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Definition of terms: casualty recording, casualty tracking, casualty estimation

Over the past decade there has been increased global attention to the monitoring and documenting of casualties in situations of armed conflict and human rights violations. This has grown alongside developments in political attitudes and military policies concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Technological innovations in this time have revolutionised the ways in which such information can be gathered, verified, and disseminated.

As this field of work continues to mature and diversify we identified the need for agreed, shared terminology. This document is a collaborative effort to codify a common definition of the main approaches to documenting and monitoring of casualties in situations of armed conflict and human rights violations. It provides a brief description of each approach, focusing on the features which distinguish them. For more detailed descriptions of any of these areas of work, please see the **Further Reading** section below.

These definitions have been developed and agreed by Every Casualty Counts, Bellica Consulting, CIVIC, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and PAX.

Casualty recording

Casualty recording aims to individually identify and create a comprehensive record of all fatalities within a specific situation of armed conflict or human rights violations. Some casualty recording projects also record victims who have suffered non-fatal injuries. Casualty recording is a civilian-led activity typically undertaken by independent civil society organisations, national human rights institutions or equivalent government bodies, academic institutions, and international organisations or agencies.

Casualty recording is victim-focused. Documenting personal details of each victim, including details of the event in which they were killed, is central to casualty recording. It is a long-term process and in some cases the deceased are only fully identified many years after their death and/or the end of the conflict or violations that caused their death. Casualty records may also include persons who went missing in situations of armed conflict, or were forcibly disappeared, when their fate remains unknown or they are presumed dead.

Some armed conflict casualty recording initiatives focus only on civilians, others include both civilians, military personnel and other persons directly participating in hostilities. Some only record victims from one side of a conflict or occurring in a particular geographical area.

These (and similar) variations are valid as long as the project is transparent about its parameters and limitations and consistent in their application.



Outside of situations of armed conflict, casualty recording generally focuses on a specific demographic of victim or perpetrator, on a particular type of violence (for example, firearm deaths), or on particular circumstances during which the deaths or injury occurred (for example, mass demonstrations). Examples of such initiatives include projects which highlight deaths resulting from femicide, unsafe migration, homelessness, use of force by police, and residential schools for indigenous children.

Civilian harm and casualty tracking

Civilian harm tracking aims to record and assess negative effects on civilian well-being caused directly or indirectly by armed actors who are parties to conflict. This includes not only civilian deaths and injuries (**'civilian casualty tracking'**), but also wider harm such as loss of or damage to civilian property and livelihoods, essential services, and critical infrastructure. Both civil society and armed actors can conduct civilian harm and civilian casualty tracking.

The primary purpose of civilian harm tracking is to identify the military tactics, strategies and operations which have negative consequences for civilians in order to mitigate and minimise these. The information gathered enables armed actors to respond appropriately to specific instances of civilian harm (for example, by offering compensation), and inform operational guidance and decision making in order to minimize future harm. To be most effective, civilian harm tracking must be conducted and assessed as promptly as possible after an incident.

Civil society organisations may use civilian harm tracking data to support their advocacy with parties to the conflict and for targeting humanitarian responses. Some organisations focus on specific military tactics (such as explosive weapons) or specific areas of civilian infrastructure (such as education or health), rather than attempting to create a comprehensive record of all harm suffered.

Data identifying specific civilian fatalities or injuries may be recorded where relevant, but individual identification of victims is not the primary goal of civilian casualty or civilian harm **tracking**.

Casualty counting / estimation

Casualty counting (or **'casualty estimation'**) aims to establish the number of people killed (and/or injured) in an armed conflict (or other situation of mass fatalities), either as a total figure or within a specific category (for example, the total number of civilians killed in air strikes). Casualty counts or estimates are typically derived by applying statistical methods to data extrapolated wholly or partly on casualty recording or casualty tracking initiatives.

Further reading

For a more detailed explanation of these subjects, we recommend the following materials.

Date	Source / author	Title
2013	Seybolt, T.B, Aroson, J.D., Fischhoff, B. (Ed.)	Counting Civilian Casualties. An introduction to Recording and Estimating Nonmilitary Deaths in Conflict
2013	CIVIC	Backgrounder: Tracking civilian harm
2014	CIVIC/ECC	Examining Civilian Harm Tracking and Casualty Recording in Afghanistan
2015	Ellen Policinski / CIVIC	Civilian harm tracking: an important tool during armed conflict
2016	ECC	Standards for Casualty Recording
2017	AOAV / Harvard Law School	Acknowledge, Amend, Assist. Addressing Civilian Harm Caused by Armed Conflict and Armed Violence
2017	Nicholas P. Jewell, Michael Spagat and Britta L. Jewell	Accounting for Civilian Casualties: From the Past to the Future
2019	OHCHR	Guidance on casualty recording
2019	OHCHR	Technical Guidance Note on SDG Indicator 16.1.2 Number of conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause
2020	PAX	Civilian harm tracking, analysis and response
2022	Article 36	Committing to civilian casualty tracking in the future political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas
2023	OHCHR	Impact of casualty recording on the promotion and protection of human rights
2023	PAX	Civilian harm mitigation: Primer