

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Changing Contours of Organized Violence in Post–New Order Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the changing nature of organized violence in post–New Order Indonesia. The New Order regime, which ended with the overthrow of Suharto in 1998, employed violence as a central strategy for maintaining political control, both through the state apparatus and via state proxies: criminal and paramilitary groups acting in the state’s behalf. In effect, violence and criminality were normalized as state practice. The collapse of the New Order and the resulting fragmentation of its patronage networks have prompted a decline in state-sponsored violence, but at the same time the number of non-state groups employing violence and intimidation as a political, social, and economic strategy has increased. This article looks at this phenomenon of the “democratization” and privatization of organized violence in post–New Order Indonesia via detailed case studies of a number of paramilitary and vigilante groups. While operating in a manner similar to organized crime gangs, each group articulates an ideology that legitimizes the use of force via appeals to ethnicity, class, and religious affiliation. Violence is also justified as an act of necessary rectification rather than direct opposition, in a situation where the state is considered to have failed in providing fundamentals such as security, justice, and employment.

Paramilitary, vigilante, and militia groups have a long and colorful history in Indonesia. Prevalent throughout the colonial period, the Indonesian national army itself was originally formed from such groups, pointing to the long-standing historical ambiguity between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” uses of violence.¹ During the New Order era (1965–98), as has been well documented, the state fostered and utilized a number of quasi-official organizations such as

Pemuda Pancasila, and Pemuda Panca Marga.² Drawing from gangs and the criminal underworld of *preman* (thugs),³ these groups acted as “assistants” to the regime, employing the time-proven methods of physical and psychological intimidation in carrying out what O’Rourke refers to as “regime maintenance” chores.⁴ Aside from these groups, a symbiotic relationship also existed between street-level *preman* and the military and political and social elites, referred to simply as *beking* (backing). *Preman* were allowed to carry out their activities, e.g., protection rackets and control over a particular localized sector of the economy, in return for a cut of the profits that would make its way through the various levels of the state bureaucracy. Violence and criminality were normalized as state practice.

Although incidents of state-sponsored violence have declined since the collapse of the New Order in 1998 and the beginning of the “reform era,” the decline has been accompanied by an upsurge in violence, coercion, and extortion carried out by paramilitary, criminal, and vigilante groups that are not dependent upon state patronage. The fragmentation of the centralized state and the resulting rivalry between groups seeking economic and political power at the national level and control over resources at the local level have both been central factors in this proliferation of violent thuggery. Groups with a variety of agendas have employed the violent mobilization of supporters as a central political strategy. Decentralization reforms initiated in 1999 have resulted in greater economic and political autonomy at the provincial and subdistrict levels. These reforms have also led to an increase in conflicts between groups trading in violence, as political and civil organizations fight over “turf,” economic resources, and constituencies that were once the exclusive domain of the New Order.⁵

This article outlines some of the recent events that I will argue have played a significant role in the “democratization” of violence in post–New Order Indonesia, specifically, the impact of the state-sponsored Pamswakarsa vigilante force mobilized in 1999 and the subsequent boom in paramilitary “task forces” attached to political parties. The article then examines the structure, actions, and practices of two of the many vigilante groups that have emerged since 1998. Be-

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1. See Cribb 1991.
 2. Ryter 1998.
 3. While for the purposes of this article I have translated *preman* as “thug,” it is important to note that the term has a diverse range of political and cultural connotations. Shifting in meaning over time from “free man” to “military out of uniform” to “hooligan” and “thug,” the term has an etymology that is in itself revealing, reflecting perhaps the public’s experience of the New Order, and the thin line that continues to exist between criminality and the state practice. See Ryter 1998, esp. 48–51.
 4. These “maintenance chores” included intimidating and attacking critics of the government, organizing pro-government rallies, and “procuring” funds via state-sanctioned criminal activities such as standover rackets. O’Rourke 2002, 11.
 5. For more on the impact of decentralization reforms, see the various contributors in Aspinall and Fealy 2003.

hind the differences in their histories, ideologies, and politics, all the groups share a common set of practices based upon the use of organized violence. The first of the groups, the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (Forum Betawi Rempug, or FBR), which claims to represent working-class members of the indigenous Betawi ethnic group of Jakarta, combines appeals to ethnicity and class with a strategy of extortion and coercion. The second, the Defenders of Islam Front (Front Pembela Islam, or FPI), is one of a number of post-1998 vigilante-style groups that employ the symbols of militant Islam in their street-level war against “immorality.” I intend to demonstrate that FBR, FPI, and similar groups have emerged as a consequence of the fragmentation of state power post-1998.

This case study of Indonesia has broader implications as it makes problematic one of the most basic assumptions regarding the state, namely, that it has an internal monopoly over the “legitimate” production of violence and security. As I will show, the increasing privatization of violence that has occurred in post-New Order Indonesia demonstrates that the state does not possess a monopoly over violence, either its production or its “legitimate” use.⁶ Far from the consolidation of formal institutions of power, democratization in Indonesia has involved a more fragmented and decentralized intertwining between formal and informal constellations of power. While formal legitimacy has been conferred upon the post-1998 Indonesian state through the implementation of electoral democracy, decentralization reforms, and the reduced role of the military in national politics, this legitimacy has been simultaneously undermined by the existence of groups using coercive rather than legal-institutional strategies to pursue their interests, exposing the absence of the rule of law. The state now finds itself as one of a multiplicity of social and political forces employing and laying claim to legitimacy in the use of violence and coercion.

Para-militarizing the Public: Pamswakarsa and Political “Task Forces”

The roots of the growth in paramilitary and vigilante activity in post-1998 Indonesia were established during the New Order era. Through its development of a corporatist state, the New Order co-opted and politicized “youth” as a form of political capital. The military concept of “total people’s defense and security” justified the use of civilian groups and youth organizations, which were often merely fronts for criminal gangs, as proxies by the state apparatus.⁷ As Lindsay has argued, the New Order operated in a way analogous to a criminal gang, employing and normalizing violence and extortion as state practice.⁸ The removal of Suharto in 1998 meant not the complete collapse of patrimonial networks

6. “Legitimate” as I use it here is not intended to imply public consent or adherence to a moral principle. I use the term in the sense outlined by Charles Tilly as “the probability that other authorities are likely to confirm the decisions of a given authority.” See Tilly 1985, 169–91.

7. Lowry 1996, 88.

8. Lindsey 2001.



South Jakarta, 4 September 2005. Members of Betawi Brotherhood Forum (Forum Betawi Rempug, or FBR) prepare to depart on a motorcade through the streets of Jakarta to celebrate the opening of a new security post in Kebayoran, South Jakarta. The motorcade later launched a successful takeover bid on a market in central Jakarta. FBR insists that the protection dues it forcibly extracts from local businesses are a legitimate tax levied in behalf of the indigenous Betawi community. (All photos courtesy of author.)

and authoritarian structures, but rather the loss of their central focal hub, so that they loosened into decentralized and competing power centers.

An event that highlighted the extent and speed with which the strong nation-state unraveled after Suharto's departure was the Pamswakarsa "self-help" civilian guard formed by Gen. Wiranto and Gen. Kivlan Zein in late 1998. In the lead-up to the special legislative session of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Musyawarah Rakyat, or MPR) in November 1998, around thirty thousand civilians were recruited by the army and mobilized around the national parliament. The ragtag civilian security force was intended to bolster the overstretched police force and help counter widespread opposition to the Habibie presidency.⁹ With its public profile at an all time low, the armed forces felt compelled to resort to using proxies armed with bamboo spears to carry out the task of defending state interests. The composition of the Pamswakarsa forces revealed an alliance of largely militant Muslim groups sympathetic to Habibie,

9. Publicly, Wiranto denied coordinating and funding the vigilante forces, claiming that they were a "spontaneous act of the people." Pamswakarsa leaders themselves, however, named Wiranto as the architect of the force. See *Tempo* 1999.

such as Furkon (Muslim Forum to Uphold the Constitution and Justice) and the Front Pembela Islam, alongside a hodgepodge of martial arts and youth groups from Banten, nationalist organizations such as Pemuda Pancasila, and the unemployed.¹⁰ The circulation of rumors that “anti-Islamic” forces would attempt to derail the parliamentary session and overthrow the Habibie government led other Muslim groups to mobilize their forces around the MPR.¹¹ The presence of the Pamswakarsa provoked an already tense situation resulting in violent clashes with student demonstrators and locals that left fatalities on both sides.¹² Public outrage and political pressure soon led to Pamswakarsa’s disbandment.

As a state political strategy the Pamswakarsa exercise was undeniably a failure, but its impact is significant in a number of respects.¹³ First, whilst being the continuation of a pattern familiar during the New Order, i.e., the military employing civilian proxies to do its dirty business, the Pamswakarsa was on a scale not seen before. It was one of the largest mobilizations of civilian forces by the state since the 1960s, reflecting the state’s recognition that it could no longer get away with the centralized violent suppression of peaceful dissent. There was also an unintentional flow-on effect. As Bouchier notes, the government’s decision in 1998 to form a civilian militia in Jakarta was partly a response to the already large and well-organized paramilitary wings of Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, or PDI-P) and Nahdatul Ulama.¹⁴ A reverse effect was also evident, however: political parties and religious and civil organizations began forming and expanding their own paramilitary forces in reaction to the prevalence of state-sponsored vigilantes. The resulting increase in the number of civil-backed paramilitary and vigilante groups reflected a new awareness, “if the state can do it, why can’t we?”

With suspicion and mistrust of the army and police at an all-time high, many people turned to local preman, paramilitary, and vigilante groups for security. A new decentralized intersection between criminal and political interests established itself. During the New Order, the state had justified the mobilization of civilian militia and thugs by reference to the constitution, which states that citizens are responsible for the defense of the nation. With the weakening of state power and the ideology of collectivist nationalism, groups with a variety of political, economic, and social agendas now made the same appeal — a phenomenon referred to by some commentators as the “I am Indonesia” syndrome.¹⁵ By appealing to religious affiliation, the Pamswakarsa legitimated a new pole for

10. *Tempo* 1998.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Gatra* 1998.

13. In 2004 the Pamswakarsa affair came back to haunt Wiranto’s presidential campaign. Kivlan Zein accused Wiranto of still owing him nearly 5 billion rupiah (Aus\$750,000) that Zein claimed to have paid out of his own pocket to fund the vigilante force. See *Jakarta Post* 2004.

14. Bouchier 1999, 165.

15. Interview with Munir, Jakarta, 26 June 2003.

political mobilization post–New Order, lifting the taboo on invoking primordial sentiments.

The economic crisis of 1997 swelled the ranks of the urban poor, forcing many of them into crime and violence.¹⁶ A greater opening for preman and organized crime began to emerge. In the post–New Order environment, gangsters have expanded their networks in the big cities, not just operating individually but forming organizations, often along ethnic or religious lines, that have established control over public space such as bus terminals, markets, and food stalls. With the patronage and protection of the New Order gone, preman were forced to seek out new patrons, or they simply went “private.” The enforcement partnerships that existed between the state and criminal gangs fragmented and have been replaced by sets of shifting contractual arrangements with political parties, members of the political and economic elite, local officials, business people, and other interest groups.

Securing Support: The “Task Forces” of the Political Parties

During the period of political liberalization between the overthrow of Suharto in 1998 and the general elections in 1999 more than one hundred new political parties emerged. On the streets of major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, the scramble by the new parties to form paramilitary forces presented itself as a golden opportunity for the ranks of preman and unemployed youth. Replete with military-style uniforms and helmets, command structures, and an aggressive “us against the rest” mentality, the *satgas* paramilitary wings of the political parties reflected the reproduction of New Order–style militarism within the new political culture. Satgas groups in themselves are not a new phenomenon; they were established by Golkar, PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, or Pancasila Patriot Party), and the PDI in the early 1980s. Yet the “party arms race” really began in 1999 with the reintroduction of multiparty competitive elections.¹⁷ Almost all political parties in Indonesia have some form of active paramilitary wing, as well as numerous associated “supporter” groups, membership numbering in the tens, possibly hundreds, of thousands. Officially, the function of satgas is for internal party security, such as protecting party assets and controlling the membership. The reality has been that satgas have been akin to private mercenary armies, intimidating opponents and critics both within and outside of the party, providing “muscle” for the private sector, and operating their own protection rackets alongside other criminal activities. They have acted as a nexus between legitimate political power and criminality. Satgas groups have provided a vehicle by which preman can gain a semblance of legitimacy and win concessions within the political system, and also a means by which politicians can establish working relations with the criminal groups. The 1999 elections were peppered with incidents of violence and coercion, most involving satgas from the major parties, PDI-P, United Development Party (Partai

16. Schulte Nordholt 2002, 33–60.

17. King 2003, 19–20.

Persatuan Pembangunan, or PPP), Golkar, and National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, or PKB). While on the surface many of these clashes appeared to be caused by political rivalries, often the conflict was over control of local resources by preman within satgas ranks. From late 1999 through to 2002 paramilitary and vigilante forces had emerged as a conspicuous and intimidating presence on the streets and in public consciousness.¹⁸

Of all the political parties, PDI-P has had perhaps the largest menagerie of paramilitary- and militia-style “supporter” groups. The four main groups linked to PDI-P at the national level have been PDI-P Security Taskforce (Satgas PDI-P), Indonesian Young Bulls (Banteng Muda Indonesia), Defend Mbak Mega Command (Komando Bela Mbak Mega), and the “elite” Alert One Brigade (Brigass: Brigade Siaga Satu). Of the four, only Satgas PDI-P is formally incorporated within the party structure, and hence accountable to it. Indonesian Young Bulls is an informally affiliated “youth” organization formerly headed by East Timorese militia leader Eurico Guterres; Defend Mbak Mega Command is a militant Megawati loyalist group.¹⁹

Brigass

Brigass, which is led by former student activist Pius Lustrilanang, is interesting as an example of the degree to which some previously strident critics of the New Order have reproduced its militarism post-1998. It was initially conceived as the “elite” guard of the PDI-P, consisting of around two hundred highly trained “troops.”²⁰ Rumored to be financed by Megawati’s husband, Taufik Kiemas, Brigass was formed in 1999 in order to raise support for her unsuccessful presidential campaign.²¹ It did this by mobilizing supporters around the 1999 Special Session of the MPR. Despite Megawati’s failure to secure the presidency, the group did not disband, instead it established a headquarters in Bogor, West Java. Recruiting from among taxi drivers, laborers, and security guards, its membership quickly grew to around thirty-five hundred.²² Adopting a centralized

18. *Panji* 2000.

19. The Young Bulls came to public attention when two hundred of its members were involved in an attack on the office of *Tempo* magazine in March 2003, after it ran a report implying that business tycoon Tommy Winata, a business associate of Taufik Kiemas, was behind a fire that destroyed the Tanah Abang market in Jakarta. Winata recently won a libel suit against *Tempo* over the accusation. Komando Bela Mbak Mega was established in August 2001, the product of a split with Komite Bela Mega (Defend Mega Committee), a Megawati supporter group set up in 1996. According to KBMM’s chairperson Herdy Mas, the group’s loyalty is “to Mega alone, not to the PDI-P.” *Kompas* 2002a.

20. Supriyanto 2002.

21. Kiemas has fostered close relations with numerous underworld figures, including Yapto Suryosumarno, head of Pemuda Pancasila. During demonstrations over rising fuel prices, Kiemas deployed Satgas PDI-P to guard his petrol stations, fueling the perception that the role of satgas and party militia was merely to protect the business interests of the first family. *Laksamana.net* 2001b.

military-style command structure, the group is strictly controlled by Lustrilanang, who is deferentially referred to as “commander in chief” (*panglima*). If the PDI-P satgas are the “foot soldiers” of the party, then Brigass is its “special forces,” ironic considering that its leader was kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured for several months in 1997–98 along with other student activists by Kopassus special forces troops under the command of Prabowo Subianto.²³ Brigass has received training from ex-special forces troops, including those who were directly involved in abducting Lustrilanang.

Selection criteria for Brigass members are rigorous. Once accepted, recruits undergo intensive and ongoing training in martial arts, crowd control, and military-type exercises, such as that provided by ex-special forces troops. Whilst PDI-P party membership is not compulsory, recruits receive sixteen hours of “political education,” and Lustrilanang ensures that all members channel their political aspirations to PDI-P.²⁴ Like many satgas groups, Brigass also offers its security services to the private sector as well as government institutions via its affiliated business, Brigass Lustrilanang Security.²⁵ Despite its initial mandate as hardcore Megawati supporters, Brigass has recently developed into a largely freelance organization, independent from the internal political interests of PDI-P. Through its private security service and close links with government and military figures, it has come to resemble New Order-period groups, such as Pemuda Pancasila, which are available for hire to the highest bidder.

Satgas PDI-P

Unlike Brigass, Satgas PDI-P has been formally integrated within the PDI-P party structure as its internal security branch. Led at the national level by Maringan Pangaribuan, PDI-P’s membership is estimated to be between ten and fifty thousand.²⁶ Through neighborhood command posts known as *posko* (established during the campaign period of the 1999 elections), PDI-P satgas maintain a constant and intimidating presence at the local level. The size of Satgas PDI-P has meant that factionalism and internal conflict were inevitable. Factional loyalties between supporters of local candidates, as well as vertical conflicts between the national-level party leadership and provincial branches, have been frequent. Local PDI-P satgas groups have emerged as crucial players in factional fighting within regional branches of the party, usually linked to the selection of candi-

22. Supriyanto 2002, 16.

23. The reasons behind Lustrilanang’s involvement with his ex-captors remain unclear. Former friends from activist circles have speculated that it could have been due to the psychological effects of torture or his close personal relationship with Taufik Kiemas. A number of those kidnapped are still unaccounted for and presumed dead. Confidential interviews, Jakarta, 2005.

24. Supriyanto 2002, 18.

25. *Pikiran Rakyat* 2002, and *Pikiran Rakyat* 2003.

26. Pangaribuan is also a legislative candidate. In January 2004 he was accused of extorting 1.3 billion rupiah from the Jakarta Public Works Department. See *Republika* 2004a.



East Jakarta, June 2003. "Special forces troops" from Betawi Brotherhood Forum (Forum Betawi Rempug, or FBR) pose for a photo in front of the group's headquarters in Cakung, East Jakarta, before going on a routine patrol through the area. FBR claims that it provides a neighborhood security service to fill the gap created by an understaffed, inefficient, and corrupt police force.

dates for the local legislature, and the positions of mayor and regent. In Tegal, for example, PDI-P satgas went on a rampage after the head of Tegal PDI-P lost in the mayoral election.²⁷ Similar instances of inter-satgas violence have occurred in Medan, Surabaya, Pematang, Tulungagung, Banyumas, Mojokerto, Madiun, and Jember. Like Brigass, PDI-P satgas have also worked as freelance security, including breaking up labor actions by factory workers and acting as bodyguards for business executives.²⁸

In PDI-P rhetoric, satgas forces consist of grassroots supporters, and its members are largely recruited from disenfranchised urban youth, rank-and-file party cadre, and local preman.²⁹ With scant job prospects and with the rising cost of living, the satgas units have provided legitimacy and a sense of identity and empowerment for the ranks of unemployed youth.³⁰ PDI-P specifically targeted youths, conducting recruitment drives among unemployed senior high school

27. *Sinar Harapan* 2004a.

28. *Bernas* 2000. The PDI-P in Central Java prohibited its satgas from working as security for local businesses or as bodyguards, however this policy was not adopted by the national leadership.

29. Interview with PDI-P official, 10 June 2003, Jakarta.

30. The average wage for a PDI-P satgas can be anywhere between five to fifty thousand rupiah per week.

graduates unable to undertake university studies.³¹ As satgas membership automatically confers PDI-P party membership, it becomes an effective strategy for developing a mass base that can be quickly mobilized. Apologists within PDI-P have argued that the training, structure, and discipline involved in becoming a satgas is a means for “reforming” preman, and provides them with an opportunity to become “useful members of society.”³² In this respect, the parties claim to be providing a valuable social service for a marginalized social group. The argument is a convenient and familiar one; it was used throughout the New Order to rationalize the existence of groups such as Pemuda Pancasila. On the contrary, it is the very fact that they *are* preman that makes them a valuable asset to the party. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) has noted in its report on civil militias in Bali and Lombok, local political candidates have found that the support of key criminal figures and civil militias is considered proof of political power. Consequently, rather than endeavoring to eradicate crime and vigilantism, they have sought to “direct” them, via the incorporation of their perpetrators.³³

Clashes in October 2003 in Bali between rival supporters of PDI-P and Golkar left two dead, and renewed fears that the 2004 elections would be marred by more conflict sparked by rival paramilitary and supporter groups.³⁴ Yet, as it turned out, the elections passed with a notable absence of violence, and the feared satgas groups were conspicuously absent from the streets. This was partly due to the last-minute introduction of regulation from the Indonesian Electoral Commission, which imposed restrictions on the mobilization of satgas forces during campaigning, with the threat of sanctions against parties that failed to control their supporters.³⁵ Since early 1999 moves had been made to introduce similar regulations, most notably from the police and armed forces, who by that stage had already grown alarmed at the threat the satgas posed to their legitimacy. In 2002 Indonesia’s military chief, Endriartono Sutarto, called for the disbanding of all “extremist and militia groups,” including those affiliated with political parties and religious organizations.³⁶ In March 2003 the minister for defense, Matori Abdul Djalil, also urged the dissolution of civil militias, especially those that used military-style uniforms and symbols, and the curtailment of party satgas that used a “paramilitary approach,” stating that they were “inappropriate in a democratic system.”³⁷ The response from political parties, however, particularly PDI-P, was blunt: the military could no longer interfere in party affairs, and satgas were an internal party issue.³⁸

The primary reason behind satgas being sent “back to the barracks” in 2004 was the changed political climate. Compared to the high emotions and enthusi-

31. Supriyanto 2002, 16.

32. Interview with PDI-P official, 10 June 2003, Jakarta.

33. International Crisis Group 2003.

34. *Republika* 2004b.

35. Indonesian Electoral Commission Decision 2004.

36. *Sriwijaya Post* 2002.

37. *Sinar Harapan* 2003.

38. *Sriwijaya Post* 2002.

asm surrounding the 1999 elections, the 2004 election year was marked by a more somber atmosphere of indifference on the part of the voting public. While voters enthusiastically exercised their new voting rights, a deepening cynicism and ambivalence toward the quality of available candidates resulted in lackluster turnouts to mass rallies. “Traditional” methods of mobilizing support no longer guaranteed success. Vote buying was rampant throughout the 2004 campaign, but it proved far less effective, for how successful can bribery be in the absence of at least the implied threat of repercussions? The possibility of voter backlash, coupled with the risk of reprisals from rival groups, outweighed the potential gains that were to be made by mobilizing satgas. At the national level this indicates that Indonesia’s new system of electoral democracy may have reduced the effectiveness of the mobilization of satgas violence as a political strategy. As Tilly has argued, the value of the use or threat of force is determined in proportion to the magnitude of the potential damage, be it financial or political, that may result from the absence of either protection or patronage from a particular group.³⁹ When the “market” in violence comprises many players operating with similar resources — in this case the satgas forces of the major parties — the stakes involved in violent action increase dramatically and this can act as a strong disincentive for its use.

The New Vigilantism

With the increase in crime in post–New Order Indonesia, vigilantism has also become widespread. The ineffectiveness of the weakened state in maintaining order has led to the establishment in many communities of vigilante groups ostensibly aimed at combating the symptoms of social and economic collapse, such as “premanism” and “vice” (*kemaksiatan*). These non-state initiatives were at first welcomed in official quarters.⁴⁰ Vigilantes were considered to be filling a space created by the separation of the police and military by providing policing and security at the community level. In many instances, however, preman themselves either established or infiltrated these groups in order to establish a new legitimacy, often with official backing, both financial and moral. In 1999, the post–New Order state introduced decentralization reforms that sought to answer criticisms of the previous centralized patronage network. In theory, this devolving of power was to help foster local leadership and autonomy, and to an extent this has happened. But devolution has also given long-standing patron-client relations a quasi legality and allowed local interests to consolidate control over resources and markets without institutional checks or rule of law. The new vigilantes combine the pragmatic self-interest and reliance on violence of the preman with a justificatory moral ideology. The following two examples, Betawi Brotherhood Forum and Defenders of Islam Front, show that this ideology takes the form of defending the interests of an imagined ethnic and religious community.

39. Tilly 1985.

40. International Crisis Group 2003, 1.

Betawi Brotherhood Forum

Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) was formally established on 27 July 2001, the same date as the anniversary of the 1996 overthrow of Megawati's leadership of PDI. The choice of 27 July was not mere coincidence: FBR's head, Fadloli el-Muhir, was himself a former chair of the Jakarta branch of the anti-Megawati faction of PDI. More recently, he served as a member of the Indonesian Supreme Advisory Council (Dewan Pertimbangan Agung). Fadloli conceived of FBR as a forum for reclaiming Jakarta for middle- and lower-class members of the indigenous Betawi ethnic group. Ostensibly aimed at gaining employment for its largely blue-collar, unemployed, and preman membership, FBR currently has around ten thousand members throughout Jakarta.⁴¹ In the words of Fadloli:

Our aim is for Betawi people to become *jawara* [local strongmen] in their own neighborhood. As the indigenous people of Jakarta, we should be enjoying the fruits of its growth. Unfortunately, many businesses do not employ local people, and don't contribute to the community in any significant way.⁴²

According to Fadloli, throughout the New Order the Betawi were culturally and politically marginalized. Fadloli believes that this marginalization has been compounded by "globalization" and this has led to a loss of ethnic and cultural identity: "The first step we need to take post-New Order is to raise our heads, to stop cowering and take pride in our ethnicity."⁴³ An increase in ethnic pride post-1998 is evident in the emergence of a large number of groups representing the ethnic Betawi in Jakarta. Sixty-seven of these are affiliated with the umbrella organization the Betawi Consultative Body (Bamus Betawi) led by Jakarta's current vice-governor, Fauzi Bowo. Initially FBR refused to join Bamus Betawi on the grounds that it was considered to represent only the interests of the "Betawi elite" and not those of poor and working-class Betawi.⁴⁴ Later in 2003 FBR joined Bamus, but only after Fadloli secured the position of deputy chair.⁴⁵ FBR strongly identifies itself as a voice for the Betawi underclass.

In and around its headquarters in the Ziyadatul Muslim boarding school, in Cakung, East Jakarta, FBR has a firm hold over the informal economy. For example, it provides local *ojek* motorbike chauffeurs who join FBR with interest-free loans to assist them in buying their own motorbikes. The organization offers its members other economic initiatives as well, e.g., screen-printing workshops and food stall cooperatives. These are similar to the benefits nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) give to the urban poor. From all appearances, however, FBR's concern for the poor extends only to its own membership, and its control

41. This number is based on various Indonesian media reports. The group itself claims to have up to 150,000 active members.

42. Interview with Fadloli el-Muhir, 3 July 2003, Jakarta.

43. Ibid. Internal FBR document 2002.

44. Interview with Fadloli el-Muhir, 3 July 2003, Jakarta.

45. This was rumored to be a tactical move linked to Fadloli's ambition to run as a candidate for the governorship of Jakarta in 2007. Confidential interview, Jakarta, 2005.

of the informal sector has not occurred without conflict. A dispute between Maduranese preman and FBR members in 2002 over control of the lucrative parking market in Cakung soon escalated into a riot that left one person dead and several seriously injured.⁴⁶ FBR claimed that the incident was a product of ethnic tensions resulting from uncontrolled migration into the capital. Indigenous Betawi and not migrant ethnic groups such as the Maduranese should control the sectors of the informal local economy such as parking, FBR activists insisted.⁴⁷ FBR also attributes social ills such as prostitution and gambling to non-Jakartans. Several bars and cafes in Cakung run by non-Betawi have been attacked by FBR on the grounds of eliminating “immorality.” Perceiving the social, moral, and economic cohesion of the ethnic community as under threat, FBR considers its use of violence as a legitimate act of self-defense.

FBR’s organizational structure consists of a central governing board that mirrors a mini-government, with separate “departments” for culture, economy, law, and security. The emphasis, however, is firmly upon “security.” FBR security personnel are called *dedengkot*, a colloquial Betawi term for “big shot.” The security wing employs a hierarchical structure similar to that found in local *pencak silat* martial arts associations, from which many of its members are recruited.⁴⁸ The head of the security wing is referred to as a *jawara*. In Betawi culture, a *jawara* is both a figure of reverence and fear who is believed to have martial and magical powers.⁴⁹ The second in command following *jawara* is the *pendekar*, traditionally an honorary title given to an esteemed master of *pencak silat*. Under the command of each *pendekar* are several hundred regular members known as *pitung*, named after Si Pitung, the Robin Hood–style social bandit of Betawi folk legend.⁵⁰ FBR also has an “elite” group of security personnel who possess advanced martial abilities and are believed to have supernatural skills. Throughout Jakarta, FBR has 185 security posts, known as *gardu*, that are coordinated by regional commanders, who in turn are accountable to the central board. Ostensibly in order to fill the void left by the understaffed and underpaid police, the *gardu* are an adaptation of the *siskamling* local security/surveillance system established during the New Order. Aside from conducting neighborhood patrols, *gardu* also organize various “cultural” services, such as performances of Betawi arts and traditional weddings that provide an opportunity for drawing in new members. When I visited FBR’s headquarters in 2003, the street was filled with around seventy well-built men wearing black and camouflage military-style uniforms emblazoned with the FBR logo; they were waiting to go on “patrol” in the neighborhood. Some were armed with wooden batons and

46. *Suara Merdeka* 2002.

47. Interview with FBR official, 4 July 2003, Jakarta.

48. See Wilson 2002.

49. During colonial times *jawara* and *jago* acted as power brokers for the colonial and indigenous elite. On the relationship between the *jago* and the colonial state, see Schulte Nordholt 1991, 74–91.

50. As Margareet Van Tillen discovered in her study on Si Pitung, the bandits’ relationship with the poor was largely predatory. Van Tillen 1995, 462–81.

barely concealed machetes. The group also has its own intelligence agents who “collect information” on suspected drug dealers, petty criminals, gambling operators, and potential “troublemakers.”⁵¹

According to Fadloli, crime rates in neighborhoods surrounding the security posts have dropped since the establishment of the gardu. At the same time, FBR membership has grown. The perhaps unintentional suggestion was that crime dropped *because* its perpetrators now wore FBR uniforms, for intimidation and extortion are only illegitimate, and hence criminal, when practiced by those who do not have a “right” to do so. Businesses and street traders operating in FBR territory are expected to make regular “contributions” to their local gardu. In the Pulo Gadung industrial area, FBR taxes trucks a one thousand rupiah entrance fee. In early 2002 an alleged extortion letter from FBR sent to businesses in Pulo Gadung and Cakung surfaced in the press. In the letter, signed by both Fadloli and the group’s secretary, FBR requested monthly donations to cover group “operational costs” and as a sign of support for ethnic Betawi. The letter threatened retribution against those who refused.⁵² After initially making a clumsy attempt to deny the authenticity of the letter, Fadloli then defended it, saying that businesses that benefited from the security the gardu provided should contribute. Fadloli insisted that business also has a moral obligation to assist the indigenous population FBR claims to represent.⁵³ FBR has regularly demonstrated, picketed, and intimidated businesses and shopping malls that have refused to employ its members.⁵⁴

FBR first gained public notoriety in March 2002 when members attacked peaceful demonstrators outside the Indonesian Human Rights Commission (IHRC). The demonstrators, members of the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), had just left a meeting in which they sought IHRC’s support in the upholding of a decision of the Jakarta district court that the Jakarta administration led by Sutiyoso had unlawfully evicted and arrested pedicab drivers, buskers, street vendors, and street children.⁵⁵ The vicious attack, in which men, women, and children were beaten with wooden clubs, resulted in seventeen being hospitalized. Wardah Hafidz, the coordinator of UPC, had a machete held to her throat. Two weeks earlier FBR members had also attacked flood victims demanding government assistance at the Jakarta City Hall. Why would FBR so violently oppose a peaceful demonstration in support of the rights of the urban poor? According to Fadloli, UPC and other NGOs “provoke and manipulate the poor for their own agenda....What’s more they ignore the FBR.”⁵⁶ Considering the territorial nature of FBR, it considered UPC both a rival for its Betawi constituency as

51. Ibid. “Intelligence agents” are a common part of many political and social organizations in the post–New Order environment.

52. See *Kompas* 2002b and 2002c.

53. Interview, Fadloli el-Muhir, Jakarta, 3 July 2003.

54. See *Kompas* 2003b and 2004b.

55. A chronology of the FBR attack can be found on the UPC website at <http://urban-poor.or.id/28.23.0.0.1.0.phtml>.

56. Interview, Fadloli el-Muhir, Jakarta, 3 July 2003.



Central Jakarta, 18 August 2005. Members of Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, or FPI) celebrate the group's seventh anniversary with a march through the streets of Jakarta. Employing the symbols of militant Islam and declaring itself a vanguard against Western decadence and immorality, the organization has grown dramatically within the space of a few years. It currently has branches in twenty-six provinces, with an estimated membership of one hundred thousand.

well as a supporter of those it considers competitors for resources: poor, primarily Javanese, migrants. Media commentators, however, along with Wardah Hafidz, saw the action as evidence that FBR was on the payroll of Jakarta's governor, Sutiyoso, who as the administrative head of Jakarta was the object of the UPC protest.⁵⁷

The relationship between Fadloli and Sutiyoso extends back to at least 1996 and the New Order–orchestrated storming of the PDI headquarters in Jakarta.⁵⁸ Fadloli at that time was prominent in the Suharto-backed faction of the PDI from which Megawati had split. FBR was also established just two months after Sutiyoso officially declared his 2001 “war on thugs” campaign.⁵⁹ Around seventy-

57. Interview with Wardah Hafidz, Jakarta, 29 June 2003. Seven FBR members were arrested over the attacks, however Fadloli himself as a then member of the DPA could not be arrested without the formal permission of President Megawati. The DPA itself severely reprimanded Fadloli, but Megawati made no comment on the incident. INFID Short News Overview 2002, and *Suara Merdeka* 2002.

58. Sutiyoso, who was then Jakarta military commander, was later implicated in helping to coordinate the thugs involved in the attack in an investigation into the incident. *Jakarta Post* 2002.

three areas of preman activity were identified throughout the city, and the government budgeted 12 billion rupiah for the operation. Ostensibly aimed at addressing public concern over rising levels of street crime, in practice the campaign largely targeted street vendors and the homeless. Prior to the campaign, Sutiyoso consulted with preman groups such as the Betawi-dominated Family of Tanah Abang Association (Ikatan Keluarga Besar Tanah Abang, or IKBT) on strategies for dealing with the “preman problem.”⁶⁰ IKBT proposed that the Jakarta police give month-long training programs for the unemployed in order to “prevent them from becoming thugs.”⁶¹ Those who completed the training would be employed as security guards for shops and businesses in their local district. Sutiyoso took to the idea. In order to carry out his cleansing program Sutiyoso deployed around nineteen hundred civilian police assistants (Banpol: Bantuan Polisi) in addition to the eight hundred regular police already assigned. The irony, noted by the local media, was that the Banpol were largely recruited from the ranks of the very preman that the program was supposedly aimed at eliminating.⁶² Not surprisingly, then, when amid great media fanfare Sutiyoso took to the streets of Tanah Abang, there were no preman in sight, except for those now wearing Banpol uniforms. The following day, however, it was business as usual, with preman collecting entrance fees and “security” money from taxi, bus, and ojek drivers. Only later did government officials state publicly that preman were not the sole target of the operation, but that the campaign also targeted pedicab drivers, buskers, street vendors, and others who “disturbed public order.”⁶³ In effect, Sutiyoso recruited preman to “eliminate” themselves. Seeing the opportunity available to Betawi preman to work with the Jakarta administration, FBR considered it a politically opportune time to establish a new preman organization. In this respect Fadloli’s choice of 27 July as FBR’s founding day can be interpreted as a signal to Sutiyoso that, like IKBT, FBR was available for hire. Considering that he faced reelection the next year, Sutiyoso’s move was politically risky. Weighing the possibility of public backlash against the political benefits of gaining access to Betawi preman, Sutiyoso chose the latter. The war on thugs campaign prompted protests from NGOs, street vendors, and bus drivers around Tanah Abang, but opposition to the new “preman regime” failed to gain momentum.⁶⁴

59. *Jakarta Post* 2001 and *Gamma* 2001.

60. IKBT started in 1998 as the product of a truce between rival ethnic gangs in Tanah Abang negotiated by the mayor of central Jakarta. Led by a renowned Betawi thug, the group splintered along ethnic lines after eighteen months.

61. *Kompas* 2001b.

62. *Gamma* 2001.

63. Later in June at a ceremony celebrating Jakarta’s anniversary, Sutiyoso symbolically “shot” a statue meant to represent the “preman problem.” Horned and with eight arms, each holding a weapon, the statue also wore a tie, prompting some onlookers to suggest that it looked more like a politician than a preman. *Tempo* 2001a.

64. Interview with Wardah Hafidz, UPC coordinator, Jakarta, 15 June 2003.

It wasn't until negative publicity emerged over FBR's attack on UPC that Sutiyoso was forced to publicly deny involvement with it and similar groups, even claiming to have never met Fadloli before.⁶⁵ Despite his refutation, several days later Sutiyoso attended an FBR gathering at which Fadloli supported his reelection as governor for 2002–2007.⁶⁶ Fadloli stated that while in principle FBR preferred a native of Jakarta as governor it could accept a non-Betawi such as Sutiyoso as he had proven his commitment to improving the conditions of the indigenous population. Fadloli's choice of political pragmatism over principle did not find unanimous support within FBR ranks. A significant faction in the group publicly backed the bid of former minister for women's affairs Tutty Alawiyah on the grounds that she was ethnic Betawi.⁶⁷ Tensions were clearly emerging between the political opportunism of FBR's leadership and the ethnically driven ideology that motivated many rank-and-file members. The split was diffused uneventfully when Alawiyah unexpectedly died of natural causes prior to the election. If Fadloli thought his support for Sutiyoso would secure special treatment for FBR he was soon to be disappointed. In May 2003 FBR leaders met with Sutiyoso to request that the Jakarta administration provide facilities for a skills training center for unemployed FBR members as part of its obligation to assist ethnic Betawi.⁶⁸ Sutiyoso politely denied the request, saying that no organization would receive special treatment. Having secured his reelection, Sutiyoso no longer needed to court the controversial FBR.

FBR's other flirtation with those in power has been with former police chief Noegroho Djajoesman. Three months prior to the April 2004 legislative elections, Noegroho established the "Save Indonesia Alliance" (Aliansi Penyelamat Indonesia, or API), a curious mix of former activists and human rights advocates such as Hariman Siregar and Buyung Nasution, together with preman-dominated groups such as FBR and Muslim Workers Brotherhood. Noegroho appointed Fadloli deputy head of the alliance. Founded on an "anticorruption" platform, API supported the election of former military candidates such as Wiranto and Yudhoyono. Mirroring the prediction of armed forces chief Sutarto, Noegroho threateningly suggested that the elections would fail, in which case API was ready to "take action" to ensure a smooth transition to a stable government.⁶⁹ In March 2004 FBR held its own rally, attended by presidential candidate Wiranto, at which the group affirmed its willingness to provide security for the upcoming elections and "hammer anyone who makes trouble."⁷⁰ By the time of the second round of presidential elections in October, however, FBR had emerged as a vocal supporter of Megawati, a position contradicting their earlier involvement with the anti-Megawati API. FBR hosted a public show of support for Megawati, who attended the event, in which Fadloli de-

65. *Republika* 2002.

66. *Liputan6.com* 2002a.

67. Interview, FBR member, 28 June 2003, Jakarta.

68. *Kompas* 2003a.

69. *Sinar Harapan* 2004b.

70. Interview, Fadloli el-Muhir, Jakarta, 3 July 2003.

clared that she had made improvements in “every aspect of national life.”⁷¹ Three days later hundreds of FBR members held a noisy demonstration outside the Indonesian Electoral Commission, protesting over the campaign leaflets produced by Megawati’s rival, Bambang Yudhoyono. They claimed that the leaflets played upon religious sentiment.⁷² Fadloli cited the seeming contradictions in FBR’s shifting political allegiances as evidence of the group’s neutrality. Rather than seeking out patronage, Fadloli insists that “currently we are like a pretty girl, everyone is flirting with us!”⁷³

FBR, then, is an example of a group that has successfully established a mass support base and powerful street-level presence by appealing to both ethnicity and class, whereby coercion is justified by claims to socioeconomic rights for an exclusive community. As we will see in the next case study, calls to moral virtue and asserting religious identity have also emerged as a foundation for claiming legitimacy in the use of force.

Defenders of Islam Front

Defenders of Islam Front (FPI) was one of a number of “radical” Islamic organizations to emerge as part of the pro-Habibie 1998 Pamswakarsa forces. FPI was rumored to be close to a number of figures within the military involved in organizing the Pamswakarsa, including armed forces chief General Wiranto, Lieutenant General Djaja Suparman, Major General Zacky Anwar Makarim, Police Chief Noegroho Djajoesman, as well as Habibie’s brother-in-law Mochsin Mochdar, who funded transportation for the Pamswakarsa.⁷⁴ On 24 September 1998, a month after its founding, FPI made its first public appearance, attacking student activists at the Christian Atmajaya University on the pretext of challenging “left-wing and Christian students who are paid by American Jews.”⁷⁵ One month later FPI was involved in a bloody pitched battle with Christian Ambonese security guards in Ketapang, Central Jakarta. In the aftermath fourteen were dead and the public was left with an indelible image of white-robed and turbaned young men angrily wielding machetes and swords in the name of Islam.⁷⁶

FPI was founded by Misbahul Anam, a Nahdatul Ulama-educated preacher, and Habib Rizieq, a *babib* (an Islamic preacher tracing familial descent from the Prophet Muhammad) of mixed Arab-Betawi descent.⁷⁷ According to a report in *Tajuk* magazine, the FPI was originally intended to be a nationwide support base for Muslim United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, or PPP) of Hamzah Haz, modeled along the lines of the Banser paramilitary wing of

71. *Liputan6.com* 2004a.

72. *Liputan6.com* 2004b.

73. Interview, Fadloli el-Muhir, Jakarta, 3 July 2003.

74. *Laksamana.net* 2002, and *Tempo* 2002. See also Ngatawi 2002.

75. *Radio Nederland Wereldomroep* 2000.

76. Gunawan and Patria 2000.

77. FPI’s founding committee also included several seasoned Islamic radicals such as Habib Husein Al-Habsyi, who was jailed for the bombing of the 1985 Borobudur temple.



Central Jakarta, 23 August 2005. Habib Rizieq, leader of Islamic Defenders Front, addresses members at a demonstration in support of a 2005 government campaign to eliminate gambling. Formed in 1998, the group has launched numerous vigilante attacks on “places of sin” such as bars, nightclubs, gambling dens, and prostitution areas. Despite frequent clashes with the police, calls from the government to disband, and Rizieq himself being imprisoned for six months, FPI continues to act as self-proclaimed guardians of public morality.

Nahdatul Ulama.⁷⁸ With the emergence of the PPP-aligned Ka’abah Youth Movement and FPI’s initial failure to create strong support bases outside of Jakarta, FPI redefined itself as a street-level anti-vice movement.⁷⁹ While its leadership consists of scholars from habib circles alongside several seasoned Muslim radicals of the New Order period, rank-and-file members are drawn mainly from poor, urban youth in districts of Jakarta such as Tanah Abang and Depok. FPI’s uniform, consisting of long white robes and turbans, invokes popular representations of the “*wali songo*,” the nine Muslim saints believed to have spread Islam throughout Java.⁸⁰ This romantic image, drawn from popular myth, combined with the focus upon vigilante actions, religious instruction, martial arts training, and vehement attacks on U.S. foreign policy, have proved irresistible to many disenfranchised urban youth. By August 1999, Rizieq claimed to have up to 3 million militia members who were “ready to fight,” and a total FPI membership of 13 million.⁸¹ While Rizieq’s figures are greatly exaggerated, FPI’s membership did grow quickly. By 2005 FPI had an estimated one hundred thousand members with branches in twenty-six provinces.⁸²

78. *Tajuk* 1999.

79. Front Pembela Islam Surakarta (FPIS), based in central Java, is estimated to have around twelve thousand members, however its leadership operates independently of FPI.

80. Gunawan and Patria 2000.

81. *Gatra* 1999.

82. This figure is derived from media reports in Indonesia and interviews with Habib Rizieq and FPI officials.

Like FBR, FPI has a formal leadership hierarchy. A supreme advisory council reports directly to Habib Rizieq. The FPI secretariat is subdivided into six council fronts, such as those for “anti-sinful practices” and recruitment. The investigation council front, the group’s intelligence unit, is rumored to have coordinated the infiltration of FPI operatives into student organizations considered to be “communist.”⁸³ The council fronts are supplemented by numerous government-style departments, covering issues from foreign relations, national defense, and education, to women’s affairs and food distribution. The hierarchy of the paramilitary wing FPI uses in its raids, the Laskar Pembela Islam, mirrors the territorial command structure of the Indonesian armed forces, with a chain of command and semiautonomous territorial units extending from the national down to the subdistrict level. Recruits are given martial arts and “inner power” training (e.g., physical invulnerability).

FPI’s ideology has two central themes. The first is the necessity for the insertion of the “Jakarta Charter” into the Indonesian constitution. The Jakarta Charter obliges the application of Shari’a law to all Muslims. Islamic political parties proposed the inclusion of the Charter in the original version of the 1945 Constitution, but the government of Sukarno and Hatta later dropped the proposal after objections from nationalists and Christians. Since the end of the New Order, which had outlawed discussion of the proposed amendment, a variety of Muslim groups and political parties have made its re-inclusion a rallying point. Unlike Laskar Jihad and Hizbut Tahrir, FPI stops short of openly rejecting democracy. Somewhat reservedly, Misbahul Alam stated that “the voice of the people is the voice of God, however Islam is not a democratic religion even though it does respect democracy.”⁸⁴ According to Rizieq, the Prophet Muhammad never discussed the specifics of an Islamic state and was concerned only with the creation of a society based upon Shari’a law.⁸⁵ Consequently FPI’s agenda has been to reform public morality rather than directly challenge the nation-state. In Rizieq’s opinion, “if the morals and character are not reformed then it would be useless to talk about reform in economy, political affairs, and law.”⁸⁶ The second theme fundamental to FPI’s ideology is the Qur’anic edict of *amar ma’ruf nahi munkar*; leading people toward good and away from evil. This principle is the rationale for FPI’s ongoing attacks on Jakarta nightspots. FPI believes that the Islamic community in Indonesia is under serious attack from western decadence and

83. Confidential interview, Jakarta, 2003. FPI accused several student organizations such as the People’s Democratic Party of being the basis for a resurgence of communism in Indonesia.

84. In an interview, Misbahul Anam said that he had held discussions with four generals where the possibility was discussed of an armed Iranian-type insurrection in Indonesia in order to achieve a state governed by Shari’a law. He declined to name them, but it is documented that FPI has enjoyed the patronage of former generals Djaja Suparman and Wiranto. See *Laksamana.net 2003a*, and interview with Misbahul Anam, Tangerang, 29 June 2003.

85. Interview with Habib Rizieq, Banda Aceh, 25 February 2005.

86. *Asia Times* 2004.

immorality. FPI attributes the uncontrolled spread of businesses “peddling in vice,” such as discos, bars, and entertainment centers, to the rapid growth of free-market capitalism.⁸⁷ While FPI considers the upholding of morality to be the government’s responsibility, it recognizes that the government is limited both by its administrative capacity as well as by the presence of corrupt officials within its ranks. Hence, devout private citizens have a right and an obligation to defend their community, with violence if necessary.

FPI activity has been most vigorous during the fasting month of Ramadan, the one most steeped in the symbolism of purification and cleansing for the Islamic community. In December 1999, around four thousand FPI members blockaded and occupied the office of the Jakarta regional government for over ten hours, demanding that governor Sutiyoso close down all nightlife spots during Ramadan.⁸⁸ After a lengthy meeting with Sutiyoso and police chief Noegroho Djajoesman, the governor issued a statement of support for FPI’s demands, saying he would work with FPI to ensure that new regulations regarding hours of operation were enforced. The protest was an unexpected strategic success for FPI; they gained concessions from the government and were essentially given a mandate to act in its absence. Between 1999 and late 2002, when it was deactivated, FPI’s paramilitary wing carried out dozens of raids on nightspots, billiard halls, brothels, gambling dens, and other places of “sinful” activity throughout Jakarta.⁸⁹ Initially the raids were confined to the fasting month, but they soon extended beyond. It became apparent that FPI had a larger agenda: to purge vice from the capital, full stop. In some instances the raids involved little more than smashing signs and overturning tables. In others, FPI members attacked patrons, staff, and local residents with clubs and machetes, burned down buildings, and clashed with local security and police. In at least one case FPI militia killed a resident. Throughout the early attacks, the police response was non-committal. Routinely late to the scene, they made only a small number of arrests and released ambiguous statements that called upon FPI to uphold the law, while simultaneously defending FPI’s democratic right to protest. Without a mandate or legal basis to act against the group as a whole, the police were confined to arrests of individual members proven to have committed criminal damage or assault. Rizieq’s personal attitude toward the police was far less ambiguous. While rhetorically insisting that FPI “didn’t dream of replacing the police,” he regularly launched scathing and threatening verbal attacks, accusing the police of profiting from gambling and prostitution syndicates.⁹⁰ The rumored links between FPI and key military figures led to speculation that FPI antagonism toward the police was part of a larger turf war between the police and the military, who had seen many of their lucrative entertainment industry protection rackets

87. Interview with Misbahul Anam, Tangerang, 29 June 2003.

88. *Kompas* 1999.

89. See *Laksamana.net* 2003b. The Indonesian Human Rights Commission was also attacked in 2000 in anger over a report playing down the massacre of Muslims by the military in Tanjung Priok in 1984.

90. *Liputan6.com* 2002b.

usurped after the formal separation of the police from the armed forces in 1999.⁹¹

By early 2001 relations between the police and FPI had grown increasingly tense. Under pressure from the entertainment industry, Sutiyoso revised the 1999 regulations regarding hours of operation during Ramadan, allowing businesses to stay open in the evenings. Furious at the changes, FPI threatened to enforce a total ban during Ramadan. The police countered with a threat to crack down harshly on the group.⁹² In September 2001 FPI leaders and the police met and agreed to a “truce,”⁹³ but it did not last for long. While its anti-vice raids usually involved at most several hundred members, after the 11 September attacks in the United States FPI began to mobilize far larger actions, drawing on widespread opposition to Washington’s “war on terror.” In October 2001, at a demonstration against the pending invasion of Afghanistan by U.S. forces, an estimated ten thousand FPI supporters rallied in front of the national parliament in what was the group’s largest mobilization to date. In his oration to the crowd, Rizieq demanded that the government sever all ties with the United States and he threatened to do “sweeping operations” to remove its citizens in Indonesia.⁹⁴ Fearful that the demonstration would spiral out of control, the police moved in. The situation quickly deteriorated into a series of bloody pitched battles. The day after the demonstration police raided FPI headquarters in Tanah Abang. Rizieq was detained on charges of inciting hatred, but later released.

Some saw FPI activities in late 2000 and early 2001 as part of a larger campaign to destabilize the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid.⁹⁵ Angered at Wahid’s rapid democratization of Indonesia, his attempts to bring the military under civilian control, and the sacking of Wiranto as armed forces chief in February 2000, anti-Wahidists within the military found an ally in FPI as well as other groups such as Laskar Jihad. The FPI considered Wahid a traitor to Islam due to his attempts to reestablish relations with Israel, his bridge building with Christians and Indonesian Chinese, and his move toward reconciliation with former communists.⁹⁶

91. Interview with Munir, Jakarta, 26 June 2003.

92. FPI and police had clashed violently in late 2000, including an FPI attack on a police station and an incident in which police fired shots into a van carrying FPI militia. *Gatra* 2003.

93. *Tempo* 2001b.

94. *Asia Times Online* 2001.

95. *The Guardian* (UK) 2002. Muslim-Christian violence that rocked Maluku throughout 2000, to which FPI contributed a small number of volunteer fighters, has also been attributed to a military-Islamist alliance aimed at toppling Wahid. See Hefner 2002, 754–65.

96. Interview with Misbahul Anam, Tangerang, 29 June 2003. The antagonism between FPI and Wahid has continued, most recently after the FPI forcibly closed several churches and mosques linked to the Ahmadiyah sect. *Liputan6.com* 2005.

FPI was also considered a potential street-level counter to the Banser paramilitary force of Nahdatul Ulama, Wahid loyalists who threatened to mobilize in Jakarta in the tense period leading up to his impeachment in July 2001.⁹⁷

It wasn't until after the Bali bombing on 12 October 2002 that the new government of Megawati Sukarnoputeri acted more decisively against FPI.⁹⁸ The bombing signaled the end of the government's tolerance toward groups employing the symbolism of militant Islam, such as FPI and Laskar Jihad. With international pressure coming to bear on the Indonesian government to give at least the appearance of tackling radical Islam, militant groups now became a political liability. Rizieq was arrested four days after the October bombing on charges of inciting public unrest in relation to FPI attacks on a pool hall and nightclub in Glodok on 4 October. Even while charging Rizieq, the state was still conciliatory, as reflected in the state prosecutor's recommended reduction of the penalty for the offenses from the maximum of seven years to seven months on the grounds that Rizieq had "merely intended to improve the morality of Indonesian society."⁹⁹ After a brief period in custody Rizieq was released and placed under house arrest on the condition that FPI would stop its raids. Soon after, the laskar wing of the group suspended its activities indefinitely.¹⁰⁰ The then-threatened U.S.-led invasion of Iraq put FPI back in the spotlight, as the group warned of "sweeping" actions against westerners in Indonesia. At its headquarters in Tanah Abang, FPI set up recruitment desks to enlist "jihad fighters" to go to Iraq; more than five hundred signed up.¹⁰¹ Rizieq broke the conditions of his house arrest, making a "humanitarian" visit to Iraq in April 2003 with the Red Crescent, though the Red Crescent itself refused to confirm this. On his return on 20 April, he was immediately arrested and taken back into custody.¹⁰²

Rizieq was confined in Salemba prison until November 2003. During his incarceration, FPI continued to operate as an organization, but the activities of its paramilitary wing were still suspended. Soon after Rizieq's release FPI held a national congress to "reconsolidate" its internal leadership, refocus its mission, and formulate strategies for "cleaning up" its rank-and-file membership. Rizieq and Misbahul Alam both admitted that the group had grown too fast and as a consequence had allowed what they termed "uncontrollable and undesirable elements" to slip into its ranks.¹⁰³ Along with unrepentant preman, the infiltra-

97. Salim 2004.

98. FPI categorically rejected Megawati as president. According to Rizieq, "a woman president is always a source of difference and conflict, why not chose someone far from that conflict? There are lots of men capable of becoming president." *Laksamana.net* 2001a.

99. *Laksamana.net* 2003c.

100. *Tempo* 2002.

101. *Far Eastern Economic Review* 2003. Plans to send fighters did not materialize because of a lack of funds as well as the obvious logistical problems of getting fighters into the country. More recently, Rizieq has threatened to send FPI militia to southern Thailand as well as to Falluja in Iraq. *Tempo* 2004.

102. After his arrest, FPI supporters helped Rizieq escape from the public prosecutor's office, but he surrendered to police the next day.

tors were believed to include individuals linked to the police and to businesses involved in gambling and prostitution.¹⁰⁴ Since its first raids, FPI had faced accusations that it was little more than a band of criminal extortionists in religious garb. Patrons of raided bars claimed to have been robbed, and nightclub owners accused FPI of extortion and collusion with the police. Rizieq took the allegations seriously, believing that they undermined the moral platform they claimed to stand upon. It was apparent that a gap had emerged between the short-term material self-interest of ordinary FPI members and the ideological objectives of FPI's leadership. FPI leaders introduced a number of measures to address the problem, including tightening criteria for membership. Potential recruits now had to undergo a stringent screening process and entrance test, and, once accepted, undergo intensive training coordinated by FPI headquarters. Rather than acting as semiautonomous units, laskar militia activities were coordinated centrally. If Rizieq's imprisonment was intended to undermine the group, it had the opposite effect. FPI responded by tightening its ranks, centralizing control over its component units, and upgrading the discipline and training of its recruits, moving the organization from an unruly bunch of thugs in religious garb to a far more disciplined and ideologically motivated paramilitary force. During Ramadan 2004 FPI once more took to the streets, targeting cafes and bars in the Kemang district of South Jakarta.¹⁰⁵ As in previous years, the police threatened to act, but failed to do so. Faced with continued police inaction, Kemang locals formed their own vigilante force to guard against repeat attacks, perpetuating the cycle of vigilantism. FPI's moral justification for organized violence apparently makes the state reluctant to treat the actions as purely criminal. While loathe to openly support FPI-style violence, the state has failed to act against its vigilantism in any systematic way.

The devastating tsunami that hit the war-ravaged province of Aceh on 26 December 2004 created a new arena for FPI. Within two days of the tragedy, several hundred FPI volunteers, along with Habib Rizieq, arrived in Banda Aceh, their transportation provided by the government. Other paramilitary and militant groups, including Pemuda Panca Marga, Pemuda Pancasila, and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, also arrived en masse, ostensibly as part of relief efforts.¹⁰⁶ For predatory groups, post-tsunami Aceh was new "territory," offering them a host of political and economic opportunities.¹⁰⁷ Reports soon emerged of extortion rackets and the siphoning of aid supplies. The leadership of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) was quick to issue a statement calling FPI a criminal organization and stating that FPI's purpose in Aceh was to

103. Interview with Misbahul Anam, Tangerang, 29 June 2003.

104. *Ibid.*, 2003.

105. *Asia Times* 2004.

106. *Aljazeera.net* 2005. In 2003 Pemuda Panca Marga members attacked and ransacked the offices of the local NGO Committee for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (Kontras) after it criticized the imposition of martial law in Aceh.

107. *Bulletin* 2005, and interviews with Acehnese aid workers, Banda Aceh, February 2005.

act on behalf of the Indonesian military.¹⁰⁸ Yet, while not renowned for its humanitarian relief work, FPI soon made a name for itself for its dedication to the grisly task of recovering and burying the dead.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, however, it issued terse cautions to foreigners to respect the form of Islamic law practiced in the province, with Rizieq further warning of the possibility of “Christianization” by religion-based aid agencies and an East Timor-style intervention by foreign troops. FPI’s relief work won it guarded praise from locals, while its links to the military and open opposition to Acehese independence ensures it government support. The group formulated a five-year plan for its activities in Aceh, which included proposals for FPI-run religious boarding schools (*pesantern*), mosques, and a radio station, for which it claimed to have government approval. By mid 2005, however, it had reduced its presence in Aceh to just several dozen members.¹¹⁰ Like the Laskar Jihad before them, the FPI failed to comprehend the depth of Acehese religious traditions, and was unable to establish any significant local support. To the Acehese, FPI and its brand of Islam were indelibly “foreign.”¹¹¹

Like FBR, FPI has been largely transparent in its flirtations with elite figures. Throughout its brief history the group has enjoyed the support of Habibie, Wiranto, vice-president Hamzah Haz, and Amien Rais. According to Rizieq, “we do not object to being used by others, and we will use others in order to uphold morality and eliminate vice.”¹¹² Neither FBR nor FPI are state proxies, for this presumes the existence of the state as a unified entity. The relationship between vigilante groups and the post–New Order state might better be characterized as strategic partial-patronage. At times the support of vigilante thugs has benefited particular figures within the fragmented and competing elites. At the same time temporary patronage has allowed vigilante groups to operate with impunity and gain a degree of political leverage for agendas divergent from official state interests. The groups have undoubtedly served as a vehicle for the political opportunism of their leadership, yet this does not explain why FBR and FPI have been able to gain significant support bases among the urban poor. In the case of FBR, the material benefits of membership are tangible. With FPI, especially since its 2001 reconsolidation, the primary motivation for their involvement appears to be more ideological, the group drawing part of its appeal from the broader global discourse of Muslim radicalism and opposition to the west.

108. The full statement can be read on a GAM-affiliated website: http://www.acheh-eye.org/data_files/english_format/asnlf/asnlf_statements_data-eng/asnlf_statements_data-eng_025_09jan2005.html.

109. In one instance FPI claims that GAM itself requested that they remove corpses from a conflict zone in order to avoid a confrontation between GAM and the TNI. *Indo Pos* 2005.

110. Interview with Habib Rizieq, Jakarta, 26 August 2005.

111. Confidential interviews, Banda Aceh, February 2005.

112. *Asgart* 2003, 643–67.

A Preman State?

As Hadiz has noted, political gangsters and vigilantes have been major beneficiaries of the reforms introduced to decentralize power in Indonesia.¹¹³ This new system, which has given greater autonomy and power to regional and local government, has led to paramilitary groups and political gangsters becoming a valuable form of political capital and influential power brokers in their own right, like their ancestors the *jago* of the colonial period. Some have even aspired to more direct political power. In August 2003 the granddaddy of preman/paramilitary groups, Pemuda Pancasila, formally registered its own political party, the Pancasila Patriot Party.¹¹⁴ Disillusioned with the lack of rewards for its long-standing loyalty to Golkar, the head of Pemuda Pancasila, Yapto Soerjo Soermano, stated that “rather than choose a party who doesn’t care about us, it’s better we form our own party.”¹¹⁵ The organization’s large membership networks enabled it to easily meet the necessary criteria, and it competed in the April 2004 general elections, albeit with little success. The presence of a “preman party” as a registered, albeit unsuccessful, competitor in the general election could be seen as eroding the legitimacy of the existing party system. While Pemuda Pancasila is far more established than other similar organizations, it has opened a path that other groups are beginning to take. For example, FBR is planning to nominate Fadloli as a candidate for the 2007 election for governor in Jakarta, using its growing membership base to mobilize support.¹¹⁶ Recent regional head elections (Pilkada, or Pemilihan Kepala Daerah) conducted throughout the country have seen satgas, preman groups, and organized crime figures fund successful candidates as well as fielding their own. As one preman figure commented, “the smaller the scale of an election, the easier it is to either buy or intimidate your way to victory.”¹¹⁷

If the patronage of political parties is no longer sufficient or too unpredictable, will satgas and vigilante groups seek to establish a more stable role for themselves as security agencies, akin to the transition made by Brigass, or will the now largely demobilized rank-and-file satgas simply return to the streets to join the increasing ranks of street thugs? Rather than resulting in a decrease in violent thuggery, the temporary demobilization of political paramilitary forces has seen an analogous increase in the emergence of violence as a commodity in the private sector. The labor sector is one example. No longer able to rely solely on the police and military, factory owners have turned to gangs of hired thugs who specialize in intimidating workers and breaking up strikes.¹¹⁸ Thugs acting

113. Hadiz 2003.

114. Around four hundred Pemuda Pancasila (PP) members already occupy seats in parliament throughout Indonesia, primarily as representatives of Golkar. After initially being prohibited from being involved in political parties aside from the Pancasila Patriot Party, PP members are now free to do so. See *Kompas* 2003c and *Suara Merdeka* 2003.

115. *Kompas* 2003c.

116. Interview with FBR officials, Jakarta, August 2005.

117. Confidential interview, Jakarta, 2005.

in behalf of powerful clients have also regularly targeted journalists and the media.¹¹⁹ In an attempt to establish a reputation as legitimate businessmen, some infamous gangland figures have even turned to the courts, seeking compensation from media outlets that have referred to them as thugs.¹²⁰

Criminal gangs, vigilante groups, and individual preman have established a lucrative yet unstable control over public space, such as markets, terminals, and parking lots, creating further hardship for those living on the margins of the informal economy. Preman-based organizations are both a product of poverty and unemployment and a factor further exacerbating it. Without the protection they once enjoyed from the authorities under the territorial protection racket system, preman have now become vulnerable to attacks from rivals, as well as from a public that can no longer stand the burden of what amounts to an informal taxation system that parallels the state's. A review of media reports between 2002 and 2005 indicates that the number of retaliatory attacks and instances of vigilante street justice against preman have increased steadily. During the New Order, such citizen-initiated attacks were practically unheard of. The character of such extra-legal violence, however, is self-justificatory and hence cyclic in nature.

Schulte Nordholt has suggested that on its current trajectory Indonesia is heading toward what he refers to as a "preman state," similar to that of post-communist Russia.¹²¹ The comparison with Russia is an intriguing one. Volkov, in his study of Russian gangsters, has shown how criminal networks and thugs trafficking in violence have played a pivotal role in the making of Russian capitalism and have hijacked the new political and economic structures.¹²² After a period of fierce rivalry between criminal gangs in the mid-1990s, stronger "violent entrepreneurs" have gradually established semi-legitimate monopolies, becoming recognized guarantors of business transactions. Over time private security companies with closer links to government, often run by former KGB and military officers, have commandeered these monopolies, leading to the legalization of private protection. Privatized sections of the state's coercive apparatus have also become more independent market actors.¹²³ Faced with myriad autonomous groups employing violence, the Russian state has lost "unconditional priority in those very areas that constitute it: protection, taxation, and law enforcement."¹²⁴ Looking to the future, Volkov speculates that one possible

118. One recent example of this is the beating and intimidation of workers from the Shamrock textile factory in Medan. See *Wapada* 2004, and *Kompas* 2004a.

119. For documentation of attacks on the Indonesian press, see Suwarso et al. 2002.

120. This includes Hercules, the former gangland leader from Tanah Abang, Pemuda Panca Marga, as well as underworld figure and business tycoon Tommy Winata, who won a libel case against *Tempo* magazine. Hercules later withdrew his claim, whilst Pemuda Pancasila lost the case against *Tempo*.

121. Schulte Nordholt, 2002, 33–60.

122. Volkov 2002.

123. Volkov 1999, 741–54.

124. *Ibid.*, 752.

scenario is a gradual appropriation of those private protection agencies with state links, leading to a re-centralization of state control, albeit in a more dynamic form. This process entails not just controlling crime, but a fundamental rebuilding of the state. The logic of the market, where intensive violence is simply unprofitable, could also emerge as a mediating factor.¹²⁵

Conditions in contemporary Indonesia show significant parallels. As in Russia, the semiautonomous nature of the Indonesian armed forces and its diverse business interests are a major hurdle in the way of the restoration of state control over organized violence. Curbs on satgas violence have come less from state intervention than from its political redundancy; the voting public can no longer be simply coerced into giving support. While groups such as FBR and FPI have connections to figures within the political elite, the nature of patron-client relationships is far more fragmented than during the New Order; allegiances are largely tactical and for the achievement of short-term goals, hence they shift rapidly. Attempts to incorporate such groups within state structures could only be temporary, and might further erode public trust, leading to more vigilantism. That political elites continue to make alliances with such groups is itself an indication of what they perceive as the fragility of their own position, one that forces them to accept such partners.¹²⁶ As Schulte-Bockholt has argued, elite alliances with organized crime groups and paramilitaries commonly transpire during crises of hegemony. In the case of Indonesia the crisis of hegemony is the fractured and fragmented nature of post-New Order politics itself. The ability of preman groups to integrate themselves within existing power structures is being further facilitated by the insecurity of the political elite. Dismissing such groups as self-serving thugs may be easy, but understanding the role that ideology plays is crucial. With the abandonment in 1999 of the New Order requirement that all non-state organizations adopt the state philosophy of *Pancasila* (five principles) as their “sole ideological foundation” (*asas tunggal*), appeals to local identity, ethnicity, and religion have become a persuasive justification and motivating factor behind the use of violence that both intersects with and transcends material self-interest.¹²⁷ At issue, then, are not just particular configurations of political and economic power, but also more fundamental questions regarding what constitutes post-New Order “Indonesia.”

The proliferation of paramilitary and vigilante groups post-1998 represents a manifestation of the decentralization of violence as a political, social, and economic strategy, with the state losing control as its sole formal source and patron. If we define the state in Weber’s terms, as the entity with a territorial monopoly over “legitimate violence,” then these other groups present a major challenge to restoring public confidence in state institutions and the judicial system. FBR

125. *Ibid.*, 753.

126. Schulte-Bockholt 2001, 225–42.

127. The Pancasila consists of these five principles: belief in one God, civilized humanitarianism, a unified Indonesia, popular sovereignty, and social justice. During the New Order the Pancasila was a central ideological tool through which the state sought to legitimate its authoritarian rule.

and FPI, for example, both legitimize violence and extortion within ideological frameworks in which they conceptualize themselves as acting in lieu of the lapsed state. Violence is justified as an act of necessary rectification rather than direct opposition, in a situation where the state has failed to provide staples such as security, justice, and employment.¹²⁸ Thus, the state might have an opening to engage with valid grievances while simultaneously enforcing the rule of law. So far, it has failed to do either. Local governments have tried to “eliminate” violent elements without elite backing, via police shootings and mass arrests of individual preman, or to incorporate them by employing preman as assistant police officers, such as in Sutiyoso’s war on thugs.¹²⁹ The rationale behind this recruitment is identical to that given by paramilitary and vigilante groups themselves, namely, that with discipline and direction preman can be “reformed” and transformed into law-abiding and productive citizens. The fact that anti-crime campaigns have conspicuously avoided taking action against organized preman groups has provided the groups with added legitimacy, a point of which preman themselves are well aware. During the latest campaign, in August 2005, FBR membership increased dramatically, with as many as three hundred people joining each week. Membership in an established group has become a safe haven from the law. The message sent out to the public is a contradictory one, and an indication of the functional disarray of state institutions. If this remains the extent of the state’s response, the public remains trapped between two types of thugs in uniform, those with state backing and those without. What is required is a multifaceted approach that includes a broad-ranging reconfiguring of state institutions along with measures to address the deep-rooted social and economic causes of violence, such as corruption, unemployment, and endemic poverty. This project is something far more complex and ambitious than merely tackling crime. If the state is now but one of many sources of protection, then in order to regain a monopoly over coercive force without resorting to New Order-style authoritarianism, it must attempt to provide a service that is more comprehensive, accountable, and transparent than any of its would be competitors. In essence it must undermine the free market in organized violence by both regulating the sources of supply and tackling the reasons for demand, including those within state institutions and the political elite.

128. Sung 2004, 111–30.

129. *Detik* 2001.

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