

Fish to Fight: How Do Fisheries Affect Conflicts in Indonesia?

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Abstract

To what extent do marine-based economic activities influence the onset of violent conflict? Despite ongoing debate over several decades around the relationship between natural resources and violent conflict, little of the relevant research has addressed the marine environment. Based on satellite data in Indonesia, this paper provides new evidence on the relationship between fisheries and violent conflict. From a sample of 757 cells representing the spatial interaction of conflict and catch landings in 2015 and employing ocean productivity as an exogenous instrument, both industrial and non-industrial catches were found to have a statistically significant positive effect on the number of conflict events. Additionally, increased illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) catches are more likely than legal catches to cause violent conflict. An increase in fish catches in Indonesian waters fuels conflict of every kind, among which protests and riots are most sensitive to fisheries while fighting and terrorism are least sensitive. Overall, these empirical findings support the hypothesis that increased competition for common-pool resources contributes to the onset of violent conflict.

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