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# INEQUALITY AND GROUP VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA (2018)

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## ABSTRACT

As a country with a large population, Indonesia is not free from violence. Violence in the past that often occurred was violence between state institutions and people. Meanwhile, current violence is dominated by violence between groups such as gang rivalries, street fights, fights at sports events, etc. As a developing country, Indonesia still has income inequality. This study investigates the relationships between income inequality and group violence in Indonesia. It uses The Village Potency Census (Podes) 2018 (N = 81,897) to indicate group violence, and other variables from village and district characteristics in Indonesia. The logit regression shows that inequality is significantly associated with an increase in group violence. This result says that income inequality might cause group violence. Other results obtained from the logit regression are low education, poverty and unemployment which also might cause group violence. The policy implications that this study suggests are that to decrease group violence, society should be more equal and hence, income distribution, minimum educational attainment, and institutional rearrangement are important factors to consider.

**KEYWORDS** group violence, inequality, Indonesian village, Indonesian district

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia has a long history of violence. After the revolution for independence, through the 1950s there were many regional rebellions which sought to establish a subversive government, and in 1965–66, the communist purge was continued with anti-communist violence (Poeze & Schulte Nordholt, 2024). This 1965–66 anti-communist violence was one of the Indonesian human tragedies that resulted in the massacre of 500,000 activists and sympathizers of the Indonesian Communist Party (Barron, Jaffrey, & Varshney, 2016). After that, since 1967, under the authoritarian control of the Suharto regime, Indonesia was stable and experienced relatively less violent conflict. Nevertheless, during the period of 1990–2003, there were 3,600 incidents of group violence that caused over 10,700

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deaths (Varshney et al., 2004). This group violence had continued and, in the period 2003–2008, has resulted in up to 5,831 fatalities and material losses of IDR 900 million (Sujarwoto, 2017).

The increasing incidence of group violence in Indonesia in the post-Suharto era has been linked with economic factors, especially inequality. Inequality, measured by the GINI ratio in Indonesia before the Asian crisis in 1997 was relatively low due to Indonesia's economic growth and did not show a drastic increase (Yusuf, Sumner, & Rum, 2013). However, after the economic crisis, inequality has increased from 0.32 in 2003 to 0.43 in 2013 (Yusuf et al., 2013). Inequality is not good for society as it can cause social tension that causes grievance to the people and causes them to take up violent means (Campbell, 2025).

Some studies have examined group violence in relation to inequality in Indonesia. (Justino, 2025) find a positive relationship between inequality and group violence. They interpreted it as a rising grievance because of the unequal income distribution. (Rahadiantino, Nilasari, Rakhmawati, & Fatoni, 2024) Find that the risk of group violence in Indonesian provinces increased with high population growth. (Justino, 2025) conclude that inequality, along with marginalization tend to become drivers of group violence.

(Cervi, 2023) based on cross-countries study on civil violence and horizontal inequality, found that inequality is not statistically significant for causing violence in a country. (Riveros Gavilanes, 2023), based on cross countries study on income inequality and land inequality, found that there is no significant effect of income inequality and land inequality on violence in a country.

Regardless of the important results from these previous studies, we find several limitations in them. First, these studies use district and provincial level in examining the relationship between inequality and group violence. By not using the village level, they are ignoring the level most prone to group violence. Second, some of these studies examined only particular regions of Indonesia. For example, studies conducted by (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) examined group violence specifically in Java island. Lastly, most of these studies use data from years ago and it is no longer relevant in the current conditions in Indonesia. This present research intends to fill the gap left by the prior studies by using Indonesia's village potential (Podes) 2018 census data that includes information on group violence at the village level throughout the country. The use of Podes 2018 census is expected to contribute to the analysis of the relationship between inequality and group violence. Furthermore, we argue that inequality is significantly associated with group violence at the village level.

This study starts with the definition of the terms used. It discusses two key terms, "inequality" and "group violence", and locates them in the Indonesian context. It then presents the data and method employed to uncover the relationship between inequality and group violence. Following that, it discusses the results of the study. Lastly, it presents conclusions and some policy implications. **Inequality** 

Inequality is a topic that is often discussed in social justice theories, which describe unequal conditions to rights, status, and opportunities for individuals, households, groups, and communities (Afonso, LaFleur, & Alarcón, 2015).

Inequality can have many aspects and is usually associated with inequality of health, education, social mobility, opportunities, assets, and welfare. For economists, they usually focus on inequality related to household and individual income and consumption.

(Justino, 2025) explained in their research that there are two types of inequality in society. The first is vertical inequality, which is inequality within a population. The second is horizontal inequality, which is inequality between different social groups in the community.

Inequality tends to have a negative impact to society. Rowlingson (2011) found that there is a positive correlation between inequality, health and social problems. (Boarini, Causa, Fleurbaey, Grimalda, & Woolard, 2018) in their research also stressed that when inequality excessive, it will result in the disintegration of community life. This disintegration can take the form of a weakening of social ties between the rich and the unfortunate, mutual distrust, and loss of empathy among members of the community, and even may lead to protests and violent social conflict.

#### **Inequality in Indonesia**

From 1982 to 1997, Indonesia's average Gini index was 0.29, with a high of 0.31, and a low of 0.29 (Amaluis et al., 2024). Before the Asian crisis of 1997, Indonesia had a low Gini index which tended to decline further, but at the approach of the crisis; the Gini index increased (Sumner & Edward, 2013).

After the Asian crisis, Indonesia entered a relatively stable political and economic condition. The increase in the Indonesian economy is still accompanied by increasing inequality. From 1998 to 2013, the average Gini index was 0.34, with the highest figure of 0.41 in 2013. The report from the World Bank (2015) emphasized inequality in Indonesia by explaining that in 2002, the total consumption of the top 10 percent of the population in Indonesia was equal to the total consumption of the bottom 42 percent of the population. The numbers worsened in 2014, with consumption by the top 10 percent increasing to be equal to the total consumption of the population by the top 10 percent increasing to the (Gibson, 2017), inequality in 2016 was still large, marked by the riches one percent of Indonesian population owning 49 percent of total wealth, while the top ten percent owned 77 percent of the national wealth.

One of the causes of inequality in Indonesia is the increasing concentration of financial resources in the richest household. The World Bank (2015) explained that in Indonesia, richer households grow faster compared to poor and the middle-income families. The report also explained that from 1996 to 2010, the average consumption of the richest households grew three times faster than that of the poorest households.

Differences in education and skills can be a driver of increased income inequality in Indonesia. Richer households will be more educated and more skilled than poorer households. Furthermore, richer households get wages that are more than the wages earned by the poor households (The World Bank, 2015). This is also in line with (Putri & Dartanto, 2016) finding that groups of people who do not have informal education but have an elementary certificate and have a junior high school certificate from the largest group but earn income lower than the national average.

Aji (2015) also explained that, compared to workers with lower or basic education, workers with junior high school education received 20 percent higher wages, and workers with senior high school education earned 40 percent higher income while residents with undergraduate education earned twice as much as those with the lower or basic education. We can say that income or consumption inequality in Indonesia is caused by the domination of less educated and less skilled labor among households (Putri & Dartanto, 2016; Aji, 2015).

## The Definition of Group Violence

Violence can be seen as a product of social, political and economic conditions. Therefore violence often occurs due to inequality in social, political and economic circles in the middle of society (Tadjoeddin, 2002). Likewise, group violence, the topic of this paper, occurs because of inequality in the economic dimension. Group violence referred to in this paper is similar to (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) explanation of social violence routine.

According to (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) routine social violence is not a civil war, nor is it inter-ethnic violence. Such violence has no political motive or does not constitute a rebellion against the government and the state. This violence also has no criminal dimension, although sometimes it can also be identified as a criminal act. This paper uses the term group violence because it denotes violence between groups in the Indonesian villages.

Group violence in this research is also similar to Tilly's (2003) explanation of collective violence. This violence is perpetrated by two or more perpetrators with prior collusion among the perpetrators. Examples of such violence are gang rivalries, some election battles, street fights, and fights at sports events.

#### **Group Violence in Indonesia**

We can divide the history of violence in Indonesia into several phases. First, the phase of the Sukarno regime, which was marked by rebellions. The first rebellion that occurred in 1948 was by the Communist Party of Indonesia in Madiun. A year later there was a revolt by the Darul Islam. In 1958 there was a rebellion by the Revolutionary Government formed by rebellious military commanders. Violence in the era of the Sukarno regime culminated in the second rebellion of the Communist Party of Indonesia, which then ended the Sukarno regime (The Asia Foundation, 2017). Its second phase occurred while Suharto ruled Indonesia. There were still other rebellions like the Aceh Freedom Movement in Aceh (The Asia Foundation, 2017). In addition to the rebellions, there was military violence against civilians such as, in Tanjung Priok, Jakarta in 1984 and Talangsari village, Lampung, in 1989 (van Klinken, 2007). The third phase was a period of transitional at the end of the Suharto regime. It was marked by several incidents of communal violence, which was violence among civilians, such as the Sambas, Poso, Maluku, and Sampit incidents that culminated in the riots of May 1998 which ended the Suharto regime (Tadjoeddin, 2002). Finally, in the post-Suharto phase, though political and economic conditions were relatively stable yet social violence continued though on a much smaller scale in comparison with the incidents in the previous phase (Wilson, 2015). This phase of low-level violence began in late 2003 (Barron, Jaffrey, & Varshney, 2016), which is referred to as group violence in this policy paper.

After 2003, Indonesia entered a new era of violence. It was the violence with low impact and lasted from 2004 till 2012. In provinces that were prone to violence, there was a 79 percent decrease in the violence leading to fatalities (Barron et al., 2016). Even though violence with fatalities declined dramatically, the number of violent incidents increased three times from 2006 to 2012 (Barron et al., 2016). (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) explained the violence in post-Suharto as a high number of incidents with a small number of deaths, which contrasted with the previous era when the number of violent incidents was low, but the numbers of fatalities were high.

The group violence in the post-Suharto era was a manifestation of grievance and frustration with economic conditions that were not favorable for those who perpetrated the violence. Therefore, violent acts are of committed by those who are poor, earn low-income or belong to the lowest strata of society. (Tadjoeddin et al., 2010).

## **Group Violence and Inequality**

Inequality is not good for society because it affects social relations between individuals and communities. The presence of inequality in society makes the community sharply hierarchical, less trusting, more violent and it leads to the downgrading of the quality of social relationships (Wilkinson, 2004). Boarini et al. (2018) also emphasize that when economic inequalities become excessive in society and the poor feel increasingly marginalized and disempowered, the inequalities result in weakening community participation in joint decision making.

To be more specific, inequality in income will worsen social relations (Wilkinson, 2004). Income inequality is important as other inequalities in the midst of society for reducing the quality of social life of the community (Tadjoeddin, 2010). Even for a homogeneous society as in Indonesian villages, income inequality can be an important factor for increasing the likelihood of group violence (Tadjoeddin et al., 2010).

Inequality might cause group violence because inequality triggers grievances among people which leads to group violence. When inequality emerges and places people in different groups, people feel stressed and anxious about their status (Rowlingson, 2011). More boldly, (Demir, 2021) said that inequality that raises grievance is motivated by hatred. Therefore, inequality can cause collective grievances in the midst of society which then leads to group violence.

The above explanation leads us, we can to form a conceptual framework of the relationships between inequality and group violence.



#### **RESEARCH METHOD**

#### Indonesia's Village Potential Census (Podes) 2018

In this paper, we examine the relationship between inequality and group violence by processing and combining district and village data in Indonesia. For villages data we use The Village Potency Census (Podes) 2018, and data on districts

comes from The Statistics Indonesia. Podes data is collected from Indonesian villages which numbered 81,897 in 2018 and are governed by the lower administrative governments.

The Indonesian Statistics has conducted the Podes census every three years since 1983. Various information about village characteristics is collected during this census, including group violence in the village, slum area, daily crimes, and village classification (rural or urban). This data will be used in this study. The information in the census is gathered from the headman of the village.

## **Measures of Group Violence**

There are two steps to measuring group violence. First, we are choosing a village which has incidents of group violence, incident of inter-village brawls incidents from the Podes. Second, we are constructing a dummy indicator to show whether a village is experiencing group violence or not. The dummy variable is labeled with "0" or "1". The "1" means the village is experiencing group violence and "0" means there are no incidents of group violence in that village.

#### **Measures of Inequality**

The measurement of inequality for this research is using income inequality as the vertical inequality as Tadjoeddin et al. (2010) said that for a homogeneous society such as in an Indonesian village, income inequality could be an important factor in exacerbating irritation as a cause of group violence. To measure this inequality, we used the Gini coefficient which is widely known to count the ratio of the average income or consumption. The Gini coefficient is obtained by dividing the average income or consumption of the wealthiest 10 percent by the average income or consumption of the poorest 10 percent (Tadjoeddin et al., 2010). The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1 where 0 represents perfect inequality.

The Gini coefficient in this study uses the Socio-Economic Households Survey (Susenas) 2018. We calculate the Gini coefficient using household expenditure from the Susenas survey. This calculation is the same with how The Indonesia Statistics calculate Gini coefficient (www. bps.go.id)

## **Control Variables**

We use some social and economics characteristic at the district and village level as control while assessing the likelihood of group violence. At the district level, we use education, poverty, unemployment, GDRP (Gross Regional Domestic Product) and EFI (Ethnic Fractionalization Index) as the control variables. While, at the village level, we use urban village, daily crimes, and slum area as the control variables.

Table 1. Variables, description and sources				
Variables	Description	Sources		
Dependent Variable				
Group Violence		Statistics Indonesia-Podes 2018		

Table 1. Variables, description and sources

	Dummy indicators of mass fights among community groups within a village in the last one year	
<b>Independent Variable</b> District Level		
Education	The number of schools participating in regencies/cities. Students of ages 13-15 years.	Statistics Indonesia's publication 2017
Poverty	Percentages of people in regencies/cities living below the poverty line	
Unemployment	The rate of unemployment in regencies/cities	Statistics Indonesia's publication 2017
GDRP	Natural logarithm of Districts' Gross Regional Domestic Product by current market prices	Statistics Indonesia's publication 2017
Gini Ratio	Regencies/cities' Gini ratio index	Statistics Indonesia's publication 2017
EFI (Ethnic Fractionalization Index) <i>Village Level</i>	heterogeneity, ranging from 0 (for homogenous) to 1 (for heterogeneous)	BPS-Census 2010
Urban village	Dummy indicators of village classification, whether in cities or rural/remote area.	Statistics Indonesia-Podes 2018
Daily crimes	Dummy indicators indicating the presences of crimes related to theft, robbery, fraud, gambling, human trafficking and corruption in the village in the last one year	Statistics Indonesia-Podes 2018
Slum	Dummy indicators indicating the presences of slum areas within a village	Statistics Indonesia-Podes 2018

#### **Logistic Regression**

In this research, we use logistic regression because group violence is measure by the dummy variable. This research is following previous research (Rusyiana & Sujarwoto, 2017). The logistic regression model equation is to predict the outcome of the dependent variable using the explanatory variables in districts and villages.

$$logit(E_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \sum_{ij} \beta_j W_j + \sum_{ij} \beta_{ij} X_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

 $E_{ij}$  = outcome variables (group violence) in villages

- $\beta_0$  = random intercept
- $W_j$  = a set of district characteristics
- $X_{ii}$  = a set of villages characteristics

 $\varepsilon_{ij} = \text{error}$ 

#### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Table 2 shows the statistical summary for the district and village characteristics variables used in this analysis. The number of group violence incidents are recorded in 1,646 or 2% of villages. The national average of GINI ratio is 0.32. Although districts' GRDP varies, the national average district GRDP is Rp 28.66 trillion. The national average of people in poverty within Indonesia's district is 80,24 thousand people. The percentage of young people in the age 13-15 years who attend school is 93.80 percent. The rate of unemployment is 4.69 percent in districts. There are 50% of villages with daily crimes; the percentage indicates that daily crimes are relatively high. The table shows that slum settlements are exist in 7 percent of villages, which means that some villagers live in the slum in those villages.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Group Violence	0.02	0.14	0 - 1
District Characteristics (N=492)			
Gini Ratio	0.32	0.05	0.18 - 0.48
GRDP	28.66	49.58	0.19 - 590.66
Poverty	80.24	75.57	1.23 - 487.28
Education	93.80	7.38	35.32 - 100
Unemployment	4.69	2.52	0.30 - 16.50
EFI	0.35	0.29	0.01 - 0.94
<i>Village Characteristics (N=81,897)</i>			
Urban Village	0.10	0.30	0 - 1
Slump	0.07	0.25	0 - 1
Daily crimes	0.50	0.50	0 - 1

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of Group Violence and Inequality

Source: Author's calculation from Podes 2018 and official statistics

Figure 1 presents the geographical distribution of group violence in Indonesia. The highest group violence cases occur in districts across Papua, Maluku, Maluku Utara, West Papua, and East Java. The top ten districts in which group violence occurred are Asmat, 41 incidents; Yalimo, 41 incidents; Waropen, 40 incidents; Puncak, 30 incidents; Central Maluku, 26 incidents; North Halmahera, 26 incidents; Maybrat, 23 incidents; Mimika, 23 incidents; Malang, 21 incidents; and South Halmahera, 20 incidents. Most of them are located in eastern Indonesia. Only Malang is located in western Indonesia.



**Figure 1. Geographical Distribution of Group Violence in Indonesia (2018)** (Source: Podes 2018)

Table 3 presents the logit regression of group violence with GINI ratio and other control variables. The result of the regression supports our argument that inequality increases the likelihood of group violence in the village. The coefficient of GINI ratio is measure positively and significantly at the 1% level. A village within the district which has an increased percentage of poor people, tend to have an increased likelihood of group violence. The other finding, if the rate of unemployment in a district increases, then the likelihood of group violence increases in the village. Group violence in the village tends to arise if the community in the district is heterogeneous. On the contrary, if the district's GDRP and the school participation number in the students of age 13 to 15 decreases, then the tendency for group violence among the community within a village rises.

Regarding the village characteristic, when the village is in an urban area, it is more likely to experience group violence. The daily crime also increases the likelihood of group violence among community groups within the village. Lastly, when there is a slum in the village, then the tendency for group violence among community group within a village rises.

Dependent Variable: Group Violence				
	Coef.	SE		
District				
GINI Ratio	2.822***	0.521		
In GDRP	-0.283***	0.031		
Poverty	0.033***	0.004		
Education	-0.018***	0.003		
Unemployment	0.092***	0.011		
EFI	0.941***	0.089		
Village				
Urban Village	0.452***	0.073		
Slum Areas	0.418***	0.086		
Daily crimes	1.214***	0.060		
Constants	-0.676	0.611		
N village (2018)	81,897			
Pseudo R2	0.073			

 Table 3. Result of logit regression of group violence

*Note:* \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001.

## Discussion

Firstly, from the districts rated among the top ten for the incidence of group violence, nine are in eastern Indonesia. The analysis we present is based on the finding of (Azzizah, 2015) that a gap in education in eastern Indonesia is wider than in the other regions of Indonesia, which means education in Eastern Indonesia is worse than in other parts of Indonesia. This finding is in line with the observation by (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) that low education tends to increase group violence. For Malang, the possible analysis is that the incidents of group violence are triggered by poverty because Malang has a higher poverty rate than the national poverty rate (Statistics Indonesia, 2018). This is in line with the finding of (Hasim et al., 2025) that poverty can increase the likelihood of group violence.

GINI ratio shows a positive and significant correlation with the number of incidents of group violence. This indicates the association of greater inequality with higher levels of group violence in an Indonesian village. This finding also indicates that increased inequality in a district will raise the tendency for conflict among community group within a village. These findings are in line with the findings from previous studies that examined Indonesia and other regions. For researches that examined Indonesia, the results of this study confirm the research by M. Z. Tadjoeddin et al. (2012); Sujarwoto (2017); and Rusyiana & Sujarwoto (2017). For studies that examined other countries, this study also confirms the work by (Campbell, 2025) who studied Mexico, and Fjelde and Østby (2014), who investigated Sub-Saharan Africa. This study and the other studies mentioned above confirm that inequality tends to increase the probability of group violence.

Other important results show that poverty and unemployment can be sources of group violence in Indonesian villages. This is in line with the findings by (Hasim et al., 2025). (Hasim et al., 2025) also examined group violence in Indonesia and based their findings on the proportion of the people in the villages working in agriculture. They concluded that when fewer people work in agriculture, unemployment tends to increase, and the village tends to be more prone to group violence.

The findings about GDRP and education are supported by Tadjoeddin and (Rahadiantino et al., 2024). They examined the socio-economic determinants of group violence in Java, Indonesia from 1994 to 2003 using the United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery (UNSFIR) database. When analyzing the relationship of GDP per capita and education with group violence, Tadjoeddin and (Rahadiantino et al., 2024) conclude that decline in group violence began when the level of education reached 7.4 years of education and GDP per capita reached Rp 8 million. We can conclude that if educational attainment and GDP increase, group violence tends to decrease.

As regards the daily crime result, it supports the previous study by (Rusyiana & Sujarwoto, 2017). Rusyiana and Sujarwoto (2017) found that the village's daily crime increases the likelihood of group violence in the village. The daily crime can increase tension among the community in a village.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Many researchers have tried to understand the cause of violence in society. This study attempts to answer the question from an economic perspective. We have investigated the relationships between inequality and group violence in Indonesian village using data from Podes 2018 survey and Indonesia Statistics. Using logit regression, we find that inequality can become a driver of group violence in an Indonesian village. To conclude, inequality can trigger group violence in the community. As noted in the study, the incidence of group violence incidents was greater in Eastern Indonesia. This can be an area for further research to examine specifically the region in details. (Justino, 2025)have examined Java island. A detailed study on other islands of Indonesia is needed.

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