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. 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 at http://www.acleddata.com/Resources
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 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 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 georeference 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.

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:

**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.
• **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.

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.

In addition to the full dataset, ACLED researchers produce the following resources:

• **Conflict Trends** which detail levels, patterns and dynamics of violence in select African countries;

• **Country Profiles** which highlight historical and contemporary patterns of violence in country cases;

• **Working Papers** which address thematic or methodological themes such as data collection, sources, particular group types, or types of violence.
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](image_url)
- **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.](image)

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

- **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 3: Rape in Conflict Across Africa](image)
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 in a written report, please kindly cite:


If using ACLED Conflict Trends reports, regional profiles, working papers, etc., please kindly cite the individual report and the website, for example:
Do users need specialised / technical skills or software to analyse the data?

No, the data are 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.

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.

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, 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.