

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 14 – Geography and Environmental Studies		
Title of case study: Changing global political, humanitarian, media and public understanding and actions on political violence		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Names: Clionadh Raleigh	Role(s): Professor of Political Geography and Conflict	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2013 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Prof Raleigh’s conflict research aggregates, analyses and reports on incidents of violence and conflict worldwide through the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project. Raleigh created the project over ten years ago, and her research continues to shape how conflict is defined, counted and analysed by policy makers, NGOs and the press. The research improves the accuracy and quality of journalism and helps inform strategy and policy to better allocate resources within conflict-affected states. ACLED made the global narrative about conflict and violence increasingly evidence-based and alerted large audiences to previously under- or mis-represented realities. It has opened new avenues to expose and respond to the growing conflict in the Sahel and the real cost of the war in Yemen.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Funded by a European Research Council starter grant [G1], and subsequently a consolidation grant [G2], Raleigh designed and implemented a state-of-the-art conflict measurement and collection system via the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project. ACLED is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project that collects the dates, actors, types of violence, locations, and the number of fatalities of all reported political violence and protest events across the globe. Political violence and protests include events that occur within civil wars and periods of instability, public protest and regime breakdown. Through summarising, examining and testing conflict scenarios, ACLED’s data and analysis are made publicly available for use by a wide range of governments, development practitioners, media, academics and civil society.</p> <p>ACLED is based on Raleigh’s work on conflict patterns and definitions. Its underlying research began with a critical reflection of how academic conflict work had prioritized specific, narrowly defined, political violence and poorly supported claims of failed and fragile statehood as being central to explaining violence levels. In response, Raleigh studied detailed descriptions of events and daily occurrences in states to determine their different forms of political violence; she then defined and classified violence by agents, event type, geography and interactions. This provided a new perspective on political violence that is both more nuanced and evidence-based than previous assumed causes of violence within the academic literature. ACLED emerged as a result of harnessing the best information and evidence on conflict patterns and is continually updated to reflect Raleigh’s research into the changing character of violence across the world.</p> <p>Raleigh’s subsequent research develops new best practices to collect, analyse and explain local violence characteristics [R1, R2], the range of active conflict agents [R4, R5, R6] and risks [R5]; and the concurrent conflicts that often occur in countries [R1, R2, R4].</p> <p>ACLED is a ‘living data project’ that integrates the best research to alter how, where and what conflict to capture. Raleigh continues to draw on the methodologies and findings of her academic work to direct, shape and lead ACLED’s approaches and outputs. This includes: improving geographical information; integrating political representation and levels into analysis of active conflict groups; and introducing ‘interaction’ codes to track how conflict agents engage with each other in specific events. ACLED’s introduction of the latter feature, for instance, was underpinned by Raleigh’s research findings on increasing militia and paramilitary activity [R4, R5, R6]. Raleigh’s instrumental involvement in ACLED as executive director has, in turn, made her research accessible to an extensive array of political, humanitarian and media actors.</p>		

ACLED is now a registered non-profit organisation (NGO), with Raleigh as its Director, where she determines the research and direction, content and processes of ACLED. Her research defines all of ACLED's data outputs (e.g. georeferencing formulas; actors and their designations; risk appraisal based on central government elite stability; and – ACLED's new area of focus – populism, data literacy, militias and concurring violence). Impacts based on use of ACLED data described in Section 4 below therefore constitute impacts arising directly from data collected and analysed via Raleigh's research.

3. References to the research

- R1** Raleigh, C. 2014. Political Hierarchies and Landscapes of Conflict across Africa. *Political Geography*. 42:92-103 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.07.002>
- R2** Raleigh C, De Bruijne K. 2015. Where Rebels Dare to Tread: A Study of Conflict Geography and Co-option of Local Power in Sierra Leone. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 61(6):1230-1260 <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002715603767>
- R3** Raleigh, C. 2016. Pragmatic and Promiscuous: Explaining the Rise of Competitive Political Militias Across Africa. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 60:2: 283-310 <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002714540472>
- R4** Raleigh, C. & Dowd, C. 2018. Political Environments, Elite Co-Option, and Conflict, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*. 108(6): 1668-1684 <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1459459>
- R5** Raleigh, C. & Kishi, R. 2018. Hired Guns: Using Pro-Government Militias for Political Competition, *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 32(3): 582-603 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1388793>
- R6** Raleigh, C. & Kishi, R. ACLED after ten years: reassessing conflict data measures. Under review at the *Journal of Peace Research*. Available as working paper (2020): <https://acleddata.com/2020/10/28/working-paper-updates-to-acled/>

Funding: G1. Funded by a €1.4m ERC grant (2012-2017), the “Geography of Political Violence Across Africa” (GEOPV) project sought to examine what causes the various types of political violence found within and across African states, collect novel data and develop insights into the sheer quantity and variance of human suffering due to conflict. **G2.** A second ERC grant (€1.99m, 2017-2022, £1,583,769 to Sussex) – “Violence, Elites and Resilience in States Under Stress” (VERSUS) funded a multi-and-mixed methods study of conflict and governance, developing multiple real-time measures of power distribution across select African and Middle Eastern states for widespread research and policy use.

4. Details of the impact

Through its unique integration of cutting-edge conflict research – and its adaptive flexibility to accommodate emerging data, trends and areas of conflict – the ACLED data project facilitates diverse and meaningful use of Raleigh's research by policy makers, practitioners and the media. ACLED is the most comprehensive, authoritative and independent database of conflict and violence, and thus the standard data resource for conflict reporting, mitigation, resolution and prevention. Evidence of its impact and use is widespread across governments, international institutions, media and practitioners; for that reason, selective cases are noted here. By providing global, reliable and detailed information in the form that ACLED does, it achieves three key features of impact: it informs and supports decision making in crisis environments where data and analysis on events, agents and trends is rare. Informed decision-making leads to better policies and programs. Through the sustained use of ACLED in early warning tools and models, it shapes the strategies and practices of international organizations, and, in turn, the impact of conflict on populations. Through its public and consistent reporting and analysis, it has advocated for attention to conflicts that are characterized by under-reporting or misinformation and supports political figures and policy makers to account for government action to assist civilians in war affected states. Without access to ACLED, many governments, policy makers, practitioners and media would not have reputable references, details and analytical support on the dimensions, trends, impact, modality and agents of conflicts across the world. These impacts are expanded on below.

Directly informing and supporting the decision-making of national, international and transnational governmental organisations

Since the start of 2018 alone, ACLED data has been used to inform and support the decision-making capacity of governments and governmental bodies, including: **(in the UK)** Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department for International Development (DFID) and Ministry of Defence (MOD), UK Home Office and UK Border Agency [S1a]; **(in the US)** Africa Command (AFRICOM), State Department, Department of Defence (DoD) [S1b]; **(in other countries)** the German Parliament and Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Australian Department of Defence, the Canadian Department of National Defence [S1c]; **(internationally and transnationally)** the United Nations [S1d], the African Union [S2], the European Union [S1e] and beyond. One representative example is the use of ACLED data by the Dutch, German and US governments who have each built predictive models of likely instability and violence based on ACLED data. These models have helped both to shape their foreign aid strategies and to direct their overseas aid budgets and are part of internal 'early warning' dashboards used by these governments. For example, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has asserted the importance of ACLED in its work: *"The Netherlands is committed to improving international peace and justice and emphasizes the role of a solid information position in this pursuit. We are a strong proponent of leveraging the full potential of innovative technologies and the growing availability of data to supplement and strengthen existing information and intelligence efforts and support policy decisions. We believe that ACLED is a prime example of a project that aligns with these goals... and use ACLED data to inform our work on Early Warning and conflict analysis in particular, and our broader international security and stability efforts in general in the work of the Security Policy Department, other departments within the Ministry, and several of our embassies worldwide"* [S3].

A key example of the significance of ACLED's use is by the United States Africa Command; AFRICOM is one of 11 U.S. Department of Defence combatant commands providing command and control of military forces in peace and war and is responsible to the Secretary of Defence for military relations with African nations, the African Union, and African regional security organization. As outlined by [text removed for publication], ACLED's database is *"an invaluable resource used by Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA) on a daily basis."* [text removed for publication] continues: *"The information available through the program [ACLED] enables sound decision-making based on a comprehensive, unbiased dataset. By identifying the nature of the conflict in a region, it allows the command to utilize unique capabilities in conjunction with the host nation to limit the spread and or negative impact of the identified conflict. By referencing data that is utilized by a spectrum of entities, both government and non-government alike, ACLED enables cooperation and coordination anchored on a unified comprehension of the environment. SOCAFRICA uses ACLED data for a variety of projects, including command briefings, assessments, and as a supplement to classified intelligence information. It gives us a more robust understanding of violent activity and allows us to more broadly examine the issues facing our region. Additionally, we consume a variety of other products produced by the ACLED team and other U.S. Government and non-governmental organizations which use the same dataset. Dr Raleigh's willingness and ability to share how that data is derived is unmatched"* [S4].

Shaping the strategies and programmes of national and international non-governmental humanitarian organisations (INGOs)

Since the beginning of 2018, ACLED data has been used by INGOs involved in crisis response and mitigation of conflicts and violence, including: the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Austrian Red Cross, Darfur Women Action, Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, the World Bank, the Myanmar Development Institute, the Center for Social Change, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, ACAPS and Action on Armed Violence [S1c]. ACLED is used by asylum caseworkers, Country of Origin Information (COI) researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities across the EU to gauge the potential for, and needs of, displaced and conflict-affected communities. For example, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) uses ACLED data extensively in its reports in several countries, for which Nigeria and Afghanistan are elaborated here [S5]. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Emergency Response Section uses ACLED data and analysis extensively to evaluate risk and support early warning systems tracking emerging crises and conflicts, and its application in these systems is summarized in cases below [S6a-f]. The UN High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR) likewise uses ACLED data to map the impacts of conflict on displacement and refugee flows [S6g, S6h and S6i]. According to a UNHCR Innovation Service representative, ACLED's "invaluable datasets ... significantly contributed to the development [of] UNHCR's first artificial intelligence-led predictive analytics project, Project Jetson ... [and the] Somalia data is one of the key predictors to predict forced displacement in Somalia" [S6i]. The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) representative uses ACLED data to monitor violence patterns as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. For example, ACLED data have served as a "benchmark" for peacekeeping operations "to assess the extent to which variations existed across [human rights components] in their monitoring coverage of [human rights violations]" [S6k, which includes other testimonials from UN Staff].

ACLED also regularly provides data and analysis to UN expert panels, including the Panel of Experts on Somalia, the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea [S6d], the Panel of Experts on Mali [S6e], and the Panel of Experts on Yemen [S6f]. In these cases, ACLED's evidence corroborates claims of attacks and bombings by sanctioned entities. Analysts at the UN Operation and Crisis Centre (UNOCC) "rely heavily on ACLED," [S6k] and the data are used as a key supplement to the SAGE system (internal UN monitoring system), covering a broader range of countries and time periods. In coordination with the UN, the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON) uses ACLED data to evaluate the impact of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), as well as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) on pre- and post-conflict programming and missions over time [S7a-d].

Equipping the global media to stimulate political attention and action

The use of ACLED data by the media serves to ensure its insights reach both specialist audiences (including politicians and humanitarian organisations) and the broader public. ACLED data allows journalists to challenge information on conflicts provided by warring parties and to raise awareness of new directions or dangerous developments in conflicts. ACLED data is used extensively by high-profile journalists and publications, including the BBC and *The Economist*, who appreciate its high quality and consistency and have provided strong testimonials regarding how important it is to their work on conflicts [S8]. Since well-informed journalists are better equipped to report on the true extent of conflicts and violence, ACLED's use in print and digital journalism enables better-informed consumers of media (including both policy makers/advisors and the public) to make more balanced judgments about the true nature of the conflicts.

Examples of coverage since 2013 – showing the rise of Al Shabab in Africa, analysing new tactics by Islamic State in Syria, and showing how ethnic cleansing has emerged in the Sahel – include a series of articles in *The Economist* in May 2019 and November 2020 [S9a-d]. In the first five years of ACLED's existence, the database was referenced 1,659 times by global media, an average of just over 330 times per year; between 1 January 2018 and 13 May 2019, ACLED was referenced 8,042 times, an average of almost 490 times per month [S9e]. Between October 2019 and October 2020, ACLED has had over 10,000 references in media [S9e]. Major media outlets regularly use ACLED data, including: **(in the UK)** the BBC, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *Financial Times*; **(in the US)** *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg*, *Newsweek*, CNN, ABC, PBS, NBC, Fox News, *National Geographic*, *Forbes*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*; **(and internationally)** Reuters, Al Jazeera, *The Globe and Mail*, France 24, *Le Monde*, Deutsche Welle, *The Times of India*, The Middle East Monitor, *The Jerusalem Post* [S9e]. Further, ACLED reports have directly influenced the discussion around conflicts in the media, as demonstrated by ACLED reports on the instability in the US during 2020. Both its report on peaceful protests by the social justice movement 'Black Lives Matter', and its work on militias in the US, generated significant and extensive attention in all major and minor newspapers and TV news stations in the US and around the world [S9g-f].

A key example of how ACLED data's use in the media led to a direct political response can be seen in its exposure of the real cost of war in Yemen. The number of civilian casualties reported in the war in Yemen by international bodies and the media stood at 10,000 since 2016, using data supplied initially by the UN. ACLED released a report showing that figure is likely to be over 100,000. This new information was picked up by journalists at *The Washington Post*, the

Associated Press, *The New York Times*, Al Jazeera and *The Independent*, with most outlets running a series of stories highlighting issues such as the role of land mines and arms sales to Saudi Arabia [S9i]. Further, these figures were picked up in political debate with at least four mentions of the data in the US Congress [S10]. US Senator Bernie Sanders used ACLED data in an opinion piece for *The New York Times* 'We Must Stop Helping Saudi Arabia in Yemen' [S9k]. Jeremy Hunt, UK Foreign Secretary deployed ACLED data to call for all parties to support the UN envoy's talks [S11]. Subsequently, the UNDP released a report on the full impact of the war in Yemen designed to do three things: 1. Advocate to the parties in the conflict on the consequences of the conflict on medium- and long-term development; 2. Inform the international community, about the level of devastation caused by the conflict in Yemen, and 3. To ask those who have influence over either party to the conflict to urgently push towards a sustainable peace deal and a stop to further escalation. The report made extensive use of ACLED data, including an acknowledgement that "*we determined that ACLED's data are more representative of the totality of human life lost in Yemen during the conflict, from 2016 forward*" [S12, p.50]. The report used this data to call for a more concerted approach to a ceasefire.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 a-e Aggregated reports of ACLED data use by UK, US and EU governments, INGOs etc.

S2 Testimonial [text removed for publication]

S3 Testimonial from Thierry van der Horst, Security Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands

S4 Testimonial [text removed for publication]

S5 EASO reports on security <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information/country-reports> For example, in this report p.16 reviews the use of ACLED which is then used throughout the document. ACLED has also trained EASO staff in data use. https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2020_09_EASO_COI_Report_Afghanistan_Security_situation.pdf; <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-special-report-asylum-covid-june-2020.pdf> (pp.12, 13, 15, 32 and footnotes 41 and 99).

S6 a-k List of URLs to United Nations use of ACLED data, including: reports by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OCHCR) and Security Council; testimonials; citations.

S7 a-d Effective Peace Operations Network (EPON) reports Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union missions to Somalia and South Sudan and UN missions to DRC/MONUC-MONUSCO and Mali in 2019

S8 a-d Email testimonials [text removed for publication]

S9 a-k Media Report providing URLs to ACLED use in the press

S10 Extract from Report by US Members of Congress citing ACLED:

<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43960>.

S11 High-level tweets citing ACLED including [Jeremy Hunt](#) (then UK Foreign Secretary) and [Anthony Guterres](#) (Secretary General to the UN). See:

https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ACLED-Impact-Summary_2020.pdf

S12 April 2019 Report by UNPD: 'Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen' citing ACLED data (pp.12, 21, 48, 49, 50, 56, 61)

<https://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/library/assessing-the-impact-of-war-on-development-in-yemen.html>