

# Monitoring Violence in Asia

Better data is needed to understand the drivers and impacts of conflict and violence in Asia, and to monitor progress against the violence reduction targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals. The Asia Foundation has been supporting the development of violence monitoring systems across Asia. Since these systems rely on local sources of information, we are able to capture the complexity and diversity of violence dynamics in the region.



Limited available data on violence hampers efforts to understand the prevalence and the causes of conflicts. Why do some countries or areas experience ethnic riots and others do not? Why do subnational conflicts endure at the periphery of otherwise stable middle-income countries? How are different forms of violence inter-related? These knowledge gaps hinder policymaking and programming. Having detailed, context-specific and rigorous data can help policymakers and practitioners to take more effective actions to prevent and respond to violence.

A key lesson from the Foundation's violence monitoring experience is that systems are typically more sustainable and have greater policy impact when they are rooted in local demand and are developed by local institutions. Consequently, The Asia Foundation's approach consists of providing support to local initiatives, with a focus on encouraging cross-country learning and the methodological improvements needed to link local systems with global violence prevention efforts.

## **Violent incidents monitoring systems (VIMS):**

- operate at the country or subnational level and

allow for a high level of geographic disaggregation

- monitor a broad range of violent events (conflict between the state and insurgents, ethnic riots, crime, gender-based violence, etc.) and collect detailed information on each single event (date and time, geolocation, form of violence, actors, weapons and impacts)
- use local sources in the local language(s)
- collect and update data on a near real-time basis
- rely on local participation and ownership
- provide insights on violence drivers, trends and impacts

## **OUR APPROACH**

The Foundation supports NGOs, universities, think tanks and other organizations who collect data on conflict and violence. These VIMS track and code individual violent events in near real time, with datasets updated on a daily to monthly basis. They rely on a combination of primarily local sources, such as national and subnational newspapers, local police blotters, or community reports. This enables our partners to capture a wide range of violence

types, from insurgent attacks to land conflicts to gender-based violence. They then record information on when and where the violence takes place, who is involved, and the damage done. These datasets allow for a refined analysis of local-level violence dynamics. Narrower in geographic scope but richer in information than global comparative datasets, they are a useful resource for policymakers and practitioners.

The Foundation provides grants and technical support to our partners, and facilitates peer-to-peer learning and methodological harmonization. This work includes commissioning research based on the VIMS data and helping to promote the value of violence data for policymaking.

## SUPPORTING LOCAL PARTNERS

Since 2015, the Foundation has been working with local partners in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Timor-Leste to enhance their technical and analytical capacity and optimize impacts. The Foundation works together with our partners to identify and implement possible improvements in data collection methods, bolster their analytical capacity and develop more effective communication and public outreach strategies. The Foundation produced *VIMS: A Methods Toolkit* to provide technical guidance and improve the compatibility of local systems with global datasets such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program.

## BUILDING NETWORKS

We are building a regional network of violence monitoring practitioners by supporting seminar, peer-to-peer exchanges and joint projects. Since 2016, our partners have learned from international specialists on topics such as GIS and geospatial analysis, data visualization, tracking gender-based violence or the role of social media platforms in enabling or preventing violence in the Asia. Regional events convened by the Foundation are also opportunities for our partners to learn

from each other, share experience and lessons, initiate joint projects and forge a common agenda.

## RESEARCH INFLUENCING CHANGE

The Foundation partners with a diverse group of researchers to produce papers on how violence is linked to climate change, poverty, inequality, governance, and fiscal expenditures. The Foundation continues to produce policy-oriented research investigating the impacts and drivers of violence in Asia to help governments and the civil society more effectively address violence.

### *Informing peacebuilding and development programs:*

In post-war Aceh, World Bank used local violence data to determine which districts and villages had been most affected by the conflict between the Indonesian state and the Free Aceh Movement, and help the government prioritize assistance accordingly. Data collected by our partner in Nepal has been used to monitor social tensions related to earthquake reconstruction assistance and large infrastructure projects.

### *Understanding the correlates of violence:*

In Thailand's southern border provinces, Deep South Watch used geospatial analysis to illustrate that cultural variables were a more accurate predictor of the distribution of violence than poverty, inequality or unemployment. This stresses the importance of a political solution, and the limitations of a response focusing on economic development.

### *Advocating for violence prevention:*

In Nepal, Collective Campaign for Peace uses data as an entry point to facilitate discussions about human rights and violence prevention with local governments, the civil society and affected communities. The detailed, highly disaggregated Nepal Monitor data allows facilitators to focus on types of violence and disputes that matter most in each locality.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*



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