

## NON-STATE ACTORS

**Groups running amok**

As Friday prayers ended on a rainy afternoon in late May in Jakarta, Anton Bachrul Alam, the police's vice-head of public relations, faced an unusually testing day. Hundreds of supporters from the moderate Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) had suddenly descended on his office and demanded the dissolution of the hard line Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). The supporters, incensed by the FPI's disturbance of NU Head Gus Dur's speech just four days earlier, left after a few hours and headed for the FPI's headquarters in Tanah Abang.

After hearing that the NU supporters were en route, FPI members gathered outside their office, armed themselves with sticks and clubs, and waited for the imminent confrontation. But on that day a violent street battle was avoided after police blocked the NU supporters and both groups dispersed without incident.

The scene is representative of the latest episode in the country's ongoing problem with often violent, sometimes Islamic vigilante groups, referred to in Indonesia as *ormas*, or *organisasi massa* (people's organisations). Since the fall of Soeharto, these organisations have sprouted up throughout Indonesia and have sporadically targeted alcohol sellers, gambling dens, prostitutes, and small leftist groups, occasionally provoking a few arrests and statements from public officials that such activities will not be tolerated. In recent weeks, however, it was the symbolism of radical Islamic groups shouting down former Indonesian President Gus Dur, a widely revered moderate Muslim leader, which has instigated a new level of concern about such groups and whether they should be banned.

Moves are now afoot within parliament to introduce new legislation, the largest moderate Islamic groups, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, have formed an "Alliance for an Anti-Violent Society" and top public officials such as Jakarta's police chief have publicly stated their commitment to ending such activities. Even the normally reticent President SBY has spoken out against them, stating in June that "no element or community in this country can force their will on others, or do whatever they want and resort to lawlessness."

The *Report* presents a general overview of the organisations that have crowded the headlines in recent weeks, looks at ways of understanding the groups, and examines the current controversy of whether or not they should be forcibly disbanded.

**Different flavours**

The groups presented in Table One are an extremely diverse set of actors. They sit on a continuum ranging from highly intellectual non-violent groups focused on agitating for an Islamic state, such as MMI and HTI, to pure security and protection organisations, centred on ethnic identity like Forkabi and FBR. In between them, lie groups like the FPI, whose formal *raison d'être* is the defence of Islamic morals, but they have also been accused of extortion and protection

rackets. While even more violent is the FKAWJ, whose armed wing, *Laskar Jihad*, was deployed to the troubled region of Ambon, where it inflamed the ethnic conflict there that has claimed some 10,000 lives.

**Table One: Ormas recently appearing in the press**

Name	Date Formed	Goals	Activities
<b>FPI:</b> <i>Front Pembela Islam</i> (Islamic Defenders Front)	1998 (In 22 provinces with 100,000 mostly urban poor members)	Supports imposition of sharia and upholds morality.	Has had a history of violence since its inception, including multiple killings. Also organises “morality sweeps” against nightclubs and alcohol sellers, especially during Ramadan. The group was involved in tsunami aid effort and clearing the dead.
<b>MMI:</b> <i>Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia</i> (Mujahedeem Council for Islamic Law Enforcement)	2000	Imposition of sharia.	Initially established as a federation of Muslim organisations, it has now developed into an independent organisation, linked to a network of <i>pesantrens</i> (Islamic schools). No history of violence, although some suspected links with the terrorist organisation <i>Jemaah Islamiyah</i> . Led by the recently released cleric Abu Bakar Ba’asyir.
<b>FUI:</b> <i>Forum Umat Islam</i> (Islamic Community Forum)	2004	Need for an Islamic president and the encodification of sharia.	Umbrella organisation consisting of a wide variety of Islamic groups and political parties. Originally formed to push for an Islamic president in 2004.
<b>HTI:</b> <i>Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia</i> (The Liberation Party)	Came to Indonesia in the 1970s and 1980s but was founded in the Middle East in the 1950s.	Imposition of sharia and the dissolution of the Indonesian nation-state to be replaced by a transnational model of an Islamic state, the caliphate. Rejects democratic models as a Western invention that are incompatible with Islam.	Demonstrations against US foreign policy and discussions on Islam. Campus-based and middle class members. No history of violence or paramilitary wing.
<b>Forkabi:</b> <i>Forum Komunikasi Anak Betawi</i> (Betawi Communication Forum)	2004	Inclusion of Betawi (ethnic Jakartans) people in Jakarta’s development.	Works in the security sector, has been involved in turf wars with other gangs, leading to killings and serious injuries. Some consider it little more than a protection racket.
<b>FBR:</b> <i>Forum Betawi Rempug</i> (Betawi Brotherhood Forum)	2001	Need to address the political and cultural marginalisation of Betawi people.	Control of local informal sector such as parking and security. Occasional “morality” actions against prostitution, gambling, and alcohol sales, which are attributed to non-Betawis. Small loans and economic initiatives for FBR members.
<b>FKAWJ:</b> <i>Forum Komunikasi Ahlussunnah Wal Jama’ah</i>	1999	To assist Muslims in ethnic conflict in Ambon. (Originally formed to oppose Megawati’s presidential candidacy).	Demonstrations and discussions surrounding the 1999 elections. Formed <i>Laskar Jihad</i> as its paramilitary wing and sent “defenders” to Ambon.
<b>Garda Bangsa:</b> (Nation’s Guardians)	1998	Defend the principles of the Islamic political party the PKB and the mass Islamic organisation NU.	Youth organisation under the wing of the PKB. Has been ordered by Gus Dur to physically safeguard places of worship for minority religions under threat from other radical groups.

The nature of each organisation is also extremely varied. The FBR, for example, is widely considered to be little more than a personal vehicle for the interests of its head, Fadloli el-Muhir, who has a long history as a political entrepreneur. In 1996, it was Fadloli who led the PDI faction that forcibly ousted Megawati from her position as PDI head through his connections to then President Soeharto, who was concerned Megawati was becoming too popular. The FBR was formed on the July 27, 2001, the day in 1996 that the PDI headquarters were stormed.

Through the FBR, Fadli has reportedly used his connections with Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso to physically attack a well-known Indonesian anti-poverty NGO that had protested a Sutiyoso policy to evict street musicians, street vendors, and street children. It is also seen as no coincidence that the FBR was formed just two months after the announcement of a Sutiyoso initiative to deal with street thugs (*preman*). It later became clear that Sutiyoso employed many FBR members as “civilian police assistants” to cleanse the streets of exactly the activities which the FBR had, and continued to undertake.

Such politically opportune motivations for forming an *ormas* can be contrasted to an organisation like HTI. Academic Saiful Umam notes that HTI has never revealed the leader of its Indonesian branch, which is represented by a man claiming to be nothing more than a spokesperson. Saiful suggests that such secrecy may derive from the “bitter experiences of HT leaders in Arab countries, where they have been repressed, tortured and jailed.”

In terms of activities, the FPI has become the most talked about organisation, through its sweeps of entertainment spots and attempted closures of alcohol sellers. Other FPI activities have included the intimidation of well-known figures who publicly oppose the controversial anti-pornography bill and the involvement in turf wars with rival security gangs, the first of which occurred just two months after its formation, leaving 14 dead. Like the MMI, the FPI arrived in Aceh days after the tsunami to help with the aid effort, but was branded “a criminal organisation” by the leader of the Free Aceh Movement after reports of siphoning aid and extortion surfaced.

Most of the Islamic-centred organisations in Box One stepped up the frequency of their demonstrations in response to the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which served to unite these disparate groups under one cause. Otherwise, the more intellectual groups tended to operate on different terrains from their more thuggish colleagues, until the recent disturbance of Gus Dur’s speech that saw the FPI, MMI, HTI, and FUI act in concert.

### A recipe for vigilantism

There are several different ways of understanding the origin and motivations of these groups. Ian Wilson points to the historical continuities between the groups now active in Indonesia and similar vigilante groups used by the state during the New Order.

He writes that “during the New Order the state fostered and utilised a number of quasi-official organisations such as *Pemuda Pancasila*. Drawing from gangs and the criminal underworld of *preman* (thugs), these groups acted as ‘assistants’ to the regime, employing the time-proven methods of physical and psychological intimidation in carrying out what others have referred to as ‘regime maintenance’ chores.”

This practice was continued from the very beginning of the post-1998 *reformasi* period when the military recruited an estimated 30,000 civilians in November 1998 to guard the MPR as its members debated what should be done in the

wake of Soeharto's downfall. According to Wilson, this led political parties and religious and civil organisations to form and expand their own paramilitary forces in reaction to the prevalence of state-sponsored vigilantes. The result was a spike in the number of both civil and state-backed paramilitary and vigilante groups, reflecting a new awareness: if the state can do it, why can't we?

Apart from this political militarisation of some sections of the population, others have focused in particular on the Islamic groups and their links to political parties at the national level. Many of the Islamic *ormas* have acted as pressure groups linked to particular political parties or even just individual political figures to further their agenda of ensuring the election of an Indonesian president who is Muslim oriented or the formal implementation of sharia throughout Indonesia. It has been reported, for example, that the FPI was originally conceived as an auxiliary organisation for the Muslim party PPP but later turned to anti-vice when the party formed its own movement.

Another popular explanation for the existence of these groups centres on the social, political, and economic breakdown that Indonesia has experienced since the fall of Soeharto. Rizal Sukma, Director of Studies at the Indonesian think tank CSIS, has pointed to the pressures facing the Indonesian population, as some 40 million people are unemployed and an additional 1.3 million people are internally displaced due to ethnic and religious conflicts. In effect, such an argument suggests that the problem of these radical groups is not so much religious as social and economic.

Such a view is supported by the experience of many of the ordinary members of these groups, whose reasons for joining vary widely but are often economic. As reported in the local media outlets, a *Garda Bangsa* member admits that he joined the group because he was promised that later he would find work through a cooperative run by NU. FBR members say that they gain work in security or as parking attendants if they join, even if the cost to them is a payment of Rp 100,000 per month to the FBR.

It seems then that the militarisation of civilians and the release of Islamic politics after years of New Order repression combined with millions of jobless youth has produced a lethal cocktail of vigilante groups on Indonesia's streets.

### **An appetite for change?**

What can be done about these groups? Few would disagree that any long-term solution must address deeper and more intractable social and economic issues such as unemployment and ethnic conflict. In the meantime, however, the government must act swiftly against these groups, but it faces something of a quandary; given the experiences under the New Order, many commentators are understandably concerned that the proposed new law to dissolve groups that "disturb security and order" could be used by present or future governments to control freedom of organisation—a right hard won by the *reformasi* movement.

The issue is not so much whether the government should be allowed to ban or control certain groups, but on what basis. Clearly, any actual acts of violence

need to be dealt with more professionally and systematically. Notwithstanding the links between many of these groups and the military and police, any individual breaking the law must be arrested and face the full force of the law, without exception.

But the trickier question of when radical groups should be banned is a dilemma that is faced by governments all over the world and there are no easy answers. Rather than the government drafting laws with such vague wording as “the disturbance of security and order,” it should be focusing on more elaborate issues such as the distinction between offending some one or some thing, fomenting hatred, and inciting violence.

While the right to offend is generally accepted as a democratic right, whether groups should be outlawed for fomenting hatred is more debatable. There are those who suggest that, especially under such fragile social conditions as Indonesia’s, fomenting hatred can not be tolerated and should be appropriately outlawed. Others uphold freedom of speech under all circumstances, maintaining that censoring disagreeable ideas will not make them disappear, rather the only way to deal with them is to make sure they enter the public discourse where bad speech can be mitigated by good speech.

Inciting violence, something that many of the *ormas* in Indonesia are accused of, is a more technical matter which hinges on the legal definition of incitement. Does causation from words to deeds need to be shown? Or should it be defined by the likelihood that it will provoke an immediate response?

These are highly complex questions with which the Indonesian government should now be grappling. But it is also within the legal and judicial sector more broadly that the government’s successes in dealing with these organisations lie. Only when the police are professional enough to deal impartially with the perpetrators of violence and the judges have the capacity and the will to interpret the laws relating to this issue can the problem of vigilante groups be dealt with satisfactorily. □