Codebook for Armed Group Dataset (AGD)

Group-Level Data
Version 1.3: 13 January 2023[1]

Iris Malone
George Washington University

Overview:

The dataset records information about the characteristics of approximately 1,431 armed groups that expressed politicized opposition against the state between 1970 and 2012. Information is compiled for use in both qualitative and quantitative settings.

The dataset primarily draws on the population of armed groups introduced by the Terrorist Organization (TORG) Crosswalk Project, hosted by the Project for Violent Conflict at the University of Albany (Asal et al 2015).

An armed group is defined as an organized and independent group of non-state actors that justify their use of violence as being in the service of political control.

The unit of analysis is the dyad between the armed group and the state government that it opposes. Transnational armed groups that oppose multiple state governments, e.g. Al Shabaab, will appear in multiple dyads.

This dataset records organizational information related to when an armed group first emerges and does not record information about attributes that change over time (e.g. size). As such, the dataset is not recommended for answering time-varying questions.

The current version of this dataset (1.3) contains information about 1,510 armed groups in 15 countries across the United States, Central America, South America, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Asia, and the Oceania/Pacific regions.

The unit of analysis is the group-country dyad.

Description of Variables:

scode

Three letter ISO 3 character code uniquely identifying the name of each country in the dataset.

ccode

Three digit number uniquely identifying each country in the dataset based on Gleditsch and Ward (2002) country code.

region

String variable describing the geographic region of the target country based on Gleditsch and Ward (2002) country codes. Please note this often, but does not always, describe the location where the armed group is geographically active.

gname

String variable identifying the primary name of each armed group in the dataset. For aliases, see either the list of aliases in the AGD narratives or the list of all group names in the TORG crosswalk v. 2 dataset.

torg

String variable uniquely each identifying each armed group in the dataset. This variable is taken from the TORG crosswalk v. 2 dataset (Asal et al. 2015).

torgid

Numeric variable uniquely identifying each independent armed group in the dataset. This variable is taken from the TORG crosswalk v. 2 dataset (Asal et al. 2015).

dyadid

Numeric variable uniquely identifying an armed group-government dyad. The list of dyad ids is based on the compatibility requirement that the armed group express politicized opposition against the target government in question. The group is considered to be politically opposed if either it explicitly states so or it targets a military, government, or political target. If the group targets private actors within the state (e.g. private contractors, businessmen, corporations), it is not coded as an instance of political opposition unless there is also a political statement or claim of responsibility targeting the state government.

ucdp

Numeric variable for overlapping actor ID for version 17.1 of Uppsala Conflict Data Program datasets and later. If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is set to zero.

Some UCDP codes refer to generic actors such as 'Kashmir insurgents' or 'Pattani insurgents' due to the highly fragmented nature of these conflict environments. In these cases, the following decision rules were used to map UCDP codes onto specific actors:

Examples:
1. Patani insurgents
   (1) gname_match = 0 for Patani insurgents in the Fortna GTD-UCDP alias data and
   (2) have first violent attack on or before 2003 (earliest start_date2)
2. Sikh Insurgents
   (1) gname_match = 0 for Sikh insurgents in the Fortna GTD-UCDP alias data and
   (2) have first violent attack on or before 1983 (earliest start_date2)
3. Kashmir insurgents
   (1) gname_match = 0 for Kashmir insurgents in the Fortna GTD-UCDP alias data and
   (2) have first violent attack on or before 1990 (earliest start_date2)

olducdp

Numeric variable for overlapping actor ID in historical versions of Uppsala Conflict Data Program datasets. This actor ID is for UCDP datasets prior to version 17.1. If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is set to zero.

tops

Numeric variable for overlapping actor ID in the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) Terrorist Organization Profiles (TOPs). This variable is taken from Asal et al (2015). If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is set to zero.

margrp

String variable uniquely identifying the name of the minority group from the Minorities at Risk project. This variable is taken from Asal et al (2015). If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is blank.

marobgrpnum

Numeric variable for overlapping group number in the Minorities at Risk dataset Organization Behavior dataset. This variable is taken from Asal et al (2015). If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is set to zero.

maroborgid

Numeric variable for overlapping organization number in the Minorities at Risk Organization Behavior dataset. This variable is taken from Asal et al (2015). If there is no overlapping actor ID, the entry is set to zero.

Organizational History

yrform

Numeric variable recording the year in which the group first organized even if it is not explicitly violent. It is NA if the date of formation could not be found.

For example, if the group is a political party that later turns violent, then this would be the year the political party is formed and the next variable would measure when the group transitions to using violence. The earliest known group date is then captured by the next variable: yr.first.attack.

If the group later renames itself, then the date of formation is still considered the date the group initially organized. For example, AQI initially starts at TWTJ in 1999, but does not undergo any serious reorganization when it renames itself to AQI in 2004. Similarly, RPF is originally known as RANU when it forms in 1979, but renames itself RPF in 1987. If the group undergoes a substantial reorganization, then it may be considered a new organization and the date of formation would change.

In some cases, there is uncertainty surrounding the precise date in which an armed group form. For example, best sources suggest that Takfir wal-Hijra formed in Egypt around the late 1960s, but some sources say it could have also been sometime during the 1970s. Under these cases, the coding date is rounded based on the following decision rules:

- If the best evidence is "early 19X0s" then the year is set at 19X2 and dateapprox is coded as 1.
- If the best evidence is "mid 19X0s" then the year is set as 19X5 and dateapprox is coded as 1.
- If the best evidence is "late 19X0s" then the year is set as 19X8 and dateapprox is coded as 1.

yrfirstattack

Numeric variable recording the year in which the group first conducts a violent attack. It is NA if the date of first violent attack could not be found.

This is the first date of the group's first violent incident in any country that is undertaken in political opposition to the target state. Militias or groups that may have previously used violence in support of the government only have their first date started when they began to oppose the government (e.g. Marhan Clan in Somalia or David Yau Yau Murle Tribe militia in South Sudan). In some rare cases, there are disputed reports where a group may have initiated violence before formally establishing itself (e.g. International Revolution Action Group (GARI)).

In some cases, there is uncertainty surrounding the precise date in which an armed group first uses violence. Under these cases, the coding date is rounded based on the following decision rules:

- If the best evidence is "early 19X0s" then the year is set at 19X2 and dateapprox is coded as 1.
- If the best evidence is "mid 19X0s" then the year is set as 19X5 and dateapprox is coded as 1.
- If the best evidence is "late 19X0s" then the year is set as 19X8 and dateapprox is coded as 1.

If the date of the first violent incident is within a range (e.g. sometime between date of formation and as late as XXXX), then the earliest date is coded and date approx is also coded as 1.

yronset

Numeric variable recording the year in which the armed group first surpasses the 25-battle threshold demarcating civil conflict in the Uppsala Armed Conflict Dataset. It is based on the year in start_date2. When the actor repeatedly surpasses the threshold, this is given based on the earliest episode.

yrlastattack

Numeric variable recording the year in which the group last conducts a violent attack against the state. If a precise end date cannot be found, then this is the year that the group was last known to conduct a violent attack based on either yrfirstattack or available incident information from the Global Terrorism Database.

In some cases, there is a discrepancy between when the group is last violent and when it formally disarms, e.g. the Punitive Leftist Front conducted its last violent attack in 1992 and then formally disarmed as part of an amnesty pact with the Nicaraguan government in 1993.

If the group formally or publicly disarms and continues to operate as a political organization, then this captures the date that they are last violent before they disarm (e.g. April 19 Movement).

If the group is transnational, then this variable may not record the date the armed group is last active within a particular country if it is transnational.

dateapprox

Binary variable denoting whether there is any uncertainty in the year of formation, first attack, or last attack.

Organizational Behavior

sustainedviolence

Binary variable denoting whether the armed group is associated with multiple incidents of political violence or not.

Some armed groups are only ever associated with one violent plot or a few attacks in a very compressed amount of time like one day to one week. This includes groups specially formed for one attack (e.g. Abdurak Janjalani Brigade), non-violent movements (e.g. Students for a Democratic Society), or violent political parties (e.g. PRD). This binary variable helps differentiate between groups only ever associated with one violent incident and those that are chronically violent.

If there is contextual or descriptive evidence to suggest the group was continuously violent for a certain amount of time, this variable is coded as one even if GTD only records one incident of violent. The purpose of this is to examine groups which engage in sustained violence. By definition, if group does not exhibit sustained violence then it will have the yrfirstattack and yrlastattack.

electviolence

Binary variable denoting whether the armed group perpetrates incidents of electoral violence or not.

Violence perpetrated by political parties during elections or other times of the year often reflects a different set of issues and may be normalized. It can be difficult to assign responsibility to these groups because it is unclear whether the group sanctioned the violence or whether it was carried out by rogue party members/followers. An armed group that engages in electoral violence is frequently a violent political party. For example, many Ghanian armed groups like Farighan and the New Patriotic Party conducted violent attacks around the 1992 elections when the country allowed multi-party elections for the first time. The groups only conducted violent attacks during the election and otherwise acted as a nonviolent political organization.

Organizational Attributes

typeform

String variable describing how the armed group came to start using political violence.

Label	Description
New	The group is new or previously unknown.
Splinter	The group forms as the result of a splinter from a pre-existing group.
Merger	The group forms as the result of a merger between two or more pre-existing groups.
Political Party Militarizes	The group forms as the result of a pre-existing political party that turns violent.
Militia Politicizes	The group forms as the result of pre-existing tribal movements, sects, criminal organization, or militias politicizing or switching their opposition against the state government.

Splinters can form from pre-existing militant or political organizations. A splinter differs from a political party militarizing if it forms a new and independent organization. For example, an armed group can break from from a communist party to launch its own rebellion (making it a splinter) or a communist party can launch an armed insurrection (making it a political party that turns violent).

Mergers include the re-organization of several pre-existing groups into a new armed group. Umbrella groups and other coalitions are not included as independent organizations unless there is a dissolution of individual groups (e.g. Rally of Democratic Forces in Chad).

Militias that politicize are often pre-existing violent organizations including tribal movements, militias, or groups that change their political opposition status against the state (e.g. Bani Hilal Tribe, Rwenzuru militants).

typeend

String variable describing how the armed group came to stop using political violence.

Label	Description
Civil War	The group ends by escalating to insurgency and civil war.[2]
Disarmed	The group ends by disarming or dissolving.
Splintered	The group ends by splintering or fragmentation.
Merged	The group ends by merging with another group to form a new group.
Disappeared	The group ends by disappearing or another unknown cause.
Destroyed	The group ends by police or military repression.
Other	The group ends by another method not listed above.
Active	The group was still using violence as of 2012.

Disarmed includes formal and informal notices. A group may sign an agreement with the government, formally dissolve, or unilaterally decide to disarm. Most armed groups sign an agreement with the government, but a few groups unilaterally disarm or dissolve (eg. Ulster Volunteer Force in UK). If a group stops using violence, but continues to operate as a political organization, then this is coded as disarm (e.g. World United Formosans for Independence).

Splintering includes splintering, fragmentation, and the mass defection of large numbers of members to other groups (e.g. May 15 Organization). An armed group may experience splinters and continue to survive so this variable does not record which armed groups ever experience splinters.

Other methods of ending include substantial reorganization to warrant the creation of a new group. See for example the shift from the Mujahideen Shura Council to ISI in Iraq. Other methods of ending may include the disarmament and integration of group members into the formal armed services like Argentina's AAA.

An armed group is considered still active if it perpetrated an act of political violence after 2012.

---

[2] Scholars may want to merge this dataset with existing data on UCDP rebel group outcomes to expand on this civil war transition coding.

primarymem

String variable describing where possible the background of the group's founding or initial set of members. If the group recruited from multiple backgrounds, this coding is based on the primary membership or the group's leadership background.

Label	Description and Examples
Unknown	The group's membership background is unknown.
Labor	Laborers, blue collar workers, peasants, or farmworkers, etc.
Religious Community	Religious communities, religious organizations, clerics, church members, mosque members, synagogue members, etc.
Students	Undefined youth, youth groups, university students, high school students, madrassa students, etc.
Ex-Militants/Military	Rebels, Militants, State Military, Former Militants, Former Soldiers, Former Police, etc.
Foreign Fighters	Foreign Fighters
Political Movement	Political Movements, Political Organizations, Political Parties, Etc.
Refugees/Exiles	Refugees, Migrants, Political Exiles, Etc.
Other	Criminals, Prisoners, Mafias, Families, Unusual Social Organizations (e.g. Mental Hospitals), Other, Etc.

ethmem

Binary variable denoting whether the armed group primarily recruits from a certain ethnic group or not.

ethgroup

String variable describing the name of the ethnic group from which the armed group primarily recruits members.

In general, the members of the ethnic group will be clearly identified. In the Iraqi cases, the religious identity of the group (Sunni or Shia) was sometimes used to extrapolate the

identity of its members (Iraqi Sunni or Iraqi Shia) with the assumption that these are aligned.

If a group did not explicitly state its ideological affiliation and there was no evidence of members from a specific ethnicity or religion, then this is coded as a zero.

In rare cases, an ethnonationalist armed group may not have a corresponding ethnic armed group if the group's ethnonationalist aims are vague (e.g. promote 'indigenous' rights) or if the group represents multiple ethnic groups equitably.

gwgroupid

Numeric variable for overlapping politically-relevant ethnic group ID in the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset. Some ethnic groups are not politically relevant so may not have a corresponding code (e.g. ASALA, JCAG, and New Armenian Resistance all represent Armenians from Turkey).

polwing

Binary variable denoting whether the armed group has an organized and organizationally distinct political wing in addition to the group's principal armed wing. A political wing may exist prior to the group's formation (e.g. political party turns violent) or emerge during the group's organizational history.

Political Aims

aim1

A numeric variable describing the armed group's initial political motivation to start using violence against the state.

Values
- 1 = Center-Seeking
- 2 = Territory/Autonomy-Seeking
- 3 = Mixed/Ambiguous

This coding is most similar to the UCDP issue incompatibility measure. Center-seeking groups protest the central government and seek either policy changes, political reforms, or regime change. Autonomy-seeking groups seek territorial reforms, increased autonomy status, or to break away from the current state and create their own state.

Mixed or ambiguous aims arise when the armed group makes multiple or unclear political claims that cannot clearly be delineated into either center-seeking or autonomy seeking. For example, mixed goals can refer to groups like the Oromo Liberation Front which is ostensibly a separatist group but with a territorial claim that includes the capital. Mixed goals also include transnational terror networks like Al-Qaeda or groups who claim they want to "wage jihad" or intimidate groups of populations, but have no clearly defined political solution they would like to see implemented, e.g. Indian Mujahideen. This category also includes armed groups that want to expel foreign troops have mixed goals because they do not clearly seek changes in the metropole, but do demand changes to the status quo. Mixed/Ambiguous includes most Iraqi insurgent groups who state they want multiple goals including, but not limited to, a new government, the removal of US troops, the release of political prisoners, or policy changes.

If there is not enough information to discern the armed group's political aims, this is coded as "ambiguous."

aim2

A binary variable describing the armed group's initial political motivation to start using violence against the state.

Values
- NA = Unclear/Never Stated
- 1 = Center-Seeking
- 2 = Territory/Autonomy-Seeking

This variable tries to roughly sort groups with mixed or ambiguous goals as either center-seeking or autonomy-seeking. Armed groups that protest foreign occupations,

protest foreign policies, or wage jihad are coded here as 'center-seeking.' If there is not enough information to discern their aims, this is coded NA.

aim3

A numeric variable describing the armed group's initial political motivation to start using violent against the state. Values are based on the issue codings used in the Correlates of War Project.

Values
- 1 = Regime
- 2 = Policy
- 3 = Territory
- 4 = Mixed/Ambiguous

This coding is most similar to the Correlates of War revisionist type measure. It is possible for a group to have center-seeking aims in aim1, but regime, policy, or mixed/ambiguous in aim3 depending on what type of political change they seek. Similarly, if autonomy-seeking groups want an independent state their goal is territory, but if they simply wanted increased autonomy status or some other political reform, then their goal is policy.

Ideological Goals

A series of binary variables identifying the group's ideological motivations for conducting violence.

left

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to a left-wing ideological goal.

center

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to a centrist or moderate ideological goal.

right

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to a right-wing ideological goal.

religious

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to a religious ideological goal.

islam

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to an Islamic ideological goal.

ethnonational

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to an ethno-nationalist ideological goal.

anarchist

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to an anarchist ideological goal.

environmental

A binary variable denoting whether the group ascribes to an environmental ideological goal.

ideodescrip

A string variable describing the group's ideological philosophy or philosophies in greater detail.

Values
- Leftist
    - NA
    - Democratic
    - Castroism
    - Chavismo
    - Communist (Generic/Unspecified)
    - Maoist
    - Marxist
    - Peronist
    - Socialist
    - Stalinist
- Center
- Right
    - NA
    - Fascist
    - Neo-Nazi
- Religious
    - Buddhist
    - Catholic
    - Christian
    - Hindu
    - Kikuyu
    - Jewish
- Islam
    - NA
    - Sunni
    - Shia
- Environmental
    - NA
    - Animal Rights
- Other
    - Baathist
    - Anti-Monarchy

External Operations and Support

transnationalattack

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group conducted violent incidents outside the target state's borders.

This variable only provides information about where acts of political violence occur and not whether the armed group has an external base of operations in another country. If the group is in international waters, international airspace or en route between two destinations when it carries out an attack, then this is coded as one (e.g. Eagles of Palestinian Revolution). If the group attacks the target state's Embassy in another country, then this is also coded as a transnational attack (e.g. Leon Czolgosz Group). A group can carry out transnational attacks without having an external base.

externalbase

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group organized and operated from an external base outside the target state's borders.

An external base is a defined territorial space that exists outside the jurisdiction of the target government where training, logistics, and other active operational planning take place. An armed group may conduct transnational attacks -- meaning attacks outside the target country -- without evidence of having an external base (e.g. Revolutionary Socialists). Concurrently, an armed group can have an external base and never conduct transnational attacks (e.g. Tunisian Armed Resistance). In the latter case, this coding would occur if all attacks occurred within the country that the group politically opposed.

externalbasename

String variable describing the country or set of countries where the armed group has an external base.

numbases

Numeric variable counting the number of countries where the group has an external base. If the best available information is a region or set of undescribed countries, the count is marked "-9."

statesup

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives external assistance from a state actor.

This variable measures what some scholars call "active" support, meaning deliberate support given to an armed group in order to advance or complement the sponsor's interests. It does not include measures of "passive" support whereby a sponsor state is too weak to deter an armed group from setting up an external base. As a result, some armed groups may have an external base, but no measure of external assistance from a state.

statesupname

String variable describing the country or set of countries that provide external support to the armed group.

numstatesponsors

Numeric variable counting the number of countries that provide some form of sponsorship. If the best available information is a region or set of undescribed countries, the count is marked "-9."

statetypesupmaterial

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives material support from an external sponsor state. Material claims of support generally include weapons, military equipment, and other items that increase the group's physical capabilities.

statetypesuptrain

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives training from an external sponsor state.

statetypesupfinancial

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives financial support from an external sponsor state.

statetypesupterr

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives territorial support from an external sponsor state. Territorial support is only noted here if it falls under `active' support (e.g. Sudan).

statetypesupendorse

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives an endorsement or statement of support from an external sponsor state.

statetypesupother

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives some other form of support from an external sponsor state not specified above. If the armed group receives logistical support (e.g. intelligence), then this is coded as a type of other support. Other forms of support include general claims of support, "ties," "partnerships," and other ambiguous or unspecified types of external support.

nsasup

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives external assistance from a non-state actor. In most cases, the list of sponsor non-state actors are other armed groups.

This variable measures active support, alliances, and links to other groups. It does not include information about rivalries.

nsasupname

String variable describing the non-state actor or set of non-state actors that provide external support to the armed group.

numnonstateties

Numeric variable counting the number of non-state actors that have some 'positive' relationship with the armed group. If the only reference is a tie to an alliance or coalition, this is coded as one even if there are numerous individual armed groups within the organization. As such, this measure should not be used as a proxy for how well-connected the group is. If the best available information is a set of undescribed or ambiguous actors, the count is marked "-9."

nsatypesupmaterial

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives material support from another non-state actor. Material claims of support generally include weapons, military equipment, and other items that increase the group's physical capabilities.

nsatypesuptrain

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives training from another non-state actor.

nsatypesupfinancial

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives financial support from an external sponsor state. This does not include donations or contributions from individuals or diaspora networks.

nsatypesupalliance

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group has an alliance with another non-state actor.

Alliance includes both formal and informal relations with other groups. Formal alliance agreements can include pledges of allegiance towards certain organizations (e.g. ISIS, Al Qaeda). Informal agreements can include references whereby groups are members of the same umbrella organization, coordinate attacks with other groups, are "related to" other groups, have "loyalties" to other groups, or have "ties" to other groups. See for example Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors, Islamic Rage Brigade, and Fallujah Mujahideen.

nsatypesupother

Binary variable measuring whether the armed group receives some other form of support from another non-state actor not specified above. If the armed group receives logistical support (e.g. intelligence), then this is coded as a type of other support. Other forms of support include general claims of support, "ties," "partnerships," and other ambiguous or unspecified types of external support.