

**Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED)
Codebook
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Table of Contents

1 Introduction and Brief Description	3
2 Definitions of ACLED events	3
2.1 Conflict Actors.....	4
2.2 Conflict Events	5
2.2.1 <i>Battle Definition</i>	8
2.2.2 <i>Headquarter or Base Establishment</i>	10
2.2.3 <i>Non-Violent Activity by a Conflict Actor</i>	10
2.2.4 <i>Rioting & Protesting</i>	10
2.2.5 <i>Violence Against Civilians</i>	11
2.2.6 <i>Non-Violent Transfer of Location Control</i>	11
2.2.7 <i>Important Notes Regarding Event Type Codes</i>	11
3 The Location of an Event	12
4 The Date of the Event	13
5 Interaction Codes.....	14
6 Notes	15
7 Fatalities.....	16
8 Sources for Information.....	16
9 Relationships to Other Datasets.....	16

Important notes:

- 1) This codebook describes a publicly available beta version of ACLED(2).
- 2) This codebook concerns a) data entry in the ACLED web portal and b) understanding the output from the ACLED web database. Information on the data collection process, including where and how the data for ACLED events is collected and organized may be found in the “Creating a Conflict Manuscript” document by Clionadh Raleigh available on the ACLED website.

1 Introduction and Brief Description

The ACLED project codes reported information on the exact location, date, and other characteristics of politically violent events in unstable and warring states. ACLED focuses specifically on:

- Tracking rebel, militia and government activity over time and space
- Locating rebel group bases, headquarters, strongholds and presence
- Distinguishing between territorial transfers of military control from governments to rebel groups and vice versa
- Recording violent acts between militias
- Collecting information on rioting and protesting
- Non-violent events that are crucial to the dynamics of political violence (e.g. rallies, recruitment drives, peace talks, high-level arrests)

ACLED data cover all countries on the African continent from 1997-present. Real-time data is available for African states. Data for additional countries including Haiti, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal, Myanmar are available from 1997-early 2010. Data for Afghanistan and Pakistan is available from 2006-2009 and Lebanon from 2006-2012.

ACLED data are available to the public and delivered in three forms: the first is a Microsoft Excel sheet called “Full_Country_X” which will give all information on the politically violent events in which actors from this country are involved (even if abroad). The next sheet “Country X” will provide only those events, which occurred on the state’s territory (also can involve foreign groups). The shapefile for each country is based on the second type of Excel file.

Visuals on real-time data are available (with lags of up to two weeks). These data are released in six-month periods. They are recorded in the same way as the data available on the ACLED website and can be added to the full annual sheets noted above.

2 Definitions of ACLED events

ACLED definitions mainly concern actors and events. ACLED collects and codes reported information on political violence from the developing world on civil and communal conflicts, violence against civilians, rioting and protesting. ACLED covers activity that occurs within the context of a civil war, and violent activity that occurs outside of civil wars, particularly violence against civilians, militia interactions, communal conflict and rioting.

2.1 Conflict Actors

In ACLED, conflict actors include rebels, militias, and organized political groups who interact over issues of political authority (i.e. territorial control, government control, access to resources, etc). ACLED recognizes a range of actors including governments, rebels, militias, ethnic groups, active political organizations, and civilians.

Governments are defined as internationally recognized regimes in assumed control of a state. Government actors are defined by ACLED as a series of separate regimes rather than a uniform body (e.g. Congo/Zaire 1965-1997 (Mobutu), Democratic Republic of Congo 1997-2001(Kabila, L) and Democratic Republic of Congo 2001-2008 (Kabila, J) as opposed to Congo/Zaire (1962-present)). As the strength, capacity and policies of governments can vary widely from one regime to the next, ACLED designates governments by their leading regimes. This enables researchers to capture the differences in government involvement and reaction to violence. As militaries are a direct arm of the government, these actors are noted as “Military Forces of State, 19xx-19xx”. Mutinies of militaries are coded as “Mutiny of Military Forces of State, 19xx-19xx”.

Rebel groups are defined as political organizations whose goal is to counter an established national governing regime by violent acts. Rebel groups have a stated political agenda for national power, are acknowledged beyond the ranks of immediate members, and use violence as their primary means to pursue political goals. Rebel groups often have predecessors and successors due to diverging goals within their membership. ACLED tracks these evolutions.

Militias are more difficult to assess since they can be created for a specific purpose or during a specific time period (i.e. Janjaweed) and may be associated with an ethnic group, but not entirely represent it (i.e. Kenyan Luo ethnic militias). ACLED’s definition of organized political groups includes militias operating in conjunction or in alliance with a recognized government, political elite, and rebel organization or opposition group. These groups are typically supported, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements. Whereas often opposition parties will have a militia arm, groups such as the Sudanese Janjaweed or Serbian Tigers work as supplements to government power. These groups are not subsumed into the category of government or opposition, but are noted as an armed associated wing. When these groups operate with another type of group (e.g. military, rebel etc) this alliance during each event is noted.

Militias are recorded by their stated name. In some cases, an ‘unidentified armed group’ perpetrates political violence; the default assumption in ACLED is that such groups can be considered militias and their activity coded under ‘unidentified armed group’.¹ Within the ‘unidentified armed group’ designation, it is also possible to specify a country of origin if it is known, such as ‘unidentified armed group (Sudan).’

Alternatively, ethnic militias can be long-term policing units, such as those common among Somali clans. ACLED coders distinguish between active ethnic militias involved in communal violence (militias against each other) as opposed to violence with governing forces that are outside of a civil war context (i.e. Karamojong violence in Uganda). If an ethnic militia is formed to engage in intra or inter communal violence, such groups are designated “ethnic group x’ militia”.

Riots are violent, spontaneous groupings populated by ‘rioters’. These activities are coded as riots if the spontaneous civilian actors become violent against people or property. Protests are non-violent spontaneous groupings with ‘protesters’. However, should violence be used against protesters, this is considered violence against civilians. Should the protesters become violent, this action is considered a riot. Protesters and civilians are the only unarmed actors included by ACLED. These groups are either the direct victims of armed violence or are recognized groups protesting peacefully. Both protesters and civilians are general categories and are noted as “Protesters (Country X)” or “Civilians (Country X)”

Small categories of ‘other’ actors include hired mercenaries, security firms and their employees, UN or external forces. They are noted by their name and actions.

In conclusion, all actors have an official name², a political purpose and use violence or protest for political means. Organizations must be cohesive and are not assembled for single events, with the exception of riots and protests. Further, the events in which they are involved must be connected to each other as a means to achieve a larger political purpose. This necessary and sufficient definition of actors allows us to track a range of movements.

2.2 Conflict Events

Political violence is understood as the use of force by an group with a political purpose or motivation. ACLED defines political violence through its constituent events, the

¹ Often such activity is designed to be ‘unidentified’, since most of ‘unidentified’ activity is violence against civilians for a political purpose.

² Barring the ‘unidentified’ category

intent of which is to produce a comprehensive overview of all forms of political conflict within and across states. A politically violent event is an single altercation where often force is used by one or more groups for a political end, although some instances- including protests and non-violent activity- are included to capture the potential precursors or critical junctures of a conflict.

The fundamental unit of observation in ACLED is the interaction of actors in an *event*. Events occur between designated actors – e.g. a rebel group, a militia or a government.³They occur at a specific point location (name, coordinates, etc) and on a specific day. Coders work to ensure that the most specific location and time possible are recorded. ACLED currently codes for eight types of events, both violent and non-violent, that may occur during a civil war, instability or state failure. Figure 1 displays the eight ACLED events.

Table 1: ACLED Event Types

Event Number	Event Type	Event Description
1	Battle-No Change of Location Control	A battle between two violent armed groups where control of the contested location does not change. If the government controls an area, fights with rebels and wins, this is the correct code. If rebels control a location and maintain control after fighting with government forces, this is the correct code. If two militia groups are fighting, this is the correct code. Battles are the most common activity and take place across a range of actors, including rebels, militias, and government forces, communal groups.
2	Battle- Rebels Control Location	A battle where rebels win control of location. This is the correct code if,

3

		after fighting with another force, a rebel group acquires control. If two rebel groups fight and the group that did not begin with control acquires it, this is the correct code. There are few if any cases where opposition groups other than rebels acquire territory.
3	Battle- Government Regains Control	A battle in which the government regains control of a location. This event type is used solely for government re-acquisition of control.
4	Headquarters or Base Establishment	A rebel group establishes a base or headquarters. This event can be non-violent, but must be coded when a permanent or semi-permanent base is established. Again, there are few if any cases where opposition groups other than rebels acquire territory. These are coded as one-sided events without a second actor involved.
5	Non-Violent Conflict Event	This event records activity by rebel groups/militia/governments that does not involve active fighting but is within the context of the war/dispute. For example recruitment drives, incursions or rallies. It also records the location and date of peace talks, militia rallies and arrests of high-ranking officials. Its purpose is to capture pivot events with campaigns of political violence. The notes column will specify the details of the events. These are coded as one-sided events without a second actor involved.

6	Rioting/Protesting	Protest describes a group involved in a public meeting against a government institution. These actions are not violent on the part of the civilian protestors. Rioting is a violent, unorganized form of protest. The actors involved are noted as ‘protestors (country)’ or ‘rioters (country)’. These can be coded as one-sided events. All rioters and protesters are noted by these terms, but if representing a group, the name of that group is recorded in the ‘ally’ column.
7	Violence Against Civilians	Violence against civilians occurs when any armed/violent group attacks unarmed civilians. Rebels, governments, militias, rioters can all commit violence against civilians. This is the only event that involves civilians.
8	Non-Violent Transfer of Location Control	This event describes situations in which rebels or governments acquire control of a location without engaging in a violent act.

2.2.1 Battle Definition

ACLED defines a battle as “a violent interaction between two politically organized armed groups at a particular time and location.” Typically these interactions occur between government militaries/militias and rebel groups/factions within the context of a civil war. However, these interactions also include militia violence, rebel on rebel violence and military on military violence. There is no causality minimum necessary for inclusion.

The specific elements of that definition are as follows:

- (1) A violent interaction is the use of armed force, including guns or military hardware, machetes, knives or any tool to inflict harm upon the opposing side.

(2) Organized armed groups including but not limited to rebel and government groups.

Battle events are coded in one of three ways depending on the result.

(1) No transfer of territory

ACLED assumes that the government is in control and holds all territory under its internationally recognized mandate. When rebels and governments engage in battle and there is no report of rebels winning control or governments losing control, the event is coded as battle with no transfer of territory. Areas under rebel control at night but not during the day, are assumed to be tacitly under government control. This action is also the default battle setting for a militia group interaction with another violent actors since these groups are not considered the main authority in towns or larger localities. Note that although the term 'battle' is used here to describe various kinds of encounters between the parties, e.g. 'the ceasefire is broken', battles must be *violent* events involving *at least two actors*.

(2) Rebels gain territory

This involves battles in which rebels have won control and/ or subdued government forces. Rebels have won territory in which they can now act with impunity. They are regarded as having a monopoly of force within that territory.

Although rebels and government forces may fight many times in a location after the rebels gain control of it, only the initial territorial acquisition, or when rebels regain territory after losing it, uses this event code. For continuous battles between rebels and a government after the rebels acquire the territory, the event type 'battle-no transfer of territory' is used.

This code can also be used to note the transfer of control from one rebel group to another by violence. Rebel-on-rebel violence uses this and the previous code ('battle-no transfer of territory'), and no others.

(3) Government gains territory

This event is coded if, after a rebel group has held an area, further battles between the government and rebels result in the government regaining control. This code is only used for re-establishment of government control and not for rebel-on-rebel violence.

In the course of a civil war, control over locations may change hands many times. By the end of a war, rebel losses and gains must match the outcome. If the rebels gain control of the government, they retain all their acquisitions. If the rebels lose, all territory must be assumed returned to government control.

2.2.2 Headquarter or Base Establishment

Rebels often establish bases and headquarters during their active periods. ACLED records the date, location, and actor involved in base or HQ establishment.

Rebels can have many active bases simultaneously. These bases may be either inside or outside the country/countries in which the rebels operate. In the notes field, coders specify whether the position is the main headquarter or a regional base (or forest base, mountain base, border base, etc).

ACLED also notes whether bases or HQ have been abandoned. If a base or HQ is no longer in use because of government or other rebels' encroachment, coders record the estimated final date of use.

2.2.3 Non-Violent Activity by a Conflict Actor

This category is designed to capture events that are important within a state's political history, and may be triggers of future events, but are not directly violent. It includes arrests of key political figures, rallies, peace talks, etc. This category also records all cases in which rebels were present but not fighting a battle, setting up bases or harming civilians. This category is necessary in instances where rebels are active without military engagement with another force. The rebel presence category notes when rebels are present or active in a town without violence between government and rebels, rebels and rebels, or rebels and civilians or without controlling the area. Non-violent rebel actions include recruitment, speeches, looting, destruction of property, etc.

2.2.4 Rioting & Protesting

A riot is defined as 'a violent disturbance of the public peace by three or more persons assembled for a common purpose.' ACLED records reported information on both spontaneous and organized rioting. Organized riots can be planned by a previously recognized political group. The rioting group is not necessarily an inherently violent organization. A political party can riot (i.e. ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe). If the protesters or rioters are representing a group, the name of this group is recorded in the 'ally' section. Spontaneous riots primarily involve civilians, without direct reference to an organized

political group. Protests are nonviolent spontaneous organizations of civilians for a political purpose. Protesters do not engage in violence, and if violence occurs during a protest as a result of protesters' actions, this event is coded solely as a riot. If violence is done to protesters in the event of a protest, the event is coded solely as an act of 'violence against civilians'.

2.2.5 Violence Against Civilians

Violence against civilians is defined as deliberate violent acts perpetrated by an organized political group such as a rebel, militia or government force against an unarmed non-combatant. These acts are political and harm or kill civilians, and are the sole act in which civilians are an actor. There is no minimum number of victims needed to qualify as an ACLED event.

Although the victims can be combatants in a different context, here they are UNARMED and NOT ABLE to defend themselves. One-sided violence also includes inflicting significant harm (e.g. bombing, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation etc) or accosting victims (e.g. kidnapping and disappearances). It does not include incidents in which people are not physically harmed, (e.g. looting or burning, destruction of sacred spaces, and forced displacement.) These events are covered in ACLED by the event 'non-violent activity by a conflict actor'.⁴

2.2.6 Non-Violent Transfer of Location Control

This code applies when groups transfer control of a location without violence. Rebels abandoning a base or government forces spontaneously retreating without violence are both examples of this.

2.2.7 Important Notes Regarding Event Type Codes

One or more events can occur in the same location on the same day. If two similar events between the same actors in the same locations are reported, they may be noted as a single event. If another event type occurs, it is coded separately. For example: (1) a rebel group may fight with a government in a town and win control. The government may then engage in acts of violence against civilians outside of the battle with rebels. In this case, two events have occurred; (2) In a large city on the same day, there may be a riot and violence against civilians committed by an armed group.

⁴ Government actions of this type will be able to be coded under this category in the near future.

In most cases, an event requires at least two actors. However other groups' alliances with either of the main actors are noted. Only event types "Headquarters or Base Establishment" "Non-Violent Activity by a Conflict Actor", "Riots/Protests" and "Non-Violent Transfer of Location Control" should be single actor events. Rebel presence does not require an interaction and the government does not necessarily respond to protesters.

When civilians are one of the two actors in an interaction, the event may ONLY be coded as "Violence Against Civilians." If civilians engage in organized violence, they are not operating as unarmed civilians. If a group is clearly organized but unidentified or unnamed, it is classified as an 'unidentified armed group'.

3 The Location of an Event

There are six different types of location information recorded in each ACLED event line: (1) the name of the specific location of an event, as noted by the media report; (2) the geographic coordinates of that specific location; (3) the region as noted by the media report; (4) the name of the third, second and first level administrative zones that the specific location is found in according to GIS based assignments and updated administrative codes; (5) the state in which the event occurred; and (6) the georeference spatial precision scale of information.

The most specific location for an event is sought for each ACLED code, and several sources may be used to triangulate better location information. The first region location may not be the same name as the additional geo-referenced administrative codes, as this code reflects the source notes from which the location information was retrieved.

3.1 The Location Information

Coordinates for locations are generally found using GEO-NET gazetteers. If not available using this source, or the name of a location is spelled differently; coders use a range of additional sources including online gazetteers, such as www.geonames.org and www.fallingrain.com. The fallingrain website collects coordinates of villages, towns, cities, and airports alphabetically by country. It also notes alternate spellings and names. If you do add a location, please include its proper name, administrative zone, country, and type of location (city/airport etc).

Administrative units for georeference are from the GADM shapefile updated in 2012 and available from www.gadm.org. The state, the first administration unit, the second and the third are incorporated into each country sheet, having been standardized from

the GADM file. The region noted in the source material is in the final column of the country and regional level dataset.

All ACLED data is checked in GIS and associated with additional location information before public release.

3.2 Spatial precision

If the source notes a particular town, and coordinates are available for that town, the highest precision level (1) is recorded. If activity occurs in the outskirts of a town or city, this same precision code is employed. If the source material notes that activity took place in a small part of a region, and notes a general area, a town with georeferenced coordinates to represent that area is chosen and the geoprecision code will note '2' for 'part of region'. If a larger region is mentioned, a provincial capital is chosen to represent the region and noted with precision level '3'. With few exceptions, the provincial capital should be selected to represent the larger regions. Deviation from this rule occurs if there is evidence that the activity happened in another area.⁵ No ACLED event is associated with the 'state' as the smallest location unit available, and the town level of geo-referencing is the default setting for geo-precision.

4 The Date of the Event

Four forms of time information are found in each ACLED code: (1) the date of each event; (2) the month; (3) the year and (4) the temporal precision. Source material note a specific day, month and year and these dates are a necessary component of each ACLED event. ACLED events are atomic in that events are coded by day. Hence, if a military campaign in an area starts on March 1st, 1999 and lasts until March 5th, 1999 with violent activity reported on each day, is coded as five different events in ACLED with a different date for each entry. This allows ACLED to capture the exact number of active days. In contrast, events which source material note occurred in the space of three months are only coded for the days in which reported activity took place (not as 90+ days). This avoids over counting event occurrence.

4.1 Time precision

⁵ The location table includes georeferenced coordinates and geographical characteristics of each location. ACLED has an internal gazetteer that is derived from a larger gazetteer project available for viewing and downloads at:

<http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>. Each location is associated with a feature designation, which indicates the type of location it is. For a complete list of feature designations, visit the website: http://gnswww.nga.mil/geonames/Desig_Code/Desig_Code_Search.jsp

If sources include an actual date, '1' is chosen as the precision level. If sources note a week, '2' is noted in the precision field and the first date of that week is used as the reference date. If sources note only that an activity took place within a particular month, without reference to the particular date, the month mid-point is chosen unless the beginning or end of month is noted (in which case, the first and last date are used, respectively) and '3' as the precision level. ACLED does not include events with less temporal information.

5 Interaction Codes

Interaction codes note the 'types' of actors who interact, without reference to the type of event. Single actor type codes are recorded in Inter1 and Inter2 columns, which the compounded number is recorded in the Interaction column. Only the main actor for Actor1 and Actor2 are the basis for the interaction codes.

All actors fall into 1 of 8 categories (including governments, rebels, civilians etc):

Government or mutinous force = 1

Rebel force =2

Political militia= 3

Ethnic militia = 4

Rioters= 5

Protesters = 6

Civilians = 7

Outside/external force (e.g. UN) =8

An ethnic militia is associated with a direct ethnic community and no other identifier. For example, the Turkana, Pokot, or many Somali militias are described as armed units for ethnic group contest and protection. These are referred to as 'communal' in the interaction column. These local and ethnically bounded groups are considered distinct from militia groups that operate as armed and violent wings of government, opposition groups, the forces of political elites or a religious organization. These 'political' militia groups tend to not be associated with defined ethnic communities; they also operate outside of ethnic homelands and for goals other than the promotion of ethnic interests. The Mungiki of Kenya, War Veterans Group in Zimbabwe, Boko Haram of Nigeria, and Mayi-Mayi of DR-Congo are examples of these groups. The remaining group identifiers are covered in section 2.

A single number represents the one/two group interaction. This is the basis of the INTERACTIONS column. INTERACTION numbers are always the smallest possible number. Those with a 0 are for single actor events. The codes include:

- 10- SOLE MILITARY ACTION
- 11- MILITARY VERSUS MILITARY
- 12- MILITARY VERSUS REBELS
- 13- MILITARY VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA
- 14- MILITARY VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (these include all 'ethnic' militias)
- 15- MILITARY VERSUS RIOTERS
- 16- MILITARY VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 17- MILITARY VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 18- MILITARY VERSUS OTHER
- 20- SOLE REBEL ACTION (e.g. base establishment)
- 22- REBELS VERSUS REBELS
- 23- REBELS VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA
- 24- REBELS VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA
- 25- REBELS VERSUS RIOTERS
- 26- REBELS VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 27- REBELS VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 28- REBELS VERSUS OTHERS
- 30- SOLE POLITICAL MILITIA ACTION
- 33- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA
- 34- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA
- 35- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS
- 36- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 37- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 38- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHERS
- 40- SOLE COMMUNAL MILITIA ACTION
- 44- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA
- 45- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS
- 46- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 47- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 48- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHER
- 50- SOLE RIOTER ACTION
- 55- RIOTERS VERSUS RIOTERS
- 56- RIOTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 57- RIOTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 58- RIOTERS VERSUS OTHERS
- 60- SOLE PROTESTER ACTION
- 66- PROTESTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS
- 67- PROTESTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS
- 68- PROTESTERS VERSUS OTHER
- 80- SOLE OTHER ACTION
- * NOTE- CIVILIANS CANNOT ATTACK CIVILIANS OR OTHER ACTOR GROUPS

6 Notes

The notes column records any other important details. Notes are often cut from source material to supplement the ACLED coded information.

7 Fatalities

ACLED only reports estimated casualties when reported by source materials. It cannot verify the numbers reported from sources and does not use fatalities as the basis for event inclusion. Very often, no fatality information is available for events from sources and such reported fatality totals are often erroneous, as the numbers tend to be biased upward. If reported in a source, the number (or estimated number if several sources report various totals) is found in the fatalities column. If records from sources differ or a vague estimate is provided, the lowest number of fatalities is reported. However, if reports mention several, many, or plural ‘civilians’ and ‘unknown’ and no other reference, this is recorded as ‘10’. If report mentions dozens, this is recorded as ‘12’. If report mentions hundreds, this is recorded as ‘100’. If a note mentions ‘massacres’, a default number of 100 fatalities is recorded.

If summarized fatalities are reported, but events occurred across several days or in multiple locations simultaneously, total number is divided and that fraction is recorded for each day of the event (if over 1). If an odd number, the proportion of fatalities is divided by assigning the first day the additional fatality and distributed as evenly as possible.

No information for number of harmed people is recorded in any other space besides the notes column.

8 Sources for Information

ACLED sources differ in three ways: (1) more information from local, regional, national and continental media is reviewed daily; (2) consistent NGO reports are used to supplement media reporting in hard to access cases; (3) Africa-focused news reports are integrated to supplement daily media reporting. The result is the most comprehensive and wide-reaching source material presently used in disaggregated conflict event coding. Every ACLED event is composed from at least one source. The name, acronym, and/or website are noted in the source column. The publication details are sufficient that a data user can find the original source with ease.

If more than two sources are used, the most thorough report is cited or both are noted in the source column.

9 Relationships to Other Datasets

The conflicts coded in ACLED are generally compatible with other conflict data collections, including the UCDP/PRIO data on armed conflicts. ACLED information may be joined with many, if not all, other conflict datasets by country, year, actor or

specific locality. Please see Raleigh, Linke & Dowd 2012 for a review of compared event data.

ACLED contains information about extra-systemic armed conflict, internal armed conflict, and internationalized armed conflict. Generally, ACLED disaggregates civil wars into their constituent events. However, since the threshold for inclusion in an event dataset is lower than that for a conflict dataset, ACLED occasionally codes information for actors that are not in other datasets. The threshold for inclusion as an ACLED event is lower than most 'civil war' datasets. As a result, ACLED records some events that are not recorded in other datasets.

In ACLED, many events do not include the government as an actor. Information on actors is coded independently of the fixed government/rebel dyad combinations used in the UCDP/PRIO dataset and each warring party is recorded as an independent actor as dictated by their changing roles (i.e. a rebel group can become a governing regime and vice versa).