



Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Guide for Media Users

April 2019

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

Subscribe to our [mailing list](#) or follow us 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 and demonstrations in over 70 countries. The data are drawn from news reports, publications by civil society and human rights organisations, and security updates from local and 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 [here](#).

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 70 developing countries, with a focus on Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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 [here](#).

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 region** – the region in which the event took place;
- **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;
- **The scale of the source** – whether the source was local, national, international, etc.
- **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 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. In addition, ACLED has introduced sub-event types to disaggregate specific incidents of violence under the wider event type categories.



The various event and sub-event types of violence in ACLED are detailed below:

- **Battles** – Violent interactions between two organised armed groups distinguished by whether they resulted or not in a territorial exchange:
 - **Armed clash:** no territory is captured by either side
 - **Government regains territory:** state or para-state forces capture territory from a non-state actor or opposing governmental force;
 - **Non-state actor overtakes territory:** a non-state or a foreign state actor captures territory from an opposing government or non-state actor
- **Explosions/Remote violence** – One-sided violence events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond.
 - **Chemical weapon:** chemical weapons are used in warfare in the absence of any other engagement
 - **Air/drone strike:** air or drone strikes are used in the absence of any other engagement
 - **Suicide bomb:** a suicide bombing occurs in the absence of any other engagement
 - **Shelling/artillery/missile attack:** long-range artillery or missile system are used in the absence of any other engagement
 - **Remote explosive/landmine/IED:** remotely- or victim-activated devices are detonated in the absence of any other engagement
 - **Grenade:** a grenade or another explosive is thrown in the absence of any other engagement
- **Violence against civilians** – Violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants.
 - **Sexual violence:** any individual (regardless of gender) is targeted with sexual violence
 - **Attack:** civilians are targeted with any violence – excluding sexual violence – by an organised armed actor
 - **Abduction/forced disappearance:** an actor engages in the abduction or forced disappearance of civilians, without reports of further violence
- **Protests** – A public demonstration against a political entity, government institution, policy or group in which the participants are not violent.
- **Peaceful protest:** demonstrators are engaged in a protest while not engaging in violence or other forms of rioting behaviour and are not faced with any sort of force or engagement

Data Analysis:

Data analysis allows users to collapse or group categories according to their research requirements.

It is also possible to exclude some event types from analysis, for example, leaving out all non-violent



- **Protest with intervention:** there is an attempt to disperse or suppress peaceful demonstrators without serious/lethal injuries being reported or the targeting of protesters with lethal weapons
 - **Sexual violence:** peaceful demonstrators are targeted with violence by an actor leading to (or if it could lead to) serious/lethal injuries
- **Riots** – Violent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts or disorganised acts of violence against property or people.
 - **Violent demonstration:** a group of individuals engages in a demonstration involving violence
 - **Mob violence:** rioters violently interact with other rioters, another armed group or civilians, outside of demonstrations and without the use of lethal weapons like guns, knives or other lethal weapons.
- **Strategic developments** – Contextually important activity by a conflict actor that does not involve fighting, yet may trigger future violence or contribute to political dynamics within and across states.
 - **Agreement:** conflict actors reach any sort of agreement (e.g. peace agreements/talks, ceasefires, evacuation deals, etc.)
 - **Arrests:** state or para-state forces either detain a particularly significant individual or engage in mass arrests
 - **Change to group/activity:** significant changes in the activity or structure of armed groups occur
 - **Disrupted weapons use:** an event of ‘Explosions/Remote violence’ is prevented from occurring, or armed actors seize significant caches of weapons
 - **Headquarters or base established:** a violent group establishes a permanent or semi-permanent base or headquarters
 - **Looting/property destruction:** organised armed groups engage in looting or seizing goods or property other than weapons or weapon systems
 - **Non-violent transfer of territory:** rebels, governments, or affiliates of both acquire control of a location without engaging in a violent interaction with another group
 - **Other:** any significant development that does not fall into any of the other ‘Strategic developments’ sub-event types.
- Data are updated every week and available to download on the ACLED website. Interested parties can receive data updates and other ACLED resources through our distribution list by contacting admin@acleddata.com.

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

- Weekly **Regional Overviews** tracking emerging or consolidated trends within and across states in ACLED’s focus regions;
- **Infographics**, which provide a visualisation of specific conflict trends. They also include maps of territorial control in selected civil war contexts;



- **Analysis** pieces, such as reports, briefs, and working papers offering detailed analysis of specific trends, snapshots of current crises, or offering further information around new data releases

All of the above are online at <https://www.acleddata.com/category/analysis/>. Alternatively, interested parties can sign up to receive data updates and other ACLED resources through our distribution list by contacting admin@acleddata.com.

How can the data be used?

ACLED data have 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 real-time, 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.

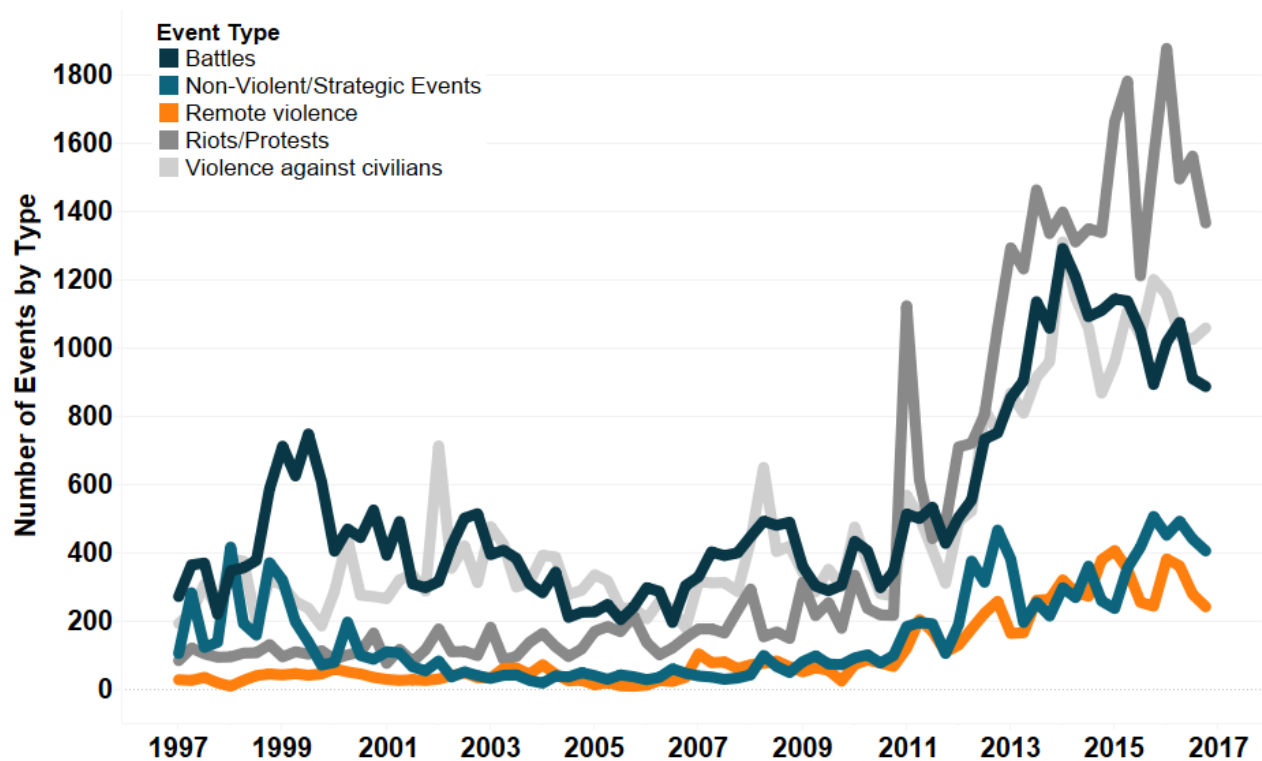


Figure 1: Conflict Events and protest over time across Africa

- **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.

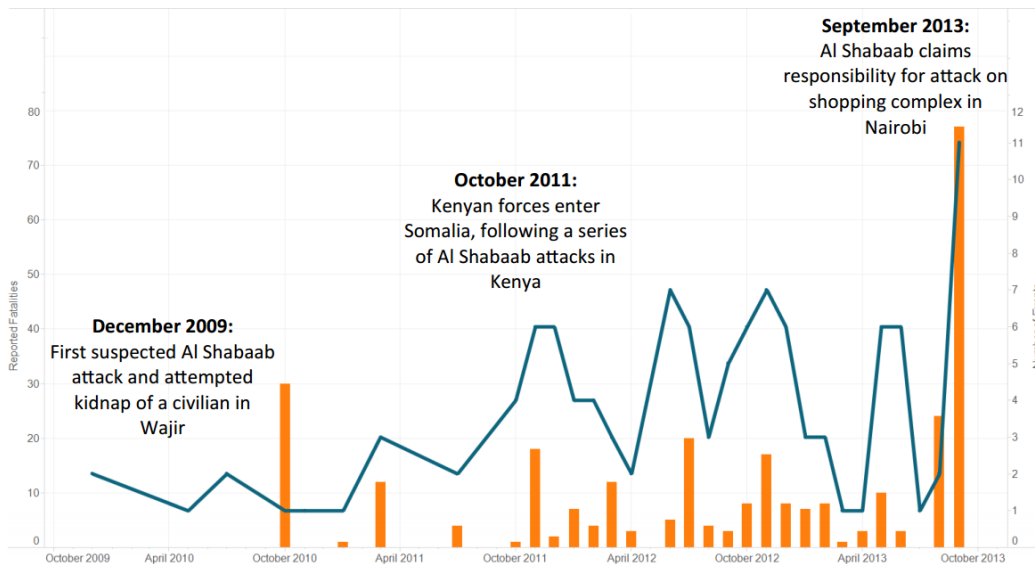


Figure 2: Al Shabaab Activity in Kenya, December 2009 - September 2013.

Alternatively, by showing changes in the use of particular conflict tactics by different conflict actors.



Figure 3: Rape in Conflict Across Africa

- **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, or are underwritten by different economic or political dynamics.

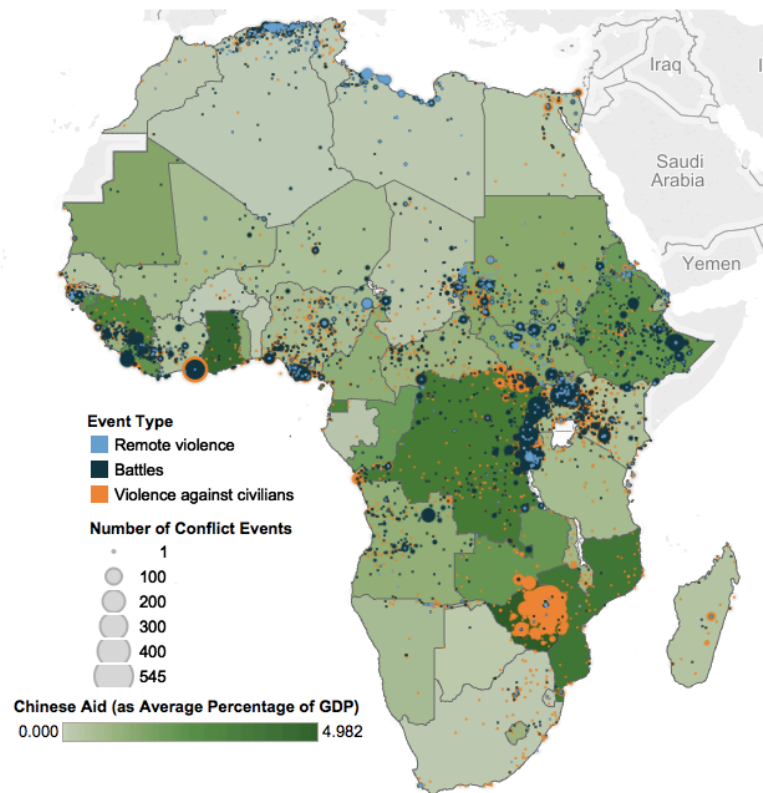


Figure 4: Chinese Aid and Conflict in Africa 2000-2011

Frequently Asked Questions

Can anyone use the dataset?

ACLED data is free and open to the public for non-commercial use on the condition that the user follows the Attribution Policy outlined in the codebook and on the ACLED website. Any commercial application such as selling, licensing, sublicensing, or otherwise distributing the data, analysis, codebook, or any auxiliary materials to third parties for profit constitutes a violation of the Terms of Use.

How do I cite the dataset?

If using ACLED 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) 651-660.

If using ACLED data in any way, direct or manipulated, the data must be clearly acknowledged. Acknowledgement should include 1) a footnote with the full citation which includes a/the link to ACLED's website, 2) in text citation/acknowledgement, stating where the data you use are



from and that ACLED data are publicly available, and 3) clear citation on any and all visuals making use of ACLED data.

If citing ACLED analytical products, please kindly cite the individual report and the website, for example:

- Hart, Tom, and Lauren Blaxter. (23 November 2018). *"Ceasefire Divisions: Violations of the Truce with Gaza Lead to Rising Political Pressures in Israel."* Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

If the piece doesn't have an author recognized (often the case for pieces on ACLED methodology), you should include ACLED as the author.

Further details about citations is available in the ACLED Codebook.

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

No, the data is downloadable in csv and xls formats 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.

Are 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 admin@acleddata.com.

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.

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.