THE LEGACY OF VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA

The Legacy of Violence in Indonesia • LOWELL DITTMER • Rethinking Aspects of Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Indonesia and East Timor • PETER ZIMONI • and NANCY LEE PELLS • Unresolved Problems in the Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966 • ROBERT KRIESE • History, Memory, and the "1965 Incident" in Indonesia • MARK S. ZURBACHEN • Indonesia: A Violent Culture? • ELIZABETH FULLER COLLINS • Problematising the Place of Victims in Reformasi Indonesia: A Contested Truth about the May 1998 Violence • JEMMA PURDEY • The Making of "Ground Zero" in East Timor in 1999: An Analysis of International Complicity in Indonesia's Crimes • JOSEPH NEW • On the Uses and Abuses of the Past in Indonesia: Beyond the Mass Killings of 1965 • ANN LAURA STOLER • Democratization and Regional Power Sharing in Papua/Irian Jaya: Increased Opportunities and Decreased Motivations for Violence • TIMO KIVIMÄKI • and RUBEN THORNING •
The collapse of Subarto's 33-year old New Order regime in May 1998 was accompanied by a wave of violence in Indonesia's major cities directed against ethnic minorities, women, and others that left many asking why the country again experienced such bloody turmoil as it passed through a period of transition. Among those implicated in the violence was Lt. Gen. (ret.) Prabowo Subianto, who was commander of Kopassus (Special Forces Command) at the time. Though later forced to retire because of his involvement in the kidnapping, torture, and murder of democracy activists in early 1998, Prabowo was among those that people turned to in search of an explanation for the May violence. At a symposium in April 2001, Prabowo appeared on a panel on "Separatism in Indonesia," where he presented his views, claiming that Indonesian culture is very violent and the military is a mirror of society. An example of this mirroring can be seen in Maluku...
Does his assessment match the country’s reality? Is Indonesia really a violent culture, or are arguments such as those made by Prabowo and other Indonesian elites advanced to suit other purposes? In this article, I suggest that the latter is the case. These arguments are useful to elites, who make them to mobilize people behind campaigns for a return to order and stability as a means of protecting their own interests against groups demanding land rights, higher wages, and political reform. The Siharto regime institutionalized state terror by labeling political opposition “communists,” using military and paramilitary forces against protesters and separatists when necessary. In the post-Suharto era, the failure of leaders to address economic injustice, the continued resort to military suppression of protests, the deployment of paramilitary groups by elites, and the failure of security forces to enforce the law have led people to take the latter into their own hands and social unrest to take an violent turn. This combination of circumstances has created the appearance of a culture of violence.

The first section of this article points out that under the New Order, a facade of order and stability masked simmering economic and political conflicts. State-sponsored violence was endemic. The second part of the paper examines several outbreaks of violence in South Sumatra between 1998 and 2000 to more carefully identify the roots and nature of incidents described as “mob violence.” In part three, I explore parallels between patterns of conflict in Indonesian today and conditions preceding the massacre of actual and alleged communists after the so-called September 30th Movement (Gerakan on G30S, Gerakan September Tiga puluh Satu, the term used to describe the coup of 1965). I suggest that in Indonesia the greatest threat of violence arises from the existence of paramilitary youth groups linked to the military, political parties, and Islamic organizations that allow political and economic elites to utilize violence against opponents and avoid responsibility.

Violence in the New Order

The New Order portrayed itself as the defender of order and security against the forces of immorality and anarchy. A 1984 government documentary or the coup of 1965, Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI (The Treason of the PKI Septem ber 30 movement), shown to all schoolchildren in Indonesia, makes this point. Foulcher comments that the film makes its bid for the sympathy of its audience not so much through appeals to the national interest as through repetitive affirmation of the sanctity of the family as a group of children, which is violated by the inhuman and un-Indonesian actions of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) and its supporters. The detailed portrayal of each of the murdered generals as loving husbands and fathers, caring fathers of families and eventually as the death of th...
Disturbingly, Goenawan Mohamad, senior editor and founder of the nation's weekly Tempo, has noted a survey reporting that more than 80% of respondents thought that the version of events portrayed in the film was essentially true.

Throughout the New Order, the Indonesian nation was represented as a family with a benign father, Pak Harto, who acted on behalf of all. However, the regime was in fact punctuated by incidents of extraordinary mass violence: the anti-Japanese riots known as Malari (from Malapetaka Januari, "January Disaster") in 1974, the military suppression of a protest by Muslims in Tanjung Pniok in 1984, a labor riot in Medan in 1994, and a riot in Jakarta following the attack on the headquarters of the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI) in July 1996. Each of these incidents began with a protest against the policies of the New Order and ended with the use of military force to suppress the protest. In the case of Tanjung Pniok and the attack on the PDI headquarters, violence was started by government forces or paramilitary groups associated with the government. Malari and the labor riot in Medan are discussed below.

One can identify the roots of violence in the New Order in four conditions: First is the failure of political institutions and the judicial system to provide channels for redress of wrongs or resolution of conflicts. Second are developments that suppressed labor organizing and transferred control over land (and other natural resources) from small holders to the central government and elites closely connected to the New Order regime. Third is the tradition of paramilitary youth groups and the existence of a large pool of young men with little hope of finding jobs who can be recruited to paramilitary forces. And fourth is how those paramilitary forces are used: by the New Order to instigate violence and thereby justify the suppression of protests and by elites within the military and government to unrest or discredit rivals. These factors are discussed below.

Institutional and Systemic Failures

The judicial and political institutions of the New Order did not provide channels for redress of grievances or to object to policies seen to be unjust. According to Lindsey, "By the late 1980s the Indonesian court was a nation..."
scandal. It became utterly riddled with corruption, probably one of the most corrupt institutions in the whole of Indonesia. It is impossible now to get a case to court without being asked to pay a bribe. And it is also almost impossible to win without paying a bribe.  

Loss of respect for and trust in the criminal justice system also results from corruption of the police force. The reforms of the early 1990s intended to bring independent security forces under the control of the police led instead, as Barker describes, to "a far greater involvement of the police in law protection racketsthan had been previously possible when such racketswere either under the control of gangs, heirs of KT/RW [neighborhood security organizations], or the Army." As a result, a complex state takeout shape. According to Lindsay, state officials under the new order "protective street-level preman [gangsters] through a system known as delisting or backing [backing]. Rival criminal 'gang' structures linked political and business elites through the military to 'preman' . . . in order to transform the power derived from its violence into wealth, the new order consciously created a parallel 'secret' state to ensure elite access to illegal or extralegal rents."

With the downfall of the new order, the state lost control over organized crime, "resulting in violent battles over territory and attempts to find new sources of income" and also a backlash and growth in "anti-preman vigilantism."

Perhaps the most appalling outbreaks of violence in Indonesia today involve incidents in which a mob takes the law into its own hands and attacks a person presumed guilty because he was caught in the commission of a criminal act. Since the fall of Suharto and the Indonesian's criminalized and ineffective police force was separated from the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI), such attacks (loropectors) have become quite frequent. For example, the mobrage at Jakarta's Cipta Mangunkusumo Hospital reports 100 victims of mob beatings—more than one every two days—in the first six months of 2000. Most of these suspected criminals were beaten to death, but many were also covered in kerosene and set on fire."

By the 1990s, the new order's legitimacy had been deeply eroded as violent acts against local officials and groups perceived to have benefited from unjust government policies became common. For example, over 1:

months from July 1995 to the riot at the PDI headquarters in July 1996, the following incidents occurred. In Jember, East Java, warehouses, motorcycles, silos, and houses were torched by tobacco farmers protesting the decision to transfer ownership of 2,000 hectares of government land—until then tended by individual farmers—to a state-owned plantation (July 30–August 2, 1995). In Jambi, Central Sumatra, earthquake victims angry about inadequate relief measures and a wave of looting killed two plaintexts military officers (October 15). In Porsea, North Sumatra, protesters burned 100 houses, a radio station, and vehicles owned by paper maker Inti Kedara while Utama after rumors of a hazardous gas leak (November 3–4). In Pasuruan, East Java, farmers staged five days of protest against a Korean monosodium glutamate factory for polluting their shrimp ponds. Cars and houses were burned, causing $3 million in damage (November 15–20). In Tangerang, a suburb of Jakarta, protesters destroyed a cotton factory because it polluted the neighborhood (November 21). In Irian Jaya, villagers armed with rocks attacked Freeport Corporation because a car driven by a Dutch employee killed a local person. Locals were also angry about human rights violations in the Timika case on trial at the Jayapura Military Court (March 7–10). Abuse of power by security forces was another source of violence during the same period. In Medan, North Sumatra, soldiers in the Calvary Battalion angrily at the murder of a fellow soldier by a gang member, injured 12 people and damaged 20 houses and 23 cars (February 23, 1996). Finally, in Jayapura, Irian Jaya, a riot erupted when authorities refused to allow a messengers service for Thomas Wangge, a political prisoner who had died in a Jakarta jail (March 18).8

Problems of Developmental Policy

Repression of labor protest also fueled simmering resentment against the government and owners of factories. In 1991 Indonesia’s labor force numbered 74 million people. The average 60% minimum wage of US$1.40 was one of the lowest in Southeast Asia, yet laborers were not allowed to establish independent labor unions or protest, except through government channels. In 1991, Saut Arionang and human rights activist H. J. C. Princen founded an independent union known as Solidarity (Setakawan). But Sau was abducted and Solidarity collapsed in 1992. The same year Muchta Pakpahan founded the Indonesia Welfare Labor Union (SBSU, Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia) in Medan, North Sumatra. However, the government

In 1994, the case of Nursidah, a 25-year-old worker-organizer who was tortured and left to bleed to death after she and co-workers had demanded higher wages, brought international attention to New Order suppression of labor organizing. The same year, a labor protest took place in Medan because of the nonpayment of the minimum wage, the firing of workers following a strike at a rubber factory, and the mysterious death of one striker. This wave of protests culminated in a mass rally in April because workers were not paid the customary bonus for the Islamic holiday of Eid Fitri. This demonstration turned into a riot in which Sito-Indonesian-owned stores were looted and one factory owner was beaten to death. The SBSI’s Pakpahan explained that Sino-
Indonesian Chinese were targeted because “It’s a fact that the Chinese are colluding with ABRI to protect their interests. If the workers demand 1 million, the Chinese businesspeople would rather give one-and-a-half million to the military.” As a consequence of the riot, workers in Medan were paid the minimum wage and forced overtime was stopped, suggesting that violent protest paid off. However, plainclothes soldiers were stationed in factories and Pakpahan was charged with inciting the riot. He was sentenced to nine years in jail; however, he was released after nine months following an international campaign protesting his incarceration.

Against the background of the Pakpahan trial, government manipulation of PDI elections intended to oust Megawati Sukarnoputri as a potential opposition candidate, and a government ban of four popular news magazines that had engaged in critical reporting, a small group of student activists launched the People’s Democratic Party (PRD, Partai Rakjat Demokratik) in 1994, PRD took a more militant and confrontational approach to labor organizing in order to make the violence of the regime evident. Their more aggressive (but nonviolent) tactics of large marches and demonstratons precipitated a crackdown on all labor organizers and attacks on demonstrators by security forces. The LBH (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, Legal Aid Institute) documented over 100 cases of military interference in labor disputes in 1995. Further conflicts were created under the New Order by a massive transfer of control over land from small holders to the central government and elites closely connected to the regime. The LBH, which had been founded by Ad-

ing, while in the latter land was taken from poor urban dwellers for Taman Mimi, a project of Suharto’s wife, Ibu Titiek. However, resort to the courts was not effective. The most well-known case taken up by LBH was that involving the Kedungomogo Dam. The incident attracted international attention because it involved the seizure of land from small holders to construct a dam that was financed by the World Bank. LBH lawyers worked with student activists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and religious leaders to support the rights of these displaced by the project. In 1984 the Indonesian Supreme Court awarded compensation to the people of Kedun-
gomogo, but under pressure from the government, a newly appointed judge annulled the decision.

In the outer islands of Indonesia, the policy of granting extensive concessions of forestland to large corporations for logging, paper and pulp production, palm oil estates, and industrial shrimp farming set the stage for ethnic conflict between indigenous people and migrants. Under the New Order, the military, in partnership with corporations owned by Sino-Indonesians and such Suharto cronies as the timber baron Bob Hassan, took over vast forest concessions for timber extraction. Local protests in these areas were easily suppressed and received little attention in the press. In the mid-1990s, organizations at the national level began to bring leaders of the indigenous peoples of the outer islands together. The Consortium for Agrarian Reform (Konsorsium Pembuluan Agraria) was formed in 1995 and the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara) in 1999. However, these organizations have not been successful in pressuring the government on the question of land reform or the rights of indigenous peoples with undocumented claims to forestland.

Economic competition between indigenous peoples and migrants from other parts of Indonesia became another source of conflict. New Order poli
cies encouraged the migration of Javanese and Madurese Muslims to aceh in Eastern Indonesia that were predominantly Javanese led to outbreaks of violence characterized as religious in nature because of the composition of these groups.

In 1995 alone, riots targeting Muslim immigrants occurred in Banua, East Timor (January); Flores (April); East Flores (June); Dili, East Timor (September); and Atambua, West Timor (November). In January 1998, attacks on Madurese (Muslim) immigrants by Dayaks and Malay Muslims in West Kalimantan showed that economic competition between indig

The rising tide of violence and protest against the government in rural urban areas led in 1997 to calls in the media for the government to look at the underlying causes of social discontent. Analysts pointed to the growing ga
between rich and poor, competition between immigrant and local peoples in the outer islands, and anger that the government, police, and court system did not provide a venue for justice or the redress of grievances.11 In an address to the Islamic Forum of Communication for Young Mosque Activists, Suharto appealed to Indonesians not to blow out of proportion the issue of wealth disparity in the country.12

Paramilitaries and Youth

The tradition of People’s Militias during the Indonesian Revolution provided the basis for mobilization of people into paramilitary units by the Indonesian army. Such units were established in Kalimantan during the confrontation with Malaysia in the 1960s. Paramilitary groups also were recruited and trained by the army to combat separatist movements in East Timor and Aceh in the 1990s. The groups developed a culture of violence that encouraged the practice of certain activities that included the public display of dismembered corpses, beheading, rape, the mysterious night attacks by so-called nigbas, and the spanking of threats to family members of the victims of violence.13

The elite military units that trained these irregular forces likewise applied violence and terror throughout the New Order years to repress opposition to the regime and deal with social problems. The campaign of extra-judicial murders of criminal types—known as petrusa (for penampakan misteri, mysterious shootings)—in 1984 stands as one example of their activities, which Suharto later described in his autobiography as a kind of “shock treatment.”14 The culture of terror and violence developed by security forces and paramilitary groups sponsored by the regime including Pent Доdカ Pencalisa, the youth group of the New Order’s ruling Golkar party,15 has undermined concepts of civility and heightened fears that the killing and chaos of 1965 could happen again.

The role of security forces and paramilitary groups in provoking violence became evident to most Indonesians on July 27, 1996, when paramilitary thugs backed by soldiers moved against students supporting opposition candidates.

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The riot marked a turning point in the democracy movement, for it demonstrated that widespread dissatisfaction from the regime lay underneath the surface of New Order prosperity. In response, former cabinet minister Emil Salim called for a reappraisal of the New Order in order to cope with "...new social classes and new aspirations." He was echoed by Iogras Kleder, chairman of a private research institute called Society for Political and Economic Studies, who told a reporter from the Far Eastern Economic Review, "This is evidence of the rigidity of the political system, and the unwillingness of the powers-that-be to take into account new developments." Speaking to the same reporter, Gothaman Mohanad, chairman of the Independent Election Monitoring Committee and former editor of the banned weekly Tempo, reflected, "We are entering uncharted waters.... Megawati has to play a more open role in a long-term strategy; her faction has to change from an electoral machine to a much more broad-based movement and she has to develop a [reformist] platform acceptable to every one."17

While the attack on students occupying the PDI headquarters and the campaign against the PRD that followed temporarily put an end to demonstrations against the New Order, the riot of July 6, 1996 appears to have raised the stakes for the Subarto government in the election scheduled for May 1997. Violent clashes involving security forces, Pemuda Pancasila, and youth groups associated with opposition parties were common. In Palembang Central Java, protests by the youth organization of the opposition Partai Pembangunan Persatuan (PPP) over the organization of a concert by the government party Golkar resulted in 68 buildings (mostly owned by Sinoh-In doxians) and one state-run bank being vandalized (March 24-25). In Surabaya, pro-Megawati PDI-P (Parti Demokrat Indonesia-Persatuan, Jindonesia Democracy Party-Struggle) activists were attacked by supporters of Soeharto, leader of the government faction in PDI (April 28). In Yogyakarta, PPP offices were attacked by Pemuda Pancasila (April 30). In Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi, a PPP rally was attacked by Pemuda Pancasila (May 4). In Yogyakarta, security forces broke up a demonstration by PPI youths carrying coffins to symbolize the death of democracy and to protest

attacks on PPP offices (May 5). On May 20, three clashes broke out in
Jakarta when supporters of political parties clashed with security forces in
East and South Jakarta while PPP supporters in Pekalongan, Central Java
attacked a Golkar office.

The violence culminated just before the election with a clash on May 22
between PPP and Golkar supporters in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, in
which 135 people died in a fire at a shopping mall. According to government
sources the dead were looters; however, the Indonesian Human Rights com-
missions investigated the incident due to accusations by PPP supporters that
the riot had been instigated by outside parties and that ABRI forces had
opened fire needlessly during the clash and took the bodies to the shopping
center where a fire was then started to conceal the evidence.18 After this
election, protests against election fraud were mounted by PPP supporters;
burning ballot boxes in Medan on May 29 and marching in Jember, East
Java, on June 13, at which time they threw rocks at a shopping center and
the Timor car showroom.

The Use of Paramilitaries

As Richard Rose>n has noted, "Many commentators have seen the Malar
note as primarily a political power struggle between the Commander o
Kopkamtis, Genera Sumitro, and the existing hierarchy, dominated by
Suharto and Moeropo, in which the students were manipulated by competing
political forces."19 Bresnan adds that the riots were instigated "to discredit
the student radicals and perhaps in the process General Soemtiro and other
moderates." Further to this point, Bresnan notes that a student leader arrested
after the Malar riots claimed that "he met young thugs in jail who claimed
they had been working for Moeropo at the time, had started the burning, as
had been picked up along with other rioters. A senior intelligence officer
friendly as Soemtiro said later that he believed this was indeed the case."20

In the last years of the New Order, the accusation that violence was
being instigated by unnamed thugs surfaced frequently, particularly when riot
targeting Christians and Sino-Indonesians began in East Java in the months
following the anti-government rise of July 1996. The first of these riots oc
occurred on October 10 in Solo, East Java. A Muslim mob burned 2

of rioting before the election, see "Official Human Rights Commission Report," Ibid, June-
1998.

166.

20. See Julia Bresnan, Managing Indonesia: The Modern Political Economy (New York: G
churches, five Catholic schools, a Christian orphanage, and a court. Five people died in the fire in one church. A subsequent investigation by the National Human Rights Commission concluded that the riot had been instigated by (unknown) provocateurs. Leaders of Nabalatul Ulama (NU), a traditionalist Islamic organization based in East Java, claimed that the riot had been designed to put NU in a bad light and incite hostility between Christian supporters of Megawati and Muslim supporters of Abdurrahman Wahid, who had joined together in opposition to the reelection of Suharto. Army Chief of Staff Hartono dismissed the idea that the aim of the provocateur was to discredit NU, but agreed that "some people have been coordinating a certain mission here to create instability."20

A series of riots targeting Sino-Indonesians in other parts of Java followed— in Purwakarta, West Java (October 31-November 2, 1997); Pekalongan, Central Java (November 24-26); and Jakarta (December 24); and Rembang (January 1998)—saw its peak with a riot in Tasikmalaya, West Java, on December 26, 1997. There, Muslim youths set fire to 13 churches and seven schools on fire. Twelve police posts were damaged and three burned down. Four people died. Popular anger seemed to be directed as much at local officials as Sino-Indonesians. Tasikmalaya residents said that enmity toward Sino-Indonesians had increased in 1995 when the market burned down and the government did not rebuild the market but gave the land to a Sino-Indonesian developer for a supermarket.21

Manipulation of popular anger at the government and resentment of wealthy Sino-Indonesians (who were perceived to have benefited from concessions to the regime) could be seen clearly in an incident in Bandung that took place on January 31, 1997. Earlier that month, 10,000 textile factory workers rioted and company officials sent to impose new rules were stoned because the company did not pay the traditional bonus for Idul Fitri. On the 31st, unknown persons followed up on the disturbances by distributing leaflets calling on Muslims to attack Christian and Catholic targets.22

Finally, in the last days of the New Order, when student demonstrations threatened to bring down Suharto in the aftermath of the shooting of four student protesters at Trisakti University on May 13, 1998, Lt. General Subantoro Prabowo, Suharto's son-in-law and commander of the Indonesian Special Forces (Kopassus), appears to have resorted to the tactic of instigating riots to create a demand for a return to law and order and possibly also to

discredit his rival, General Wiranto. Widespread support among the middle class for the government's petau campaign against criminal elements in 1984 may have contributed to the belief that people of that class would rally
behind a call for the restoration of order and stability when riots broke out in

South Sumatra, 1994–2000
South Sumatra has not featured in news stories about student-led demonstra-
tions against the New Order or outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence, yet
in the final years of the New Order there was a pattern of escalating protest
and outbreaks of so-called mob violence. If one examines these outbreaks,
three kinds of violence can be distinguished: (1) violence by paramilitary
groups and security forces to intimidate and harass protesters; (2) protests by
rural villagers aimed at corporations given large concessions of forestland by
the Subharto government; and (3) rioting and looting in urban areas targeting
businesses owned by Subharto family members and cronies or Sino-business-
ians and banks. Characteristically, incidents of the first type involved at-
tacks on persons, while incidents of the last two kinds involved attacks on
property. However, over time conflicts between rural villagers and corpora-
tions were transformed into horizontal conflicts between protesting villages
and employees of the company (often local youths hired as security forces) in
which violent clashes took place involving attacks on both property and per-
sons. Examination of the emerging pattern of violence in South Sumatra be-
tween 1994 and 2000 allows one to identify when and why protests and
conflicts became violent.

The policy of granting extensive concessions of forest land (hak penggunaan
hutan) to state-owned corporations or private companies controlled by
the Subharto family or elites closely connected to Subharto, sometimes in part-
nership with foreign corporations, was implemented in South Sumatra in
1989. Subharto’s daughter, Siti Hardjianti, and two Subharto cronies, Prapto
Pangestu and Syamsul Nursalim, were major beneficiaries. According to
law, local government officials must certify as unproductive the status of land
given out in concessions. However, villagers report that their rights to land
they had been farming for years (and in many cases generations) were not
recognized because local officials were paid for their cooperation in approving
concessions. Protests by rural villagers against corporations given conces-
sions of forestland began early in 1993.25

24. Susan Berfield and Dewi Loevard, “Ten Days That Shocked Indonesia” Asiatweek, July 21,
1998.

25. The foregoing is based on reports regarding land conflicts compiled by LBH-Palembang
Initially villagers wrote letters appealing to government officials and corporate managers to recognize their rights. Typically, corporations used military forces to intimidate villagers, ignoring local protests. During a brief period in 1994 known as Keterbaluan (openness), the New Order relaxed restraints on the press, and news of these protests began to reach the public. However, that July the government banned three national publications and cracked down. In Sumatra, village leaders involved in protests were replaced and people were warned that further demonstrations would not be tolerated. In 1997 fires set by corporations to clear land for forest estates and palm oil plantations got out of control, destroying rubber trees that many lowland villagers relied upon for income. The fires were particularly intense because of the El Niño drought. In addition, fires in logged-over areas are canopy fires, which burn intensely and spread rapidly. International concern over the fires and the blanket of smog that spread to other countries in Southeast Asia brought conflict over land out into the open in accusations and counter-accusations about who was responsible. With the fall of Suharto in 1998, frustration at the failure of the government to provide resolution of long-standing conflicts erupted. Throughout Indonesia, villagers began to resort to land occupation in corporate estates, government forests, and golf courses. Villagers in South Sumatra attempted to harvest crops on land in palm oil estates they claimed had been taken from them. They also tried to force corporations to return land or pay compensation by seizing corporate property (generally vehicles). Although government officials promised to act, nothing changed. In October 1999, one corporation involved in a long-standing conflict agreed to return land to villagers, probably because of threats by villagers who had seized company vehicles and burned down log piles and the changing political situation. However, corporate executives then postponed meetings and revoked promises made earlier.26

In February 2000, several hundred representatives of farmers’ organizations from South and North Sumatra went to Jakarta to demand that the Ministry of Forestry take action on their claims. They were promised that within one month their cases would be settled. Finally, on April 27, 2000, Secretary-General of Ministry for Forestry and Plantations Suripto declared that 12,500 hectares of disputed land would be returned to the people of a sub-district in South Sumatra, settling one case where the protesting villagers were well organized. Explained Suripto, "Up until now, corporations have

been facilitated in obtaining land; now it is time to give compensation.\textsuperscript{27}

While this decision validated the justice of the villagers' land claims, the long struggle leading up to resolution of the conflict seemed to prove that a resort to violence and threats of violence against company property was an effective tactic because government officials became involved. Corporations could then be forced to negotiate with protesters.

Mob violence in these cases involved attacks on property. Where company vehicles and other property were seized in order to force a corporation to engage in negotiation, the property was returned after resolution of the conflict. In a few cases, corporate officials were threatened and held hostage for several hours, but in only one case (that I know of) was a company representative physically attacked. This took place over the installation of the industrial shrimp farms of Dipasena. In March 2000, Nursalim, head of the Gadjah Tunggal Group (whose shrimp farms extend into South Sumatra) was attacked by angry shrimp farmers, who blocked two of his bodyguards to death. Nursalim had to be rescued by helicopter.\textsuperscript{28}

In these conflicts, security forces employed by corporations have used violence to intimidate and harm protesters. For the year 1999-2000, LBR-Palembang listed 10 incidents in which it alleged unwarranted involvement in police or military actions in conflicts between protesting villagers and corporations. Not infrequently, local newspapers report (without comment) that villagers have been killed. In April 2001, an activist from the Indonesian Environmental Forum (Wabah Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia) was badly beaten by police when he attempted to photograph police violence in a "sweeping operation.\textsuperscript{29}

In August 2001, the governor of South Sumatra reported that 135 cases of land conflict were under consideration by his office. LBR-Palembang lists almost 200 cases. Progress in settling these cases has been extremely slow because there is no legal framework for making decisions and the government has little leverage over large corporatists with close connections to political elites. Some activists argue that violence is necessary in order to force the government and corporations to respond to villagers' land claims. Other incidents of so-called mob violence in South Sumatra have involved the destruction of property and looting in the context of student-led demonstrations against the government. The first student-led demonstrations i

\textsuperscript{27} "12 Ribu Ha Lahan MEMP Dibekalkan" [12,000 hectares of land returned by MIHI Sawajaya] MSBI, April 28, 2000.

\textsuperscript{28} Dan Murphy, "Deeper into the Murk," FEER, June 1, 2000, pp. 58-59.

\textsuperscript{29} "Fenomena Tindakan Kekerasan Yang Dilakukan Oleh ApuS Kepolisian Kota Bireun (POLTARBES) Palembang terhadap Sdr. Syamsul Asahir" [With reference to the violent attack by the Palembang police of Sdr. Syamsul Asahir, Rural Press Teherah (Open protest letter) April 2001.]
South Sumatra, which occurred in 1994 in response to an increase in tuition fees at Sriwijaya University, were non-violent. Many faculty members quietly supported these demonstrations because they believed that the tuition increase was due to corruption in tenders for a new campus building with World Bank funding. There at the time, I saw that the rector of the university was restrained the military from responding to the protests with attempts to disperse the students or arrest.

However, in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis of 1997, students organized protests against economic hardship turned into riots. One such incident took place on February 14, 1998, in the market town of Pagaralam in the highlands of South Sumatra. Inspired by the pro-democracy university students who had returned home during the Islamic holidays, a group of high school students planned a demonstration against the high price of basic foods. They requested permission for their demonstration from the mayor, but this was denied. The students decided to proceed anyway. Their symbolic demonstration in the market place turned into a riot in which shops owned by Sino-Indonesians were ransacked. Witnesses spoke with that October blamed young men (immigrants from Lampung), who regularly gathered in Pagaralam market in search of work.

One factor provoking this violence may have been statements by Lt. Gen. Subianto Prabowo and leaders of the Indonesian Islamic group, the Indonesian Committee for World Muslim Solidarity (KISDI, Komite Indonesia untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam), reported on television and in newspaper reports shortly before the riot. At a rally on February 8 organized by KISDI at the Al Azhar Mosque in Jakarta, KH Abdul Qadir Djasran called upon the government to confiscate the wealth that non-Pribumi (i.e., non-indigenous, non-Muslim ethnic Chinese in this case) conglomerates had transferred abroad. Ahmad Sumarsono, the leader of KISDI, charged the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a New Order-era think-tank directed by Jusuf Wanandi, brother of a prominent Sino-Indonesian businessman, with political engineering that harms Muslims. The chairman of the KISDI youth group called for the formation of a “command post” that would “join to face traitors of the nation like Sofian Wamandiri [brother of Jusuf Wamandiri] or whoever stands behind” and concluded his speech with the appeal, “Live honorably or die a martyr’s death! God is Great!”

The most extensive attacks on Sino-Indonesian businesses took place during three days of rioting and looting in Palembang, the capital of South Sumatra. These riots began on May 14, when riots also erupted in Jakarta and

Solo (Surakarta) following the shooting of four students at Trisakti University. The Jakarta riots claimed the lives of over 800 people, most of whom were (Javanese) looters trapped in high-rise malls that had been set on fire. While property damage was extensive in Palembang, there were no attacks on people or deaths.

Even before evidence surfaced linking elements in the Indonesian military with the riots in Jakarta, people in South Sumatra suggested that the Palembang riot had been instigated by "unknown" agents. According to local reporters, outsiders resembling members of security forces (military or paramilitary) were seen disembarking from trucks in the morning. They started throwing rocks at car showrooms and set tractors on fire to attract a crowd. Reporters said that they also heard of rumors promising that no one would be prosecuted for looting.31

Like the mob violence in land conflict cases, the anti-Chinese riots in South Sumatra involved attacks on property rather than persons. Palembang rioters also attacked businesses associated with the Soeharto family, including the showroom for the Timor car (produced by a company partly owned by Tommy Soeharto). These riots could be said to be politically instigated in that attacks by elite political figures on Sinic-Indonesians blaming them for the economic crisis appeared to justify looting of shops and businesses owned by non-Indonesians.

The Pagaralam riot in February and the Palembang riot in May left people in South Sumatra stunned at the rapid breakdown of law and order. These riots have also generated a fear of disorder among the urban middle class, which tends to view protests against corporations involving an attack on property as evidence of a threat to their own security. The middle class believes that the government must protect corporate property so that investors will feel secure and the Indonesian economy can begin to grow again. Ongoing protests since the fall of Soeharto are typically greeted with cynicism. In 2001 one frequently heard comments to the effect that people were demonstrating only to get whatever they wanted. It would not be difficult for political elites competing for power under new local autonomy legislation to tap middle-class anxiety, promoting a return to order and stability and cracking down on protesters to bring foreign investment back.


The taboo on public discussion of the massacre of half a million or more real and alleged communists in 1965–66 has left Indonesian society haunted by

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31 Author interviews

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the return of the repressed. After the fall of Saharto, groups that suggested unearthing evidence of the killings were threatened with violence. Even the free press that has emerged since May 1998 has been wary about taking up the issue. Unspoken fear that the chaos and killing in the aftermath of the 1965 coup could happen again is perhaps the strongest argument in support of the view that Indonesia is a violent culture. However, what is known about the massacres of 1965–66 indicates that the Indonesian military played a key role in authorizing and supporting the killing of communists.

It remains uncertain as to who was behind the Untung coup attempt of September 30, 1965. The New Order and the Indonesian military maintain that the coup was plotted and carried out by the Communist Party, while Benedict R. Anderson and Ruth McVey, for example, argued that the coup was primarily the result of internal army divisions. The extent of the killing in its aftermath also remains unknown, although the estimate of 500,000 people is widely taken to be reasonable. But the studies done of the massacre—Robert Cribb’s path-breaking editing of accounts of the violence, Rob- ert Heffern’s research on the violence in one area of East Java, Geoffrey Robinson’s study of Bali, and unpublished dissertations by Iwan Sudjatmiko and Herawanan Sulistyono—agree in concluding that in those places where the death toll was highest (East Java, Bali, and North Sumatra) the killing was instigated or organized and supported by the Indonesian military. As Cribb argued, “in most cases, the killings did not begin until elite military units had arrived in a locality and had sanctioned violence by instruction or example.” Arguing along similar lines, Heffner concluded, “In the end, then, the violence in highland Pasuruan was not in any simple sense a product of local class or religious cleavages. It was thoroughly regulated by agents of...”

33. See J. Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia (Chicago: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971). Adam Schwartz concludes, “Although not without its flaws— in particular its view that the Communist Party was not involved at all in the coup—an analysis of the Coup Paper seems to offer a more credible interpretation of events than the army’s conten- tion that the communists were solely responsible.” See A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia in the 1960s (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), p. 30.
the state and included in its ranks representatives of a variety of NGOs, especially Nahdlatul Ulama.36 And as Robinson observed, “[V]irtually all evidence indicates that military forces, both local and Java-based, together with political party authorities, orchestrated and incited the violence in Bali, as they did in Java.”37

According to all sources, paramilitary youth groups were incited to kill particular people and given moral and logistical support by the Army, particularly the Army’s Special Forces (RPPKD, later renamed Kopassus). In East Java, the NU-affiliated Ansor was the major accomplice of the Army, while in West Java it was Pemuda Pancasila and in Bali the Ansor youth group and the anti-PKI vigilante gangs backed by the Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia).38

There are striking and worrisome parallels between the political and economic problems Indonesia faced in 1965 and conditions today. Damien Kingsbury describes the dire economic situation that Indonesia faced in 1965:

[The government under Sukarno had almost completely lost control of the economy ... the general rate of inflation had reached 500%, and the price of rice, which was in short supply, had risen by 900%. The budget deficit had risen to 300% of government revenues, and if foreign debt repayments for 1966 were not to be made on schedule, they would have amounted to almost the total of the nation’s export income.39]

Indonesia today stands at the edge of bankruptcy, owing to the economic crisis of 1997. As domestic investors transferred wealth out of the country, a crumbling currency and diminishing sources of revenue created a financing gap of over $3.5 billion for the year beginning April 1, 2001.40 The crisis pushed 40% of Indonesia’s population below the poverty line. Many companies were forced to downsize and restructure their workforce, resulting in a massive loss of jobs. In 1998 the minimum wage, already low even by Asian standards, was increased by 15% compared to an inflation rate of 78%.41

And yet amid this, according to the Urban Poor Consortium, the budget for maintenance of the residences for the governor and deputy governor and "official entertainment" for the legislature in Jakarta is over $10 million, while less than $150,000 is budgeted for Jakarta’s street children. The "official en-

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38. For example, Robinson, p. 281; and Crabb, Problems in the Historiography,” p. 33.
entertainment" budget is five times greater than the budget to improve nutrition for the poor in the city.42

Concentrate with this are the parallels between the social conditions that motivated people to participate in the killing in the aftermath of the coup and conditions today. In 1962 Herbert Feith noted that conditions for a turn to authoritarian rule had been created by "harshening government, bafflement about by recurring explosions of political unrest." As Robert Hefner later pointed out, "In 1945 and 1965 factionalism in the state led rival elites to exacerbate ethnoreligious antagonisms in society, creating segmented alliances that exploited communal tension for their own narrow ends."43 This factionalism and political instability led to a strengthening of collective identities, which were mobilized in the killing.44 The killing of Christians in Nusa Tenggara, Javanese transmigrants in Lampung, and long-time Sino-Indonesian residents in Kalimantan in the 1965–66 massacres was one consequence of this, justified by allegations that communists were communist. Echoes of these factors may be seen today, as already explored above.

Conflict over land was also a cause of violence as today. Cribb, Hefner, Robinson, Sudjatmiko, and Sulistyowati agree that the national land-reform legislation of 1960 passed after the nationalization of foreign holdings, and that PKI’s December 1963 decision to sponsor a land-occupation campaign (aksi sepokah) deepened and radicalized divisions in local societies, facilitating the recruitment of local groups to implement the attacks on communists.45 An Rex Mortimer further notes:

The relationship between the earlier pattern of atri clashes and the massacres, as in the absence of more intensive studies at the village level, highly persuasive. Over and over again, in sports of the areas where killings were particularly severe, we meet up with places where Comminist and anti-Communist strength during the atri period had been most evenly matched and the tensions aroused by the land-reform campaign most acute.46

The legal system, too, provided no check on the abuses of elites or the regime in 1965 or in more recent times. Sukarno sought to erode the system’s independence, "starting deliberate and led attack on the judici-

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ary. He systematically alienated all the good judges and good lawyers, and undermined the court throughout his rule. He set about removing lawyers from the court and replacing them with military officers with no university education. Without effective and impartial judicial institutions, people take justice into their own hands. In 1963–65, both the PKI-led landowners resorted to violence to establish their claims to land. Subsidiary likewise attacked the independence of the judiciary, as a consequence, distrust of the courts and police is pervasive today, and people resort to force against government officials to become involved in land and wage conflicts. As violent confrontations over land and protests against the regime became common in the early 1960s society became increasingly polarized along ideological lines between the Communists left and landlords and the military on the right. National elites responded by becoming “active supporters of moves toward a more coercive and restrictive form of government, seeing such government as the only possible means by which the newly sharpened divisions in the polity could be held in check.”

Particularly important in providing a context for the massacres of 1965–66 was the polarization between the Indonesian Army and the PKI that eliminated the middle ground of negotiation and compromise. Robinson notes that, after the coup, “A campaign was launched under Kopkamtib (Operational Command for the Restoration of Order and Security, or Komando Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban, a unit created by Subarto in 1965) auspices to make it impossible for ordinary people to remain politically neutral—a technique of psychological warfare later employed by Indonesian forces in Aceh and East Timor.” Hetherington further points to the use of paramilitary groups recruited to organize the attacks on targeted groups in 1965–66. “A key element in the military’s arsenal of violence was to be civilian vigilantes, some of whom were recruited from the ranks of Indonesia’s growing population of urban gangsters.”

Reflections

Today, as in 1965, economic factors—including increases in the cost of basic necessities and an extremely high rate of unemployment—threaten the livelihood of the poor and the economic security of the middle class. Furthermore, only three years after the fall of Subarto, there is widespread cynicism about the prospects for political and legal reform that would lead to more democratic governance, economic accountability, and a more just division of resources.  

48. Lindsey, “Judicial System Reform.”
50. Robinson, The Dark Side of Paradise, p. 297; and also Critical, “Problems in the Historical Regime,” p. 56.
51. Hetherington, The Political Denouement, p. 46.
wealth. Political leaders are proving ineffective in resolving the economic problems that Indonesia faces and conflicts cannot be resolved through the courts because one legacy of the New Order has been subversion of legal institutions.

Mobilization by political parties in preparation for elections in 2004 and the emergence of independent labor unions set the stage for polarizing conflicts along ideologically aligned lines. As Hadiz observes,

[a turbulent process of political transition will almost certainly involve attempts by contending elites to mobilize sections of the society, including workers, present in the officially delineated realm of politics. Under such a situation, political parties and other organizations, representing particular sections of the society, will strive to enhance their position in the post-Fordist political configuration by making a working-class constituency.

Initially, the transition government of B.J. Habibie tried to respond to protests. For example, in February 1999, when 20,000 workers from four major electronics companies demonstrated demanding higher wages and larger allowances for food and daily transportation, the government organized negotiations between the strikers and factory management, resulting in an increase in the transportation and food allowances. However, since the early months of 1999, the government has swung back and forth between responsiveness and repression.

Conflict over land is emerging everywhere, especially in the outer islands where it is considered to be a threat to foreign investment that most Indonesian accept as necessary to recover from the economic crisis that began in 1997. For example, an article reporting negotiations between Kalimantan Timur and villagers in East Kalimantan notes that "land dispute has recently become the number one problem in province and regencies outside Jakarta following the introduction of [a] new democratic environment in the country. This has created tensions among investors."

Even if the national government were able to outline a clear economic strategy and a consistent policy on land issues, implementation would be complicated by new local autonomy legislation. Without effective political or legal institutions, redress for grievances or resolution of such conflicts, regional elites are likely to resort to the use of security forces to maintain law and order, perpetuating a second legacy of the New Order: the normalization of state-sponsored violence against protesters.

52. Vivi Hadiz, Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia (Perth: Western Australian Rudolphs, 1997), p. 188.
Ethnic and religious tensions growing out of economic competition between local peoples and transmigrants are also likely to lead to further outbreaks of violence. In a recent incident reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation in March 2001, local residents in Riau burned down a settlement of transmigrants. The violence in Malaka in Eastern Indonesia, Peto in Kalimantan, and Sariat in Kalimantan provide vivid examples of how such "ethnic" and "religious" conflicts between indigenous peoples and migrant groups can become deeply entrenched. Such conflicts can also prove useful to the military by proving the need for protection of society by security force and by providing opportunities for economic exploitation of refugees.

There are, however, significant differences between the early 1960s and the post-Suharto period. First, today there is no national organization equivalent to the PKI that could organize local protests into a mass campaign. Second, the end of the Cold War means that foreign governments are less likely to lend support to a campaign by the government or military elite against "leftists." Third, a military coup is unlikely in the immediate future because the Indonesian military has been so tainted by past and present abuses of human rights. And fourth, an international civil society, as manifest in Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, has emerged over the past 40 years. These organizations have been increasingly effective in pressuring Western governments to protest against systematic state violence and human rights abuse. These factors make it unlikely that the massacres of 1965–66 could be repeated.

In Indonesia, the greatest threat of violence arises from the existence of paramilitary youth groups linked to the military, political parties, and Islamic organizations. One possible scenario for the future in Indonesia is suggested by events in Thailand in 1976 where paramilitary groups led by the Red Guard and the Village Scouts in league with a corrupt police force and privileged political elites joined to crush "leftist" students and a new-born democracy under the banner of nationalism. With respect to Indonesia, as I argue above, the youth groups have been infected with the culture of violence developed by paramilitary groups associated with the Indonesian military. For example, PDI-P, the ruling party of President Megawati Sukarnoputri which has three paramilitary youth affiliates, has selected Ermito Guterres—accused of gross human rights abuses as leader of one of the most vicious
paramilitary units in action in East Timor—head one of its paramilitary organizations. The actions of paramilitary groups, which often include criminal gangs, are usually reported in the news as having been perpetrated by “unknowns” individuals. For example, on March 30, 2001, the Jakarta Post reported that “hundreds of workers of car upholstery producer PT Kadera ARI in Pulogadung industrial estate were attacked while on strike in the early hours of Thursday, leaving one dead and 11 injured.” Paramilitary youth groups sponsored by political elites allow their sponsors to avoid responsibility by pointing to an Indonesian “culture of violence.” The use of paramilitary groups also thwarts the security of ordinary citizens, who become fearful of political engagement.

That there is widespread violence in Indonesia today is undeniable. This violence has emerged for multiple reasons, including the failure of political and legal institutions to provide a means of resolving conflicts and dealing with grievances, the consolidation of communal identities where group competing for access to or control over economic resources, and the use of state-sanctioned violence to instigate and repress conflict. In this context, the claim that Indonesia is a violent culture is a political claim that can be used to justify a return to authoritarian rule and further state violence.