



CoDA Series 2: Papua

# Ever Shrinking Civic Spacetime in Papua

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# Executive Summary

## Distinct Pattern

Papua showcases a distinct pattern of shrinking civic spacetime, at least compared to other provinces across Indonesia.

- It has a different starting point, seeing that its “incorporation” as Indonesia’s 26th province in the 1960s left Papua with little meaningful civic spacetime to begin with.
- Its scope cannot be understood as local *per se*, but as heavily nested within national, regional, and global political-economy interests. Governance, security, development, and public services in Papua have always been shaped more by governments, corporations, military forces, and/or organizations outside of Papua than by Papua's own civil society.
- It covers multiple dimensions that go beyond militarization and curtailing of civil liberties. One needs to also look at dismissals of indigenous authorities, territorial redistrictings, resource extractions, environmental destruction, and massive inward migrations as mechanisms that shrank civic spacetime.
- It is undoubtedly the most violent amongst shrinking civic spacetimes across Indonesia. It happens within the combined contexts of colonialism, ethnic cleansing, slow-motion genocide, and ecocide.

## Racist and Militaristic Discourses

The reason as to why atrocities continue to take place in Papua has less to do with them being unknown to the general public and more with the narratives justifying them as strategic, or even moral. These narratives are anchored in racist and militaristic logics.

- The Indonesian state perpetuates the racist logic instilled by the Dutch that Papuans are incapable of modern self-governance and do not know what is best for them. This logic has been used to justify Papua’s “incorporation” into Indonesia.

This report on shrinking civic spacetime in Papua is the second of the CoDA series.

Developed by the Institute of International Studies (IIS) Universitas Gadjah Mada, CoDA is part of Connect, Defend, Act! (CDA), a project conceived by Hivos and Humanis, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD).

In Papua, CoDA was co-designed and co-implemented by IIS UGM and Papua Democratic Institute (PD-Institute).

Drawing on interviews and reviews of the literature, the report elaborates how civil society actors (CSAs) in Papua live their civic life amidst profound political, territorial, ecological, demographic, economic, and security onslaughts.

Rather than assessing civic spacetime solely through institutional guarantees towards civil liberties and elections, CoDA delves into the capacities of CSAs to **connect** with one another, **defend** against physical and digital attacks, as well as **act** to push back against shrinking civic spacetime.

- Framed as fulfilling “people’s demand” for complete decolonization of Dutch East Indies, military operations in Papua between 1961 and 1969 were justified as moral, legitimate, just, and necessary. Subsequent military operations are therefore seen as staying true to a moral cause.
- Aspirations for self-determination have been labelled as treacherous towards the unitary state of Indonesia, as disrespectful towards those who have given their lives for liberating Papua from the Dutch, and as ungrateful of the development projects – therefore deserving disciplining, including through military approaches.
- While seemingly granting more autonomy to Papua in comparison to other provinces, “Otonomi Khusus” (special autonomy, henceforth Otsus) became a restrictive container for discussing matters of governance, security, rights, development, etc. in Papua. Ideas are welcomed, as long as they are within the confines of Otsus, and thus, the unitary state of Indonesia.

## Connect: Local, National, Regional, International Stages

Despite many obstacles, Papua’s civil society demonstrates strong capacities to build networks across local, national, regional, and international levels.

- The issue that connects them the most is the right to live (*hak hidup*). Other unifying issues include human rights, indigenous rights, and environmental protection.
- The issue that divides them the most is Otsus, as to what extent it is a form of cooptation or power redistribution.
- The biggest obstacle in terms of building coalitions and alliances is mistrust amongst civil society actors. Other challenges include a mental divide between those working on civil and political rights (*hak SIPOL*) versus those on economic, social, and cultural rights (*hak EKOSOB*), redistricting policies, and donor-driven project cycles.
- While solidarity and collaboration with national and international partners are appreciated, there is a concern that these interactions are not always grounded in equality and can be patronizing.

## Defend: A Whole New Level of Violence

Notwithstanding frequent threats, intimidation, and repression, Papua’s civil society carry on their important work in defending civic spacetime.

- Papua’s civil society faces a different and more severe set of challenges, such as killings, torture, internet shutdowns, and electricity cuts.
- Default training against physical and digital attacks, as well as Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), remain mostly inadequate to overcome Papua-specific forms of repression.
- While some legal protection for rights defenders exists, including anti-SLAPP clauses, Papuans seem to question their effectiveness.
- An important defense strategy has been to reframe campaigns and advocacies within the “accepted discourses,” to not be labelled as having separatist agendas.

## Act: Not for the Lack of Effort

Pitted against all odds, Papua's civil society perseveres in their fight for their life, land, and dignity.

- The most notable recent acts of resistance in Papua are those utilizing indigenous and religious processions, including erecting red crosses on sacred lands and organizing collective mournings. Other noteworthy acts include speak-ins that disrupt government events and the public screenings of the *Pesta Babi* documentary.
- Three prominent actors in pushing back against shrinking civic spacetime in Papua are the church, *mama-mama* (indigenous mothers), and the youth.
- There is an awareness amongst Papua's civil society that they are not able to fight back as fast as they had been struck by the government, military, and business actors.
- Previous recommendations from civil society actors have not succeeded in generating meaningful transformations towards social justice and a healthy civic spacetime. The distinct and severe characteristics of shrinking civic space in Papua calls for fundamentally radical policy responses.

# Never-Ending Shrinkages in Tanah Papua

Any meaningful conversations about civic spacetime in Papua need to look beyond its administrative boundaries. This is true for a number of reasons. Firstly, the imaginaries shared by local civil society actors and/or organizations (CSAs/CSOs) when talking about Papua encompass the area and people throughout what was previously known as Dutch East Indies, Irian Jaya, and West Papua. The 2003 and 2022 redistricting (*pemekaran*) laws may have administratively altered the province of Papua into a significantly smaller territory. Yet, the notion of Papua being more than its provincial boundaries remains salient. Time and again, CSAs/CSOs invoke the term “Tanah Papua” (which literally translates to “the land of Papua”) to emphasize that they are not just talking about the province.

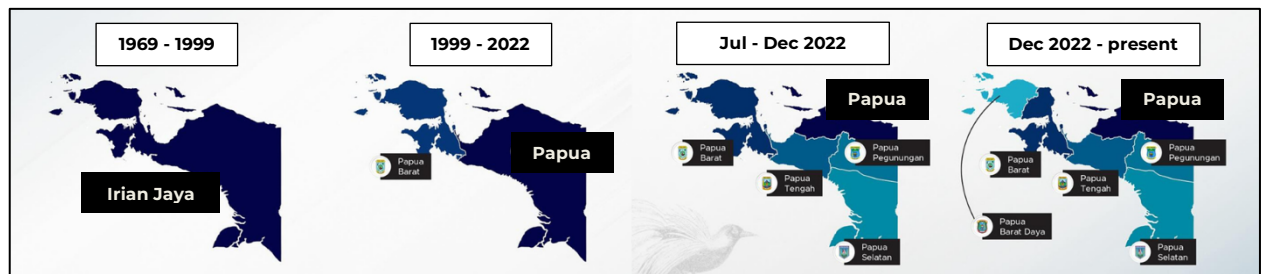
## Box. 1 What is civic spacetime?

CoDA utilizes the concept of civic spacetime to highlight that what is under threat during autocratization is not only civic space(s), but also the diminution of the time to invest and take care of those spaces. The problem is then not as simple as CSAs losing the space(s) they need to push back against autocratization, but also CSAs losing substantial time (and energy) to do so.

Secondly, although commonly addressed as “local,” almost every aspect of civic spacetime in Papua is nested within national, regional, and global political-economy interests. Governance, security, development, and public services in Papua have always been shaped more by governments, corporations, military forces, and/or organizations outside of Papua than by CSAs/CSOs residing within. Thirdly, campaigns and advocacies on the issue of Papua are sometimes more vibrant outside Papua, or even outside Indonesia. Thus, focusing solely on civic works performed inside Papua would significantly limit one’s analysis.

With those in mind, the following section discusses civic spacetime in Papua beyond its provincial boundaries, conscious of the global, regional, and national strings at play, as well as attentive of its multiple loci. It highlights the distinctiveness of shrinking civic spacetime experienced by CSAs/CSOs in Papua, of it being significantly more violent compared to that across Indonesia. It also elaborates on the racist and militaristic discursive frames that have been used to discipline thoughts and emotions when engaging with the topic. If anything, those who wish to meaningfully learn about civic spacetime in Papua need to unlearn the ways it has been conceptualized and measured.

**Figure 1. Redistricting in Papua, 1969–present**



*Note.* This figure was originally created and published by GoodStats in November 2025 to show the timeline of redistricting in Papua. The figure has been cropped and re-arranged for the purpose of this report. From GoodStats [goodstats.id], 2025, (<https://www.threads.com/@goodstats.id/post/DOdTRdIkxAB/pemekaran-provinsi-di-papua-dimulai-pada-1969-dengan-pembentukan-irian-jaya-yang?hl=en>).

## What Shrinkage? Which Shrinkage?

It is certainly not an understatement to say that shrinking civic spacetime in Papua has been more extensive and immense compared to that taking place across Indonesia. Even at the conceptual level, it bears a distinctive understanding. It has a different starting point, it covers more dimensions, and it takes place within the combined contexts of colonialism, ethnic cleansing, slow-motion genocide, and ecocide.

In one of our earliest interviews, a renown Papuan CSA “schooled” us on the topic:

*“Shrinking civic space? What do you mean by shrinking? Every other region in Indonesia had a relatively decent civic space as a starting point, from which the shrinking took place. Ever since its incorporation into Indonesia, Papua has lost its civic space. With [Papua having] little or no civic space to begin with, what do you mean by shrinking civic space [in Papua]?”*

A number of other interviews shed light on the ambiguity of the matter:

*“We have been given specific arrangements [special autonomy] that, on the one hand, open some space to talk about governance, development, and rights, but on the other hand, restrain the ways we talk about them. What looks like an expansion can indeed feel like a shrinkage — or is it the other way around?”*

*“Is it freedom (kebebasan) if we are not allowed to talk about freedom (kemerdekaan)? Is it freedom (kebebasan) when every single dissent is labelled, or even criminalized, as freedom (kemerdekaan) and separatist agendas — silencing and/or invalidating genuine grievances?”*

To better situate the above comments, it is perhaps useful to quickly lay out the institutional arrangements governing state-society-capital relations in Papua over time. In quite some literature, the story originated in the 1969 Act of Free Choice (Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat, henceforth Pepera), which led to the “integration” of Papua into Indonesia, marked by the unanimous adoption of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2504 on 19 November 1969.

A number of literature would go slightly earlier, to the 1962 New York Agreement ceding Dutch administration of Papua to the United Nations and/or the 1963 “handover” from the United Nations to Indonesia. While historically relevant, such starting points invisibilize centuries of civilizations in Papua, thus reinforcing colonial accounts on Papua’s political history.

An extensive review of Papua's political history is beyond the scope of this civic spacetime monitoring report. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the report acknowledges the fact that precolonial Papua was marked by a complex range of social, political, and economic arrangements that had been co-opted, weakened, or eliminated by the Dutch and Indonesian colonial regimes. Anthropological studies found that many precolonial societies in the entire island of Papua were governed by a “big man,” whose leadership may be shared between older men or held by an individual, which position may be passed through hereditary systems or acquired through competition (warfare, alliances, resource management, spiritual knowledge, etc.), which may take more hierarchical forms or more egalitarian ones (Chowning, 1974; Ungirwalu et al., 2025; Kendi & Ibrahim, 2025). The Patuans-Keret structures in what is now Fakfak Regency and the Ondofolo-Ondoafi leaderships in what is now Jayapura Regency are only two of the many remaining systems of indigenous governance. However, such systems have been deliberately defanged by the Indonesian state, reduced to mere cultural symbols without real power to make political decisions.

Under Indonesia’s administration, Papua has endured a number of political arrangements. These include being a province under Old Order Indonesia, a province under the highly centralized New Order Indonesia, a province with special autonomy under the 2001 Law (henceforth 2001 Otsus Law), a province with a renewed special autonomy under the 2021 Law (henceforth 2021 Otsus Law), and a significantly smaller province following the 2003 and 2022 Redistricting Laws that eventually split Papua into six provinces (henceforth DOB, Daerah Otonomi Baru, new autonomous regions).

Throughout those years, a series of military operations, overt and covert, took place. Between 1961 and 2004, under the Old Order and New Order regimes, Papua was subject to military operations Wisnumurti I-IV, Sadar, Brathayudha, Wibawa, Pamungkas, Gagak I-II, Kasuari I-II, Rajawali I-II (al Rahab, 2004). At the beginning of Reformasi, large-scale military operations seemed to have relatively declined. Up until Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s presidency, the government claimed to have put a halt to military operations in Papua (BBC News Indonesia, 2010; Winarto, 2011).

However, the military maintained an active presence in Papua, in the name of *penegakkan hukum* or law enforcement (BBC News Indonesia, 2013; Nathaniel, 2020). The Jokowi and Prabowo periods saw an increased spike in military operations in Papua, with the formation of Operasi Namengkawi in 2018, subsequently replaced with Operasi Damai Cartenz in 2022, which adopted a more confrontative and aggressive approach, even rising to *siaga tempur* or combat alert status (CNN Indonesia, 2022; CNN Indonesia, 2023; Aji, 2022).

Most operations above were coordinated by the Regional Military Command (Komando Daerah Militer, henceforth Kodam) stationed in Papua, namely Tjendrawasih (1963-1985), Trikora (1985-2007), and Cendrawasih (2007-present). Between 1961 and 2025, Indonesia has deployed hundreds of thousand military personnel to Papua.<sup>1</sup> Since 2022, military operations have incorporated the regional police into security operations in the region. As of 2025 alone, there were 56,517 military and 26,660 police forces stationed in Papua (Supriatma & Salam, 2025). This number does not yet include the “non-organic” military personnel (only temporarily stationed in Papua, usually for about a year). As of July 2026, the number of non-organic forces reportedly reached 17,780, bringing the total of active security forces in Papua to more than 100 thousand (Salam & Supriatma, 2026). These numbers reflect a renewed focus to target “armed criminal groups” (Kelompok Kriminal Bersenjata, henceforth KKB), perceived as threatening strategic political and economic interests in the area.

Aside from military officers, Papua saw a massive influx of migrants. Between 1964 and 1999, reportedly 78 thousand families had migrated to Papua, facilitated by the government’s transmigration program (Pemerintah Provinsi Papua, 2007). To accommodate said influx, the local government conceded a total of 2,100,760 hectares of land, including customary lands, spread across 10 regencies (*kabupaten*), to be converted into Transmigration Settlement Units (Yuminarti, 2017). By 2010, the demographic makeup of Papua had changed into 8 percent Javanese, 4 percent Sulawesi, 3 percent Bugis, and 3 percent Maluku, as the majority non-indigenous ethnic groups. In total, they make up almost 19 percent of Papua’s population in 2010, compared to the 75 percent percent of indigenous Papuans (*orang asli Papua*, henceforth OAP) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010).

Although the program officially ended in 2000, Papua remains a popular destination for transmigration. As indicated in the 2020 census, the number of inward migrants, particularly lifetime migrants, exceeds outwards migrants by thrice the amount. When compared to Indonesia’s population growth (at 1.25 percent), Papua’s population grows by 4.13 percent each year (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021), a staggering statistic that cannot be driven exclusively by births. The most common motivation for moving to Papua is employment (BPS Provinsi Papua, 2020b), which in the more recent years is largely driven by prospects of working on Proyek Strategis Nasional (national strategic programs, henceforth PSN), e.g., palm oil plantations (Kadir, 2024).

As is often the case with that of elsewhere, transmigration to Papua is not politically neutral. Rather, it is a project of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing, driven by the twin agendas of resource extraction and territorial consolidation (McNamee, 2020). After the 1984 uprising in Papua, the Indonesian government deliberately created transmigrant settlements in the border between Papua and Papua New Guinea, in order to prevent cross-border movement by secessionist forces.

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<sup>1</sup> This estimation is based on numbers of reported military personnel in al Rahab’s (2004) paper on military operations in Papua between 1963–2004, as well as Project Multatuli’s 2025 and 2026 journalistic reports on the number of organic and non-organic forces stationed in Papua in more recent years.

Transmigrants were also placed in resource-rich areas, particularly after the opening of the Grasberg mine in 1990, in order to create a stable and loyal labor force and bar OAP from accessing such areas. Clearly, transmigration privileges outside actors and their needs to secure political and economic interests in the region, rather than Papuans' needs to secure their dignity and well-being. Among others, the military and private corporations frequently infringe upon indigenous rights by converting *tanah ulayat* (customary lands) into government-owned lands, handing *Hak Guna Usaha* and *Hak Pakai* (rights to cultivate and use) to third parties without consulting the communities (Soembari & Yandedai, 2025). Although some forms of compensation exist, they cannot replace the spiritual and cultural values that indigenous communities ascribe to their lands.

The same patterns, unfortunately, persist until today. We see this in Freeport-McMoRan's ongoing operations since 1967, in PT GAG Nikel's nickel mining operations in Raja Ampat, and most recently, the Food and Energy Estate in Merauke, designated as PSN, which led to the clearing of large swathes of forests to create land for expansive palm oil and sugarcane plantations. These are also found in controversial planned construction projects, such as Mamebramo and Urumuka hydropower plants, as well as the potential petroleum extraction of newly discovered oil reserves in Blok Warim. The planned Trans-Papua Highway Project too will lead to large-scale dispossession of indigenous lands in order to facilitate non-indigenous migration and access to key natural resources in Papua (Wangge, 2023). While there are little disaggregated data available, economic development in Papua has been highly uneven, with urban, coastal areas that have significant transmigrant populations experiencing lower levels of poverty and significantly higher levels on the Human Development Index than largely rural mainly indigenous inland areas (BPS Provinsi Papua, 2020a; Resosudarmo et al., 2014).

As long as one can remember, Papua has always been caught in tug of wars — between Indonesia and the Netherlands, between Indonesia/Netherlands and the United Nations, between international corporations and the Indonesian government, amongst Indonesian oligarchs, between Indonesian oligarchs and the Indonesian government, between provincial government(s) in Papua and the Indonesian government, and so on. It almost seems that various actors at various levels see the need and have the means to insert themselves into deciding what to do with Papua, except the majority of Papuans themselves, especially the indigenous communities. As mentioned by an informant:

*“We (Papuans) will die in our ancestral land, (and will remain as) mere onlookers (on our land) until the day we die.”*

A number of reports cited that around half a million Papuans were killed in military operations throughout the New Order and about 10 thousand sought refuge in Papua New Guinea (Condon, 2022; Antonopoulos & Cottle, 2019; May, 2012; Smith, 2021). Between 2018 and 2025 alone, an estimated 411 persons in Papua have died due to armed conflict (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, 2026). A reported 667 OAP as well as members of non-Papuan solidarity groups have suffered torture or ill treatment, based on data between 2019 and 2023 (Human Rights Monitor, 2024).

In the span of three years (2022–2024), a total of 1,142 persons have been arbitrarily arrested in Papua (Papua Behind Bars & TAPOL, 2025). Beyond direct violence, Papuans have also been subjected to structural violence, deprived of access to basic needs. At least 103 thousand mothers have lost their livelihoods due to landgrabbing for PSN, between 2020 and 2024 (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, 2025). As of June 2026, there are currently 122,932 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) currently living in Papua (Jubi, 2026a). Amongst the most salient episodes of violence include that in Biak (1998), Wasior (2001), Wamena (2003), Paniai (2014), and most recently in Intan Jaya (2026). Taken together, such numbers point towards a broader, deeper, and more fundamental phenomenon taking place in Papua.

Referring to the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, a number of scholars have alerted that Papua is undergoing slow-motion genocide (Budiarjo & Liong, 1984; Yoman, 2004; Wing & King, 2005; Hyslop, 2011; Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2013), although a few others cautioned the use of such term without proof of intent on the part of Indonesian authorities (Aspinall, 2006). Meanwhile, without necessarily rejecting the idea of a genocide taking place in Papua, some scholars find it more productive to situate the atrocities as part of Indonesia's settler colonialism (McNamee, 2020; Woodman, 2022; Kadir & Wahid, 2026; Kogoya, 2026).

There is no simple way to understand shrinking civic spacetime in Papua. It has a different origin story and starting point than other provinces in Indonesia. It covers many dimensions: governance, territory, ecology, demography, livelihood, ideology, etc. It sustains colonial practices as well as facilitates ethnic cleansing and slow-motion genocide.

## **Racist and Militaristic Discourses**

The sheer data presented above should have been enough to raise alarms and stop said atrocities from taking place in Papua. The fact that such excessive use of force continues to take place with a blanket of immunity has to do with the narratives justifying the violence as strategic, or even moral. These narratives are anchored in racist and militaristic logics.

Racist attitudes towards Papua and Papuans were apparent in the “handover” processes following Indonesian independence from the Dutch. Even the term “handover” signifies an underlying assumption that Papua was an entity “owned” by the Dutch, whose “ownership” ought to be transferred to Indonesia, through the “facilitation” of the United Nations.

The Dutch, Indonesia, and the United Nations went on to decide Papua's fate without meaningfully including Papuans into the conversation, failing to see them as capable of self-governance, despite centuries long practices. Diverse indigenous communities were lumped into a single entity and stripped of their agencies, reduced as primitive simpletons (Karma, 2014; Webb-Gannon, 2022).

Compounded with militarism, such racist attitudes led to a rigged referendum. Believing that Papuans “do not know what is best for them,” Pepera 1969 was not open to the general public. Instead, only a select 1,025 individuals were “invited” to cast their “free will.” Handpicked by the Indonesian military, these individuals reported intimidation and repression (Chairullah, 2022; King, 2004; Pigay, 2001; Scott & Tebay, 2005; Shabecoff, 1969).

Such use of force was justified as following popular demand in Java, formulated in the 1961 Tri Komando Rakyat (three commands from the people, henceforth Trikora). The commands include (1) stopping the Dutch from turning Papua into its puppet state, (2) hoisting the Indonesian flag in Papua, and (3) preparing for a mobilization to defend Indonesia’s independence and territorial integrity. Framed as “people’s call for complete decolonization,” military operations in Papua between 1961 and 1969 were seen as moral, legitimate, just, and necessary.

The emphasis on people’s will and decolonization agenda gave Pepera a democratic and humane face. From that point on, it was easy to paint any criticism towards the violent incorporation of Papua into Indonesia as unpatriotic, as going against people’s will. Furthermore, aspirations for self-determination were labelled as treacherous towards the unitary state of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, henceforth NKRI), as disrespectful towards hundreds who have given their lives for liberating Papua from the Dutch, and as ungrateful of the freedom “bestowed” upon Papuans.

These sentiments hardened throughout the military-backed New Order as it faced secessionist challenges from armed groups in Aceh, Timor Leste, and Papua. Applying zero tolerance to separatist agendas, the regime engaged in heavy-handed military operations. Throughout the years, the excessive use of violence was seen as just and necessary, to give treacherous citizens the lessons they deserve. As anti-separatism became hegemonic, it became even more convenient for the government to paint any kinds of criticism as having separatist undertones. Such labelling would effectively quell any kinds of dissent.

At the early stage of Reformasi, Timor Leste acquired its independence through a referendum and Aceh entered into a peace agreement with the Indonesian government. As for Papua, there was an increased awareness of the need to redress militarism in Papua and recognize its cultural identities, including the Morning Star Flag which has been widely associated with independence agendas. Nevertheless, this newfound awareness did not provide (much) space for referendum and self-determination.

The most that came out of it was the notion that Papua deserved more autonomy relative to other provinces across Indonesia. While Reformasi led to decentralization of power in most Indonesian provinces, it granted Papua special autonomy (*otonomi khusus*, henceforth Otsus).

While relatively more open than what was there throughout the New Order, Otsus soon became a restrictive container for discussing matters of governance, security, rights, development, etc. in Papua. Ideas are welcomed, as long as they are within the confines of Otsus, and thus, NKRI.

Entertaining thoughts of independence would be seen as ungrateful of the “extra degree of autonomy” compared to that enjoyed by most provinces in Indonesia. Moreover, as the “privileges” that Otsus brought were seen as redress against past human rights violations, it kept the blanket of impunity untouched.

Some of our informants pointed at the racist and colonialistic characters of Otsus:

*“We see that civil liberties of Papuans were guaranteed in the 2001 Otsus Law... but those have been cut in the 2021 Otsus Law... This is a form of institutionalized racism.”*

*“The Otsus Laws did not give meaningful opportunities for OAP, seeing that most of the authority remains with the central government... as if we are brought back to the Dutch occupation.”*

Others take a more optimistic approach by pointing out that the problem is not the Otsus Law *per se*, but its implementation:

*“The Otsus Laws require addressing past human rights violations and the root cause of the problems. However, none of them were fulfilled. Throughout the 20 years, this requirement was not implemented.”*

*“I think what was problematic was not the laws, but their implementation. We can put together perfect legislation in order to protect civil liberties. But if they are not well executed, those laws are useless. For example, the Otsus Law.”*

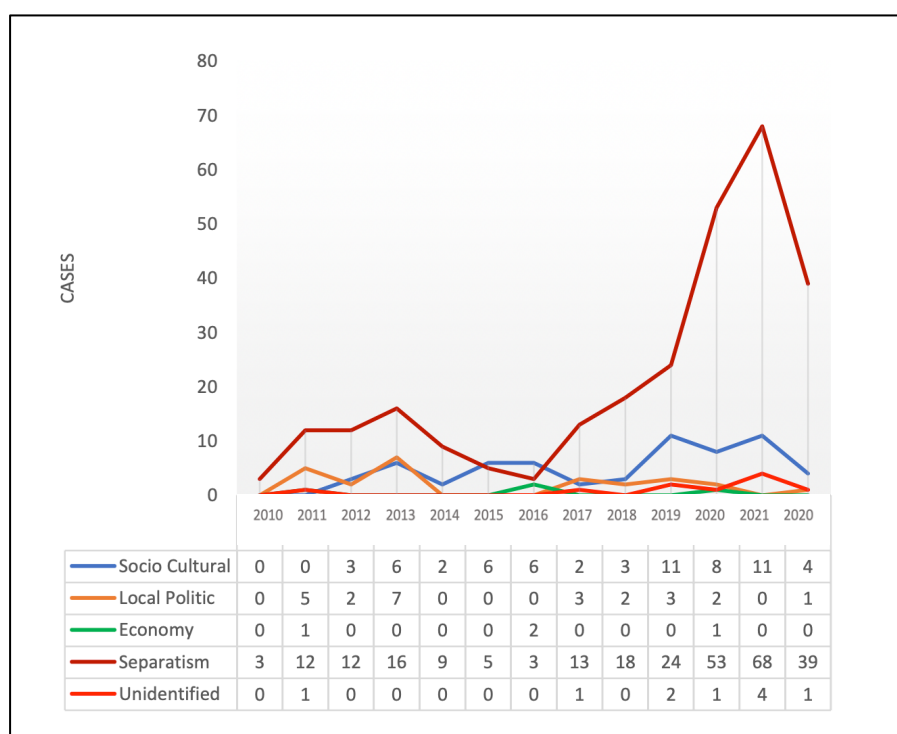
*“[On paper] The Otsus Law provides opportunities for OAP to participate in political processes in MRP (Papuan People’s Assembly) and DPRK (Regency/City People’s Representative Council), however, implementation-wise, all those positions are taken by the national government.”*

As Joko Widodo began his presidential term, a renewed commitment towards “embracing” and “developing” Papua emerged. The slogan “Papua adalah Kita” (which literally translates as Papua is Us) was widely adopted amongst the public and by government institutions, signalling acknowledgement that Papuans “should have been treated as siblings” and that Papua “should have been as developed as the rest of Indonesia.” However, the beginning of Widodo’s second presidential term witnessed racist persecutions against Papuan students in Malang, Surabaya, and Semarang, which included soldiers shouting “monkey” at students, prompting the 2019 Uprisings in 87 cities (Koman, 2020).

While CSAs across Indonesia attempted to revamp the “Papua adalah Kita” slogan to ease the tension, the Indonesian state saw it as a rightful pretext to up their militaristic approach. To further legitimize this, the government labelled KKB as terrorist groups, while the police named certain civil society groups, including student executive bodies, student networks, local media organizations, as well as churches, as part of a broader domestic terrorist network (Wangge, 2023).

As shown in a dataset put together by Gugus Tugas Papua Universitas Gadjah Mada (2022), there was a constant increase in the level of violence in Papua between 2010 and 2022, encompassing most of Widodo’s reign. Most of them revolve around the issue of separatism, followed by socio-cultural issues, local politics, and economy.

**Figure 2. Violence Motives in Papua, January 2010–August 2022**



Note. Adapted from *Acts of Violence in Papua: Diagnosis and Recommendations* (p.15) , by Gugus Tugas Papua Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2022.

On the one hand, the siblinghood and development narratives allowed the general public to express solidarity with Papuans enduring military violence at home and Papuan students facing racial discrimination and violence in other provinces. On the other hand, the “implicit remorse” within the narratives was considered enough to appease calls for justice.

No meaningful steps were taken to account for past violence, let alone to depart from violent measures altogether. If anything, it strengthened the notion that Papua should always remain a part of Indonesia. Thoughts of independence would be seen as ungrateful of the “solidarity” shown by Indonesians and the “civility” that was brought to Papua through decades of development projects.

As mentioned by our informants:

*“Our lives are worth nothing [to them]. Indeed, they [Indonesians] believe we owe them our lives and the progress that they bring to our lives. It never occurred to them that they are the one living off our resources.”*

*“[Economic] Investments have sunk hope amongst Papuans, their rights to live, and their resources. Some Papuans live through agriculture, others hunt and gather what the forests provide. They will lose their livelihood; their descendants will lose their future.”*

*“Investments directly impact Papuans’ survival... Investments lead to communities losing their land and forests, and thus their ability to sustain their lives. Investments, mining activities, and deforestation encroached into the lives of communities and stripped them of their rights to live.”*

It is certainly not in the lack of exposure that human rights violations in Papua sustain and are continuously met by impunity. Racist and militaristic attitudes barred most of the Indonesian public from recognizing the full humanity of Papuans, let alone their rights (see Rorty, 1993), thus normalizing the violence as morally justifiable and strategically necessary, producing and reproducing infrastructures of impunity (see Drexler, 2024). Since the excessively violent shrinking civic spacetime in Papua is sustained by racist and militaristic discourses, it is in countering those very discourses that civic spacetime can be meaningfully restored. This is not to say that exposing everyday and extraordinary violence in Papua is not important. They are crucial, yet not enough without dismantling racist and militaristic ways such information is processed.

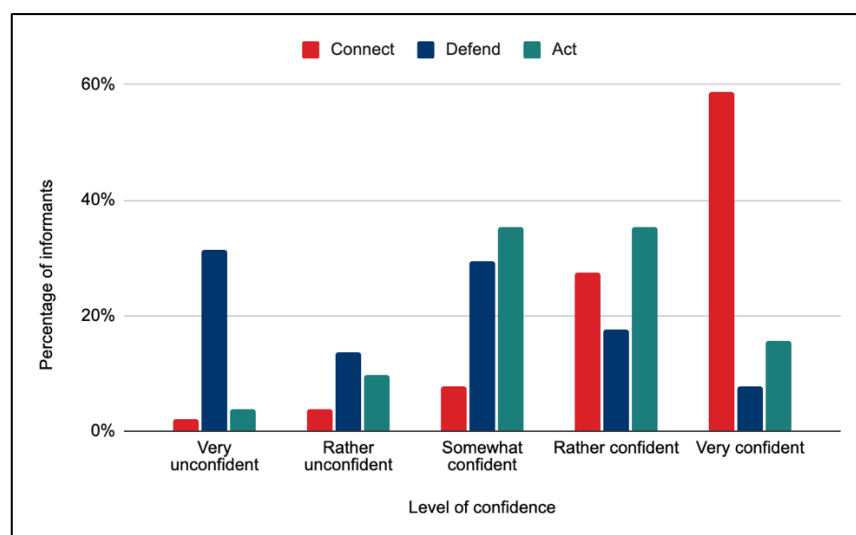
# Surviving Shrinking Civic Spacetime

As established in the previous section, shrinking civic spacetime in Tanah Papua cannot be understood simply as a decline in civil liberties. Rather, it is the cumulative result of decades of militarization, territorial restructuring, extractive economic activities, as well as racist and militaristic discourses that have constrained not only civic participation but also indigenous agency over land, governance, and livelihoods. Yet, despite these structural pressures, Papua's civil society has not remained passive.

This chapter turns from the broader political context to the lived experiences of Papua-based CSAs/CSOs<sup>2</sup>, examining how they navigate and contest shrinking civic spacetime through their capacities to **connect**, **defend**, and **act**.

Drawing mainly on what was shared by 51 Papua-based CSAs, this report finds that CSAs in Papua remain connected to one another amidst decades of shrinking civic spacetime, even as it shrunk more rapidly in the last five years. Meanwhile, their abilities to defend and push back against shrinking civic spacetime are challenged by repression, administrative fragmentation, and the growing demands on their time and resources. Despite the harsh environment for civic work, CSAs have remained resilient, have engaged in strategic adaptation, and are continuously committed to safeguarding democratic participation under exceptionally difficult conditions. As illustrated in Figure 3, they are confident in their capacities to connect with one another, but less in defending and acting effectively to push back against shrinking civic space.

**Figure 3. Self-assessment of Capacities to Connect, Defend, Act by CSAs in Papua**



<sup>2</sup> This report uses the term Papua-based CSAs/CSOs (instead of Papuan CSAs/CSOs) to acknowledge the diverse ethnic identities of those working in this field.

## A Battered Civic Spacetime

CDA's baseline study on shrinking civic spacetime in Indonesia (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024) found all seven strategies listed in the Authoritarian Playbook (Dresden, Baird & Raderstorf, 2022) at play in the last five years, albeit at varying forms and degrees throughout the country. These strategies include politicizing independent institutions, spreading disinformation, aggrandizing executive power, quashing criticism and dissent, scapegoating vulnerable and marginalized communities, corrupting elections, and stoking violence.

All seven are also present in Papua. Throughout the last five years, the most salient strategies have been aggrandizing executive power as well as quashing criticism and dissent. The first is done by further dividing the area into six provinces, giving Otsus Law a stronger grip. The second is done violently, especially in relation to securing land and obedience for PSN.

When asked how they understand “civic space” or “civic spacetime,” nearly all informants highlight emotive aspects, such as “without fear,” “without intimidation,” “with confidence,” and “comfortable.” The emphasis was not on whether arenas for expression and/or contestation exist, but on the degree of freedom and dignity they endow to regular citizens. The weight put on human dignity makes sense amidst racist attitudes towards Papua and Papuans. As mentioned by our informant:

*“[Civic spacetime is about] Humankind. It is a space where humans understand why they need to care for other human beings — not eliminate them and their humanity.”*

While informants seem to not be familiar with the term “civic spacetime,” their depiction of civic life is filled with notions on how its quality is dependent on the time and energy that CSAs can afford to perform their civic duties.

*“People can debate whether Otsus and redistricting open up political participation for OAP. What is clear is that both policies have led to heaps of administrative work and training, to make sure that new offices are ready and able to serve. We [CSAs] became stretched thin. Too many meetings, too many reports. Sometimes we lose sight of our core task, which is safeguarding civil liberties and democracy.”*

Referring to Chambers and Kopstein's (2006, p. 364) categories of civil society,<sup>3</sup> most informants do not see Papua-based CSAs/CSOs neatly falling into a single category. Many of them do not necessarily see the state as singular, as they tend to separate the national government and the provincial government. While seeing themselves as being “apart from,” or “against,” the national government, some informants also consider themselves as sometimes being “in dialogue with” the provincial government. Whether the openness to collaborate with the government is ideological or tactical needs more careful research.

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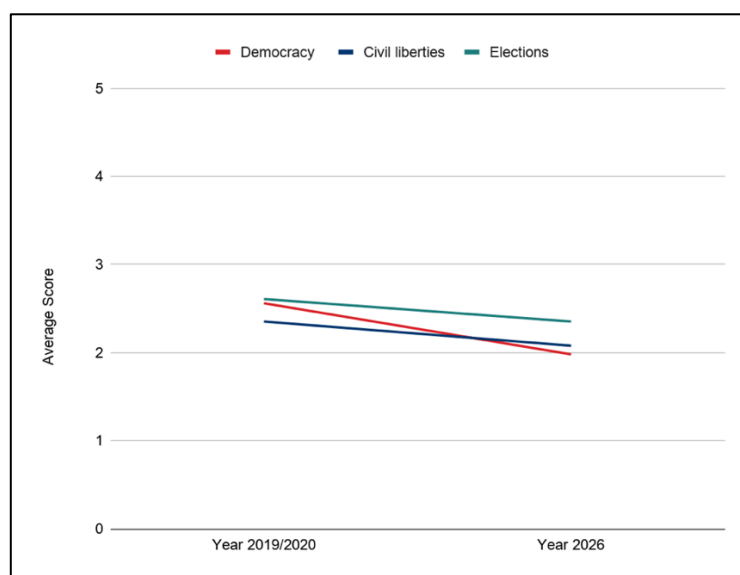
<sup>3</sup> The categories include (1) apart from the state, (2) against the state, (3) in dialogue with the state, (4) in support of the state, (5) in partnership with the state, and (6) beyond the state.

Meanwhile, in reference to Keane and Merkel’s (2019, p. 374) functions of civil society,<sup>4</sup> most of our informants fall under “observing and monitoring state power.” Some aspire to “protect against state intervention” but are aware of the power discrepancy between the military-backed state and resource-limited civilians.

In terms of democracy and its two main components — civil liberties and elections — our informants reported a decline between 2019 and 2024. This decline has a lot to do with the government’s effort to crush the 2019 uprising, both through violence and redistricting. “The 2019 Uprising” refers to the 87 demonstrations that took place between 19 August and 30 September 2019 in 23 cities in Papua, 17 cities outside Papua, and 3 cities abroad, which violent state responses resulted in 61 civilian deaths, 284 civilian injuries, 22,800 civilian displacements, and 1,017 civilian arrests, leading to 157 of them becoming political prisoners (Koman, 2020).

As shown in Figure 4, the starting score for each is lower than midpoint (3). This reflects the fact that shrinking civic spacetime has taken place way before 2019. Of the three, democracy seems to have the steepest decline, civil liberties seem to have the lowest quality, and elections seem to fare better.

**Figure 4. Average Scores of Democracy, Civil Liberties, and Elections, 2019/2020 vs 2026**



*Note.* Average score follows a numeric scale of 1-5, denoting a range from very bad/very limited/not free at all (1) to very good/very open/totally free (5).

<sup>4</sup> The functions include (1) protecting against state intervention, (2) observing and monitoring state power, (3) supporting democratic-participatory socialization of citizens and recruitment of democratic elites to decision-making bodies, (4) opening effective channels for generating, aggregating, and articulating common values beyond formal political channels, (5) civilizing and democratizing local authoritarian enclaves and (6) bridging deeper societal enclaves, thus helping mitigate violent conflicts.

## Connect

The 51 Papua-based CSAs who participated in CoDA survey feel confident in their capacities to connect with other CSAs/CSOs. The majority of them feel very well connected (30 persons) or well connected (14 persons) to their peers at the local, national, and international levels. This level of connectedness may have something to do with the fact that donors have upped their focus on Papua, for example in mitigating and adapting to climate crises, e.g., through programs aiming at saving tropical forests. In turn, this compelled international and national (Jakarta-based) organizations to partner up with Papua-based CSAs/CSOs in their efforts to bid for international funds.

According to our informants, the issue that connects them the most is basic rights, including the right to live, freedom for fear, and freedom from violence. The right to live (*hak hidup*) has indeed become a useful frame in bringing together issues of extra-judicial killings and arrests with issues of indigenous rights and landgrabbing.

Meanwhile, our informants pointed out that the most divisive issue is Otsus. Seeing how it grants more autonomy to Papua compared to most Indonesian provinces,<sup>5</sup> some CSAs genuinely see that Otsus provides a platform for self-governance. However, cognizant of the decades-long mistreatment of Papua, other CSAs see Otsus as Jakarta's cooptation strategy. Here, Otsus is seen as a "candy" to lull or appease CSAs and a "container" against self-determination aspirations.

While not necessarily divisive issue-wise, redistricting of Papua into smaller provinces had put some strain in reorganizing campaigns and advocacies. CSAs/CSOs based in the current province of Papua face extra challenges in managing the cases that are now considered beyond their provincial jurisdiction. These include, but are not limited to, mining activities by Freeport-McMoran (now Central Papua), nickel mining in Raja Ampat (now Southwest Papua), and the food estate in Merauke (now South Papua). A number of informants mentions how the NGO hub has shifted from Jayapura (Papua) to Sorong (now Southwest Papua). For CSAs/CSOs that have mostly operated out of Jayapura, this could mean having to allocate extra resources and time to stay connected with donors, networks, and actors that are key to their organization's work.

Such territorial splitting also produces new political actors and intermediaries that CSA/CSOs must familiarize themselves with and liaise with. In other words, CSAs/CSOs have an added task of keeping up with changes in the constellation of political actors at the district level. More importantly, redistricting may split the constituent base that CSAs/CSOs are working with. As redistricting creates new political opportunities and resources to compete over, this can hamper efforts to build solidarity and alliances amongst civil society actors.

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<sup>5</sup> Two other provinces with special governance arrangements are Yogyakarta, where governorship is passed hereditarily, as well as Aceh, where local political parties exist and sharia law is enacted. To learn more about shrinking civic spacetime in Yogyakarta, see [Coda Series 1: Civic Spacetime in a City of Contradictions](#). To learn more about Aceh, see the upcoming CoDA Series 4.

At the local level, CSAs/CSOs are well connected to one another. However, they also saw how actors and organizations tend to work more closely within the “civil and political rights” (*hak SIPOL*) or the “economic, social, and cultural rights” (*hak EKOSOB*) circles. Given Indonesia’s violent encroachment of Papua, it is no wonder that SIPOL circles developed earlier, while the EKOSOB circles only started to flourish in the 1990s. Our informants underline that both sets of rights are intertwined, yet they find themselves mainly engaging with those in the civil and political rights circle when discussing democracy and civic space. As mentioned by a renowned CSA:

*“[In Papua,] Civic space is mainly understood as space for political expression.”*

At the national level, Papua-based CSAs/CSOs thread their interactions wisely. On the one hand, collaboration and networking with CSAs/CSOs that are based in Jakarta and other parts of Indonesia allowed for a wider platform for campaign, advocacy, and fundraising. On the other hand, the state-endorsed hegemonic view of Papua as troublesome and underdeveloped often hinders equal and meaningful partnership. In other words, while seemingly well-intentioned, the interactions are often marred with patronizing attitudes and/or pity. Self-evaluations and reflections are needed to change the sentiment to solidarity and accountability.

Some meaningful allyship with those residing outside of Papua include that of Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (Communion of (Protestant) Churches in Indonesia, henceforth PGI) and WatchDoc. Universities in Java play an ambiguous role in advancing Papua issues. While most of them maintain curricula that are aligned with the government’s racist, militaristic, and capitalist views on Papua, some universities in Java provide just enough space for Papuan students to build networks and organize. An informant argued that studying in Java may serve as a decisive point in life, where one becomes more critical, skilled, and connected in working on pro-social justice issues in Papua, or becomes more technocratic and optimistic with Indonesia’s developmentalist agendas.

At the international level, CSAs/CSOs seem to be able to use more explicit terms in their campaigns, in calling out Indonesia’s colonization, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and ecocide. One that is seen as an important hub and is formally recognized by the Melanesian Spearhead Group is the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). Established in 2014, it brought together three organizations, namely the Federal Republic of West Papua, the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation, and the National Parliament of West Papua. As suggested by the organizations’ names, their ultimate goal is to establish Papua’s independence. Amongst other places, their aspirations are raised, year in and year out, during the UN General Assembly, by Pacific diplomats inside the room and activists outside the building.

However, most international campaigns and advocacies emphasize on the human rights violations taking place in Papua. While accusing the Indonesian government of genocide and ecocide, they do not necessarily demand for free Papua. These campaigns and advocacies mostly originated by activists and organizations in the UK, the Netherlands, and Australia. A notable voice would be that of Veronika Koman, an Australia-based Indonesian human rights lawyer.

The issue of Papua has also made it to academia, albeit amongst small circles. In the literature and international conferences, the political dynamics in Papua have been discussed as colonization, genocide, and ecocide. However, the discussions have been overshadowed by atrocities taking place in other places across the globe, e.g., Palestine, Lebanon, Sudan, South Sudan, DRC, Ukraine, and Myanmar. Also, the academic discussions at the international stage does not necessarily loop back to that at the domestic level.

While well-connected, our informants mentioned that it has not always been easy to build alliances and coalitions. The main challenge is suspicion, and another challenge is time. Given Papua's political history, it is not surprising that CSAs/CSOs are being extra careful in their interactions with one another. Also, given that almost everyone and every organization is stretched thin, it has been difficult to find time to meaningfully connect. As mentioned by some informants:

*"Lack of trust. People are suspicious that they would only be treated as objects, as tools to achieve other parties' goals. This is especially true since project cycles are relatively short [only allowing for superficial and transactional exchanges]."*

*"Time is finite (terbatas). Our attention is pulled towards different directions in our efforts to work on the various cases across Papua."*

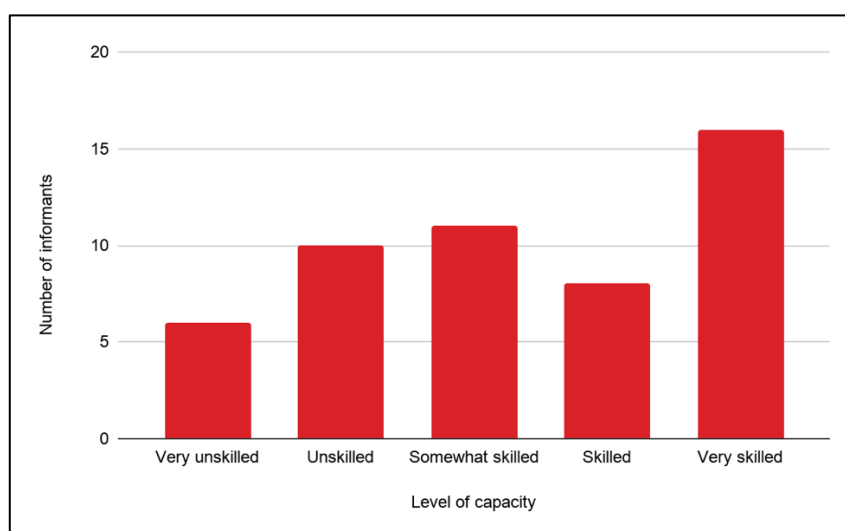
*"We are bound (to dedicate our time and energy) to issues promoted by donor organizations... which we have to complete within a short period of project cycle, with very demanding administrative standards."*

Compounded with the state narratives that justify military actions and landgrabbing in Papua, the above challenges make it difficult for Papua-based CSAs/CSOs to build strong alliances with CSAs/CSOs, let alone the general public, across Indonesia. Perhaps, moving from the human rights circles and languages towards the church's networks and the everyday narratives of Papuan mothers would yield better chances of opening meaningful conversations with the general public.

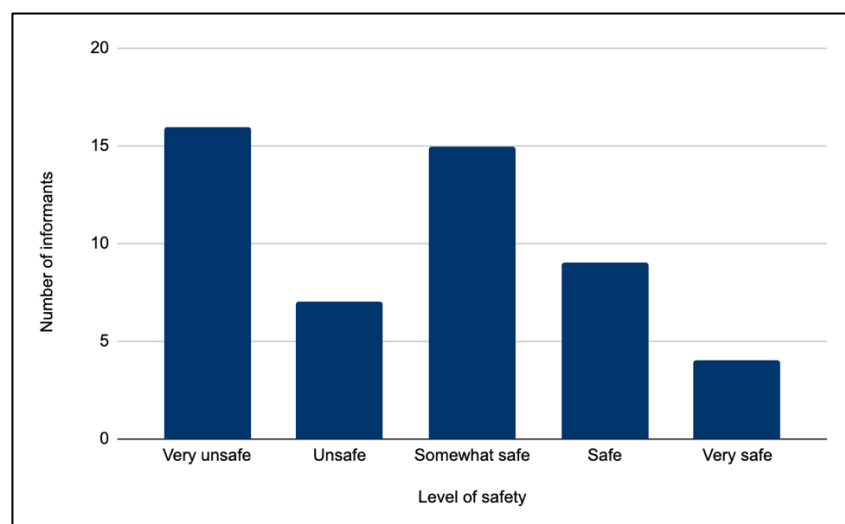
## Defend

Most of our 51 informants feel rather confident in their capacities to defend democracy, elections, and civil liberties. Around 58% of them mentioned that their organization has standard operating procedures to deal with physical and digital attacks. Also, almost 65% of them have received training on physical, digital, and/or holistic security. Yet, most informants feel unsafe in performing those roles. As seen in Figures 5 and 6, capacities do not correlate with safety.

**Figure 5. How skilled are CSAs/CSOs in your province/district in defending civil liberties, elections, and democracy?**



**Figure 6. How safe do you feel in performing civil society, election, and democracy-related work?**



CSAs/CSOs in Papua indeed have a lot to defend against. Between 2010 and 2022, patterns of violence in Papua became increasingly brutal, from “mere” usage of firearms and edge weapons to burning schools, houses, kiosks, and airplanes, as well as torture, looting, rape, and mutilation, resulting in at least 497 casualties and 1,668 injuries (Gugus Tugas Papua, 2022).

Our informants shared that the most common form of repression they, their family members, or their colleagues receive is intimidation, both digital and physical. This includes receiving calls and texts from unknown parties, being wiretapped, hacked, and/or doxxed, as well as being accused as separatists or foreign lackeys. When such attacks take place, most informants would seek support from LBH Papua, SAFEnet, church networks, or colleagues and family members.

While training on digital hygiene and digital security are appreciated, Papua-based CSAs/CSOs underline the need for strategies to overcome internet shutdowns, network throttling, or even electricity cuts. More specifically, our informants would like to have more security support and financial support, seeing that most of them do not get paid for engaging in civic works.

When asked which actors disturb their civic work the most, our informants pointed at the police and military, including intelligence officers from both institutions. Some also mentioned the local government, along with Lembaga Masyarakat Adat Merah-Putih, the government sponsored institution on indigenous communities. Historically, *adat* institutions in Papua have been an important site of political contestation, between the Lembaga Musyawarah Adat (Customary Assembly) who are more accommodating of the interests of Papuan elites and Indonesian government to push for development programs, and the Dewan Adat (Customary Council) who are more aligned with the cause for Papuan self-determination (Kusumaryati, 2019). Although the institutionalization of *adat* in Papua was originally a means to extend state control over Papua, it is worth noting that *adat* institutions are not monolithic.

When asked which regulations put them more at risk when performing civic duties, our informants point at the ITE Law, which has been used to criminalize activists and civilians. None of them mentioned anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation) clauses as mechanisms to defend against criminalization. This may be an indication of the lack of confidence towards the clauses’ robustness. This may also have to do with the general racist attitudes, where anti-SLAPP is seen as potentially less effective when used to protect Papuan activists.

*“Many [Papua-based CSAs] feel that the existing regulations do not enhance things for Papua, including that in terms of the safety of human rights defenders. If any, safety infrastructures are usually difficult to access. There is a belief that everything formulated in Jakarta would result in something different in Papua.*

*Also, it is not about whether or not infrastructures for social justice are accessible, it is also about how racism is institutionalized within, which makes it difficult for CSAs in Papua to have confidence in any legal mechanisms.”*

That said, to many Papuan-based CSAs/CSOs, a realistic defense strategy has been to (re)frame their campaigns and advocacies within the “accepted” discourses. This means that condemnation towards human rights violations by Indonesian military and/or police officers need to use words that would not be associated with sympathy towards “freedom-fighters.” Or, demands for better economic redistribution need to be threaded in ways that would not invalidate Otsus. Or, critiques towards landgrabbing need to not be associated with being anti-development.

*“I see that [some organizations are] reframing [their work/demands] into humanitarian and environmental issues, e.g., “Papua is not an empty land” or “Save Papua Forest.” Such framing can be an extension of the global trend and donor’s commitment to [mitigating] climate change and saving tropical forests. Other CSOs ... may take on a more frontal frame, e.g., “Stop deforestation.” What is interesting is that amidst such reframing, [anti-] colonialism is becoming a lens to make sense of Papua. Case in point, Pesta Babi movie.”*

Looping back to the Connect section, a frame that is considered safe and has the potential to bring CSAs/CSOs together is “the right to live.” Said frame may not be able to effectively bring violators to justice. Nevertheless, it allows for the issue or case to be discussed and not dismissed altogether. When certain persons’ deaths were justified by the state, e.g., due to their alleged affiliation with KKB or their defiance towards PSN, CSAs/CSOs could still argue that the respective persons have the right to live and to due process. Furthermore, a CSA shared with us:

*“It is more than just a frame. I think this is an urgent agenda seeing that the massive destruction of Papua can no longer be framed separately by those working in different sectors. “The right to live” captures anxieties revolving around the ecological destruction and survival of Papuans, along with their identities, forests, and water — all of which define Papuans. ... This is a strategy to capture the compounded vulnerabilities embodied by Papuans. It also explains why some CSAs use [anti-] colonialism as their lens, seeing that [other frames such as] marginalization, failure of development, poverty, and conflict zone, had proven to be inadequate in capturing the multidimensional complexity of Papua’s destruction.”*

Many of the CSOs involved in this civic spacetime monitoring project have been around since the 1990s and early 2000s. This attests to their capacity to defend themselves not only against a very violent encroachment of civic spacetime but also amidst limited funding as well as colonial and racists attitudes seeping through the human rights, humanitarian, and development sectors.

*“To CSOs in Papua, defending Papua [is not just another project, but] has become their moral obligation, as this is the space in which they live together. Such an emotional connection to the land is a crucial aspect to sustain their ability to defend [against shrinking civic spacetime.]”*

## Act

Most of our 51 informants feel somewhat confident (18 persons), confident (18 persons), or very confident (8 persons) in their capacities to push back against civic spacetime. More than 80% of them have programs specifically designed for protecting civil liberties, elections, or democracy.

Moreover, around 85% of them have engaged in direct actions, mostly in the forms of marches and demonstrations. Cross checked with Jubi's news articles and Damai Pangkal Damai database, the majority of nonviolent actions in Papua were indeed the classic combo of marches, demonstrations, banners, and speeches. Sometimes, these are performed as part of political mournings and demonstrative funerals. As recent as July 2026, hundreds of people carried the body of Melkiana Duwitu and her unborn child across the town. They were amongst the civilians caught in the crossfire between the military and KKB.

Another notable method adopted by CSAs invokes religious and indigenous processions, that is by erecting red wooden crosses (*salib merah*) to delineate sacred lands where extraction and exploitation are forbidden. Up to 2025, more than 1,800 red crosses have been put on lands across Boven Digul, Mappi, Merauke, and Jayapura to stop landgrabbing practices that convert indigenous lands to PSN properties (Muazam, 2025). Those crosses were put by different communities working as a network, with no central command. Also invoking indigenous rituals were members of the Malind-Makleuw community. They smeared their body and face with white mud to symbolize grief upon losing their indigenous land to PSN.

What took the national attention was the speak-in conducted by Papuan youths and Greenpeace activists, as they barged in an international nickel conference in Jakarta, June 2025 (Greenpeace Indonesia, 2025). As the Deputy Foreign Minister addressed the audience, the activists shouted, "Papua is not an Empty Land" and "Save Raja Ampat." They also displayed banners that read "What's the True Cost of Your Nickel?" and "Nickel Mine Destroy Lives."

Such speak-ins also took place in various events in Papua, most recently in May 2026, when four university students interrupted a public discussion forum, held at the governor's office in Jayapura. They held up posters that stated "PSN Plunders Indigenous Rights" and expressed their opposition, in the face of the attending government officials (Kurniawan, 2026).

Understanding that direct actions in Jakarta receive wider public attention, Papua-based CSAs/CSOs, in collaboration with Jakarta-based NGOs, organized some demonstrations in front of the ministerial offices and the Supreme Court to call attention to the human rights violation, land grabbing, as well as environmental damages caused by mining and deforestation practices. In October 2025, the *Solidaritas Merauke* movement, collaborated with WALHI, a prominent national environmental NGO, to conduct a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Agriculture and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency, condemning PSN in Merauke, South Papua (Hamzah, 2025).

Also protesting against the same project, West Papuan environmental activists partnered with Greenpeace Indonesia to stage a theatrical performance in front of the office of the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs in December 2025 (O'Neill, 2025). Beyond co-organizing protests, Jakarta-based CSAs/CSOs show support by providing legal aid and temporary shelter, as was done by LBH Jakarta (CNN Indonesia, 2019).

It is plausible to say that the capacity to push back against shrinking civic spacetime in Papua hinges upon three groups of actors in particular: churches, mothers, and youth. Any discussions about CSAs/CSOs in Papua cannot sideline the role that churches, both Protestant and Catholic, have played in creating much-needed spaces for expression, collecting information of human rights violations, providing advocacy services, and bridging communications with the government. Given the churches' proximity to communities at the grassroots level, there tends to be a high level of trust between churches and their local congregations, which serves as an important resource for churches to carry out civic liberties and democracy-related work. As one informant noted:

*"The church brings voices from the people, which is imperative for the government to know, that people's rights are infringed upon, that some policies do not favor the people."*

Beyond religious institutions, our informants also highlight the political power of *mama-mama*, especially *mama-mama pasar* — OAP mothers who trade commodities at traditional markets. By virtue of their gender, the mamas often take it upon themselves to protest, as part of their carework. In July 2026, around 500 mamas occupied the paved road in front of the Governor of Southwest Papua's office, sitting and sleeping there, protesting poor market facilities, lack of transparency surrounding the allocation of Otsus funds for capital assistance, and of the governor's inadequate response towards migrant traders overtaking traditional markets (Howay, 2026).

Beyond political protest, some mamas managed to establish alternative institutions to counter state control. Two of them, Rosita Tecuari (Mama Ita) and Regina Bay (Mama Regina) from the Jayapura regency, opened Sekolah Kebudayaan Namblong, a school dedicated to teaching and preserving indigenous knowledge, including the origins of customary lands and their boundaries (Adiningsih, 2026). Also, one could argue that amongst the reason why the movement against the PSN in Merauke amassed such wide traction was due to Yasinta Moiwend's (Mama Yasinta) profile, who then became an important symbol of resistance, and was featured in the 2026 documentary *Pesta Babi*.

Lastly, against the backdrop of the neoliberalization of education, the youth is considered an important force to sustain political movements. Student organizations, networks of OAP students in universities outside of Papua, youth forums, and youth-based hobby groups are just some examples of youth groups named by our informants, who are viewed as bearers of Papua's future and OAP's dignity. Our informants underline that for Papuan youth to meaningfully fulfill such roles, political education and training programs are a must.

Our informants observed that what could serve as a red line that would bring all Papuans to take up direct action are racial discrimination, violation of indigenous rights, and economic crisis, marked by price hikes and high unemployment rates. They also noted that, while fully aware of their power imbalance vis a vis the heavily armed state, Papua-based CSAs/CSOs would not be deterred from resisting.

*“We know that the cost of resisting is repression. We are willing to endure the consequences. We will resist regardless.”*

On the one hand, it almost feels that pro-Papua campaigns and advocacies are more likely to gain traction when launched abroad, be it by Papuan diaspora or global CSAs/CSOs. On the other hand, wide traction does not necessarily translate into effectiveness. News and information of violence in Papua are often met by blindness and silence of Indonesia’s Western allies (Philpott, 2018, p.8).

More than two decades have passed since Reformasi and Otsus, so why has it not changed much for Papua? For sure, it is not for the lack of ideas. Papuan activists, scholars, journalists, indigenous leaders, religious leaders, etc., have been putting forward their ideas. These have been compiled and presented through high level channels, including the 2002 e-conference on building sustainable peace and fostering development in Papua co-organized by Universitas Gadjah Mada and Harvard University as well as the the 2008 roadmap for a peaceful Papua put together by the Indonesian Institute of Science (henceforth LIPI), later updated in 2017. These high-profile fora recommended recognizing Papua’s political history as well as redressing human rights violations in Papua, only to be dismissed as academic papers removed from the harsh reality in Papua.

While most of our informants are rather confident with their capacity to push back against shrinking civic space, it is important to note that said capacities are not evenly spread across CSAs/CSOs. As mentioned by a CSA:

*“Papua is a huge area ... that is heavily militarized. Things happen so fast; we are not yet able to respond as quickly as the state and oligarchs strike us. Sustained by capitalist agendas, oligarchs and military forces consolidate themselves well, while we [CSAs] have not done enough consolidation. Many of what we do [in terms of civic spacetime] are program-based, while Papua needs more than that. But we do not have enough resources in terms of time and energy.*

*Not to mention the geography [of Papua] is challenging, the plundering of natural resource plunder is massive, militarism is hard to cease. Also, the judiciary, up to its highest court, has been coopted [by the regime]. Academics have been advocating for dialogue, reconciliation, and such, but those are not enough to overcome problems in Papua. We need honest and appropriate lenses to look at Papua and come up with the right solutions.”*

## Box 2. Pesta Babi: Countering State Narratives

*Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita* (Pesta Babi: Colonialism in Our Times) is an investigative documentary film that was released on March 7th, 2026. It showcases how the Malind, Yei, Awyu, and Muyu indigenous communities were dispossessed of their ancestral land and forests due to PSN and how they fought back.

Co-directed by Dandy Dwi Laksono dan Cypri Dale, *Pesta Babi* emerged as a collaborative effort amongst Papua-based and Jakarta-based CSAs/CSOs, including WatchDoc production house, Ekspedisi Indonesia Baru, Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, Jubi, Greenpeace dan LBH Papua Merauke. Keeping with its collaborative nature, the movie's distribution involved CSAs/CSOs across Indonesia. Through an online form, communities were invited to register to host public screenings and discussions of *Pesta Babi*. This way, as intended by the filmmakers, *Pesta Babi* not only serves as a source of information but also as a conversation starter on atrocities in Papua. As of May 2026, the documentary has been screened in more than 1,800 communities, mostly in university campuses, NGO offices, and cafes in more than 500 cities throughout Indonesia and abroad. In May 2026, *Pesta Babi* was made available for streaming on YouTube. Within less than three months, more than 14 million people have watched it online.

While there are already a number of movies documenting military and environmental onslaughts in Papua, *Pesta Babi* is amongst the very few that explicitly frames them as part of colonialist agendas. It challenges the state's justification that militaristic approaches were necessary for quashing separatist movements and that state-sponsored development projects were truly bringing prosperity to Papuans. Furthermore, by showing how Papuans have been subjected to systematic domination and environmental destruction by the Indonesian government since the 1960s, it offers a powerful counternarrative to depictions of Papuans as violent, greedy, lazy, and ungrateful.

Given its discursive power, *Pesta Babi* public screenings were met with surveillance and intimidation from a mix of state security apparatus and local thugs, even leading some to be forcibly cancelled and/or disbanded. The movie also invited denials, including from Bishop Mgr. Petrus Canisius Mandagi, MSC who claimed that the film promotes false narratives, as well as the Director of the think-tank Indonesian Political Review, Iwan Setiawan, who argued that the film is part of a systematic attempt by foreign powers to foil PSN and keep Indonesia dependent on agricultural imports. As of May 2026, the Indonesia Legal Aid Organization (YLBHI) recorded 21 cases across Indonesia where the film's screenings received intimidation.

*Pesta Babi* attests to the connectedness of Papua-based CSAs/CSOs to their peers in Jakarta and other cities. It also shows how such connections are valuable in pushing back against shrinking civic spacetime, particularly through the use of creative medium like documentary films. By utilizing colonialism as an alternative lens to understand the ongoing dynamics in Papua, the film produces spaces of contestation, encouraging viewers to question, criticize, and challenge dominant frames used by the Indonesian government. However, while the capacity to act might be strengthened when civil society is well-connected and resources are pooled together, the capacity to defend remains particularly vulnerable.

In an unexpected turn of events, Yasinta Moiwend (Mama Yasinta), one of the documentary's central figures and prominent voice of OAP resistance, stated her support towards PSN and disappointment towards LBH Papua for taking advantage of her. Mama Yasinta's family alleges that the sudden change in her stance was due to pressure from the Indonesian military. By splintering the alliance between Mama Yasinta and her OAP and Jakartan co-collaborators, the Indonesian state decided to strike where it hurts the most: co-opt the resistance, delegitimize the movement, and divide the public.

# About CoDA

This report on Papua is the second of the CoDA series. Developed by Institute of International Studies (IIS) Universitas Gadjah Mada, CoDA is part of Connect, Defend, Act! (CDA), a project conceived by Hivos and Humanis, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (NORAD). In Papua, CoDA was co-designed and co-administered by IIS and Papua Democratic Institute (PD-Institute).

## What is CoDA?

CoDA is a subnational monitoring program designed to capture how CSAs in Indonesia perceive, experience, and navigate their civic spacetime. Rather than measuring democracy solely on institutional benchmarks, CoDA focuses on the agency that CSOs/CSAs have in living their civic life amidst distinctive socio-political settings.

CoDA adopts a diagnostic rather than evaluative approach. It does not aim to rank regions nor actors, but generate context-sensitive evidence on patterns of expansion, stagnation, or contraction in civic spacetime. CoDA complements global democracy and civic space indices by prioritizing variance, depth, interpretation, and local insights. It offers accounts on various aspects that underlie civic life, allowing for evidence-based interventions and guidance on how to increase the quality of civic space.

Amidst the plethora of datasets and indices on democracy and civic space, the following features clarify CoDA's scope:

- CoDA is not interested in producing hierarchical classifications of civic spacetime. While recognizing significant variations across time and place, it avoids simplifying civic conditions into categories such as good, flawed, or bad. Instead, it documents the underlying factors shaping civic engagement, allowing for more nuanced and evidence-based interventions.
- CoDA does not generate national-level scores. Its analytical focus is explicitly subnational. This focus allows CoDA to capture local dynamics that are often obscured by national aggregation.
- CoDA is not an incident-based monitoring system. It does not record day-to-day events of repression or violence. Rather, it produces annual assessments of patterns and trends in civic spacetime, complementing organizations such as the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS), which document daily incidents of violence and repression experienced by civilians.
- CoDA does not assess formal democratic structures such as electoral systems, party competition, or constitutional design. Instead, the emphasis is on how democracy is experienced in practice, particularly in CSOs/CSAs' perceived capacity to sustain engagement and contest power through nonviolent means.

## Why Civic Spacetime?

Following CDA's baseline study on Indonesia (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024), CoDA expands its attention from "civic space" to "civic spacetime." Granted, most CSAs in Indonesia are more familiar with the term "civic space." They tend to take on working definitions akin to that of the UN and CIVICUS, which underlines the environment enabling civil society to meaningfully participate in political, economic, social, and cultural life, as well as the extent to which the state guarantees this.

While most CSAs in Indonesia conceptualize civic space as *ruang gerak* (maneuvering space) and only recently expanding it to include *ruang hidup* (living space), CoDA underlines the need to see it more as *ruang kontestasi* (contestation space). Furthermore, CoDA directs its attention not just to the contraction, stagnation, and expansion of said maneuvering, living, and contestation **spaces**, but the **time** needed to invest in and take care of those spaces. It recognizes that the problem is not simply that CSAs are losing the space they need to perform their civic duties, but also that they are losing substantial time (and energy) to do so. Only by taking the time dimension seriously can we begin to understand why and how the third wave of autocratization managed to slowly creep into our civic lives in the last two decades. It is not that autocrats dismantle democracies altogether in a single blow. Instead, they skillfully utilized democratic procedures to rise to power, and only then destroy democracy from within — all while CSAs are overwhelmed with seemingly normal everyday processes.

## How is Civic Spacetime Monitoring Done in Papua?

CoDA's pilot in Yogyakarta attests to the need to lean into the lived experiences of CSAs residing in, and working on, the province itself. Therefore, it is only appropriate to center Papuan actors and organizations in this civic spacetime monitoring program in Papua. Here, IIS is privileged to partner with PD-Institute, a think tank based in Jayapura. In doing so, CoDA consciously shy away from the more conventional method of treating Papua-based CSAs as mere research subjects, but as co-researchers.

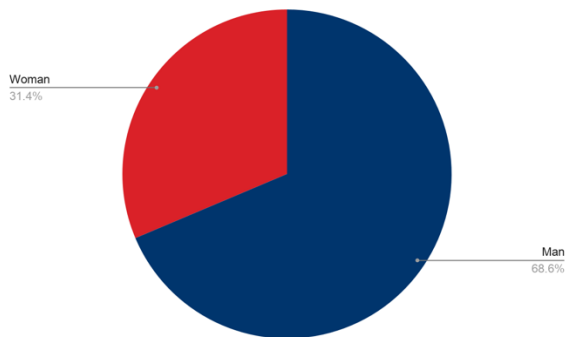
The above commitment is sustained by the feminist methodologies of intersubjectivity, intersectionality, and positionality. In terms of intersubjectivity, CoDA refrains from insinuating, let alone enforcing a specific assessment of civic spacetime, democracy, civil liberties, elections, etc.

Using emic and inductive approaches, CoDA holds space (and time!) for CSAs to be more reflective about their civic lives. Here, CoDA is also interested in gauging at the power-laden subjectivities that inform the CSA's understanding of the world they live in. In terms of intersectionality, CoDA believes that civic spacetime is lived differently by different individuals, based on their intersecting identities. Extra care is put in developing the list of informants, to make sure that the most invisibilized and vulnerable are centered.

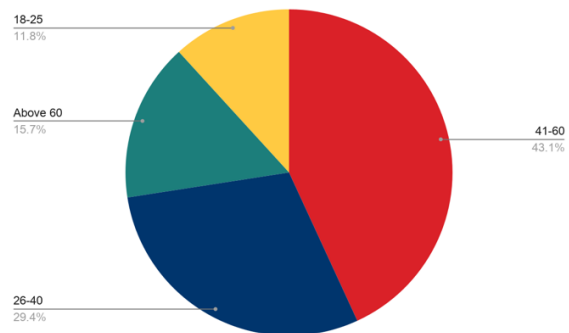
As for positionality, CoDA actively shelves the potential biases it may have. Among others, the biases may come from IIS researchers being middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied Muslim Javanese, affiliated with UGM, a public university in which many of its staff and alumni are affiliated to the regime. Here, IIS' partnership with PD-Institute goes beyond anti-colonial sentiments and adds to the study's rigor.

CoDA collected primary data in February and March 2026 through interviews of 51 key informants residing in the province of Papua. Cognizant of the territorial shrinkages that Papua has gone through over the decades and rapidly in the more recent years, the scope of the interviews encompassed "Tanah Papua," beyond the province's administrative boundaries. Data collected through interviews are juxtaposed and triangulated with that of in academic literature, journalistic pieces, and NGO reports.

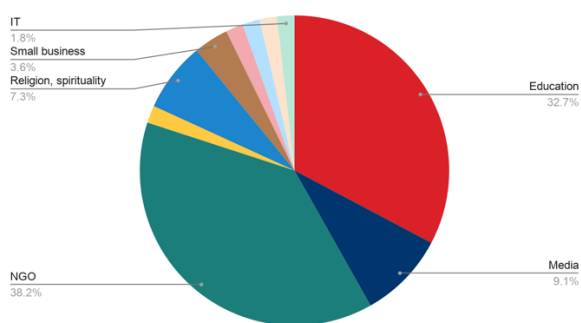
**Figure 7. Gender composition of informants**



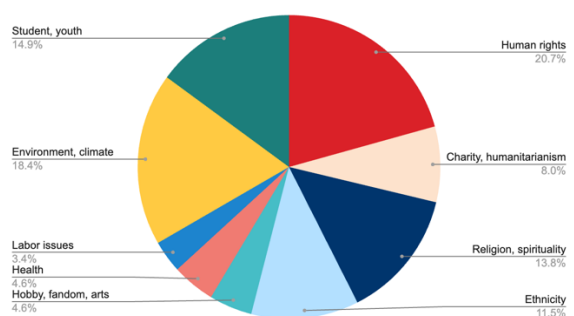
**Figure 8. Age composition of informants**



**Figure 9. Employment sector of informants**



**Figure 10. Civil society sector of informants**



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