Policy Brief

Understanding Conflict Dynamics
and Impacts in Indonesia

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New Patterns of Violence in Indonesia:
Preliminary Evidence from Six 'High Conflict' Provinces

The large-scale violent conflicts in Indonesia that took place during its transition to democracy have been studied well. Yet relatively little evidence is available to policy-makers on the levels, forms and impacts of violent conflict in recent years. This brief provides early evidence from the Violent Conflict in Indonesia Study (ViCIS), commissioned by Bappenas, on conflict dynamics in six provinces affected by large-scale violence —Aceh, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, and West Papua—for the 1998-2008 period. The results show that:

❖ The extended communal and separatist violence that accompanied Indonesia's democratic transition has now largely subsided since its 1999-2004 peak. However, many of the factors that drove these conflicts have not been fully dealt with and old conflict issues continue to result in incidents of violence.

❖ High levels of routine violent conflict—frequently occurring forms of violence, such as clashes between neighborhood gangs, violent political demonstrations, beatings of suspected thieves, or fights over land— are present in the six provinces. These have resulted in 2,000 violent conflict incidents on average per year since 2006, in areas accounting for only 4 percent of Indonesia's population. During 2006-2008, these conflicts led to over 600 deaths, 6,000 injuries, and the destruction of more than 1,900 buildings. Given that past episodes of extended violence were preceded by smaller-scale violent incidents, the high prevalence of routine violence indicates a potential for escalation.

❖ The nature of violent conflict in Indonesia has undergone a gradual shift. While identity issues were behind most of the large-scale violence between 1999-2004, popular justice issues are now dominant, accounting for more than half of the conflict deaths in recent years. The forms violent conflict is taking have also shifted. Riots and group clashes continue to occur but less frequently, with assaults and fights accounting for most deaths in recent years.

❖ The security response to violent conflict remains weak. Only 7 percent of violent conflict incidents recorded in the database between 2005-2008 saw any intervention from the military or the police, including the Special Forces (Brimob). Conflicts between elements of the security forces, which presented an obstacle to effective law enforcement during the high conflict period, also continue to lead to deadly incidents.

❖ Of the provinces covered so far, Papua shows the highest aggregate levels of violent conflict and Maluku registers the steepest rise in the number of violent conflict incidents in recent years. In Aceh, separatist violence ended in 2005 but the number of popular justice incidents has been on the rise since then; most of the post-MoU violence is concentrated in the pre-MoU conflict hotspots. Across each province, levels, forms and impacts of violent conflict vary greatly between districts, showing the importance of local factors in driving violent conflict.

There is a growing recognition among the government and civil society that a shift is needed in the national approach to conflict management from ad-hoc responses to an overarching policy framework that adopts a preventative approach. Several initiatives are underway to create such a framework, including the drafting of a new Grand Strategy for Conflict Prevention and Management and a legislative bill on Social Conflict Management. ViCIS findings highlight that such attempts should consider the following key issues and measures:

❖ Development of a comprehensive policy framework that addresses the structural causes of past large-scale conflicts and prioritizes management of routine violent conflict to prevent escalation into larger episodes.

❖ Investment in systematic conflict monitoring, particularly in hot-spots, as a foundation for early-warning systems.

❖ Measures to improve the ability of the law enforcement agencies to effectively respond to violence. Strengthening of local dispute resolution mechanisms to increase societal resilience and prevent escalation.

❖ Continued investment in peace-building programming in post-conflict areas, but with local leadership.

❖ Involvement of local actors in the formulation of a national policy framework.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's democratic transition was accompanied by a range of violent conflicts. Separatist conflict in Aceh escalated and claimed thousands of lives before a successful peace deal in 2005, and continues at a low intensity in Papua. Thousands died in ethnic riots in West and Central Kalimantan and Jakarta. Inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence broke out in 1999 in Maluku and North Maluku and in 1998 and 2000 in Central Sulawesi. Terrorist acts have been infrequent but deadly. In addition, many areas have been affected by smaller-scale 'routine' violent conflicts over resources, politics, and identities.

The large-scale violent conflicts have ended or reduced in intensity as Indonesia's democracy has consolidated. Yet relatively little evidence is available to policy-makers on the levels, forms and impacts of violent conflict in recent years. Existing quantitative studies on violence do not cover the period after 2003. The United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery (UNSFIR) conflict database (1990-2003), the most commonly used quantitative source on Indonesian violent conflict, records only inter-group conflicts. Given that much violent conflict in Indonesia is now smaller-scale, involving individuals rather than groups, there

Map 1: Provinces covered by ViCIS
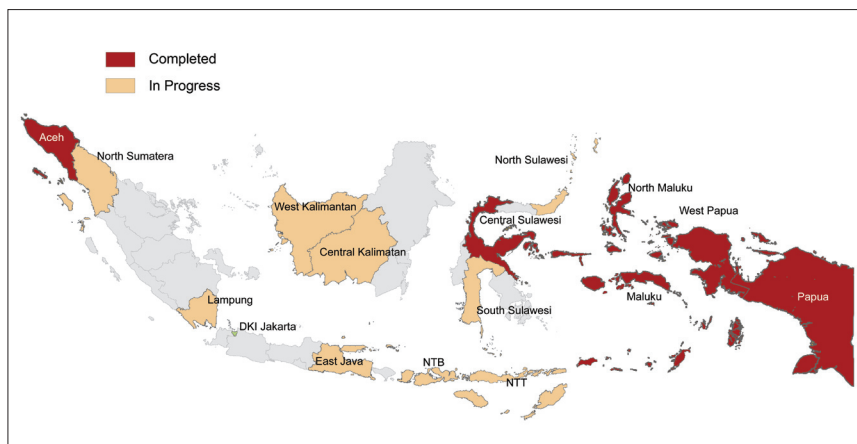
is a need for new evidence to ensure that policy-making is built on up-to-date and accurate information on conflict dynamics.

This brief provides early evidence from a new database on Indonesian violent conflicts. The Violent Conflict in Indonesia Study (ViCIS) records all incidents of violent conflict and violent crime between 1998 and 2008 as reported in local newspapers. This brief focuses on trends and patterns of violent conflict in four provinces that were previously affected by escalated violence (Aceh, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, and North Maluku) as well as Papua and West Papua, the sites of an ongoing low-level separatist movement. The note does not consider violent crime which will be

analyzed in a separate publication. Key questions addressed are:

- How have violent conflict levels, forms and impacts changed over time in provinces that previously experienced high levels of violence?
- Which places are currently most affected by violent conflict?
- How much variation is there between areas in recent patterns of violent conflict?

METHODOLOGY

ViCIS aims to fill knowledge gaps on violent conflict in Indonesia to enhance evidence-based conflict management and prevention policy-making. The project consists of three components:

Mapping patterns of violent conflict. The first component involves the creation of a new violence dataset for 1998-2008/9 covering sixteen provinces, accounting for half of Indonesia's population. The ViCIS dataset includes all incidents of violent conflict and violent crime reported in over 150 local (provincial and district) newspapers. These are supplemented by, and checked against, other secondary sources including UNSFIR, NGO incident lists, and academic studies. ViCIS employs a wide definition of violent conflict, collecting data on all conflicts between individuals and/or groups that result in physical
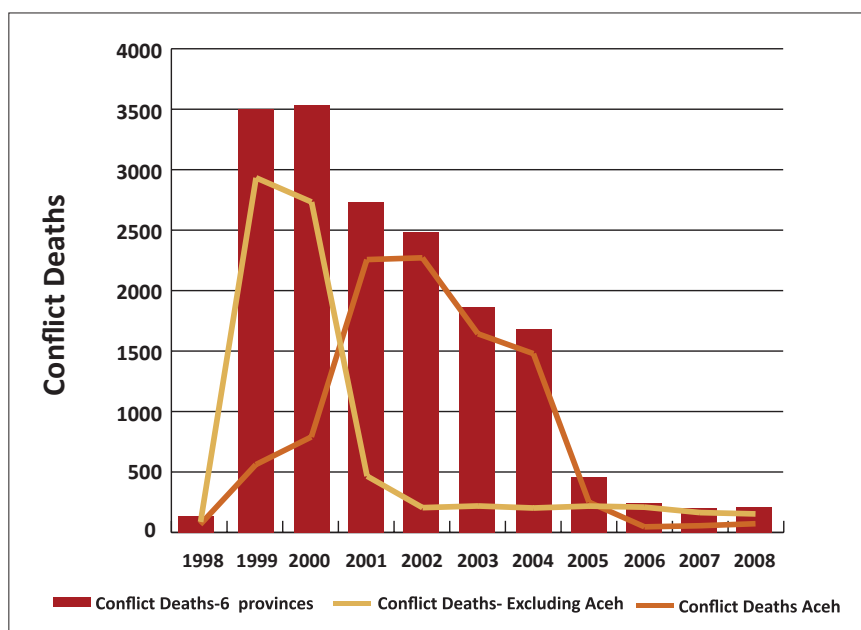
Box 1: Conflict Issues and Forms in ViCIS

The ViCIS database includes all incidents of violent conflict and violent crime reported in local newspapers. Incidents are recorded as being conflicts if a pre-existing grievance is reported. If there is no such grievance, the database records the incident as being crime.

Violent conflict incidents in the ViCIS database are coded by the issue at stake and the form violence takes. The conflict issue is not necessarily the cause of violence but is the proximate problem or grievance that is reported as leading to the violence. Incidents are assigned to one or two main issue types: resource; administrative; political; identity; or popular justice. Within each of these, sub-types allow for a more accurate categorization. For example, categories of identity conflicts include ethnic, religious, geographic, and gender identity conflicts.

For each incident, the form violence takes is also coded. Violent forms include demonstrations, riots, lynchings, assaults, fights, group clashes, and terror attacks. Often an incident involves more than one of these forms of violence.

Figure 1: Conflict Deaths—Aceh, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, and West Papua (1998-2008)

Box 2: Using Newspapers to Map Violence

The ViCIS database builds upon previous work that tracks violent conflict incidents through local newspapers.

- The approach was initially used in Indonesia by UNSFIR to estimate the impacts of large-scale communal violence between 1990 and 2003 using national and provincial news sources (Varshney, Tadjoeddin, and Panggabean 2008).

- Further research conducted in East Java and East Nusa Tenggara provinces found significantly higher impacts from violence than did UNSFIR, both because it used sub-provincial papers and because it included small-scale violent conflicts, such as clashes between individuals (C&D 2008).

- The method was used to track violent conflict patterns in Aceh following the signing of the Helsinki peace agreement. Aceh Conflict Monitoring Updates have been produced since 2005 (now called Aceh Peace Monitoring Updates, published by the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies at Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh).

- A pilot in Maluku and North Maluku provinces confirmed the utility of using newspapers to map patterns of violence in high conflict areas in Indonesia. A comparison of newspapers with other sources such as police and hospital data and traditional survey methods revealed that the former provided more accurate estimates of violence and its impacts; newspapers recorded 50 percent more deaths than police and hospital sources, especially outside the provincial capital, and experts interviewed assessed the newspaper counts to be the most accurate.

impacts such as deaths, injuries, or property destruction. The database thus includes episodes of large-scale communal violence with high per-incident impacts, such as riots and other group clashes, and incidents of routine violent conflict with low per-incident impacts, such as fights and lynchings of suspected thieves (Box 1). While violent crime is included in the dataset, only the conflict incidents are analyzed in this brief.

Each incident is coded for a range of variables including its location, the date it occurred, its physical impacts, the form violence took and the issue at stake, who was involved, and what interventions took place to stop the violence. Strict quality control procedures ensure accuracy and consistency of coding. So far, data has been collected from six provinces with the next ten currently ongoing (Map 1). The six-province dataset uses 46 local newspapers, which were selected after an assessment of the availability of their archives, their geographic coverage, and their conflict reporting policies. Multiple newspapers were used from every province

to minimize reporting biases by individual papers. Local researchers photographed over 600,000 pages of archived newspapers for the 1998-2008 period. At present, the database includes almost 30,000 violent incidents, providing the most comprehensive quantitative picture of violence in 'post-conflict' Indonesia to date.

Investigating the causes of violent conflict. The second component of ViCIS will involve thematic qualitative studies designed to explore and explain trends from the database, including different patterns of escalation and de-escalation of violent conflict (not presented in this brief), and patterns of routine violent conflict. These studies will commence in late 2010.

Impacting policy by building capacity. The third component aims to build the capacity of government and non-government institutions to track, analyze and effectively respond to violent conflict by making the ViCIS data freely available and gradually transferring the methodology to national institutions for ongoing conflict monitoring efforts.

FINDINGS

Key findings from the quantitative component of ViCIS—based on the conflict data collected from six provinces (Aceh, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, and West Papua)—are as follows:

Conflict fatalities in the six provinces have decreased significantly since 2005. Violent conflict peaked in 1999 when an estimated 3,500 people were killed in the six provinces. There was a swift drop in conflict deaths in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas from 2001. The conflict in Aceh intensified in 2001-2002 resulting in around 2,400 deaths per year. But since the MoU between the national government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was signed in August 2005, conflict fatalities have declined sharply (see Figure 1).

However, many of the issues associated with the large-scale violent conflicts have not been fully addressed, resulting in ongoing incidents and the risk of future escalation. Analysts of the episodes of large-scale violent conflict have pointed to a number of common issues that either led to violence or assisted in escalation. These include:

Figure 2: Incidents of Violent Conflict (2000-2008)
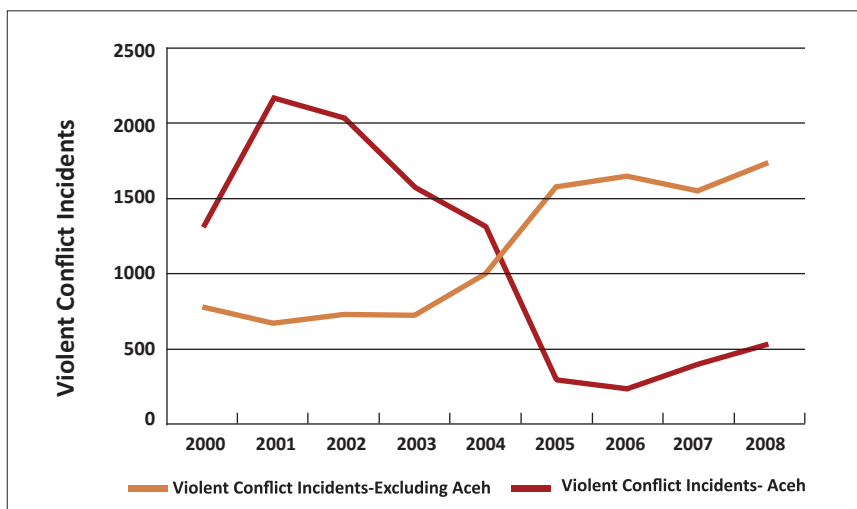
the political upheavals associated with the end of authoritarian government; the transition to democracy and decentralization; competition over access to natural resources including land; poor and inconsistent law enforcement and inadequate security response to outbreaks of conflict; the creation and exploitation of divisive ethnic and religious identities by political elites for instrumental purposes; and widespread corruption and poor governance (e.g. Bertrand 2004; Sidel 2006; Van Klinken 2007). While large-scale violence has

largely ended, many of these issues continue to lead to violent conflict, albeit on a smaller scale (Table 1).

The number of violent conflict incidents in the six provinces has risen in recent years. Excluding Aceh, there were twice as many violent incidents in 2008 as in 2004. (Aceh is excluded as large-scale violence was still ongoing in 2004). Similarly, in post-MoU Aceh, the number of routine violence incidents (not related to the separatist conflict) increased from 200 in 2006 to over 500 in 2008 (Figure 2).

While deaths associated with large-scale communal violence have declined, widespread routine violent conflict is having significant impacts. Since 2006, there have been an average of 200 conflict-related deaths and 2,400 injuries per year from conflicts in the six provinces, which together account for only 4 percent of Indonesia's population (Figure 3). The spike in impacts in the latter half of 2006 is the result of tribal clashes in Papua, which led to 34 deaths and over 400 injuries. Other studies, conducted in East Java, NTT, Lampung, Bali, and West Java, suggest that routine violent conflict may be prevalent in other parts of the country (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock 2011; Barron and Madden 2004; ICG 2003; Welsh

Table 1: Old Conflict Issues and New Violence

Key issues behind large-scale violence that continue to surface	Related violence in six provinces during 2006-2008
Democracy and decentralization remain sources of conflict. Local elections (*pilkada*) and administrative re-districting (*pemekaran*) regularly lead to violence, often through the mobilization of ethnic and religious organizations.	161 violent election-related incidents and 11 deaths from disputes over redistricting. Most commonly occurring forms of such political violence are vandalism, assaults, and violent demonstrations.
Resource-related conflicts, for example conflict between individuals and groups over land, natural resources, and access to jobs, markets, etc, also result in violence.	264 violent incidents and 33 deaths, with conflicts over land the most prevalent. Resource conflicts frequently take place as assaults, vandalism, and fights between individuals.
Issues with effective law enforcement remain as responses by security forces and justice institutions are often absent or ineffective. In many cases violence is used to resolve small disputes or to apply 'vigilante justice'.	3212 violent incidents as responses to perceived legal infractions (67 deaths), to perceived moral infractions (69 deaths), or to offence or loss of face (155 deaths). Popular justice incidents mostly occur as assaults and lynchings.
Identity issues such as ethnicity, religion and tribal affiliations continue to result in conflict fatalities, albeit at a smaller scale.	131 incidents took place leading to 69 deaths. About half of the violent identity related conflicts took place as group clashes and riots.
Poor governance issues such as misuse of government funds, inadequate provision of public services and poor program implementation still lead to violent incidents.	178 violent conflict incidents over corruption and government performance, mostly in the form of vandalism, assaults and violent demonstrations.

2008). Routine violent conflict is important not just for its impacts. It also has the potential to create a culture where the use of violence becomes an accepted means of settling disputes, sparking cycles of retribution and reducing trust in state institutions. High levels of such violence could lead to the establishment of networks of violent actors such as gangs, which may be mobilized for escalation and contribute to existing political and social tensions as happened in the earlier large-scale episodes. The significant impacts and rising number of violent conflict incidents indicate the need for continuous risk management and the prioritization of conflict prevention in the policy agenda.

Identity conflicts continue to occur but popular justice issues are now associated with the most deaths. A decade ago, most deaths were from large-scale ethno-religious or separatist conflicts. In contrast, between 2006 and 2008 identity issues accounted for only 2 percent of the total incidents but still 10 percent of conflict deaths (Figure 4). This shows that even when they occur in lower numbers, violent identity conflicts have high fatality rates. Administrative, resource and political issues are present but produce only a small proportion of fatalities. The dominant issue at stake in recent violence is 'popular justice', accounting for about half of the total deaths (and 55 percent of incidents). This category includes: violent responses to perceived moral infractions, such as sexual indiscretions, alcohol use, debt or witchcraft (12% of all deaths during 2006-2008); violent responses to crimes committed by others such as thefts, assaults, car accidents and vandalism (11% of all deaths); as well as violent responses to a loss of face or an insult (27% of all deaths). This type of violence sometimes occurs between ethnic groups or between locals and migrants, thus expressing identity-based tensions.

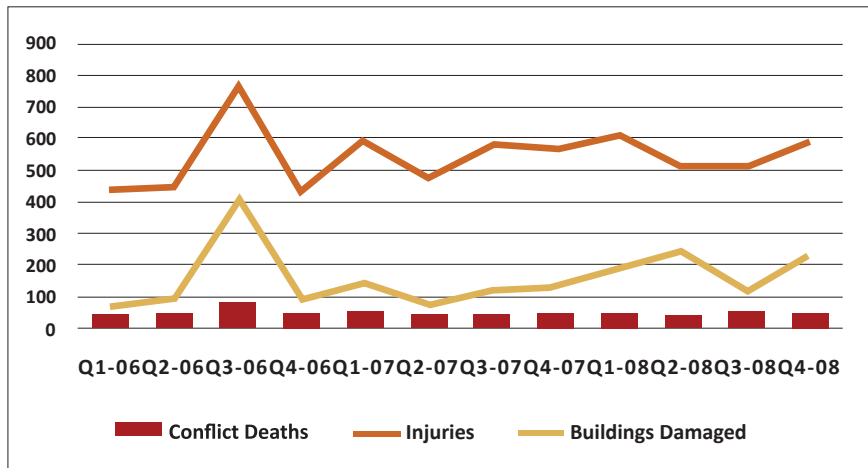**Figure 3: Recent Trends: Aggregate Conflict Impacts from Six Provinces (2006-2008)**

Figure 4: Conflict Deaths by Issue in Six Provinces (2006-2008)
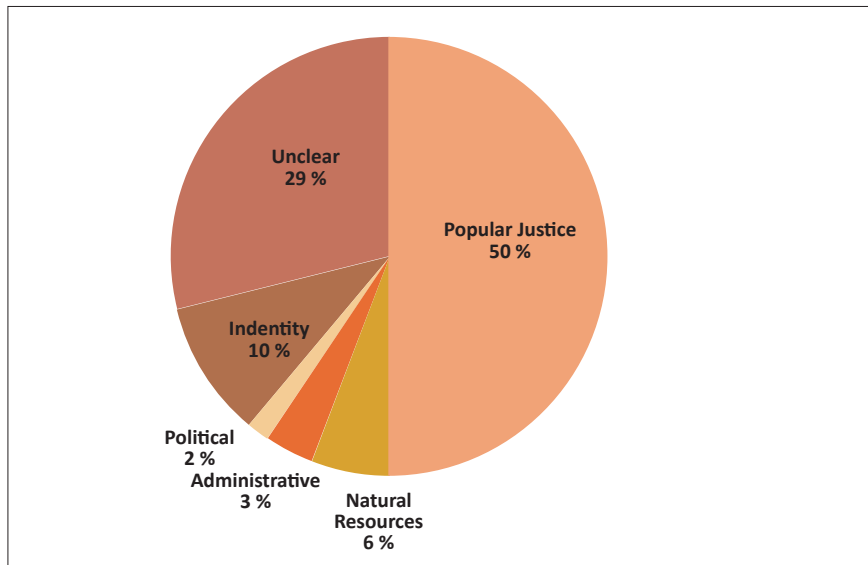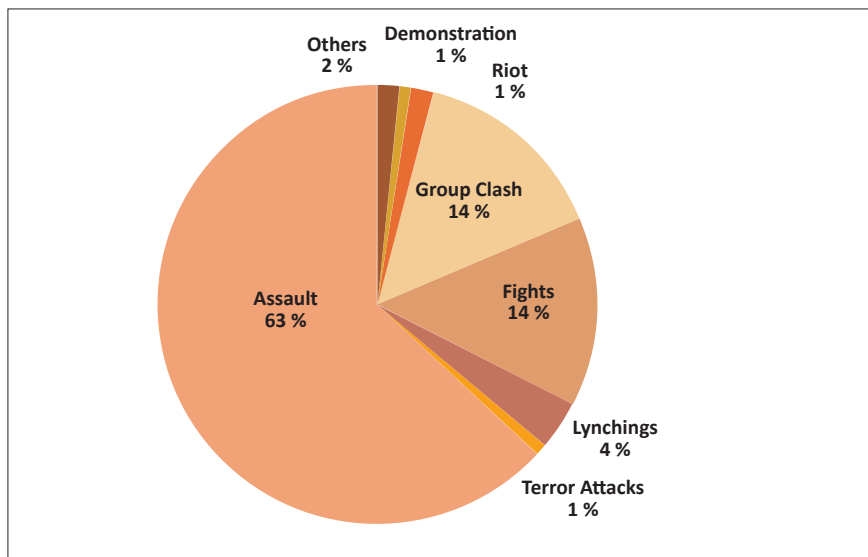

Figure 5: Conflict Deaths by Form in Six Provinces (2006-2008)

The tendency to use violence in small disputes as well as the propensity to take the law into one's own hands suggests a lack of trust that law enforcement and justice institutions will carry out their roles effectively.

Forms of violent conflict have also shifted. Riots and group clashes continue to occur but in smaller numbers, with assaults and fights accounting for most deaths in recent years. Most of the violent conflict during 1999-2002 unfolded in the form of deadly riots and group clashes, which resulted in large-scale destruction. In the recent period (2006-2008), 14 percent of all deaths occurred during group clashes, but riots account for only a small percentage of deaths (as do terror attacks, which are heavily covered by the national media)—Figure 5. Instead, small-scale incidents such as one-way assaults and two-way fights account for over three-quarters of all conflict deaths.

Use of firearms remains relatively low except in Aceh. The data show that the most frequently used weapons in violent cases resulting in deaths are sharp weapons such as knives. The use of firearms in fatal incidents by private individuals remains relatively low, except in post-MoU Aceh where 7 percent of violent incidents involved the use of firearms. These incidents resulted in 19 percent of Aceh's deaths during the 2006-2008 period.

The security response to violent conflict remains weak. The military or the police, including the Special Forces (Brimob), intervened in only 7 percent of all the violent conflict incidents recorded during 2005-2008 across the six provinces. Only 29 percent of riots and group clashes during this period saw any intervention. Overall, in cases where an intervention was attempted it was successful in halting the violence in 66 percent of cases. However, attempted interventions to stop lynchings (*pengeroyokan*—where a

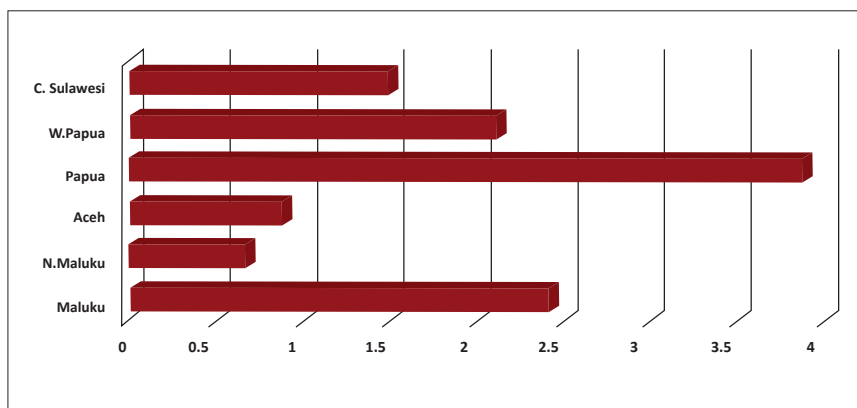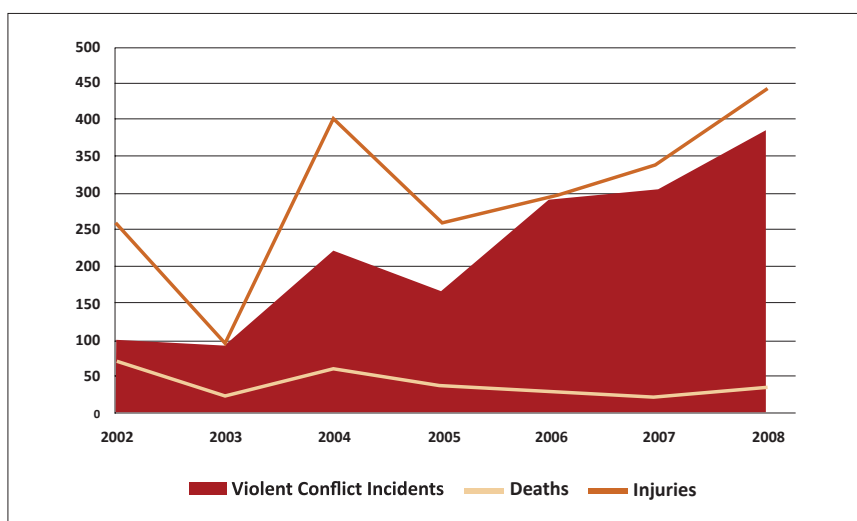**Figure 6: Average Annual Conflict Deaths per 100,000 people (2006-2008)**

Figure 7: Annual Conflict Incidents, Deaths and Injuries in Maluku (2002-2008)

crowd beats one or a few individuals) and riots were less successful, at 32 percent and 57 percent respectively.

Conflicts between elements of the security forces, which presented an obstacle to effective law enforcement during the high conflict period, continue to lead to deadly incidents. From 2004 to 2008, the database records 107 incidents of violence between members of the police (including Brimob) and the military resulting in 24 deaths.

There is large variation between provinces in the incidence and impacts of violent conflict in recent years. Papua shows the highest levels of violent conflict followed by Maluku (Figure 6). During 2004-2008, a total of 40 incidents of

separatist violence are reported for Papua resulting in 30 deaths. In contrast, there were 3,308 violent conflict incidents related to other issues, resulting in 318 deaths. The media assessment ascertained, however, that newspapers under-report separatist incidents, which are deemed 'sensitive'. The importance of the separatist conflict goes far beyond the number of incidents. The presence of such high levels of routine violent conflict in an environment with significant tensions surrounding separatist, anti-migrant, tribal and resource extraction issues highlights the risk of escalation.

Levels of violent conflict are rising most rapidly in Maluku. In Maluku, the site of one of the worst episodes

of religious violence in Indonesia's recent history, the number of violent conflict incidents has been increasing steadily since 2002 (see Figure 7). Most dominant are popular justice conflicts, with some resource and administrative conflicts also taking place.

Separatist violence in Aceh ended with the 2005 MoU, but routine violent conflict is increasing and often is concentrated in the old conflict hotspots. Whereas there were 193 violent conflict incidents in 2006, there were 468 incidents occurred in 2008. Popular justice and resource conflicts are the most common issues. The majority of incidents in post-MoU Aceh are taking place in the same districts that experienced the highest levels of violence during the separatist conflict, notably Bireuen, Aceh Utara, and Aceh Timur (Figure 8). Banda Aceh and Lhokseumawe, which saw relatively less separatist violence due to high levels of security presence before the MoU, have also emerged as sites of routine violence in recent years. Forthcoming qualitative research will explore why some districts in Indonesia that experienced large-scale violence are now witnessing higher levels of routine violent conflict than others.

Variation in violent conflict within provinces is large. The incidence, predominant forms, and impacts of violent conflict vary widely between districts. For the 2006-2008 period, just over half of all conflict deaths in Papua were recorded as occurring in two districts: Kota Jayapura and Mimika. However, the issue at stake and the form violence took differ greatly between the two (Figure 9). In Mimika, more than half of conflict deaths were associated with identity issues, usually involving large clashes between tribes, often in retribution for earlier violence. In Kota Jayapura, popular justice issues were the most frequent, but the identity aspect was absent and violence mostly took the form of small-scale assaults rather

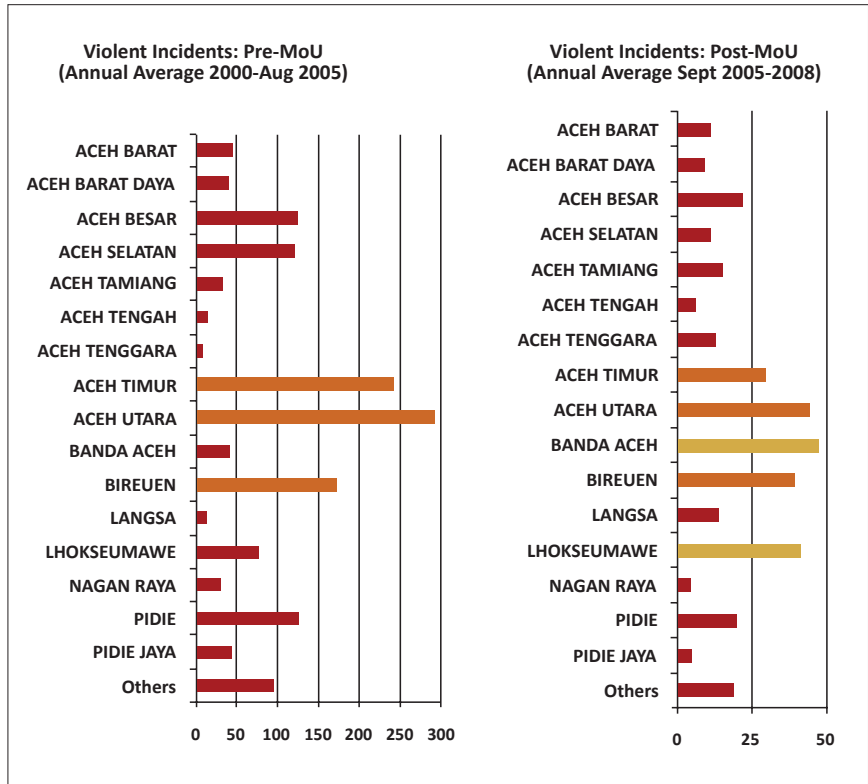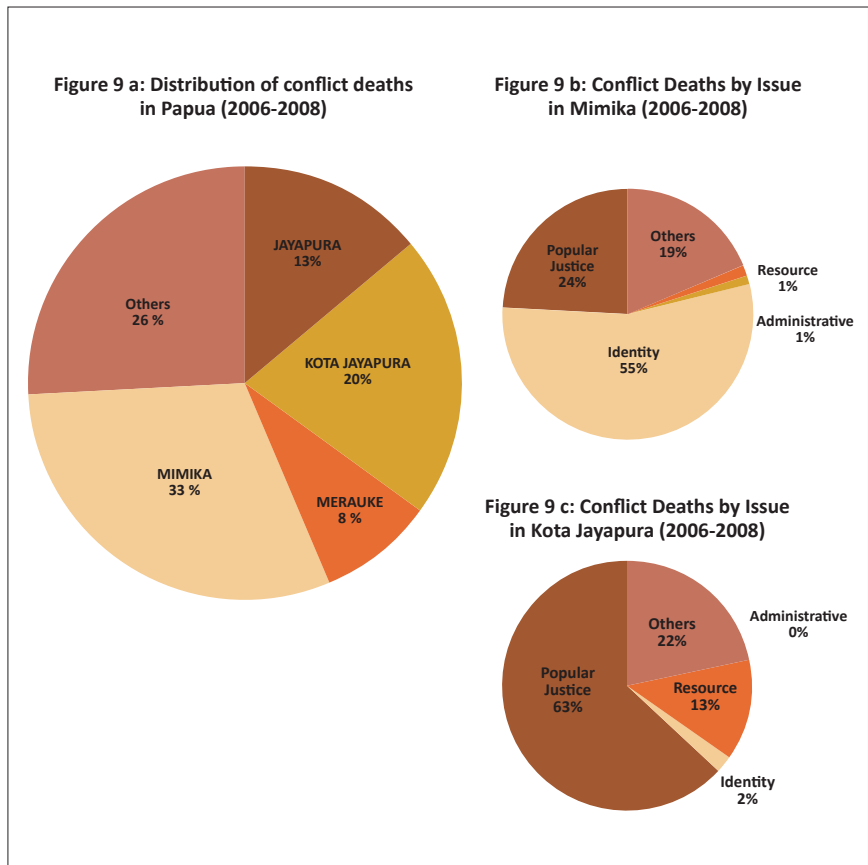**Figure 8: Distribution of pre-MoU and post-MoU violence in Aceh**

Figure 9: Different Violent Conflict Patterns Across Districts in Papua

than group clashes. Similarly, a comparison of the two most violent districts in Central Sulawesi reveals that while 58 percent of the violent conflict incidents in Palu since 2006 have taken the form of assaults, in Poso the dominant form of violence in the same period was terror attacks (43 percent) using explosive devices. Such variations between districts in the same provinces highlight the role played by local factors in driving conflict.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The large-scale communal and separatist violent conflicts that accompanied Indonesia's transition have largely subsided. However, many of the issues at the heart of the earlier large-scale unrest have not been fully addressed and continue to lead to violence. The dataset records rising levels of small-scale routine violent conflict in recent years, with significant aggregate impacts. High levels of routine violence pose a risk of escalation into larger conflicts. There is a growing recognition among government and civil society that a shift is needed in the national approach to conflict management from ad-hoc responses to an overarching policy framework that that adopts a preventative approach. Several initiatives are underway to create such a framework, including drafting a new Grand Strategy for Conflict Prevention and Management, a draft bill on Social Conflict Management, and the design of a Conflict Prevention Framework. ViCIS findings highlight that such attempts should consider the following key issues and measures:

- Systematically address the structural causes behind past large-scale violent conflict while prioritizing effective management of routine violent conflict in the future.

- Determine a clearer division of responsibilities between national and local governments, and between the state and civil society, in preventing violent conflict.

- Involve district-level governments in formulating and implementing conflict prevention and management policies so that local issues are adequately addressed in national policies.

- Inform formal security institutions of the evolving conflict dynamics in their areas and strengthen their ability to effectively respond to violence.

- Enhance informal dispute resolution mechanisms and access to justice at the local level by training local leaders in conflict resolution to prevent the escalation of disputes into violent incidents.

- Continue investing in peace-building programming in post-conflict provinces, particularly in Papua given that it experiences high levels of violence in an environment of rising tensions.

- Invest in regular, systematic research to gather up-to-date information on patterns and impacts of violent conflict in additional provinces and conduct ongoing monitoring of conflict patterns in key hotspots such as Papua and Maluku. Such monitoring requires close partnerships between government and non-state bodies, with the latter collecting and analyzing data to help inform government responses.

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