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Abstract

**Routine violence in the Javanese districts:
neo-Malthusian and social justice perspectives**

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This paper examines the role of population pressure and vertical inequality, and their possible joint effects on routine violence across Javanese districts. It looks at violence from the perspectives of neo-Malthusian and social justice. These issues are highly relevant for Java. Inhabited by 128 million people, it is the most populous island on earth and the most densely populated island in Indonesia, making it classically Malthusian. The effects of global climate change (e.g. rising sea level) and environmental degradations are likely to deepen the Malthusian scenario for Java. Unlike the country as a whole, the island is ethnically very homogenous. We employ count data panel data regression technique of 98 Javanese districts during 1994-2003.

Using population density as the indicator of population pressure, we empirical evidence of the neo-Malthusian conflict scenario. Although the role of vertical inequality in conflict has been largely discounted in cross-country study, we find a U-shaped relationship between routine violence. It means that violence will decline as inequality rises from a low level; however, as inequality keeps rising, violence will reach a turning point at a lowest point, where violence starts to increase as inequality continues to rise. Our results point to a tolerable level of vertical inequality at the value of income, the Gini coefficient is at 0.34. It indicates that there is some optimal distribution that minimises conflict. Either an increase or a decrease from this middle range of inequality is likely to disturb the social peace, and this is what Hirschman (1973) refers to "tolerance for inequality". Lower levels of inequality might reflect stagnant hopes. But people, observing the incomes of others rising at a faster rate than their own, interpret this as a signal of social mobility. They patiently wait for their turn of better fortunes. However, at higher degrees of inequality this effect is likely to break down, as many people find their expectations unfulfilled and lose hope of catching up with the beneficiaries of a higher a higher Gini coefficient.

On the upswing part of the U-curve between inequality and violence, the violence inducing risk of higher inequality is aggravated if it coincides with higher population density or larger size of youth bulges. The logics are in order. Inequality induced grievances would be more intense and spread quicker in more densely populated localities, Rwanda is another telling example in this respect. Since youths are the main perpetrators of any kinds of social violence, or in other words youth is an important agent of violence, higher levels of inequality potentially add to youth frustration. In sum, these findings point to an unsafe mixture of population pressure and inequality.