

**Joint article**

**A Collaborative Approach to data  
on the Syrian Conflict:  
The Syrian Network for Human Rights**



**ACLED**

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The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) collaborate - together with a large group of information providers - to collect and triangulate information on Syria. Other providers of information are the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Airwars, the Carter Center, the International Security and Development Centre (ISDC), the Clingendael Institute, LiveUaMap, Shaam News, Syria Direct, the London School of Economics Conflict Research Group, and a number of undisclosed sources.

The data collected by this consortium will inform a better understanding of the nature of the conflict. Humanitarian organizations may use these realtime data for needs assessments of areas hit by mining and cluster munitions or to account for IDP-movement. Journalists may use these data to understand the hundreds of militias operating in Syria currently and the different types of violence they display. Governments and advocacy organizations may use these data to assess culpability and keep track of violations. However, these data may be most crucial in the future when Syria is rebuilt. These data will document the areas in which there have been the most violence and those in which civilians have suffered the most harm.

The creation of this consortium was motivated by the realization that to truly understand the realities of the Syrian conflict, genuine collaboration is required. No organization has a network of information in each and every Syrian village, but each has its own areas of geographic expertise. No organization can keep track of all flight movements above Syria, but some may possess the ability to identify where the Global Coalition and the Russian state are dropping their bombs. No organization keeps track of every troop movement in the country, but some may effectively track territorial gains made by the regime. It is this realization, that only genuine collaboration allows for a comprehensive understanding of the day-to-day realities of the Syrian conflict, which spurred SNHR to share its data with ACLED. This article reflects on the contribution of SNHR data to ACLED <sup>1</sup>.

#### SNHR's contribution

The unique features of the data provided by SNHR are as follows: 1) unrivaled coverage of violence perpetrated in Deir-ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Al-Hasakeh; 2) the unique ability to shed light on the deliberate targeting of civilians as a means of war; and 3) the inclusion of carefully collected and verified information on perpetrators. Overall, SNHR provides %15 of events within the ACLED Syrian dataset (about 5,000 out of 30,000 events as of July 2018).

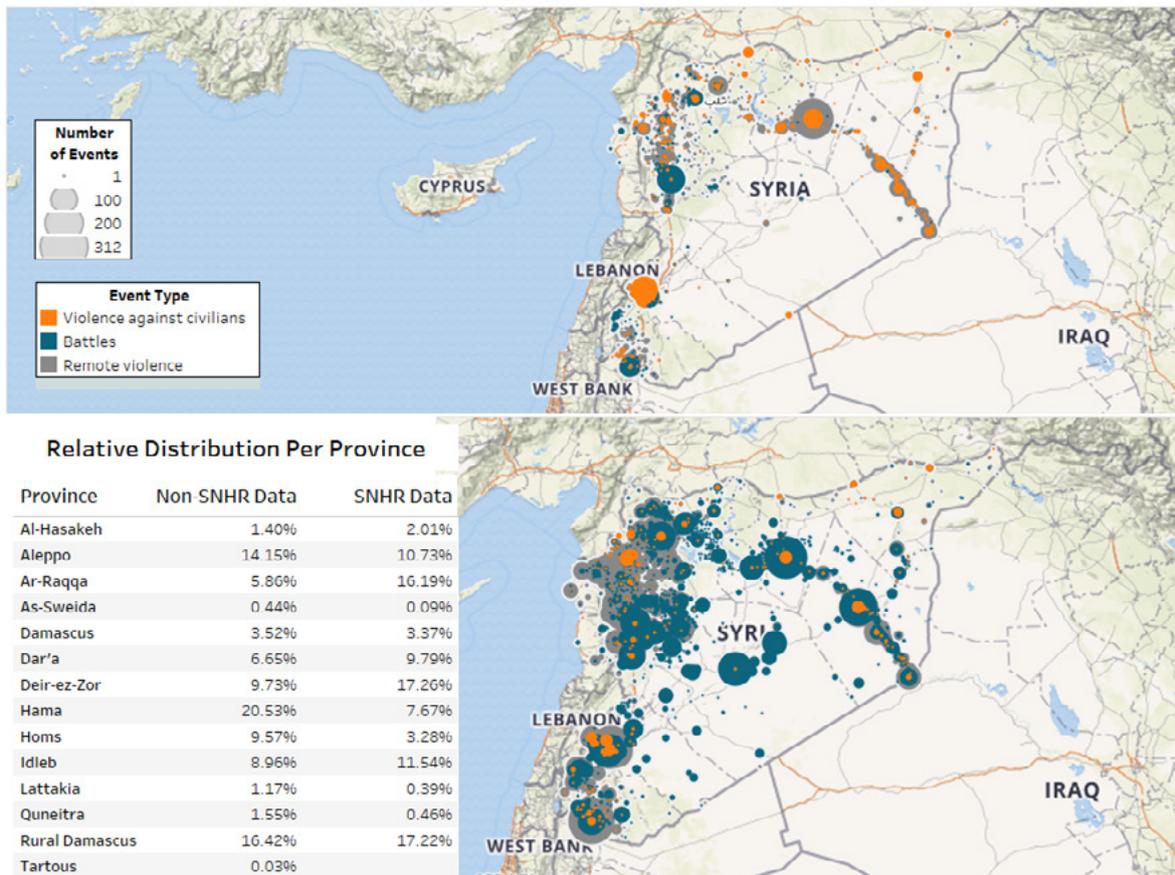
**Figure 1** below compares the coverage of incidents of political violence by SNHR to the violence reported by other organizations in the network. The figure displays the three most common types of violence in the data: 1) incidents of shelling, IED usage, and airstrikes (i.e. remote violence); 2)

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a series highlighting the contributions made by each consortium partner to the ACLED Syrian dataset.

battles; and 3) unilateral/deliberate violence against civilians (e.g. targeted killing, murder, mine campaigns). Comparing the map at the top and bottom of the figure, SNHR data cover violence along the Euphrates (both in Raqqa and Deir-Ez-Zor), Idlib, and Dara particularly well. The table in the same figure corroborates this finding, highlighting that the share of events reported in these districts is relatively higher than those reported by all other information providers.

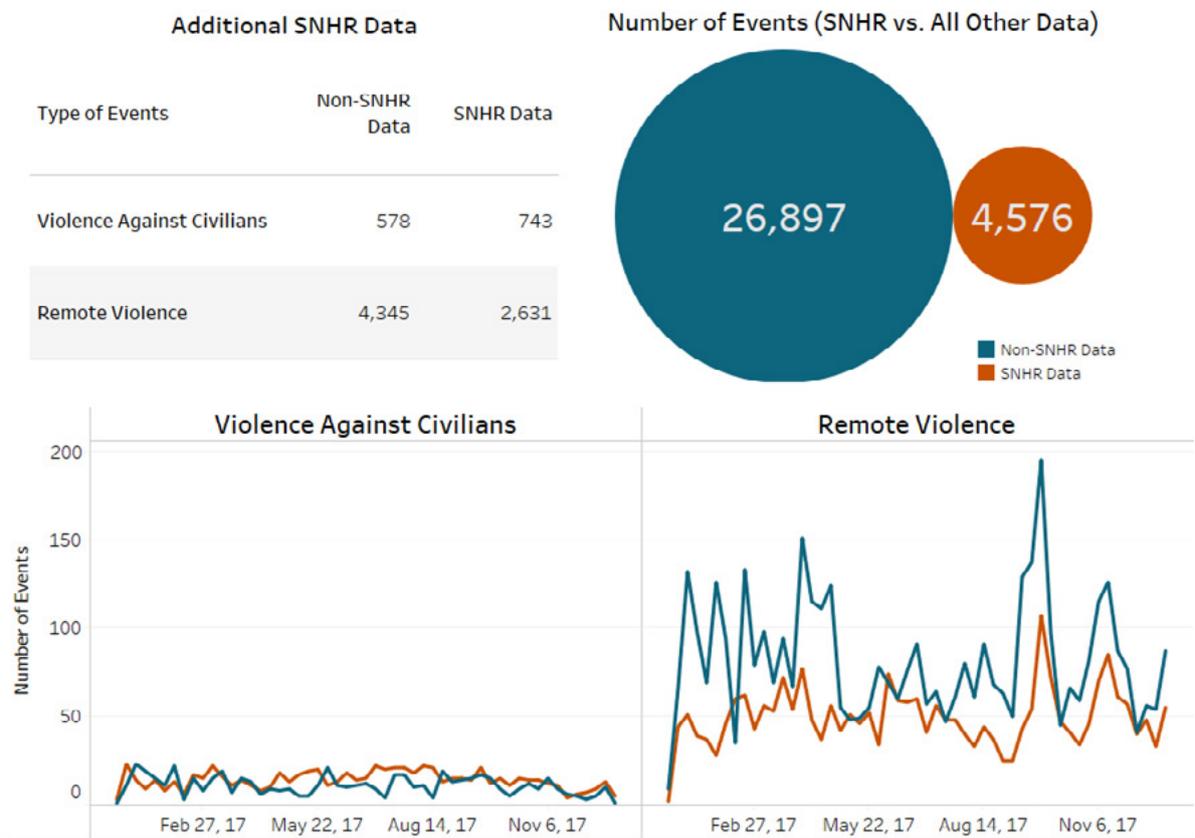
*Visual 1: SNHR (above) vs. All Other Data (below) [2017]*



**Figure 2** below shows all reported violence perpetrated in Syria against civilians in 2017. As the main goal of SNHR is to report on violations against human rights, these data are particularly important for the ACLED database. In Syria, many of these violations are in fact civilian fatalities. As a result, SNHR is the source for the majority of violence against civilian events in the ACLED Syrian dataset. The triangulation of SNHR data with other sources allows for better understanding of not only whether violence resulted in fatalities, but also whether the fatalities were deliberate or part of broader military engagements (and potentially ‘collateral’). SNHR highlights many more instances of deliberate violence against civilians than any of the other information providers. The ACLED Syrian dataset includes 1,321 events of ‘Violence against civilians’ in 743 ,2017 of which are incidents contributed by SNHR. This means that while SNHR is the source of only one-sixth of all data in the ACLED Syrian dataset, it provides more than half of all violence against civilians events. A similar pattern holds for shelling and airstrikes deliberately aimed at civilians (see

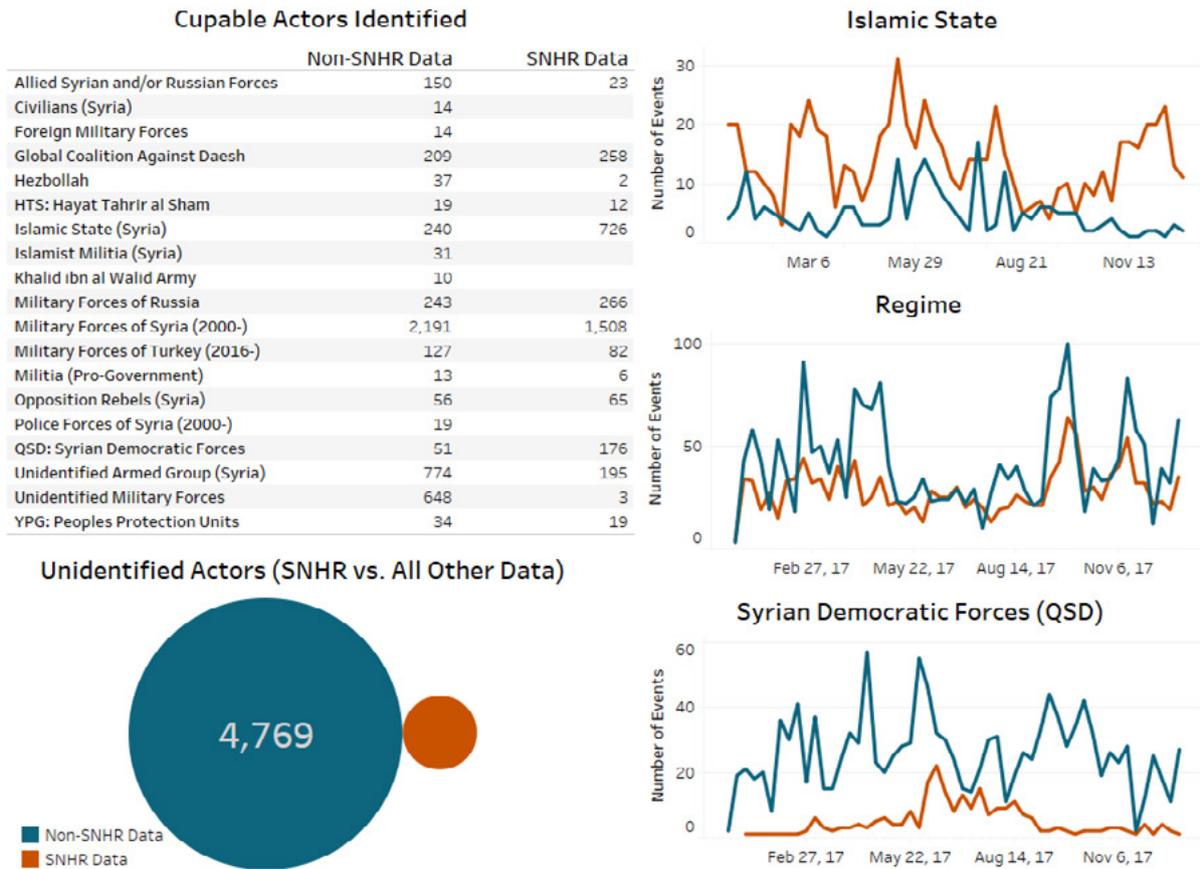
**Figure 2).** Overall, SNHR provides unique information on the fate, modes, and means of civilian fatalities in the Syrian conflict. For post-conflict prosecution, such information may be invaluable.

*Visual 2: Civilian Fatalities [2017]*



**Figure 3** highlights how the data contributed by SNHR shed light on the perpetrators of violence in Syria. Thus far, data generated by open source information collectors (e.g. validated Twitter feeds and news sites) have identified the Syrian regime as responsible for the most civilian targeting (about 2,000 events in 2017), followed by ‘unidentifiable actors’ (about 1,300 events in 2017), followed by the military forces of Russia, the Global Coalition Against Daesh, and the Islamic State (just over 200 events each). Yet, data from SNHR highlight a very different hierarchy with hardly any unidentifiable perpetrators: a much larger number of violations attributed to the Syrian Democratic Forces (QSD), and a high number of events of violence against civilians perpetrated by the Islamic State, which – quite surprisingly – went up in the aftermath of its alleged defeat in October/November 2017. Hence, one key contribution of SNHR to the dataset is to provide critical insight into the identity of perpetrators, allowing for a better understanding of the patterns of violence, to inform initiatives like the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIM) on Syria.

### Visual 3: Identified Actor in Events Involving Civilian Casualties [2017]



#### The need for collaboration

Calling for increased collaboration in an extremely divisive and fragmented conflict may sound lofty. Yet, ACLED’s background as an academic initiative gives it tools to reliably collect and combine information in a complex data landscape, allowing it to serve as a convening platform to disparate actors. Bringing together many varied data sources into one database allows for analysis and insight that no one provider of information alone can provide.<sup>2</sup>

In a collaborative effort such as this, each contributor brings unique data, and with them, unique insights. Alongside SNHR, the members of [the ACLED Syria Consortium](#) each provide unique data allowing for deeper analysis and understanding. For example, the Carter Center generates information on territorial takeovers that is not consistently collected anywhere else. Airwars validates incidents involving Coalition and Russian forces with a consistency that no other organization can offer. LiveJamap is better in identifying new locations and actors than many others. Each organization pursues, gathers, and reports information according to their individual mandate and their methods reflect the ways in which their local networks are built. It is only through genuine collaborative efforts that we can recognize and account for these reporting patterns and help to better inform efforts to help heal Syrian society, both during and after the war.

<sup>2</sup> De Bruijne, Kars and Clionadh Raleigh 2017. [Reliable data on the Syrian conflict by design. Report](#), Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.