



## **ASSESSING CHALLENGES: VIOLENCE MONITORING IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT**

**Date:** November 20, 2025

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 20, 2025, Tom Hart, Head of Global Data Collection at Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), presented *Assessing Challenges: Violence Monitoring in a Contemporary Context* at the 2025 West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with audience members and CASIS Vancouver executives. The session examined how ACLED is adapting its conflict data collection model to balance timeliness and credibility amid changing media ecosystems, funding constraints, and growing competition from AI-driven datasets.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

The discussion focused on the production and use of event-based conflict data in an increasingly complex information environment. Mr. Hart outlined how ACLED's researcher-coded methodology enables detailed geographic and temporal analysis of a wide range of events, including political violence and demonstrations. He also presented current challenges to ACLED's model, namely cost, timeliness, source reliability, and ease of use. This was balanced against measures being integrated into the model to act as counterweights, such as data being produced more efficiently and an increase in unique local information. The presentation emphasized organizational and methodological adaptations intended to preserve data credibility while improving timeliness, accessibility, and responsiveness to user needs.

## BACKGROUND

ACLED was presented as a global provider of disaggregated data on political violence and demonstrations, recording individual incidents as discrete events. Each event includes information on actors, location, timing, and event type, enabling fine-grained geographic analysis and cross-regional comparison. The dataset is updated on a weekly basis, with more frequent updates in certain regions, supporting near-real-time monitoring and trend identification.

Event-based data was described as offering several advantages over aggregated reporting. By capturing incidents at the event level, ACLED enables analytical granularity, compatibility with other datasets, and the ability to support visualization, early-warning analysis, and accountability efforts. Detailed event notes also allow for retrospective re-analysis as methodologies evolve, or new questions emerge.

ACLED's sourcing model draws on over 3000 sources in upwards of 80 languages, including international and local media, United Nations reporting, partner organizations, and local journalists. Events are coded by regionally specialized researchers using standardized methodologies and undergo multiple layers of review prior to publication. Ongoing revisions are incorporated to maintain the integrity of long-term trend analysis as additional information becomes available.

Mr. Hart identified several challenges that have intensified in recent years. Expert-led data production carries inherent cost and time constraints, particularly as key details – such as fatality figures – often evolve after initial reporting. The reliability and availability of traditional and local sources have declined in some regions, exacerbated by funding cuts, crackdowns on independent reporting, and shifts toward social media-driven information outputs. At the same time, the technical nature of event-based data can present usability barriers for non-specialist audiences. These pressures are compounded by increased competition from AI-driven datasets that leverage speed, sometimes at the expense of transparency or methodological rigor.

In response, ACLED has implemented a range of adaptations aimed at improving efficiency without compromising credibility. These include targeted source-scraping to reduce researcher workload, automated tagging to support more

specialized analysis, and expanded data partnerships. Mr. Hart noted that ACLED has invested in building local information networks in regions with limited or deteriorating source coverage, which in turn strengthens access to on-the-ground reporting. Quality assurance processes have been adjusted to prioritize timely publication for real-time monitoring. In tandem, greater emphasis has been placed on simplifying methodological explanations, expanding visualization tools, and providing user guidance to support effective data interpretation.

### **Question and Answer**

*What are the primary challenges in maintaining a reliable incident monitoring system in the current information environment, particularly amid media monopolization, disinformation, and the spread of extremist violence and hate speech? What are the biggest challenges in maintaining a reliable incident monitoring system?*

Disinformation and increased political control over media environments are central challenges. Building direct relationships with local journalists, NGOs, and conflict monitoring groups has become increasingly important for mitigating bias and identifying incidents that may be omitted or distorted in traditional media reporting. Although this approach is resource-intensive, it enhances coverage in highly constrained information environments.

### **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

- Event-based conflict data provides high analytical granularity that supports geographic, strategic, and early-warning analysis while enabling integration with other datasets.
- ACLED's expert-led data production model faces increasing pressure from cost, timeliness demands, declining source accessibility, and funding constraints in a changing information environment.
- Strategic adaptations, including selective AI integration, targeted scraping, automated tagging, revised review processes, and expanded local networks, are enabling ACLED to improve efficiency and accessibility while preserving data quality and credibility.

### FURTHER READING

De Bruijne, Kars, Tom Hart, 2020. Gang Violence and Political Violence: concepts, benchmarks and Coding Rules Methodology Note, ACLED.

Hart, T., & Beahm, E. (2018, April 20). *Comparative analysis of riots and protests in Jammu & Kashmir and Azad Jammu & Kashmir*. ACLED. <https://acleddata.com/archived/comparative-analysis-riots-and-protests-jammu-kashmir-and-azad-jammu-kashmir>



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