Glimpses of Indonesia’s 1965 Massacre through the Lens of the Census: Migration and Refuge in East Java

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The widespread anti-Communist violence that followed the kidnapping and assassination of senior Indonesian generals on the morning of October 1, 1965, accounts for perhaps the most traumatic period in Indonesian history. Orchestrated and executed by the Indonesian army and its political allies, the violence resulted in the loss of an estimated 500,000 lives. Much of the research on this subject has focused on the politics surrounding the assassinations and the subsequent political decline of President Sukarno and rise of Major General Suharto, the sociocultural and...
socioeconomic schisms in Java or Bali that pitted different groups against each other, the extent to which the military and civilian organizations involved were responsible for perpetrating the widespread violence, or the killings themselves and their aftermath. Yet it is almost always the case that mass killings are accompanied by migration, as people who are fearful of becoming victims or deprived of their livelihoods flee violent areas in search of refuge. Viewed in this light, the near-complete absence of the phenomenon of migration from the scholarly narrative about 1965 is striking.

The aim of this paper is to explore two questions about migration in Indonesia during the violent months that followed the events of October 1965. First, is there evidence of mass migration associated with the violence and, if so, what is it? Second, what are the strengths and limitations of such evidence and what are its implications for future research? Using data from three Indonesian censuses that were taken prior to or after the killings but within two decades of them, estimates of population change at the kecamatan (sub-regency, or district) level attributable to events during 1965–66 are computed and assessed for patterns that may be indicative of such migrations. Specifically, these estimates can be compared with information collected between 1965 and 1968 to test the hypothesis that locations in which cadres of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) were regrouping in the wake of the killings, as identified by the intelligence apparatus of the Indonesian military, coincide with locations for which there is evidence (i.e., census data) of a large, one-time in-


migration during 1965–66. A second hypothesis is that these refuge locations tended to be in established PKI strongholds, which the army was unable to effectively penetrate, where the PKI’s political opponents had relatively weak support, and where refugees could expect to find shelter among like-minded people. The findings can also provide clues about locations in East Java in which researchers may find additional information about such movements of people and about the 1965–66 killings more generally from survivors and witnesses. It is hoped that the findings of this study will encourage scholars of Indonesian history and politics to conduct complementary research that explores this violence-induced migration, adding an important dimension to our understanding of a defining episode in the history of independent Indonesia.

The present article forms part of a larger project on the killings of 1965–66. A previous paper, also using census data from East Java, identifies a clear pattern of demographic change across the province’s kabupaten (regencies), apparently associated with the violence. This study builds on those findings by drilling down to the level of the kecamatan to provide a more detailed picture of population changes. During the time period under consideration, there were, on average, about fourteen kecamatan per kabupaten. This greater geographic precision enables a comparison with complementary and more-detailed findings on the violence and the response of the PKI to it. In this case, that material comes primarily, but not exclusively, from an intelligence report produced by the Brawijaya Kodam (Indonesian military command) located in East Java.

Data and Sources

This study examines data from Indonesian censuses along with material published by the intelligence apparatus of the Indonesian army in East Java. East Java is a suitable case for the study of violence-related migration for a number of reasons. First, as one of the four most-affected provinces (the others being Central Java, Bali, and Aceh), the East Java census data are more likely to yield evidence of demographic impact than those for other, relatively less-affected provinces. Second, complementary material exists in the form of a detailed army-intelligence report on the movements of PKI cadres in the aftermath of the violence, complete with detailed geographic information. Third, the census data for Java, including East Java, tend to be of higher quality than those for some of the more remote provinces of Indonesia, especially for the 1961 census. Finally, East Java presents a clear-cut case of the role of sociocultural schisms in facilitating the violence, with the youth brigades (Ansor) of the Islamist party Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) collaborating with the Indonesian army to kill their less religiously oriented PKI-affiliated brethren.

7 For instance, the kabupaten that experienced the greatest losses in population were located in the Nahdlatul Ulama-dominated areas of northern East Java. By contrast, the PKI-dominated kabupaten experienced smaller losses and, in some cases, even gains in population that may be indicative of in-migration.
8 Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, Trisula Operation by the 8th Regional Military Command Brawidjaja (Surabaya: Jajasan Taman Tjandrawilwatikta, 1972).
Three censuses were conducted within two decades of the killings—1961, 1971, and 1980. For East Java, population count data were available at the desa (village) level for the 1961 and 1980 censuses, and at the kecamatan (subdistrict) level for the 1971 census. The data from these censuses provide the information necessary, under simplifying assumptions about population growth trajectories before and after the events, to estimate one-time changes in population in the various kecamatans across East Java in 1965–66 using the same conceptual approach I used elsewhere.

Briefly, for each kecamatan, the change in population in 1965–66 was computed by calculating the trajectory of population growth after 1966 using data from the 1971 and 1980 censuses and projecting this trajectory back in time to 1966 to obtain an estimate of population immediately after the killings (see Figure 1). Then, using the population growth rate calculated for the period 1971–80 and adjusting it upward by a fixed amount to reflect the more rapid rate of population growth prior to 1965, an

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11 The first step in estimating the population trajectories in Figure 1 was to ensure that the boundaries of the kecamatan remained constant over time. To facilitate this, lists of desas in each kecamatan as of the 1961 and 1980 censuses were compared. In some instances, desas were reallocated across kecamatans or even kabupaten boundaries as they were modified. (For examples of changes in territorial composition or legal status of districts and cities in East Java, see: Mohammad Ihsan, “Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 2 Tahun 1965 Tentang Perubahan Batas Wilayah Kotapraja Surabaya Dan Daerah Tingkat II Surabaya Dengan Mengubah Undang-Undang No. 12 Tahun 1950, Tentang Pembentukan Daerah-Daerah Kota Besar Dalam Lingkungan Provinsi Jawa Timur, Jawa Tengah, Jawa Barat dan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta” (“Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 for the Year 1965 Concerning the Amendment of the Boundary of the Municipality of Surabaya and the Second Level Administrative Region of Surabaya by Amending Law Number 12 for the Year 1950 Concerning the Establishment of Large Cities in the provinces of East Java, Central Java, and West Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta,” an act of Parliament] (Jakarta: Kementerian Dalam Negeri, Republik Indonesia, 1965); and S. H. Sudharmono, “Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 14 Tahun 1976 Tentang Pembentukan Kota Administratif Jember” [Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 for the Year 1976 Concerning the Establishment of the Administrative City of Jember] (Jakarta: Kementerian Dalam Negeri, 1976).) Because desa-level population data were not available for the 1971 census, in instances for which there were reallocations of desas across kecamatans boundaries, the affected kecamatans were combined for the purposes of computing population counts such that all desa reallocations occurred within the boundaries of these larger (combined) units. The most sweeping instance of such a reallocation occurred, not surprisingly, in South Blitar, where a large-scale administrative reorganization occurred between the 1961 and 1980 censuses. Elements of this reorganization at the desa level are detailed in the Operation Trisula report (See, for example, Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, Operasi Trisula Kodam VIII Brawidjaja, 251–64).

estimate of population just prior to the killings was computed using the population obtained from the 1961 census and growing it by that adjusted rate. A similar upward adjustment to the rate of population growth was also made to the trajectory for the period 1965–71 (not shown in Figure 1). Finally, the discrepancy between the two trajectories provides an estimate, for each kecamatan, of the one-time decrease (or increase) in population coinciding with the time of the killings.

Figure 1: Computation of Estimates of Population Loss/Gain

![Population Trajectories](image)

Note: The population trajectories in the figure appear to be linear, but, given the exponential nature of population growth, are actually curved.


In interpreting the estimates of population change, the reader should be aware of the assumptions underlying these computations and what these estimates do and do not indicate. The key assumptions underlying the estimates are:

- The rate of population growth in any kecamatan between 1971 and 1980 was constant. Therefore, if the population in a kecamatan grew at the rate of 2 percent in 1975–76, for example, it also grew at the rate of 2 percent in 1976–77. This is a standard assumption in demographic analysis. While this premise never precisely holds in reality, what it means is that combining the birth rate, death rate, and net migration rate of the population of a kecamatan yields an annual rate of change of population that is constant over the specified time interval. This assumption is used in the computation of the rate of population growth between 1971 and 1980.

- The rate of population growth between 1961 and the end of 1965, and between the beginning of 1966 and 1971, is constant and equal to the rate of population growth between 1971 and 1980 plus an upward-adjustment factor to reflect the more rapid rate of population growth in East Java prior to 1971 compared to 1971 and after.
• There are no large one-time population loss or gain events in the period 1961–66. This assumption allows us to assume that the trajectory is smooth at all times except for the one-time increase (or decrease) in 1965–66.

• The calculations also implicitly assume that the killings ended in 1966 even though, in actuality, they continued intermittently until 1968. The impact of this assumption on the estimates is minimal because the vast majority of the killings occurred in 1965–66.

The estimate of the population loss in 1965–66 comprises a combination of the effects of higher than normal mortality (from the killings), lower than expected fertility, and one-time migration. In areas where there is a lot of violence it is to be expected that high mortality will be accompanied by decreased fertility and net out-migration. In peaceful and stable areas, “normal” mortality will be accompanied by steady fertility and, possibly, in-migration. Therefore, all three drivers of population change will move the estimate of the one-time change in population in the same direction or will not contribute to change.

Scholars studying large-scale population loss in other parts of Southeast Asia have used data on the age structure of populations to estimate the impact of war or genocide. Unfortunately, reliable data on the age structure of populations at the kecamatan level are not available for East Java for the 1961 census, precluding similar analyses in this case. In addition, even the existing age structure data for the 1961 census of East Java, which are aggregated up to the provincial level, have been the subject of fierce debate and a good deal of skepticism about their accuracy.

Estimates of Population Change, 1965–66

The above assumptions, while common in demographic research, cannot exactly capture the irregularities that are inevitably associated with demographic change in the real world. Therefore, in order to not ascribe meaning to small estimated one-time increases or decreases in population that may be artifacts of the model rather than reflective of a real phenomenon, this paper focuses only on those kecamatan for which population changes were “large,” that is, where the population showed a one-time change of at least 5 percent in 1965–66. Figure 2 is a map of East Java in which the shaded kecamatan show increases in population of at least 5 percent during 1965–66. Interestingly, the computations yield 91 kecamatan that show one-time “large” increases in population. The most likely explanation for these jumps is one-time immigration, because it is unlikely that these kecamatan experienced one-time jumps in fertility or drops in mortality—phenomena which typically do not tend to spike upward (births) or drop downward (deaths) in short bursts.


If, indeed, there was systematic migration from disturbed areas to locations friendly to the PKI, then we would expect to see population build-ups in areas that were known to be PKI strongholds at the time. The map in Figure 3 shows the strength of the PKI in East Java based on the percentage of seats won in the 1957 local elections, the last elections to be held prior to the killings.\(^1\)

Figure 2: Kecamatan with Large Estimated Increases in Population in 1965-66

The shaded areas in Figure 2 showing inferred one-time in-migration generally coincide with the shaded areas in Figure 3 that show strong PKI support in the province’s southwestern and southern coastal kabupaten. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this pattern. For example, unlike the rural kabupaten that experienced a mix of demographic outcomes, the urban areas, some of which were PKI strongholds, uniformly experienced population declines. This can be explained by a number of factors, not the least of which is the strong presence in these locations of the

\(^1\) The use of data on the 1957 elections, while not coincident with the timing of the killings, nevertheless provides a broad portrait of political affiliation in the province. Between those elections and 1965, however, there were some notable changes in the political milieu. For example, the Masyumi party was banned in 1960, and in 1963 the PKI initiated a series of land redistribution (aksi sepihak) actions in East Java that may have altered local politics in the affected areas. Nevertheless, as a general portrait, the data on the elections of 1957 provide a picture that is reflective of the areas of strength for the PKI in the early 1960s as well.
Indonesian army, which perpetrated much of the killing. More generally, variation of this nature is indicative of the complex nature of the one-time population changes associated with the killings and underlines the need to recognize a range of factors that were likely associated with these changes. The broad pattern of overlap between locations with strong PKI support and locations of in-migration also comports with what others have found: “The places they have fled to are in the south (Zuid [Dutch: south] Besuki, Zuid Malang, Zuid Madiun, all the way to Central Java).”

Figure 3: Support for the Communist Party (PKI) in the 1957 Local Elections

A second and more focused source of data that lends added credence to this interpretation of the population change estimates comes from the Indonesian army itself. In 1968, the Indonesian army launched Operation Trisula to eliminate the remnants of PKI’s leadership thought to be regrouping in South Blitar and other parts of East and Central Java. Prior to implementing the operation, the military conducted intelligence operations to identify suspected PKI strongholds. A map from the official account of Operation Trisula, reproduced in Figure 4, shows the locations of these PKI strongholds as identified by military intelligence operations. The large circles in the map show the seven established \textit{kompro} (\textit{Komite Proyek}, or project committee, neighbourhoods).

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17 Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, \textit{Trisula Operation by the 8th Regional Military Command Brawidjaja} (Surabaya: Jajasan Taman Tjandrawilwatikta, 1972), 285.
namely, Kendeng, Lawu, Pandan, Blitar Selatan, K.K.A. [Kelud, Kawi, Arjuna], Semeru, and Raung-Argopuro) and their locations. An eighth one, Bendjeng, was under preparation (persiapan). In addition, two Komite Kota (city committees), in Surabaya and Malang, are displayed as small circles. Because urban areas experienced a different dynamic from rural areas, this study focuses on the seven established rural kompro. A notable feature of these kompro is their location in remote areas with difficult terrain (i.e., the slopes of volcanic complexes and the uneven limestone karst countryside of the southern shore of East Java), a point also noted by Hearman.18

Figure 4: Reproduction of Map in Operation Trisula Report Showing Locations of PKI Komite Proyek

**Kompro and Kecamatan Show Significant Population Increases**

Based on the foregoing, my hypothesis can be restated as follows: every kompro experienced significant in-migration associated with the events and violence of 1965–66. This conditional hypothesis is distinct from the broader one that every location to which there was migration was a kompro stronghold. As noted above, there could have been other characteristics of kecamatan, which are not the focus of this paper, that made them attractive to people fleeing disturbed areas.

Figure 5 overlays the information in Figure 2 (locations of significant population increases) with the \textit{kompro} locations from Figure 4. The results are striking. For all \textit{kompro} located primarily in East Java (Kendeng, the exception, is located for the most part in Central Java), Figure 5 reveals a number of areas of overlap.

Figure 5: Comparison of \textit{Komite Proyek} Locations and One-time Population Increases in 1965-66

![Map showing \textit{Kompro} and Kecamatan with > 5% Population Increase in 1965-66](image)

These correspondences are listed in Table 1. In each case, rather than a single \textit{kecamatan} coinciding with the \textit{kompro} location, there is a cluster of contiguous \textit{kecamatan}. This is important because it suggests that we are not witnessing a one-off \textit{kecamatan}-specific phenomenon stemming, perhaps, from an aberrant census count or population estimate, or a deviation from one of the aforementioned assumptions, but rather something more systematic. This point is reinforced by the fact that all of the clusters of \textit{kecamatan} straddle \textit{kabupaten} boundaries, suggesting that administrative idiosyncrasies of census-taking that may have occurred within a single \textit{kabupaten} are not a plausible alternate explanation for the phenomenon. In other words, every \textit{kompro} experiences in-migration, which supports the aforementioned hypothesis.
Table 1: Kecamatan with 5-percent or Greater One-time Population Change within Kompro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kompro</th>
<th>Kabupaten</th>
<th>Kecamatan</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argopuro (Raung-Argopuro)</td>
<td>Banyuwangi</td>
<td>Gambiran, Genteng, Glagah, Glenmore, Kalibaru, Pesanggaran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jember</td>
<td>Tempurejo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blitar Selatan</td>
<td>Blitar</td>
<td>South Blitar*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tulungagung</td>
<td>South Tulungagung**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kawi (K.K.A., or Kelud-Kawi-Ardjuna)</td>
<td>Blitar</td>
<td>Gandusari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kediri</td>
<td>Pagu, Papar, Purwoasri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malang</td>
<td>Kasembon, Ngantang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mojokerto</td>
<td>Gondang, Jatirejo, Pacet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendeng</td>
<td>Ngawi</td>
<td>Kedunggalar, Mantingan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Java</td>
<td>[estimates not computed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawu</td>
<td>Pacitan</td>
<td>Arjosari, Bandar, Nawangan, Tegalombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ponorogo</td>
<td>Badegan, Sampung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Java</td>
<td>[estimates not computed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandan</td>
<td>Bojonegoro</td>
<td>Balen, Baureno, Kanor, Kedungadem, Keph Baru, Sumberejo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lamongan</td>
<td>Bluluk, Modo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semeru</td>
<td>Lumajang</td>
<td>Candipuro, Pasirian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malang</td>
<td>Ampelgading, Poncokusumo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Bakung, Binangun, Kademangan, Panggunrejo, Suruhwadang, Sutojayan, and Wates
** Campurdarat, Kalidawoi, Pucan Laban, and Tanggung Gunung

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study are consistent with the phenomenon of systematic one-time migration into rural PKI strongholds in the mid-1960s, part of an “impetus to flee the cities of Java” as well as the migration from hostile rural areas to friendly ones. While the body of on-the-ground evidence supporting or disconfirming these results is thin and the data do not enable one to parse the extent to which movements of people constituted urban-to-rural or rural-to-rural migration, the computations align well with the material presented in the Operation Trisula report about the regrouping of PKI cadres in selected areas of East Java, and, more broadly, with data identifying areas of political support for the PKI. Among the sparse literature that anecdotally mentions migration, Hearman focuses in part on interviews with six political prisoners who were arrested in the aftermath of the 1965 violence, some of them or their PKI colleagues having moved to South Blitar from outside the kabupaten. The Operation Trisula report also mentions hundreds of arrests or

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20 See: Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, Operasi Trisula Kodam VIII Brawidjaja (Surabaya: Jajasan Taman Tjandrawiwatika, 1969); and Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, Trisula Operation by the 8th Regional Military Command Brawidjaja.
21 Hearman, “Guerillas, Guns, and Knives?”
executions,\textsuperscript{22} and the rare account of refugees from the violence who “slept in dank caves with hundreds of others,”\textsuperscript{23} corroborates the notion that the number of refugees was, indeed, quite large. As Hughes rightly observed, if the membership of the PKI was three million, then the hundreds of thousands of victims would amount to less than a fifth of the PKI’s membership even if all the victims were PKI members, which they were not.\textsuperscript{24} That left a substantial number of PKI members and supporters alive and at risk. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to expect that similarly large numbers of vulnerable people, again amounting to a fraction of the PKI’s total membership, would have fled the most violence-prone areas.

It is worth repeating that the inferences above about migration are made from computations that are based on the assumptions listed earlier. If any of those assumptions is violated to a significant degree in a particular kecamatan, then the interpretation of the results in the context of that kecamatan will need to be modified. Examples of migrations unrelated to the violence could be due to some other large, one-time shock to the population (for example, a devastating epidemic or weather event, the unequal effects of 1963–65’s hyper-inflation across different parts of Java, or a burst of in-migration related to a specific employment opportunity) or a larger drop in the population growth rate after 1971 than has been assumed for this study, which would change the size of the estimated one-time population change in Figure 1. Therefore, until they are verified using additional evidence, these findings should be treated as a roadmap for future research.

Table 2: Kecamatan Clusters with 5-percent or Greater One-time Population Change Not Located within Kompro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Kabupaten</th>
<th>Kecamatan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawu (North): Ngawi-Magetan</td>
<td>Magetan</td>
<td>Karangmojo, Karangrejo, Maospati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ngawi</td>
<td>Jogororo, Kendal, Ngrambe, Sine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liman-Wilis: Madiun-Ponorogo-N. Trenggalek-N. Tulungagung</td>
<td>Madiun</td>
<td>Gemarang, Kare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ponorogo</td>
<td>Ngebcl, Pulung, Soko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trenggalek</td>
<td>Bendungan, Tugu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tulungagung</td>
<td>Pagerwojo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest Coast: Pacitan, S. Trenggakek, S. Tulungagung</td>
<td>Pacitan</td>
<td>Kebon Agung, Ngadirejo, Pring Kuku, Tulakan, Sudimoro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trenggalek</td>
<td>Gandusari, Kampak, Munjungan, Panggul, Pule, Watulimo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tulungagung</td>
<td>Bandung, Besuki, Pakel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps the most surefire way to confirm or disconfirm the findings for the different locations identified as in-migration hot spots is to conduct field research. To this end, this study may also be viewed as a guide to locations (Table 1), hitherto for the most part ignored or under-studied, which are ripe for such research. Additional

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example, Semdam VIII Brawidjaja, \textit{Operasi Trisula Kodam VIII Brawidjaja}, 176, 187, 229–34.


\textsuperscript{24} Hughes, \textit{The End of Sukarno}, 196.
promising locations that lie outside the focus of this paper because they were not contained within the regions (circles) identified as *kompro* by the Operation Trisula report include the *kecamatan* listed in Table 2.

Three such locations are the North Lawu area (Magetan-Ngawi), the Liman-Willis complex (Madiun–Ponorogo–North Trenggalek–North Tulungagung), and the southwestern coast of East Java (Pacitan-South Trenggalek–South Tulungagung). It is possible that these areas were also congregating locations for PKI survivors, but eluded the attention of Indonesia’s military intelligence. For example, a telegram from the US Consulate in Surabaya states, “From news report appears possible some armed forces units Madiun may be pro-PKI and PKI elements from Central Java may be penetrating Patjitan, hoping eventually use as access to sea.” Or, these areas’ remoteness may have attracted people who felt that their lives might be in danger if they remained in more densely populated and often urban environs, and among people who knew them, their social networks, and their political leanings. It is hoped that this study will encourage scholars adept at using field-research techniques to venture into such locations to obtain personal accounts from witnesses or those who are knowledgeable about the events in these areas.
