

## ACLED DOWNLOAD AND USE

ACLED is designed to present a realistic assessment of violent political activity within a state. For that reason, data downloaded from ACLED is likely to look different than other, complementary, conflict datasets. This is a brief on how to download and read these files.

### FILES

#### *Downloading*

Files are in xls and shapefile format. The xls sheet can be opened by any office package. Click on the "xls" link to download the file. A compatible document with a general description of the violence within the chosen state is also provided for select cases as well as a review of the active groups in particular countries and regions. The shapefile will require a GIS package or others than can read spatial data (e.g. R).

#### *File Contents*

Data are available by country from Jan 1997-Dec 2011 and countries can be joined as the same columns appear in each state file. Additional 'regional' or 'actor' sets are available where particularly unstable regions are reported together. For example, activity from Sudan, Chad and Central African Republic can be downloaded, or activity for all of Africa, select rebel groups, pre 1997 Sierra Leone and Liberian conflicts, only civil wars, only violence against civilians, etc.

#### *Variable and File Structure*

The file structure is the same for all downloaded files. Events are atomic, in that they are recorded by day and location, actor and event type. For example, if a battle between a government and rebel group occurs over three days in one town, this is recorded as three separate events in ACLED. If during that time, there are reports of violence against civilians in the same town, this is recorded as a separate event, as the actors and event type are different. Data can be aggregated by month, regions, or event types using pivot tables.

#### Information in a downloaded file

Column Name	Column Description	Notes
GWNO	Country Identification Number from Gleditsch and Ward (2000)	
Event ID Country	A unique identifier for each event	Is associated with country id short name. This cannot be sorted as the country name distorts the sequence.
Event ID No Country	A unique identifier for each event without country abbreviation	This can be sorted, and is based on event date
Event Date	Recorded as Day/Month/Year	
Year	Year of event occurrence	
Time Precision	Notes the specificity of the event date	Number corresponds to likelihood of correct date 1-day 2-week 3-month 1 is the default
Event Type	Eight types of events are coded for. 1-battle- no territory exchanged (Dyadic) 2-battle rebels win territory (Dyadic) 3-battle government regains territory (Dyadic)	Longer description below

	4- base or HQ established 5-nonviolent activity by rebels 6-rioting 7-violence against civilians (Dyadic) 8-Nonviolent acquisition of territory	
Actor 1	First Actor. If a dyadic event, this will be accompanied by a second actor. If a monadic event, no second actor necessary	See 'Actor Type' designation below
Ally Actor 1	Ally of actor 1 if reported. Ally for one specific event	See 'Actor Type' designation below
Inter1	Number corresponding to the type of actor	See 'interaction' numbers below. Only main actor is coded.
Actor 2	Second Actor. If a dyadic event, there will be an "Actor 1"	See 'Actor Type' designation below
Ally Actor 2	Ally of actor 2 if reported. Ally for one specific event	See 'Actor Type' designation below
Inter2	Number corresponding to the type of actor	See 'interaction' numbers below. Only main actor is coded.
Interaction	Coded as an interaction between actor types, and recorded as lowest joint number 1-Government/Military/Police 2-Rebel group 3-Political Militia 4-Communal Militia 5-Rioters 6-Protestors 7-Civilians 8-Other (e.g. Regional groups such as AFICOM; or UN)	See 'Interactions' below and in codebook e.g. When the action is between a government and a rebel group, this will be coded as 12; when a political militia attacks civilians, it is coded as 37.
Country	Country name where event took place	
Region 1	Administrative region 1 where event occurred according to global administrative database (updated in 2012)	Based on GIS operation
Region 2	Administrative region 2 where event occurred according to global administrative database (updated in 2012)	Based on GIS operation
Region 3	Administrative region 3 where event occurred according to global administrative database (updated in 2012)	Based on GIS operation
Location Name	Specific place name of event location	
Coordinates	Latitude and longitude	
Geoprecision	Notes the specificity of the event location	Number corresponds to likelihood of correct

		location 1-town or immediate surroundings 2-part of ADM 2 region 3-regional capital
Source	Publication from where the event information is gathered	The general name of the source is provided
Notes	Notes coder deemed relevant to the event	
Fatalities	Number or estimate of fatalities due to event. These are frequently different across reports.	Recorded as number if reported. Lowest number reported if records differ or vague estimate is provided. However, if reports mention several, many, or plural 'civilians' and no other reference, this is recorded as '10'. If report mentions dozens, this is recorded as '12'. If report mentions hundreds, this is recorded as '100'. If summarized fatalities are reported, but events occurred across several days or in multiple locations simultaneously, total number is divided and recorded by day or by location.
Additional Region Notes	The region information from the news report	This information is not standardized, as reports often provide various administrative names with locations.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In ACLED, conflict actors include rebels, militias, and organized political groups who interact over issues of political authority (i.e. territorial control, government control, access to resources, etc). ACLED recognizes a range of actors including governments, rebels, militias, ethnic groups, active political organizations, and civilians. Political violence is understood as the use of force by an group with a political purpose or motivation. ACLED defines political violence through its constituent events, the intent of which is to produce a comprehensive overview of all forms of political conflict within and across states. A politically violent event is an single altercation where often force is used by one or more groups for a political end, although some instances- including protests and non-violent activity- are included to capture the potential pre-cursors or critical junctures of a conflict.

#### *Actors:*

Governments are defined as internationally recognized regimes in assumed control of a state. Government actors are defined by ACLED as a series of separate regimes rather than a uniform body (e.g. Congo/Zaire 1965-1997 (Mobutu), Democratic Republic of Congo 1997-2001(Kabila, L) and Democratic Republic of Congo 2001-2008 (Kabala, J) as opposed to Congo/Zaire (1962-

present)). As the strength, capacity and policies of governments can vary widely from 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 are a direct arm of the government, these actors are noted as “Military Forces of State, 19xx-19xx”. Mutinies of militaries are coded as “Mutiny of Military Forces of State, 19xx-19xx”.

Rebel groups are defined as political organizations whose goal is to counter an established national governing regime by violent acts. Rebel groups have a stated political agenda for national power, 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.

Militias are more difficult to assess since they can be created for a specific purpose or during a specific time period (i.e. Janjaweed) and may be associated with an ethnic group, but not entirely represent it (i.e. Kenyan Luo ethnic militias). ACLED’s definition of organized political groups includes militias operating in conjunction or in alliance with a recognized government, political elite, and rebel organization or opposition group. These groups are typically supported, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements. Whereas often opposition parties will have a militia arm, groups such as the Sudanese Janjaweed or Serbian Tigers work as supplements to government power. These groups are not subsumed into the category of government or opposition, but are noted as an armed associated wing. When these groups operate with another type of group (e.g. military, rebel etc) this alliance during each event is noted.

Militias are recorded by their stated name. In some cases, an ‘unidentified armed group’ perpetrates political violence; the default assumption in ACLED is that such groups can be considered militias and their activity coded under ‘unidentified armed group’.<sup>1</sup> Within the ‘unidentified armed group’ designation, it is also possible to specify a country of origin if it is known, such as ‘unidentified armed group (Sudan).’

Alternatively, ethnic militias can be long-term policing units, such as those common among Somali clans. ACLED coders distinguish between active ethnic militias involved in communal violence (militias against each other) as opposed to violence with governing forces that are outside of a civil war context (i.e. Karamojong violence in Uganda). If an ethnic militia is formed to engage in intra or inter communal violence, such groups are designated “‘ethnic group x’ militia”.

Riots are violent, spontaneous groupings populated by ‘rioters’. These activities are coded as riots if the spontaneous civilian actors become violent against people or property. Protests are non-violent spontaneous groupings with ‘protesters’. However, should violence be used against protesters, this is considered violence against civilians. Should the protesters become violent, this action is considered a riot. Protesters and civilians are the only unarmed actors included by ACLED. These groups are either the direct victims of armed violence or are recognized groups protesting peacefully. Both protesters and civilians are general categories and are noted as “Protesters (Country X)” or “Civilians (Country X)”. If either rioters, protesters, or civilians are associated with a named group, that group is recorded in the ‘ally’ column.

Small categories of ‘other’ actors include hired mercenaries, security firms and their employees, UN or external forces. They are noted by their name and actions.

In conclusion, all actors have an official name<sup>2</sup>, a stated political purpose and use violence or protest for political means. Organizations must be cohesive and are not assembled for single events, with the exception of riots and protests. Further, the events in which they are involved 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 track a range of movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Often such activity is designed to be ‘unidentified’, since most of ‘unidentified’ activity is violence against civilians for a political purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Barring the ‘unidentified’ category

## Event Types

### ACLED Event Types

Event Number	Event Type	Event Description
1	Battle-No Change of Location Control	A battle where control of the contested location does not change. This is the most common event. If the government controls an area, fights with rebels and wins, this is the correct code. If rebels control a location and maintain control after fighting with government forces, this is the correct code. If two rebel groups are fighting and the group in control of the location retains its authority, this is the correct code.
2	Battle- Rebel Control Location	A battle where rebels win control of location. This is the correct code if, after fighting with another force, a rebel group acquires control. If two rebel groups fight and the group that did not begin with control acquires it, this is the correct code.
3	Battle- Government Regains Control	A battle in which the government regains control of a location. This event type is used solely for government re-acquisition of control.
4	Headquarters or Base Establishment	A rebel group establishes a base or headquarters. This event can be non-violent, but must be coded when a permanent or semi-permanent base is established.
5	Non-Violent Activity by a Conflict Actor	This event records activity by groups that does not involve active fighting but is within the context of the war/dispute. For example recruitment drives, arrests, incursions or rallies.
6	Rioting/Protesting	Protest describes a group involved in a public meeting against a government institution. Rioting is a violent, unorganized form of protest. The actors involved are noted as 'protestors (country)' or 'rioters (country)'.
7	Violence Against Civilians	Violence against civilians occurs when any armed group attacks unarmed civilians within a larger conflict. Rebels, governments, and militias can all commit violence against civilians. This is the only event that involves civilians.
8	Non-Violent Transfer of Location Control	This event describes situations in which rebels or government s acquire control of a location without engaging in a violent act.

Please see the codebook for further information.

### Interactions

Interaction codes note the 'types' of actors who interact, without reference to the type of event. All actors fall into 1 of 8 categories (including governments, rebels, civilians etc):

Government or mutinous force = 1  
Rebel force =2  
Political militia= 3  
Ethnic militia = 4  
Rioters= 5  
Protesters = 6  
Civilians = 7  
Outside/external force (e.g. UN) =8

An ethnic 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 'communal' in the interaction column. These local and ethnically bounded groups are considered distinct from militia groups that operate as armed and violent wings of government, opposition groups, the forces of political elites or a religious organization. These 'political' militia groups tend to not be associated with defined ethnic communities; 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, Boko Haram of Nigeria, and Mayi-Mayi of DR-Congo are examples of these groups. The remaining group identifiers are covered in section 2.

A single number represents the one/two group interaction. This is the basis of the INTERACTIONS column. INTERACTION numbers are always the smallest possible number. Those with a 0 are for single actor events. The codes include:

10- SOLE MILITARY ACTION  
11- MILITARY VERSUS MILITARY  
12- MILITARY VERSUS REBELS  
13- MILITARY VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA  
14- MILITARY VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (these include all 'ethnic' militias)  
15- MILITARY VERSUS RIOTERS  
16- MILITARY VERSUS PROTESTERS  
17- MILITARY VERSUS CIVILIANS  
18- MILITARY VERSUS OTHER  
20- SOLE REBEL ACTION (e.g. base establishment)  
22- REBELS VERSUS REBELS  
23- REBELS VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA  
24- REBELS VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA  
25- REBELS VERSUS RIOTERS  
26- REBELS VERSUS PROTESTERS  
27- REBELS VERSUS CIVILIANS  
28- REBELS VERSUS OTHERS  
30- SOLE POLITICAL MILITIA ACTION  
33- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA  
34- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA  
35- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS  
36- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS  
37- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS  
38- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHERS  
40- SOLE COMMUNAL MILITIA ACTION  
44- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA  
45- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS  
46- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS  
47- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS  
48- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHER  
50- SOLE RIOTER ACTION  
55- RIOTERS VERSUS RIOTERS

56- RIOTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS  
57- RIOTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS  
58- RIOTERS VERSUS OTHERS  
60- SOLE PROTESTER ACTION  
66- PROTESTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS  
67- PROTESTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS  
68-PROTESTERS VERSUS OTHER  
80- SOLE OTHER ACTION  
\* NOTE- CIVILIANS CANNOT ATTACK CIVILIANS OR OTHER ACTOR GROUPS

## USE

ACLED data can be used in a variety of statistical packages. It is particularly useful for a user to have knowledge of spatial data and programs. When converted into a dbf, these data can be uploaded into GIS. In csv format, they can be integrated into programs such as SpatialKey, and in xml format can be used in Google Earth.