

Appendix 2B. Definitions, sources and methods for the conflict data

UPPSALA CONFLICT DATA PROGRAM

This appendix clarifies the definitions and methods used in the compilation of data on major armed conflicts, and explains the treatment of the sources consulted. The armed conflict records presented in appendix 2A are compiled by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.¹

I. Definitions

The UCDP defines a major armed conflict as a contested incompatibility concerning 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 1000 battle-related deaths in a single calendar year.² The separate elements are defined as follows:

1. *Incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory.* This refers to the stated generally incompatible positions of the parties to the conflict. An *incompatibility that concerns government* refers to incompatible positions regarding the state's type of political system or the composition of the government. It may also involve an aim to replace the current government. An *incompatibility that concerns territory* refers to incompatible positions regarding the status of a territory and may involve demands for secession or autonomy (intra-state conflict) or aims to change the state in control of a certain territory (interstate conflict).

2. *Use of armed force.* This refers to the use of armed force by the military forces of the parties to the conflict in order to promote the parties' general position in the conflict. Arms are defined as any material means of combat, including anything from manufactured weapons to sticks, stones, fire, water, and so on.

3. *Party.* This refers to the government of a state or an opposition organization or alliance of opposition organizations. The *government of a state* is the party which is generally regarded as being in central control, even by those organizations seeking to seize power. If this criterion is not applicable, the party controlling the capital of the state is regarded as the government. In most cases these two criteria coincide. An *opposition organization* is any non-governmental group which has announced a name for the group as well as its political goals and which has used armed force to achieve them. It should be noted that opposition organizations operating from bases in neighbouring states are listed as parties to the conflict in the location (country) where the

¹ See the UCDP Internet site at URL <<http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp>>.

² This definition of major armed conflicts differs slightly from that used by the UCDP in *SIPRI Yearbooks 1988–1999* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1988–99). The requirement that a conflict must cause at least 1000 battle-related deaths in a single year, rather than over the entire course of the conflict, ensures that only conflicts which reach a high level of intensity, as measured by battle-related deaths, are included. Tables 2A.1 and 2A.2 have been retroactively revised accordingly.

government is challenged. Apart from these primary parties to the conflict, one other type of actor may be included in the table: a state or a multinational organization that supports one of the primary parties with regular troops. In order to be listed in the table, this secondary party must share the position of one of the warring parties. In contrast, a traditional peacekeeping operation is not considered to be a party to the conflict but is rather seen as an impartial part of a consensual peace process.

4. *State*. A state is an internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specific territory or an internationally non-recognized government controlling a specific territory whose sovereignty is not disputed by an internationally recognized sovereign state which previously controlled the territory in question.

5. *Battle-related deaths*. This refers to the deaths caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility. Once a conflict has reached the threshold of 1000 battle-related deaths in a year, it continues to appear in the annual table of major armed conflicts until the contested incompatibility has been resolved or until there is no recorded use of armed force resulting in at least one battle-related death between the same parties and concerning the same incompatibility during a year. The same conflict may re-appear in subsequent years if there is renewed use of armed force between the same warring parties, resulting in at least one battle-related death and concerning the same incompatibility. The focus is thus not on political violence per se but on incompatibilities that are contested by the use of armed force. Thus, the UCDP registers one major type of political violence—battle-related deaths—which serves as a measure of the magnitude of a conflict. Other types of political violence are excluded: for example, the unilateral use of armed force (e.g., massacres); unorganized or spontaneous public violence (e.g., communal violence); and violence that is not directed at the state (e.g., rebel groups fighting each other) These categories of political violence are thus expressions of phenomena that are distinct from armed conflict as defined here.

II. Sources

The data presented in appendix 2A are based on information taken from a wide selection of publicly available sources, printed as well as electronic. The sources include news agencies, newspapers, academic journals, research reports, and documents from international and multinational organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In order to collect information on the aims and goals of the parties to the conflict, documents of the warring parties (governments and opposition organizations) and, for example, the Internet sites of rebel groups are often consulted.

Independent news sources, carefully selected over a number of years, constitute the basis of the data collection. The Factiva news database (previously known as the Reuters Business Briefing) is indispensable for the collection of general news reports. It contains 8000 sources in 22 languages from 118 countries and thus provides sources from all three crucial levels of the news media: international (e.g., Reuters and Agence France-Presse), regional and local. However, it is worth noting that the availability of the regional and national news sources varies. This means that for some countries several sources are consulted, whereas for other countries and regions only a few high-quality region- or country-specific sources are used. Since 2003, more efficient automated software has been used when extracting sources, serving *inter alia* to raise the comparability of the material.

The UCDP regularly scrutinizes and revises the selection and combination of sources in order to maintain a high level of reliability and comparability between regions and countries. One important priority is to arrive at a balanced combination of sources of different origin with a view to avoiding bias.

The reliability of the sources is judged by using the expertise within the UCDP together with advice from a global network of experts (academics and policy makers). Both the independence of the source and the transparency of its origins are crucial. The latter is important because most sources are secondary, which means that the primary source also needs to be analysed in order to establish the reliability of a report. Each source is judged in relation to the context in which it is published. The potential interest of either the primary or secondary source to misrepresent an event is taken into account, as is the general climate and extent of media censorship. Reports from NGOs and international organizations are particularly useful in this effort, to complement media reporting and facilitate cross-checking.

The criterion that a source should be independent does not, of course, apply to those sources that are consulted precisely because they *are* biased, such as government documents or rebel groups' Internet sites. The UCDP is aware of the high level of scrutiny required and makes great effort to ensure the authenticity of the material used.

III. Methods

The data on major armed conflicts are compiled by calendar year. They include data on conflict location, type of incompatibility, onset of the armed conflict, warring parties, total number of battle-related deaths, number of battle-related deaths in a given year and change in battle-related deaths from the previous year.³

The data on battle-related deaths is given the most attention in the coding process. Information on, for example, the date, news source, primary source, location and death toll is recorded for every event. Ideally, these individual events and figures are corroborated by two or more independent sources. The figures are then aggregated for the entire year of each conflict. The aggregated figures are compared to total figures given in official documents, in special reports or in the news media. Regional experts, such as researchers, diplomats and journalists, are often consulted during the data collection process. Their contribution is mainly clarification of the contexts in which the events occur, thus facilitating proper interpretation of the reporting in published sources.

Because very little precise information is publicly available on death figures in armed conflicts, the numbers presented by the UCDP are best viewed as estimates. Rather than always providing exact numbers, ranges are sometimes given. The UCDP is generally conservative when estimating the number of battle-related deaths. Experience shows that, as more in-depth information on an armed conflict becomes available, the conservative, event-based estimates are more often correct than the less conservative estimates that are widely cited in the news media. If no figures are available or if the numbers given are unreliable, the UCDP does not provide a figure. Figures are revised retroactively each year as new information becomes available.

³ See also the notes for table 2A.3 in appendix 2A.

Finally, a comment is warranted on a major data revision initiative: from the autumn of 2002 to the spring of 2004 the UCDP established an Internet-based database on armed conflicts covering the period 1989–2003.⁴ In addition to data on conflict activity, the database contains information on a number of other variables, such as negotiations, peace agreements and third-party involvement in conflicts. This major review of the data collection resulted in revisions of some UCDP data, and the tables in appendix 2A have been retrospectively revised accordingly.

⁴ The database is publicly available at URL <<http://www.pcr.uu.se/database>>.

