



CENTRE FOR  
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STUDIES

## **POLICY BRIEF**

# **MANAGING ESCALATING TIDES: INDONESIA'S RECORD-BREAKING COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE INCIDENTS IN 2023**



**Farhan Julianto and Pieter Alexander Pandie**



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A Policy Brief by CSIS Indonesia

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## Introduction

Violent conflicts in Indonesia have evolved into more frequent, though smaller-scale incidents compared to mass atrocities that happened in the past. While these occurrences are currently less lethal, there is a risk that they could escalate into significant and deadly mass atrocities if not properly managed.

In order to provide the stakeholders with a comprehensive monitoring tool that provides early warnings and strategies for risk mitigation on atrocities prevention, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) with support from the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) at the University of Queensland developed the Collective Violence Early Warning (CVEW) Dataset. This important database compiled detailed reports of all collective violence incidents in Indonesia with daily updates and analysis. Additionally, this Dataset aligns with the variables outlined in the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes.

The Dataset monitors these incidents through a daily data-collecting process by six trained and experienced coders from 71 provincial-level and 2 national-level online newspapers across all 34 provinces. It meticulously captures 57 detailed variables, encompassing the full spectrum of each incident's aspects and underlying causes. Furthermore, the Dataset evaluates related incidents and assesses the effectiveness of third-party interventions, providing a robust framework for timely and informed response strategies. The data will be verified and analyzed before being published through an accessible webpage.<sup>1</sup>

This report will provide general and specific findings on the patterns of collective violence incidents in Indonesia between January and December 2023. In that period, the CVEW Dataset recorded 1.632 collective violence incidents - most since its inception - which resulted in 261 deaths and 1.689 injuries.

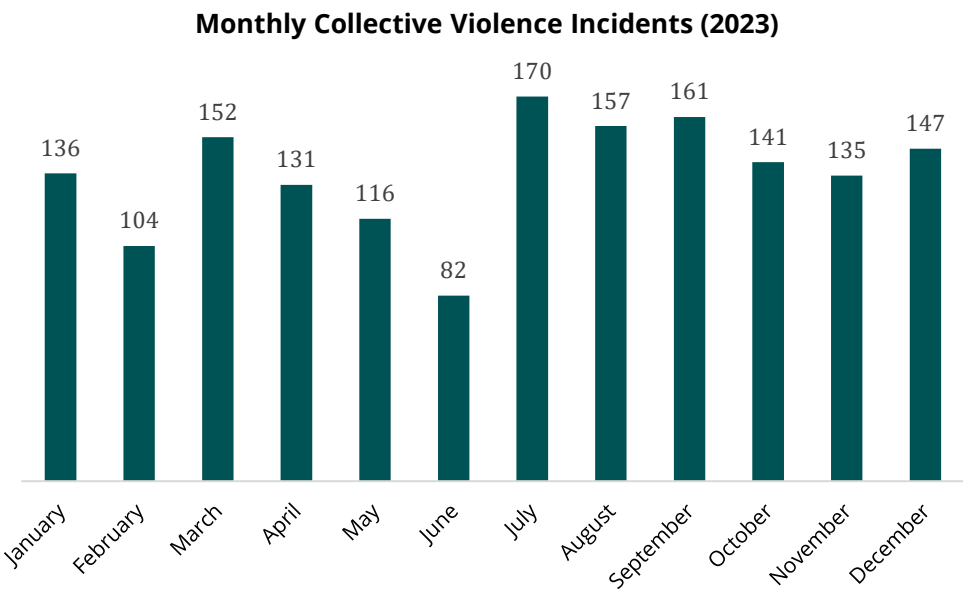
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<sup>1</sup> The webpage for the Dataset is <http://www.violence.csis.or.id>.

## General Findings: Patterns of Collective Violence in 2023

### Frequency and Geographical Concentrations of Collective Violence

In 2023, the CVEW Dataset reported a record high of 1.632 collective violence incidents, marking the highest annual count since the inception of the Dataset. This represents a 46% increase compared to the 1.114 incidents recorded in 2022. This concerning milestone also means that an average of 4.47 incidents occurred daily in Indonesia. Most notably, there was a significant increase in the frequency of these incidents during the latter half of the year, aligning with the start of the national election campaign for presidential and legislative candidates.



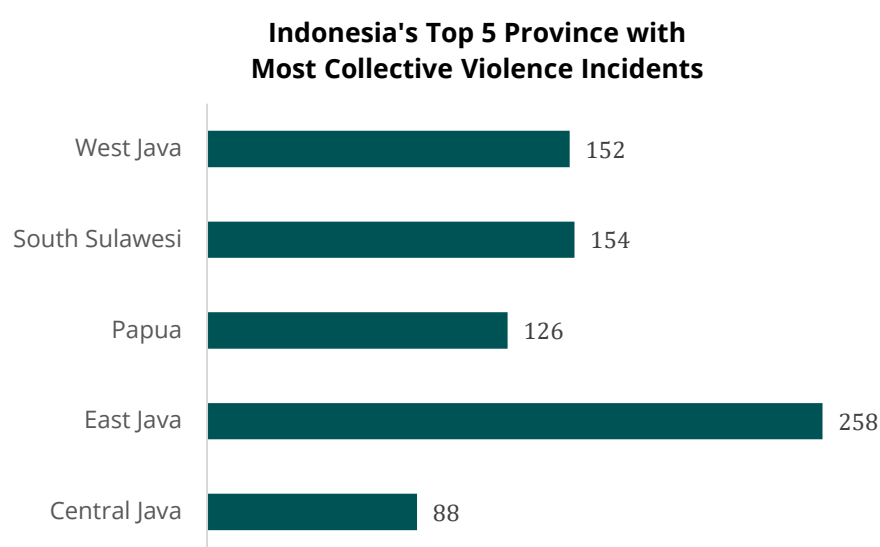
Graph 1. Indonesia's Monthly Collective Violence Incidents in 2023  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

Additionally, the Dataset highlighted an alarming trend in Papua, where initial single incidents resulted in subsequent strings of violence. Specifically, four such sequences were documented, each initiated by one incident that subsequently led to at least two additional related incidents. This pattern underscores a particular vulnerability in Papua and is exacerbated by insufficient incident management by local security personnel. Furthermore, there was a recurring issue in most of these incidents, with all of the incidents related in some sense to vigilantism, and local authorities were involved directly or indirectly in these strings of violence.

Date	City/ Regency	Total number of Incidents	Incident Details
21 January	Dogiyai Regency	3	Mass riots sparked by the death of a resident who had attempted robbery on a truck driver.
23 February	Jayawijaya Regency	3	Mass riots triggered by a child kidnapping issue
14 July	Jayapura City	3	Riots caused by a misfire by the joint security task force
27-28 December	Dogiyai Regency	6	Mass riots during the funeral process of former Governor Lukas Enembe

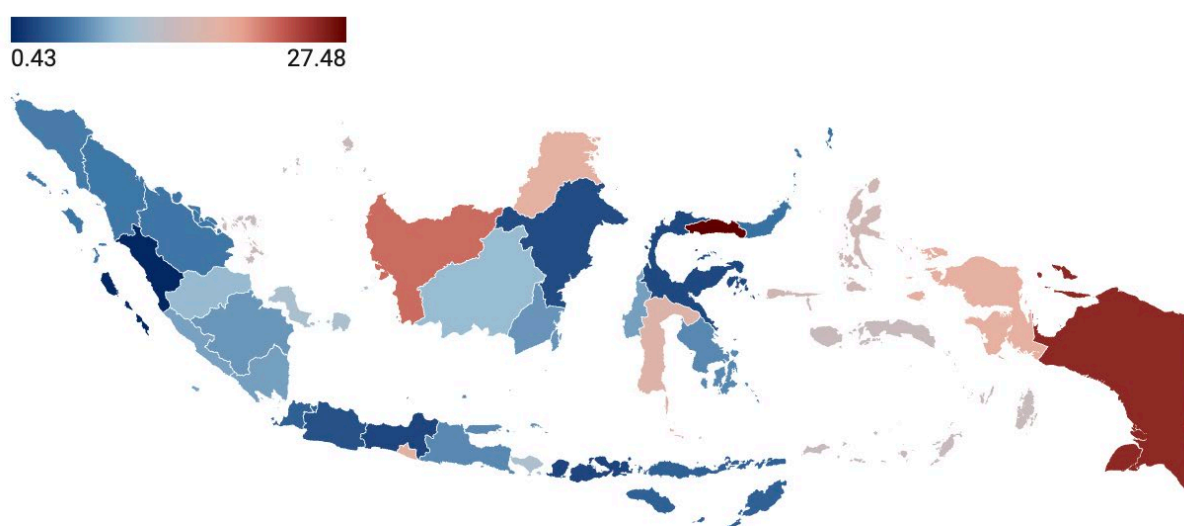
Table 1. Strings of Incidents in Papua (January – December 2023)  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

In terms of geographical distribution, the incidents were mostly recorded in East Hava, South Sulawesi, and West Java consecutively. East Java and South Sulawesi continue to follow the existing pattern from the previous years with a relatively high frequency of incidents, each with 258 and 154 incidents this year. However, the rise of West Java is unique to this year, recording 130 incidents, which is a deviation from the previously established pattern.



Graph 2. Indonesia's Top 5 Provinces with Most Collective Violence Incidents in 2023  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

However, frequency is not always linear with intensity. Intensity is defined in this Dataset as the comparison between frequency per a million population in a province. This year, we found that Gorontalo was the most intense province with 27 incidents per a million population. It was closely followed by Papua and West Kalimantan, with 25 and 21 incidents respectively. The findings represent a similar pattern to the findings of Sujarwoto, which argued that communal conflicts are caused by economic inequality, elite capture, and weak capacity to manage financial resources, a pattern mostly seen in Eastern Indonesia.<sup>2</sup>



Map: Farhan Julianto • Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Graph 3. The Intensity of Collective Violence Incidents in Indonesia by Province (2023)  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

### ***Underlying Causes of Collective Violence***

Two underlying causes of collective violence incidents require further scrutiny. First, vigilantism that is triggered by criminal activities and sexual violence incidents was reported in 182 collective violence incidents. Areas with higher population densities like Java and Sumatra have seen a correspondingly high frequency of such incidents. It has also resulted in 36 deaths and 226 injuries, an average of 1,44 casualties per incident. The incident with the most casualties occurred in Wamena where escalated vigilantism occurred in response to unfounded rumors of the child kidnapping by an immigrant from Java residing in Papua.

There are two underlying causes of collective violence incidents that require scrutiny. Firstly, vigilantism actions that are triggered by criminal activities and cases of sexual

<sup>2</sup> Sujarwoto, "Geography and Communal Conflict in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Geography* Vol. 49, No.1, 2017.

violence/harassment. These specific underlying causes were reported in 182 collective violence incidents this year.<sup>3</sup> Areas with higher population densities, especially Java and Sumatra, have seen a correspondingly high frequency of such incidents. Vigilantism related to criminal acts and sexual offenses has accounted for at least 36 deaths and 226 injuries, an average of 1.44 casualties per incident. The incident with the most casualties occurred in Wamena where escalated vigilantism occurred in response to unfounded rumors of child kidnapping by an immigrant.

The second underlying issue that requires close attention is the identity issue. The Dataset recorded 281 incidents related to identity issues, with most of them related to educational institution's identity such as school gangs, martial arts schools (*perguruan silat*), and local Islamic schools (*madrasah*). However, four community conflicts require further examination with three of these conflicts occurred in Sumatra (Lampung and Jambi). There is a singular pattern between these incidents in which all of them are rooted in vigilantism. Vigilantism prompted escalating and larger incidents between these communities and led to more serious incidents.

Date	City/ Regency	Incident Details
2 February	Tual, Maluku	Clash between Banda Ely and Yarler complex caused by the attack of an unknown assailant towards a teenager after drunk teenagers were punched by a restaurant owner for not paying their meals.
12 September	Kerinci, Jambi	Hundreds of Tamiai villagers blocked the Kerinci Bangko road to intimidate Parentak villagers who they accused of conducting illegal gold mining in the Tamiai's indigenous land
14 September	Merangin, Jambi	Parentak villagers retaliated through blockading the Kerinci Bangko road in an attempt to intimidate the Police to release the Parentak villagers in custody. The villagers were arrested on the charge of illegal gold mining after accusations from Tamiai villagers
21 October	Central Lampung, Lampung	Hundreds of residents set a house on fire. This incident was triggered by anger towards the owner of the house who had attacked a resident several days ago

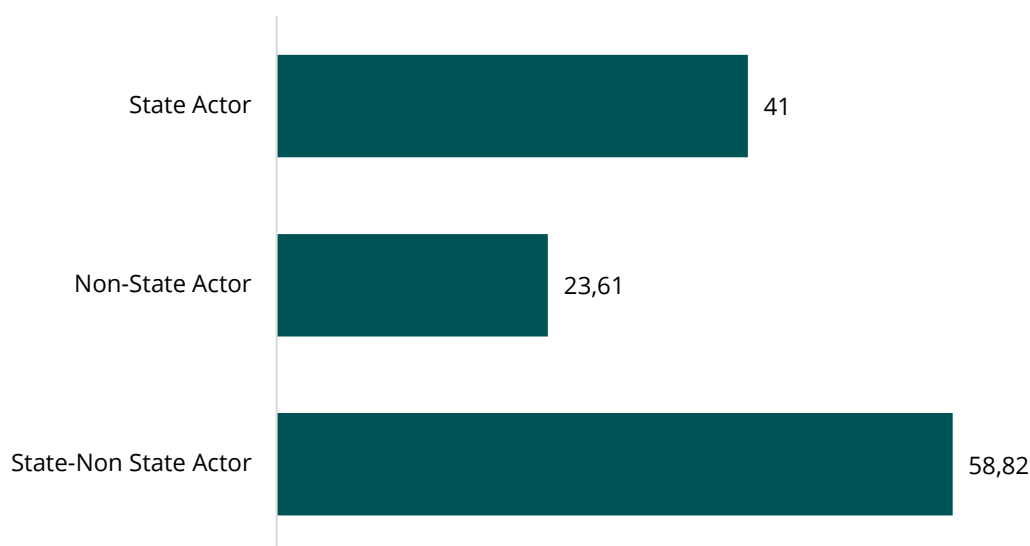
Table 2. Notable communal conflicts in Indonesia caused by identity issues in 2023  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

<sup>3</sup> In overall, at least 724 collective violence incidents were related to vigilantism. Vigilantism includes, but not limited to, revenge actions for insults, accidents, theft, adultery, destruction of property and raids on locally-defined "immoral or inappropriate sites".

## Intervention

Intervention is defined as actions by an actor or a collective of actors to de-escalate and stop the ongoing collective violence. In 2023, the Dataset recorded that more than a quarter of collective violence incidents were intervened by state and non-state actors. 334 interventions were recorded with most of them recorded in East Java, corresponding with their high frequency of incidents. Upon further examination, it can be seen that only 8 provinces recorded at least a 17% intervention rate which is the national average.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Lampung province is the only province with more than a 17% intervention rate and a 50% successful intervention rate with a proportionate amount of intervened incidents. South Sulawesi actually recorded more success rate but their intervention rate is below the national average of 17%. Other provinces like Bangka Belitung Islands, West Kalimantan, Banten, and Aceh recorded success rates but their intervention incidents were quite low.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of intervening actors, the findings were parallel with the previous years. The Dataset consistently finds that the combination of state and non-state actors as the intervening actors resulted in more successful intervention incidents. In 2023, the combination recorded a 58,82% success rate, followed by state actors' intervention with 41% and non-state actors' intervention with 23,61%. Interestingly, private sectors have yet to play a role in de-escalating collective violence incidents in Indonesia.



Graph 4. Intervention Success Rate by Intervening Actors in 2023  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

<sup>4</sup> Those eight provinces were Yogyakarta Special Region, East Java, West Java, Central Java, Lampung, Maluku, South Sumatra, and North Sumatra.

<sup>5</sup> These four provinces recorded less than 10 intervened incidents in 2023



## Casualty

Collective violence incidents recorded a considerably high number of injuries and death casualties in 2023. The Dataset recorded 261 deaths and 1,689 injuries as a result of collective violence incidents in Indonesia, lower than the previous year. However, it must be noted that last year's number included an outlier, which is the Kanjuruhan incident which in itself resulted in 135 deaths and 583 injuries. The only outlier incident in 2023 is the Wamena Riot with 11 deaths and 52 injuries, significantly lower than the Kanjuruhan incident. Therefore, it can be argued that this year's collective violence casualty is higher than the previous years which is also corresponding with the record-number incidents as well.

While the casualty remains quite high in terms of numbers, the fatalities and injuries per incident are actually lower than in previous years. The lethality rate for 2023 stands at 0,16 per incident. This is a significant drop from 2022 where the lethality rate is around 1.3 per incident. Furthermore, the injury rate stands at around 1,03 per incident. This shows that most collective violence incidents will likely end with injuries rather than death.

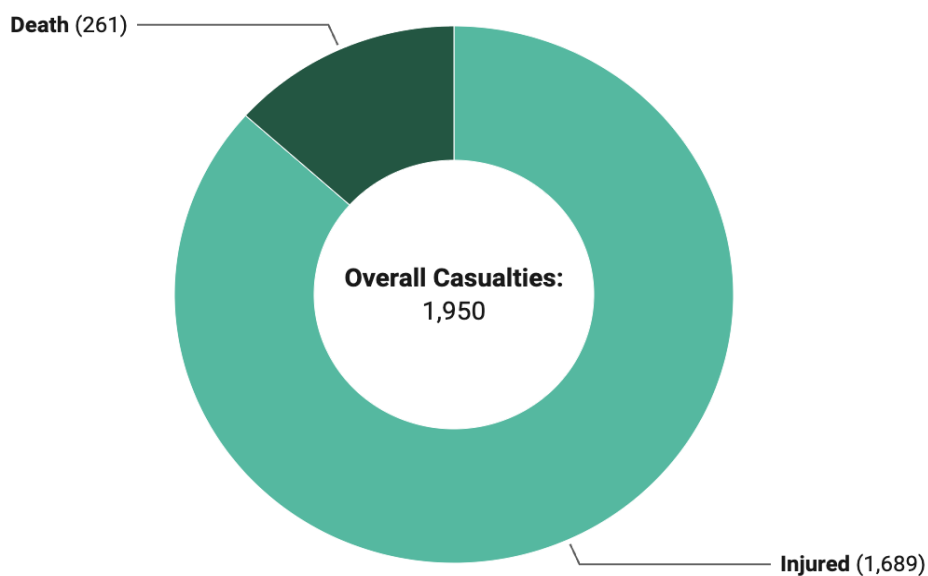


Chart: Farhan Julianto • Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2023) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

*Graph 5. Casualty statistics of collective violence incidents in 2023*  
(Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2024)

## Specific Findings: Election-related violence, Crime Rates, and Separatism

### *Trends of Election-related violence*

The CVEW dataset identifies election-related violence as collective violence incidents that occur when electoral processes and politics are the underlying motives. As a democratic country, elections in Indonesia take place to vote for local leaders up to the presidential level.

Since Indonesia was due to face an election year in 2024, 2023 was marked with the campaigning period for the electoral candidates involved in the presidential, house of representatives, and regional representative council elections. This period of elections was especially contentious and received significant national and international attention, as it marked the end of President Widodo's administration.

The election and campaign period of the members of the House of Representatives and the regional representative council coincided directly with the presidential elections as well, meaning that Indonesians on both a local and national level were likely involved with the electoral process in some form.

In 2023, the CVEW dataset found that 11 incidents of election-related violence occurred. Geographically, 6 of these incidents occurred in Java, where a majority of the Indonesian population is densely populated. 3 events occurred in Sulawesi, with 2 more occurring in Maluku and Sumatra each.

Interestingly, violence tend to occur more at the lowest local level, especially during the village head elections rather than the presidential or regional representative elections. Approximately 55% of election-related violence in 2023 occurred in relation to village head elections, with the underlying motives varying from demands for delaying the electoral process, violence related to the formation of the election committee, violence between supporters of different village heads, and allegations that the village head inauguration process in a specific region was not aligned local customs.

On the other hand, only 27% of collective violence incidents in 2023 occurred in direct relation to the presidential candidates and their campaign teams, as the victims of these incidents were all volunteers or members of the campaign teams of each presidential candidate. There was also an incident in which the head of a student organization was

beaten due to protesting the trends of political dynasties in Indonesia, and an incident where members of a nationalist political party clashed with the youth wing of a religious political party.

A key takeaway from these incidents is the degree of contention and violence that the village head elections caused rather than the presidential or regional representative elections. This is predictable as people are normally more relate to the immediate issue at the local level rather than national one. In addition, the competition to be a local leader has been seen by the people as more real due to the significant political power and 'elite' social status that a village head has over their area of jurisdiction particularly in relation to agenda and policy setting.

Moreover, the local leader is also powerful as he or she has the leverage to influence the direction of regional and national elections in favour of certain candidates, among others. If popular, the village heads are able to serve for a maximum of 2 electoral terms, with each term lasting 8 years, allowing them to serve in that position for a maximum of 16 years. This makes the village head position extremely desirable, thus explaining the contentious nature of its electoral process.

### ***Trends of Criminality Issues***

As the fourth most populous country in the world, Indonesia is bound to experience a certain degree of collective violence as a result of crime, particularly in more densely populated areas. However, regardless of population density in a given geographic area, there are multiple social and economic factors that contribute to the rates of crime and collective violence that can be seen in Indonesia today. Socio-economic disparity is perhaps the key driver of the relationship between crime and violence, as poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic and social opportunities may drive individuals toward crime as a means of survival.

Crime, and violence, in turn, may also be done as a result of perceived social injustices or grievances, particularly in marginalized communities. Social divides as a result of ethnic, religious, or cultural tensions may also lead to higher rates of crime and collective violence, which is certainly the case in a society as diverse as Indonesia. Overall, the factors that drive instances of violence as a result of crime are diverse, and beyond the scope of this report.

The CVEW dataset recorded 373 incidents of collective violence as a result of criminal activity throughout 2023. Geographically, incidents throughout 2023 were concentrated in Indonesia's most densely populated islands, in this case Java and Sumatra. There were 189 recorded incidents in Java across 6 provinces (Banten, DI Yogyakarta, DKI Jakarta,

West Java, Central Java, and East Java), while in Sumatra there were 117 incidents recorded across 8 provinces (Aceh, Bengkulu, Jambi, Riau Islands, Lampung, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, and North Sumatra). Of the 373 incidents recorded, criminal actors served as the perpetrators for 170 incidents, regular citizens accounted for 113 incidents, and youth accounted for 37 incidents. There were also 456 recorded deaths and injuries throughout 2023.

As depicted earlier, vigilantism remains the primary cause, where 40% of the incidents of collective violence throughout 2023 were caused by vigilantism. A significant number of these incidents also involved a melee weapon of some sort, with 144 incidents involving a melee or close-ranged weapon, which caused 196 deaths and injuries - accounting for 43% of the total deaths and injuries throughout 2023. There was also very little done by third-party actors (either by state or non-state actors) to intervene in these acts of vigilantism, as 76% of these incidents were not intervened at all.

Even when the act of vigilantism was intervened, only 27% of interventions were successful. It is also worth noting that 43% of the attempted interventions were done by state actors. This speaks to the nature of vigilantism in Indonesia, where such acts are viewed as a 'common good' in the absence of legitimate security and policing authorities. It also speaks to the effectiveness of state security forces in preventing and intervening in acts of vigilantism, as such acts were more often left allowed to continue rather than stopped.

### ***Trends of Separatist-related Violence***

Indonesia experiences separatist conflict and separatist-related collective violence incidents mainly in Papua, where the Indonesian government often clashes with various non-state actors who function under the Free Papua Movement. The conflict has been marked by outbreaks of violence between Indonesian security forces (both the military and police) and the Papuan separatist groups, in which human rights violations have allegedly been done on both sides.

Recently, a video surfaced on social media in which Indonesian soldiers were shown to be torturing a member of a Papuan separatist. This also comes amid a rising degree of frequency and lethality of attacks from Papuan separatist groups, as well as a more militarised response from the Indonesian government, which is leaning towards a more heavy-handed approach in dealing with the issue. As it stands, the conflict lacks any clear path toward reconciliation, making the increasing occurrence of collective violence incidents more likely than not.

The CVEW dataset recorded 68 instances of separatist-related violence in 2023, all of which occurred in Papua. This is an increase from the number of incidents recorded in 2022, which was only limited to 51 incidents. The perpetrators of the incidents in 2023 were primarily separatist groups: 44 incidents of collective violence were done by separatist groups, whereas the Indonesian security forces contributed to 11 incidents. A key takeaway is a major increase in lethality of the collective violence incidents in 2023 compared to 2022, as the dataset recorded 118 people that were killed and injured in Papua throughout 2023, whereas the previous year the number was significantly lower at 70 killed and injured. The lethality rate this year is in fact closer to the lethality rate recorded in 2021, where 114 people were killed and injured during separatist-related collective violence incidents in Papua. These findings are consistent with the general political situation in Papua, where an increasingly militarised response from the Indonesian government is met in turn with instances of violence.

However, it is also important to note that separatism is not the sole source of violence that plagues Papua. There were an additional 72 recorded incidents of collective violence throughout 2023, totalling 136. While separatist issues accounted for 47% of the total amount of collective violence incidents in Papua, other causes such as vigilantism, violent law enforcement, sexual violence, criminality, and resource competition were also recorded in the dataset. As such, it is important to note that while separatism is a significant driver of violence in Papua, Papuan society still experiences a vast array of other societal issues that contribute to instances of collective violence as well.

## Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, this policy brief recommends put forward several recommendations:

### 1. Law enforcement officers need to maintain the crime rate at a steadily low level

Based on the data stated by the Indonesian National Police Chief, the crime rate in Indonesia saw a rise of more than 32 with more than 288.000 cases in 2023.<sup>6</sup> This trend has continued from the previous years despite it was declining before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the police have also indicated that the number of cases against women and children also recorded high. Increasing criminal activities are related to collective violence incidents caused by the actions themselves and/or vigilantism. Therefore, a significant strategy to control the crime rate, especially in urban areas, will likely reduce the vulnerability of collective violence incidents.

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<sup>6</sup> "Police Chief: Crime Increases in 2023, Reaches 288.000 Cases," *CNN Indonesia*, December 27 2023, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20231227132644-12-1042231/kapolri-kejahatan-meningkat-di-2023-tembus-288-ribu-perkara>



## **2. Law enforcement officers need to create a better system to intervene in collective violence incidents**

Law enforcement officers are among the most frequent actors intervening in collective violence incidents. While this might be a positive sign, the national average intervention rate only stands at 17%, indicating that most incidents are still not intervened. To increase the national intervention rate, the police and local governments need to create a civilian-centered reporting system as a platform to report crime or other incidents. This system has been on trial in several cities through their Smart City platforms. However, the implementation has been lacking due to changes in leadership and funding issues.

Additionally, law enforcement officers could also reap benefits from further training to increase trust from members of society. This training's aim is to mitigate issues within society in an effort to prevent an escalation to collective violence incidents. We argue that one of the causes of the increasing vigilantism is the very low trust in law enforcement authorities. This case can be observed in the inter-society conflict in Jambi in September, where both villages chose to act upon themselves to address illegal mining issues. Therefore, such training might be important to develop immediately to prevent the continued rise of vigilantism.

## **3. Law enforcement officers and local stakeholders need to prioritize preventive measures in anticipating collective violence trends**

Another point to highlight about the police chief statement is about the number of cases solved by the police this year. He pointed out that the police prioritized restorative justice in 2023, with an increase of 15% in cases solved restoratively. However, another input for law enforcement officers is to prioritize preventive measures instead of restorative to reduce the number of violent incidents. This responsibility is not only on the police but also on local stakeholders such as religious and community leaders among others. We can see that collaboration between state actors and non-state actors is fruitful in violence de-escalation. While the police are responsible from the enforcement point of view, local leaders have a crucial role in de-escalating tensions and reducing casualty risk, in case the violence does happen.

## **4. The government needs to move beyond the normative approach to promote inclusive dialogue in Papua**

The government has failed to provide stable security conditions in Papua despite implementing multiple changes in its strategy to handle separatist movements. Having labeled the Criminal Armed Group as a terrorist group in 2021, the government withdrew

it and now used the term Free Papua Movement to describe separatist actors.<sup>7</sup> Beyond label-shifting and excessive use of force, Indonesia has not made much progress in promoting inclusive dialogue. It was even mentioned by presidential candidates but their vision was very normative without touching upon the substance.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, if the government wants to reduce conflict vulnerability and improve stability in Papua, truly inclusive dialogue processes must be put forward instead of the relentless use of force.

### **5. Educational institutions need to improve the emotional intelligence of their students**

Over the past three years, inter-student conflicts have been found to be one of the most common violent incidents in Indonesia, especially in urban areas. This means that the involvement of youth as perpetrators of collective violence is concerning, with at least 420 incidents involving youth and students. Therefore, there is an urgency for the government, in collaboration with relevant civil society actors, religious groups, and academic communities to formulate more educational programs to mitigate the tendency to be involved in delinquency behaviors.

### **6. More data sharing and early warning collaboration between fellow think tanks, civil society, and government institutions**

The CVEW Dataset is the only remaining national database that records collective violence on daily basis in Indonesia. While we can provide daily trends of the incidents, more collaboration and support, both from government as well as civil society are needed to ensure that the data that were being collected are reliable and can be used as reference for crafting actionable policies.

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<sup>7</sup> "From CAG to FPM: Bad Consequences for Conflict Handling and Humanitarian Situation in Papua," *KontraS*, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2024, <https://kontras.org/2024/04/21/dari-kkb-kembali-ke-opm-konsekuensi-buruk-terhadap-penanganan-konflik-dan-situasi-kemanusiaan-di-papua/>

<sup>8</sup> Vidhyandika Djati Perkasa, "The Gap in the Ideas of Presidential Candidates and Complexity in Papua Issues," *CSIS Commentaries*, December 21<sup>st</sup> 2023.



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