



ACLED Actors and Interactions

ACLED recognizes a range of actors including governments, rebels, militias, ethnic groups, active political organizations, external forces, and civilians. In ACLED, politically violent actors include state forces (e.g. military), rebels, militias, external forces (e.g. UN missions) and organized political groups who interact over issues of political authority (e.g. territorial control, government control, access to resources, etc.). Protesters, rioters and civilians are actors whose inclusion deviates from the organization and armed group rules. Rioters and protesters involve spontaneous, atomic acts of organization that may, or may not, continue beyond a discrete event.

To be included in an ACLED event, actors must have a name,¹ a political purpose and use violence or protest for political means. For inclusion as agents of political violence, organizations must be armed and organized. They must engage with other agents multiple times. Further, the events of organizations 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 establish campaigns and trajectories of movements.

Each actor is recognized in the following ways: their specific name is noted in the “Actor” columns of the dataset. Associates of actors for specific events are noted in the respective “Associated Actor” columns. In addition, the type of group is noted in the respective “Inter” columns, and the compounded group type is noted in the “Interaction” column.

Actor Names, Types and Inter Codes

ACLED records the recognized name of groups as reported, whenever possible. Names are abbreviated as an acronym in front of the proper name. For example, the Pakistani Taliban is recorded as “TTP: Tehrik-i-Taliban”. If a group is active across several countries and have a distinct organization in each, a county name is also included. For

¹ Barring the “unidentified” category.



example, Islamic State (Somalia). In exceptional circumstances described in detail below, a name of a group is generated to reflect their origins and composition, such as “Bachama Ethnic Militia (Nigeria)”.

Each named actor is also designated as a type of organization. Because there are thousands of individually named groups within the ACLED data project, each named organization is also characterized by what type of group it is. Group type designates all groups into one of eight ACLED categories, and assigns a number in the “Inter” column to that categorization. Hence, the “Inter” code groups organizations by whether they have similar organizational structures, goals and practices.

These categories offer a way to distinguish between actors, and determine how patterns of activity conform to goals and organizations. ACLED does not use a pattern of activity to designate what kind of agent a group is: it specifically observes the goals and structure of an organization, where possible, its spatial dimension and its relationships to communities. As such, the Inter code of a group can change over time. For example, if a rebel group is successful in overthrowing a regime, its armed agents may then become the armed wing of a political party within the new regime structure (this would be a change in Inter code from 2 to 3). Below is a detailed description of the group types, and examples therein.

Inter Code 1: Governments and State Security Services

Governments are defined as internationally recognized regimes in assumed control of a state. Government actors are named by ACLED as a series of separate regimes rather than a uniform body (e.g. Congo/Zaire (1965-1997), Democratic Republic of Congo (1997-2001), and Democratic Republic of Congo (2001-) as opposed to Congo/Zaire (1962-present)).² As the strength, capacity and policies of governments can vary widely from

² In cases where the authority of a government is severely challenged, or where two or more groups have a claim to be the government (with an associated military), a distinct choice is made about how to proceed



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 and police forces are a direct arm of the government, these actors are noted as “Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx)” or “Police Forces of State (20xx-20xx)”.³ Mutinies of militaries are coded as “Mutiny of Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx)”.

Inter code “1” relates to state forces, including military (and mutinous military), police and other security agents and government agents.

Inter Code 2: Rebel Groups

Rebel groups are defined as political organizations whose goal is to counter an established national governing regime by violent acts. Rebel groups are named according to the title they publicly use to represent themselves. The designation as a rebel group means that the group has a stated political agenda for national power (either through regime replacement or a separatist agenda), 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 in analysis. Rebel forces are known by a specific chosen name, the groups are open and transparent about their intentions and leadership; they typically operate in significantly large areas of a state; and conduct activity against the central government and its associates.

In cases where aggregate groups are contesting the government, we often use an overarching name rather than factions (e.g. Hutu Rebels active in Burundi; Southern Muslim Separatists active in Thailand). Specific or local factions may or may not be

with coding. This choice will be outlined and discussed extensively in reference to that country’s data. Updates will appear in the crisis.acleddata.com blog.

³ Branches of the military or police forces are coded as, for example, “Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx) Special Presidential Division”.



acknowledged in reports, but when they are, they are added to the overarching group name (e.g. PALIPEHUTU-FNL: National Forces for Liberation-Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People as a specific Hutu Rebel group in Burundi; RKK: Runda Kumpulan Kecil as a specific Southern Muslim Separatist group in Thailand).

This code relates to groups that seek the replacement of the central government, or the establishment of a new state.

Inter Code 3: Political Militias

Political militias are a more diverse set of violent actors, who are often created for a specific purpose or during a specific time period (i.e. Janjaweed) and for the furtherance of a political purpose by violence. Militias are recorded by their stated name. These organizations are defined by their political goals of influencing and impacting governance, security and policy. However, these groups are not seeking the removal of a national power, but are typically supported, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements. Militias operate in conjunction, or in alliance, with a recognized government, governor, military leader, rebel organization, political party, business elite, or opposition group. Whereas opposition parties will often have a militia arm, groups such as the Sudanese Janjaweed or Serbian Tigers are pro-government militias that work as supplements to government power. These groups are not subsumed within the category of government or opposition, but are noted as an armed, distinct, yet associated, wing given their purposeful indirect ties to the state. These political militias may be associated with defined ethnic, regional or other identity communities, but 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, and Mayi-Mayi of DR-Congo are examples of these groups.

In some cases, an “unidentified armed group” perpetrates political violence. The use of the UAG category is due to two reasons: the first is a lack of information about the group from reports received; however, the second reason may be more common: groups benefit



from being unidentified to the larger public, as they can pursue violent actions without liability. Their activity is coded using the name “Unidentified Armed Group” or “Unidentified Communal Group” in the “Actor” columns. Within the “Unidentified Armed Group” designation, a country of origin is specified, such as “Unidentified Armed Group (Sudan).”⁴

This code relates to armed, organized groups that have a specific political objective that is designated by their political elite patron.

Inter Code 4: Identity Militias

ACLED includes a broad category of “identity militias” that signifies armed and violent groups organized around a collective, common feature including community, ethnicity, region, religion or, in exceptional cases, livelihood. Therefore, for ACLED’s purposes, identity militias include those reported as “tribal”, “communal”, “ethnic”, “local”, “community”, “religious” and “livelihood” militias. Events involving “identity militias” are often referred to as “communal violence” as these violent groups often act locally, in the pursuance of local goals, resources, power, security, and retribution. An armed group claiming to operate on behalf of a larger identity community may be associated with that community, but not represent it (i.e. Luo Ethnic Militia in Kenya). Recruitment and participation is by association with the identity of the group. Identity militias may have a noted role in the community, such as the long-term policing units common among Somali clans. ACLED includes vigilante activity under identity militias as the group actions are designed to provide a form of local security by the participants. Local and ethnically bounded militias are considered distinct from militias that operate as armed and violent

⁴ An “Unidentified Armed Group” is coded with Interaction 3, unless they are an “Unidentified Military” (a rare case that has an interaction of ‘1’ or ‘8’, depending on the context) or “Unidentified Ethnic/Communal/Community Group” which is noted as a ‘4’, as discussed below.



wings of government, opposition groups, the forces of political elites or a religious organization.

When a “unidentified armed group” perpetrates local political violence, their activity is coded using the name “Unidentified Communal Group” in the “Actor” columns, and a ‘4’ in the interaction.

This code relates to groups engaged in local political competition, often traditionally based contests between ethnic, community or local religious groups.

Inter Code 5: Rioters

Rioters are individuals who either engage in violence during demonstrations or in spontaneous acts of disorganised violence, and are noted by a general category of “Rioters (Country)”. If a group is affiliated or leading an event (e.g. ZANU-PF political party), the associated group is named in the respective associated actor category. Rioters are by definition violent, but rioters are not organized, armed groups – they are *spontaneous*, violent groups. Rioters may engage in a wide variety of violence, including property destruction, engaging with other armed groups (e.g. security forces, private security firms, etc.) or in violence against unarmed individuals.

This code relates to demonstrators engaging in violence, or disorganized groups engaging in spontaneous acts of violence.

Inter Code 6: Protesters

Protesters are individuals who do not engage in violence during demonstrations, and are noted by a general category of “Protesters (Country)”; if a group is affiliated or leading an event (e.g. MDC political party), the associated group is named in the respective associated actor category. Although protesters are nonviolent, they may be the targets of



violence by other groups (e.g. security institutions, private security firms, or other armed actors).

This code relates to peaceful, unarmed demonstrators

Inter Code 7: Civilians

Civilians, in whatever number or association, are victims of violent acts within ACLED as they are, by definition, unarmed and hence vulnerable. They are noted as “Civilians (Country X)”. In cases where communities are attacked based on identity, the civilian labelled is replaced with the specific community group label (e.g. Pokot Ethnic Group (Kenya)).

This code relates to unarmed individuals not engaging in violence

Inter Code 8: External/Other Forces

Small categories of “other” actors include hired mercenaries, private security firms and their employees, UN or external forces. They are noted by their name and actions. The military forces of states are coded as ‘other’ when active outside of their home state (e.g. the military of Kenya active in Somalia).

This code relates to non-domestic or non-political forces including hired mercenaries, private security firms and their employees, UN, or external forces (such as the military forces of another state).

Certain types of violent agents may appear to fall outside of this categorization, but ACLED has designed these classifications to flexibly fit the universe of agents operating in conflict. For example, militant religious organizations can have various goals (e.g. Taliban), including overtaking the state, influencing political processes and supporting regional political elites, and engaging in communal contests over access to religious sites.



In choosing to categorize actors as rebels, militias, communal organizations, protesters, etc., ACLED does not allow for “insurgents” or “terrorists” as types of agents. Many non-state violent organizations may use insurgency tactics or commit acts against civilians with intended high fatality levels as part of their violent repertoire. Instead, ACLED considers the goal and organization of each group to be the basis for their classification.

Coding detail: In the dataset, a group’s name will appear in the Actor 1 or Actor 2 column. Associated actors in the event to Actor 1 will appear in ‘Associated Actor 1’ column, and associated actors for Actor 2 will appear in ‘Associated Actor 2’ column. Each Actor 1 and Actor 2 category has a corresponding “Inter 1” and “Inter 2” category, respectively. If an event has two actors, both Inter 1 and Inter 2 are recorded in reference to both actors; if an event has only one actor, Inter1 is recorded along with a 0 (in reference to there being no Actor 2). The “Inter” code refers to the main actors, and not associated actors.

Interaction codes

The “Interaction” code is the combination of “Inter” codes. Single actor type codes are recorded in “Inter1” and “Inter 2” columns, and the compounded number is recorded in the Interaction column. For example, if a country’s military fights a political militia group, and the respective “Inter 1” and “Inter 2” codes are “1” and “3”, respectively, the compounded Interaction is recorded as “13”.

Interaction numbers are always the smallest possible number (for example, 37 instead of 73), regardless of the order of “Actor1” and “Actor2”. Interaction codes are recorded for all events, including non-violent activity. For single actor events, the empty second actor category is coded as “0”.

If a non-violent rebel event occurs where only “Inter 1” is noted with a ‘2’, “20” is coded in the “Interaction” column). Only the main actor for Actor1 and Actor2 are the basis for the interaction codes.



The following interaction codes translate to:

10- SOLE MILITARY ACTION (e.g. base establishment by state forces; remote violence involving state military with no reported casualties; non-violent military operations)

11- MILITARY VERSUS MILITARY (e.g. military in-fighting; battles between a military and mutinous forces; arrests of military officials)

12- MILITARY VERSUS REBELS (e.g. civil war violence between state forces and a rebel actor)

13- MILITARY VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA (e.g. violence between state forces and unidentified armed groups; violence between police and political party militias)

14- MILITARY VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. military engagement with a communal militia; police engagement with a vigilante militia)

15- MILITARY VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. suppression of a demonstration by police or military)

16- MILITARY VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. suppression of a demonstration by police or military)

17- MILITARY VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. state repression of civilians; arrests by police)

18- MILITARY VERSUS OTHER (e.g. inter-state conflict; state engagement with private security forces or a UN operation; strategic developments between a regime and the UN or another external actor)

20- SOLE REBEL ACTION (e.g. base establishment; remote violence involving rebel groups with no reported casualties; accidental detonation by a rebel group)



22- REBELS VERSUS REBELS (e.g. rebel in-fighting; violence between rebel groups and their splinter movements)

23- REBELS VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA (e.g. civil war violence between rebels and a pro-government militia; violence between rebels and unidentified armed groups)

24- REBELS VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. violence between rebels and vigilante militias or other local security providers)

25- REBELS VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. spontaneous violence against a rebel group ; a violent demonstration engaging a rebel group)

26- REBELS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. violence against protesters by rebels)

27- REBELS VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. rebel targeting of civilians [a strategy commonly used in civil war])

28- REBELS VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. civil war violence between rebels and an allied state military; rebel violence against a UN operation)

30- SOLE POLITICAL MILITIA ACTION (e.g. remote violence by an unidentified armed group with no reported casualties; accidental detonation by a political militia; strategic arson as intimidation by a political party)

33- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA (e.g. inter-elite violence)

34- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g violence between communal militia and an unidentified armed group ; violence between political militia and vigilante militias or other local security providers)



35- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. violent demonstration against a political party; spontaneous violence against a political party)

36- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging a political party)

37- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. out-sourced state repression carried out by pro-government militias; civilian targeting by political militias or unidentified armed groups)

38- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. violence between private security forces and unidentified armed groups; violence between pro-government militia and external state military forces)

40- SOLE COMMUNAL MILITIA ACTION (e.g. destruction of property by a communal militia; establishment of a local security militia)

44- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. intercommunal violence)

45- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. violent demonstration against an identity militia; spontaneous violence against an identity militia)

46- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging an identity militia)

47- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. civilian targeting, especially in the context of intercommunal violence)

48- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHER (e.g. external state military engaging in violence against a communal militia)



50- SOLE RIOTER ACTION (e.g. 1-sided violent demonstration ; spontaneous arson)

55- RIOTERS VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. 2-sided violent demonstration in which both sides engage in violence)

56- RIOTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. 2-sided demonstration in which only 1 side engages in violence)

57- RIOTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. violent demonstration in which civilians are injured/killed ; spontaneous violence in which civilians are targeted)

58- RIOTERS VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. mob violence against regional or international operation)

60- SOLE PROTESTER ACTION (e.g. 1-sided peaceful protest)

66- PROTESTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. 2-sided peaceful protest)

68- PROTESTERS VERSUS OTHER (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging private security forces)

78- OTHER ACTOR VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. regional or international operation targeting civilians; private security forces targeting civilians)

80- SOLE OTHER ACTION (e.g. strategic developments involving international or regional operations; remote violence by external military forces with no reported casualties; non-violent external military operations)

Further notes on interactions

(a) Civilians cannot attack other civilians or engage in violence.



(b) An ethnic identity 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 “identity” in the interaction column.

(c) for ACLED’s purposes, identity militias include those reported as “tribal”, “communal”, “ethnic”, “local”, “community”, “religious” and “livelihood” militias.