

Using Newspapers to Understand Variation in Violent Conflict Towards a Database of Violence in Indonesia

This briefing is based on the following articles:

Patrick Barron and Joanne Sharpe. 2005. "Counting Conflicts: Using Newspaper Reports to Understand Violence in Indonesia." *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Paper* No. 25. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Patrick Barron and Joanne Sharpe. 2008. "Local Conflict in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Understanding Variations in Violence Levels and Forms Through Local Newspapers." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 8: 395-424.

Two series of Policy Briefs are published by the Conflict and Development program within the World Bank Indonesia country team. The first, "Understanding Conflict Dynamics and Impacts," summarizes the results of research on conflict in Indonesia. These briefs draw out lessons for understanding and responding to conflict in other middle-income countries. The second, "Evaluating Responses to Conflict," summarizes the results of evaluations and assessments of conflict programs, and the methodological implications for how we can best measure the impacts of peace-building programs. All Policy Briefs are available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org

The fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998 was accompanied by an upsurge in violent conflict in Indonesia. The largest episodes of violent conflict – in Aceh, Papua, Maluku, North Maluku, Central Sulawesi, Central Kalimantan and West Kalimantan – are well known. Far less attention has been paid to localized violent conflicts, which have affected most of the country.

An emerging literature seeks to understand violent conflict in Indonesia through the compilation and analysis of datasets that record conflict incidents reported in newspapers. This note presents the findings of a Conflict and Development (C&D) program study that uses local newspaper monitoring in two provinces to track the incidence of localized violent conflict. By using local newspapers, the study finds levels of localized violence three times higher than has been detected by previous studies that rely on the provincial and national press. The study finds significant variation in the level and impacts of violent conflict across districts. Results suggest that violent conflict incidence and impact are more widespread than previously thought.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the utility of the newspaper method, the importance of using sources below the provincial level, and of including a program of qualitative research as part of the compilation of a violent conflict database. Using this methodology, the C&D program is currently expanding the two-province study to assemble a dataset of violent conflict in Indonesia covering twenty-one provinces. This project is expected to be completed by early 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Responding to conflict requires an understanding of its distribution, forms and impact within countries. With its 33 provinces and more than 400 districts, spread across 17,000 islands, this poses a serious challenge in Indonesia. Two efforts using different methodologies have attempted to systematically examine patterns of conflict across Indonesia:

- The United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery (UNSFIR) commissioned two studies that tracked communal conflicts using newspapers. The first iteration (UNSFIR-1), using national papers, found at least 6,208 conflict deaths from 1990-2001 (Tadjoeddin 2002). A second (UNSFIR-2), using provincial papers in fourteen provinces (excluding Aceh and Papua), found over 10,700 deaths from 1990-2003 (Varshney, Panggabean and Tadjoeddin 2008).
- The government's Potensi Desa (PODES) household survey, conducted in all villages in Indonesia in 2003, found that 7.2 percent of villages had experienced conflict the previous year. Its single year snapshot identified 4,869 deaths caused by conflict in 2002 alone (Barron, Kaiser and Pradhan 2004).

UNSFIR-2 is the most comprehensive dataset currently available on collective violence in Indonesia. However, it is not without weaknesses. First, the dataset overstates extent to which most violence in Indonesia

is limited to just a few districts. By using national and provincial papers, UNSFIR-2 excludes recurrent cases of small-scale violence in remote parts of provinces, which are unlikely to be captured by the provincial press. Second, the definition of conflict used does not capture the full spectrum of violent conflict forms. Individual-on-individual violence is not counted in the dataset. Limiting the definition of conflict to intergroup disputes not only results in lower reported violence impacts but also negates a fuller examination of the links between the myriad forms that violent conflict may take.

As a result, the C&D program decided to put together a new dataset. The approach differs from UNSFIR-2 in two key respects. First, where possible, the study uses sub-provincial newspapers, each covering a small number of districts, to capture more local conflict incidents. Second, the study includes conflict between individuals in the dataset. This choice is theoretically justified in Indonesia, because closer examination of many “individual conflicts” reveals that they have a group basis.

For obvious reasons, improving data accuracy and breadth necessitates limiting the geographic and temporal scope of the dataset. Where UNSFIR-2 (using provincial sources) covers fourteen provinces, the C&D study limits data collection to twelve districts in two provinces and to three years (2001-2003).

The methodology and main findings of the C&D study are summarized below. This note addresses two key questions:

- What benefits are gained by including sub-provincial newspapers in the compilation of a national conflict database?
- What are the implications of patterns of localized conflict for practitioners seeking to develop policy responses?

Table 1: Primary Violent Conflict Types

Physical resource	Disputes over ownership, access to, and use of resources (natural or manmade; private, public, or communal)
Administrative	Disputes over management/procedure/service provision of government or donor-funded programs and public or private enterprises
Political position and influence	Competition over political power in state/non-state, village/district level positions (usually relating to elections and political appointments)
Vigilantism and retribution	“Mob justice” or lynchings; violence motivated by revenge
Other	Residual conflicts not described by other categories (primarily domestic violence and other intra-family disputes)

METHODOLOGY

The study selected East Java and Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) for the local newspaper dataset. These two provinces were chosen for a number of reasons:

- Each frequently experiences significant levels of localized conflict, but neither has experienced unrest on the scale of Indonesia’s highest conflict areas.
- To assess the commonalities, or differences, of conflict forms and impacts, the provinces were chosen to be as different as possible. They vary by population size, degree of ethnic homogeneity, dominant religious group, and level of provincial development.

Data for 2001-2003 was collected in twelve districts. In East Java, data was collected on the “Pamekasan cluster” (four districts on the island of Madura) and the “Ponorogo cluster” (three districts in the northeast of the province). In NTT, data was collected on all five districts on the island of Flores. Two teams of researchers gathered data from seven local newspaper sources.

Using a standardized set of codes and a standard template, each incident of conflict was coded by conflict type, location, impact,

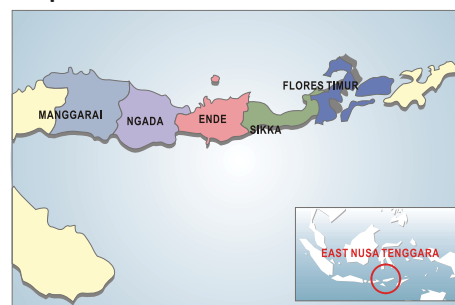
actors and interveners. Each incident was assigned one of five main conflict types (Table 1). The newspaper dataset was cross-checked with six months of ethnographic fieldwork in the research areas, conducted as part of a broader study on the impact of a community development program on conflict outcomes (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock 2006).

The resulting data provide an empirical base to look more closely at the distribution of conflict forms and their impacts, a starting point for assessing questions of causality and suitable responses.

Map 1: Research Districts in East Java



Map 2: Research Districts in NTT



FINDINGS

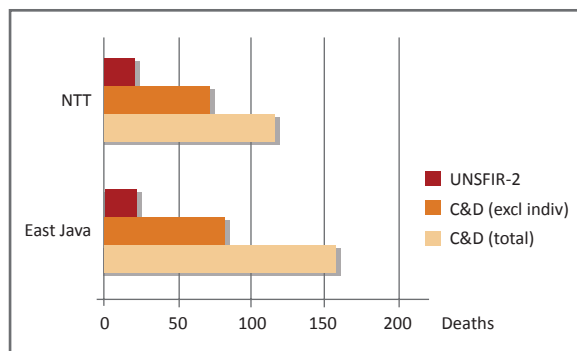
Deaths from localized conflicts in Indonesia are significantly higher than is captured by previous studies. The C&D study identifies more than three times as many conflict deaths as did UNSFIR-2 in East Java and NTT from 2001 to 2003, even when incidents between individuals are excluded from the dataset. If incidents between individuals are included, the level of deaths is approximately six times as high (Figure 1).

Violent conflict incidence and impacts are more widely distributed than previously thought. The districts surveyed for the C&D study were not considered conflict prone, but the study shows that several experienced significant violent conflict impacts. The factor by which conflict goes uncounted is unlikely to be constant, so it is not possible to project a more accurate death toll from the C&D study for conflict across Indonesia. Nevertheless, it appears likely that UNSFIR-2 missed thousands of conflict deaths.

The forms and intensity of violence and the types of impacts observed vary significantly for each district. In East Java, violence in the Pamekasan cluster is characteristically fatal, whereas violence in the Ponorogo cluster causes property damage but rarely results in deaths (Figure 2). In NTT, Manggarai stands out as experiencing the worst impacts of violence. It has the lowest rate of violent conflict per capita, but accounts for 44 percent of deaths and 47 percent of property damage in the Flores cluster.

Sources of conflict vary both between and within clusters. Conflict over resources – in particular, communal land conflict – is important in the NTT. Vigilantism and retribution is the dominant source of conflict in both clusters in East Java, but this violence has different sources in each cluster

Figure 1: Deaths from Collective Conflict by Province, 2001–2003



Note: All data (including UNSFIR) is for the seven districts in East Java, and five in NTT

(Figure 3). In the Pamekasan cluster, vigilantism most commonly arises in response to theft, witchcraft, or humiliation. In Ponorogo, vigilantism tends to stem from clashes over group identity.

Qualitative research is required to understand why violence takes particular forms and results in varied impacts. For instance, vigilantism in the Pamekasan cluster most often targets individuals and causes deaths, whereas in Ponorogo vigilantism targets groups and causes property damage. Qualitative fieldwork suggests that the targeting of individuals in Pamekasan stems from the local *carok* (dueling) culture,

which has extended beyond its traditional context of response to loss of face, to the targeting of thieves and witchcraft (Said 2003). Violence against groups in Ponorogo arises from a local history of youths organizing in groups based on martial arts ideology (Probo 2003). Violence in the cluster targets property because vandalism sprees on

enemy turf are the dominant mode of retaliation and aggression for these martial arts groups.

Local factors appear to drive conflict, meaning that policy responses must be tailored to local conditions.

Interventions that specifically target the dominant local form of violence may have a significant overall impact on local levels of violence. For example, Madiun district has easily the highest level of property damage in the Ponorogo cluster, with 70 percent caused in incidents involving local martial arts groups. A successful intervention to target this local vigilantism could greatly improve security in the district.

Figure 2: Forms of Impact by District, 2001–2003

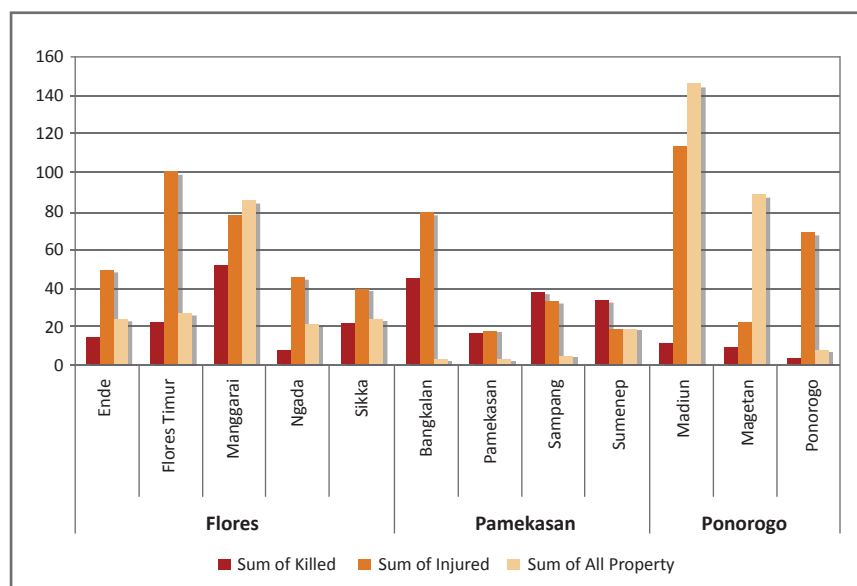
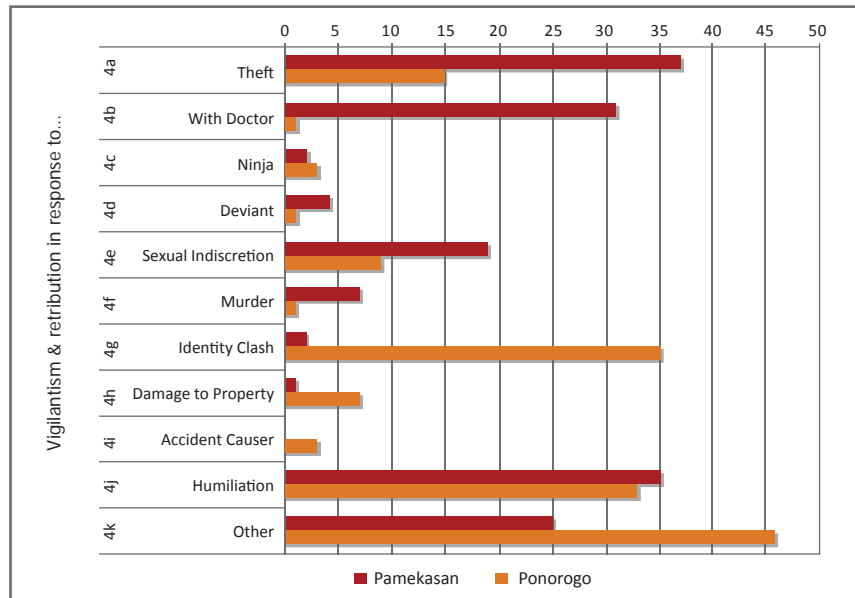


Figure 3: Forms of Violent Conflict by Cluster in East Java, 2001–2003



CONCLUSION

The use of sub-provincial newspapers facilitates significant alterations to our understanding of violent conflict in Indonesia. The study reveals much higher levels of localized violent conflict than have been captured by previous methods, and finds that violence varies in its levels and forms at the district level. The levels of violent conflict found in twelve districts not previously considered to be conflict prone also suggests that UNSFIR-2’s findings regarding the concentration of violent conflict may be overstated.

The study also demonstrates the importance of local historical, cultural and political processes in shaping patterns of violence. The nature of violence differs locally and the causes vary by location. The implication for practitioners is that policy and programmatic instruments that do not take account of the differences in form and incidence of conflict at the local level are likely to be overly blunt.

Because of the limited geographic and temporal scope of the C&D study, many questions remain unanswered. How accurate, for example, is previous studies’ reporting of episodic violence in high-conflict areas such as Maluku and Central Sulawesi? What are the overall impacts of conflict across Indonesia? In what ways are the forms of conflict in higher and lower conflict areas different or similar? As Indonesia’s democratization processes consolidate, to what extent is violence receding, and how is this varying across areas?

To start to get at some of these questions, the Conflict and Development program is currently expanding its conflict dataset to cover twenty-one provinces containing almost 90 percent of Indonesia’s population. This will be a multi-year project. However, such a system can aid our understanding of violence in Indonesia and help in the development of responses that enhance human

security and promote peaceful development in the archipelago.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Systematic newspaper mapping is a useful way to better understand conflict incident, impacts and characteristics.
- Efforts to monitor conflict through newspaper reportage should use sub-provincial newspapers when available.
- A qualitative research program, that can investigate why violent conflict takes specific forms and results in particular impacts, should be incorporated into dataset compilation to inform policy responses.
- Policy responses to conflict must be tailored to local conditions and should take into account the dominant local factors that drive violence

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