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# How Large Conflicts Subside: Evidence from Indonesia



Patrick Barron The Asia Foundation | Sana Jaffrey University of Chicago | Ashutosh Varshney Brown University



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Series editor name

# How Large Conflicts Subside: Evidence from Indonesia

**Patrick Barron**  
The Asia Foundation

**Sana Jaffrey**  
University of Chicago

**Ashutosh Varshney**  
Brown University

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Please direct comments to the author: [sjaffrey@uchicago.edu](mailto:sjaffrey@uchicago.edu)

Cover Photograph by Adrian Morel

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# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

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The last two decades have witnessed an extraordinary spate of literature on large-scale subnational conflicts. Scholars have for the most part concentrated on why violent conflicts begin. As a consequence, we know a great deal about the outbreak of civil wars and riots. Considerably less attention has been paid to how and why large conflicts subside.

There is, of course, a growing literature on how civil wars end and why they recur. However, such studies have tended to conceptualize periods of civil war and peace as dichotomous states. This prevents consideration of the forms of violence that often emerge in 'post-conflict' situations. The so-called peaceful phase can also have a lot of violence, though such violence may fall short of a full-fledged civil war.

Stated differently, temporal variation in patterns of communal violence of one kind—escalation of small incidents into large scale violence, or transformation of "sparks" into "fires"—has been extensively studied, but how and why large-scale violence subsides space remains, on the whole, inadequately understood. As a consequence, we know little about how spatial units marked by large-scale and/or extended riots move towards relative peace, and what prevents reescalation.

This paper turns its gaze towards the second kind of temporal variation: how sites of large-scale violence move towards a phase of substantially lower violence. Our materials come from Indonesia, where several provinces experienced grotesque violence after the fall of President Suharto and the collapse of the New Order (1965–97). The period of high violence lasted roughly from 1998 through 2003. Since then, violence has continued to occur but has declined in intensity and scale. Provinces caught in highly destructive violence have moved to a phase where large-scale violence is largely absent. Small-scale violence has continued to occur frequently, often taking on new forms. Furthermore, areas previously affected by high levels of violence continue to harbor specific vulnerabilities.

Why has large-scale violence precipitously declined? How did the new phase of lower violence come about? We seek to answer these questions by examining evidence from the National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS), a new dataset that records the incidence and impact of violence in Indonesia over a 15-year period since Indonesia's democratic transition commenced in 1998.

We argue that it is changes in state responses to violence that, to a large extent, account for the observed temporal variation. In the early post-Suharto years, small episodes of violence quickly escalated into large-scale conflicts. There were widespread political uncertainties and rapid shifts in institutional powers, including major security sector reforms, such as the separation of the police from the military, contributing to the inability and often unwillingness of state actors to intervene effectively. Only when the state began seriously to address the problem of large-scale violence in Indonesia did the civil wars and communal

conflicts come to an end. Gradual consolidation of power by political actors and changing political will from the center allowed for a series of peace agreements and security operations that ended these large-scale conflicts. These factors also led to improvements in the incentives and ability of the security forces to respond effectively to violence when it emerged. Larger episodes of violence have thus been contained, though they have not been fully eradicated. We argue that improved response to violence by the Indonesian security forces is a key reason for the decline of large-scale violence in Indonesia.

We are, however, not confident that a new and enduring equilibrium has emerged. But what has happened thus far has lasted long enough to qualify as a new phase, whose principal properties can be dissected and analyzed. While greater policing capacities of the Indonesian state need to be acknowledged, it should also be noted that the police remains incapable of, or disinterested in, preventing smaller acts of violence. It now prevents the worst outcomes, but stops well short of generating the best results. Why this is so should be analyzed separately. It is not our focus here.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections. First, we describe the new National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS) dataset, perhaps the largest subnational dataset of its kind anywhere in the world. Following this, Section 3 provides a descriptive analysis of the initial post-Suharto violence. Section 4 presents the main features of the new phase of lower violence that has emerged since 2003. Section 5 explains how and why this new phase has been maintained, with a primary focus on the changing responses of security forces to incidents of violence. Section 6 concludes.

## 2

### THE NATIONAL VIOLENCE MONITORING SYSTEM DATASET

The new Indonesian National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS) dataset, which we created and now use to make our arguments, provides the most comprehensive and accurate quantitative picture to date of the nature and impact of violence in post-Suharto Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> The dataset records all incidents of violence in 16 provinces, which represent all major island groups and account for about 53 per cent of Indonesia's population, as reported by over 120 local news sources.<sup>2</sup> The selected provinces include the 'high conflict' provinces that were affected by large-scale violence following Indonesia's democratic transition as well as 'low conflict' areas that were not. For the high conflict provinces, data has been compiled since 1998 to allow us to see how violence in these areas has evolved over time. For low conflict provinces, data has been collected, by and large, since 2005, which allows us to compare them with high conflict provinces to assess the extent to which convergence might have occurred. By 2012, the NVMS had recorded 30 distinct variables for 163,466 incidents, which collectively resulted in 36,222 deaths, 132,110 injured, 75,937 buildings damaged, 4,322 kidnappings, and 22,529 sexual assaults. As far as we know, the NVMS is the largest dataset of violence created for any single country.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 summarizes its scope.

#### 2.1 Why build a new violence dataset in Indonesia?

The NVMS is the latest in a series of datasets that record incidents and impact of violence in Indonesia. Our efforts to design this new dataset stem from the deficiencies of earlier attempts, each of which is summarized below.

##### *UNSFIR*

The most comprehensive and accurate information about violence in Indonesia's early transition period came from the UNSFIR dataset, which covers the period 1990–2003. In 2000, lack of systematic statistics on post-Suharto violence motivated the effort by Varshney and his colleagues at the United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery (UNSFIR). In doing so, they turned to newspaper reports of violence based

<sup>1</sup> The NVMS dataset is a continuation of the Violent Conflict in Indonesia Study (ViCIS) dataset that collected baseline data for 16 provinces in Indonesia from 1998–2009. In January 2012, the ViCIS methodology, initially developed by the authors of this paper, was adopted by the Government of Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for People's Welfare (Kemenko Kesra) to allow for continuing ongoing data collection under the National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS) program. Kemenko Kesra maintains full ownership of the data and has published it on the project site: [www.snpk-indonesia.com](http://www.snpk-indonesia.com)

<sup>2</sup> The data collection methodology, specifically the use of newspaper sources, is explained later on.

<sup>3</sup> ACLED is probably the largest violence dataset containing events data at the subnational level for multiple countries (Raleigh et al. 2010). It records 57,000 violent incidents between 1997 and 2012. This is less than 40% of those in the NVMS, even although ACLED covers 50 countries. (Indonesia is not included in ACLED.) The number of incidents in ACLED for individual countries is often small. In Cambodia, for example, the dataset contains 357 incidents between 1997 and 2010. Other single country datasets of violence have proliferated but are also smaller than the NVMS. The Colombia dataset used by Daly (2012), for example, includes 7,729 violent events. Weinstein's newspaper events dataset contains 1,400 violent incidents in Mozambique (1976–2004), 800 in Uganda, and more than 4,000 in Peru (Weinstein 2007).

**Table 1: Coverage of the National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS) dataset**

|                         | Province           | Population (million) | Number of local newspapers used | Period of Data Available | Total Incidents Recorded | Total Deaths Recorded | Recent history of large-scale violence  |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| High conflict provinces | Aceh               | 4.5                  | 8                               | 1998–2012                | 16,892                   | 11,217                | Active civil war between GAM and Gol until 2005                                     |
|                         | Maluku             | 1.5                  | 7                               | 1998–2012                | 4,910                    | 3,348                 | Christian–Muslim communal violence 1999–Feb 2002                                    |
|                         | North Maluku       | 1                    | 5                               | 1998–2012                | 1,692                    | 3,404                 | Christian–Muslim communal violence 1999–2000  |
|                         | Central Kalimantan | 2.2                  | 8                               | 1998–2012                | 5,438                    | 1,771                 | Ethnic violence between Dayak and Madura communities in 2001                        |
|                         | West Kalimantan    | 4.4                  | 5                               | 1997–2012                | 15,893                   | 2,141                 | Ethnic violence between Dayak and Madura communities in 1997 and then again in 1999 |
|                         | Central Sulawesi   | 2.6                  | 11                              | 1998–2012                | 5,847                    | 1,297                 | Christian–Muslim communal violence 1999–2001  |
|                         | Papua              | 2.7                  | 14                              | 1998–2012                | 11,903                   | 1,468                 | Persistent low-level insurgency since 1963  |
|                         | West Papua         | 0.7                  |                                 | 1998–2012                | 2,856                    | 283                   | Persistent low-level insurgency since 1963  |
| Low conflict provinces  | East Nusa Tenggara | 4.8                  | 11                              | 1998–2012                | 10,620                   | 1,522                 | –   |
|                         | Lampung            | 7.6                  | 6                               | 1998–2012                | 9,042                    | 1,116                 | –   |
|                         | Greater Jakarta    | 28                   | 5                               | 2005–2012                | 19,768                   | 3,116                 | Anti-Chinese riots in May 1998 <sup>4</sup>   |
|                         | West Nusa Tenggara | 4.5                  | 6                               | 2005–2012                | 5,708                    | 566                   | –   |
|                         | North Sulawesi     | 2.2                  | 6                               | 2005–2009                | 8,194                    | 517                   | –   |
|                         | South Sulawesi     | 8                    | 6                               | 2005–2009                | 5,135                    | 738                   | –   |
|                         | North Sumatera     | 13                   | 10                              | 2005–2009                | 14,049                   | 1,583                 | –   |
|                         | East Java          | 37.5                 | 15                              | 2005–2009                | 25,519                   | 2,135                 | –   |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>125.2</b>       | <b>123</b>           | –                               | <b>163,466</b>           | <b>36,222</b>            | –                     |   |

Source: NVMS, Population figures from 2010 Census (Badan Pusat Statistik)

on the methodology used to build a dataset of riots in India.<sup>5</sup> After an initial attempt using national-level sources, a second database (UNSFIR-2) turned to provincial newspapers (Varshney, Tadjoeidin, and Panggabean 2010).

There are a number of limitations to UNSFIR-2 for our purposes. First, the statistics do not go beyond 2003. As such, the dataset tells us little about how violence has evolved after the large-scale conflict in several of Indonesia's regions ended. Second, the dataset does not include smaller incidents of violence. This made sense given that the goal was to assess levels of violence in the early post-Suharto period, when most deaths were the result of the large-scale ethno communal violence engulfing a number of provinces. However, the exclusion of smaller incidents means that much of the violence that has occurred since these cataclysmic communal conflicts ended is missed.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the UNSFIR dataset does not include Aceh, the site of Indonesia's most deadly civil war, and Papua, where low-level insurgency has persisted since 1964. The purpose of the UNSFIR dataset was to cover collective violence short of civil war.<sup>7</sup>

Following UNSFIR's innovative attempt, newspapers have been widely acknowledged as a reliable, if not perfect, source to collect violence data in Indonesia (Varshney 2008). Others have since sought to improve and extend UNSFIR's work. For example, additional studies have shown that provincial newspapers, while providing a more accurate picture than national ones, still significantly under-report levels of violence. Barron and Sharpe (2005) compared death tolls from UNSFIR-2 with those from a violence dataset using sub-provincial papers for twelve districts in two Indonesian provinces for 2001–2003. Employing the same definition as UNSFIR, they found three times more deaths from collective violence. Using a broader definition of violence, and more extensive source materials, the NVMS contains 44 times as many incidents between 1998 and 2003 as are included in UNSFIR-2.

#### PODES

Since 2003, the Indonesian government's statistical bureau has collected data on violence through its PODES survey, which is conducted every three years. The nationwide survey asks village heads about violence that has occurred in the past year and the impact it has had. However, PODES has significant weaknesses. For one, the accuracy of the violence data is questionable. In areas with large-scale violence, PODES appears to over report fatalities. The 2003 survey—which provides data on violence between September 2001 and August 2002<sup>8</sup>—reported that of the 4,849 people who died from conflict across Indonesia, 4,106 lost their lives in the high violence provinces of West and Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, and Aceh (Barron, Kaiser, and Pradhan 2009). NVMS data for the same provinces records 3,415 deaths from violence. In contrast, it appears that in lower conflict areas PODES under-reports violence.<sup>9</sup> While, the 2005 PODES reported that just 276 people were killed from violent conflict nationwide (Vothknecht and Sumarto 2011), NVMS data for the same period found 1,207 deaths

4 We include Jakarta in our list of low conflict provinces because the May 1998 riots, while killing more than 1,000 people, lasted for a few days and there has not been large-scale violence since.

5 On the Indian dataset, see Varshney (2002). The tradition of using newspaper analysis to code conflict and contentious incidents goes back much further. See, for example, Snyder and Kelly (1977).

6 UNSFIR, for example, do not record any incidents of violence in Maluku province in 2003 while NVMS records 115 incidents which led to 28 deaths.

7 For the difference between forms of collective violence, including riots, and civil wars, see Varshney (2007).

8 The enumeration of the survey was completed in August 2002. Given that PODES was rolled out over a period of time, the preceding 12 months may be different for different areas.

9 The PODES figures were estimates based on just one year of data.



## 3

### THE EARLY TRANSITION YEARS: LARGE-SCALE SUBNATIONAL VIOLENCE (1998–2003)

As is well known, the years following the fall of Suharto witnessed high levels of violent conflict. Violence, of course, had been a defining feature of the New Order regime for three decades. General Suharto came to power on the back of a massive anti-communist massacre (1965–1966), when over half a million people lost their lives (Cribb 1990; Robinson 1995; Heryanto 2006). Throughout the New Order years (1965–1997), the security arms of the state used violence to retain control, build power, and scare off challenges.<sup>19</sup>

State-sponsored violence included the petrus (or ‘mysterious’) killings of alleged criminals from 1983–1985, when as many as 2,000 might have died (Bourchier 1990; Barker 2001; Siegel 1998). The military, which received a small share of its budget from official state sources, also used violence to generate income (Liem Soei Liong 2002). At times state repression and coercion led to armed resistance. Separatist violence ebbed and flowed in Papua from 1964 and in East Timor and Aceh from 1976 onwards, resulting in harsh counter-insurgency operations that killed many. Communal rioting also occurred, in particular in the late Suharto period, with outbreaks in Situbondo and Tasikmalaya in Java and Banjarmasin and Makassar in Kalimantan and Sulawesi (Sidel 2006). However, the violence that accompanied the fall of the New Order was new in both scale and nature. The early post-Suharto years undoubtedly saw the highest levels of violence since the 1965 killings. In the 17 provinces for which we have data, 21,495 people lost their lives between 1998 and 2003.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for the rise in violence have been debated extensively elsewhere and need not detain us for long, for our purpose is to examine the decline in violence, not its outbreak. Globally, as a host of scholars have shown, violence often emerges during authoritarian breakdowns<sup>21</sup> and when rapid economic declines take place.<sup>22</sup> In Indonesia, the period from 1998 to 2003 was indeed one of major national level political and socio-economic change driven by parallel transitions from authoritarianism to democracy (*reformasi*) and from a centralized to decentralized polity (*desentralisasi*) as well as changes to the structure of Indonesia’s economy following the Asian financial crisis (*krismon*). These national-level changes constituted a ‘critical juncture’, as the rules of the game—what institutions would emerge, and whose interests they would represent—were redefined (Bertrand 2004). In this context, local leaders in different parts of the country responded by using violence to cement or extend their control of the local political and economic arena (Klinken 2007) and religious leaders used violence to assert and maintain their authority in time of change (Sidel 2006). The weakening of the capacity and will of state security forces

<sup>19</sup> See, in particular, the articles in Anderson (2001) and Colombijn and Lindblad (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Data are for: Central Kalimantan, West Kalimantan, Maluku, North Maluku, Aceh, Central Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and West Papua (from NVMS); and Banten, Jakarta, West Java, East Java, Central Java, Riau, West Nusa Tenggara, and South Sulawesi (from UNSFIR–2). This figure does not include deaths from East Timor. The figure is an underestimate as UNSFIR does not record many smaller incidents of violence.

<sup>21</sup> Mansfield and Snyder (1995), Snyder (2000), Hegre et al. (2001) and Huntingdon (1991).

<sup>22</sup> Chua (2003), Paris (2004) and Cramer (2006).

to intervene in local disputes—a result in part of the separation of the police from the military—led to a security vacuum allowing for violence escalation in some place (Tajima 2012). The result was that Indonesia witnessed roughly half a decade of large-scale violence in many areas of the country.

#### 3.1 Predominant forms of violence

Two forms of violence — separatist civil war and communal violence — were especially deadly. Table 2 includes data for eight provinces that saw the highest levels of violence, and shows that the largest share of fatalities stemmed from separatist rebellions and inter-communal unrest. The other forms of routine violence, such as conflict over issues such as land, were less prominent. Violent crime also resulted in thousands of deaths.

**Table 2: Violence by type in eight Indonesian provinces 1998–2003**

| Type of Violence     | Deaths |               | Proportion of all violence-related deaths |        |
|----------------------|--------|---------------|---|--------|
| <b>Conflict</b>      |        |               |   |        |
| Ethno-Communal       |        |               |   |        |
| Inter-religious      | 6,509  |               | 74.79%                                    |        |
| Inter-ethnic         | 2,158  |               | 24.80%                                    |        |
| Other                | 36     |               | 0.41%                                     |        |
| Total Ethno-Communal |        | 8,703         |   | 45.1%  |
| Separatist           |        | 6,997         |   | 36.30% |
| Resource-related     |        | 106           |   | 0.55%  |
| Governance-related   |        | 54            |   | 0.28%  |
| Electoral            |        | 12            |   | 0.06%  |
| Vigilante            |        | 117           |   | 0.61%  |
| <b>Other</b>         |        |               |   |        |
| Crime                |        | 2,959         |   | 15.4%  |
| Domestic violence    |        | 152           |   | 0.8%   |
| Law enforcement      |        | 112           |   | 0.6%   |
| Unclear              |        | 64            |   | 0.3%   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>         |        | <b>19,276</b> |   |        |

Source: NVMS. Data are for: Aceh, Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, West Papua and West Kalimantan.

**Table 3: Summary of early transition violence in Indonesia**

| Province           | Form      | Period of large-scale violence        | Deaths               | Injuries        | Buildings       |
|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Aceh               | Civil war | Jan 98–end July 05 <sup>23</sup>      | 10,613               | 8,546           | 9,230           |
| North Maluku       | Communal  | Aug 99–end June 00                    | 3,257                | 2,635           | 15,004          |
| Maluku             | Communal  | Jan 99–end Feb 02                     | 2,793                | 5,057           | 13,843          |
| East Timor         | Civil war | Jan 98–end Dec 99                     | 1,485–1,585          | N/A             | N/A             |
| West Kalimantan    | Communal  | Jan 97–end Feb 97 / Feb 99–end Apr 99 | 1,103                | 646             | 3,830           |
| Central Kalimantan | Communal  | Feb 01–end Apr 01                     | 1,031                | 77              | 1,998           |
| Central Sulawesi   | Communal  | Apr 00–end Dec 01                     | 517                  | 579             | 6,004           |
| <b>Total</b>       |           |                                       | <b>20,799–21,799</b> | <b>17,540 +</b> | <b>49,909 +</b> |

Source: NVMS. Timor data from CAVR (2005).

In two provinces, long-running civil wars gained new momentum. In Aceh, the war between the secessionist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian military heated up with at least 8,775 killed between 1999 and 2003 and a further 1,521 losing their lives in 2004. In East Timor, 1,400–2,600 people were killed as the province parted from Indonesia, adding to the tens of thousands of deaths during the Indonesian occupation (CAVR 2005). Papua, too, saw separatist violence, although this was much more sporadic than in either Aceh or Timor.

Other provinces experienced escalated communal violence. As we have said, the New Order era was certainly not free of inter-religious and inter-ethnic unrest, but episodes were usually short-lived, burning out after a day or two, often after the arrival of the military. In contrast, new communal violence in five Indonesian provinces continued for months or years, resulting in enormous destruction of lives and property. In Central Sulawesi and Maluku, the cleavage was primarily a religious one; in North Maluku, ethnic violence morphed into inter-religious battles. Violence endured in North Maluku for almost a year; in Maluku and Central Sulawesi for multiple years. Extended communal violence also broke out in Indonesian Borneo. For around three weeks from late 1996 to early 2007, while Suharto was still in power, ethnic Dayaks in West Kalimantan attacked the migrant Madurese community; a second round of violence

around two years later set Malays against the Madurese. In February 2001, Dayaks in Central Kalimantan attacked the Madurese over the course of a few weeks, resulting in 90 percent of the Madurese population fleeing the province (ICG 2001). While the violence in West and Central Kalimantan was shorter than that in Maluku, North Maluku and Central Sulawesi, there were similarities. Fatalities were high (over a thousand in each province, except Central Sulawesi—Table 3), violence was highly organized, government services came to a halt, and clashes were spread over large geographic areas.

Beyond these areas of extended violent conflict, incidents of episodic large-scale violence also became more common. The biggest of these were the massive riots that engulfed Jakarta in mid-May and that preceded the fall of Suharto. Anti-Chinese riots also hit other Indonesian cities such as Medan in North Sumatra and Solo in Central Java (Purdey 2006). An estimated 1,193 died in Jakarta alone;<sup>24</sup> the riots in Solo led to 33 deaths and Rp 457 billion (US\$ 46 million) of property damage in a city of just 400,000 people (Panggabean and Smith 2010). The 2002 Bali bombing killed over 200 people while the Australian Embassy in Jakarta was attacked in 2004 and the Marriot Hotel in Jakarta in 2003 (and again in 2009). The early post-Suharto period can thus be characterized as a time of high violence with the greatest impact concentrated in a small number of provinces, but with episodes of violence rising across the country. For some analysts, the risk of Indonesia fragmenting Balkans-style was real (Emmerson 2000; Aspinall and Berger 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Best estimates are that between 1,574 and 6,074 people were killed in Aceh between 1976 and the end of 1997. These figures are calculated by subtracting deaths in Aceh for the 1999–2005 period (as reported in NVMS) from Aspinall's (2009: 2) estimates of the number of deaths over three decades of violence in Aceh.

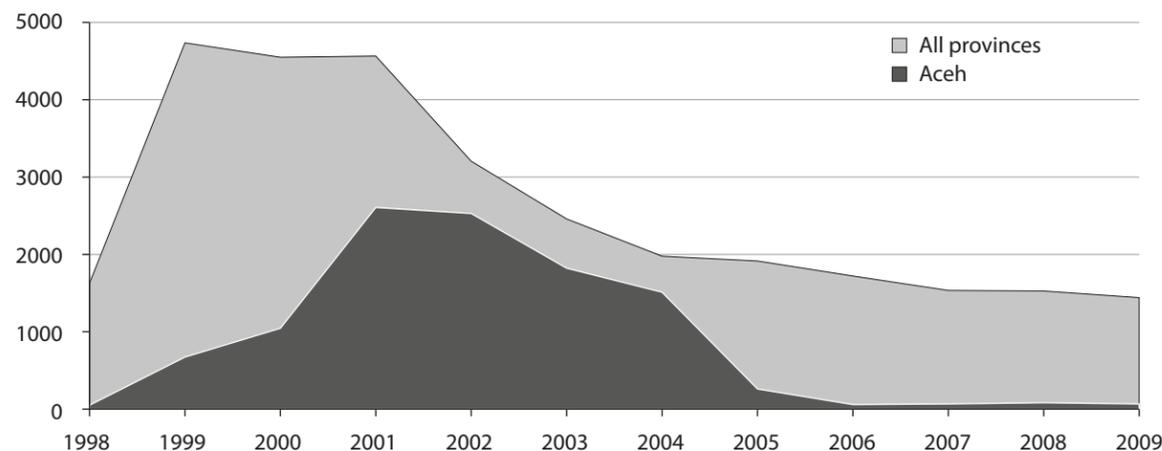
<sup>24</sup> Data from UNSFIR-2.

# 4

## THE POST-CONFLICT PHASE: HIGH FREQUENCY, LOW FATALITIES (2004–2012)

Figure 1 shows the decline in violent deaths in 15 provinces for which we have time series data until 2009.<sup>25</sup> The big wave of violence experienced its peak in 1999 when the toll stood at over 4,500 deaths. The following two years saw similar levels of violence but by early 2002 the death toll began to decline as peace accords were concluded in Central Sulawesi and Maluku. By 2003, annual fatalities had reduced by half.

**Figure 1: Decline of violence-related deaths in Indonesia**



Source: NVMS and UNSFIR-2.

In our judgment, the end of 2003 is a distinctive cut-off point to distinguish the high conflict phase from the low conflict one. The clear exception to this is the civil war in Aceh, which was only concluded in August 2005. As we know, all cut-offs in empirical analysis are to some extent arbitrary, as ours might appear to some. However, by the end of 2003, Indonesian observers were beginning to believe that a new phase of low conflict had set in. This is why most assessments of large-scale violence in Indonesia, such as UNSFIR, focus on the events up to 2003. Following this trend, we refer to the 2004–2012 period as the post-conflict phase.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Data are for the provinces mentioned in footnote 20, with the exception of Riau, which is not included because we do not have post-2003 data. The year 2004 data are missing for the four provinces on Java, South Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. Smaller-scale violence is likely under-reported for the earlier years given that we rely on UNSFIR-2 for some provinces for the pre-2005 period.

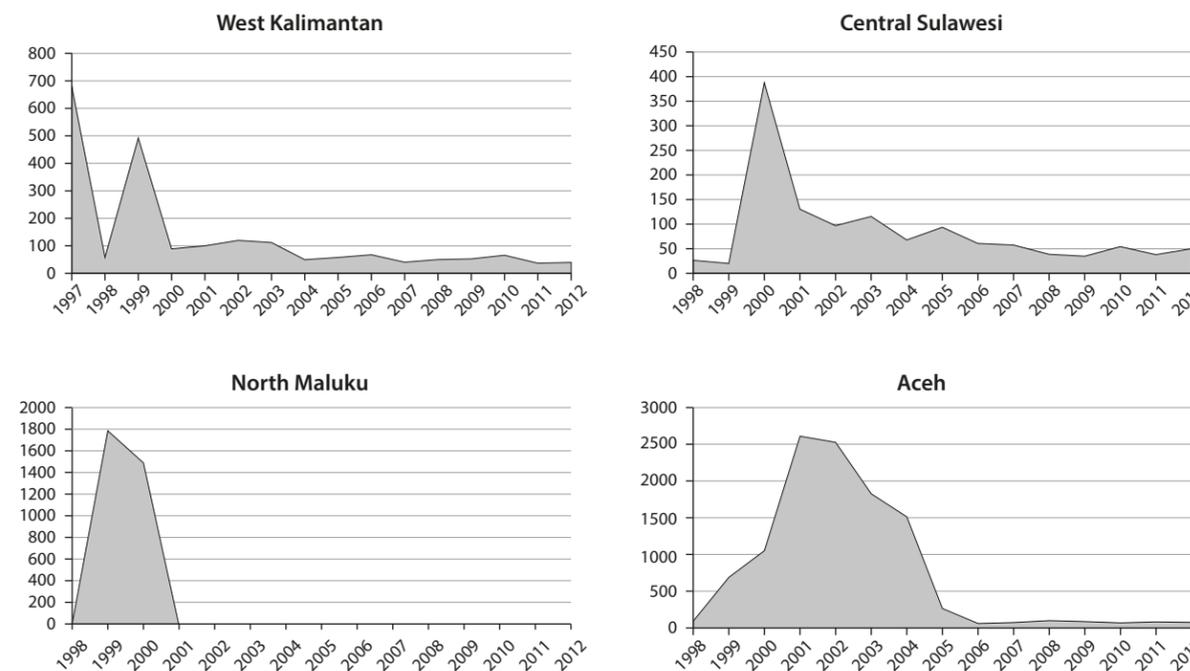
<sup>26</sup> To account for the ongoing violence in Aceh until 2005, we have separated Aceh in all cumulative analysis.

The decline in deaths was largely a consequence of the large-scale communal conflicts coming to an end. After the initial turbulence that accompanied the fall of Suharto, new rules of the game were forged that reduced the incentives of elites to support — actively or passively — the escalation of violence.<sup>27</sup> Rainbow cabinets, which contained most elements of political society, were formed; the military, realizing that core interests were not under significant threat, pledged loyalty to civilian political institutions. The resulting political stability allowed the state to start addressing the large-scale conflicts that had been a by-product of the early stages of transition.

At least two mechanisms were important. First, the state was able to more effectively coopt belligerents (for example, through peace accords and deployment of post-conflict assistance in Maluku, Sulawesi and Aceh). Second, relative political consensus led to the more effective deployment of state coercion, as the security forces began to ensure adherence to the terms of settlements, preventing conflicts from reescalating.

While the overall decline of violence has been dramatic across the country, the process of deescalation has not been uniform. Figure 2 shows the patterns of deescalation in different parts of Indonesia. We observe a sharp drop in violence followed by uniformly low levels of violence throughout the post-conflict period in areas where capacities of warring groups for violence were destroyed (North Maluku). Aceh experienced a similarly rapid deescalation of civil war violence following the Helsinki Memorandum of Agreement

**Figure 2: Patterns of deescalation in Indonesia—decline in violence-related deaths**



Source: NVMS.

<sup>27</sup> Barron (2014: chapter 8) provides a fuller discussion. See also, Mietzner (2009), Crouch (2010) and Horowitz (2013).

(MoU) between Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) and the government. However, new types of violence, most notably related to local elections and resource distribution, have since appeared in Aceh. The deescalation process has been more gradual in other areas. Central Sulawesi continued to experience outbreaks of religious violence for several years even after a government brokered peace agreement was signed in December 2001. West Kalimantan witnessed two episodes of anti–Madurese violence in rapid succession before it finally subsided.

While the pace of deescalation varied between provinces, all high conflict areas in Indonesia have one feature in common: despite some experiencing sporadic but frequent outbursts of post–conflict violence, a full reescalation to the levels of the early post–Suharto period has not occurred. A new phase has come about, in which violence continues to occur but does not rise beyond a particular threshold.

#### 4.1 Levels of post–conflict violence and its impact

Compared to the conflict period (1998–2003), the post–conflict period (2004–2012) saw a 79% reduction in annual violent deaths in the provinces previously ravaged by communal conflict. Aceh has seen a 94% decline in annual fatalities since the civil war was brought to an end in August 2005.<sup>28</sup> With the exception of injuries in areas of previous communal conflict, other impacts from violence have also declined (Table 4).

Given the steep decline, is it reasonable to conclude that violence levels in these areas have normalized? By normalization, we mean returning to all–Indonesia averages. To examine the degree of convergence with the rest of the country, we compared homicide rates<sup>29</sup> in the high and low conflict provinces. The data indicates that in the post–conflict period, high conflict provinces still experience a homicide rate that is 32% higher than that in the low conflict ones. A higher number of homicides can indicate either of two phenomena: deadly violence occurs more frequently in previously high conflict areas or violence is

Table 4: Decline in impact of violence

|                   | Post–Conflict Provinces (except Aceh) |                                 |          | Aceh                       |                                 |          |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
|                   | Annual Ave Conflict Period            | Annual Ave Post–Conflict Period | % Change | Annual Ave Conflict Period | Annual Ave Post–Conflict Period | % Change |
| Deaths            | 1,738                                 | 365                             | –79%     | 1,330                      | 82                              | –94%     |
| Injuries          | 3,006                                 | 3,272                           | 9%       | 1,079                      | 472                             | –56%     |
| Kidnappings       | 43                                    | 31                              | –27%     | 346                        | 27                              | –92%     |
| Buildings damaged | 7,391                                 | 674                             | –91%     | 1,164                      | 90                              | –92%     |

Source: NVMS.

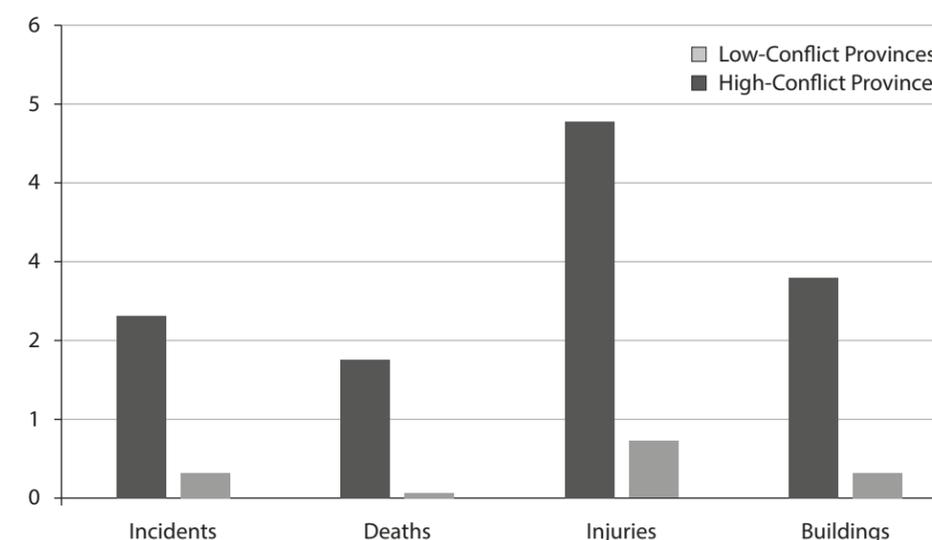
28 Average annual fatalities in Aceh during 1998–2005: 1,738. Between 2006–2012 the number declined to 365

29 Average annual deaths per 100,000 people.

more fatal in these places. Controlling for the population difference between the two samples, we find the former to be true: the frequency of violent incidents is 36% greater in high conflict areas than in low conflict ones, while the deaths–to–incident ratios are similar in both samples.

If we narrow our focus to look only at *collective* violence, defined in the dataset as those incidents that involve mobilization of a group of 10 or more individuals to participate in a riot or a clash, we also see continued differences between high conflict and low conflict provinces. We find that the frequency of collective violence is significantly higher in the former (Figure 3). The fatality rate of collective violence — the ratio of deaths per incident — is seven times higher in high conflict provinces than low conflict provinces, even in the post–conflict period.<sup>30</sup> Given the description in the preceding paragraph — namely, the frequency of violence being greater in high–conflict provinces, not the fatality rate — this finding may seem surprising, even contradictory. The seeming contradiction can be resolved if we note that the figures above are about overall violence, whereas figures in this paragraph are about *collective* violence. It is also worth reporting that incidents of collective violence in post–conflict areas have been on the rise since 2006 (Figure 4).

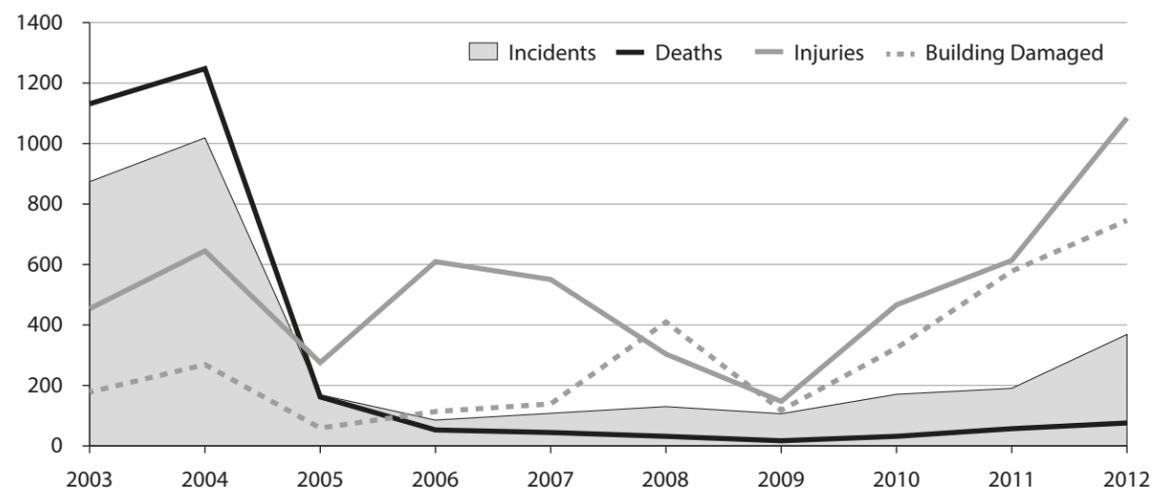
Figure 3: Collective violence in post–conflict period (annual ave./100,000 people)



Source: NVMS

30 In high conflict provinces, every 1.3 incidents of collective violence result in a death in the post–conflict period. In low conflict provinces, every 10 such incidents result in a death. Notably, the ratio of injured persons and buildings damaged to incidents is the same across high and low conflict provinces.

**Figure 4: Collective violence over time in High Conflict Provinces**



Source: NVMS.

#### 4.2 Sites of post-conflict violence

Highly localized concentration of violence was one of the defining features of Indonesia’s high conflict period. The UNSFIR study concluded that between 1990 and 2003, 85% of collective violence deaths were concentrated in 15 districts that represented just 6.5% of Indonesia’s population (Varshney, Tadjoeidin, and Panggabean 2010). To examine how concentration levels have changed in the post-conflict period, we restricted our sample of violent deaths to only those that result from incidents of collective violence (the definition used by UNSFIR) and included data from all 16 high and low conflict provinces to form a larger sample.<sup>31</sup> Using the UNSFIR definition, we find that in the post-conflict period, districts that represent just over 13% of the country’s population account for 85% of collective violence deaths.<sup>32</sup> While this figure indicates a lower level of concentration than in the past, collective violence is still quite concentrated.<sup>33</sup>

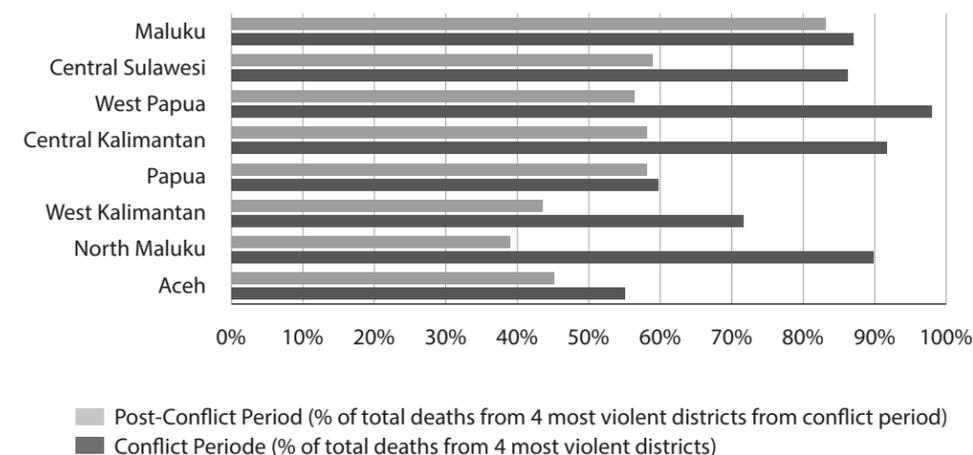
Within the sample of high conflict provinces, we find that not only is the violence still highly concentrated in these areas but that it also tends to occur in the same sites that experienced the highest levels of violence during the conflict period. Figure 5 compares the share of violence-related deaths that occurred in the four most violent districts in each province in the conflict period with the share of deaths in the same districts in the post-conflict period. We can see that with the exception of North Maluku, the most violent districts in the conflict period still account for more than 40% of the total deaths in the province.

31 The actual list of provinces included in the UNSFIR study is slightly different from the one used for NVMS. UNSFIR excluded Aceh, Papua and West Papua and included West and Central Java. NVMS includes the former but excludes the latter. However, none of the districts from West and Central Java were included in UNSFIR’s 15 most violent districts.

32 Calculated for the period 2005–2009 for which data from all high and low conflict provinces is available. We compare the population as the number of districts is not comparable between the UNSFIR and the NVMS sample due to rapid frequent district splitting during between 1998 and 2008.

33 When we unrestricted our sample to include all incidents of violence, collective or individual, we find similar levels of concentration: 85% of all violent deaths are accounted for by districts that represent 40% of the country’s population. This suggests that collective violence is more concentrated than other forms of violence.

**Figure 5: Post-conflict violence concentrated in old conflict sites**



Source: NVMS.

In some cases, like Maluku, Papua and Aceh, there has been virtually no change in the share of violence accounted for by these areas. This finding is consistent with research elsewhere, suggesting that areas that experience large-scale violence are likely to remain vulnerable to new, often interlinked forms of violence in the post-conflict period.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4.3 Composition of post-conflict violence

So far, we have shown that violence is more frequent in provinces with a prior history of large-scale conflict. Within these provinces, post-conflict violence tends to be concentrated in old sites. But is the new violence merely a continuation of the old conflicts at lower levels, or have new types of violence emerged?

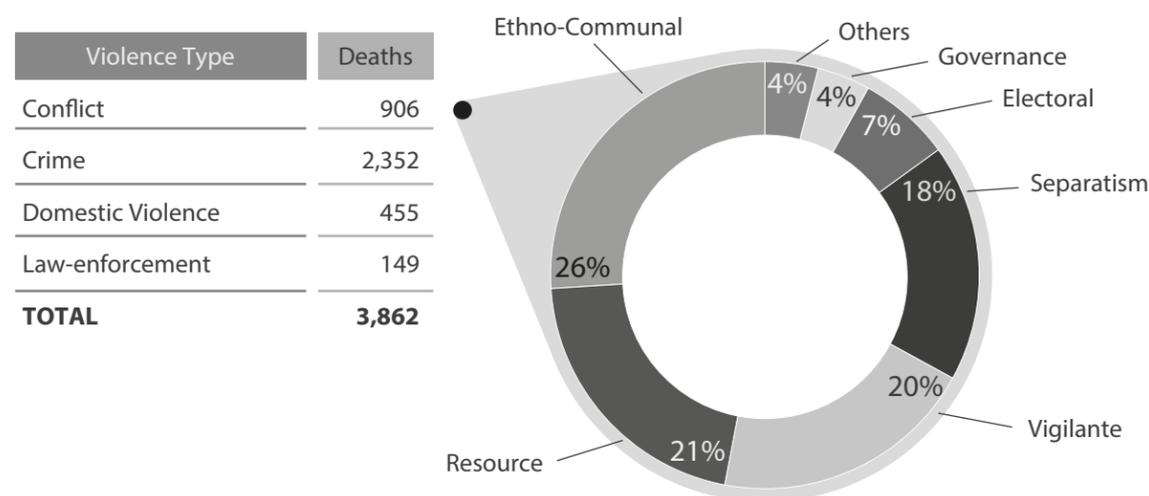
Figure 6 shows the composition of violence in the eight high conflict provinces during the post-conflict period.<sup>35</sup> Compared with the early post-Suharto years that were dominated by ethno-communal and separatist violence (Table 2), in the post-conflict period, some of these types of violence have continued, but new ones have emerged making the composition of violence much more diverse.

Ethno-communal violence still accounts for a quarter of all conflict deaths in the post-conflict areas in the second phase. Continuation of low-level religious violence in Poso and Ambon, intensification of tribal warfare in Papua and the rise of village rivalries explain why this is still the largest category of conflict. Even though normal life has long been restored in (most of) these areas, small incidents involving members of different religious groups, or even rumors of such an incident, can trigger violent reaction. A relatively recent example of this was in May 2013 when, during a torch passing ceremony associated with the commemoration of a local hero, clashes, apparently triggered by a disagreement over protocol, broke

34 The World Development Report of 2011 (World Bank 2011) makes this argument for post-civil war areas. We find that this it also holds true also for areas that experienced prolonged episodes of large-scale communal violence.

35 High conflict period is 1998–2003 for all provinces except Aceh, where it is 1998–2005.

**Figure 6: Composition of post-conflict violence in high conflict provinces**



Source: NVMS

out between Christian and Muslim residents in the Mardika and Batumerah hamlets in Ambon.<sup>36</sup> Clashes lasted for several hours resulting in 55 injuries and the burning of five houses and 11 vehicles.<sup>37</sup> Rumors of impending bomb blasts, later dispelled by the police, sent residents looking for safe locations and the city was shut down for the day.<sup>38</sup> Despite the residual communal tensions evident in these sporadic post-conflict outbreaks, it should be reiterated that Indonesia has managed to avoid a major outbreak that would remind one of the pre-2003 period.

The post-conflict period in Indonesia has been accompanied by rapid economic growth, political and institutional change including direct local elections and decentralization. One consequence has been a rise in resource-related violence, mostly land disputes, which have increased from 76 average incidents a year in the conflict period to 158 in the post conflict period.<sup>39</sup> According to some observers, land disputes between groups and individuals have existed for decades (Habibie Center 2012). However, the recent influx of outside investment for palm oil plantations and mining projects has raised the stakes in these disputes. This has resulted in a spate of violent confrontations between communities, private company employees and even government officials. An example of this kind of dynamic is found in Central Maluku district in Maluku province, the site of intense Christian-Muslim violence in 1999. Between 2005 and 2012, a complex land dispute, involving claims by multiple villages, has claimed 33 lives with scores more injured and hundreds of buildings destroyed (NVMS). So far, the conflict does not appear to be drawn along religious lines as villages of the same and different religious affiliations are in competition with one another (Habibie Center 2012). However, given the recent history of religious violence between these villages a possible reframing of the issue is an ongoing concern for the government, which has attempted, unsuccessfully to mediate the dispute.

<sup>36</sup> These areas were the location of the first outbreak of communal violence in Maluku in 1999.

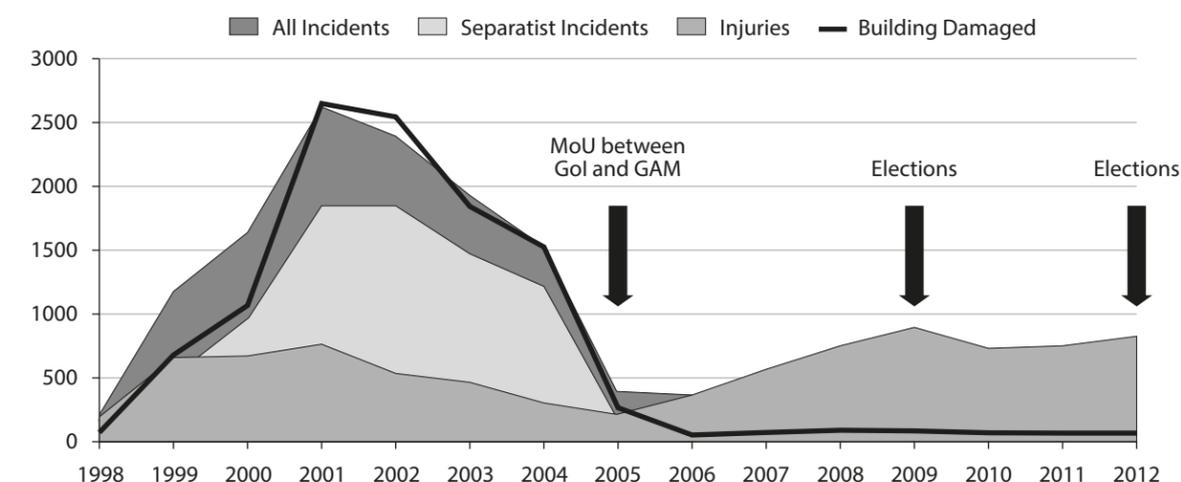
<sup>37</sup> NVMS.

<sup>38</sup> For further examples, see Barron, Azca, and Susdinarjanti (2012).

<sup>39</sup> The rise of resource related violence is not unique to the 'high conflict' areas of Indonesia. Analysis of the 'low conflict' areas shows that there is no significant difference in the frequency these incidents between the two samples.

Violence related to local elections has also risen, particularly in areas with a history of separatist violence. In Aceh for example, the number of violent electoral incidents has increased from an average of seven a year (in the conflict period) to 47 per year as a result of fierce political competition between rival factions of the former rebel group.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the NVMS data shows that following the decline of the separatist violence, levels of other forms of violence, including criminal activity, have increased in Aceh and tend to peak around the local elections. As Figure 7 shows, overall levels of violence have spiked around election time in Aceh. Papua and West Papua provinces have also seen a steady rise of electoral violence against the backdrop of an *ongoing* insurgency. Between 2008 and 2012, 48 deaths were recorded as a result of disputes during local elections, making Papua the site of the most violent elections in the country (NVMS).

**Figure 7: Violence in Aceh over time**



Source: NVMS.

Before we proceed to a causal examination of trends, let us summarize the argument thus far. We have noted that violence in the second phase has not reescalated to the levels seen in the early post-Suharto days. However, we have also documented three other trends. First, we showed that despite the dramatic decline of violence-related deaths, the frequency of violence in post-conflict areas has remained high. Indeed, the frequency of collective violence incidents has increased since 2006 resulting in a growing number of injuries and property damage across these areas, *though each incident is less fatal*. Second, we showed that violence is still concentrated in provinces that previously experienced large-scale conflict and, within these, it is highly concentrated in districts that were particularly affected by conflict in the past. Third, we traced changes in the composition of violence to show how old triggers of violence such as ethnic and religious tensions continue to account for a major share of violence, but also how rising levels of resource and electoral disputes have created new avenues for violence in the post-conflict period.

<sup>40</sup> See ICG (2012b).

# 5

## MANAGING THE POST-CONFLICT PATTERN: IMPROVED SECURITY RESPONSES

Why has violence not reescalated to the older level? Recall that the initial deescalation of violence in Indonesia was attributed to two factors related to the political rules of the game at the center. A new consensus on the lack of desirability of escalated regional violence led to state-sponsored peace settlements. Moreover, such a political shift also allowed for a more effective deployment of security personnel to prevent escalation of violence.

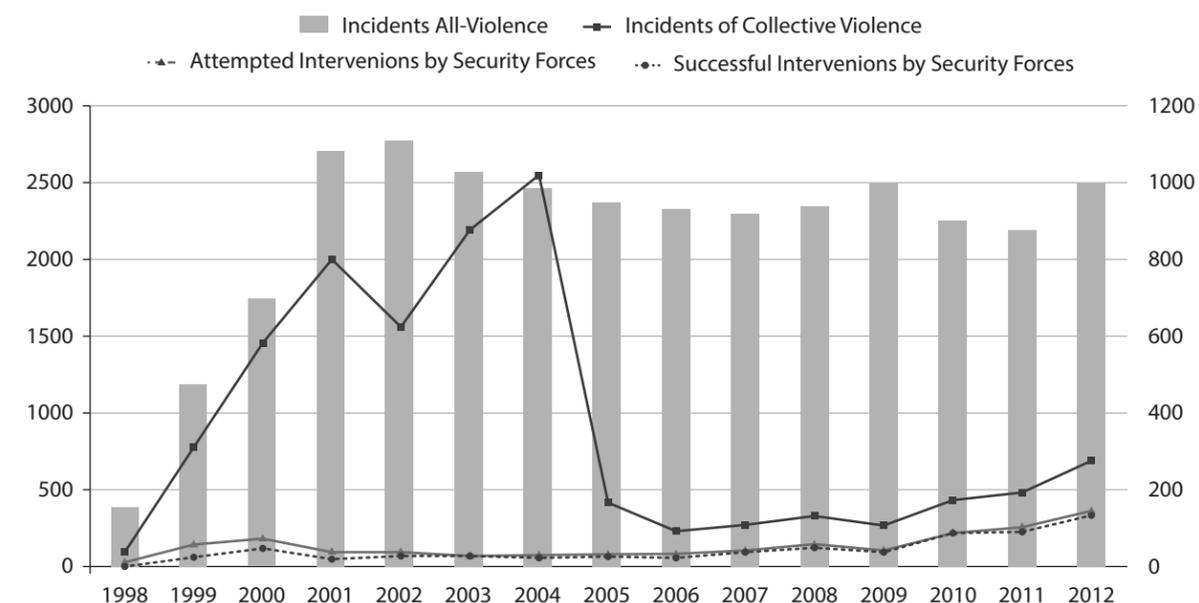
We argue these two factors continue to play a key role in ensuring lower levels of violence, despite many underlying causes of large-scale violent conflict remaining in place. Eruption of episodic violence in post-conflict areas is usually met with a stern response from the highest-level officials in the central government; this translates into swift security interventions on the ground. In many cases, local police units have been quickly reinforced by rapid deployment of regional reserves.<sup>41</sup> In extreme cases, assistance is sought from the stand-by military units that have been stationed in these areas since the initial conflict. Our data shows that this active management of the security situation has worked well to prevent massive casualties.

Beyond collecting information on incidents of violence, their impact and triggers, the NVMS also records where an ‘intervention’ was made to stop the violence *during the course of an incident*. If made, the identity of the intervener is coded (such as the law enforcement agency or civilian leaders) along with the result of the intervention. An intervention is coded as successful if the intervener is able to stop the violence and is able to disperse the actors involved (either through arrests or other means). Figure 8 shows how both interventions by security forces, and success, have increased over time in the province that saw large-scale violence.

Overall, incidents of individual violence (corresponding with the left axis) have remained uniformly high over the years. However, the number of collective violence incidents (corresponding with right axis) has risen steadily following an initial deescalation around 2004. The number of such incidents tripled between 2006 and 2012. In the previous section, we showed how this surge in collective violence incidents has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of injuries and damaged buildings but *not* deaths, which have remained low.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example: McRae (2013) on improved security responses in Poso; Wilson’s (2013) account of security responses to riots in East Kalimantan; and ICG (2011, 2012b) on responses to violence in Ambon.

**Figure 8: Change in incidence of collective violence in high conflict areas and interventions by security forces**



Source: NVMS.

This paradox can be explained by the rise in interventions by security forces that has accompanied the upsurge in collective violence incidents. During the conflict period, only 10% of these incidents saw any interventions from the security forces. Following 2006, however, security forces have intervened in about half of all collective violence incidents. While the majority of security interventions were attempted by the Indonesian military during the conflict period, in the post-conflict period the police is the primary responder, accounting for over 80% of all interventions.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the success of interventions has risen steeply with an average success rate of over 85%. In short, intervention by the security forces in collective violence incidents has increased and helped limit further violent escalation.

While we attribute the relatively lower levels of fatalities to increasing and improved security force interventions, we are not making any claims about the long-term effectiveness of this strategy. The number of interventions only represents attempts to halt the violence in an incident that has already occurred. It does not tell us anything about the attempts to prevent such incident from occurring in the first place. The Indonesian security agencies have been widely criticized for not following up security action with broader law enforcement measures such as arrest of perpetrators or control of the smaller-scale violence (ICG 2012c).

<sup>42</sup> Although the percentage of military interventions has increased gradually over the last four years.

Further, while we claim that this damage control approach is responsible for keeping fatality levels relatively low in high conflict areas, we are by no means implying that interventions by Indonesian security forces are adequate across the universe of cases. Of late much has been written in the local and international press about the unwillingness of local police forces to intervene and stop violence against minorities. Documentary evidence has surfaced in many cases where mobs have attacked members of the Ahmadiyya community, while police officers have looked on.<sup>43</sup> Indeed when we check the rate of interventions in low conflict areas, we find that it is much lower (30%) than in the high conflict areas. The strategy of swift intervention in response to collective violence incidents that is practiced in high-risk areas does not appear to take place in areas that have not seen large-scale conflict in the past.

Finally, we are not making any claims about the sustainability of this approach to violence management in the future. In fact, when we note that violence continues to be widespread in areas with an acute history of violence, the fragility of the current equilibrium perhaps becomes apparent. That violence is being artfully managed through a series of successful security interventions is no guarantee that this strategy will work in the future.

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<sup>43</sup> For details see report by the Asian Human Rights Commission <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-071-2012>

## 6

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### CONCLUSION

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By way of conclusion, let us recapitulate our principal arguments. We have made three substantive arguments and one methodological. First, Indonesia has witnessed a significant decline in violence since 2004. A paradox, however, marks this decline. Incidents of violence have remained high, but fatalities per incident have come down. Large-scale violence is precipitously lower than in the immediate post-Suharto years (1998–2003), but small-scale violence remains unabated. Second, provinces that experienced high levels of violence in the early period continue to be more violent in the later period, compared to provinces that previously witnessed low levels of violence. There is no nationwide spatial convergence in the intensity of conflict. Third, effective security interventions by the state, embedded in a new political settlement, especially in the high-conflict provinces, are an important cause of the decline in overall violence. The state is on the whole able to prevent the escalation of those episodes of violence, which in its judgment have the potential to turn into larger conflagrations. It is not entirely clear that this conflict management strategy will necessarily work in the long run unless the polity addresses the underlying causes of conflict.

Our final conclusion is methodological. Conflict studies have so far tended to concentrate on one kind of violence (for example, Muslim-Christian, Sinhala-Tamil, Hindu-Muslim, Chinese-*pribumi*, etc), or one form of violence (for example, riots or civil wars). Collecting data on all forms of violence together allows one to see how forms of violence can change over time, even when a period of peace, as we normally understand it, sets in. Forms of violence can morph as time goes on.

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**The World Bank Office Jakarta**  
Indonesia stock Exchange Building  
Tower 2, 12th Floor  
Jl. Jenderal Sudirman kav. 52-53  
Jakarta 12910. Indonesia  
Phone : (62-21) 5299 3000  
Fax : (62-21) 5299 3111  
Website : [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

**The World Bank**  
1818 H Street N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 21433, U.S.A  
Phone : 1(202) 458-1876  
Fax : 1(202) 522-1557 / 1560  
e-mail : [books@worldbank.org](mailto:books@worldbank.org)  
Website : [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

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