

Creating a Conflict Manuscript

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Collecting Conflict Information

An ACLED conflict manuscript should be used by the coder to inform their understanding of the conflict, and can therefore include considerable information and contextual elements, such as maps, graphs, charts, etc.

Introduction to the Conflict Manuscript

ACLED coding begins with choosing a country where episodes of conflict have taken place. It may be necessary to determine a time frame for the conflict to direct the coder. The conflict timeframes and reviews provided by Uppsala/PRIO dates are a guide to which periods of a country's history should be surveyed. After constructing a general summary of conflicts that have occurred and the group's involved, in-depth information for each conflict is sought. Such detailed information is available from a number of different sources. After recording specific information by group and date for the entire conflict, the coder can begin to add battle events into the online coding portal.

Developing a Conflict Document

Conflict Summaries: To begin, it may be helpful to develop a short history of each conflict episode. The Peace and Conflict database at the University of Uppsala provides excellent summaries of conflict within states. The address to access these summaries is <http://www.pcr.uu.se/database> . This database also includes excellent information on post-1989 warring parties. A close reading of this information should inform the coder of the important major parties in the conflict.

Conflict Timelines: Many conflict documents will only record conflicts and not other political occurrences within a country. For that reason, the conflict manuscript should note each month and year the conflict was active. For example, a conflict manuscript for Burundi is broken down by Month-Year Paragraphs for 1965 violence; 1965 attempted coup; 1966 successful coup; 1972 genocide; 1976 coup; 1987 coup; 1993-2003 massacres, continued violence and attempted coup, 2004 tenuous peace. Years when there was no recorded civil violence are not necessary to include in the conflict manuscript. Month-Year designations are useful as collected information on all rebel groups active can be organized by date. If preferred, exact dates can be given and clustered within years.

Conflict Manuscript Sources: At this point, the coder may collect information sources for all episodes of conflict within a state. These sources can come from a number of different places, but some of the best choices include:

Newspapers (online newspaper databases such as Keesings, Factiva etc)
News Periodicals from country or regions (examples include African Confidential, African Research Bulletin, Africa Today, African Contemporary Record)
Country histories available online or books
Books on conflict, country or regions
Updates from NGO/Relief organizations in country (examples include IRIN, FEWS, UN information etc).
For African conflict, the following website may be of help:
http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/AS.html
<http://www.oneworld.net/article/country/180/>
<http://www.grandslacs.net/home.html>
<http://www.iiss.org/home.php>

It may be helpful to develop smaller word documents for each of these sources, and then combine the information into a month-year timeline, with different sources colour-coded or otherwise differentiated. The source of the information will be recorded along with the details in the coding-portal.

Conflict Information: The coder must then peruse the information and record all events that involve rebel actions. The ACLED database mainly records rebel-government battles, where they occur, when they occur, and which group controlled contested territory. However, it also records rebel activity such as the establishment of bases and headquarters, rebel activity that is not directly related to battles, rebel alliances, rebel home areas and a number of government actions. For this reason, the conflict document should include all information the coder finds relevant or interesting to the larger conflict.

Directly codeable battle entries will include a date, or approximate date (see below), a location (village, town, city, area, region), and a clear indication of which group(s) are involved. Useful ancillary information includes casualties, length of conflict (if over one battle) and battle alliances. Although to code in the database, single sentences such as the following are preferable, there will be many variations in source quality.

Swift advances by RCD group. On August 6th, they captured Uvira and captured Kisangani on August 23rd. Beni and Bunia fell on August 9 and August 12 respectively while Kalemie, in the SE, was captured on August 26th. Capture of Inga in mid august gave rebels control over electricity (which they shut off to Kinshasa). Rebels also secured Atlantic port of Matadi at the same time, hence controlling maritime access.

It also is useful to record information not directly codeable, but contributes to the context of the conflict such as:

More on rebels: Mainly Tutsis both from army and from area. Instrumental in bringing Kabila to power, due to army mutinies and a reversal of policy by Kabila (who fired Tutsis to replace them with people from his province Katanga), the Tutsi faction rebelled. Group was joined by 1) previous supporters of Mobutu 2) those against Kabila (including ministers from his government). Leader is Ngoma (non Tutsi). Another leader emerged when rebels announced the formation of RCD—Congolesse Democratic Rally—led by Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba, who was chosen for his links to the SW of the country.

Other examples include army mutinies, peace agreements, alliance agreements, and foreign support.

The information collected should also include ancillary details on rebel and government political actors, factions, alliances etc. This information will be entered into the coding –portal as the coder develops Group or Actor descriptions.

Often the collected information from sources will give neither a particular day nor a particular village. In those circumstances, the coder may decide to guess the best probable day that the event occurred. Some general guidelines are that if no approximate time is mentioned, such as early January or late September, then the effort may be lost in favour of looking into other sources for extra information. However, if an approximate time-- such as a particular month-- is given, then the coder should choose a mid-month date-- such as the 15th-- to record the information. If early or late month is indicated, the 1st and the 30th are acceptable stand-in dates. The ACLED coding portal will ask for a level of specificity with regard to dates. If the exact date is given, the coder can choose this option. If a date was estimated, coders can acknowledge this during coding.

With regard to geographic locations, if village level information is not given, the coder must, if possible, first try to glean the information from another source. If this is not possible, the coder should attempt to develop an educated guess of where the conflict is taking place. There are many ways to inform the best educated guess. The first involves having small scale maps of the state readily available so as to know the general locations of where conflict is taken place. Online maps are often quite good and readily available. If more precise local level geographic information is needed, go to <http://www.fallingrain.com/world/> , locate the country, locate the general region noted in the information, choose the main city in that region, and code the coordinates for that location. For example, a report from Uganda noted that a battle occurred in the Kisoro region. The above mentioned website notes seven settlements in the Kisoro region, one of which is named Kisoro. It is advisable to code the coordinates of this town, Kisoro, and note the estimation in the precision coding.

If the record notes that the battle happened south of Kisoro, the interactive gazetteer can be used as it notes a number of close towns in each cardinal direction. For the Kisoro example, both Nyamigogo (3.4 nm) and Kabutindi (2.7 nm) are close villages, with exact distances given.

The Kisoro example highlights a different issue. At times, towns in reports are misspelled, or known by a different name. Kisoro is also known as Kisolo; they both

have the same coordinates, elevation and population. The gazetteer website will note all names, and such information should be recorded in the conflict manuscript or in the notes section of the coding portal, or both places.

For each village, the coder must also note the larger region it is located in. This will provide extra information when reports claim that entire regions are rebel run, or government run etc.

Another geography issue arises when sources note a forest, national park, mountain range, river, train tracks, road etc. Again, if it is not possible to get more precise information from another source, the coder can make an educated guess if it is supported by previous knowledge of the particular group's activities. If not, then this event should not be coded.

Difficult Cases

If you have questions about particular instances or events, email acled@prio.no. Some frequently asked questions include:

What should be done if a lot of territory is understood to be in the hands of the rebels from the onset of the conflict e.g. - separatist claim or inaccessible to government?

You should assign the territory that is rebel hands to the rebels on the first day, making a note in the note area that rebels held territory right away. That way, it will make sense when battles occur to regain the territory for the military. You must try to accurately reflect the situation on the ground as closely as possible.

What is a rebel group is really a proxy for the government and is fighting with another rebel group within the country?

.If a battle occurs where government and rebel (proxy government troops are involved) against another rebel group (s), then both government and proxy group must be selected as side A, and the opposing groups as side B. If the government does not actively participate in the fighting, then only the proxy group is designated side A. Hence, Side A will change by event.

How can we disentangle the actions of many rebel groups acting together with similar aims?

You can only code as well as your information allows. If it is impossible to detect which group is the perpetrator of events and actions, code events as best you can. Then plot the events of each group to determine if there is a specific spatial

configuration that is evident for each actor. Perhaps outliers in each (which fall in the area of the other) can then be recorded as having been perpetrated by the other actor. Make sure to note this discrepancy both within the book and within the notes of the data. Try and see if any other information is available about the rebel groups that may clarify the situation.