

***State of Disorder: Privatised Violence and the State in Indonesia.***  
**By Abdil Mughus Mudhoffir. Singapore: Springer/Palgrave Macmillan,**  
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There have been numerous studies examining Indonesia in the aftermath of the fall of President Suharto's New Order. The conventional wisdom was that the country would quickly transition to a full and peaceful democracy following the collapse of Suharto's three-decade authoritarian regime. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. In the years that followed, the violence that was commonplace during the Suharto era has endured. For example, ethnic violence between the Dayaks and the Madurese broke out in West Kalimantan and religious conflict between Christian and Muslim groups erupted in Moluccas Islands.

One of the explanations that scholars have utilized to account for violence in states undergoing democratic transition is the fragmentation of authority. For example, in Latin American states such as Mexico and Colombia, the military, police and politicians work hand in hand with crime syndicates and landowners to control and distribute resources. Contestations over the control of resources between rival factions have resulted in outbreaks of violence. While the idea of fragmented authority has its merits, it does not fully account for the violence in Indonesia.

To explain why outbreaks of violence have become rampant after Reformasi in Indonesia, the book employs a critical political economy approach which focuses on how both political and economic forces work together to mould the state and its various institutions. The book asserts that violence in Indonesia has been a byproduct of the predatory state and capital accumulation among the elite, who often forge alliances with privatized violence providers to protect access to resources. According to the author, "The existence of privatised violence organisations is an outcome of the way the state organises coercive institution in its evolution, along with particular kinds of capitalist development" (p. 3). The idea of the predatory state is mentioned throughout the book and refers to the way elites often employ coercive means to accumulate and exploit the country's resources to advance their own interests. This predatory state behaviour accounts for phenomena such as massive deforestation in Kalimantan, land grabs in North Sumatra and demonstrations by

the local population against plans for andesite mining in Wadas, Central Java—incidents where the use of privatized violence has been documented.

According to Mudhoffir, the predatory state has been around since the nineteenth century during the colonial period when the Dutch introduced capitalism into Indonesia. He notes that state resources in Indonesia have since been monopolized and distributed by elites in power. Mudhoffir argues that the perpetuation of the predatory state has “provided the functional base under which privatized violence is very likely to thrive” (p. 39).

During the process of capital accumulation and gaining access to power, elites such as business owners and political actors often maintain alliances with organized gangs and other privatized violence providers to intimidate opponents and protect their access to power and resources. As a result, the author describes how Indonesian democracy often goes hand in hand with “lawlessness, disorder and uncertainty” (p. 10). This dynamic within the predatory state helps to explain the perpetuation of conflict and violence across the country. Mudhoffir also offers insights into how these privatized violence providers often adeptly employ anti-communist rhetoric or mobilize ethnic and religious sentiments to advance their goals, depending on the prevailing political dynamics at various periods in Indonesia’s history.

While Mudhoffir provides a captivating account of violence in Indonesia, the book does have some shortcomings. First, it lacks a detailed account of the foundations of privatized violent groups. How did they come about and what binds them together? Every organization needs its foundations to cement its bonds. Otherwise, its presence may be threatened. Many violent organizations—such as the mafia in Sicily or crime syndicates in New York—originate from groups of people who have traditional ties such as familial bonds. Ideology then serves as a secondary organizational glue. An examination of this important issue is missing from the book, which perhaps relies too heavily on the political economy approach without taking into account the sociological origins of these groups.

Second, prominent instances of violence have never been private. For example, demonstrations against the LGBT community have attracted the attention of many people, some of whom are ready to resort to violence to express their views. In another example, demonstrations against particular religious groups considered heretical

have also drawn support from the masses and have often become violent. Thus, only focusing on privatized forms of violence may not fully explain outbreaks of violence in Indonesia.

Despite these reservations, this book provides keen insights and perspectives that give readers a nuanced understanding of violence in Indonesia. Such insights are particularly timely given the repeated outbreaks of violence in the country in recent years.

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