The Institutional Origins of Communal Violence

Why are transitions from authoritarian rule often marked by spikes in communal violence? Through examining Indonesia's recent transition to democracy, this book develops a novel theoretical explanation for this phenomenon that also accounts for why some communities are vulnerable to violence during such transitions while others are able to maintain order. Yuhki Tajima argues that repressive intervention by security forces in Indonesia during the authoritarian period rendered some communities dependent on the state to maintain intercommunal security, whereas communities with a more tenuous exposure to the state developed their own informal institutions to maintain security. As the coercive grip of the authoritarian regime loosened, communities that were more accustomed to state intervention were more vulnerable to spikes in communal violence until they developed informal institutions that were better adapted for less state intervention. To test the theory, Tajima employs extensive fieldwork in, and rigorous statistical evidence from, Indonesia as well as cross-national data.

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The Institutional Origins of Communal Violence

Indonesia's Transition from Authoritarian Rule

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In Memory of Agus Muliawan
(1973–1999)

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Preface

This book, and indeed my relationship with Indonesia, began in Tokyo in 1997 when my friend Agus Muliawan, a fellow exchange student, explained to me how different things were in his home country. The main difference, he explained, was that "in Indonesia, life is cheap." This book has been my attempt to understand why.

Two years after we returned to our home countries, Agus was working in the jungles of Timor Leste as the first Indonesian photojournalist to be embedded with the Falintil, the insurgent army fighting for Timor Leste's independence from Indonesian occupation. It was a time of great hope and uncertainty. Suharto had just stepped down as president, sweeping democratic reforms were afoot, and Timor Leste was granted a UN-sponsored referendum to decide once and for all whether it would continue under Indonesian occupation or forge out on its own as an independent state. The lead-up to the August 1999 referendum provided a brief period of respite, allowing Agus to steal away from the jungle interior of Timor Leste to host me for a week in his native Bali.

At the end of the week, he returned to Timor Leste and slipped back to the Falantil base camp to cover the historic moment when the Timorese were to gain their independence after twenty-five years of occupation. In the month after we parted ways, the Timorese voted for independence, but the vote was followed by a retaliatory rampage by pro-Indonesian militias that left a thousand people dead and decimated the infrastructure of the nascent country. Although almost all of the foreign press had been evacuated, Agus remained behind, hoping to document photographic evidence of human rights abuses and the relationship between the militias and the Indonesian military. On September 25, 1999, Agus left the safety of the Falintil camp to accompany a group of clergy who were delivering rice to refugees of the violence. Eight clergy members and my friend were ambushed and killed by a militia that had learned of Agus's presence. Later, his videotapes were recovered from the group's wrecked van and edited into a

film that documented his last days and provided evidence of the military's support of the militias.[1]

It is in memory of my friend Agus that I dedicate this book to his mother, father, sisters, and brother. *Penulisan ini dipersembahkan atas ingatan Agus yang tercinta kepada ibu, bapak, kakak dan adiknya Agus*.

The idea for this project began in the years after the tragedy as I continued to follow the events of Indonesia's democratization process. During this time, there were numerous media accounts of large-scale incidents of communal violence that were engulfing the provinces of West and Central Kalimantan, Maluku, North Maluku, and Central Sulawesi. I would later learn that the violence was even more widespread, but on a much smaller scale, among villages and groups of villages that did not garner coverage in the national media. A common media account attributed the violence to the inability of the Indonesian population to handle democracy, which was often paired with a romanticization of the heavy-handed military of the authoritarian period. After initially spiking in 2000, however, the violence waned in the ensuing years, demonstrating that democracy and local security were not incompatible. This led me to the central question of my Ph.D. dissertation on which this book is based: What explains the spike in communal violence during the transition from authoritarian rule?

This question confronted me with a difficult empirical problem – how to study a nationwide pattern of a fundamentally local phenomenon. Each of the thousands of incidents of communal violence during this time had its own unique context and sequence of events, which could be the subject of its own rich local histories and ethnographies and provide valuable insights as to their origins and dynamics. And yet there were thousands of such incidents with an undeniable nationwide pattern in the violence, which would be impossible to adequately study using historical and ethnographic approaches alone. To understand these broader patterns, I complemented my in-depth fieldwork of case studies with an applied formal model and a statistical model. By stripping intercommunal interactions of all particularistic context, the formal model allowed me to articulate what I theorized to be the most essential aspects of the mechanism that could plausibly explain how nationwide changes during this period caused violence at the local level among villages. I used the observable implications of this model to generate predictions that I then tested statistically on a nationwide dataset of violence.

Although the modeling and statistical approaches can facilitate our understanding of these broad patterns of violence, they also sanitize the painful and often gruesome incidents they represent by quantifying, aggregating, and

[1] On July 15, 2008, in a meeting with Timor Leste's prime minister and former guerrilla commander, Xanana Gusmao, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono acknowledged that the military was indeed behind much of the violence. For the documentary based on his footage, see Sachiko Chiba and Nobuto Ariyoshi, *Black September in East Timor* (NHK, 2000).

rendering them abstract. Thus, before proceeding any further, it is appropriate to remember the suffering that is not reflected in models and statistics. Social scientists are trained to apply a dispassionate lens to their subjects. Here, I will momentarily abandon this professional norm to address normative issues that the reader may encounter throughout the book as those issues pertain to the methods I employ as well as the policy implications of the findings.

In the course of my fieldwork, it was difficult to ignore the emotional content of the accounts of my respondents. Perhaps the most pervasive emotion conveyed in interviews about their experiences with violence was fear.[2] During my time examining Christian-Muslim violence in Poso District in Central Sulawesi in 2006, the descriptions of the events were superfluous to the sense of fear that pervaded the district amid a string of intermittent and unexplained shooting and bombing incidents. I myself was not immune to this fear while living among the residents, refugees, and activists who had experienced the violence firsthand and who remained in fear of another attack. During late-night conversations with victims and former combatants who shared their shelter with me, our conversations were sometimes abruptly interrupted by a noise from outside; the source of the noise would be promptly investigated before resuming our hushed conversations. Our worries were driven by the continued killings, multiple death threats against the human rights activists from whom I received shelter, and the fact that among the buildings that I used for meetings and shelter, one had been bombed and another trashed before.

Although the palpable sense of fear was undeniable among the people with whom I came into contact, the social sciences are ontologically limited in accounting for such shared emotions. Thus, while I remain cognizant that aggregating such incidents into a sterilized statistic on violence completely divorces the suffering behind each incident, these methods do provide an ability to explain broader patterns of violence. By employing a wide range of approaches, I hope to help make sense of a nationwide spike in communal violence that can place individual experiences in the context of a widespread phenomenon of violence during this period of Indonesian history.

It is also important to preface the remainder of the book with a caveat on its policy implications in order to prevent the misinterpretation or misuse of the findings. This book examines some of the security consequences of authoritarian breakdowns and democratic transitions. Despite my finding that the withdrawal of the military led to a short-term spike in communal violence in Indonesia, I emphasize that *this study should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the nostalgic idealization of stability and order during Suharto's New Order or*

[2] In order to protect interviewees and encourage honest and open interviews about sensitive topics relating to communal conflicts, I offered anonymity to interview respondents. Throughout the book, I have referenced interviewees by the village name in which the interview took place, the date of the interview, and an alphabetical label (A, B, C, etc.) indicating the order of the interview in the village and date.

other authoritarian regimes. Indeed, although large numbers of Indonesians were killed, injured, and displaced by the communal violence during the recent transition, far more were killed by the military and its proxies during the New Order. Rather, by understanding the potential pitfalls of authoritarian breakdowns and democratic transitions, it is my hope that this book can be of use to those who aim to mitigate violence and instability that can threaten such political transitions.

In the ten years in which I have worked on this project in both its dissertation and later book forms, I have drawn on numerous individuals for inspiration, intellectual and otherwise. Bob Bates has been a vast source of inspiration, encouragement, and insight, and I am grateful for his continued mentorship. His curiosity and deep understanding of politics in developing contexts and of the nature of order and violence pushed me to develop a theory that could capture the essential features of the political interactions that I documented in my fieldwork. I have benefited greatly from the guidance of Roger Petersen, whose intuitions and attention to the micromechanisms of the cases I used helped me develop the theoretical mechanisms of my argument. Monica Toft has been very important in helping me formulate and develop this project by pushing me to clarify my argument. I am very fortunate to have had the guidance of Steve Levitsky, who helped enrich my argument with his insights of institutions and synthesize my project into a more coherent whole.

I have been fortunate to be in a few dynamic intellectual communities throughout the development of this project. During my time as a Ph.D. student at Harvard University, I was fortunate to have had the camaraderie and feedback of David Lynch, Sandra Sequeira, and Fotini Christia. Special thanks are due to Jesse Driscoll, who has given much of his time and insights into multiple readings of the manuscript as I reformulated the project as a book. I also thank Chris Blattman, Oeindrila Dube, Adoyo Owuor, Matt Kocher, Steve Shewfelt, Maria Petrova, Ruben Enikopolov, Ashutosh Varshney, James Scott, Robert Hefner, Syarif Hidayat, Abbey Steele, Natan Sachs, Ana Arjona, Ryan Sheely, Kevin Fogg, Eddy Malesky, Tom Pepinsky, Marcus Mietzner, Ed Aspinall, Kevin Esterling, Indridi Indridason, David Pion-Berlin, Karthick Ramakrishnan, Shaun Bowler, Pepper Culpepper, Bill Clark, Sanjeev Khagram, Bill Hogan, Luis de la Calle; participants of the Harvard Civil War Seminar, Harvard Political Economy Workshop, Harvard Comparative Politics Workshop, MIT Identity Politics Workshop, Yale Order, Conflict, and Violence Workshop, and UC San Diego's School of International Relations and Pacific Studies for helpful comments on various parts of the dissertation. I am grateful to my fellow Indonesianists Michael Buehler, Sam Clark, Rachael Diprose, Sebastian Eckardt, Adrian Morel, Dave McRae, Claire Smith, Christian Von Luebke, and Chris Wilson, not only for their feedback on this project, but for their support as my community in Indonesia. I am very grateful to Lew Bateman, Shaun Vigil, and Cambridge University Press for their support and advice in bringing this book to publication

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Because of the sensitivity of researching communal violence, my fieldwork would have been impossible without the help of a great many people. I am grateful to my respondents for generously offering me their stories, time, and at times food and shelter. I am profoundly thankful to Arianto Sangaji, who gave me access to a vast network of contacts, shelter, and insights into the local politics of Central Sulawesi. Similarly I was touched by the generosity of Vincent Lumintang and Mama Sinta, who, despite living in a refugee camp, provided me with shelter, food, and company. I am grateful to my friends at Yayasan Tanah Merdeka (notably Mahfud and Yogi) and KPKP-ST. I thank Sonny in Manado, Kamel in Bandar Lampung, and David McCahon for their research assistance.

Throughout this project, I have leaned on my friends Amit Bouri, Chris Johnson, Matt Howard, Mark Shorett, Ben Maulbeck, Jim Zhu, Miho Tsujii, and Laureen Laglagaron for their support and humor to navigate the occasional obstacles along the way. I am forever grateful for the unwavering support from my parents, Fumiko and Toshiki Tajima, and my sister Mika Tajima and her husband Howie Chen. They have also each inspired me in their own way for how they have pursued their own intellectual and artistic pursuits. Finally, I am especially grateful to my partner Lilian Gunawan for her love, support, and humor, which has sustained me through the trials and tribulations of writing this book. It is because of her and our daughters, Miya and Ailyn, that I have remained grounded in understanding what matters most.