Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

User Guide

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Further information and maps, data, trends and publications can be found at www.acleddata.com or by contacting info.africa@acleddata.com

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ACLED DOWNLOAD AND USE

ACLED is designed to present a realistic assessment of violent political activity within a state. For that reason, data downloaded from ACLED is likely to look different than other, complementary, conflict datasets. This is a brief on how to download and read these files.

FILES

Downloading

Version 7 of ACLED covers political violence in Africa, from January 1997 – December 2016. The dataset is available online. Earlier versions of the dataset (Versions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) contained data on Africa from 1997 to 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 in addition to short periods of coverage for regions outside Africa. These are available online here.

In addition to the published datasets which cover full years, ACLED produces up-to-date data on political violence in Africa in 2017 every week. The data are published every Monday afternoon and are available on the realtime data page.

Alternatively, data updates and other ACLED resources (such as Conflict Trends reports) can be sent through our distribution list. A sign-up form for email alerts is available on our website contact page.

Files are in xls and shapefile format. The xls sheet can be opened by any office package. Click on the "xls" link to download the file. A compatible document with a general description of the violence within the chosen state is also provided for select cases as well as a review of the active groups in particular countries and regions. The shapefile will require a GIS package or others than can read spatial data (e.g. R).

File Contents

Data are available by country from Jan 1997-Dec 2016 and countries can be joined as the same columns appear in each state file. Additional 'regional' or 'actor' sets are available where particularly unstable regions are reported together. For example, activity from Sudan, Chad and Central African Republic can be downloaded, or activity for all of Africa, select rebel groups, pre-1997 Sierra Leone and Liberian conflicts, only civil wars, only violence against civilians, etc.

Variable and File Structure

The file structure is the same for all downloaded files. Events are atomic, in that they are recorded by day and location, actor and event type. For example, if a battle between a government and rebel group occurs over three days in one town, this is recorded as three separate events in ACLED. If during that time, there are reports of violence against civilians in the same town, this is recorded as a separate

event, as the actors and event type are different. Data can be aggregated by month, regions, or event types using pivot tables.

Information in a downloaded file includes:

Column Name	Content	
GWNO	A numeric code for each individual country from Gleditsch and Ward (209)	
EVENT_ID_CNTY	An individual identifier by number and country acronym	Is associated with country id short name. This cannot be sorted as the country name distorts the sequence
EVENT_ID_NO_CNTY	An individual numeric identifier	This can be sorted, and is based on event date and country
EVENT_DATE	Recorded as Day / Month / Year	
YEAR	The year in which an event took place	
TIME_PRECISION	A numeric code indicating the level of certainty of the date coded for the event	Number corresponds to likelihood of correct date 1-day 2-week 3-month 1 is the default
EVENT_TYPE	The type of conflict event. Nine types of events are coded. Battle-No change of territory Battle-Non-state actor overtakes territory Battle-Government regains territory Headquarters or base established Strategic Development Riots/Protests Violence against civilians Non-violent transfer of territory Remote violence	
ACTOR1	The named actor involved in the event. If a dyadic event, this will be accompanied	See 'Actor Type' designation below

	by a second actor. If a monadic event, no second actor necessary	
ALLY_ACTOR_1	The named actor allied with or identifying ACTOR1. Ally for one specific event	See 'Actor Type' designation below
INTER1	A numeric code indicating the type of ACTOR1	See 'interaction' numbers below. Only main actor is coded.
ACTOR2	The named actor involved in the event. If a dyadic event, there will be an "Actor 1"	See 'Actor Type' designation below
ALLY_ACTOR_2	The named actor allied with or identifying ACTOR2	See 'Actor Type' designation below
INTER2	A numeric code indicating the type of ACTOR2	See 'interaction' numbers below. Only main actor is coded.
INTERACTION	A numeric code indicating the interaction between types of ACTOR1 and ACTOR2. Coded as an interaction between actor types, and recorded as lowest joint number 1-Government/Military/Police 2-Rebel group 3-Political Militia 4-Communal Militia 5-Rioters 6-Protestors 7-Civilians 8-Other (e.g. Regional groups such as AFICOM; or UN)	See 'Interactions' below and in codebook e.g. When the action is between a government and a rebel group, this will be coded as 12; when a political militia attacks civilians, it is coded as 37.
COUNTRY	The country in which the event took place	
ADMIN1	The largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place	Based on GIS operation
ADMIN2	The second largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place	Based on GIS operation
ADMIN3	The third largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place	Based on GIS operation
LOCATION	The location in which the event took place	

LATITUDE	The latitude of the location	
LONGITUDE	The longitude of the location	
GEO_PRECIS	A numeric code indicating the level of certainty of the location coded for the event	Number corresponds to likelihood of correct location 1-town or immediate surroundings 2-part of ADM 2 region 3-regional capital
SOURCE	The source of the event report	The general name of the source is provided
NOTES	A short description of the event	
FATALITIES	Number or estimate of fatalities due to event. These are frequently different across reports.	Recorded as number if reported. Lowest number reported if records differ or vague estimate is provided. However, if reports mention several, many, or plural 'civilians' 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 summarized fatalities are reported, but events occurred across several days or in multiple locations simultaneously, total number is divided and recorded by day or by location.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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. Political violence is understood as the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation. ACLED defines political violence through its constituent events, the intent of which is to produce a comprehensive overview of all forms of political conflict within and across states. A politically violent event is a single altercation where often force is used by one or more groups for a political end, although some instances - including protests and non-violent strategic development - are included to capture the potential pre-cursors or critical junctures of a conflict.

Actors

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) and Democratic Republic of Congo (2001-2008) 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 captures 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 (YEARS)". Mutinies of militaries are coded as "Mutiny of Military Forces of State (YEARS)".

 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 grouping populated by 'rioters'. These activities are coded as riots if the spontaneous civilian actors become violent against people or property. Protests are non-violent

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

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)". If either rioters, protesters, or civilians are associated with a named group, that group is recorded in the 'ally' column. 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 name[2], a stated 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.

ACLED Event Types

Event Type	Event Description
Battle-No change of territory	A battle between two violent armed groups where control of the contested location does not change. This is the correct event type if the government controls an area, fights with rebels and wins; if rebels control a location and maintain control after fighting with government forces; or if two militia groups are fighting. These battles are the most common activity and take place across a range of actors, including rebels, militias, and government forces, communal groups.
Battle-Non-state actor overtakes territory	A battle where non-state actors win control of location. If, after fighting with another force, a non-state group acquires control, or if two non-state groups fight and the group that did not begin with control acquires it, this is the correct code. There are few cases where opposition groups other than rebels acquire territory.
Battle-Government regains territory	A battle in which the government regains control of a location. This event type is used solely for government re-acquisition of control. A small number of events of this type include militias operating on behalf of the government to regain territory outside of areas of a government's direct control (for example, proxy militias in Somalia which hold territory independently but are allied with the Federal Government).
Headquarters or base established	A non-state group establishes a base or headquarters. This event is non-violent, and coded when a permanent or semi-permanent base is established. There are few if any cases

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[2] Barring the 'unidentified' category.

	where opposition groups other than rebels acquire territory. These events are coded as one-sided events without a second actor involved.
Strategic development	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 qualify for inclusion. It also records the location and date of peace talks and arrests of high-ranking officials. The inclusion of such events is limited, as its purpose is to capture pivotal events within campaigns of political violence. The notes column contains information on the specifics of the event. This category can also refer to failed attempts at remote violence, for example the disarming and defusing of improvised explosive devices by security forces.
Riots/Protests	A protest describes a non-violent, group public demonstration, often against a government institution. Rioting is a violent form of demonstration. These can be coded as one-sided events. All rioters and protesters are noted by generic terms (e.g. Protester (Country)), but if representing a group, the name of that group is recorded in the 'ally' column.
Violence against civilians	Violence against civilians occurs when any armed/violent group attacks civilians. By definition, civilians are unarmed and not engaged in political violence, Rebels, governments, militias, rioters can all commit violence against civilians.
Non-violent transfer of territory	This event describes situations in which rebels or governments acquire control of a location without engaging in a violent act.
Remote violence	Remote violence refers to events in which the tool for engaging in conflict did not require the physical presence of the perpetrator. Remote violence notes that the main characteristic of an event is that a spatially removed group determines the time, place and target of the attack. These include bombings, IED attacks, mortar and missile attacks, etc. Remote violence can be waged on both armed agents (e.g. an active rebel group; a military garrison), civilians (e.g. a roadside bombing) and infrastructure/property (e.g. the bombing of oil facilities).

Interactions

Interaction codes note the 'types' of actors who interact, without reference to the type of event.

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:

Interaction codes include:

10- SOLE MILITARY ACTION

11- MILITARY VERSUS MILITARY

12- MILITARY VERSUS REBELS

13- MILITARY VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA

14- MILITARY VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA

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 MILIITA

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

78- OTHER ACTOR VERSUS CIVILIANS

80- SOLE OTHER ACTION

Gaps in Fatalities Data

All data remain subject to some limitations, and this is particularly true of fatality data. While the 'hard facts' of data such as the date, location and actors have been shown to be largely consistent with those of private, closed security sources (*see* Weidmann, 2014, for example), fatality data are particularly vulnerable to bias and inaccurate reporting. If there are conflicting reports of the number of fatalities, ACLED researchers will note down the varying reported figures in the Notes column and use the figure cited by the most authoritative source. In the absence of a definitive authoritative source, ACLED will assign the most conservative estimate cited to the Fatalities column. Users are urged to remember that fatality figures reflected reported levels of deaths, and have not been independently verified by team researchers.

USE

ACLED data can be used in a variety of statistical packages. It is particularly useful for a user to have knowledge of spatial data and programs. When converted into a dbf, these data can be uploaded into GIS. In csv format, they can be integrated into programs such as SpatialKey, and in xml format can be used in Google Earth.