

Definitions, sources and methods for Uppsala Conflict Data Program Battle-Death estimates

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)

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This document clarifies the definitions and methods used in the compilation of data on armed conflicts, and provide explanations concerning the treatment of the sources consulted. The document focuses specifically on the coding of estimates for battle-related deaths, published since 2005 in the *Human Security Report* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Funding for the UCDP Battle-Death Dataset was provided by the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia.

The UCDP Armed Conflict Battle-Deaths Dataset

The definition of conflict inclusion in this dataset follows the UCDP definition of armed conflict. Variables 1-8, and 12-17 in this dataset are extracted directly from the UCDP-PRIO Dataset: more information about the definitions and coding rules is available in the UCDP-PRIO Dataset Codebook (version 3)¹
http://www.prio.no/cwp/armedconflict/current/Codebook_v3-2005.pdf

The major difference between the Battle-Deaths Dataset and the UCDP-PRIO Conflict Dataset is the level of analysis. The UCDP-PRIO list focuses on the *conflict level*, meaning that several actors can share an incompatibility and thus each conflict can consist of several dyads. The Battle-Deaths Dataset is focusing on the *dyadic level*, as the battle deaths for each unique pairing of opposing actors is reported as far as possible. As a consequence, some UCDP-PRIO variables have been removed as they focus on conflict-level. Table 1 below summarizes the variables of the UCDP Armed Conflict Battle-Deaths Dataset. The definition of armed conflict follows, as well as the coding notes for variables 9-11, and 18.

¹ For more information about the UCDP-PRIO Dataset, see Gleditsch et al. (2002)

Table 1

No	Variable	Label	Description
1	ID	Conflict identifier	The unique identifier of all conflicts
2	SubID	Sub-conflict identifier	Identifying sub-conflicts within a defined conflict
3	Location	Country name(s)	The name(s) of the country/countries whose government(s) have a primary claim to the object in dispute.
4	Side_A	Country name(s)	Identifying the country/countries of side A in a conflict. Always the government side in civil wars
5	Side_B	Country name(s) or Opposition actors	Identifying the name and/or country/countries of side B in a conflict. In a civil conflict, this includes military opposition organizations.
6	Incompatibility	Conflict incompatibility	A general coding of the conflict issue
7	Territory	Name of territory	The name of the territory over which the conflict is fought, provided that the incompatibility is territorial
8	Year	Year of observation	
9	Bdead Best	Estimate of deaths	UCDP Best estimate of battle-related deaths in fighting between the parties
10	Bdead Low	Estimate of deaths	UCDP Low estimate of battle-related deaths in fighting between the parties
11	Bdead High	Estimate of deaths	UCDP High estimate of battle-related deaths in fighting between the parties
12	Intensity	Intensity level	Conflict intensity in conflict based on the yearly observation and conflict history (Minor armed conflict, intermediate armed conflict, war)
13	Type	Conflict type	Four different types of conflict (interstate, extrastate, internal, internationalized internal)
14	COW_A ²	COW numbers of Side A	COW numbers of all countries in Side A, separated by semicolons
15	COW_B	COW numbers of Side B	COW numbers of all countries in Side B, separated by semicolons
16	COW_location	COW numbers of Location	COW numbers of all location countries, separated by semicolons
17	Region	Region of Location	See Section 3.19 for the definition of the different regions.
18	Version	Version number	The current version of the UCDP Battle-related Death Dataset.

² COW: Correlates of War project.

Definition of Armed Conflict

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) defines an armed conflict as a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, has resulted in at least 25 battle-related deaths each year.

The separate elements of this definition are defined as follows.

- (a) *Incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory*. The incompatibility must concern government and/or territory and it refers to the stated generally incompatible positions of the parties. An *incompatibility that concerns government* refers to the type of political system, the replacement of the central government or the change of the composition of the current government. An *incompatibility that concerns territory* refers to the status of a territory, for example, the change of the state in control of a certain territory (interstate conflict), secession or autonomy (intrastate conflict).
- (b) *Use of armed force*. This refers to the use of arms by the military forces of the parties in order to promote the parties' general position in the conflict, resulting in at least 25 deaths in a year. Arms are defined as any material means of combat, for example, manufactured weapons as well as sticks, stones, fire, water, and so on.
- (c) *Party*. This refers to the government of a state or an opposition organization or alliance of opposition organizations. *The government of a state* is that party which is generally regarded as being in central control, even by those organizations seeking to take over power. If this criterion is not applicable, the government is the party controlling the capital of the state. In most cases where there is a government, the two criteria coincide. An *opposition organization* is any non-governmental group which has announced a name for the group and its political goals and has used armed force to achieve them.
- (d) *State*. A state is an internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specified territory or an internationally non-recognized government controlling a specific territory which is not disputed by an internationally recognized sovereign government, which previously controlled the same territory.

Definition of Battle-Related Deaths

Battle-related deaths refer to those deaths caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility.⁵ This includes traditional battlefield fighting, guerrilla activities (e.g. hit-and-run attacks/ambushes) and all kinds of bombardments of military bases, cities and villages etc. Urban warfare (bombs, explosions, and assassinations) does not resemble what happens on a battlefield, but such deaths are considered to be battle-related. The target for the attacks is either the military forces or

⁵ Battle-related deaths, which concern direct deaths, are not the same as *war-related deaths*, which includes both direct as well as indirect deaths due to disease and starvation, criminality, or attacks deliberately directed against civilians only (one-sided violence).

representatives for the parties, though there is often substantial collateral damage in the form of civilians being killed in the crossfire, indiscriminate bombings, etc. All fatalities – military as well as civilian – incurred in such situations are counted as battle-related deaths.

Sources

The data presented by UCDP is based on information taken from a selection of publicly available sources, printed as well as electronic. The sources include news agencies, journals, research reports, and documents of international and multinational organizations and NGOs. This includes documents of the warring parties (governments and opposition organizations) when such sources are available, since they serve as a crucial complement when identifying statements about the parties' incompatible positions. Global, regional and country-specific sources are used for all countries.

Both the independence and the transparency of the sources are deemed crucial. Each source is judged according to the context in which it is published, that is, according to the potential interests of the source in misrepresenting political or violent events. Since most sources are secondary sources, UCDP attempts to trace reports back to the primary source in order to decide whether they are reliable. In cases of biased sources or in situations where there is unreliable information, the events are normally only included in the high estimate.

Little information on the exact number of deaths in conflict is usually available, and media coverage varies considerably from country to country. It is important to emphasize that the fatality estimates given by UCDP is based on publicly accessible sources. Due to the lack of available information, it is possible that there are more fatalities than the UCDP high estimate, but it is very unlikely that there is fewer than the UCDP best estimate. One important caveat is that the precision of the numbers belies the uncertainty of the estimates; while UCDP estimates are based on aggregated totals of all incidents recorded in our sources, we acknowledge that numerous events is not reported in the media. Figures are revised retroactively each year as new information becomes available.

In addition to deciding the level of reliability of available sources, the project strives to identify the existence of censorship. Thus, other sources than regular news sources must be used to establish what is occurring in a country. Documents and reports issued by international and multinational organizations and NGOs are consulted for this purpose.

Methods

The data on armed conflicts are compiled by calendar year. They include data on conflict location, type of incompatibility, year the incompatibility was formed, year the warring party began its use of armed force, warring parties, secondary support, negotiations, and battle-related deaths during the year.

The data on battle-related deaths constitute the largest part of the data collection. The Factiva news database (previously known as the Reuters Business Briefing)⁸ is

⁸ Factiva is a news and information service database which contains over 8,000 sources.

indispensable for the collection of general news reports. To extract the relevant articles from Factiva, the project uses an automated events data search using VRA® technology.⁹ This software makes it possible to retrieve all reports which contain information about individuals killed or injured. Each news report is then read by UCDP staff, and every event that contains information about individuals killed is coded manually into an events dataset. For every event, the following information is recorded: the date of the event, the reporting source, the primary source, the actors involved, where the event took place, what occurred, and an estimate of fatalities. Ideally, these individual figures are corroborated by two or more independent sources. These fatalities are later aggregated into a low, high, and best estimate for every calendar year.

The aggregated figures are also compared to total figures that appear in official documents, special reports and the news media. This serves as a contribution to clarify the context in which events occur, thus facilitating proper interpretation of the reporting in published sources.

Best, Low and High Estimate of Battle-related Deaths

The general rule for UCDP's estimation of battle-related deaths is moderation. All battle-related deaths have to be verified in one way or another, and all estimates reported are based on UCDP expertise of each particular conflict. As a general rule, all figures are disaggregated as far as possible and any figures that are not trustworthy are disregarded in the coding process. Due to the great uncertainty of reports from conflict areas, the project provides three estimates concerning battle-related deaths for each year.

- (a) *Best estimate.* The UCDP Best estimate consist of the aggregated most reliable numbers for all battle-related incidents during a year. If different reports provide different estimates, an examination is made as to what source is most reliable. If no such distinction can be made, UCDP as a rule include the lower figure given.
- (b) *Low estimate.* The UCDP Low estimate consists of the aggregated low estimates for all battle-related incidents during a year. If different reports provide different estimates and a higher estimate is considered more reliable, the low estimate is also reported if deemed reasonable.
- (c) *High estimate.* The UCDP High estimate consists of the aggregated high estimates for all battle-related incidents during a year. If different reports provide different estimates and a lower estimate is considered more or equally reliable, the high estimate is also reported if deemed reasonable. If there are incidents when there is some uncertainty about what parties have been involved, these are also included in the high estimate.

⁹ The VRA software system automatically generates specific events data and displays them in summary form. For more information on automated events data and coding, see Bond et al. (2003).

References:

Bond, Doug; Joe Bond; Churl Oh; J. Craig Jenkins & Charles Lewis Taylor, 2003. "Integrated Data for Events Analysis (IDEA): An Event Typology for Automated Events Data Development", *Journal of Peace Research* 40 (6): 733-745.

Gleditsch, Nils Petter; Peter Wallensteen; Mikael Eriksson; Margareta Sollenberg & Håvard Strand, 2002. "Armed Conflict 1946-2002, A New Dataset", *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (5): 615-637.