



Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Guide to Dataset Use for Humanitarian and Development Practitioners

January 2017

Further information and maps, data, trends, publications and contact details can be found at
www.acleddata.com

Follow ACLED on Twitter for real-time updates, news and analysis: **@ACLEDinfo**



Introduction

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a publicly available conflict event dataset designed for disaggregated conflict analysis and crisis mapping. This dataset contains information on the dates and locations of all reported political violence events in over 50 developing countries, with a focus on Africa. The data are drawn from news reports, publications by civil society and human rights organisations, and security updates from international organisations.

An estimated 1.5 billion people worldwide live in conflict-affected countries where repeated cycles of political and organised violence hinder development, reduce human security, and result in massive humanitarian suffering (World Bank, 2011). A core challenge for the design, targeting, delivery and assessment of efficient, effective, high-quality humanitarian operations in conflict-affected contexts is the absence of, and access to, reliable, timely and accessible data on political violence which is comparable across time periods and geographic contexts.

The ACLED dataset can be used to inform evidence-based decision making by humanitarian and development practitioners, whether in the field, or developing medium- to long-term policy and planning. All humanitarian contexts and complex emergencies are situations of acute need. In deciding where, how and when to allocate resources, ACLED can help practitioners and policy makers:

- Design appropriate, effective and high-quality programmes.
- Identify drivers of conflict for effective peace-building and conflict mitigation.
- Inform assessments of project efficacy and impact, and identify additional variables (including conflict levels and limitations on access) which might affect programme performance.
- Make informed decisions about risk levels to beneficiaries, staff, and logistical procedures in volatile conflict contexts.

This short guide provides an introduction to the structure of the dataset, key terminology used, potential uses by humanitarian and development practitioners, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Supporting documentation, including the project Codebook (detailing the data collection and recording process), a general user guide, and working papers which explore sources and methodology in greater detail are all available online at <http://www.acleddata.com/>.

Terminology:

Political violence refers to any act involving force or aggression, carried out with the purpose of pursuing a political agenda.

Events refer to the individual incidents which make up periods of instability and war: discrete battles, attacks on civilians, riots and protests are coded individually to provide information on the overall level of conflict occurring at a given time in a location.



The ACLED Dataset

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED) is a publicly available conflict event dataset designed for disaggregated conflict analysis and crisis mapping. This dataset contains information on the dates and locations of all reported political violence events in over 50 developing countries, with a focus on Africa.

This section provides a brief overview of the data structure and components. For more detailed information, please consult the ACLED Codebook, which contains full descriptions of coding practices, procedures, and ACLED definitions, available online at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/>.

The ACLED dataset is made up of thousands of individual data points, each referring to an individual event (a battle, an attack, a riot, etc.). Each event contains the following information:

- **The date** – the day on which the event took place;
- **The type of violence** – what kind of violence (as detailed below) was involved;
- **The actors involved** – violent actors identified by group name or type (for example, the LRA or Protesters);
- **The type of group** – actors identified by a numeric code, indicating whether the actors are part of state forces (military or police), rebels, militias, communal/ethnic militias, etc.
- **The country** – the state in which the event took place;
- **The location** – several columns detailing the administrative zone and town / village location at which the event took place;
- **Latitude and longitude coordinates** – the geo-reference for the individual event;
- **The source of the report** – the source in which the description of the event was found;
- **Event notes** – a brief description of the event;
- **Fatalities** – the reported number of fatalities

Data Structure:

The most important categories for most users of the dataset are:

The date – which allows users to specify a timeframe for their analysis (for example, in the last 12 months; in the last calendar year; since the start date of a peacebuilding project);

The type of violence – which allows users to focus on particular modalities of violence (for example, on civilian targeting in a conflict zone, or on battles between armed groups); and

The location – which allows users to identify sub-national areas (regions, districts and towns/villages) where conflict occurs, so programming and practice can be designed or adjusted in response.

ACLED differentiates between different types of violence to allow users to distinguish between different dynamics of conflict. Not all researchers are interested in the full range of political violence which occurs in many countries. Some focus only on violence against civilians; others are concerned with battles between combatants.

The various types of violence categories in ACLED are detailed below:

- **Battle-No change of territory** – A fight between two violent armed groups where control of the contested location in which the fighting takes place does not change.



- **Battle-Non-state actors overtake territory** – A fight where non-state actors, such as rebels, win control of the location in which fighting takes place.
- **Battle-Government regains territory** – A fight in which the government regains control of the location in which fighting takes place from another group.
- **Riots/Protests** – Protest describes a demonstration against a government institution or policy in which the participants are not violent. Riot describes a violent form of protest, or a spontaneous, disorganised act of violence against property or people by a mob.
- **Violence against civilians** – An attack in which any armed / violent group targets unarmed civilians / non-combatants.
- **Remote violence** – Remote violence describes an attack in which the perpetrators are spatially removed from the target of the attack. Examples include IEDs, drone activity, air strikes and mortar attacks. Remote violence can be against people or infrastructure and so the category is still applied when an attack does not result in casualties.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis allows users to collapse or group categories according to their research requirements. For example, when constructing a pivot table, it is possible to group the various **Battle** categories into a single event type, rather than differentiate between them.

It is also possible to exclude some event types from analysis, for example, leaving out all non-violent strategic developments (**Headquarters or base established; Strategic development; and Non-violent transfer of territory**).

There are also a small number of non-violent conflict event types in the ACLED dataset, which do not involve actual violence, but are included because to capture pivot events or critical junctures which are relevant to the wider conflict. These include:

- **Headquarters or base established** – A violent actor establishes a permanent or semi-permanent base or headquarters in a territory.
- **Strategic development** – Activity by a conflict actor that does not involve fighting but is within the context of a war / unrest, for example, recruitment drives, troop movement, or participation in peace talks. This category can also refer to failed attempts of remote violence, for example, the disarming and defusing of improvised explosive devices by security forces.
- **Non-violent transfer of territory** – When territorial control is transferred from one group to another without violence or force being used, for example, by a group withdrawing without fighting.

The most recent version of the ACLED dataset (Version 7) covers all political violence in Africa, from January 1997 – December 2016. It is available online [here](#). 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 updated data on political violence in Africa in 2017 every week. This data is published every Monday and available on the [realtime data page](#).



Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Alternatively, data updates and other ACLED resources can be sent through our distribution list. A sign-up form for email alerts is available on our website at <http://www.acleddata.com/contact/email-alerts/>.

How can ACLED data be used?

ACLED data have been used extensively in academic research of conflict, civil war, peacebuilding and development. It is also a valuable resource for humanitarian and development practitioners, and can help inform evidence-based decision-making in the design, implementation and delivery of programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Humanitarian decision-making in other sectors is informed by data such as statistics on vulnerable populations' health and nutrition status, displacement and migration patterns, and more. The provision of accessible data on conflict patterns, levels and dynamics is an important part of designing, implementing and delivering high-quality, effective humanitarian and development assistance.

ACLED delivers reliable, real-time and accessible data on conflict patterns, levels and locations. All humanitarian contexts and complex emergencies are situations of acute need. In deciding where, how and when to allocate resources, ACLED can help practitioners and policy makers:

- Design appropriate, effective and high-quality programmes.** For example, by determining where conflict is concentrated; where hotspots of need or gaps in coverage are; and where are civilians or non-combatants being targeted (see Figure 1).

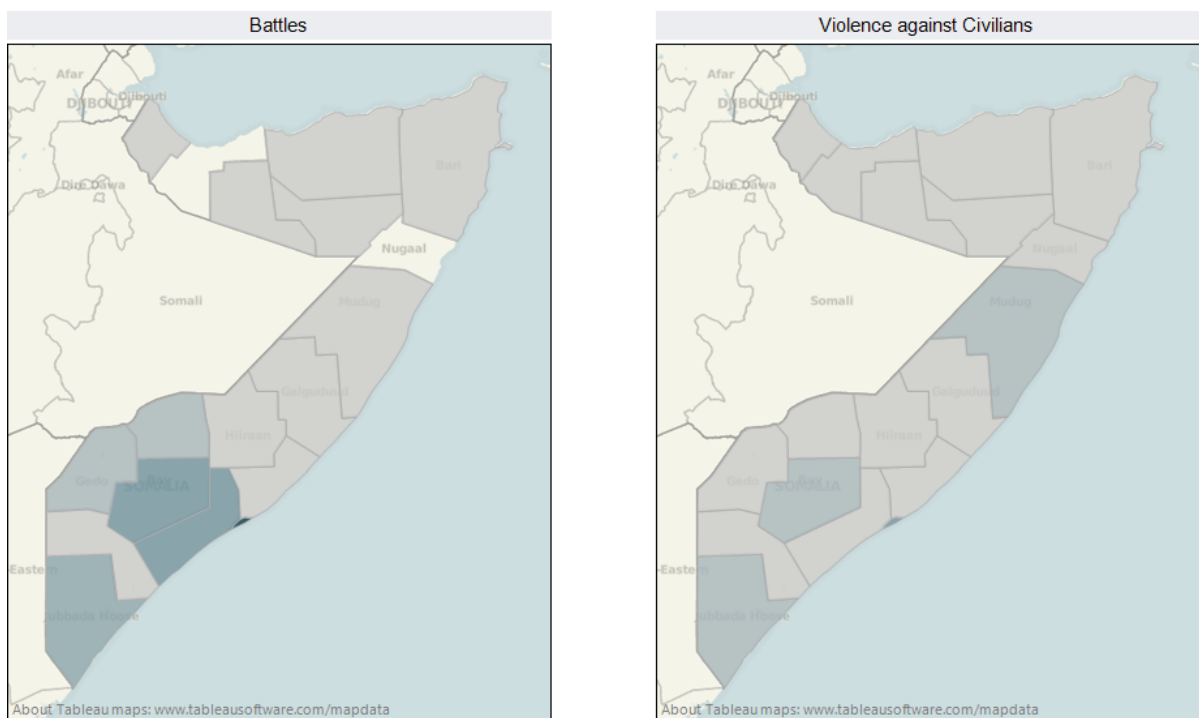


Figure 1: Conflict Events by Violence Type, Somalia, January - April 2013.

The data can also be used to identify areas where conflict is increasing or decreasing sharply (see Figure 2).

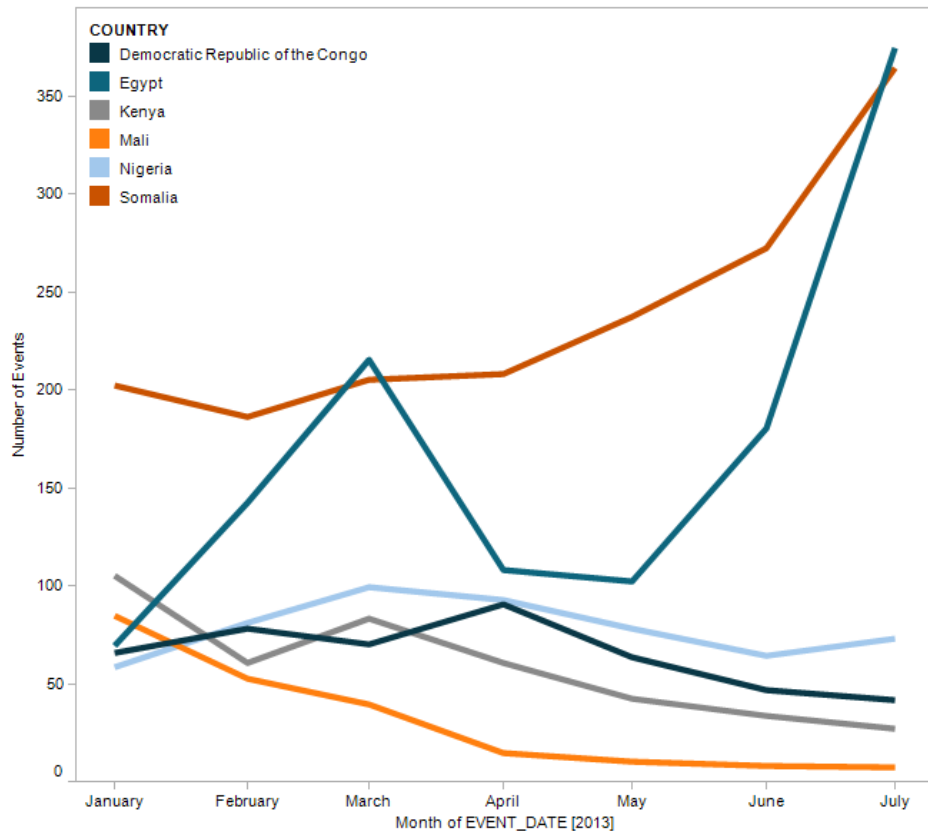


Figure 2: Conflict Events by Country, January 2013 - July 2013.

- **Identify drivers of conflict for effective peace-building and conflict mitigation.** For example, by determining whether violence is centred around resource deposits, border lands, contested areas, zones of higher or lower poverty, or areas of particular livelihood strategies or vulnerabilities (see Figure 3).

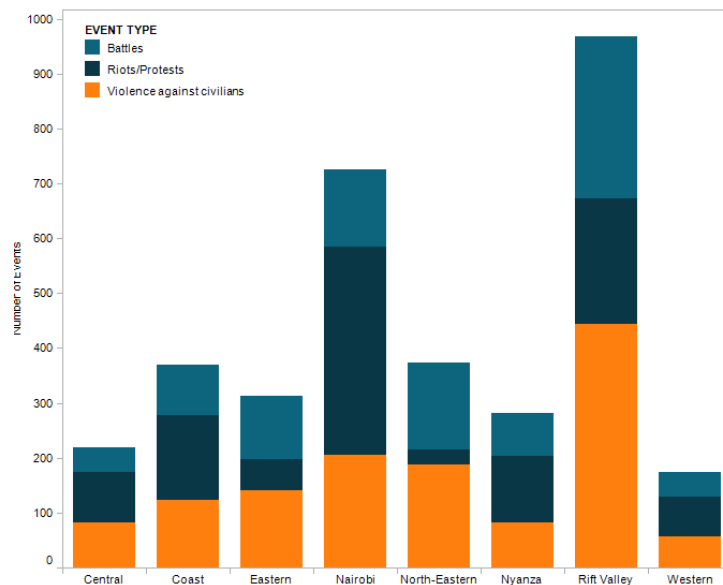


Figure 3: Conflict Events by Province, Kenya, 1997 - 2013.

Alternatively, ACLED can also be used to identify which actors are most active within a given conflict, and give insight into an actor's preferred targets and their methods of attack (see Figure 4).

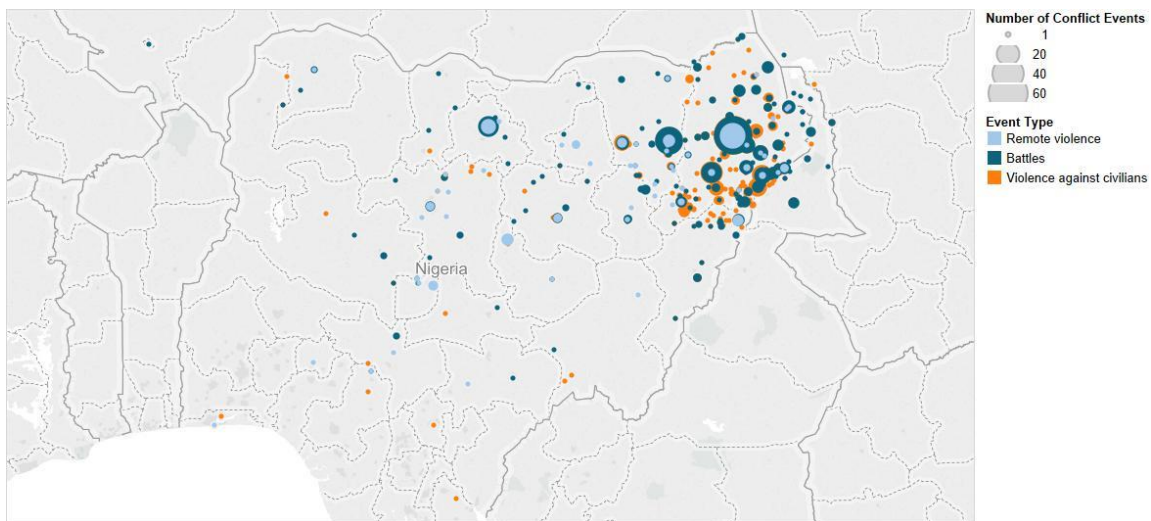


Figure 4: Conflict Events Involving Boko Haram by Type, Nigeria, 2009 - 2014.

- **Inform assessments of project efficacy and impact, and identify additional variables (including conflict levels and limitations on access) which might affect programme performance.** For example, by providing a baseline for violence levels before, during and after a project. Did conflict levels affect project delivery, access or efficacy?

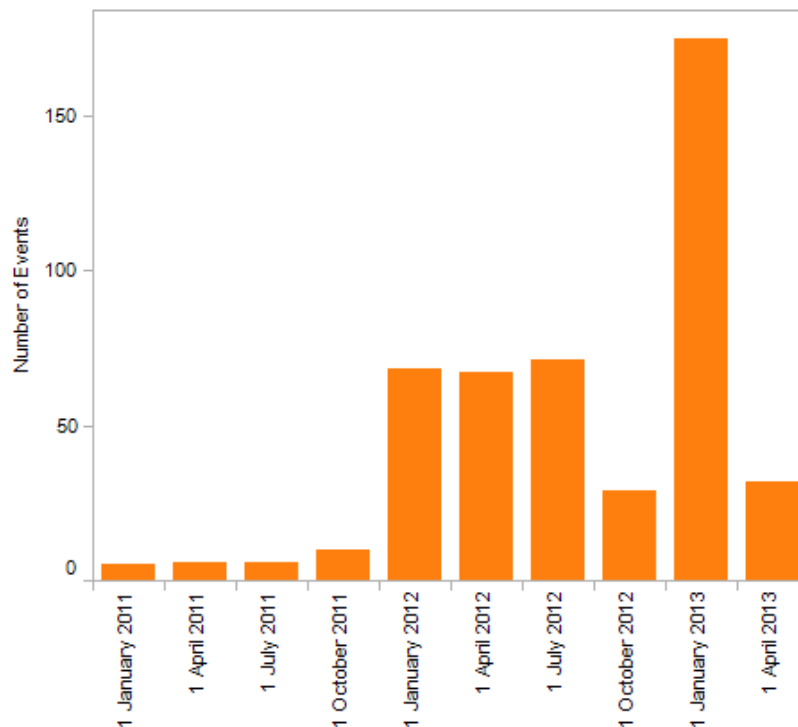


Figure 5: Conflict Events by quarter-year, Mali, January 2011-June 2013.

- **Make informed decisions about risk levels to beneficiaries, staff, and logistical procedures in volatile conflict contexts.** For example, by providing information on the frequency of attacks involving civilians or aid workers; and data on the level and nature of attacks in particular population centres, at particular sites, and in relation to areas of operation (see Figure 6).

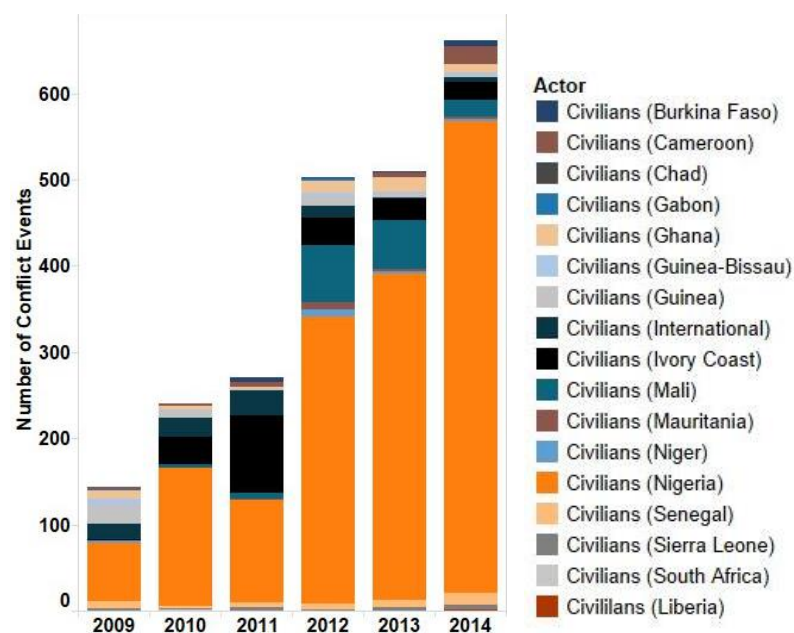


Figure 6: Attacks on Civilians, West Africa and the Sahel, 2009 - 2014.



Additional ACLED Resources

In addition to the full dataset, ACLED researchers produce the following resources which are useful for humanitarian and development practitioners:

- Monthly ***Conflict Trends*** reports, which detail levels, patterns and dynamics of violence in select African countries;
- **Country Profile** reports, which highlight historical and contemporary patterns of violence in country cases;
- **Working Paper** reports, which address thematic or methodological themes such as data collection, sources, particular group types, or types of violence.

All of the above are online at <http://www.acleddata.com/research-and-publications/>. In addition, ACLED researchers produce customised conflict reports and research for a wide range of institutional, government and civil society practitioners active in the humanitarian, development and diplomacy communities. Please contact info.africa@acleddata.com for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can anyone use the dataset?

Yes, the dataset is publicly available free of charge. The published data contain no confidential information. The dataset can be used by anyone provided they cite the data fully in any publications or referencing. The data can also be shared among users freely.

How do I cite the dataset?

If using ACLED data, please cite: Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen. 2010. Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5) 651-660.

Do users need specialised / technical skills or software to analyse the data?

No, the data is downloadable in Excel files to maximise accessibility for users without specialised skills or operating with limited technological resources in field locations. Anyone with a familiarity with Excel can produce tables and charts which detail levels and patterns of violence, changes over time, and breakdowns by location, event type and other categories.

Is ACLED data reliable?

Yes, ACLED data are reliable and verifiable, and have been subject to rigorous peer review mechanisms by academic researchers, policy and practitioner communities, and country experts. We are continually working to improve the quality, reliability and accessibility of the dataset, and welcome your suggestions, comments and feedback at www.acleddata.com or info.africa@acleddata.com.

All data, however, 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.

Can I use ACLED data to tell me how many people have been killed by a particular group?

ACLED does not code fatality figures according to which group suffered casualties because most source reports do not offer this level of detail, and instead report on the total number of deaths arising from a conflict event. For this reason, the figure in the Fatalities column reflects the total number of deaths reported for a given event, and may include some deaths of group members you wish to study.

The exception to this is in incidents of violence against civilians: because ACLED only codes events of violence against civilians where the targets were unarmed, non-combatants, the number of fatalities reported for each event of violence against civilians is taken to be the reported number of civilians killed.

What is the difference between the monadic and dyadic files?

ACLED makes data available in two formats: dyadic and monadic.

Dyadic is the standard data format. Most data analysis can be carried out using the standard Excel file. In this file, both Actor 1 and Actor 2 appear in the same row, with each event constituting a single unit of analysis. However, in order to analyse conflict actors and actor types, a monadic file is more useful. This is a file in which Actor 1 and Actor 2 appear in a single column, with each actor's activity constituting a single unit of analysis. This allows users to analyse things like the proportion of events in which a particular actor or actor type is involved; or the geographic patterns of activity of specific actors.

Creating a monadic file involves duplicating the events so that each actor is represented as participating in a single event (all the actors from both Actor 1 and Actor 2 are placed in a single column, with the corresponding details of the event for each). For this reason, monadic files are not useful for analysis of the number of events or overall patterns of violence in a country, etc. They should be used for analysis of specific actors, actor types and patterns in their activity.

For example, if you are interested in the number of events involving Boko Haram attacking police forces in Nigeria, you can use the dyadic file to identify how many *total* events occurred in Nigeria or a particular location in Nigeria. In the dyadic file, a battle between police forces and Boko Haram would appear as a single event. However, you can use the monadic file to isolate Boko Haram activity only, and show the number of locations in which Boko Haram were active specifically. In the monadic file, a battle between the police forces and Boko Haram would appear as two events – one involving the police, and one involving Boko Haram. If you are analysing a specific group, however, this does not increase the number of events for that particular group.

What is the difference between Version 7 and the real-time data?

Version 7 is the most recent fully reviewed annual update to the dataset. It covers the years 1997 – 2016, and is available online [here](#).

The realtime data is updated on a weekly basis. It is available on the [realtime data page](#). It will be fully reviewed, geo-referenced and added to the existing Version 7 in the next annual update in early 2018.

To view all data for a particular country or group from 1997 to present, users can combine the real-time data with Version 7, or submit a request via our contact form for a particular dataset.