



Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Guide for Media Users

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Introduction

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a publicly available conflict event dataset designed for disaggregated conflict analysis and crisis mapping. The 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 is 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 in understanding and analysing the sudden onsets or spikes in political violence, or particular conflict actors, is situating these phenomena in the longer history and wider context of conflict in a given country or sub-national region over time.

The ACLED dataset can be used to inform evidence-based analysis and illustration of political conflict by journalists and conflict researchers. Almost all conflict-affected contexts are complex, volatile and affected by limited information and competing reports of activity. In seeking to understand, explain and analyse these complex scenarios, ACLED can help journalists and researchers:

- Understand the levels of conflict in Africa, a region, a country, or sub-national location.
- Identify patterns and levels of conflict over time.
- Illustrate dynamics of particular conflict actors over time and space, for example, whether they increasingly or decreasingly target civilians; are active outside their historical strongholds, etc.

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.

Conflict actor refers to the individual organisations or groups involved in conflict. Because the type of groups involved in conflict varies across context and time, we use 'conflict actor' in this guide to cover a wide range of groups such as rebels, militias, militaries, and organisations responsible for terrorist attacks.



The ACLED 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; or since a particular policy or law has been in place).

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 distinguishes 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-Rebels overtake territory** – A fight where 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.

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.
- **Non-violent activity by a conflict actor** – 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.
- **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.

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 activity (**Headquarters or base established; Non-violent activity by a conflict actor; and Non-violent transfer of territory**).

The most recent version of the ACLED dataset (Version 4) covers all political violence in Africa, from January 1997 – December 2013. It is available online at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/africa/>.

In addition to the published datasets which cover full years, ACLED produces weekly updates for political violence in Africa in 2014, which will be published as part of Version 5 in early 2015. This data is posted online at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data-2014/>.



How can the data be used?

ACLED data has been used extensively in academic research of conflict, civil war, peace-building and development. It is also a valuable resource for journalists and researchers with a focus on realtime, on-going conflict dynamics.

- **Understand the levels of conflict in Africa, a region, a country, or sub-national location.** For example, by contrasting levels of violence in different countries, states, or sub-national regions. ACLED data can also be added to data such as population statistics to show rates of violence per 100,000 people, or per capita.

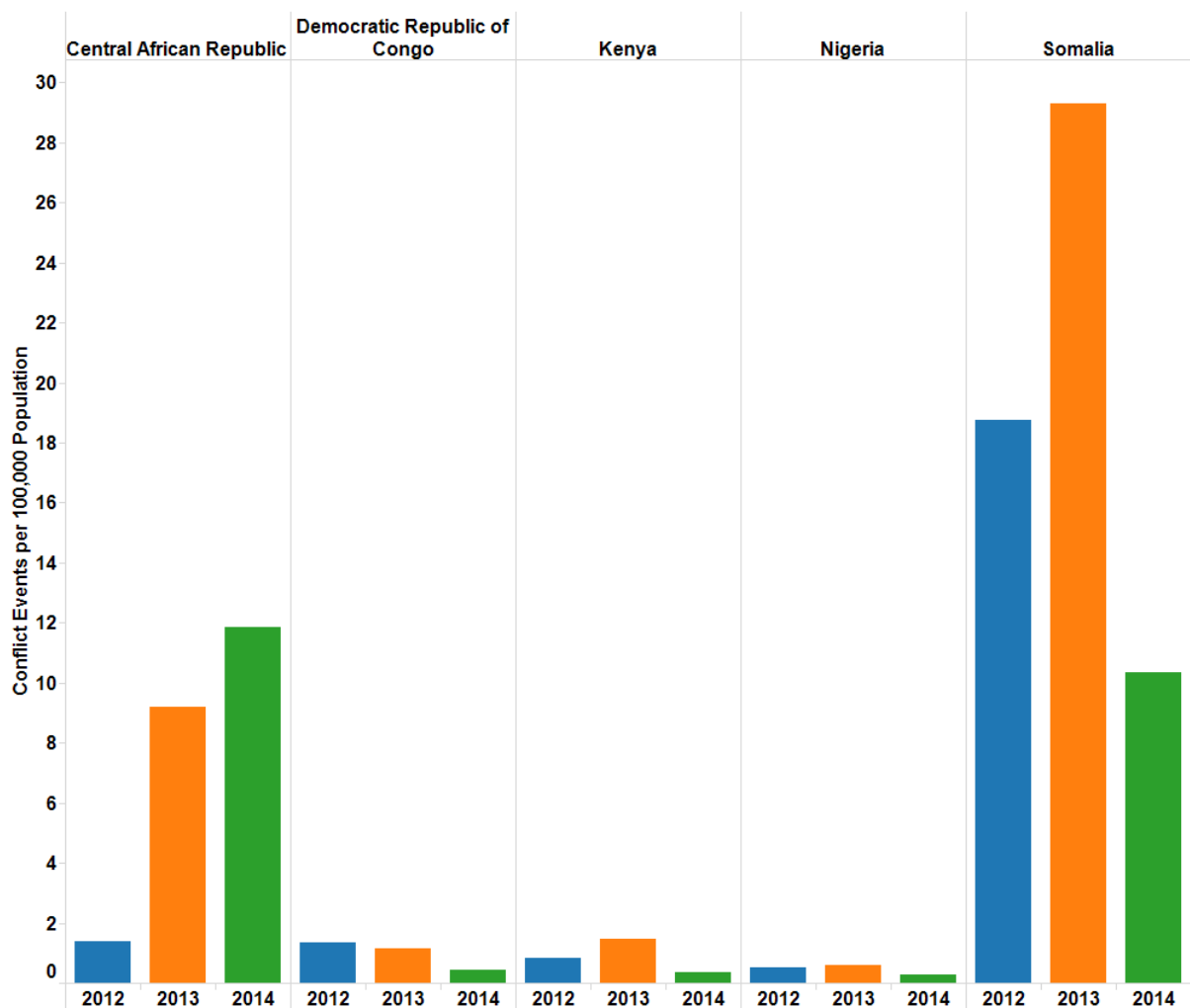


Figure 1: Conflict Events per 100,000 Population, 2012, 2013 and 2014 (to date). Population Data Source: World Bank Development Indicators: Population (Total), 2012, <http://data.worldbank.org/>.

- **Identify patterns and levels of conflict over time.** For example, by showing how conflict patterns and dynamics have changed in response to particular developments such as policies, interventions or tactical changes.

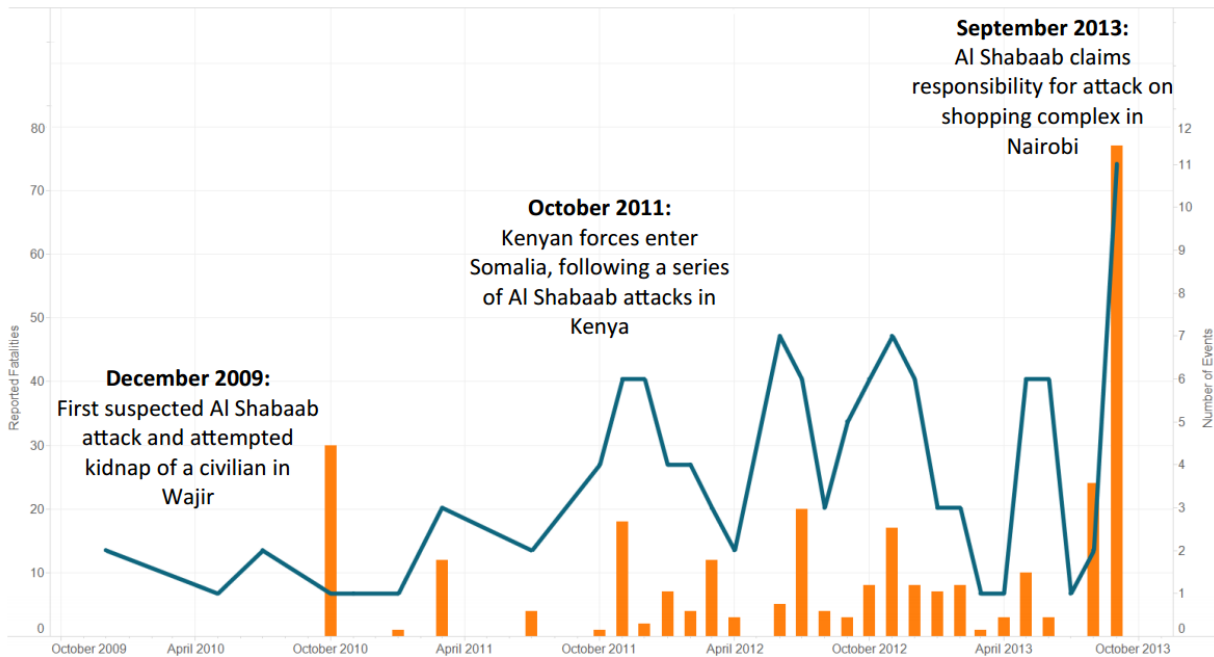


Figure 2: Al Shabaab Activity in Kenya, December 2009 - September 2011.

- **Illustrate dynamics of particular conflict actors over time and space.** For example, whether they increasingly or decreasingly target civilians; are active outside their historical strongholds, etc.

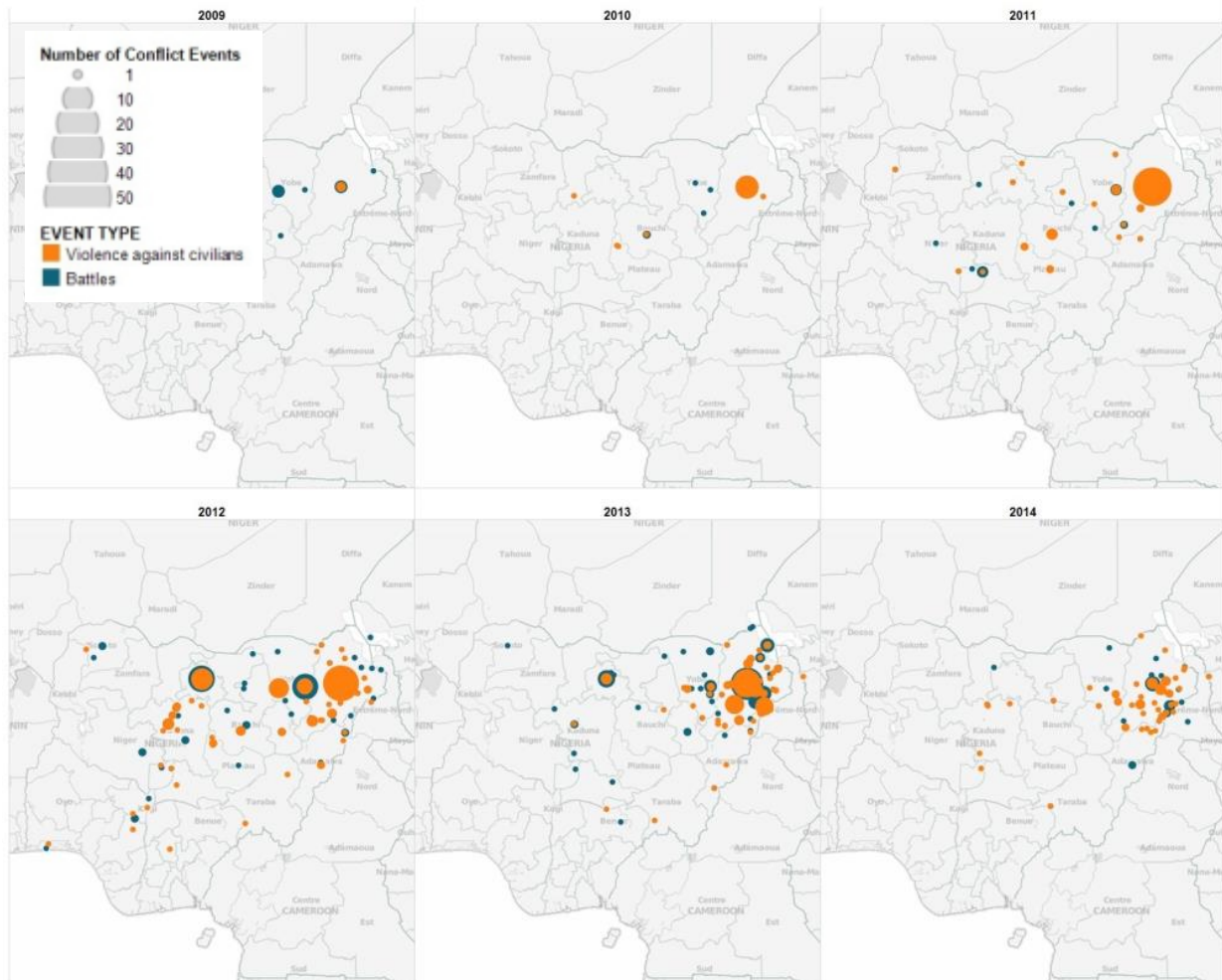


Figure 3: Conflict Activity by Boko Haram by Type and Location, 2009 - May 2014.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can anyone use the dataset?

Yes, the dataset is publicly available free of charge. The published data contains 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 in a written report, please kindly 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) 1-10.

If using ACLED *Conflict Trends* reports, regional profiles, working papers, etc., please kindly cite the individual report and the website, for example:

- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, *Conflict Trends Report*, No. 24, April 2014, <http://www.acleddata.com/research-and-publications/conflict-trends-reports/>.

If using ACLED data in a visual, graphic, map or infographic, please kindly attribute the source data on the visual / graphic itself or within the key. Examples can be found at:

- "Five Years of Attacks by Boko Haram in Nigeria" <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/19/world/africa/a-jihadists-face-taunts-nigeria-from-the-shadows.html?hpw&rref=world&r=1>
- "Peacekeepers and Rebels in Eastern Congo" <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/03/140327-congo-genocide-united-nations-peacekeepers-m23-kobler-intervention-brigade/#close-modal>
- "Political Violence in Zimbabwe" <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2013/07/daily-chart-23>

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 is reliable and verifiable, and has been subject to rigorous peer review mechanisms by academic researchers, policy and practitioner communities, and country experts.

However, users should be aware of some limitations in the data before conducting analysis: the first is that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may under-estimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We



work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.

All data, however, remains subject to some limitations, and this is particularly true of fatality data. While the 'hard facts' of the 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 is particularly vulnerable to bias and inaccurate reporting. 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 its 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



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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 4 and the realtime data?

Version 4 is the most recent fully reviewed annual update to the dataset. It covers the years 1997 – 2013, and is available at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/version-4-data-1997-2013/>.

The realtime data is updated on a weekly basis (for Sub-Saharan Africa) and monthly (for North Africa). It is available at <http://www.acleddata.com/data/realtime-data-2014/>. It will be fully reviewed, geo-referenced and added to the existing Version 4 in the next annual update in early 2015.

To view all data for a particular country or group from 1997 to present, users can combine the realtime data with version 4, or submit a request via our contact form for a particular dataset.

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/>.

We are continually working to improve the quality, reliability and accessibility of the dataset, and welcome your suggestions, comments and feedback at <http://www.acleddata.com/contact/>.