

Religious violence in Indonesia has been among the nation's trickiest problems. 216 of such attacks occurred in 2010, topped by 244 in 2011 and 264 in 2012.<sup>i</sup> In 1948 Darul Islam, an Islamic militant group, tried to establish an Indonesian Islamic state before getting crushed by the government in 1962. Most of the perpetrators have belonged to Sunni Islam that, in 2000, comprised 88.22% of the Indonesian population.<sup>ii</sup> Despite pleas for religious tolerance by two immensely popular leaders, Soekarno and Suharto,<sup>iii</sup> the violence has continued, albeit episodically, since Indonesia's independence in 1945.

What causes religious violence in Indonesia? Herriman's ethnographic study illuminates the details of the problem. In rural villages of East Java in 1998, the rate of "sorcerer" killings had increased.<sup>iv</sup> While many of the sorcerers were Muslims, the Muslim majority considered them a religious minority of sorcery. The perpetrators were family, friends, or neighbors of the sorcerers. They designated the victims as sorcerers based largely on whether the victims walked at night naked, whether people who had dealings with them fell ill, and whether others told them the victims were in fact sorcerers.<sup>v</sup> The victims were pulled, bludgeoned, stoned, and otherwise beaten until they died.

I hypothesize that the perpetrators' motive was to keep their sense of accepted reality – a knowing that chance is under rules one approves of, whether it be by a deity alone, natural laws, or else – by eliminating threats to it. Living often requires understanding the rules governing that process of living. Unless understood, such rules belong to chance. Understanding them, at least to subjective satisfaction, can be done by either observing or associating. Farming with buffalos yields more crops faster, and bribes render undeserved benefits; these are the observables. The associative is when one's leaders and associates contribute to shaping the rules, like how often one gets invited to a party. Because one often does not directly observe nor shape such rules,

they belong partly to chance. By choosing leaders and associates, one can shape this chance. Beyond this chance is risk with no available avenues for understanding it. Such risk inspires fear and necessitates a label and a cause to make it perceivably controllable. During the U.S. cholera epidemics in 1832, 1849, and 1866, people, not knowing how cholera spread, at times killed non-contagious neighbors to feel safe.<sup>vi</sup> In Herriman's study, a group of otherwise healthy people suddenly fell ill; common to them was one family member. Sorcery therefore, and countered it must be. By defining the cause as a human that is observable, the perpetrators could move the risk to the realm of controllable chance. This chance they could accept as they had accepted accidental deaths by buffalos or floods, which they could try to counter. High in homogenous social capital that united them against the unfamiliar,<sup>vii</sup> the villagers had little doubt in their view. Countering mad buffalos meant sending them to slaughterhouse; so with sorcerers.

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<sup>i</sup> In Religion's Name: Abuses against Religious Minorities in Indonesia, Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 2

<sup>ii</sup> In Religion's Name: Abuses against Religious Minorities in Indonesia, Human Rights Watch, 2013. p. 22

<sup>iii</sup> In Religion's Name: Abuses against Religious Minorities in Indonesia, Human Rights Watch, 2013. p. 10-11

<sup>iv</sup> Herriman, Nicholas. Witch-Hunt and Conspiracy: The 'Ninja Case' in East Java.

<sup>v</sup> Herriman, Nicholas. Witch-Hunt and Conspiracy: The 'Ninja Case' in East Java.

<sup>vi</sup> Rosenberg, Charles. The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866.

<sup>vii</sup> Putman, Robert. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.