# Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

# Codebook

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# Introduction and Brief Description

The ACLED project codes reported information on the type, agents, location, date, and other characteristics of political violence events, demonstrations and select politically relevant non-violent events. ACLED focuses on tracking a range of violent and non-violent actions by political agents, including governments, rebels, militias, identity groups, political parties, external actors, rioters, protesters and civilians. The full list of the columns in ACLED is available in Table 1 below.

ACLED concentrates on:

- Tracking rebel, militia and government activity over time and space;
- Recording violent acts between and across non-state groups, including political and identity militias;
- Recording political violence by unnamed agents, as violent groups may remain unnamed for strategic reasons;
- Recording attacks on civilians by all violent political agents;
- Distinguishing between territorial transfers of military control from governments (and their affiliates) to non-state agents and vice versa;
- Collecting information on rioting and protesting; and
- Tracking non-violent 'strategic developments' representing crucial junctures in periods of political violence (e.g. recruitment drives, peace talks, high-level arrests).

ACLED data are derived from a wide range of local, regional and national sources and the information is collected by trained data experts worldwide. An updated overview of ACLED's current coverage is available on the ACLED website.

ACLED data are available to the public and are released in real-time. Data can be downloaded through the data export tool on the ACLED website or can be accessed through the API (a manual is available online). Curated data files – such as regional data files, or aggregate country-year files – can also be accessed online on the ACLED website. Further information on ACLED's coding choices are available on the methodology page of the ACLED website.

*Table 1: ACLED Data Columns*

| **Column Name** | **Content** |
|---|---|
| ISO | A numeric code for each individual country |
| EVENT_ID_CNTY | An individual identifier by number and country acronym (updated annually) |
| EVENT_ID_NO_CNTY | An individual numeric identifier (updated annually) |
| EVENT_DATE | The day, month and year on which an event took place |
| YEAR | The year in which an event took place |
| TIME_PRECISION | A numeric code indicating the level of certainty of the date coded for the event |
| EVENT_TYPE | The type of event |
| SUB_EVENT_TYPE | The type of sub-event |
| ACTOR1 | The named actor involved in the event |
| ASSOC_ACTOR_1 | The named actor associated with or identifying ACTOR1 |
| INTER1 | A numeric code indicating the type of ACTOR1 |
| ACTOR2 | The named actor involved in the event |
| ASSOC_ACTOR_2 | The named actor associated with or identifying ACTOR2 |
| INTER2 | A numeric code indicating the type of ACTOR2 |
| INTERACTION | A numeric code indicating the interaction between types of ACTOR1 and ACTOR2 |
| REGION | The region of the world where the event took place |
| COUNTRY | The country in which the event took place |
| ADMIN1 | The largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place |
| ADMIN2 | The second largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place |
| ADMIN3 | The third largest sub-national administrative region in which the event took place |
| LOCATION | The location in which the event took place |
| LATITUDE | The latitude of the location |
| LONGITUDE | The longitude of the location |
| GEO_PRECISION | A numeric code indicating the level of certainty of the location |

| | |
|---|---|
| | coded for the event |
| SOURCE | The source of the event report |
| SOURCE SCALE | The scale (local, regional, national, international) of the source |
| NOTES | A short description of the event |
| FATALITIES | The number of reported fatalities which occurred during the event |

# Definitions of ACLED Event and Sub-Event Types

ACLED collects and codes reported information on political violence, demonstrations (rioting and protesting) and select non-violent, politically important events. It aims to capture the modes, frequency and intensity of political violence and opposition as it occurs.

Political violence is defined as the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation. ACLED records political violence through its constituent events, the intent of which is to produce a comprehensive overview of all forms of political disorder, expressed through violence and demonstrations, within and across states. A politically violent event is a single altercation where often force is used by one or more groups toward a political end, although some non-violent instances – including protests and strategic developments – are included in the dataset to capture the potential pre-cursors or critical junctures of a violent conflict.

The fundamental unit of observation in ACLED is the *event*. Events involve designated actors – e.g. a named rebel group, a militia or state forces.[1] They occur at a specific named location (identified by name and geographic coordinates) and on a specific day. Researchers work to ensure that the most specific location and time possible are recorded. ACLED currently codes for six types of events and twenty-five types of sub-events, both violent and non-violent, that may occur during a period of political violence and disorder. Table 2 displays ACLED's event and sub-event types.

[1] With the sole exception of 'unidentified armed groups' and generic categories including rioters, protesters, and civilians.

*Table 2: ACLED Event Types*

| General | Event Type | Sub-Event Type |
|---|---|---|
| **Violent events** | **Battles** | *Armed clash* |
| | | *Government regains territory* |
| | | *Non-state actor overtakes territory* |
| | **Explosions/Remote violence** | *Chemical weapon* |
| | | *Air/drone strike* |
| | | *Suicide bomb* |
| | | *Shelling/artillery/missile attack* |
| | | *Remote explosive/landmine/IED* |
| | | *Grenade* |
| | **Violence against civilians** | *Sexual violence* |
| | | *Attack* |
| | | *Abduction/forced disappearance* |
| **Demonstrations** | **Protests** | *Peaceful protest* |
| | | *Protest with intervention* |
| | | *Excessive force against protesters* |
| | **Riots** | *Violent demonstration* |
| | | *Mob violence* |
| **Non-violent actions** | **Strategic developments** | *Agreement* |
| | | *Arrests* |
| | | *Change to group/activity* |
| | | *Disrupted weapons use* |
| | | *Headquarters or base established* |
| | | *Looting/property destruction* |
| | | *Non-violent transfer of territory* |
| | | *Other* |

### *Violent Events*

#### Battles

ACLED defines a battle as "a violent interaction between two politically organized armed groups at a particular time and location." Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. *There is no fatality minimum necessary for inclusion.*

Although the term "battle" may be used here to describe various kinds of encounters between parties – e.g. "the ceasefire is broken" – battles must be violent events involving at least two armed and organized actors. One-sided interactions – e.g. reports of shots fired into the air without a target – are categorized as 'Strategic developments' (see

below). Violence against unarmed civilians is categorized as 'Violence against civilians',[2] although civilians can also be harmed as "collateral damage" in 'Battles' or 'Explosions/Remote violence' events. When harmed in the event of a battle or explosions, a separate civilian-specific event is not recorded, but the fatalities, if any, are aggregated in the "Fatalities" column.

The specific elements of that definition therefore are as follows:

(1) A violent interaction is the exchange of armed force, or the use of armed force at close distance, between armed groups capable of inflicting harm upon the opposing side.

(2) Organized armed groups are collective actors assumed to be operating cohesively around an agenda, identity, or political purpose, using weapons to inflict harm. These groups frequently have a designated name and stated agenda.

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Battles' event type and are designated according to the outcome of the battle event: 'Armed clash', 'Government regains territory', and 'Non-state actor overtakes territory'.

***Armed clash***

If armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control, the correct sub-event type is an 'Armed clash'.

***Non-state actor overtakes territory***

When a non-state actor wins control and/or subdues government forces, and/or has won territory in which they can now act with impunity and are regarded as having a monopoly of force within that territory, 'Non-state actor overtakes territory' is the correct sub-event type. Short-lived territorial exchanges that do not last for more than one day are coded as 'Armed clash'.

In cases where government and non-state forces fight many times in a location before a non-state group gains control, only the final territorial acquisition is coded as 'Non-state actor overtakes territory'. All other battles in that location are coded as 'Armed clash'.

[2] Contrary to previous versions of ACLED, violence targeting peaceful protesters is coded under the new 'Protests' event type, with 'Excessive force against protesters' as sub-event type.

This sub-event can also be used to note the transfer of control from one non-state group to another by violence.

***Government regains territory***

This sub-event type is used to describe cases where government forces or their affiliates fighting against competing state forces or against a non-state group regain control of a location. This code is only used for re-establishment of government control and not for dual non-state violence. Short-lived territorial exchanges that do not last for more than one day are coded as 'Armed clash'.

**Explosions/Remote violence**

ACLED defines 'Explosions/Remote violence' as "one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond". The tools used in instances of 'Explosions/Remote violence' are explosive devices, including, but not limited to, bombs, grenades, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artillery fire or shelling, missile attacks, heavy machine gun fire, air or drone strikes, or chemical weapons. Suicide attacks implicating the use of bombs also fall under this category. When any instance of 'Explosion/Remote violence' is reported in the context of an ongoing battle, they are merged and coded as a single battle event. 'Explosions/Remote violence' can be waged on both armed agents or on civilians. *When accounting for all attacks on civilians, explosions/remote violence with civilian targets should be included.*

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Explosions/Remote violence' event type: 'Chemical weapon', 'Air/drone strike', 'Suicide bomb', 'Shelling/artillery/missile attack', 'Remote explosive/landmine/IED', and 'Grenade'.

***Chemical weapon***

This sub-event type is coded whenever chemical weapons are used in warfare in the absence of any other engagement. ACLED considers chemical weapons all substances listed in the Schedule 1 of the Chemical Weapons Convention, including sarin gas, mustard gas, chlorine gas, and anthrax. Napalm, white phosphorous, as well as tear gas and other non-lethal crowd control substances, are not considered to be chemical weapons within this sub-event type.

***Air/drone strike***

This sub-event type is coded whenever air or drone strikes have occurred in the absence of any other engagement. Please note that any air-to-ground attacks fall under this sub-event type, including attacks by helicopters that do not involve any exchange of fire with forces on the ground.

***Suicide bomb***

This sub-event type is coded whenever a suicide bombing occurs in the absence of any other engagement (other engagement could include gun fire against other armed groups or civilians). It also includes suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attacks.

***Shelling/artillery/missile attack***

This sub-event type is coded whenever a long-range artillery or missile system is used in the absence of any other engagement. It also includes attacks described as shelling, the use of artillery either stand-alone or tank based, mortars, or guided missiles. Planes shot down by rockets or artillery fall under this sub-event type; unmanned drones shot down, however, given no human targets, are coded as an interception under 'Disrupted weapons use' (see below). Similarly, while planes shot down using rockets or artillery fall under this sub-event type, an interception of a strike itself (such as by the Iron Dome of Israel) are coded as 'Disrupted weapons use' as well given no human targeting. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) are coded under the 'Shelling/artillery/missile attack' sub-event type as opposed to 'Grenade' given their similarities to artillery.

***Remote explosive/landmine/IED***

This sub-event type is coded whenever remotely- or victim-activated devices are detonated in the absence of any other engagement. Examples include landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) whether alone or attached to a vehicle, or any other sort of remotely detonated or triggered explosive. Unexploded ordinances (UXO) also fall under this category.

Suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED) are coded as 'Suicide bomb' (see above), while the safe defusal of an explosive or its accidental detonation by the actor who planted it (with no other casualties reported) are coded under 'Disrupted weapons use' (see below).

***Grenade***

This sub-event type is used when a grenade or another explosive is thrown in the absence of any other engagement. Events involving "crude bombs" (such as Molotov cocktails, firecrackers, cherry bombs, petrol bombs, etc.) as well as 'stun grenades' are not coded in this category but are included under either 'Riots' or 'Strategic developments' depending on the context where they occurred.

**Violence against civilians**

ACLED defines 'Violence against civilians' as violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. By definition, civilians are unarmed and cannot engage in political violence. The perpetrators of such acts include state forces and their affiliates, rebels, militias, and external/other forces.

In cases where the identity and actions of the victims are in question (e.g. the target may be employed as a police officer), ACLED determines that if a person is harmed or killed while unarmed and unable to either act defensively or counter-attack, this is an act of 'Violence against civilians'. There is no minimum number of civilian fatalities needed to qualify as an ACLED event.

'Violence against civilians' includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g. beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g. kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors.

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Violence against civilians' event type: 'Sexual violence', 'Attack', and 'Abduction/forced disappearance'.

***Sexual violence***

This sub-event type is used when any individual (regardless of gender) is targeted with sexual violence. 'Sexual violence' is defined largely as any action that inflicts harm of a sexual nature. This means that it is not limited to solely penetrative rape, but would also include actions like public stripping, sexual torture of men, etc.

***Attack***

This sub-event type is used when civilians are targeted with any violence by an organised armed actor. Attacks of sexual nature are coded as 'Sexual violence'.

***Abduction/forced disappearance***

This sub-event type is used when an actor engages in the abduction or forced disappearance of civilians, without reports of further violence. If fatalities or serious injuries are reported as a consequence of the forced disappearance, the event is coded as 'Attack' instead.

Note that this sub-event type does not cover state-sanctioned arrests, unless they are reported to have been conducted extra-judicially. By contrast, non-state groups can never engage in arrests, and their activity engaging in "arresting" is typically coded using this sub-event type.[3]

## *Demonstration Events*

**Protests**

A protest is defined as a public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. Events include individuals and groups who peacefully demonstrate against a political entity, government institution, policy, group, tradition, businesses or other private institutions. Events that are not coded as protests are symbolic public acts such as displays of flags or public prayers (unless they are accompanied by a demonstration), protests in legislatures such as parliamentary walkouts or MPs staying silent, strikes (unless they are accompanied by a demonstration), and individual acts such as self-harm actions (e.g. individual immolations or hunger strikes).

Protesters are noted by generic terms (e.g. 'Protesters (Country)'); if representing a group, the name of that group is recorded in the respective associated actor column.

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Protests' event type: 'Peaceful protest', 'Protest with intervention', and 'Excessive force against protesters'.

[3] In rare cases where non-state groups are able to able to maintain some level of judicial/penal system, they would also be able to engage in 'Arrests', and these actions would not be coded as 'Abduction/forced disappearance' and would instead be coded under the 'Arrests' sub-event type.

***Peaceful protest***

This sub-event type is used when 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. Interaction terms here include: 60, 66, or 67.

***Protest with intervention***

This sub-event type should be used when individuals are engaged in a peaceful protest during which there is an attempt to disperse or suppress the protest without serious/lethal injuries being reported or the targeting of protesters with lethal weapons. Additionally, this sub-event type should cover any instance where armed groups or rioters interact with peaceful protesters without resulting in serious/lethal injuries. Interaction terms here include: 16, 26, 36, 46, 56, 68.

***Excessive force against protesters***

This sub-event type should be used when individuals are engaged in a peaceful protest and are targeted with violence by an actor leading to (or if it could lead to) serious/lethal injuries. Interaction terms here include: 16, 26, 36, 46, 56, 68.

**Riots**

'Riots' are violent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts, including but not limited to rock throwing, property destruction, etc. They may target other individuals, property, businesses, other rioting groups or armed actors. Rioters are noted by generic terms (e.g. 'Rioters (Country)'); if representing a group, the name of that group is recorded in the respective 'Associated actor' column. Rioters may begin as peaceful protesters, or may be intent on engaging in spontaneous and disorganized violence from the beginning of their actions. Contrary to armed groups, rioters do not use sophisticated weapons such as guns, knives or swords. "Crude bombs" (e.g. Molotov cocktails, petrol bombs, firecrackers) may be used in rioting behaviour.

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Riots' event type: 'Violent demonstration' and 'Mob violence'.

***Violent demonstration***

This sub-event type is used when a group of individuals engages in a demonstration involving violence. Examples of rioting behaviour include vandalism; road-blocking

using barricades, burning tires, or other material; other types of violent and/or destructive behaviour are also included here.

***Mob violence***

This sub-event type is used when rioters violently interact with other rioters, another armed group or civilians, outside of demonstrations and without the use of lethal weapons like guns, knives, swords, etc. A mob is defined as "a large crowd of people, especially one that is disorderly and intent on causing trouble or violence." Note that this type of violence can also include (unarmed or crudely armed) vigilante mobs clashing with other armed groups or attacking civilians. Vigilante groups that are more than crudely armed are not considered to be spontaneous mobs and rather are assumed to be organized and would hence not be included here.

## *Non-Violent Actions*

**Strategic developments**

This event type captures contextually important information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. The inclusion of such events is limited, as its purpose is to capture pivotal events within campaigns of political violence. They typically include a disparate range of events, such as recruitment drives, looting, incursions, as well as the location and date of peace talks and the arrests of high-ranking officials or large groups. While it is rare for fatalities to be reported as a result of such events, they can occur in certain cases – e.g. the suspicious death of a high-ranking official, accidental detonation of a bomb resulting in the bomber being killed, etc.

The following sub-event types are associated with the 'Strategic developments' event type: 'Agreement', 'Arrests', 'Change to group/activity', 'Disrupted weapons use', 'Headquarters or base established', 'Looting/property destruction', 'Non-violent transfer of territory', and 'Other'.

***Agreement***

This sub-event type is used to record any sort of agreement between different actors (such as governments and rebel groups). Examples include peace agreements/talks,

ceasefires, evacuation deals, prisoner exchanges, negotiated territorial transfers, prisoner releases, surrenders, repatriations, etc.

***Arrests***

This sub-event type is used whenever state forces or other actors exercising de facto control over a territory either detain a particularly significant individual or engage in mass arrests.

***Change to group/activity***

This sub-event type is used to code significant changes in the activity or structure of armed groups. It can cover anything from the creation of a new rebel group or a paramilitary wing of the security forces, "voluntary" recruitment drives, movement of forces or any other non-violent security measures enacted by armed actors. This sub-event type can also be used if an armed group is absorbed into a different (existing) armed group or to track large-scale defections.

***Disrupted weapons use***

This sub-event type is used to capture all instances in which an event of 'Explosions/Remote violence' is prevented from occurring, or whenever armed actors seize significant caches of weapons. It includes the safe defusal of an explosive, the accidental detonation of explosives by the alleged responsible of planting it, the interception of explosives in the air, as well as the seizure of weapons or weapon platforms such as jets, helicopters, tanks, etc. Note that in cases where a group other than the one who planted an explosive is attempting to render an explosive harmless and it goes off, this is coded under the event type 'Explosions/Remote violence', as the explosive has harmed someone other than the group that planted it.

***Headquarters or base established***

This sub-event type is used when a violent group establishes a permanent or semi-permanent base or headquarters. There are few, if any, cases where opposition groups other than rebels can also establish a headquarters or base (e.g. AMISOM forces in Somalia).

***Looting/property destruction***

This sub-event type is used when organised armed groups engage in looting or seizing goods or property other than weapons or weapon systems (in which case the sub-event type 'Disrupted weapons use' should be used). This can occur during raiding or after the capture of villages or other populated places by armed groups that occur without reported violence.

***Non-violent transfer of territory***

This sub-event type is used in situations in which rebels, governments, or affiliates of both acquire control of a location without engaging in a violent interaction with another group. Rebels establishing control of a location without any resistance is an example of this event.

***Other***

This sub-event type is used to cover any significant development that does not fall into any of the other 'Strategic developments' sub-event types. Examples include the occurrence of a coup, the displacement of civilian population as a result of fighting, or the discovery of mass graves.

## *Important Notes Regarding Event Type Codes*

One or more events can occur in the same location on the same day. If two events between the same actors in the same location are reported, they are typically noted as a single aggregate event. For example:

(1) a rebel group fights with government forces in a town and wins control. Rebel artillery strikes are reported throughout the day. In this case, only a single battle event between the rebels and the government forces is recorded;

(2) on the same day, demonstrators stage peaceful protests and also engage in clashes with the security forces. In this case, a single riot event is recorded.

ACLED researchers do not 'double count' events. For example, if civilians are killed in the context of a battle, then their reported fatalities will be added to the total number of fatalities reported for the event and this will be noted in the 'NOTES' section, but it will not constitute a separate event. In battle events, civilians are never coded as associate actors as both parties are assumed to engage in violence.

Further, if an attack – such as an air strike - is meant to target militants, but does also hurt civilians, civilians are coded as associate actors, and again the fatalities, if mentioned, are aggregated together. In cases where a bombing occurs with a vague and unspecified military target (e.g. a bombing occurs in a city that has some militants in it, rather than an area controlled and actively used by militants), but civilians are the main group affected, they will be coded in the 'ACTOR 2' column. Militants may appear in the 'ASSOC_ACTOR_1' and 'ASSOC_ACTOR_2' columns.

However, if another event type involving different actors occurs, it is coded separately. Hence, it is possible to have multiple events--involving distinct actors--occur in the same location on the same day. For example, if armed violence purposely targets civilians and is separately reported on the same day and location of a battle, two events are coded to accurately capture the battle and the distinct civilian attack.

In most cases, an event requires two actors, noted in columns 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2'. However, event types 'Explosions/Remote violence', 'Riots', 'Protests', and 'Strategic developments' can include one-sided events. If more than two actors are reported, only the most important engagement is coded, and the additional groups may be coded as associated actor depending on the context (for example, police forces intervening to disperse rioters). *The order of actors has no meaning in the ACLED system*, barring cases of 'Violence against civilians', in which the victim is always coded as Actor2.

***Coding detail***: The event and sub-event types as noted above will appear in 'EVENT_TYPE' and 'SUB_EVENT_TYPE' columns for each event.

## ACLED Actors

ACLED recognizes a range of actors including state forces, rebels, militias, identity groups, demonstrators, civilians, and external and other forces.

In ACLED, politically violent actors include government forces and its affiliates, rebel groups, militias, external or private forces (e.g. UN missions) and other political groups who interact over issues of political authority (e.g. territorial control, government control, access to resources, etc.). All organised actors have an official name[4] and a political purpose, and use violence for political means. For inclusion as agents of political violence, organizations must be cohesive and not assembled for single events, with the exception of riots and protests. Further, the events of organizations must be connected to each other as a means to achieve a larger political purpose. This necessary and sufficient definition of actors allows for the establishment of campaigns and trajectories of movements. Protesters, rioters and civilians are actors whose inclusion deviates from the organization and armed group rules. Rioters and protesters involve spontaneous, atomic acts of organization that may, or may not, continue beyond a discrete event. Civilians are those who do not actively choose to be involved in an event.

The name of each actor is noted in the 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2' columns of the dataset. The group *type* is recorded in the 'INTER1' and 'INTER2' columns, while their dual engagement is noted in the 'INTERACTION' column.

The 'ASSOC_ACTOR_1' and 'ASSOC_ACTOR_2' columns record the associated groups for specific events as well as the identity of specific actors. In the former case, an associated group may be allies in actions, like two armed organized groups that are engaging in attacks against a common enemy. In the latter case, the 'ASSOC_ACTOR_1' and 'ASSOC_ACTOR_2' columns may record additional information concerning the victims of an attack or the socio-political affiliation of demonstrators or ethno-religious identity of a civilian victim. An 'Explosions/Remote violence' event that is intended for an armed, organized group, but also affects civilians, will have both groups noted – the primary

[4] Barring the "unidentified" category.

actor will be the ostensibly intended target, while civilians (the collateral damage in this case) would be the associated actor.[5]

### *Actor Names, Types and Inter Codes*

ACLED records the recognized name of groups as reported, whenever possible. In exceptional circumstances described in detail below, the name of a group is generated to reflect their origins and composition.

Each named actor is also designated as a type of organization. There are thousands of individually named groups within the ACLED dataset, and the Inter code groups organizations by whether they have similar organizational structures, goals and practices. Group type designates all groups into one of eight ACLED categories and assigns a number in the 'INTER' column to that categorization.

These categories offer a way to distinguish between actors and determine how patterns of activity conform to goals and organizations. ACLED does not use a pattern of activity to designate what kind of agent a group is: *it specifically observes the goals and structure of an organization, where possible, its spatial dimension and its relationships to communities.*

As such, the Inter code of a group can change over time. For example, if a rebel group is successful in overthrowing a regime or seceding from a state, its armed agents may then become the armed wing of a political party within the new regime structure (this would be a change in Inter code from 2 to 3, e.g. the Imbonerakure militia in Burundi) or the government forces of the new state (this would be a change in Inter code from 2 to 1, the SPLA rebels in Sudan turned into South Sudan's state forces).

Certain types of violent agents may appear to fall outside of this categorization, but ACLED has designed these classifications to flexibly fit the universe of agents operating in conflict. For example, militant religious organizations can have various goals (e.g. Taliban), including overtaking the state, influencing political processes and supporting

[5] While civilians are coded as an associated actor when they are collateral damage in 'Explosions/Remote violence' attacks, they are not coded as such in 'Battles' events. This is because events under the former involve one-side not engaging in any violence within the course of the event; in 'Battles' events, both side, by definition, are engaging in violence, and it would hence be incorerct to denote that civlians are associated with either side here.

regional political elites, and engaging in communal contests over access to religious sites. In choosing to categorize actors as rebels, militias, communal organizations, protesters, etc., *ACLED does not allow for "insurgents" or "terrorists" as types of agents.* Many violent organizations may use insurgency tactics or commit acts against civilians with intended high fatality levels as part of their violent repertoire. *Instead, ACLED considers the goal and organization of each group to be the basis for their classification.*

***Inter Code 1: State Forces***

State forces are defined as collective actors that are recognised to perform government functions, including military and police, over a given territory. Government actors are named by ACLED as a series of separate regimes rather than a uniform body (e.g. Congo/Zaire (1965-1997), Democratic Republic of Congo (1997-2001), and Democratic Republic of Congo (2001-2019) 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 and police forces are a direct arm of the government, these actors are noted as 'Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx)' or 'Police Forces of State (20xx-20xx)'.[6] Mutinies of militaries are coded as 'Mutiny of Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx)'. Various units of these state forces are coded distinctly as well – such as 'Police Forces of India (2014-) Assam Rifles' or 'Police Forces of the Philippines (2016-) Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force' – given that such units can engage in distinct patterns of behaviour; pro-government militias with *indirect* links to the state are not included under 'state forces' here given their deliberate distance from formal ties to the state.

It is important to note that this classification of state forces does not imply legitimacy, but rather acknowledges the de facto exercise of state sovereignty over a territory. This is why, *in a limited number of cases*, ACLED records government actors in states with limited or no recognition as 'state forces'; these states are not recorded separately in the 'COUNTRY' column, but their government forces are coded as distinct state actors. For

[6] Branches of the military or police forces are coded as, for example, "Military Forces of State (20xx-20xx) Special Presidential Division".

example, the 'Military Forces of Somaliland (1991-)' are coded though their 'COUNTRY' of activity is noted as Somalia not Somaliland.

In cases where the authority of a government is severely challenged, or where two or more groups have a claim to be the government (with an associated military), a distinct choice is made about how to proceed with coding – often resulting in both forces being coded as 'state forces'. For example, there are competing state forces coded as active in Libya from 2014 onwards or in Yemen from 2015 onwards.[7]

***Inter Code 2: Rebel Groups***

Rebel groups are defined as political organizations whose goal is to counter an established national governing regime by violent acts. Rebel groups are named according to the title they publicly use to represent themselves. The designation as a rebel group means that the group has a stated political agenda for national power (either through regime replacement or separatism), are acknowledged beyond the ranks of immediate members, and use violence as their primary means to pursue political goals.

Rebel forces are known by a specific chosen name, the groups are open and transparent about their intentions and leadership; they typically operate within and across states, and conduct activity against the central governments and their associates. Rebel groups often have predecessors and successors due to diverging goals within their membership. If splinter groups or factions within a group emerge, these are recorded as distinct actors.

In cases where aggregate groups are contesting the government, we often use an overarching name rather than factions (e.g. Hutu Rebels active in Burundi; Southern Muslim Separatists active in Thailand; Opposition Rebels in Syria).

***Inter Code 3: Political Militias***

Political militias are a more diverse set of violent actors, who are often created for a specific purpose or during a specific time period (i.e. Janjaweed largely active in Sudan) and for the furtherance of a political purpose by violence. Political militias are recorded by their stated name. These organizations are defined by their political goals of

[7] Examples of split states include Libya from 2014 onwards and Yemen from 2015 onwards.

influencing and impacting governance, security and policy. However, these groups are not seeking the removal of a national power, but are typically supported, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements. Political militias operate in conjunction, or in alliance, with a recognized government, governor, military leader, rebel organization, political party, business elite, or opposition group. Whereas opposition parties will often have a militia arm, groups such as the Sudanese Janjaweed or Serbian Tigers are pro-government militias that work as supplements to government power yet maintain *indirect* links to such power.

These groups are not subsumed within the category of government or opposition, but are noted as an armed, distinct, yet associated, wing given their purposeful indirect ties to the state. These political militias may be associated with defined ethnic, regional or other identity communities, but they also operate outside of ethnic homelands and for goals other than the promotion of ethnic interests and as such are coded as 'political militias' as opposed to 'identity militias' (more on that below). The Mungiki of Kenya, War Veterans Group in Zimbabwe, and Mayi-Mayi of DR-Congo are examples of these groups.

In some cases, an "unidentified armed group" perpetrates political violence. These groups often operate like political militias as they can be used by elites under the guise of anonymity. The use of the UAG category is due to two reasons: the first is a lack of information about the group from reports received; however, the second reason may be more common: groups benefit from being unidentified to the larger public, as they can pursue violent actions without liability. Their activity is coded using the name 'Unidentified Armed Group (Country)'.[8]

***Inter Code 4: Identity Militias***

ACLED includes a broad category of "identity militias" that signifies armed and violent groups organized around a collective, common feature including community, ethnicity, region, religion or, in exceptional cases, livelihood. Therefore, for ACLED's purposes, identity militias include those reported as "tribal", "communal", "ethnic", "local", "clan",

[8] An "Unidentified Armed Group" is coded with Interaction 3, unless they are an "Unidentified Military" (a rare case that has an interaction of '1' of '8', depending on the context) or "Unidentified Ethnic/Communal/Clan/Tribal Militia" which is noted as a '4', as discussed below.

and "religious" and "caste" militias. Events involving "identity militias" are often referred to as "communal violence" as these violent groups often act locally, in the pursuance of local goals, resources, power, security, and retribution.

An armed group claiming to operate on behalf of a larger identity community may be associated with that community, but not represent it (i.e. Luo Ethnic Militia in Kenya or Fulani Ethnic Militia in Nigeria). Recruitment and participation are by association with the identity of the group. Identity militias may have a noted role in the community, such as the long-term policing units common among Somali clans. When an unidentified group that is armed perpetrates local political violence, their activity is coded using the name 'Unidentified Communal Militia (COUNTRY)'[9] in the 'Actor' columns, and a "4" in the interaction – rather than as an "Unidentified Armed Group' with "3" in the interaction columns given the localized nature of their activity.

***Inter Code 5: Rioters***

Rioters are individuals or 'mobs' who either engage in violence during demonstrations or in spontaneous acts of disorganised violence, and are noted by a general category of 'Rioters (Country)'. If a group is affiliated or leading an event (e.g. ZANU-PF political party), the associated group is named in the respective associated actor category. Rioters are by definition violent, yet are unarmed (or crudely armed at most) and not organized mobs, and may engage in a wide variety of violence, including property destruction, engaging with other armed groups (e.g. security forces, private security firms, etc.) or in violence against unarmed civilians.

***Inter Code 6: Protesters***

Protesters are peaceful, unarmed demonstrators[10], noted by a general category of 'Protesters (Country)'; if a group is affiliated or leading an event (e.g. MDC political party), the associated group is named in the respective associated actor category. Although protesters are nonviolent, they may be the targets of violence by other groups (e.g. security institutions, private security firms, or other armed actors).

[9] Or 'Unidentified Caste Militia', 'Unidentified Clan Militia', etc. depending on the country-context.
[10] Though non-violent, protesters may engage in disruptive behaviour like burning effigies or shoe-throwing.

***Inter Code 7: Civilians***

Civilians, in whatever number or association, are victims of violent acts within ACLED as they are, by definition, unarmed and, hence, vulnerable. They are noted as 'Civilians (Country X)'. Some normally armed actors may be coded as civilians if they are targeted with violence in situations where they are caught unarmed. Examples include off-duty state soldiers targeted in their home or members of armed groups subject to violence/execution while imprisoned.

***Inter Code 8: External/Other Forces***

Small categories of "other" actors include international organisations, state forces active outside of their main country of operation, private security firms and their armed employees, and hired mercenaries acting independently. They are noted by their name and actions. The military forces of states are coded as 'other' when active outside of their home state (e.g. the military of Kenya active in Somalia).

## *Interaction codes*

The joined interaction code is the combination of the two 'INTER' codes associated with the two main actors. Single actor type codes are recorded in 'INTER1' and 'INTER2' columns, and the compounded number is recorded in the 'INTERACTION' column. For example, if a country's military fights a political militia group, and the respective 'INTER1' and 'INTER2' codes are "1" and "3", respectively, the compounded Interaction is recorded as "13".

Interaction numbers are always the smallest possible number (for example, 37 instead of 73), regardless of the order of 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2'. Interaction codes are recorded for all events, including non-violent activity. For one-sided events, the empty second actor category is coded as "0". If a non-violent rebel event occurs where only 'INTER1' is noted with a "2", "20" is coded in the 'INTERACTION' column. Only the main actors recorded in the 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2' columns are the basis for the interaction codes.

The following interaction codes translate to:

10- SOLE MILITARY ACTION (e.g. base establishment by state forces; remote violence involving state military with no reported casualties; non-violent military operations)

11- MILITARY VERSUS MILITARY (e.g. military in-fighting; battles between a military and mutinous forces; arrests of military officials)

12- MILITARY VERSUS REBELS (e.g. civil war violence between state forces and a rebel actor)

13- MILITARY VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA (e.g. violence between state forces and unidentified armed groups; violence between police and political party militias)

14- MILITARY VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. military engagement with a communal militia)

15- MILITARY VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. suppression of a demonstration by police or military)

16- MILITARY VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. suppression of a demonstration by police or military)

17- MILITARY VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. state repression of civilians; arrests by police)

18- MILITARY VERSUS OTHER (e.g. inter-state conflict; state engagement with private security forces or a UN operation; strategic developments between a regime and the UN or another external actor)

20- SOLE REBEL ACTION (e.g. base establishment; remote violence involving rebel groups with no reported target; accidental detonation by a rebel group)

22- REBELS VERSUS REBELS (e.g. rebel in-fighting; violence between rebel groups and their splinter movements)

23- REBELS VERSUS POLITICAL MILIITA (e.g. civil war violence between rebels and a pro-government militia; violence between rebels and unidentified armed groups)

24- REBELS VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. violence between rebels and local security providers)

25- REBELS VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. spontaneous violence against a rebel group; a violent demonstration engaging a rebel group)

26- REBELS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. violence against protesters by rebels)

27- REBELS VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. rebel targeting of civilians [a strategy commonly used in civil war])

28- REBELS VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. civil war violence between rebels and an allied state military; rebel violence against a UN operation)

30- SOLE POLITICAL MILITIA ACTION (e.g. remote violence by an unidentified armed group with no reported target; accidental detonation by a political militia; strategic arson as intimidation by a political party)

33- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS POLITICAL MILITIA (e.g. inter-elite violence)

34- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. violence between communal militia and an unidentified armed group; violence between political militia and local security providers)

35- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. violent demonstration against a political party; spontaneous violence against a political party)

36- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging a political party)

37- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. out-sourced state repression carried out by pro-government militias; civilian targeting by political militias or unidentified armed groups)

38- POLITICAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. violence between private security forces and unidentified armed groups; violence between pro-government militia and external state military forces)

40- SOLE COMMUNAL MILITIA ACTION (e.g. destruction of property by a communal militia; establishment of a local security militia)

44- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS COMMUNAL MILITIA (e.g. intercommunal violence)

45- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. violent demonstration against an identity militia; spontaneous violence against an identity militia)

46- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging an identity militia)

47- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. civilian targeting, especially in the context of intercommunal violence)

48- COMMUNAL MILITIA VERSUS OTHER (e.g. external state military engaging in violence against a communal militia)

50- SOLE RIOTER ACTION (e.g. 1-sided violent demonstration; spontaneous arson)

55- RIOTERS VERSUS RIOTERS (e.g. 2-sided violent demonstration in which both sides engage in violence)

56- RIOTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. 2-sided demonstration in which only 1 side engages in violence)

57- RIOTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. violent demonstration in which civilians are injured/killed; spontaneous violence in which civilians are targeted by a mob)

58- RIOTERS VERSUS OTHERS (e.g. mob violence against regional or international operation)

60- SOLE PROTESTER ACTION (e.g. 1-sided peaceful protest)

66- PROTESTERS VERSUS PROTESTERS (e.g. 2-sided peaceful protest)

67- PROTESTERS VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. peaceful protesters engaging civilians)

68- PROTESTERS VERSUS OTHER (e.g. peaceful demonstration engaging private security forces)

78- OTHER ACTOR VERSUS CIVILIANS (e.g. regional or international operation targeting civilians; private security forces targeting civilians)

80- SOLE OTHER ACTION (e.g. strategic developments involving international or regional operations; remote violence by external military forces with no reported target; non-violent external military operations)

***Further notes on interactions***

a) Civilians cannot attack other civilians or engage in violence
b) An ethnic identity 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.
c) For ACLED's purposes, identity militias include those reported as "tribal", "communal", "ethnic", "local", "clan", and "religious" and "caste" militias.

***Coding detail:*** In the dataset, a group's name will appear in the Actor 1 or Actor 2 column. Associated actors in the event to Actor 1 will appear in 'ASSOC_ACTOR_1' column, and associated actors for Actor 2 will appear in 'ASSOC_ACTOR_2' column. Each Actor 1 and Actor 2 category has a corresponding 'INTER1' and INTER2' category, respectively. If an event has two actors, both Inter 1 and Inter 2 are recorded in reference to both actors; if an event has only one actor, Inter1 is recorded along with a 0 (in reference to there being no Actor 2). The interaction codes refer to the main actors, and not associated actors.

## Event Geography

There are up to six different types of spatial information recorded for each ACLED event:

1. the continental sub-region in which the event occurred;
2. the country in which the event occurred and its associated ISO code;
3. the name of the *first*, *second* and *third* level administrative zones that the specific location is found in according to GIS-based assessments and updated administrative codes;
4. the name of the specific location of an event;
5. the geographic coordinates of that specific location; and
6. a spatial precision code.

The most specific location for an event is sought for each ACLED code, using multiple sources to triangulate better location information.

### *Spatial precision codes*

If the report notes a particular town, and coordinates are available for that town, the highest precision level "1" is recorded. If the source material notes that activity took place in a small part of a region, and notes a general area, a town with georeferenced coordinates to represent that area is chosen and the geo-precision code will note "2" for "part of region". If activity occurs near a town or a city, this same precision code is employed. If a larger region is mentioned, the closest natural location noted in reporting (like "border area", "forest" or "sea", among others) is chosen to represent the region – or a provincial capital is used if no other information at all is available – and is noted with precision level "3". No ACLED event is associated with the "country" as the smallest location unit available.

***Coding detail:*** The columns that provide spatial information include 'REGION', 'COUNTRY', 'ADMIN1' (administrative unit that corresponds to provincial level, or similar); 'ADMIN 2' (administrative unit that corresponds to county level, or similar); 'ADMIN3' (administrative unit that corresponds to district level, or similar); 'LOCATION' (the village or town name); 'LATITUDE' (in decimal degrees); 'LONGITUDE' (in decimal degrees); and 'GEO_PRECISION' (coded as either 1, 2, or 3).

When events occur in neighbourhoods of large cities and distinct neighbourhood/district coordinates are available, these are used to identify the sub-urban area. This location is coded as: "City Name [hyphen] district name" (e.g. 'Mosul-Old City') in the 'LOCATION' column. If information about the specific neighbourhood/district is not known, the location is coded at the city level (e.g. 'Mosul'). In both cases, geo-precision 1 is used. The hyphenate feature allows for users to aggregate events by city if needed.

## Event Time

Three forms of temporal information are found in each ACLED code:

1. the date of each event;
2. the year; and
3. the temporal precision.

Dates are a necessary component of each ACLED event. ACLED events are atomic as events are coded by day; if a military campaign in an area starts on March 1, 1999 and lasts until March 5, 1999 with violent activity reported on each day, this is coded as five different events in ACLED, with a different date for each entry. This episode would not be entered as a single campaign of violence. This allows ACLED to record the exact number of active days. Events which source material note occurred in the space of three months – like long-running protests – are only coded for the days in which reported activity took place (not as 90+ days). This avoids over-counting event occurrence.

### *Time precision codes*

If sources include an actual date of an event, a time precision code of "1" is entered. If sources note that an event happened during a specific week or in the weekend, "2" is noted in the time precision field and the middle of that week (or of the weekend) is used as the reference date. If sources note only that an event took place within a particular month, without reference to the particular date, the month mid-point is chosen unless the beginning or end of the month is noted (in which case, the first and last date are used, respectively) and "3" is noted as the time precision level. ACLED does not include events with less temporal information.

***Coding detail:*** Dates are recorded as Day, Month, Year. Time precision is recorded as 1, 2 or 3.

## Notes and Reported Fatalities

### *Notes*

The 'NOTES' column records any additional important details surrounding the event. Notes are kept short to only report significant details about the specific event. In rare cases, additional relevant information is added to provide context to the event.

### *Reported fatalities*

*Events coded by ACLED do not have to meet a minimum fatality level for inclusion*. ACLED only codes estimated fatalities when reported by source materials. It cannot verify the numbers reported from sources and does not use fatalities as the basis for event inclusion. Fatality data are typically the most biased, and least accurate, component of any conflict data. They are particularly prone to manipulation by armed groups, and occasionally the media, which may overstate or underreport fatalities for political purposes. As such, all figures recorded by ACLED should be treated as '*reported* fatalities'.

The fatality number is found in the 'FATALITIES' column. If source reports differ or a vague estimate is provided, the lowest number of fatalities is reported unless a more reliable or corroborated estimate has become available. If reports mention "several", "many", "few" or plural fatalities, yet the exact number is unknown, "10" is recorded as the total.[11] If a report mentions "dozens", this is recorded as "12" fatalities. If a report mentions "hundreds", this is recorded as "100" fatalities. If a note mentions "massacres", a default number of 100 fatalities is recorded. If there is no reference made to fatalities in the report, or if it is unclear whether fatalities occurred at all (for example, when "casualties" are mentioned, which, by definition, means 'injuries and/or fatalities'), "0" fatalities are recorded.

When summarized fatalities are reported, but events occur across several days or in multiple locations simultaneously (e.g. "12 fatalities result from fighting over a span of 3 days"), the total number of fatalities is divided and that fraction is recorded for each day of the event (4 fatalities per battle day, in the example above). If an odd number

[11] Or 3 if there is evidence that the number is lower than 10 – such as the bombing of a motorcycle, which could not have housed 10 individuals. Ten is chosen as this was the approximate average fatality rate across fatal events for an earlier subset of ACLED data.

(including 1), the proportion of fatalities is divided by assigning the first day the additional fatality and distributed as evenly as possible. Such disaggregation of fatalities is recorded in the 'NOTES' column.

> ***Coding detail:*** ACLED does not use a fatality threshold for its inclusion of events. The number used is conservative, in that it is the most reliable, smallest number reported

## Information Sources

ACLED tracks reported political violence from four main types of sources:

1. local, regional, national and continental media reviewed on a daily basis;
2. reports from NGOs or international organisations used to supplement media reporting;
3. selected social media accounts, including Twitter and Telegram; and
4. information and data provided through partnerships with local conflict observatories in hard-to-access cases.[12]

ACLED researchers use thousands of distinct sources in more than twenty different languages. The result is the most comprehensive and wide-reaching source material presently used in disaggregated conflict event coding. Every ACLED event is composed from at least one source. Their names or acronym are noted in the source column. With the exception of local sources who aim to remain anonymous, the publication details are sufficient to enable a data user to find the original source name with ease. If more than two sources are used, the most thorough report is cited, or all are noted in alphabetical order in the 'SOURCE' column. Researchers may often refer to more than one report to confirm the details of an event but will note the source with the most thorough and unbiased information in the 'SOURCE' column. If that event has additional information taken from more than one source, both report sources are noted in the 'SOURCE' column.

The 'SOURCE SCALE' column describes whether the sources used for coding an event operate at the local, subnational, national, regional, international, or at another level. One scale over another does not guarantee more direct information, accuracy, or legitimacy, but ACLED supports gathering and using local sources whenever possible. ACLED has arrangements and partnerships with many local organizations for data exchange in pursuance of this goal.

[12] For safety reasons, some partners that wish to remain anonymous are noted as 'Local Sources' in the 'SOURCE' column.

## Relationships to Other Datasets

The conflicts coded in ACLED are generally compatible with other conflict data collections. ACLED information may be joined with many, if not all, other conflict datasets by country, year, actor or specific locality. *ACLED data are event data, and as such, care should be given in joining its information with other datasets using different units of analysis (e.g. campaigns of violence instead of violent events by day).*

As ACLED codes a wide range of constituent events for periods and areas affected by political violence and disorder, the information collected is far more numerous than datasets that focus on specific forms of violence (e.g. civil war, terrorism as defined by targeting of civilians by non-state actors alone, or those with fatality thresholds for inclusion) or only campaigns of violence instead of events.

Generally, ACLED disaggregates civil wars into their constituent events. However, the threshold for inclusion as an ACLED event is lower than most "civil war" datasets. As a result, ACLED records some events that are not recorded in other datasets.

Versions 1-7 of the ACLED dataset covered African states. Version 8 expanded to also include South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Codebooks for earlier versions of the ACLED dataset are available upon request. Following Version 8, ACLED moved towards a system of updating events with corrections and appending supplemental data as necessary in real-time and hence no longer releases formal 'Versions'.

# Terms of use and attribution policy

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3. **To reference the ACLED codebook, please cite:** ACLED, (2019). "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook."

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5. **If referring to figures or statistics published in ACLED analysis, infographics, working papers, etc.,** please cite the individual analysis piece or paper, including the author(s), as follows: *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.

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