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Indonesian Civilians' Attributions for Anti-Chinese Violence During the May 1998 Riots in Indonesia

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Abstract

The present research examines the perceptions of Indonesian civilians regarding the May 1998 riots, which occurred at the end of the period of military dictatorship in Indonesia and included looting, rapes, and murders, disproportionately targeting Chinese Indonesians. Using a mixed methods approach, the research explores the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender as factors associated with perceptions of the extent and causes of the riots. It aims to contribute to the literature concerning the Ultimate Attribution Error, and to the psychology of intergroup relations in non-WEIRD contexts more broadly. An online survey with qualitative and quantitative components was administered to 235 participants (134 Pribumi and 101 Chinese Indonesian participants). The present research provides what may be the first documentation of civilian perceptions of the May 1998 riots. Significant differences consistent with the Ultimate Attribution Error were found between perpetrator and victim groups' accounts. Participants who are Pribumi (the group involved in perpetrating the violence) attributed the causes of the violence to external factors more strongly, while participants who are Chinese Indonesians (the victim group) attributed the causes of the mass violence more strongly to the internal factors of perpetrators. There was no evidence, however, that gender affected perceptions, despite the gendered nature of the violence.

Keywords

ultimate attribution error, May 1998 riots, Indonesia, intergroup relations, non-WEIRD

The dark side of intergroup relations has manifested in incidents of genocide and mass violence around the world, recurring in colonization, wars, and ethnic rioting. We presently study the country of Indonesia, where historical violence includes the war for decolonization, the mass killings of 1965-1966, and long-lasting violence in Papua, Aceh, and East Timor (Davies, 2006; Melvin, 2018; Raben, 2012), as well as persecution toward minority groups (Coppel, 1983; Purdey, 2006). Our focus is the mass violence that marked the end of General Suharto's "New Order" regime (1966–1998), the May 1998 riots.

Critically, these riots—as with other mass violence perpetrated during the New Order—are a taboo topic in Indonesia (see Bubandt, 2008; Kusno, 2010; Roosa, 2020). In the two decades since, there has yet to be any judicial investigation

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into, or redress for, the widespread looting, arson and murder, directed predominantly against Chinese Indonesians. There is no official account about these events or what caused them, and no formal record of the perpetrators or victims. Given the lack of public discussion about these events, this study makes a novel contribution to understanding everyday Indonesians' perceptions of what caused the May riots. To our knowledge, the present research provides the first scholarly account surveying civilians' perceptions of these events. Generally, our research aims to understand whether in the context of mass ethnic violence, participants' ethnicity and gender will relate to how they attribute the causes for the violence.

To understand how people see examples of violence between groups such as the riots, a social psychological perspective may be fruitful. We specifically consider attribution theory, and in particular the Ultimate Attribution Error (UAE) (Pettigrew, 1979), to explain civilians' perceptions of this critical event in modern Indonesian history. This study examines how *Pribumi* Indonesians (those whose ancestors were originally from the Malay archipelago[1]) and Chinese Indonesians explain the extent and causes of the mass riots of May 1998.

In the first part of this paper, we describe the Ultimate Attribution Error as the theoretical framework for this research. We then examine the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender in our analysis (see Cole, 2009; Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2018), which aims to present a novel contribution to the psychology of intergroup relations more broadly, including in non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) contexts (see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

The Ultimate Attribution Error in Intergroup Relations

Attribution "errors" (or "bias", see Kruglanski & Ajzen, 1983) involve differences in perceptions regarding the causes of events based on one's social position. For example, the "fundamental attribution error" is the tendency to underestimate the role of situational factors and overestimate personal factors as causes of other people's behaviour (Heider, 1944; Ross, 1977), compared to explanations for one's own actions. For example, when a colleague is fired from work, I may blame that individual's personal failings (attribution to the internal characteristics of that person). In contrast, if I am fired, I believe myself to have been the victim of unfair treatment (attribution to external factors).

Pettigrew (1979) extended this attribution error or bias to the group level, calling it the "ultimate attribution error". In the ultimate attribution error, often individuals attribute a socially undesirable act of an ingroup member to external factors, while an undesirable act of an outgroup member is attributed to internal factors (see Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979). This group bias is consistent with social identity theory, in which individuals experience a shared collective identity that shapes their perceptions and actions, based on their membership in a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Previous research on collective violence in Western contexts suggests that there are different identity concerns and psychological needs for victim and perpetrator groups (Bilewicz & Vollhardt, 2012; Hirschberger, 2018; Vestergren, Drury, & Hammar Chiriac, 2019). Perpetrator group members are more concerned with protecting their in-group's moral identity and avoiding responsibility and consequences, while victim group members are concerned with protecting their in-group from further harm and having their victimisation acknowledged (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019). A range of studies have demonstrated this ingroup and outgroup bias in other contexts, showing that the UAE occurs in the judgements of groups with a history of intense conflict and negative stereotypes, or in those communities which experience high levels of prejudice, and are perceived to be socioeconomically advantaged (Doosje & Branscombe, 2003; Hewstone, 1990; Hunter, Stringer, & Watson, 1991).

Our study contributes a valuable new case (*Pribumi*/ethnic Chinese violence in Indonesia in 1998) to the very limited research conducted on UAE in non-WEIRD contexts. The few studies conducted about UAE in non-WEIRD contexts, such as Khan and Liu (2008); Khandelwal, Dhillon, Akalamkam, and Papneja (2014); Misra and Mishra (2020), did not fully support the UAE. In-group members did not necessarily attribute out-group members' harmful actions to internal factors, and thus no intergroup bias was found in their research. Thus, further research into intergroup attribution bias within other non-WEIRD contexts is needed, particularly in contexts where there is a history of conflict. In our study,

1) The term "*Pribumi*" is contested, but means Indonesians with historical origins in the Malay archipelago, sometimes translated as "Indigenous" or "Native" Indonesians (see Setijadi, 2019).

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where there is history of discrimination and conflict between *Pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians (Melvin, 2013; Tan, 2008), we hypothesized that if a participant were Chinese Indonesian (belonging to the victim group), s/he may attribute the causes of the mass violence during the riots to the internal factors of perpetrators. On the other hand, if a participant were *Pribumi* Indonesian (belonging to the group involved in perpetrating the violence) s/he may attribute the causes of the violence to external factors.

The UAE is interpreted as motivated bias, whereby groups in the same conflict have different psychological representations of the same event (see Bilali & Vollhardt, 2019). However, another explanation for bias could be differing sources of information. For example, people in the victim group may have formed their understandings about these events based on personal experiences or word of mouth from family and friends, whereas people from the perpetrator group may have obtained their information from media stories. The present research explicitly tests this for the first time, examining whether the source of information was a mechanism that reinforces group differences in attribution bias for the May 1998 riots.

In addition to examining perceptions of the causes of the violence, the present research examines perceptions of the extent of the violence, in terms of the number of victims. At the interpersonal level, victims perceive more harm compared to the participants belonging to the perpetrator group (see Baumeister & Hastings, 2013; Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012). Similarly, at the intergroup level, the in-group's victimisation may be categorized as more severe than other groups', sometimes termed "competitive victimhood" (Noor, Vollhardt, Mari, & Nadler, 2017). In the present research, we explored whether group differences in evaluations of the riots would be observed in victim estimates, so that Pribumi would minimise the number of victims compared to Chinese Indonesia participants.

Research Context

The riots of 12–15 May 1998 occurred against a backdrop of great political and economic unrest in Indonesia, with a student-led protest movement calling for an end to the military regime (Aspinall, Feith, & Van Klinken, 1999). At the height of these demonstrations in early May 1998, military leaders sought to deflect anger by scapegoating Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority, blaming them for the economic crisis crippling the country (Purdey, 2006; Tim Relawan Untuk Kemanusiaan, 1998/1999).

The Indonesian government undertook a partial investigation months after the riots which did little to shed light on the violence or the actors involved (Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta, 1998). An in-depth civil society-led investigation undertaken shortly after the riots (see Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta, 1998), in comparison, found that the violence had been incited and led by military actors but with widespread civilian involvement, and estimated that at least 1,000 people had been killed, and an unknown number of Chinese women and girls raped (Tan, 2008; Wandita, 1998). To explain the violence, some researchers have drawn attention to the simultaneous violent attacks across multiple areas of the capital that would have required military organisation and training (Purdey, 2006; Siegel, 1998; Strassler, 2004). Others have also highlighted a longer history of discrimination and violence against the Chinese community to contextualise the riots (Chua, 2007; Purdey, 2006).

Based on the existing research, we identified a range of possible attributions for the causes of the riots, which we classified as either internal or external. The Asian financial crisis, anger at the government, and anger at the police/security services were categorised as relevant external or situational causes, because they are attributable to the political crisis and how the military regime responded. Anti-Chinese prejudice by the *Pribumi* community, criminal motives (e.g., desire to loot and rape), and government scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians (if the government is seen as representative of *Pribumi* rather than an oppressive outside force) were categorised as internal or dispositional causes, because these are attributable to the characteristics and actions of the perpetrators themselves. We are also open to new themes that could describe the attributions for the riots, so a mixed-method approach was used in this study. Quantitative measures were used to examine previously identified themes, while qualitative sections of the survey allowed participants to provide additional information, pointing to new themes and enriching insights into their perceptions.

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Intersectionality of Ethnicity and Gender

While exploring perceptions of the riots in relation to ethnicity is clearly relevant, as a second contribution of the paper, we draw on the proposition that in intergroup attributions, it is also useful to look at how intersectionality plays a role in influencing how people think and relate to their ingroup and outgroup members (Crenshaw, 1991; Warner et al., 2018). Intersectionality as a framework draws attention to the extent to which no single aspect of identity (e.g., ethnicity) should be studied in isolation without reference to other aspects of identity (e.g., gender) (Collins, 1990).

In this paper, we look at the intersectionality of two highly salient, interrelated, social identities that were critical both during the riots, and to the perceptions of what caused the violence: ethnicity and gender. Both identities are important: ethnicity because of the longstanding ethnic prejudice against Chinese Indonesians and the violence directed towards them as a group during the riots; and gender, because a major element of the violence was the deliberate targeting of Chinese Indonesian women and girls for sexual assaults.

In the quantitative section, we hypothesize that the participants' ethnicity and gender will affect responses primarily in relation to memberships in the respective perpetrator and victim groups. Overall, we expect to find an effect of participant's ethnicity, such that *Pribumi* participants are more likely to minimize the events, and to attribute them to situational factors than Chinese Indonesian participants. We expect this effect to be magnified for *Pribumi* men, in a gender x ethnicity interaction. Similarly, we expect to find that Chinese Indonesian participants are more likely to attribute the events to internal or dispositional factors of perpetrators, and we expect that this effect will be magnified for Chinese women. While on the qualitative section, we expect to see how the narratives of gender and ethnicity appeared when participants talk about general and sexual violence during the riots.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were Indonesian adults who met the following criteria: 1) Indonesians who were in Indonesia at the time of the riots; and, 2) over age 30, since this event happened 21 years before the survey was administered. This survey included qualitative and quantitative components. Only participants who completed at least 90% of the qualitative and quantitative components were included in the analysis. For the quantitative components, there was a total of 228 participants (M_{age} = 41.11, *SD* = 9.13). From the sample, 56.14% (*n* = 128) were *Pribumi* and 43.86% (*n* = 100) were Chinese Indonesians; 46.05% (*n* = 105) were male, 53.51% (*n* = 122) were female, and 0.44% (*n* = 1) preferred not to say. For the qualitative components, there were 235 participants (M_{age} = 41.07, *SD* = 9.07), of whom 57.02% (*n* = 134) were *Pribumi* and 42.98% (*n* = 101) were Chinese Indonesians; 45.96% (*n* = 108) were male, 53.62% (*n* = 126) were female, and 0.43% (*n* = 1) preferred not to say. We recruited participants until we had reached a minimum of 100 *Pribumi* and 100 Chinese Indonesians, basing our sample size on previous research (e.g. Khan & Liu, 2008).

Design

Quantitative analyses examined perceptions according to participant and target ethnicity and gender, and qualitative analyses were based on Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis. The qualitative data complements the information in the quantitative data, and considers how people explain the causes of the riots in more detail within the particular socio-economic and political context of the riots. This mixed-method study aims to give understanding to a complex phenomenon with statistical analyses as well as to explain the phenomena qualitatively (Creswell, 1999).

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee at The University of Queensland. An online survey was conducted with snowball sampling over a period of two months (March–April 2020). The recruitment material and survey were drafted in English, then the lead author translated them into Indonesian, and the third author reviewed

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the translation. A link to the online survey was shared through emails and various social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), asking for voluntary participation through the authors' personal contacts.

When a person wished to participate, s/he clicked on the link, which then opened the online survey as a separate URL. The first page of the survey contained the participant information sheet and consent form, which explained the background and study purposes, risks associated with the project, voluntary participation, the possibility for withdrawal, and data confidentiality. Participants first completed the demographics questions, then provided qualitative data, and finally completed the quantitative questions. All data were collected and recorded anonymously. Most participants took between 15 and 30 minutes to complete the survey, depending on the level of detail they chose to include in the open-ended responses.

Measures

Demographic Data

For the demographic data, participants were asked about: their gender (coded 1: Male; 2: Female; 3: Prefer not to say); age (must be minimum of 30 years old); and ethnicity (1: Javanese; 2: Sundanese; 3: Batak; 4: Balinese; 5: Minang; 6: Chinese Indonesians; 7: other (please specify)). For the responses to ethnicity, numbers 1 to 5 and 7 were grouped as *Pribumi*, thus we used two ethnic categories for this study: *Pribumi* (coded as 1) and Chinese Indonesian (coded as 2).

The Causes for the Riots: Quantitative Data

For the quantitative data, participants indicated their agreement with six suggested causes using quantitative measures on 7-point Likert-scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The causes were: 1) the Asian financial crisis; 2) anger at the government; 3) anti-Chinese prejudice; 4) criminal motives; 5) anger at the police; and 6) government scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians. Participants were asked if there were other causes and to specify them (33 respondents listed other causes, including political interests, low education, and provocation by political actors).

The Causes for the Riots: Qualitative Data

Participants first described their perceptions of what caused the riots in text boxes with unlimited character lengths. Specifically, they were asked: "What do you think were some of the causes of the May 1998 riots?", under which there were additional prompting questions: "What factors made the riots start, and why were there riots in some areas and not others? What factors made the riots last as long as they did, and what made them stop?".[2]

Participants' Sources of Information About the Riots

Participants also rated the extent to which different sources of information during and after the riots shaped their understanding about the causes of the May 1998: 1) direct personal experience ("I was there"); 2) talk with family; 3) talk with friends; 4) internet; 5) newspapers; 6) television; and 7) other (please specify), each with a 7-point scale from 1, not at all, to 7, strongly relying. No respondent listed other sources.

The Victims of the Riots

With regard to the victims of the mass violence, participants were asked to indicate their best estimate for how many Chinese Indonesians and other Indonesians were attacked physically or killed. Participants were also asked to indicate how many Chinese Indonesian and other Indonesian women and girls were attacked sexually. Participants were

2) The whole survey consisted of six open-ended questions with unlimited character lengths and four quantitative questions with Likert-scales. We report the qualitative question on causes in the present paper; the other five open-ended questions will be analysed elsewhere. We report quantitative questions on estimates of victims for rapes and murders, perceived causes, and sources of information in this paper; the other quantitative questions were about personal and family impact for the riots. We initially planned to report the results in only one paper. However, it became clear that the data were too rich and we have chosen to focus on the perceived extent and causes of the riots in the present manuscript, with further analyses to follow in a subsequent paper on the impacts of the riots.

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informed that there were no right or wrong answers and were asked to indicate their estimates for those physically attacked/killed, and those sexually assaulted, using a 5-point ordinal scale coded 1, none; 2, < 100; 3, 101-500; 4, 501-1000; and 5, > 1000.

Results

The results of this study are divided into two sections: first, participants' ratings of the causes, sources, and victims of the riots are analysed quantitatively; and second, the themes generated from the analysis of the qualitative responses are examined.

Quantitative Findings

Preliminary Analysis

The quantitative data were first examined for normality using skewness and kurtosis values. A copy of the data and syntax is available at online OSF (Open Science Framework) repository (https://bit.ly/34naHod). Preliminary analyses of normality indicated that many of the variables were negatively skewed and kurtotic. The data were then transformed using a log10 transformation procedure and all test results were compared using the original and transformed data. The results of the transformed data did not change the significance of the data, and thus the analyses below report the results for the untransformed data, except where noted. The means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations for the pooled sample are reported in Table 1.

Based on the data above, participants most strongly identified anger towards the government and anti-Chinese prejudice as the main causes of the riots. Secondary causes identified were criminal motives of the perpetrators, and the scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians by the New Order government. Causes for the riots that were rated less strongly by participants were the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 and anger at the police.

In terms of the sources, as shown in Table 1, participants most strongly identified that they relied on newspapers and television to gather information about the riots. They were less likely to rely on the Internet and information from their family and relatives. Information from personal experience was rated at just below the midpoint of the scale (Table 1), perhaps indicating that many participants had no direct personal experience of the riots at the time. With regard to estimates of the number of victims, participants perceived that the victims who were killed and sexually attacked in the May 1998 riots were predominately Chinese Indonesians.

Main Data Analysis

Three analyses were then conducted to test the impact of participants' intersectional gender and ethnicity on the causes of the riots, sources of information, and estimated number of victims. Two three-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the perceived causes of the riot and sources of participants' information in relation to two between-groups factors (participant ethnicity and gender) and one repeated-measures factor (causes of the riots or sources of information, respectively). Finally, estimates of the number of victims in the riots were examined in a four-way ANOVA with two repeated-measures factors (victim ethnicity; victimisation type) and two between-groups factors (participant ethnicity and gender). For the analyses involving repeated-measures factors, Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied although the full degrees of freedom are reported here.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-Correlations (Pooled Sample)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Age	41.11	9.129																		
2. Victims: Chinese killed	3.88	1.066	-.067																	
3. Victims: *Pribumi* killed	2.83	1.213	-.070	.431**																
4. Victims: Chinese sexually attacked	3.26	0.994	-.093	.708**	.419**															
5. Victims: *Pribumi* sexually attacked	2.04	1.021	-.028	.276**	.614**	.469**														
6. Cause: Financial crisis	4.65	1.999	-.278**	-.029	.025	-.040	.010													
7. Cause: Anger at government	5.53	1.751	-.196**	-.014	.101	-.088	.088	.426**												
8. Cause: Anti-Chinese prejudice	5.51	1.829	-.091	.288**	.104	.276**	-.020	.150*	.074											
9. Cause: Criminal motives	5.13	1.726	-.066	.243**	.083	.266**	.087	.125	.010	.546**										
10. Cause: Anger at police	3.96	1.873	-.282**	.077	.137*	.064	.176**	.263**	.423**	.177**	.239**									
11. Cause: Government scapegoated Chinese	5.31	1.915	-.056	.304**	.086	.296**	.028	-.122	-.142*	.390**	.322**	.214**								
12. Cause: Others	4.66	2.259	.248	.319*	.190	.260	.097	-.127	-.274*	.428**	.224	-.165	.390**							
13. Source: Personal experience	3.73	2.278	.140*	.239**	.076	.158*	-.039	.094	.050	.175**	-.016	-.041	.101	.149						
14. Source: Families	4.54	1.815	.031	.124	.046	.085	-.034	.097	.078	.332**	.179**	.034	.165*	.086	.348**					
15. Source: Friends	4.91	1.717	.142*	.169*	.033	.126	-.025	.185**	.129	.448**	.214**	.152*	.137*	.261	.433**	.588**				
16. Source: Internet	4.95	1.927	.034	.138*	.067	.150*	.102	.066	.082	.162*	.129	.119	.201**	-.169	.033	.126	.274**			
17. Source: Newspaper	5.35	1.678	-.035	.207**	.156*	.183**	.047	.166*	.250**	.262**	.145*	.127	.063	-.132	.207**	.312**	.363**	.543**		
18. Source: TV	5.59	1.510	.082	.156*	.063	.112	.063	.079	.192**	.137*	.071	.028	-.022	-.119	.165*	.233**	.238**	.324**	.679**	

Note. Age range = 30–73; Response range for the estimates of victims = 1–5 (1 = None; 2 = < 100; 3 = 101–500; 4 = 501–1000; 5 = > 1000); Response range for the causes and sources = 1–7 (Causes: 1 = Strongly agree; 7 = Strongly disagree; Sources: 1 = Not at all; 7 = Strongly relying).
*p < .05. **p < .01.

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The Perceived Causes of the Riots by Participant Ethnicity and Gender

Participants' ratings of the perceived causes of the riots were examined in a 2 (participant gender: male/female) x 2 (participant ethnicity: *Pribumi*/Chinese Indonesian) x 6 (type of cause) ANOVA. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of type of cause, $F(5, 1075) = 34.673$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .139$. As can be seen in Table 2, anti-Chinese prejudice was perceived as the strongest cause of the riots, followed by anger at the government, the government's deliberate scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians, criminal motives, the Asian financial crisis, and anger at the police. However, the main effect of type of cause of the riots was qualified by a significant interaction with participant ethnicity, $F(5, 1075) = 12.559$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .055$, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perceived Causes of the Riots by Participant Ethnicity and Gender

	External Causes						Internal Causes					
	Anger at Government		Financial Crisis		Anger at Police		Anti-Chinese Prejudice		Government Scapegoated Chinese		Criminal Motives	
Participant Ethnicity / Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Pribumi												
Male	6.00	1.41	5.08	1.86	4.34	1.91	5.23	2.08	4.98	2.02	4.85	1.86
Female	5.73	1.70	4.70	2.04	4.23	1.81	5.37	1.80	4.88	2.05	4.93	1.89
Chinese												
Male	4.58	2.14	4.02	2.11	3.05	1.75	5.74	1.63	5.74	1.79	5.26	1.51
Female	5.42	1.60	4.55	1.942	3.87	1.75	5.95	1.53	5.75	1.61	5.62	1.37
Total	5.53_{ab}	1.75	4.65_{c}	1.999	3.96_{d}	1.87	5.55_{a}	1.83	5.31_{ab}	1.92	5.15_{b}	1.73

Note. Response range = 1–7 (1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree); Means with different subscripts within a row indicate significant difference ($p < .05$). Follow-up comparisons of the transformed data differ however in showing that criminal motives are significantly lower than anger at government and perceptions that the government scapegoated Chinese Indonesians.

Simple effects of participant ethnicity were then conducted, and were significant for each of the six possible causes of the riots. As can be seen in Table 2, *Pribumi* participants attributed stronger causality than the Chinese Indonesian participants to the financial crisis, $F(1, 215) = 5.046$, $p = .026$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$, anger at the government, $F(1, 215) = 14.001$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .061$, and anger at the police, $F(1, 215) = 11.234$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$. In contrast, Chinese Indonesian participants attributed stronger causality than the *Pribumi* participants to anti-Chinese prejudice, $F(1, 215) = 5.003$, $p = .026$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$, criminal motives, $F(1, 215) = 5.543$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .025$[3], and deliberate government scapegoating of the Chinese community, $F(1, 215) = 9.898$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .044$. There were no significant gender or ethnicity main effects, and no interactions involving gender were significant, Fs < 3.808, ps > .051, $\eta_p^2 < .018$.

The Sources of Participants' Information by Participant Ethnicity and Gender

A 2 (participant gender: male/female) x 2 (participant ethnicity: *Pribumi*/Chinese Indonesian) x 6 (type of sources) ANOVA was conducted to examine participants' ratings of how much they relied on various information sources. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of type of source, $F(5, 1070) = 41.264$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .162$. As can be seen in Table 3, television was perceived as the highest source of information about the riots, followed by newspapers, the Internet, friends, family, and personal experiences. The main effect of type of source of information about the riots was not qualified by a significant interaction with participant ethnicity, $F(5, 1070) = 1.430$, $p = .227$, $\eta_p^2 = .007$. There were no

3) The simple effect is marginal ($p = .074$) in the transformed data.

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significant gender or ethnicity main effects, and no interactions involving gender were significant, *F*s < 3.727, *p*s > .054, η_p^2 < .018.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for the Sources of Information by Participant Ethnicity and Participant Gender

Participant	TV		Newspaper		Internet		Friends		Family		Personal Experience	
Ethnicity / Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Pribumi												
Male	5.81	1.46	5.41	1.66	5.07	1.85	5.03	1.84	4.34	2.05	3.76	2.46
Female	5.30	1.55	5.00	1.78	4.16	2.05	4.57	1.77	4.43	1.82	3.43	2.33
Chinese												
Male	5.65	1.62	5.44	1.79	5.23	1.96	5.07	1.53	4.58	1.87	4.14	2.18
Female	5.55	1.49	5.49	1.54	5.56	1.45	5.09	1.59	4.80	1.52	3.45	2.05
Total	5.58_a	1.51	5.32_b	1.68	4.96_c	1.93	4.94_c	1.72	4.54_d	1.82	3.68_e	2.28

Note. Response range = 1–7 (1 = Not at all; 7 = Strongly relying); Means with different subscripts within a row indicate significant difference (p < .05). Follow-up comparison of the transformed data differ however in showing that reliance on family was not significantly different from either reliance on friends or personal experiences (*p*s > .05).

The Estimated Number of Chinese and Pribumi Victims by Participant Ethnicity and Gender

A 2 (participant gender: male/female) x 2 (participant ethnicity: *Pribumi*/Chinese Indonesian) x 2 (victim ethnicity: Chinese Indonesian/*Pribumi*) x 2 (victimisation type: killed/raped) ANOVA was conducted, and revealed a significant main effect of the type of victimisation, $F(1, 218) = 206.661$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .487$, as well as a significant main effect of victim ethnicity, $F(1, 218) = 335.294$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .606$, and a significant main effect of participant ethnicity, $F(1, 218) = 4.697$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$. As can be seen in Table 4, the main effect of victimisation type reveals that there were more victims perceived to have been killed than raped. In addition, the main effect of victim ethnicity reveals that there were more Chinese Indonesian victims perceived than *Pribumi* victims, and the main effect of participant ethnicity reveals that the *Pribumi* participants perceived more victims overall than the Chinese Indonesians did. These main effects, however, were qualified by significant interactions between victim ethnicity and participant ethnicity, $F(1, 218) = 22.913$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .095$, as well as victimisation type and victim ethnicity, $F(1, 218) = 5.042$, $p = .026$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Estimated Number of Victims by Participant Ethnicity and Participant Gender, as well as Victim Ethnicity and Type of Victimisation

	Chinese killed		Chinese raped		*Pribumi killed*		*Pribumi raped*	
Participant Ethnicity / Gender	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
Pribumi								
Male	3.95	1.10	3.36	1.05	3.20	1.35	2.41	1.16
Female	3.73	1.16	3.14	1.17	3.02	1.09	2.09	1.02
Chinese								
Male	3.98	0.98	3.38	0.85	2.57	1.19	1.79	0.81
Female	3.89	0.99	3.18	0.77	2.40	1.07	1.75	0.84
Total	3.88_a	1.07	3.26_b	0.99	2.83_c	1.21	2.04_d	1.02

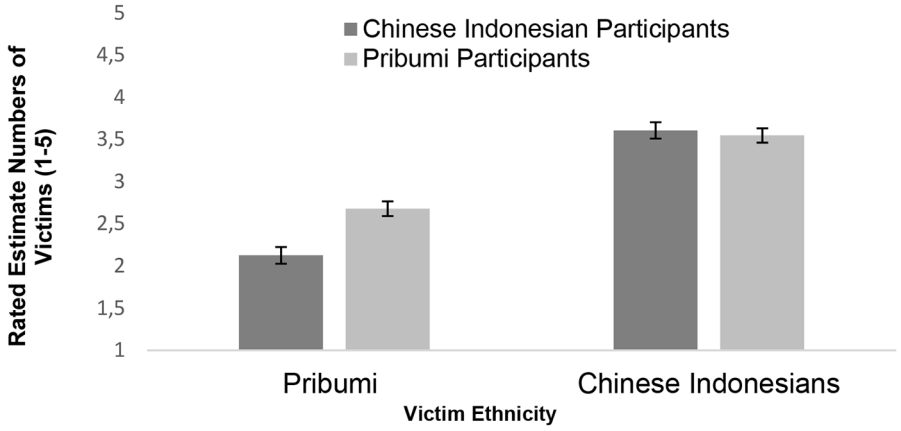
Note. Response range = 1–5 (1 = None; 2 = < 100; 3 = 101–500; 4 = 501–1000; 5 = > 1000). Means with different superscripts within a row indicate significant differences (p < .05).

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The gender main effect was not significant, and there were no other significant interactions, *F*s < 1.748, *p*s > .187, η_p^2 < .009. The simple effects of victim ethnicity are discussed below and the interactions are plotted in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1

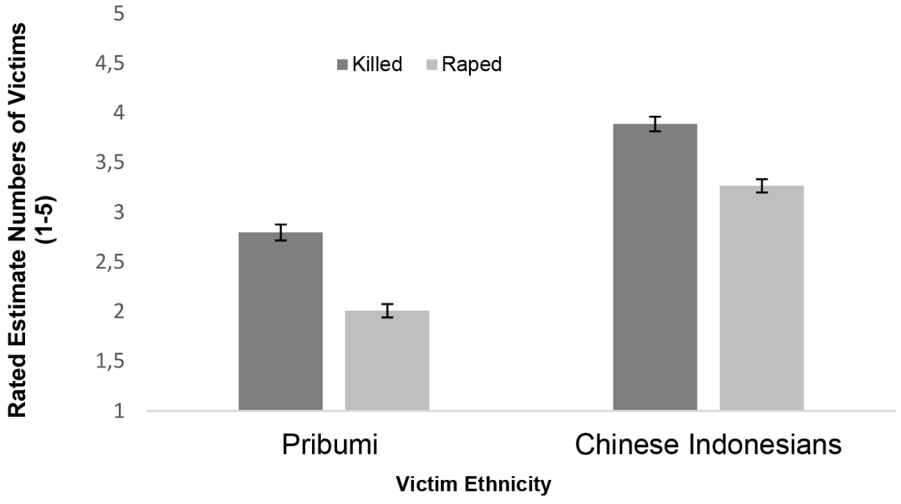
Mean Rated Estimate Number of Victims as a Function of Victim Ethnicity and Participant Ethnicity



Note. Error bars represent standard errors. Response range = 1–5 (1 = None; 2 = < 100; 3 = 101–500; 4 = 501–1000; 5 = > 1000).

Figure 2

Mean Rated Estimate Number of Victims as a Function of Victim Ethnicity and Type of Victimization



Note. Error bars represent standard errors. Response range = 1–5 (1 = None; 2 = < 100; 3 = 101–500; 4 = 501–1000; 5 = > 1000).

Decomposing the interaction of participant and victim ethnicity, simple effects of victim ethnicity were significant for both *Pribumi* respondents, $F(1, 218) = 105.695$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .327$, and Chinese Indonesian respondents, $F(1, 218) = 235.077$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .519$. In both cases, more Chinese Indonesian victims were perceived than *Pribumi* victims, although the effect size was larger for Chinese Indonesian participants than *Pribumi* participants.[4] Similarly, in decomposing the interaction of type of victimisation and victim ethnicity, the simple effects of victim ethnicity were significant for both estimates of murders, $F(1, 218) = 187.305$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .462$, and estimates of rapes, $F(1, 218) =$

4) In the log data, the simple effects of victim ethnicity was not significant for *Pribumi* participants, $F(1, 218) = .025$, $p = .875$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$.

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345.956, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .613$. Again, more Chinese Indonesian victims were perceived than *Pribumi* victims, although the difference was larger for the estimates of rapes than the estimates of murders.

Qualitative Findings

Our approach is a realist perspective associated with thematic, narrative-based analysis, and we generated the codes for our qualitative analysis both deductively and inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We ensure the quality of our analysis through verification and reviewed by the third author who is fluent in Indonesian. Data analysis adhered to the process described by King, Horrocks, and Brooks (2018), which includes: descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and the identification of overarching themes. The survey was conducted in Indonesian language and the first coding was performed by the lead author. The first descriptive coding involved grouping responses based on semantic similarities. The next phase involved the analysis of similar patterns or responses to develop categorical codes. This phase was reviewed by the third author. Based on the categorical codes, key themes were then identified. All members of the research team reviewed the codes and themes to ensure comprehensive coverage and accuracy. Differences were resolved by discussion.

The qualitative findings on how participants attributed the causes for the May 1998 riots affirmed the quantitative findings. As in the quantitative data, anger toward the government was most frequently reported as a cause (external), followed by anti-Chinese prejudice (internal). Other external causes identified were anger with the security services, as well as anger over how the government had handled the financial crisis. Another internal cause (attributable to the characteristics and actions of the perpetrators themselves) was the criminal motives of groups of people who acted violently.

Two novel themes that go beyond and deeper than the quantitative findings were identified in the qualitative responses: military provocation (external) and the vulnerability of some civilian perpetrators to this provocation (internal). Some participants expressed their belief that the military had incited and mobilized civilian participants, pointing to the organisation or coordination of violent actions during the riots. As one *Pribumi* man explained, "only those with a military background could do this" (50, male, *Pribumi*). While some participants explicitly named military actors or soldiers, other used the type of euphemistic terms for military actors commonly used in Indonesia to obfuscate agency, particularly when discussing politically dangerous topics (Anderson, 2001). One participant, for example, explained, "On 13 May 1998 at around 10am, they started burning vehicles and tires on the roads, and the shops owned by Chinese people were looted. There was looting and arson, you could see these men with short haircuts committing acts of violence" (53, female, Chinese). Here, "men with short haircuts" is code for "soldiers".

The vulnerability of civilian perpetrators to incitement was identified as an internal cause, as some respondents stated that this vulnerability was due to deprivation and ignorance, or else was the result of civilians being easily provoked because of their poor economic conditions or lack of knowledge. The idea that community disadvantage is a source of rioting is found in the research on rioting (see Lewis et al., 2011). For example, one woman explained that, "The community was easily triggered to become rioters, the community was also not critical of incitement from other people" (34, female, *Pribumi*). A Chinese man also commented on these causes, saying "There were parties who deliberately played upon the confusion of the situation and also the educational factors of the Indonesian people which are very low (lack of experience, easily fooled)" (38, male, Chinese).

Ethnicity and Gender

In this qualitative data, the respondents focused on narratives of ethnicity. No gender narratives appeared here, and none of the women or men mentioned themes of male violence/domination. Even when people talked about rape, they focused on ethnicity or criminality. For example, one participant commented, "My assumptions are based on what I remember of that time and what I read, the riots happened because they were instigated by provocateurs who provoked the masses, resulting in looting and rapes, especially against particular ethnic groups (the Chinese)" (32, male, *Pribumi*). Another stated that "Many ethnic Chinese women experienced sexual violence and were killed at that time. Even one of the witnesses to the mass rapes was killed brutally. The hatred against the Chinese was strongly felt during the May event" (52, female, *Pribumi*).

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Discussion

This mixed-method study asked Indonesian people how they explain the extent and causes of the violence directed toward the ethnic Chinese minority during the May 1998 riots. It further explored whether their interpretations varied by their social identity within the target or perpetrator group, based on the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender. We believe that the May 1998 riots offer an ideal non-WEIRD context to examine the applicability of the UAE principle in explaining the attribution of this period of mass violence because there is no public consensus on the cause(s) of the riots (Heryanto, 2000; Purdey, 2006; Van Wichelen, 2000). The taboo topic of the riots also leaves room for varying interpretations among individuals and communities.

Our study supported previous findings about attributions of the causes of the riots, but there were also new findings and deeper analysis beyond those previously identified. Both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest a pattern that the May 1998 riots are attributed to anger toward the government and anti-Chinese prejudice. This is consistent with the scholarly literature, which explains the violence primarily being caused by public dissatisfaction and anger toward Suharto's government (Aspinall et al., 1999). The focus on anti-Chinese prejudice is also consistent with what scholars have argued, that there was a systematic pattern in scapegoating Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority (Fennel & Grant, 1998; Purdey, 2006; Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta, 1998). The scapegoating mobilized communities to anger based on the perception that Chinese Indonesians controlled Indonesia's economy and therefore instigated the financial crisis at that time (Herlijanto, 2004; Tan, 2008).

Our study goes beyond previous research in demonstrating that the way that participants attributed the causes of the riot differed according to ethnicity. Specifically, the present research provides support for the applicability of the UAE in explaining perpetrator and victim groups' accounts in the context of the May 1998 riots (see also Hewstone, 1990; Misra & Mishra, 2020; Pettigrew, 1979). Chinese Indonesian participants (belonging to the victim group) attributed the riots more strongly to anti-Chinese prejudice, the criminal motives of perpetrators, and scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians by the government. In other words, Chinese Indonesians were also more likely to attribute the causes of the mass violence to the internal or dispositional factors of perpetrators.

In addition, the attribution bias regarding the causes of violence might affect how Chinese Indonesians perceived the estimated number of victims of the riots. Chinese Indonesian participants perceived the number of Chinese Indonesian victims to be significantly greater than the number of the *Pribumi* victims; *Pribumi* participants perceived a smaller (albeit still significant) difference between *Pribumi* and Chinese Indonesian victims. While the true number of victims is not known, the pattern that Chinese Indonesians underplayed the number of *Pribumi* victims or that *Pribumi* perceived higher numbers of victimisation for their ingroup is consistent with research on intergroup biases (Hewstone, 1990; Misra & Mishra, 2020; Pettigrew, 1979; Taylor & Jaggi, 1974), as well as the research on competitive victimisation more broadly (Noor et al., 2017).

Compared to Chinese Indonesians, *Pribumi* participants (belonging to the group involved in perpetrating the violence) attributed the riots more strongly toward the Asian financial crisis, anger at the government, and anger at the police. In this way, *Pribumi* participants attributed the causes of the violence more to the external or situational factors, which is again consistent with the UAE (Hewstone, 1990; Misra & Mishra, 2020; Pettigrew, 1979). The result of quantitative was further enriched by the qualitative data, which revealed two additional causes. First, military provocation, which was identified as an additional external cause, and second, vulnerability to this incitement due to deprivation and ignorance as an internal cause. These causes enriched understanding of how civilians attributed the causes of the riots beyond those identified in previous studies. We argue that the consistency of responses with scholarly literature in the present data regarding the perceived causes of these events cannot be separated from the key role of mainstream media at that time. Analyses of journalistic coverage of the riots reveals that media reported that the violence during the riots arose from prolonged economic decline caused by the New Order government, as well as ethnic prejudice (Purdey, 2006; Winarnita, 2011). In the present data, most participants reported that they relied on media such as television and newspapers for information about the riots, and their apparent reproduction of similar narratives of the riots' causes may therefore validate scholars' analyses of the media content.

However, we find that sources of information were not a mechanism that explains the UAE in the present data. That is, the UAE is reflecting different perceptions of the same sources, rather than different sources per se. In the present

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data, the failure to find differences in the source of information in personal experience and family accounts reflects the sample, as the respondents were mostly younger. Taboos and self-censorship also prevent members of the Chinese Indonesians community who experienced victimisation to share their experiences, which is a factor in attributions for violence that could be examined in future research (Bubandt, 2008; Kusno, 2010).

Whereas one's ethnicity may provide an important framework for interpreting the riots, we proposed in this research that the intersectionality with gender needs to also be taken into account. In the May 1998 riots, the violence was not only directed toward the Chinese Indonesian ethnic group, but there was also deliberate targeting of Chinese Indonesian women and girls for sexualized and gender-based attacks (Tan, 2008). The framework of intersectionality directs scholars to consider both 1) that the attributions of individuals within ethnic groups may also differ by gender, and 2) that the attributions of individuals of the same gender may differ depending on their ethnic group (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991).

We found little evidence that gender affected participants' perceptions of the patterns and causes of victimisation. In quantitative data, the perceptions of *Pribumi* men and *Pribumi* women did not differ regarding the causes and sources of the riots and the numbers of victims, nor did they differ between Chinese Indonesian men and Chinese Indonesian women. The qualitative data further enriched the finding, that even when people were talking about rape, they focused on ethnicity or criminality; no gender themes of male domination were spontaneously mentioned. This is striking given that sexual violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women (Messerschmidt, 2000), and indeed that violence in general is more likely to be perpetrated by men (Heise, 1998). The absence of any direct or moderating role of gender in perceptions of causes in our data, however, indicates that gender did not play a strong role in the social construction of the event. Participants' interpretations of the causes and sources of the riots, and the estimated number of victims were the same among men and women.

There are three plausible explanations for the unexpected findings regarding the non-significant role of gender in participants' attribution of the causes of the May 1998 riots. From a social identity perspective, an alternative principle to intersectionality is that activating one identity sometimes inhibits consideration of other identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For example, if there is a strong ethnic aspect to an intergroup conflict, this may inhibit reflection regarding how gender identity also plays a role and intersects with the ethnic identity in explaining that conflict.

Moreover, a second interpretation points to Indonesia's comparatively strong patriarchal values, highlighting that feminism is not a popular lens used by Indonesian people in considering social situations (see Himawan, 2020; Nilan & Demartoto, 2012). From this perspective, the entrenched gender norms that acknowledge the primary role of men appear to be endorsed by both men and women, so that most participants seem to have consumed and reproduced non-explicitly gendered narratives. In contrast, a feminist lens would highlight the gendered nature of the May 1998 violence, with women's sexual victimisation at the hands of men a central part of that story (Brownmiller, 1993; Korac, 2018).

Another possible explanation regarding the absent role of gender is the role of the dominant sources of the information about the riots, which were television and newspapers. Television and newspaper coverage may have downplayed the issue of gender by focusing primarily on ethnicity when discussing these events. As we have seen, in public discourse, narratives of May 1998 have been predominantly constructed around the ethnicity, rather than the gender, of the rioters and victims (Purdey, 2006; Winarnita, 2011).

Strengths, Limitation and Future Directions

One limitation of this study relates to the use of self-report data from convenience sampling, which may introduce biases in responding and limit the generalisability of the data to the general population. However, to the best of our knowledge, the present study is also the first documentation of Indonesian civilian perceptions of the May 1998 rioting. Our research identified differences in the perceptions of *Pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians, establishing a novel application of intergroup bias in an under-studied (non-WEIRD) population. Due to the sensitive and taboo nature of the topic, future research could try to triangulate self-report accounts with different measures, such as counts of destroyed

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buildings in Chinese and *Pribumi* neighbourhoods in satellite images from more recent rioting, and content analysis of news or social media posts.

To elaborate on this point, while anonymity was maintained in the present research through the use of online surveys, which is beneficial to study such sensitive topics, the reality is that it is still considered dangerous in Indonesia to report some narratives of violence, especially violence perpetrated by state actors such as the military and police. It would not be surprising if participants tend to censor their expression of belief in these narratives. To overcome this self-censorship, future research could use more subtle and indirect probes, perhaps using verbal face-to-face interviews, rather than online data collection.

It is a strength of the present research to examine the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity, but future research may also consider other ways in which intersectionality in the Indonesian context manifests. For example, socioeconomic classes and religious affiliations may play a role in shaping interpretation of the May 1998 riots, or indeed of other events. We could also explore when and how a feminist lens would come into play, and for which types of participants and events.

The impact of age differences is also an interesting direction for future research. The youngest participant in our study was 8 years old at the time of the riots. Events experienced over the age of 6 can produce relatively stable memories (Thompson et al., 2013), especially recollections of extraordinary events such as crimes or violence, which can be more vivid and long lasting (McGaugh, 2003). However, given that 28% of our participants experienced the riots before reaching the age of puberty (mean age of puberty: 11 for female, 12 for male; Blakemore, Burnett, & Dahl, 2010), this may have reduced the impact of gender on them as a lens for the experience. The analysis of age differences would therefore be beneficial for future research, as it could be that women and men who experienced the riots over the age of puberty would be more sensitive to gender-based violence, so that gender identity would play a stronger role in shaping their perceptions.

It is a limitation of the study that we did not validate whether all participants in the victim and perpetrator group interpret the causes as internal and external factors, in line with our approach. For example, a cause such as "government scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians" might be interpreted as external to the perpetrator group by some respondents, but internal by others, depending on whether the government is seen as representative of *Pribumi* or an oppressive outside force. Future research could include direct questions about causes internal to the *Pribumi* community and external to it, for a more precise measure of the UAE.

Lastly, regarding the term "*Pribumi*", our use of this broad category is not intended to obscure the rich diversity of ethnic and cultural groupings in Indonesia. We acknowledge that future research could profitably engage the distinctions between different ethnic groups which might each have their own distinct historical-political connections to the Chinese Indonesian and Indigenous peoples, such as Arab or Indian Indonesian communities.

Conclusion

The present research examines Indonesian civilians' perceptions regarding the extent and causes of the anti-Chinese violence in the May 1998 riots. It also explores the intersectionality of ethnicity and gender as factors associated with perceptions. This study contributes to the literature concerning the UAE, and to the psychology of intergroup relations in non-WEIRD contexts in particular. In Indonesia, there have been few studies on the May 1998 riots from psychological perspectives, such as focusing on the traumatic experiences of ethnic Chinese women who experienced rape (Ahmadi, 2021), women survivor's coping strategies and reactions toward sexual violence (Sutrisno, 2002), and Chinese ethnic stereotyping and discrimination (Kosasih, 2010). This study further makes an important contribution to understanding the attribution bias between groups based on their social identity, in this case ethnicity.

Previous non-WEIRD studies did not fully support the UAE (Khan & Liu, 2008; Khandelwal, Dhillon, Akalamkam, & Papneja, 2014; Misra & Mishra, 2020), while this present research supported the attribution bias between victim and perpetrator groups. This could be due to the long history of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, where the New Order government's policies promoted intergroup prejudice and conflict (see Chua, 2007; Purdey, 2006). In this case, the socio-political context played a critical role in creating attribution bias between groups.

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This study also highlights that the UAE appears on a dimension that is salient for the conflict (ethnicity) but not for all groups involved in the conflict (e.g., gender). The influence of media on how respondents frame the events may have an important contribution. Narratives of May 1998 seem to have been predominantly constructed around the ethnicity, rather than the gender, of the rioters and victims.

This study of attributions for mass violence in the May 1998 riots is part of a growing body of intergroup relations research in Indonesia. It enhances the understanding of important psychological processes in intergroup relations that affect the different understandings of perpetrator and victim group members. Such different perceptions may play a role to block reconciliation, by constructing diverging blame narratives and reinforcing the lack of accountability of the perpetrator groups. As different understandings of the events could impede the reconciliation between groups in conflict, addressing the impact of intergroup differences is important for both scholars and practitioners.

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Ethics Statement: Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee at The University of Queensland. Ethics approval number: 2019002556.

Data Availability: For this article, a data set is freely available (Himawan, Louis, & Pohlman, 2020).

Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials contain a copy of the data and syntax for this study (for access see Index of Supplementary Materials below).

Index of Supplementary Materials

Himawan, E. M., Louis, W., & Pohlman, A. (2020). *Supplementary materials to "Indonesian civilians' attributions for anti-Chinese violence during the May 1998 riots in Indonesia"* [Research data and code]. OSF. https://osf.io/8af65/

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