



Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Guide to Dataset Use for Humanitarian and Development Practitioners

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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 [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

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 nearly 100 developing countries, with a current focus on Africa, Asia, Europe 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](#).

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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 source scale** – is the source 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; 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

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.

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 strategic developments.



- **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
 - **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.



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*).

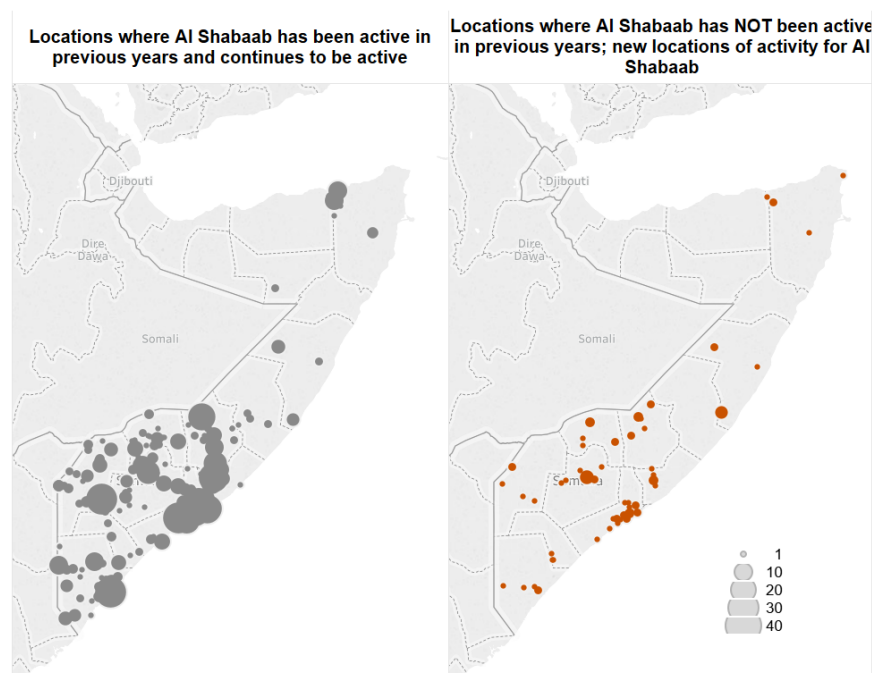


Figure 1: Conflict Events and Location Somalia, January, 2016-2017.



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

Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in CAR, Mali & South Sudan, from January 2011 - February 2015

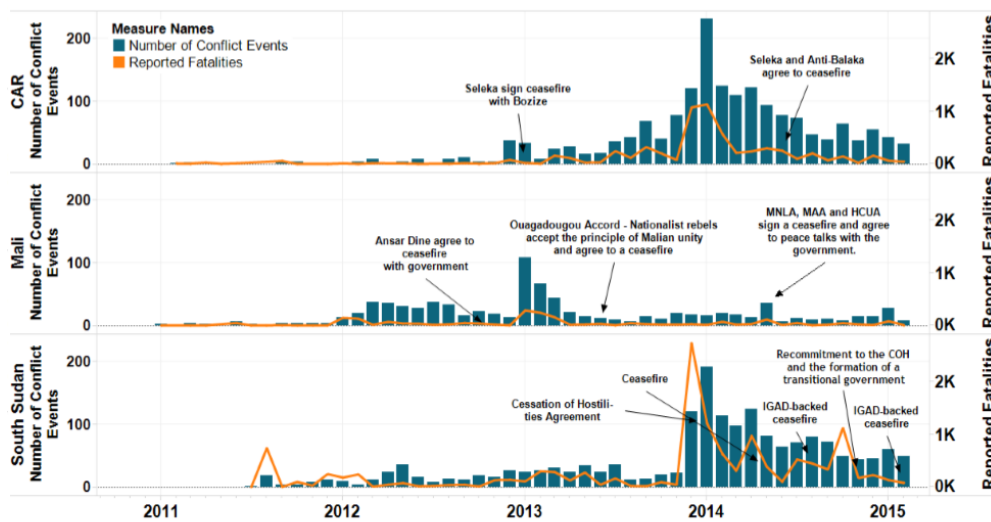


Figure 2: Conflict Events and Change.

- **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*).

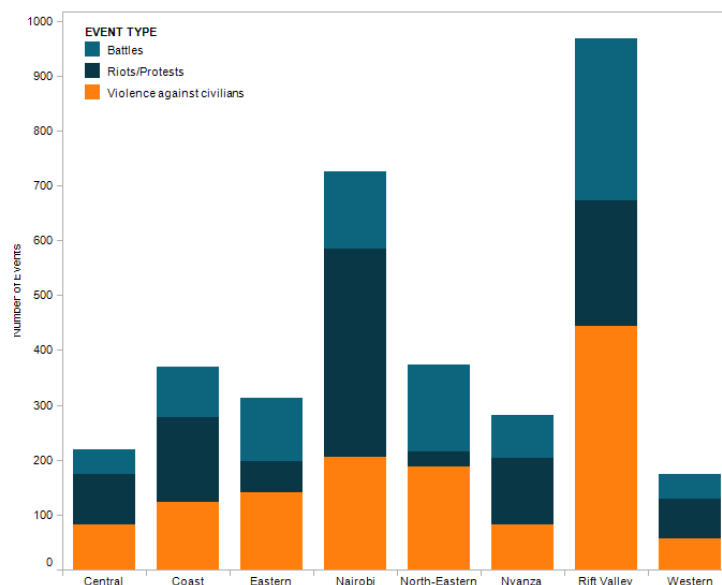


Figure 3: Conflict Events by Province, Kenya, 1997 - 2013.



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 2: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location and Reported Fatalities by Location in Nigeria, in 2016.

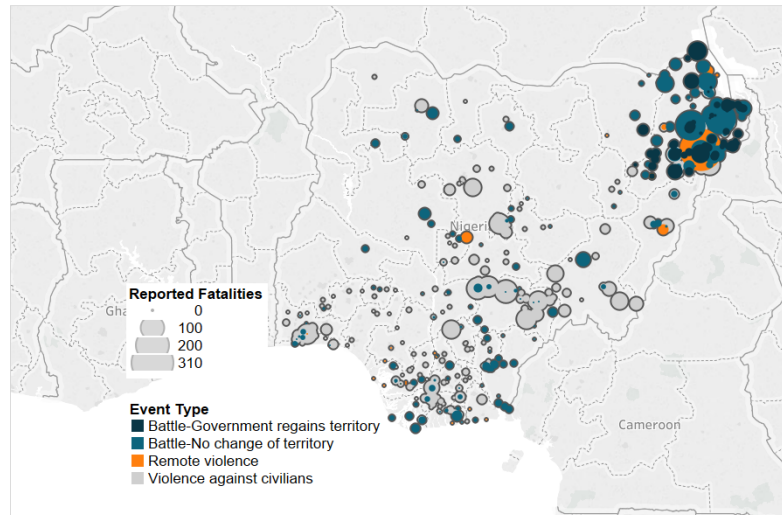


Figure 4: Conflict Events Involving Boko Haram by Type, Nigeria, 2009 - 2014.

- **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?

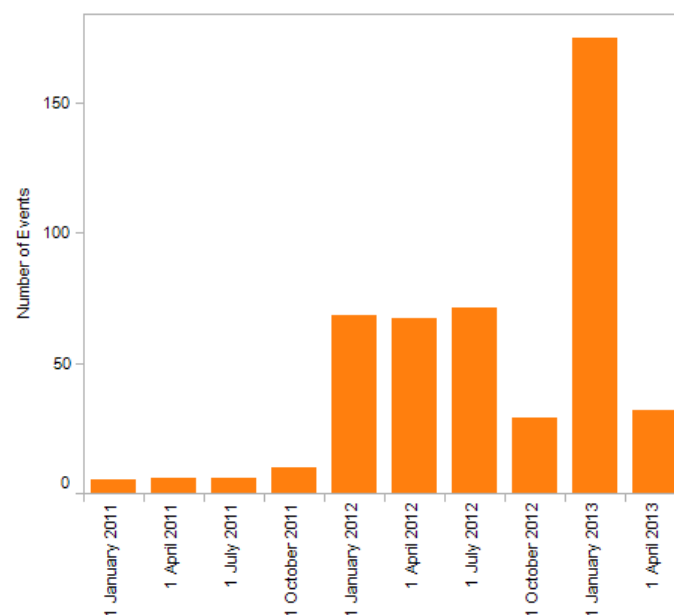
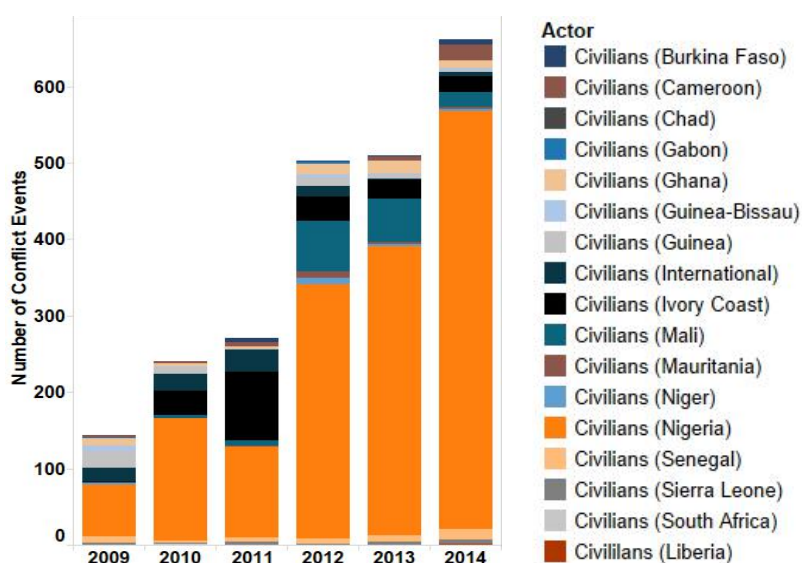


Figure 5: Conflict Events by quarter-year, Mali, January 2011-June 2013.



- **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 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/>. 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 admin@acleddata.com for more information.



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.

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.