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POLICY BRIEF

COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE INCIDENTS IN INDONESIA: Escalation and Emerging Trends





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Farhan Julianto

Data Verificator, National Violence Monitoring System (NVMS)

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Introduction

Collective violence, defined as the intentional use of physical violence or threats either by or against a group of people, has been a prominent issue in Indonesia since the turn of the century. Although the gravity of each incident is arguably less significant than incidents during the New Order era,¹ the number of incidents keeps growing throughout the year. However, there are not many publicly accessible databases that continuously monitor the trends and movements of these incidents.

To fill the gap, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) came up with an initiative to systematically gather data on collective violence incidents from verifiable provincial and national news sources in Indonesia. This initiative led to the formation of the Collective Violence Early Warning (CVEW) Dataset in 2021. Since then, the Dataset has been able to break down each incident into up to 35 data points, enabling comprehensive analysis on timelines, actors, issues, among many others.²

Violence monitoring became particularly crucial in 2025 to picture how the Indonesian society responded to the changes in government. In late 2024, President Prabowo Subianto was inaugurated, and due to his leadership style and 'fat' coalition, now has full control over policies and budgeting. The Prabowo administration has also introduced changes in important legislation and introduced new populist policies.³ These changes, however, can spark more violence in society, especially when members of the public are not involved meaningfully during the deliberation processes.⁴

This Policy Brief will present the annual trend of collective violence incidents in 2025. Our analysis found that 2025 became the year with the highest number of incidents since CVEW started in 2021. Although many of the incidents were sparked by vigilantism activities, some incidents were inseparable from systemic, yet sudden, policy changes introduced by those in power. The most recognizable incident may be the protest against

¹ I Wilson, "The Changing Contours of Organised Violence in Post-New Order Indonesia" *Murdoch University Working Paper* 118, 2005, 1-34.

² The CVEW Dataset is an initiative by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), with support from the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P). The Dataset can be accessed through: <https://violence.csis.or.id/>

³ For instance, the Free Nutritious School Meal, Food Estate, Red-and-White Village Cooperative, among others.

⁴ For instance, the Armed Forces Act was only discussed and legalized within days. See: "RUU TNI: Proses Kilat Legislasi yang Kembali Terulang di DPR", *CNN Indonesia*, 20 March 2025, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250320094745-32-1210951/ruu-tni-proses-kilat-legislasi-yang-kembali-terulang-di-dpr>

an increase in allowance for parliament members in August 2025, which led to nationwide protests and riots.⁵

The Brief will be structured into the following sections. First, we will present highlights of the data that was collected in 2025, including its patterns, impacts, and distributions. Next, we will analyze three separate topics, namely vigilantism, the effects of changes in government policies, and some warnings for other related issues. Lastly, we will present a recommendation for both policymakers and members of civil society.

Collective Violence Incidents in 2025 Indonesia

In this first part of the discussion, I will present the general trends of collective violence in Indonesia without making a further analysis of a specific issue. The highlight of 2025 figures are that the incidents increased in quantity, casualties, and lethality rates. Consistent with the previous years, the Java provinces dominate the Top 5 provinces in terms of the number of incidents, while provinces in Eastern Indonesia experienced more intense violent incidents.

Frequency. Between January and December 2025, the Dataset has recorded 1.851 incidents, or around 154.25 incidents each month, 5.07 incidents per day, or one every 284 minutes. This is a considerable 18.5% increase from 2024 figures, where incidents were reported at 1.562 incidents.

Timeline. In 2025, the distribution of incidents throughout the year indicates that there were peak months where the number of incidents was higher than average. This is especially observable in the months between March and August. This is not a coincidence, where although most of the incidents were dominated by vigilantism issues, the timing coincided with a major series of protests against the new policies, like the revised Armed Forces Act in March and the increase in housing allowance for parliament members in August, among others.

⁵ Rebecca Ratcliffe, "Indonesia Protests: President Scraps Lawmakers' Perks in Bid to Calm Tensions", *The Guardian*, 1 September 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/01/indonesia-protests-president-prabowo-subianto-scraps-lawmakers-perks>

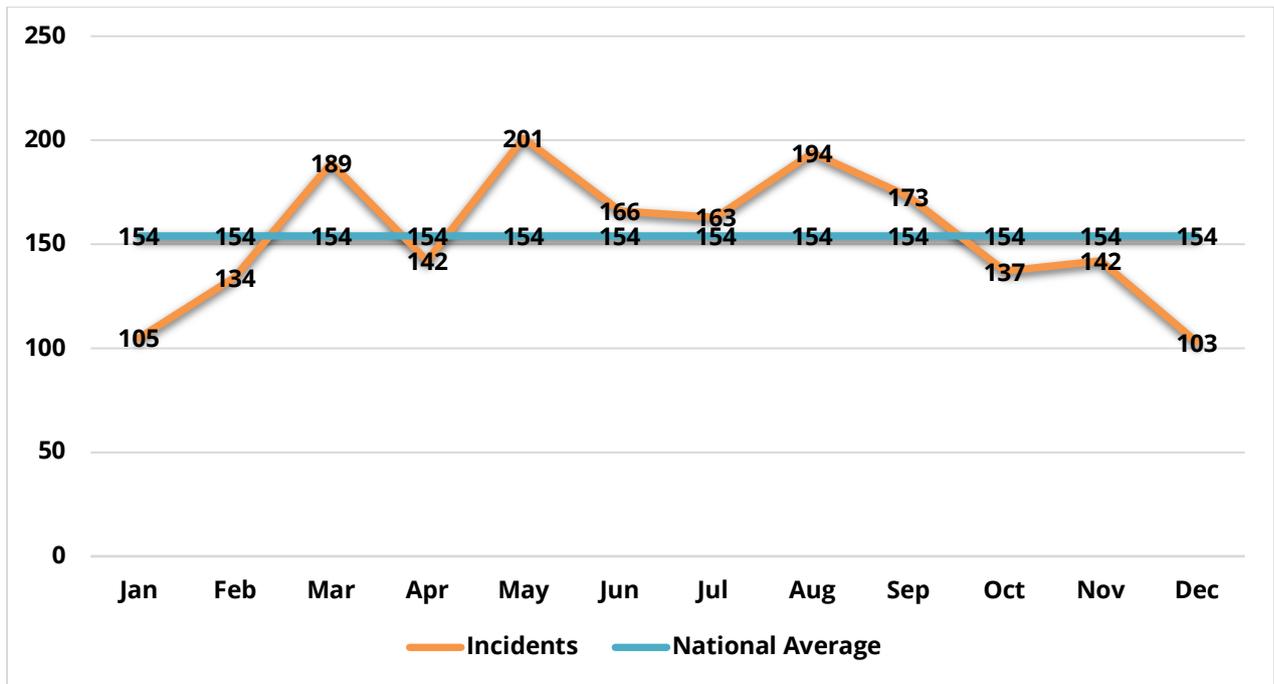


Figure 1. Frequency of Collective Violence Incidents Per Month
(Source: CVEW, 2025)

Underlying issue(s). The CVEW Dataset can record up to two underlying issues in each incident. In 2025, the Top 3 underlying issues were vigilantism with 709 incidents, followed by Law Enforcement issue (180) and Governance issue (177). The rise of both law enforcement and governance issues shows that there were considerably high number of incidents resulting from protests, which were likely recorded as law enforcement and governance issues. A detailed explanation of vigilantism will be presented in the next part.

Casualties. In 1.851 incidents recorded, the Dataset recorded 2.520 total casualties, resulting from 405 deaths and 2.115 injuries. On average, each incident resulted in 1.36 casualties. Furthermore, the lethality rate is also higher than the previous year. In 2024, the Dataset recorded a lethality rate of 0.20 per incident. In 2025, that figure increased to 0.21 per incident. Combining the lethality rate with the high number of incidents means that incidents were not only more common, but also became more deadly. Both incidents with the most casualties and lethality occurred in Central Papua. In June, conflicts over regional elections resulted in more than 200 people being injured. Meanwhile, in October, a shootout between the Armed Forces and a separatist group resulted in 15 deaths.

Geographical Distribution of Frequency. West Java became the province with the most incidents in 2025, with 175 incidents. It was followed by Jakarta (154), South Sulawesi (127), South Sumatra (101), and East Java (88). It is expected that provinces with higher

populations will have more incidents due to their density. Overall, only South Sumatra entered the Top 5 for the first time. Another interesting pattern is how East Java drops significantly, from 1st to 5th place, due to its ability to suppress its usual pattern of violence involving martial arts groups.

Geographical Distribution of Intensity. The CVEW Dataset defines intensity by calculating the number of incidents per a million population in each province. This was done to show which provinces have a higher number of incidents by considering their populations. In 2025, the Top 5 provinces with the most intense incidents were entirely composed of Eastern Indonesia provinces. Central Papua topped the list with 5.3 incidents per a million population, followed by West Sulawesi (4.8), South Papua (4.2), Maluku (3.9), and Papua Mountains (3.5).

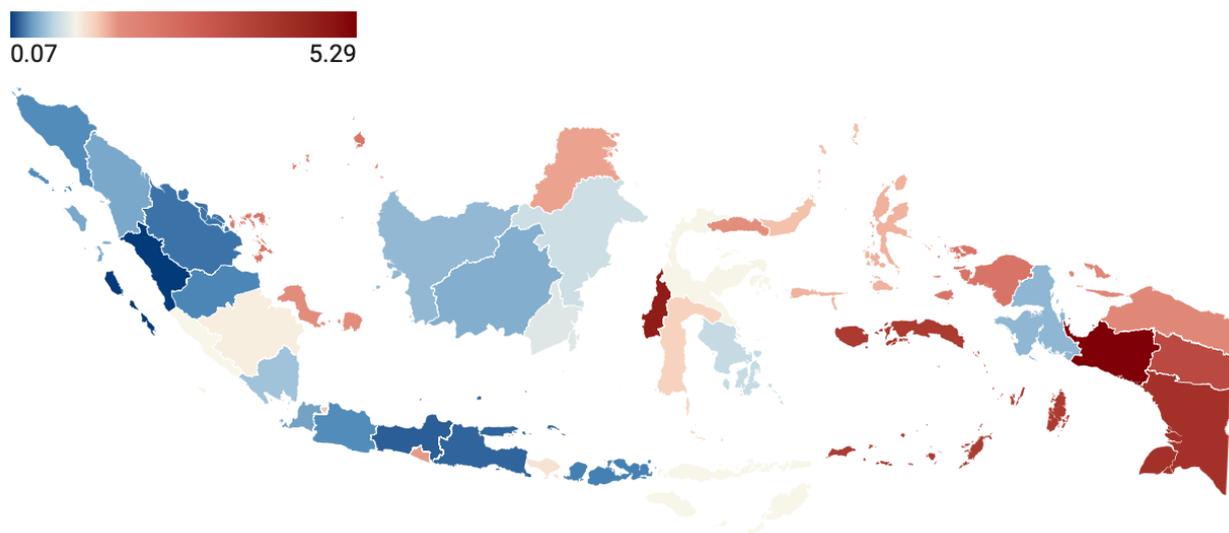


Figure 2. Intensity of Collective Violence in Indonesia, 2025
(Source: CVEW, 2025; Made with Datawrapper)

Intervention. Intervention is defined as efforts by third-party actors to de-escalate the situation and to prevent casualties resulting from the incident. An intervention is considered successful if the situation de-escalates (third parties can prevent further tensions or violence on time) and is able to prevent casualties. On the contrary, unsuccessful intervention is when third parties arrive too late, fail to stop the escalation of violence, or when casualties have already occurred.

In 2025, the Dataset recorded an intervention rate of 19.5%, a decrease from 2024's figure of 23.75%. Moreover, the success rate of those intervening acts is also lower than in 2024, which is at 40% or lower than 44.47% in 2024. These figures mean that fewer incidents were intervened in 2025, and even if they were intervened in, the success rate is also low.

In terms of intervening actors, 69.9% of interventions were conducted by state actors, while non-state actors – excluding private/company actors – intervened in 24.8% of incidents. Joint intervention by state and non-state actors was relatively low this year, only occurred in 7 intervened incidents.

Closer Look at Underlying Issues

In this part, I will present a closer examination of three underlying issues, namely vigilantism, the effect of the government's changing policies on violent incidents, and violence incited by law enforcement officers. Please keep in mind that, due to space limitations, some issues will only be briefly discussed without a closer examination.

1. Patterns of Vigilantism

The vigilantism issue always becomes the top underlying issue and motive for collective violence incidents every year. Most commonly, vigilantism was mostly related to criminal issues, with the 2025 data recording at least 146 incidents. Moreover, the vigilantism issue was also related to some incidents of violence related to identity, such as racism or opposition towards a certain group. There are a few ways to interpret why vigilantism has always been the top issue of collective violence in Indonesia.

From a methodological standpoint, we must acknowledge that the Dataset interpreted vigilantism quite widely, and as a result, will record more violence in that issue category. Specifically, the Dataset defines vigilantism as acts that includes – but are not limited to – revenge for insults, accidents, thefts, adultery, property damage, and raids on 'sinful places'. Therefore, the issue category can include acts that were based on communal factors, like revenge acts towards or by a certain group, and individual factors, like self-defense against crimes or violence based on insults.

Some existing scholarship works have also linked vigilantism acts with selective impunity. Jaffrey argues that vigilantes sometimes collude with law enforcement officers to prevent prosecution, and in turn, the officers gain community goodwill from the vigilante.⁶ While relating Jaffrey's work to the Dataset will not be conclusive, we can relate these findings to how thin the line is between self-defence and vigilantism in Indonesia. In Indonesia, a person can legally defend themselves as long as it satisfies the necessity and proportionality criteria.⁷ However, in practice, it can be difficult since there will be heightened tensions within a short period of time.

⁶ Sana Jaffrey, "Mechanics of Impunity" *Comparative Politics* 55(2), 2023, 287-311.

⁷ Law No 1 of 2023 on Criminal Code, art 34.

Furthermore, it is also important to link vigilantism and intervention rates. Although intervention is a *post-facto* act, the lack of it – and the low success rates – might indicate a low presence of intervening actors in the first place. This may contribute to high acts of vigilantism since authoritative third-party actors, like the police or community leaders, can deter an escalating act of vigilantism. However, in 2025, this figure is relatively low since only 31.4% of vigilantism incidents were successfully intervened in.

2. The Effect of Government Policies on Collective Violence

2025 is a transition year toward a new administration and policies. Unfortunately, these changes caused a spike in the rise of governance issues as one of the triggering issues of collective violence. In total, 164 incidents in 2024 were triggered by the governance issue. Moreover, this number might be under-reported since some demonstrations in late August and early September were recorded as a law enforcement issue, since the central focus of those incidents was demanding accountability for law enforcement's brutality against the protestors.

Most importantly, some of these incidents involved policies of both the Central and Regional governments. For the Central government, they must be cautious on their policies, especially the food estate, since they were vulnerable to breaching the people's basic rights.⁸ The Dataset, for instance, recorded two incidents between a private company, contracted by the government for the Food Estate program, and indigenous, local communities. Although it was only two incidents, they happened in one of the provinces with the most intense collective violence incidents.

For the Regional government, they must also tread carefully with their policies, and especially how to communicate them properly with their constituents. Policy changes, ideally, must be communicated to the people completely and with time for adjustments. Without both, new policies can be harmful to the people, and they will lead to more violent incidents. The most high-profile incident in 2025 is the Pati Demonstrations in August 2025, thousands of people protested against some of the Regency Government's policies, including a 250% increase in land and building tax.⁹

⁸ For instance, in November 2025, the Dataset recorded two incidents where a private company – contracted by the State for the food estate program – breaches into indigenous Papuans' land in Merauke, South Papua. See: "Pejabat Papua Selatan Geram, PT Jhonlin Group Diduga Terobos Palang Masyarakat di Distrik Ngguti", *Papua Selatan Pos*, 24 November 2025, https://papuaselatanpos.com/2025/11/24/pejabat-papua-selatan-geram-pt-jhonlin-group-diduga-terobos-palang-masyarakat-di-distrik-ngguti/#google_vignette

⁹ "100,000 rally in Central Java's Pati Regency for Local Leader's Resignation Over Controversial Policies", *CNA*, 14 August 2025, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/indonesia-pati-sudewo-regent-tax-hike-protest-5294351>

Lastly, from a governance perspective, the people need responsive and sensitive parliament members to step up in overseeing and constructively criticizing the executive branch of the Central and Regional governments. If parliament members do not have the sensitivity to criticize the executive, then the people will be forced to exercise the right to protest, and in Indonesia, that right often leads to clashes with security officers. Looking back at the Pati Demonstrations, for instance, parliament members invoked their right of inquiry only after the mass protests had occurred. Moreover, parliament members in the House of Representatives instead put themselves at the epicenter of controversies with their statements to justify an increase in housing allowance, which led to nationwide demonstrations in August 2025.

3. Incidents Invoked by Law Enforcement Officers

Due to the increasing scrutiny and controversy surrounding law enforcement officers' extrajudicial violence, the Dataset added a new perimeter on violence incited by law enforcement officers. As a result, the Dataset recorded 181 incidents (9.7%) that were incited by law enforcement officers, both in relation to their duties and their independent actions. This figure could be an under-reported number since some incidents might be unknown to the general public or were not being reported in the news sources.

The most high-profile incident is definitely the death of an online driver, Affan Kurniawan, after being run over by a tactical police vehicle driven by the Mobile Brigade Corps (*Brigadir Mobil/Brimob*). The incident led to public outrage, and protests spread beyond Jakarta into other provinces, resulting in loss of lives and destruction of public infrastructure. This incident also sparked discussions on police reforms, now headed by a Special Commission directly reporting to the President.

Most importantly, in my opinion, the dataset has been able to link incidents involving law enforcement officers and vigilantism actions done by them. One that deserves attention is what happened in Kutai Kartanegara in July 2025. On July 17th, a resident was beaten up by the Brimob officers because they were feeling insulted after the citizen questioned the placement of a wooden block in the middle of the road. The next day, residents from the victim's village went to the Brimob Headquarters to clarify the assault. Instead of explaining themselves, the Brimob officers assaulted 18 of the visiting residents.¹⁰ This incident not only displays the lack of restraint from law enforcement officers but also how easy it is for them to turn into vigilantes.

¹⁰ Dzul Ash, Evan Payong, "Beringas! Oknum Brimob Diduga Aniaya Pria Pengepul Pisang di Kukar", *iNews*, 21 July 2025, <https://belu.inews.id/read/620989/beringas-oknum-brimob-diduga-aniaya-pria-pengepul-pisang-di-kukar>

4. Issues to Look Out For

This policy brief will not be able to provide a deep analysis of all underlying issues. However, I would like to note that there are two underlying issues that are worth monitoring going forward, and where mitigation efforts might need to be started by local and national policymakers.

Firstly, the Dataset recorded some conflicts related to resource-extractive activities, especially in provinces with big mining potential. In total, there were 26 mining-related incidents in 2025. These incidents can be categorized into four large groups, namely: conflicts between illegal miners and authorities, conflicts between miners and residents, conflicts between mining groups, and conflicts related to mining governance. This issue needs proper attention going forward for several reasons. First and foremost, downstreaming mineral commodities has been stated as a priority for the new administration. Moreover, recently, the Ministry for Energy and Mineral Resources legalized more than 45,000 community oil wells to boost national production.¹¹

Secondly, the Dataset recorded at least 9 incidents of communal conflicts that were triggered by identity issues. Although the quantity is not as large as any other issues of violence, these incidents were spread in several provinces that are among the most intense provinces for collective violence incidents, particularly in Maluku, where at least three incidents of conflicts between indigenous people were recorded. Moreover, in September 2025, racism towards native Papuans became the triggering issue for violence among students in Yalimo, Papua Mountains, and led to the displacement of more than 178 people and the destruction of dozens of buildings. Considering the sensitivity of identity issues in Indonesia, authorities need to prevent, mitigate, and punish these incidents appropriately to ensure the violence does not recur.

Date ¹²	Province	Incident Description
February 3 rd	Maluku	A clash between people from Haya and Tehoru Villages in Maluku began with a community party that escalates into a dispute. The clash resulted in some houses burnt and access roads between the two villages were cut
March 31 st	Maluku	A clash between youth groups of Danama and Angar Villages in Maluku due to an unspecified miscommunication

¹¹ Nandito Putra, "Indonesia to Legalize 45,000 Community-Managed Traditional Oil Wells", *TEMPO*, 10 October 2025, https://en.tempo.co/read/2056131/indonesia-to-legalize-45000-community-managed-traditional-oil-wells#google_vignette

¹² Date indicates starting date of what might be a series of incidents

September 16 th	Papua Mountains	A dispute between students involved racist remarks against indigenous Papuans. The dispute escalated into mass violence where dozens of facilities were destroyed and hundreds were displaced
September 25 th	Maluku	Residents of Kaibobo village seized access roads to reject the involvement of Eti village in the land acquisition process for the construction of new Armed Forces batallion, which is located on the land of Kaibobo
December 4 th	Central Papua	Conflict between the Newagelen and Dang ethnic groups stemmed from an affair that was initially resolved through traditional means, but escalated after a priest died from an arrow and it led to inter-ethnic conflict between the two groups

Table 1. Selected Communal Conflicts in 20256
(Source: CVEW 2025)

Lastly, the Dataset also recorded at least 41 incidents where the perpetrators of violence were unknown person or persons. In general, most of these incidents were assaults or attacks against individuals, intimidation, and destruction of property. Although some of these incidents might be a common criminal activity, we have to acknowledge that there were some that were intended to spread terror. For instance, there are two incidents in the office of the news outlet *TEMPO* where the office was sent a pig's head and dead rats.¹³

Recommendation

Based on the findings, some recommendations are appropriate to be followed:

1. Enhance prevention and intervention efforts by state and non-state actors

State actors are already involved in intervening in incidents. However, there are clear deficiencies in prevention efforts and response time in preventing escalation. Therefore, it is important to increase the presence of local law enforcement officers, particularly at the Sectoral Police level, to deter violent incidents and to increase response time in case violence does happen.

¹³ Hellena Souisa, Max Walden, and Erwin Renaldi, "Pig's Head, Decapitated Rats Sent to Indonesian Media Outlet Tempo" *ABC*, 27 March 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-27/pigs-head-decapitated-rats-sent-to-tempo-indonesia/105092474>

Prevention and intervention efforts are not only the responsibility of the Police. Community and village leaders also need to step up in preventing and intervening in violent incidents in order to prevent further escalation. These leaders have an advantage that the Police do not have, namely, their close proximity to a potential incident and their interpersonal relations with the involved actors.

2. Prioritize regulatory impact assessment and legislative monitoring

Last year's policy brief already discussed the regulatory impact assessment as a response to growing violence resulting from non-transparent legislation. Unfortunately, instead of ceasing such practices, more legislation was being deliberated in a non-transparent manner, resulting in more incidents. Therefore, I would like to reemphasize the importance of regulatory impact assessment once again, especially for parliament members. However, such an assessment is also important for executive leaders, both at the national and regional levels, especially when we have seen some incidents that were responses to controversial policies at all levels this year.

3. Support ongoing efforts towards Police Reform

As a response to the Affan Kurniawan incident and other incidents involving law enforcement officers, the government established the Commission for the Acceleration of Police Reform. At the time of writing, the Commission has yet to publicly deliver all of its recommendations. These efforts need continuous substantive support to ensure that it is not only a gesture, but also a realistic step toward police reform.

Looking at incidents data from the Dataset, it is evident that police reform must not only be limited to how the Police behaved on-duty, but also off duty. Resolving this issue will need a revamp of the overall police academy and career structure, periodical education for officers – especially on a human rights-based approach – and providing mental support to ensure that officers remain fit both mentally and physically.



 csis.or.id

 csis@csis.or.id

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**Centre for Strategic and
International Studies
(CSIS Indonesia)**

Jl Tanah Abang III No 23-27
Gambir, Jakarta Pusat 10160
Indonesia