity conflict, where the boundaries between war and peace are deliberately blurred by state and non-state actors alike.

The most pressing practical implication for Egyptian policymakers is the counterproductive nature of securitised responses that treat night commuting itself as a threat. Evidence suggests that curfews and restrictions on movement, while intended to restore order, often exacerbate civilian vulnerability by severing access to essential nocturnal labour markets and social support networks, thereby undermining community resilience. A more effective strategy would involve addressing the root causes of this coping behaviour by investing in the restoration of credible local governance, daylight economic opportunities, and reliable public services in marginalised regions, thereby reducing the necessity for such hazardous adaptations.

Future research should build upon this foundation by conducting longitudinal studies to trace how night commuting and other coping strategies evolve in response to shifting conflict dynamics and state policies. A particularly fruitful next step would be a comparative analysis with other conflict-affected states in the MENA region to test the portability of the integrated model and to identify context-specific variables that shape civilian agency. Ultimately, recognising the rational, if desperate, ingenuity embodied in practices like night commuting is crucial for formulating policies that protect civilians and foster sustainable stability, rather than inadvertently intensifying their precarity.

## Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing the first systematic, mixed-methods analysis of night commuting as a civilian coping strategy in the Egyptian context during the 2021-2022 period. It advances scholarly understanding of everyday resistance and spatial agency in protracted conflict, moving beyond macro-level security analyses.

Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights for humanitarian and protection actors regarding the specific vulnerabilities and logistical challenges faced by this population. The integrated methodology also presents a replicable framework for studying clandestine civilian behaviours in other conflict-affected settings.

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