



Global Surface Displacement Data for Assessing Variability of Displacement at a Point on a Fault

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Introduction

This report presents a global dataset of site-specific surface-displacement data on faults (table 1). We have compiled estimates of successive displacements attributed to individual earthquakes, mainly paleoearthquakes, at sites where two or more events have been documented, as a basis for analyzing inter-event variability in surface displacement on continental faults.

An earlier version of this composite dataset was used in a recent study relating the variability of surface displacement at a point to the magnitude-frequency distribution of earthquakes on faults, and to hazard from fault rupture (Hecker and others, 2013). The purpose of this follow-on report is to provide potential data users with an updated comprehensive dataset, largely complete through 2010 for studies in English-language publications, as well as in some unpublished reports and abstract volumes.

Table 1. Global Compilation of Surface Displacement at a Point on a Fault.

[Table 1 is a Microsoft[®] Excel file and can be downloaded at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2013/1305/>.]

Compilation Criteria and Data Uncertainties

For this compilation effort, we have included no more than one study site per section of fault (for faults that have been segmented or otherwise subdivided), both to reduce the correlation of displacement values between sites, and to make our task more manageable. For sections of fault with more than one set of observations, we selected the dataset with the best quality and the most events. Where we had a choice, we minimized the influence of along-strike variability by minimizing the distance between observations. However, some types of data necessarily involve observations at more than one location, such as records of accruing lateral displacements along strike-slip faults.

Ideally, displacement estimates should represent the net or the main component of displacement across the entire zone of faulting at a site. However, studies of distributed faulting commonly include only part of the zone, and observations for many strike-slip and oblique-slip faults consist only of the local vertical component of displacement. For these cases, any intra-event variation in the distribution of displacement across strike, or in the ratio of horizontal to vertical displacement at the site, would contribute to the variability of the displacements sampled. Studies of faults that have blind ruptures but produce surface or near-surface fault-related fold scarps also are included in this compilation.

Sources of uncertainty affecting observed displacement variability are further discussed in Hecker and others (2013). That article includes, as an electronic supplement, a checklist of issues that can affect the accuracy of displacement measurements, recognition of events, or overall utility of results. Hecker and others (2013) developed and used this list as a guide for evaluating the quality of the datasets in their compilation. For the larger, updated compilation, we have excluded a formal evaluation of data quality because of the difficulty in consistency applying a subjective rating scheme among a group of compilers with varied backgrounds.

Analysis and Results

We have compiled 860 surface-displacement observations from 292 sites on faults in 34 countries (table 1). For almost one-half of these countries, the earliest studies date from 2000 or later, probably reflecting the global expansion of paleoseismology. Slightly more than one-half of the sampled faults are in the United States; one-third of the United States faults are in California.

The number of observations per site averages about three, although about 50 percent of the sites have only two documented displacements, and only 12 percent have more than four (fig. 1). This data distribution is essentially unchanged from the data distribution presented in Hecker and others (2013) for an earlier version of the compilation that contains 505 observations from 171 sites, primarily from studies available prior to 2000. The limited number of observations per site probably reflects a persistent difficulty worldwide in obtaining long records of paleoseismic displacements on individual faults. Organizing the data by style of faulting (fig. 2) shows that 50 percent of the sites are from normal or normal-oblique faults, 33 percent are from faults with dominantly strike-slip movement, and about 17 percent are from faults with a reverse sense of slip.

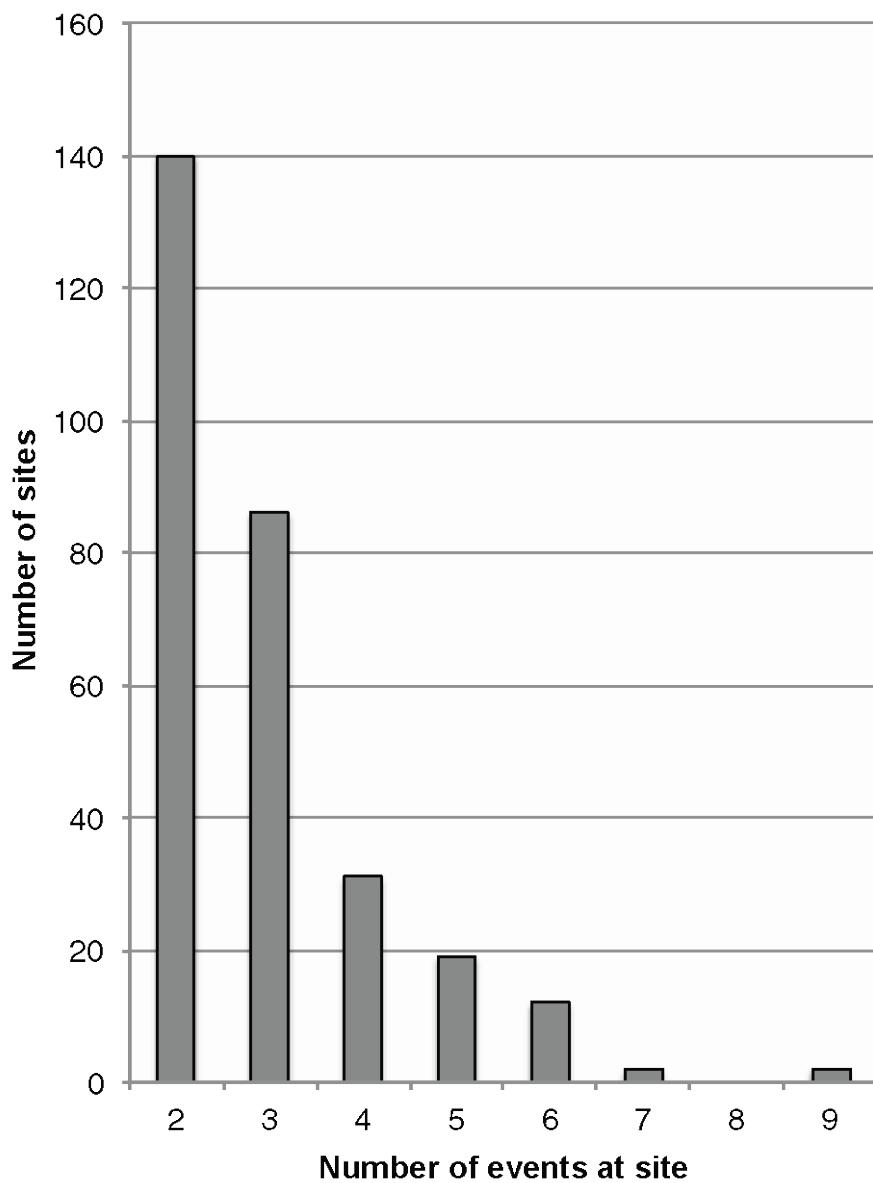


Figure 1. Graph showing distribution of sites by the number of events at a site.

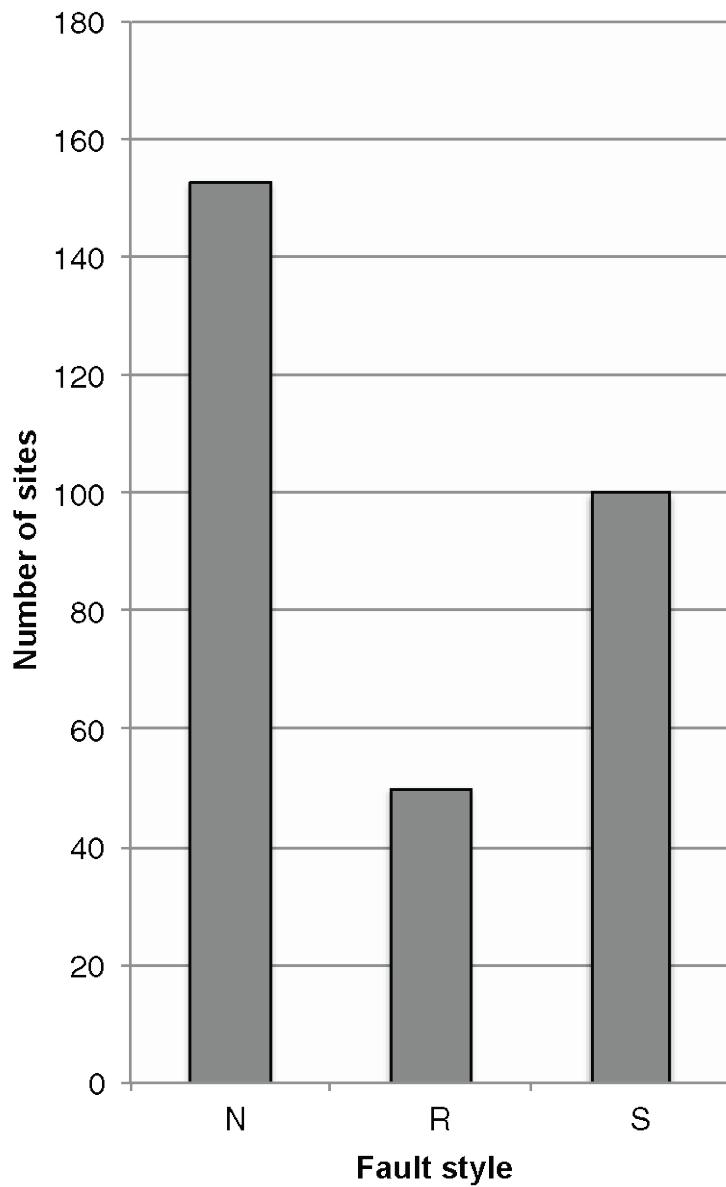


Figure 2. Graph showing distribution of sites by fault style. Eleven sites on oblique-slip faults having subequal components of horizontal and vertical slip are double-counted. N=normal slip; R=Reverse slip; S=strike slip.

To analyze inter-event variability in surface displacement at a point on a fault, Hecker and others (2013) created a composite dataset by normalizing the displacement values by the mean displacement at each site. Combining data from different sites requires making the assumption that the coefficient of variation (CV) of the displacement, given by the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean, is constant for observations at all sites, or for a selected subset of sites. Then,

$$CV = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N_{site}} \sum_{j=1}^{N_i} \left(\frac{D_{ij} - \bar{D}_i}{\bar{D}_i} \right)^2}{(N_{displ} - N_{site})}}, \quad (1)$$

in which D_{ij} is the j^{th} displacement at site i , N_i is the number of displacements for the i^{th} site, N_{site} is the number of sites, and N_{displ} is the total number of displacements observed at all sites. The accuracy of the computed CV is characterized by the standard error (SE) of the estimate and is approximated by

$$SE[CV] = \sqrt{\frac{1}{2(N_{displ} - N_{site})}} CV \quad (2)$$

There are two main sampling issues that may bias the CV of our dataset: the small number of observations per site and the presence of events smaller than the limit of detectable displacement in the geologic record. Although addressing these issues is beyond the scope of this report, Hecker and others (2013) used a forward modeling approach to formally consider how factors such as these may affect the observed CV.

Using equations (1) and (2), we have estimated the CV for the data presented in Table 1, for the entire dataset and for subsets of the data based on faulting style. Following the procedure outlined in Hecker and others (2013), we compute the CV both with and without the uncertainty of the measured displacement (table 2). Some displacements include stated measurement error or interpretive uncertainty (recorded as minimum and maximum values in table 1); for displacements that did not include stated measurement error or interpretive uncertainty, we estimated the uncertainty of the observed displacement using a maximum-to-minimum displacement ratio of 1.5, as determined from the subset of values with reported uncertainty in Hecker and others (2013).

Including the uncertainty of the measured displacement leads to a small increase in the estimated CV (table 2); in the following, we refer to the CV values that account for this uncertainty. Considering the standard error of the estimates, the CV of data grouped by sense of fault slip does not vary significantly (table 2). For the entire dataset, we compute a CV of 0.53 ± 0.02 . This value is the same as that computed from the smaller dataset (171 sites; $CV = 0.53 \pm 0.03$) used in Hecker and others (2013), indicating that this degree of variability is a stable feature of paleoseismic observations.

Table 2. Computed coefficient of variation (CV) and standard error of the estimate for subsets of data.

[**CV (w/o unc)**: Uses preferred values of displacement from table 1. For displacements reported as a range, mid-point is used as preferred displacement; for displacements reported as a minimum or maximum value, a scale factor of 1.25 is used to derive the preferred displacement (after Hecker and others, 2013). **CV (w/unc)**: Incorporates range of uncertainty in estimates (minimum and maximum values, table 1). For estimates without stated uncertainty, a scale factor of 1.25 is applied to the preferred value to derive a range. **Abbreviations**: Unc, uncertainty in the measured displacement values; w/, with; w/o, without]

Dataset	N _{site}	N _{displ}	CV (w/o unc)	CV (w/ unc)
All data	292	860	0.46±0.01	0.53±0.02
Strike slip ¹	100	285	0.44±0.02	0.51±0.03
Normal slip ¹	153	461	0.48±0.02	0.54±0.03
Reverse slip ¹	50	132	0.41±0.03	0.51±0.04

¹A total of 11 sites on oblique-slip faults having subequal components of lateral and vertical slip are double counted for this analysis.

Summary

In this report, we present a global compilation of earthquake surface-displacement data at sites where two or more events have been documented, as a basis for analyzing the intra-event variability in surface displacement at a point on crustal faults. The dataset, representing studies available through 2010, comprises 860 surface-displacement observations from 292 sites. About 50 percent of the sites have only two documented displacements, reflecting the difficulty in recovering long paleoseismic displacement records.

To analyze inter-event variability in displacement at a point, we construct a composite dataset by normalizing the observed displacement values by the mean displacement at each site (effectively substituting space for time), and compute the coefficient of variation (CV), given by the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean. For the entire dataset (and including uncertainty in the measured displacement values), we compute a CV of 0.53±0.02. This value is essentially identical to the CV computed from an earlier version of the dataset for a study relating the variability of surface displacement at a point to the magnitude-frequency distribution of earthquakes and to hazard from fault rupture.

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