

1 Introduction

The end of a regime is often accompanied by a severe outbreak of violence. The hopefulness that surrounded the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, for example, was shattered by civil conflicts. Coptic Christians in Egypt, who had marched hand in hand with Muslims on Tahrir Square in January 2011, saw their churches and properties destroyed, and their co-religionists and clergy members kidnapped and slain, within months of the revolution. Clashes between ethnic groups erupted as dictators fell following pro-democracy protests in Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya. Violence also followed the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, the breakup of Yugoslavia, the 2010 revolution in Uzbekistan, and political transitions in Iraq, Burundi, Sudan, and Nigeria. In fact, nearly half of all democratic transitions between 1973 and 2000 involved some kind of conflict (Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005). Of the 408 communal conflicts around the world that occurred between 1989 and 2013, 74.51% occurred in countries that are neither fully democratic nor authoritarian, 17.15% in democracies, and 6.12% in autocracies.¹

Indonesia's experience at the end of 32 years of authoritarian rule was no exception. Following the Asian financial crisis and a series of protests demanding political and economic reforms, President Soeharto announced his resignation on May 21, 1998. Within months of Soeharto's ouster, an argument between a Muslim and a Christian youth in Ambon in Maluku province, escalated into widespread clashes. Though previously touted as a model of interethnic and interreligious harmony, Ambon became the site of one of the most violent severe, complicated, and protracted violence between Christians and Muslims in recent history.

Yet even as Ambon was embroiled in sectarian violence during Indonesia's democratic transition in the late 1990s and early 2000s, its neighboring district, Maluku Tenggara, remained relatively peaceful in comparison. Whereas in Ambon hundreds of people died and the

¹ These calculations are based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) non-state conflict database and the Polity IV data. See Toha (2017) and Figure B.1. in Appendix B.

2 Introduction

clashes continued for years, in Maluku Tenggara the fighting lasted three months with far fewer deaths. Within months of the initial clash, refugees who had fled Maluku Tenggara were welcomed back with traditional ceremonies and both Christian and Muslim residents spoke of the conflict as a *musibah* (disaster) (Thorburn 2002).

This variation in the extent of local ethnic violence during a political transition raises important questions. What accounts for the onset of ethnic riots at a time of transition? Why do some parts of a transitioning country erupt in violence while others remain quiet? What factors account for the subsequent dissipation of violence? Why does conflict subside more quickly in some areas than in others?

The question of why groups fight each other during political transitions is one of the most debated issues in political science. Existing answers tend to fall into a few broad categories.² The first group of explanations, now outdated, focused on the inherent incompatibilities between ethnic groups. This view assumed that ethnic identities are fixed and that ethnic groups are inherently at odds with each other because individuals favor members of their own group over outsiders. Yet plenty of evidence from diverse settings suggests that violence between groups is not automatic. On the contrary, intergroup peace seems to be the norm, not an anomaly (Fearon and Laitin 1996). Furthermore, the same pairs of ethnic groups are sometimes allies in one context and enemies in another (Varshney 2009). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, ethnic Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi (Posner 2005). Intrinsic differences across ethnic groups thus cannot account for the onset of violence during political transitions.

A second, more popular, type of explanation focuses on the strategic uses of violence between groups. It highlights elites' material interests and expected gains from mobilizing ethnic loyalties, particularly around elections. Scholars have argued that elites manipulate and politicize identities when they believe that they can win an election by persuading in-group members to vote along ethnic lines. This logic has been applied to incidents of ethnic rioting in South Asia (Wilkinson 2004) and election violence in countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Based on this line of argument, violence should be more prevalent in the run-up to elections and should be more common amidst competitive elections. During Indonesia's democratic transition, however, although in some localities riots did erupt before elections, clashes escalated and

² In Chapter 2, I provide a more thorough discussion of these explanations.

continued well after the elections in many administrative units where violence happened. In Ambon, clashes spread and worsened after the 1999 election, whereas in Maluku Tenggara violence ended exactly three months before election. Electoral strategy alone cannot account for the pattern of violence in Indonesia's democratic transition.

A third category of explanations emphasizes structural factors, claiming that groups fight because of economic inequalities and grievances over their living conditions (Mancini 2008). But Ambon and Maluku Tenggara were relatively similar in terms of their levels of economic development and inequality between groups. Furthermore, both are ethnically and religiously diverse. In most cases, economic inequality between groups and the demographic composition within a country do not change drastically over time, which means these factors alone cannot explain why some riots started and ended relatively quickly during political transitions.

A good explanation of ethnic riots during political transitions must account for why they erupt in certain parts of a country and not others, why they subsequently decline, and how the incentives and decisions of actors involved in violence mobilization both shape and are influenced by institutional reforms. I attempt to answer these questions based on data from Indonesia.

The Argument in Brief

Given the prevalence of demands for change and the weakness of institutions in transitioning countries, a better approach to explaining why ethnic riots occur and subsequently decline during political transitions should take into account the unique characteristics of countries in transition. In many transitions, those who had access to power in the previous regime will want to protect their positions, and those excluded under the prior regime will push for changes in the political arrangement to favor them in the new government. In mature democracies with strong institutions, this negotiation of political influence and control of state resources typically occurs through formal political channels, such as elections. But in weakly institutionalized settings, these formal institutions may not function well, may be subject to drastic changes, or may disproportionately benefit a subset of the population at the expense of others who have been excluded. Consequently, citizens in weakly institutionalized settings must find alternative ways to voice their demands and get their government to listen to them.

4 Introduction

To characterize the actions that groups may take during a political transition, I borrow from Albert Hirschman's (1970) seminal framework of organizational decay in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. I argue that strategic local political actors in transitioning countries will *voice* their demands for seats in the new government, *exit* their local administrative units, or remain *loyal* and continue to endure unfavorable arrangements. These strategies are not mutually exclusive.

The voice and exit strategies require further explanation. Local actors in weakly institutionalized settings can voice their demands by two alternative forms of political engagement: voting or violence (Dunning 2011; Machado, Scartascini, and Tommasi 2011). I conceptualize violence as one form of voice, particularly during a political transition when institutions are weak. Local ethnic elites will interpret initial election results as a signal of the likely new configuration of power in the new government. To the extent that initial elections are competitive, previously excluded groups can assume that contestation, turnover, and ultimately political inclusion are plausible near-term outcomes. If elections are not competitive, excluded groups will perceive that the status quo is likely to continue despite overall democratic transition. When elections in transitioning countries fail to usher in the political access desired by excluded local actors, disgruntled people may express their voice by mobilizing violence.

On the other hand, incumbent ethnic elites who enjoyed insider status up to the moment of transition will also want to secure their position in the new regime. Whereas previously excluded local actors would interpret increased competition as a hopeful sign of possible entry, old guards of the prior regime view it as a threat to their place in the new government. They, too, will have an incentive to use violence to demonstrate their disruptive capacity in the new regime, should their interests be ignored. For both previously excluded and incumbent elites, violence serves as an effective signal of the group's mobilizational capacity and the threats they pose if their demands are unheeded. The more damaging the violence and the larger the number of people participating, the greater the signal of capacity and threat. To the extent that these demands for political inclusion are met in the new regime, local elites will have a vested interest in making the new arrangement work and will stop relying on violence to agitate for change. Violence will dissipate as institutions become stronger and more effective in channeling demands.

Conceptualized in this manner, my account does not attribute ethnic riots during a democratic transition in multiethnic societies to cultural incompatibilities, economic inequality, or electoral campaigns. Rather,

ethnic riots serve a formative purpose in the country's long-term political development, helping to cement a group's status in the country's landscape of political actors and signal to others that the group cannot be ignored in the new political configuration. When these demands are accommodated, the group's position is legitimated in the new government.

Beyond voicing their demands, local ethnic groups can push for more access to local politics through the exit option. Exit can entail several actions at the individual level, including migration (Okamoto and Wilkes 2008) and, capital flight (Pepinsky 2009), or leaving organizations (Hirschman 1978). At the level of local administrative units, however, one previously understudied manifestation of exit is the carving out of new administrative units (i.e., a new district or municipality) from existing ones. This splitting of administrative units is akin to secession or partitioning, but at the subnational rather than the national level. When an existing district is split into multiple separate units, the number of seats and government positions increases, while the size of the population within each new unit declines. This gives groups concerned about exclusion from the new local government a greater chance of winning elections in the new units. Whether ethnic groups in transitioning countries choose the strategy of voice or exit, violence during political transition will decline once their demands for political inclusion are accommodated.

This argument implies several observable implications. Broadly, one would expect that the patterns of rioting should rise and fall depending on local actors' demand for political access and their ability to reach an agreeable power-sharing solution in the new government. Therefore, political transitions in ethnically diverse countries will not be universally violent but will be vulnerable to ethnic clashes if ethnic groups have been politically excluded in the previous government and ethnic groups can be readily mobilized. In comparisons across different countries, the empirical data should indicate that greater levels of political exclusion are positively associated with violent political transitions, all things being equal. At the subnational level, the same implication should apply as well; that is, more politically exclusive areas should experience higher rates of violence than those with less exclusion. Another implication of the argument is that violence should decline once these demands are accommodated through increased political competition, leadership turnover, and better representation of ethnic groups in local government positions.

In this book, relying on statistical and case-study analysis of local-level experiences during Indonesia's democratic transition from 1990 through 2012, I argue that local actors tend to mobilize violence to

6 Introduction

signal their demands for greater inclusion, and that violence declines when these demands are met.

Why Indonesia

Indonesia is a vast, archipelagic country with more than 17,500 islands located between Asia and Australia. It is a middle-income country, more than 85% Muslim, with more than one thousand ethnic groups and six official religions recognized by the government. Indonesia's first tier of administrative units consists of 34 provinces, which are further subdivided into second-tier units, districts (*kabupaten*) and municipalities (*kota*).³ Despite the overall Muslim majority composition at the national level, religious and ethnic composition varies considerably across districts and municipalities. The abundance of administrative units and the variation between units along important dimensions allow for a systematic examination of local environmental precursors of violence.

Beyond the number of observations available for analysis, Indonesia provides a good laboratory to study the local dynamics of ethnic riots because such outbreaks are episodic, not routine (Varshney, Tadjoeeddin, and Panggabean 2008; Tadjoeeddin and Murshed 2007). They are rare occurrences, but they were particularly prevalent during the years immediately after Soeharto's ouster in 1998. The timing of riots during Indonesia's democratization mirrors the pattern of clashes in other transitioning countries, including Romania (Huntington 1991), Nigeria (Suberu 2001), Uzbekistan, and Georgia (Garthoff 2000). Aggregate statistics on ethnocommunal riots in Indonesia over time show that they spiked drastically shortly after Soeharto's ouster, reached its peak within the following year, and quickly declined thereafter.⁴

Geographically, ethnic rioting during Indonesia's democratic transition was concentrated in a few hot spots while most of the country remained peaceful. Specifically, 85.5% of all casualties in ethnic riots in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Indonesia occurred in 15 districts and

³ Indonesia has four tiers of administrative units below the central government. The first tier is the provinces (*propinsi*, or Daerah Tingkat I in New Order parlance); the second consists of districts/regencies (*kabupaten*) and municipalities (*kota*) and was referred to as Daerah Tingkat II during the New Order; the last two are sub-districts (*kecamatan*) and villages (*desa* and *kelurahan*). Municipalities and districts are at the same layer of government, but municipalities are urban whereas districts are generally more rural. By districts, I refer to an administrative unit, not an electoral district, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ See Figures 5.2 and 5.3 for the temporal and spatial distribution of ethnic riots during Indonesia's political transition.

municipalities where just 6.5% of the country's total population resided (Varshney, Tadjoeeddin, and Pangabean 2008). This variation in levels of violence across administrative units provides the opportunity for a careful inquiry into why violence erupted in some places and not others.

Third, the nationwide consistency in the reform process following the autocrat's ouster facilitates analysis. After President Soeharto resigned in 1998 following decades of authoritarian rule, Indonesia went through a six-year period of transition, implementing a series of important reforms and consolidating democracy.⁵ In 2001, Indonesia began a "big-bang decentralization" that entailed the granting of political and fiscal autonomy to local governments, the proliferation of administrative units, and the direct election of local executives. The timing and process of these reforms were centrally determined, enabling an examination of causal relationships that otherwise would be more difficult to discern.

Contributions of the Book

This book contributes to our understanding of the challenges of democratic development. First, its most notable contribution to the literature is its emphasis on local politics. I have shown that it is not sufficient to focus simply on exclusion, competition, and incentives that shaped the behavior of political actors at the highest levels of government. My analysis of broad patterns across districts and municipalities in Indonesia demonstrates that local political exclusion in districts and municipalities at the onset of democratic transition matters as well. Amid broader political reforms at the national level, ethnic elites in districts and municipalities evaluated their prospects in the new regime in terms of their representation in local government. As much as local elites may have rejoiced over changes in Jakarta, these changes rang hollow if not followed by their group's inclusion in important positions at home.

With this framing, the book interacts with different bodies of literature that seldom engage each other. It borrows insights that others have articulated in explaining the onset of civil wars and armed rebellions, applying them to explain the emergence of ethnic riots, which are usually considered to have little in common with more protracted, highly violent, and coordinated types of violence. Most prior studies that have demonstrated the relationship between political exclusion of ethnic groups and violence have focused on civil wars (Cederman, Hug,

⁵ The years 1998–2001 are considered the years of Indonesia's transition to democracy, as reflected in the Polity IV index score for Indonesia, which jumped from –7 in 1998 to 6 in 2001.

8 Introduction

and Krebs 2010; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010) and nationalist mobilizations (Beissinger 2002; Wimmer 2002). Horowitz (1985) has observed that ethnic groups disappointed with election results may resort to military coups to seize power from the ruling government, as demonstrated by a series of coups in the Congo-Brazzaville, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Togo in 1966–1967. While ethnic riots may occur alongside civil wars and military coups, the literature so far has not examined their onset as a unique category of violence that is associated with political exclusion at the local level. In this book, I argue that local actors are also preoccupied with concerns about entry and representation, even when they do not mobilize a secession or an armed rebellion against the state.

Second, I leverage the creation of new administrative units in Indonesia as a lens to examine whether and how accommodating demands for political inclusion ameliorates violence. Many studies have focused on power-sharing arrangements, electoral systems, and quotas and reservations as institutional solutions to violent conflict. Another body of literature has focused on secession and partitioning as a helpful (or unhelpful) solution to ethnic wars (Chapman and Roeder 2007; Kaufman 1996; Sambanis 2000). Yet another body of literature has examined administrative unit proliferation in the context of decentralization (Malesky 2009; Pierskalla and Sacks 2017; Grossman and Lewis 2014). But we know relatively little about the role of subnational territorial partitioning and boundary revisions in cultivating peace after violence. In this book, I treat administrative unit proliferations as local actors' exit and a solution to prior violence and demands for greater representation and control over state resources. District creation can function as a political tool for mitigating exclusion by carving out separate units for previously warring groups and granting each group greater control over state resources. To my knowledge, this monograph is the first to bring together ethnic rioting, political transition, and the creation of new administrative units in a cohesive framework that is then analyzed over a large number of observations with a range of methods.

Third, this book contributes to the literature on riots. Extant literature on riots has been mostly based on cases in South Asia and, to some extent, in Western Europe and the United States, where the political salience of identity-based loyalties has developed in the context of mature political institutions. Indonesia, perhaps along with other countries in Southeast Asia more generally, showcases an opposite situation: ethnic groups have historically had strong institutions and networks, whereas the state was largely absent or weak (Tajima 2014; Scott 2010).

The turn toward ethnic networks, narratives, and communities during a political transition was possible because these infrastructures were readily available and more effective than the state-affiliated political apparatus. Given the stickiness of ascriptive identities and the failures of formal political institutions in many transitioning countries, a careful study of Indonesia should also inform our understanding of other weakly institutionalized and diverse countries.

Fourth, for scholars of Indonesia, this book offers a new explanation of ethnic riots during a political transition that moves beyond national-level politics and provides systematic evidence at the subnational level, using a mixed-methods approach combining both comparative case studies and time-series analysis of administrative units from 1990 through 2012. Although pioneering works on violence during Indonesia's political transition have articulated the importance of elites' machinations in shaping violence, consistent with the argument offered in this book, the evidence presented here establishes a broad pattern across time and space in Indonesia, articulating how *local* elites' mobilization and coordination shapes both the rise and decline of violence. This book should also be of interest to policymakers, both in Indonesia and in other multiethnic new democracies, who seek to manage ethnic loyalties and avoid future outbursts of violence.

Organization of the Book

This book has two main parts. The first part develops my theoretical framework and arguments, and I present my research design and a set of implications of my theory. In the second part, these implications are examined through a large-*n* statistical analysis of districts and municipalities in Indonesia, and then in an empirically rich case study of four districts where rioting occurred at varying levels of intensity during the country's democratic transition. Finally, in the conclusion of the book, I discuss the relevance of the book's theoretical framework and findings beyond Indonesia.

In Chapter 2, I develop a theory of how local political exclusion drives ethnic riots in multiethnic countries during a political transition. I start by outlining a set of assumptions and unique characteristics of countries in transition, and by demarcating the boundaries of the argument. I outline existing explanations of the onset of ethnic riots and discuss their limitations in explaining why ethnic riots rise and subsequently decline during political transitions in multiethnic countries. Applying Hirschman's framework of strategies in organizational decay, I argue that excluded ethnic groups in countries undergoing political

10 Introduction

transitions can choose to voice their grievances and demands, threaten to exit the district, or continue to endure the existing political arrangement. I argue that ethnic riots in democratizing countries are driven by local elites' resentment over continued political exclusion and are by-products of their attempts to push for entry into politics. Following a disappointing election, excluded local elites turn to their networks – which in ethnically diverse areas will usually be ethnic networks – to mobilize violence as a means of amplifying their demands for inclusion. Once their demands for inclusion have been met and the violence has served its purpose, rioting will decline. This chapter elaborates and extends Hirschman's logic to account for why, where, and when ethnic fighting erupts and subsequently stops in transitioning countries.

Chapter 3 traces the development of ethnic cleavages in Indonesia across three significant time periods. Although the inhabitants of the archipelago now known as Indonesia have always encompassed various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, the political salience of their identities has fluctuated based on the policies of the authorities at the time. At times, ethnic groups engaged in violence to challenge their treatment by existing authorities. These precedents for using violence to contest existing political configurations and to renegotiate the boundaries of who is "in" or "out" set the stage for my examination of the more recent mobilizations of violence during Indonesia's democratic transition.

Chapter 4 provides a macro-historical context of Indonesia's 32 years of authoritarian rule under President Soeharto and the country's subsequent transition to democracy in 1998. Soeharto's combined strategy of rapid development, depoliticization of the masses, and preferential treatment of specific groups carried important implications for the local political representation of ethnic groups. During Soeharto's New Order regime, Golongan Karya (better known as Golkar), the political organization associated with Soeharto, developed a deep and dominant presence in villages throughout the country, effectively crushing alternative forces of political mobilization and engagement. Furthermore, in ethnically diverse areas, Golkar coopted and colluded with local members of certain ethnic communities while snubbing others. As such, even though Golkar was not an ethnic party in the traditional sense, in ethnically diverse districts, Golkar officials who rose through the bureaucratic ranks appeared to come from one group at the expense of others, thereby exacerbating the politicization of ethnic identities over time.

Chapter 5 investigates the relationship between political exclusion and ethnic riots. Earlier studies of the relationship between political exclusion and armed conflict have mostly relied on cross-national