Measuring Conflict: The UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Data

Margareta Sollenberg
Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Research
Senior Advisor in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program
Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University
Why Measure Conflict by Deaths?

• Correlates directly with intensity of conflict
• Observable
• Politicized: incentives for warring parties to disseminate information on battles
• Possibility for revision: conflict events under scrutiny long after battles took place
• Sufficient information for comparable numbers over time and space
UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Data

- UCDP in operation for almost 40 years
- Consistent definitions/coding rules for 25 years
- Consistency and comparability of data
- Global coverage
- Data 1989-2014 (2015 in progress)
Why *Battle-Related* Deaths?

- Battle-related deaths vs. Indirect deaths
- Indirect deaths cannot easily be measured directly
- Battle-related deaths intentional, part of warring parties’ political struggle, i.e. conflict
- Indirect deaths often unintentional consequence.
Disaggregation of Victims

- Military vs. Civilian

- Gender, age, ethnic/religious identities etc?
  - The problem of uneven and incomplete information.
  - Partly resource problem, partly inherent problem
Methods/Sources

• News sources the best available source:
  – Global coverage
  – Comparable information over time

• Minimizing bias:
  – Minimizing filtering and processing: news wires
  – Identify primary source
  – Triangulation of sources
Methods/Sources ctd.

- Factiva database (>30,000 sources)
  - Select sources: newswires (e.g. Reuters, AFP, Xinhua etc.), local media translated (BBC Monitoring Service)
  - Tailored search string (c. 90,000 articles in 2014)
- Regional/thematic journals, NGO reports etc.
- Regional experts
The Data

• Events as main unit of analysis (georeferenced)
• Aggregation to year and conflict
• Flexible aggregation to any geographical or time unit
• Battle-related deaths from state-based conflict easily combined with deaths from non-state conflict and one-sided violence to a measure of organized violence
Events Involving the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)
Global Battle Deaths (in thousands), 1989-2014
Central and South Asia: Battle Deaths (in thousands), 1989-2014
The Data ctd.

- Yearly battle deaths estimates since 1989.
- Events data for Africa, Asia and Middle East since 1989 (upcoming release of the remainder of the world)
- Total global count of events from 1989:
  - c. 130,000 (vast majority in state-based conflict events)
  - Majority of deaths from state-based conflict

- Conservative, comparable estimates of deaths
- Publicly accessible, free of charge
Fatalities in organized violence, 1989-2014, with and without the Rwandan genocide