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Writing after fear: post-authoritarian memory, censorship, and the literary reconstruction of political violence in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian post-authoritarian literature has become a crucial site for narrating political violence because official memory, archival access, and public recognition remain unevenly shaped by silence, stigma, and fear. **Objective:** This study examines how selected Indonesian literary and contextual texts reconstruct political violence through memory, censorship, and counter-archival narration after authoritarian rule. **Method:** Using qualitative interpretive textual analysis, this study analyzes a publicly verifiable corpus of literary works, scholarly studies, and contextual documents through memory-form mapping, censorship-and-fear reading, and counter-archive analysis. **Results:** First, damaged memory is most visible through fragmented temporality, spectral return, archival silence, and intergenerational transmission. Second, censorship appears not only as institutional prohibition but also as narrative hesitation, coded speech, withheld naming, allegorical displacement, and inherited suspicion. Third, literary reconstruction works counter-archivally by centering victims, families, exiles, stigmatized descendants, peripheral spaces, and poetic testimony without claiming documentary closure. **Implication:** This study shows that post-authoritarian literature should be read not merely as representation of past violence, but as a critical method for negotiating damaged public truth. **Novelty:** This study offers an integrated framework that links memory, censorship, fear, and counter-archive as interdependent mechanisms of writing after political violence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's post-authoritarian literary memory emerges from a social history in which political violence remains publicly acknowledged yet incompletely resolved. The 1965–66 anti-communist violence alone is widely estimated to have killed between 500,000 and one million people, while hundreds of thousands were detained without charge or trial; these figures mark not only a historical catastrophe but also a continuing problem of narration, evidence, and public legitimacy. In 2023, President Joko Widodo acknowledged twelve cases of past gross human-rights violations, including the 1965–66 killings and the 1997–98 activist disappearances, yet rights groups warned that acknowledgement without accountability risks converting memory into administrative closure. For Indonesian literature, this unresolved condition is crucial: novels, poetry, drama, and historical fiction become cultural sites where victims, descendants,

witnesses, and silenced subjects can be reimagined when courts, archives, and official curricula remain contested.

Existing scholarship has established that Indonesian post-authoritarian writing repeatedly returns to state violence, trauma, haunting, and political silence. Eddyono (2023) [1] demonstrates that post-New Order public memory did not abolish silence but reorganized it through selective official erasure. Leksana and Subekti (2022) [2] show how third-generation memory of 1965 violence often appears through fragmentation rather than direct testimony, while Leong (2021) [3] reads haunted landscapes in Java as mnemonic spaces where violence persists without stable documentation. Literary studies have also examined state terror in modern Indonesian fiction (Ferdinal, 2021) [4], political conflict in Laut Bercerita (Hartati et al., 2024) [5], Chinese Indonesian violence in post-New Order fiction (Widodo & Andalas, 2024) [6], and collective trauma in Ayu Utami's works (Mayasari-Hoffert, 2025) [7]. However, these studies often privilege either historical representation, trauma, or individual texts. Less attention has been given to how memory, censorship, fear, and literary form operate together as one post-authoritarian narrative problem.

This study therefore examines how Indonesian post-authoritarian literature reconstructs political violence after the formal collapse of authoritarian rule but within the continuing pressure of fear, censorship, and archival absence. It asks: how do selected literary texts narrate political violence when public memory is shaped by silence, stigma, and selective recognition? How do narrative strategies such as fragmentation, spectrality, allegory, withheld testimony, unstable chronology, and intergenerational voice transform historical trauma into literary form? How do these texts contest official or dominant narratives without reducing literature to documentary evidence? By addressing these questions, this study positions literary reconstruction not as a transparent recovery of the past but as an interpretive struggle over what can be said, who may speak, and how violence becomes narratable after authoritarianism. This focus also extends recent work on trauma narratives (Widyatnyana, 2026) [8], unfinished dead and archival silence (Ilma, 2026) [9], and poetic accounting with the 1965–66 massacres (An, 2025) [10].

This study advances the argument that Indonesian post-authoritarian literature writes after fear by making fear itself a narrative structure. Its central proposition is that censorship does not appear only as external prohibition; it is reworked inside literary form through gaps, hesitation, allegory, spectral return, fragmented chronology, and unstable testimony. Such forms do not simply represent damaged memory; they stage the ethical difficulty of reconstructing violence when perpetrators, archives, and public institutions remain unevenly accountable. This argument has implications for literary studies and memory studies because it shifts analysis from "literature as remembrance" to "literature as a method of negotiating damaged public truth." It also clarifies why post-authoritarian fiction should not be read merely as historical illustration. Rather, as suggested by Refai (2026) [11], Kadamehang (2026) [12], Ilma (2026) [9], and Widyatnyana (2026) [8], literary dissent reconstructs political violence by exposing the limits of official language, the fragility of testimony, and the unfinished work of public mourning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Post-authoritarian memory

Post-authoritarian memory refers to cultural processes through which societies narrate violence after formal authoritarian rule has ended but before public truth has been fully stabilized. It differs from simple historical recollection because memory is shaped by institutional silence, survivor vulnerability, intergenerational stigma, and contested legitimacy. Eddyono (2023) [1] shows that post-New Order Indonesia did not overcome silence; it reconfigured selective erasure within official narrative. Leksana and Subekti (2022) [2] similarly argue that later generations inherit memory through fragments rather than complete testimony. Leong (2021) [3], Ilma (2026) [9], and Widyatnyana (2026) [8] extend this view by treating haunting, absence, and trauma as structures of remembrance, not ornamental themes.

Major indicators of post-authoritarian memory include fragmentation, haunting, archival absence, intergenerational transmission, and unresolved mourning. Fragmentation appears when narratives cannot organize violence into linear chronology, while haunting marks return of suppressed histories through spectral figures, landscapes, or silences. Ilma (2026) [9] conceptualizes unfinished death as a sign of archival and moral incompletion, whereas Maslahah and Purwanta (2025) [13] emphasize collective memory around post-1965 violence as socially situated narration. An (2025) [10] and Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [7] show that poetic and fictional forms can register mass violence through incoherence, muteness, and embodied trauma. These indicators suggest that memory in Indonesian literature operates as both remembrance and epistemic disturbance.

2.2. Censorship in post-authoritarian

Censorship in post-authoritarian literary studies should not be understood only as state prohibition or textual banning. It also includes self-censorship, inherited fear, symbolic avoidance, educational erasure, market pressure, and algorithmic visibility. Ferdinal (2021) [4] reads state violence in Indonesian literature as

a terror narrative, while Kadamehang (2026) [12] links dissenting language to poetic strategies of political refusal. Ansori (2026) [14] expands censorship into digital authoritarianism, where surveillance and platform logics shape contemporary counterpublic imagination. Ramadhan (2026) [15] similarly shows that poetic dissent now depends on circulation as much as expression. Thus, censorship is both institutional constraint and internalized narrative condition.

The indicators of censorship and fear include silence, allegory, displaced setting, coded speech, interrupted testimony, and strategic ambiguity. Refai (2026) [11] positions political allegory as a mode of resistance in post-Reform novels, suggesting that indirect narration can expose power while avoiding declarative confrontation. Hartati et al. (2024) [5] show how Laut Bercerita stages political conflict through disappearance, activism, and authoritarian intimidation, while Herujiyanto (2023) [16] examines threat as political ontology in short fiction. Yani (2026) [17] adds that popular literary forms can translate political rhetoric into accessible public affect. These studies reveal that censorship often appears not as textual absence alone but as form, tone, and narrative risk.

2.3. Literary reconstruction of political violence

Literary reconstruction of political violence concerns how fiction, poetry, and drama transform violent history into narrative structure. It differs from documentation because literature does not merely preserve facts; it reorganizes damaged memory through voice, temporality, genre, metaphor, and ethical distance. Jamilah (2026) [18] demonstrates how national imagination is built through literary representation, while Widodo and Andalas (2024) [6] examine post-New Order fiction's return to Chinese Indonesian violence. Ridlo (2026) [19] foregrounds gender and ideology in political drama, showing that violence is also narrated through bodies, domestic space, and unequal voice. Larasati (2025) [20] and Chen (2026) [21] further suggest that sound, survival, and form mediate violence beyond direct testimony.

The main analytical indicators of literary reconstruction are narrative voice, temporal disruption, symbolic space, embodied trauma, political allegory, and counter-archival imagination. Setiaji (2026) [22], Sadani (2026) [23], and Abdukalykowna (2026) [24] show that Indonesian and Southeast Asian literary politics often emerge from peripheral, displaced, or precarious subjects rather than official centers of narration. This matters because post-authoritarian violence is not only remembered by victims but also reconstructed through descendants, exiles, women, minorities, and communities placed outside dominant archives. This study therefore positions Indonesian post-authoritarian literature as a counter-archival practice: it reads memory, censorship, and reconstruction as interdependent literary mechanisms through which political violence becomes narratable after fear.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis is a curated corpus of publicly verifiable literary, scholarly, and contextual documents concerning post-authoritarian memory, censorship, and literary reconstruction of political violence in Indonesia. This study treats each document, not each author or institution, as one analytical unit because political memory is examined through textual form, publication context, and thematic orientation. Primary data consist of novels, poetry, and literary translations; secondary data consist of peer-reviewed studies and academic scholarship; contextual data consist of official, civil-society, and public-memory documents. This structure enables this study to distinguish literary representation from scholarly interpretation and historical-institutional context.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Count	Characteristics	Status
PRM001	Primary	Laut Bercerita	Indonesia	2017	1	Disappearance, family memory, New Order repression	Included
PRM002	Primary	Pulang	Indonesia/diaspora	2012/2023	1	Exile, statelessness, intergenerational memory	Included
PRM003	Primary	Namaku Alam	Indonesia	2023	1	Post-1965 stigma and inherited suspicion	Included
PRM004	Primary	Amba	Indonesia/Buru	2012/2020	1	Political imprisonment and camp memory	Included
PRM005	Primary	Saman	Indonesia	1998/2023	1	Reformasi, activism, taboo-breaking narration	Included
PRM006	Primary	Entrok	Indonesia/Java	2010/2025	1	New Order militarism and everyday fear	Included
PRM007	Primary	The Years of the Voiceless	Indonesia/translation	Listed edition	1	Translation and transnational access	Included
PRM008	Primary	A Tinderbox in Three Acts	Indonesian diaspora/US	2022	1	Poetic archive of 1965–66 massacres	Included
SEC001	Secondary	Eddyono article	Indonesia	2024	1	Selective erasure and official memory	Included
SEC002	Secondary	Leksana & Subekti article	Indonesia	2023	1	Fragmented third-generation memory	Included
SEC003	Secondary	An article	Indonesia/diaspora	2025/2026	1	Fictive incoherence and poetic accounting	Included
SEC004	Secondary	Mayasari-Hoffert article	Indonesia	2025/2026	1	Collective trauma in Ayu Utami	Included
SEC005	Secondary	Hartati et al. article	Indonesia	2024	1	Laut Bercerita and New Historicism	Included
SEC006	Secondary	Widodo & Andalas article	Indonesia	2024	1	Chinese Indonesian violence in	Included

						fiction	
SEC007	Secondary	Ferdinal article	Indonesia	2021	1	State violence and terror narrative	Included
SEC008	Secondary	Herujiyanto article	Indonesia	2023	1	Mass murder and political threat	Included
SEC009	Secondary	Leksana book	Indonesia/East Java	2023	1	Local memory and impunity	Included
SEC010	Secondary	Parahita article	Indonesia/digital media	2020	1	Memory politics on new media	Included
CTX001	Context	Komnas HAM 1965–66 article	Indonesia	2020	1	Grave human-rights violation framing	Included
CTX002	Context	Komnas HAM memory page	Indonesia	2021	1	Public remembrance and memory care	Included
CTX003	Context	Komnas HAM memory museum PDF	Indonesia/exile	2021	1	Archival display and exile memory	Included
CTX004	Context	KontraS public statement	Indonesia	2025	1	Impunity and unresolved justice	Included
CTX005	Context	Inside Indonesia article	Indonesia	2025	1	Sixtieth-anniversary public memory	Included
CTX006	Context	OAPEN metadata	East Java, Indonesia	2023	1	Local memory culture	Included

This study applies qualitative interpretive textual analysis with a corpus-assisted documentary design. This design is appropriate because this study does not seek statistical representativeness or causal explanation; it examines how selected texts organize political violence as memory, silence, fear, and narrative form. This method allows close reading to be combined with structured metadata, source verification, and thematic coding. Literary texts are treated as primary cultural objects, while scholarly and contextual materials are used to situate interpretation. This design follows recent memory-oriented literary scholarship that reads post-authoritarian writing as a site where historical injury becomes formally mediated.

Information was drawn from three source categories. Primary materials were identified through publisher pages, digital book platforms, and public literary metadata for Indonesian novels, poetry, and translation. Secondary sources were selected from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and scholarly platforms addressing Indonesian political violence, 1965–66 memory, New Order repression, post-Reform fiction, trauma, haunting, and censorship. Contextual materials were taken from official institutional pages, public human-rights documents, civil-society statements, and public scholarship. These sources were separated to prevent contextual claims from being mistaken for literary findings. This separation strengthens analytical transparency and preserves boundaries among data, interpretation, and historical framing.

Data collection followed a staged procedure. First, official institutions, publishers, scholarly platforms, and public-memory sources were mapped. Second, search terms included “1965 violence,” “post-authoritarian Indonesian literature,” “New Order repression,” “political disappearance,” “literary memory,” “censorship,” “trauma narrative,” and “archival silence.” Third, items were screened for public accessibility, relevance to Indonesia, relation to political violence, and suitability for textual or contextual analysis. Fourth, metadata were recorded, including title, author, year, source, URL, event focus, document type, and verification note. Fifth, duplicates were removed by comparing title, creator, URL, edition, and document role before coding.

Analysis proceeded in three connected stages. First, memory-form mapping identified fragmented chronology, haunting, intergenerational voice, testimonial instability, and archival absence. Second, censorship-and-fear reading examined silence, coded speech, withheld naming, allegory, narrative hesitation, and the persistence of political risk after authoritarianism. Third, counter-archive analysis interpreted how literary texts produce alternative memory without being reduced to documentary evidence. Coding was conducted at document level and supported by thematic indicators in the codebook. This procedure produces interpretive claims grounded in traceable public sources while avoiding unsupported causal conclusions about readership, social impact, or national memory as a whole.

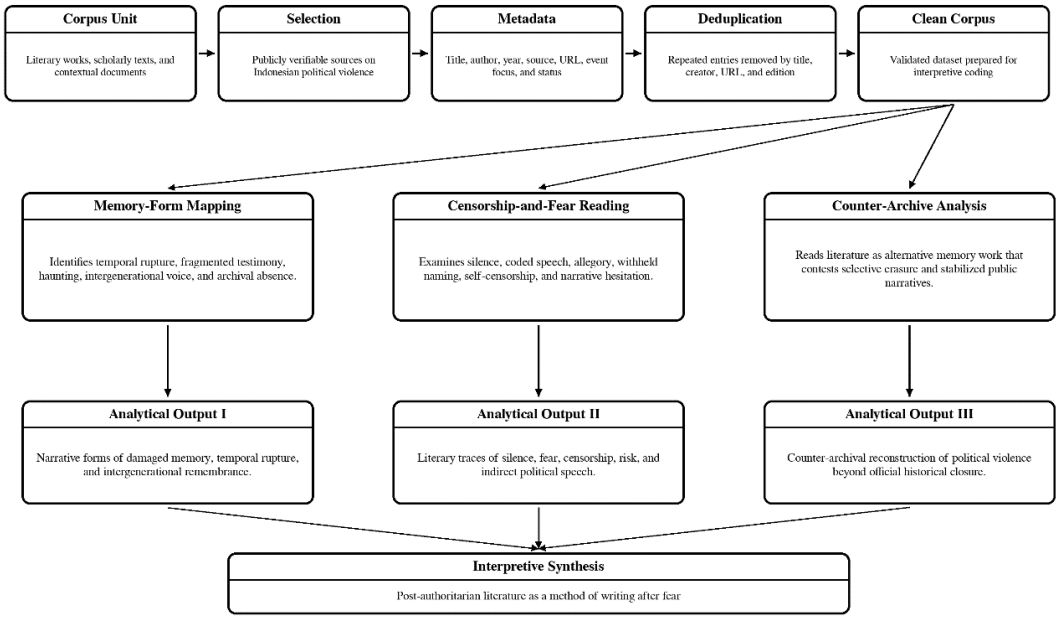


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Narrative forms of damaged memory and temporal rupture

Political violence enters the corpus less as a completed historical episode than as a damaged structure of narration. The distribution of coded indicators shows that fragmented temporality is the most frequent pattern, followed by spectral memory, archival silence, and intergenerational memory. This ordering matters because it suggests that Indonesian post-authoritarian literature does not reconstruct violence primarily through documentary completeness. Instead, it stages violence through broken chronology, delayed knowledge, absent bodies, and incomplete institutional recognition. Works associated with disappearance, exile, Buru imprisonment, 1965–66 memory, and New Order repression repeatedly organize the past as something that returns unevenly. This pattern is consistent with Eddyono's (2023) [1] account of selective erasure and with Leksana and Subekti's (2022) [2] argument that later generations inherit memory through fragments.

Table 2. Narrative forms of damaged memory and temporal rupture

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Trace	Data Code
Fragmented temporality	Non-linear chronology	Past violence appears through disrupted sequence, delayed memory, or broken recollection	8	14.8%	Novel, poetry, scholarly reading	Disappearance and imprisonment are reconstructed through return, recollection, and delayed disclosure rather than linear historical narration	PRM001, PRM002, PRM004, PRM008, SEC002, SEC003, SEC005, SEC009
Fragmented temporality	Retrospective narration	Present narration is organized around unresolved past violence	5	9.3%	Novel, historical fiction, criticism	Family and descendant perspectives reorganize political violence as belated knowledge	PRM001, PRM002, PRM003, SEC002, SEC004
Fragmented temporality	Recursive memory return	Repeated return to past events interrupts narrative closure	4	7.4%	Novel, poetry	Memory returns through recurring scenes of loss, absence, exile, and political stigma	PRM002, PRM004, PRM008, SEC003
Spectral memory	Returning dead or disappeared	Missing, dead, or politically erased figures structure narration	6	11.1%	Novel, poetry, memory studies	The absent body becomes a narrative center, especially in texts on disappearance and mass violence	PRM001, PRM004, PRM008, SEC001, SEC003, SEC008
Spectral memory	Haunted place or landscape	Space carries unresolved violence	4	7.4%	Fiction, memory studies	Buru, Java, exile routes, and domestic spaces appear as mnemonic landscapes	PRM002, PRM004, SEC006, CTX006
Spectral memory	Unresolved mourning	Mourning remains suspended by lack of recognition or justice	4	7.4%	Novel, public-memory context	Families and descendants confront loss without stable institutional closure	PRM001, PRM003, CTX001, CTX004
Archival silence	Missing documentary trace	Violence is narrated through absent files, unavailable testimony, or broken record	5	9.3%	Literary text, journal article, institutional context	Silence is not empty; it marks damaged access to public truth	PRM008, SEC001, SEC002, SEC009, CTX003
Archival silence	Withheld naming	Perpetrators, victims, or events are indirectly named	4	7.4%	Novel, short fiction, scholarship	Political danger is registered through implication, avoidance, and coded naming	PRM003, PRM006, SEC007, SEC008
Archival silence	Selective institutional erasure	Official or dominant memory leaves violence partially acknowledged	4	7.4%	Scholarship, human-rights context	Recognition appears uneven when past violations are acknowledged without full accountability	SEC001, CTX001, CTX002, CTX004
Intergenerational memory	Inherited stigma	Later generations inherit fear, suspicion, or political labeling	4	7.4%	Novel, memory studies	Children and descendants encounter violence as inherited social classification	PRM003, SEC002, SEC004, SEC009
Intergenerational memory	Descendant inquiry	Later generations attempt to reconstruct obscured family or national history	3	5.6%	Novel, scholarly article	Memory is pursued through fragments rather than direct access to full testimony	PRM002, PRM003, SEC002
Intergenerational memory	Family transmission	Domestic narration mediates political history	3	5.6%	Novel, trauma study	Family memory becomes an alternative archive when official records remain unstable	PRM001, PRM002, SEC004

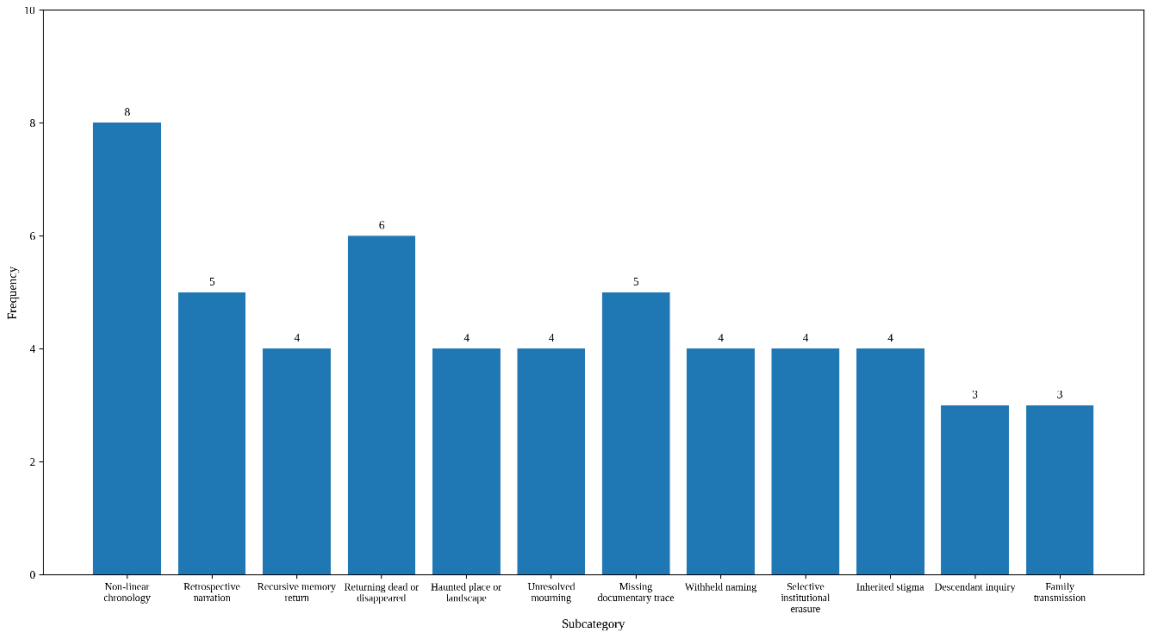


Figure 2. Distribution of memory-form indicators across corpus

The dominant pattern is non-linear chronology, appearing in eight coded instances or 14.8% of all memory-form indicators. This pattern is visible across literary works and scholarly readings where imprisonment, exile, disappearance, and political stigma are narrated through return, delay, and retrospective reconstruction. Spectral memory is also prominent: returning dead or disappeared figures appear in six instances, while haunted places and unresolved mourning each appear four times. In textual terms, the corpus repeatedly treats absence as narratively active. Disappeared activists, political prisoners, exiles, stigmatized descendants, and unnamed victims do not merely occupy background history; they organize plot, voice, and ethical attention. This supports Ilma's (2026) [9] concern with unfinished dead and Leong's (2021) [3] reading of haunted landscapes as memory-bearing spaces.

Indonesian post-authoritarian writing therefore converts damaged public memory into literary form. Fragmentation does not indicate weak narration; it functions as an ethical response to histories whose archives, witnesses, and official explanations remain unstable. Archival silence, withheld naming, and selective institutional erasure show that censorship survives not only as prohibition but also as narrative pressure. The literary text becomes counter-archival because it does not simply replace missing records with invented certainty; it exposes the conditions under which certainty has been damaged. This reading extends Widyatnyana's (2026) [8] work on trauma narratives, An's (2025) [10] analysis of poetic incoherence, and Mayasari-Hoffert's (2025) [7] attention to collective trauma. This study consequently reads memory-form as a central mechanism through which writing after fear reconstructs political violence without falsely closing it.

4.2. Censorship, fear, and narrative risk

Fear appears in the corpus as a narrative condition rather than a merely historical background. The table shows that censorship and fear are distributed across institutional, internalized, indirect, everyday, and circulatory forms. Selective erasure records the highest frequency, followed by narrative hesitation, inherited suspicion, and allegorical displacement. This pattern indicates that post-authoritarian writing does not treat censorship only as an external act of banning or prohibition. Instead, censorship is textualized through hesitation, coded speech, withheld naming, and the difficulty of testimony. This finding remains consistent with the previous section because the same document-level corpus shows how damaged memory becomes narratively legible through fear-shaped forms of expression.

Table 3. Censorship-and-fear indicators in post-authoritarian literary reconstruction

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Trace	Data Code
Institutional censorship	Selective erasure	Public memory is shaped by partial recognition, avoidance, or incomplete institutional acknowledgement	6	12.8%	Scholarship, human-rights context, public-memory document	Official memory appears as recognition without full narrative or juridical closure	SEC001, SEC009, CTX001, CTX002, CTX004, CTX005
Institutional censorship	Official euphemism	Violence is softened through administrative, ideological, or security-oriented vocabulary	4	8.5%	Scholarship, contextual document	Political violence is displaced into terms of order, threat, security, or national stability	SEC001, SEC007, SEC008, CTX001
Institutional censorship	Archival restriction	Access to past violence is mediated by missing, damaged, or institutionally controlled records	4	8.5%	Scholarly article, public archive, memory document	Documentary absence becomes part of how violence is narrated and remembered	SEC002, SEC009, CTX002, CTX003
Internalized fear	Narrative hesitation	Narration pauses, defers, or approaches violence indirectly	5	10.6%	Novel, poetry, literary criticism	Fear appears through delayed disclosure, unstable testimony, and indirect narration	PRM001, PRM003, PRM006, PRM008, SEC003

Internalized fear	Inherited suspicion	Later generations carry stigma attached to political labeling or family history	5	10.6%	Novel, memory studies, trauma study	Political identity survives as suspicion transmitted through family and community memory	PRM002, PRM003, SEC002, SEC004, SEC009
Internalized fear	Danger of testimony	Speaking about violence is represented as socially, politically, or morally risky	4	8.5%	Novel, short fiction, human-rights context	Testimony is framed as necessary but precarious under unresolved post-authoritarian conditions	PRM001, PRM004, SEC008, CTX004
Indirect dissent	Allegorical displacement	Political violence is represented through symbolic plot, displaced setting, or indirect analogy	5	10.6%	Novel, poetry, political allegory, drama criticism	Allegory allows literature to approach violence without relying on explicit documentary narration	PRM004, PRM006, PRM008, SEC007, SEC008
Indirect dissent	Coded political speech	Dissent appears through implication, metaphor, symbolic naming, or guarded language	4	8.5%	Poetry, fiction, discourse analysis	Political critique is embedded in aesthetic form rather than direct accusation	PRM008, SEC003, SEC007, SEC010
Indirect dissent	Withheld naming	Perpetrators, events, or victims are unnamed or named obliquely	4	8.5%	Novel, short fiction, scholarship	Naming becomes ethically and politically charged because violence remains contested	PRM003, PRM006, SEC001, SEC008
Everyday fear	Domesticized fear	Political violence enters family, home, intimacy, and ordinary social relations	3	6.4%	Novel, trauma study, gendered reading	Fear is narrated through household silence, family caution, and inherited vulnerability	PRM001, PRM002, SEC004
Circulatory constraint	Platform visibility	Literary dissent depends on visibility, mediation, and circulation under changing public infrastructures	3	6.4%	Digital literary studies, poetry studies	Contemporary dissent is shaped not only by expression but by discoverability and circulation	SEC010, IJPLS007, IJPLS011

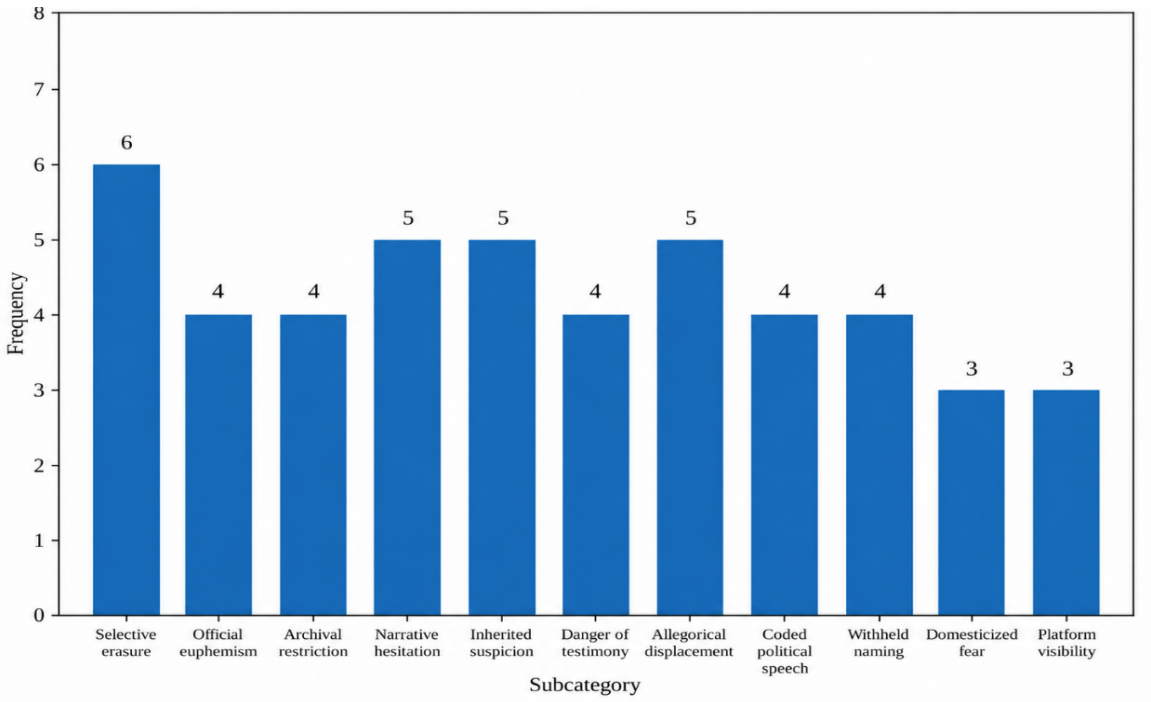


Figure 3. Distribution of censorship-and-fear indicators across the corpus

The most visible pattern is the movement from institutional silence into literary indirection. Selective erasure appears in six coded instances, while narrative hesitation, inherited suspicion, and allegorical displacement each appear in five instances. The coded textual traces show that violence is rarely presented as an easily recoverable event: official memory appears as partial recognition; testimony is necessary but precarious; political identity survives as family stigma; and allegory becomes a way of approaching violence when direct narration remains ethically or politically charged. Laut Bercerita is coded through disappearance and risky testimony, Namaku Alam through inherited suspicion, Entrok through everyday fear, and A Tinderbox in Three Acts through poetic and coded reconstruction of 1965–66 violence.

The distribution clarifies how post-authoritarian literature writes under the afterlife of censorship. Fear does not simply silence narration; it reorganizes narrative form, making indirectness, hesitation, allegory, and withheld naming part of literary knowledge. Eddyono's account [1] of selective erasure helps explain why official recognition may coexist with narrative incompletion, while Kadamehang [12], Refai [11], Ansori [14], and Ramadhan [15] show that dissent can operate through poetic language, political allegory, digital circulation, and counterpublic imagination. This study therefore reads censorship as a formal pressure that travels from institutions into narrative technique. Indonesian post-authoritarian writing reconstructs violence not by escaping fear entirely, but by making fear visible as a condition of speech.

4.3. Counter-archival reconstruction of political violence

Literary reconstruction in this corpus is organized through counter-archival work: texts create alternative routes to memory where official records, public acknowledgement, or institutional justice remain incomplete. Victim-centered narration and literary testimony appear most frequently, each with six coded instances, while descendant and family archive, symbolic affective evidence, and refusal of official closure follow closely with five instances each. This distribution shows that post-authoritarian literature does not

simply add emotional depth to historical events. It reorders the authority of memory by moving victims, families, exiles, stigmatized descendants, and damaged spaces toward the center of narration. This pattern remains consistent with the previous findings on fragmented memory and censorship-shaped narration.

Table 4. Counter-archival reconstruction indicators across the corpus

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Trace	Data Code
Counter-archival voice	Victim-centered narration	Victims, disappeared persons, prisoners, or survivors become central points of narration	6	12.2%	Novel, poetry, human-rights context	Political violence is reorganized around those normally displaced from official narrative authority	PRM001, PRM004, PRM008, SEC003, SEC005, CTX004
Counter-archival voice	Descendant and family archive	Family memory becomes a substitute or supplement for damaged public records	5	10.2%	Novel, trauma study, memory studies	Domestic narration carries historical injury when official archives remain incomplete	PRM001, PRM002, PRM003, SEC002, SEC004
Counter-archival voice	Exilic or diasporic memory	Exile, displacement, or transnational circulation reframes Indonesian political violence	4	8.2%	Novel, translation, poetry, contextual metadata	Memory is reconstructed beyond national territory through exile, translation, and diasporic address	PRM002, PRM007, PRM008, CTX003
Alternative evidence	Literary testimony	Fictional narration performs witness work without claiming documentary transparency	6	12.2%	Novel, short fiction, literary criticism	Narrative voice converts loss, disappearance, and imprisonment into ethically mediated testimony	PRM001, PRM004, SEC005, SEC007, SEC008, SEC009
Alternative evidence	Poetic accounting	Poetry organizes violence through compression, fragmentation, and symbolic reckoning	4	8.2%	Poetry, postcolonial criticism	Mass violence is approached through incoherence, rhythm, and formal rupture rather than linear explanation	PRM008, SEC003, SEC010, CTX005
Alternative evidence	Symbolic affective evidence	Affect, objects, spaces, and recurring images function as evidence of unresolved harm	5	10.2%	Novel, memory studies, cultural analysis	Houses, landscapes, journeys, bodies, and silences carry political memory beyond formal documentation	PRM002, PRM004, PRM006, SEC006, CTX006
Historical contestation	Refusal of official closure	Texts resist treating acknowledgement as equivalent to justice or narrative completion	5	10.2%	Scholarship, human-rights context, fiction	Recognition remains unstable when violence is narrated without full accountability or repair	SEC001, SEC009, CTX001, CTX002, CTX004
Historical contestation	Reframing threat discourse	Texts question ideological labels that once justified violence or exclusion	4	8.2%	Novel, short fiction, scholarship	"Threat" is reworked as a political category that produced suspicion and social vulnerability	PRM003, PRM006, SEC007, SEC008
Historical contestation	Restoring stigmatized subjects	Politically marked subjects are reintroduced as complex social and ethical figures	4	8.2%	Novel, memory studies, trauma study	Former prisoners, exiles, descendants, and accused families become subjects of memory rather than objects of suspicion	PRM002, PRM003, PRM004, SEC002
Spatial counter-memory	Peripheral memory space	Sites outside official centers carry suppressed histories	3	6.1%	Novel, local memory study, contextual source	Buru, Java, East Java, domestic space, and exile routes function as alternative mnemonic geographies	PRM004, SEC009, CTX006
Embodied counter-memory	Gendered counter-memory	Gendered bodies and domestic relations mediate political injury	3	6.1%	Novel, trauma study, feminist literary reading	Women's bodies, family relations, and intimate spaces expose how violence exceeds public political categories	PRM005, SEC004, SEC006

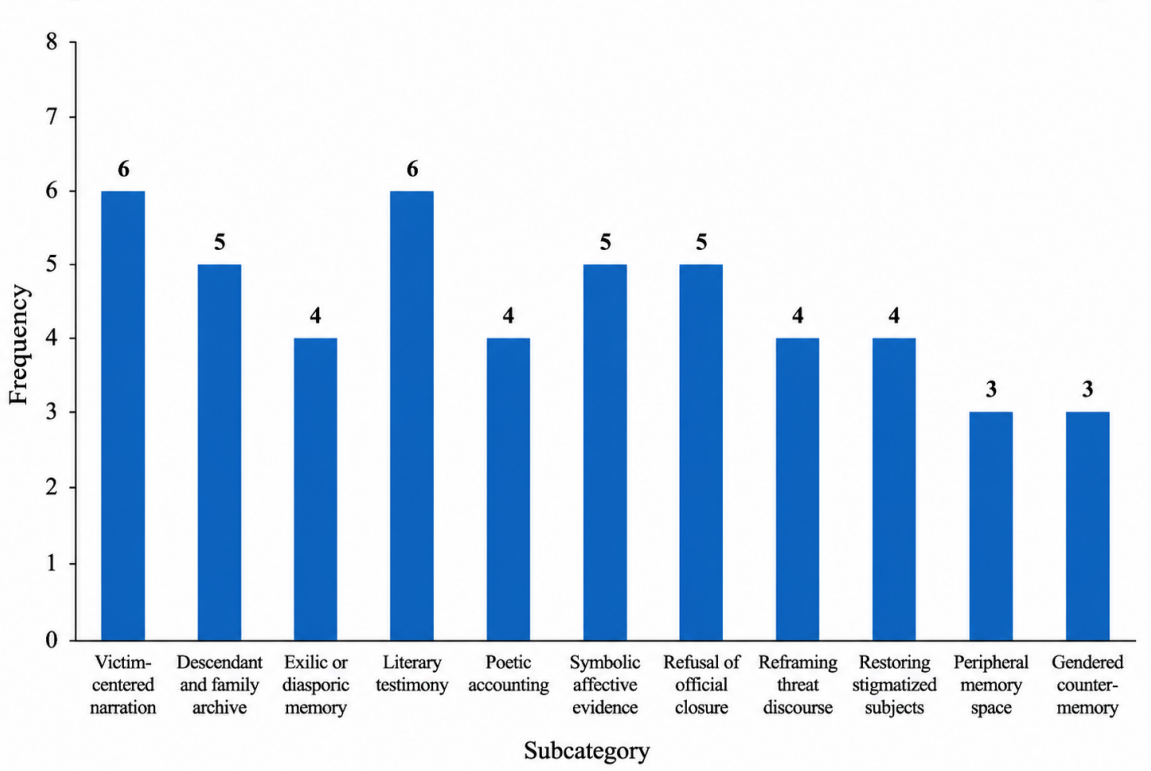


Figure 4. Distribution of counter-archival reconstruction indicators across the corpus

The dominant pattern is a shift from institutional documentation to ethically mediated testimony. In the coded corpus, Laut Bercerita is associated with disappearance and witness work; Pulang and Namaku Alam carry family memory, exile, and inherited stigma; Amba locates political imprisonment within the mnemonic geography of Buru; and A Tinderbox in Three Acts approaches the 1965–66 massacres through poetic accounting. Contextual documents from Komnas HAM and KontraS are not treated as literary evidence but as sources that clarify why refusal of official closure remains analytically important. Across

these materials, the "archive" is not only a place where documents are stored; it is also a contested field where absence, stigma, and delayed testimony shape what can be known.

Counter-archival reconstruction clarifies why Indonesian post-authoritarian writing cannot be reduced to historical illustration. Literature does not replace missing evidence with certainty; it exposes the conditions under which public truth has become fractured. This reading extends Eddyono's account [1] of selective erasure, Leksana and Subekti's work [2] on fragmented intergenerational memory, An's reading [10] of poetic accounting, and Ilma's emphasis [9] on unfinished death and archival silence. The corpus suggests that literary texts reconstruct violence by redistributing narrative authority toward subjects who were erased, displaced, or rendered suspect. This study therefore positions post-authoritarian literature as a critical memory practice that makes damaged archives legible without falsely completing them.

5. DISCUSSION

The prominence of fractured temporality, spectral memory, archival silence, and intergenerational transmission indicates that Indonesian post-authoritarian literature functions as a form of memory work precisely because historical violence cannot be narrated as a settled past. Its significance lies in the way literary form turns incompletion into critical knowledge. Non-linear chronology, delayed disclosure, and recurring absence do not merely aestheticize trauma; they prevent political violence from being absorbed into a smooth national narrative. This finding supports Eddyono's (2023) [1] argument that post-New Order memory remains shaped by selective erasure and extends Leksana and Subekti's (2022) [2] account of fragmented third-generation remembrance. Yet it also complicates readings that treat literature primarily as representational recovery. The texts do not simply restore what has been silenced; they expose why restoration remains difficult. This study therefore shows that damaged form is not a deficiency of memory but an ethical strategy for narrating unresolved violence.

The underlying structure behind this pattern is not a simple causal relation between authoritarian violence and fragmented narration, but a layered correlation among damaged archives, unstable testimony, intergenerational distance, and the politics of public recognition. Fragmentation appears because political violence has not only injured individuals; it has also disrupted the social conditions under which memory becomes communicable. Leong's (2021) [3] reading of haunted landscapes and Ilma's (2026) [9] emphasis on unfinished death help explain why suppressed violence often returns through place, atmosphere, and spectral presence rather than complete testimony. An's (2025) [10] discussion of poetic incoherence also supports this interpretation, since incoherence can become an appropriate form for events that resist orderly narration. At the same time, this finding resists any romanticization of fragmentation. Broken narrative form signals both literary agency and historical damage. Its critical power depends on acknowledging that aesthetic rupture emerges from constrained access to truth, mourning, and justice.

The second finding, centered on censorship, fear, and narrative risk, matters because it shifts discussion from visible prohibition to internalized and formalized constraint. Censorship in these texts is not limited to banned books, explicit state control, or institutional suppression. It also appears as hesitation, coded speech, withheld naming, allegorical displacement, and domesticized caution. This broader understanding resonates with Ferdinal's (2021) [4] treatment of terror narrative and Kadamehang's (2026) [12] attention to dissenting language, while Ansori (2026) [14] and Ramadhan (2026) [15] extend this issue into surveillance, digital visibility, and platform-mediated literary circulation. The implication is that post-authoritarian freedom of expression cannot be assessed only through formal regime change. Literature records how fear survives in tone, narrative pacing, indirection, and the management of risk. This study therefore identifies censorship as a literary condition that shapes expression even when overt authoritarian censorship has formally weakened.

The reason censorship persists as narrative form lies in the afterlife of political classification. Violence in the Indonesian post-authoritarian context is not remembered only through victims and perpetrators, but also through labels, suspicions, euphemisms, and inherited stigma. When texts rely on allegory, implication, or deferred naming, they are not necessarily avoiding political commitment; they are registering the continuing danger attached to speech about violence. Refai's (2026) [11] work on political allegory supports this view by showing how indirect narration can serve as resistance rather than evasion. Herujiyanto's (2023) [16] analysis of threat also clarifies how ideological categorization can structure fear long after the original event. However, this study differs from approaches that interpret indirectness only as political prudence. Here, indirection also becomes a method of representing the damaged relation between language and public truth. Fear shapes narrative not by silencing literature entirely, but by forcing literature to encode danger into form.

The third finding, concerning counter-archival reconstruction, is significant because it shows that literature redistributes memory authority toward subjects and spaces marginalized by official narratives. Victim-centered narration, family archive, exilic memory, poetic testimony, symbolic affective evidence, and

refusal of official closure demonstrate that literary texts do not merely supplement historical archives. They create alternative modes of knowing when formal archives are incomplete, inaccessible, or politically compromised. This supports Widyatnyana's (2026) [8] work on trauma narratives and Ilma's (2026) [9] concern with archival silence, while also connecting with Mayasari-Hoffert's (2025) [7] emphasis on collective trauma and Widodo and Andalas's (2024) [6] reading of post-New Order fiction on Chinese Indonesian violence. The implication is not that literature replaces historical documentation, but that it reveals what documentation often cannot hold: fear, stigma, affect, bodily memory, family secrecy, and unresolved mourning. Counter-archive here functions as ethical reconstruction rather than evidentiary substitution.

The underlying structure of counter-archival writing is produced by an uneven relationship between recognition and repair. Official acknowledgement, public commemoration, and scholarly recovery may open memory spaces, but they do not automatically resolve narrative injury. This explains why the corpus repeatedly turns to families, exiles, prisoners, descendants, domestic interiors, peripheral spaces, and poetic forms as alternative memory carriers. Maslahah and Purwanta's (2025) [13] account of local post-1965 memory and Leksana's work [2] on East Java memory cultures support the importance of situated, non-centralized remembrance. At the same time, this study avoids claiming that literary counter-archives deliver historical closure. Their function is more critical: they keep violence narratable without making it falsely complete. This is where Indonesian post-authoritarian literature makes its strongest theoretical contribution. Writing after fear becomes a practice of sustaining difficult memory, contesting selective erasure, and exposing the unfinished relation among violence, language, and public truth.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesian post-authoritarian literature reconstructs political violence not through transparent recovery, but through fractured temporality, spectral memory, censorship-shaped narration, and counter-archival voice. Its most important lesson is that fear does not end when authoritarian rule formally collapses; it persists as narrative hesitation, inherited stigma, withheld naming, and damaged public truth. This study contributes to literary and memory studies by shifting attention from representation of violence to form of reconstruction: how novels, poetry, and contextual documents make absence, silence, and incomplete testimony analytically meaningful. Methodologically, this study strengthens qualitative textual inquiry by integrating corpus metadata, coding categories, and interpretive reading.

This study remains limited by its document-based corpus and interpretive design. It does not measure reader reception, authorial intention, publishing constraints, classroom circulation, or broader public impact. Its findings therefore should be read as textual and discourse-based claims rather than general conclusions about Indonesian society as a whole. Future research should expand this corpus by including regional literatures, oral histories, school textbooks, digital literary platforms, censorship archives, and reader interviews. Comparative work across Southeast Asian post-authoritarian contexts would also clarify whether fragmented memory, indirect dissent, and counter-archival reconstruction operate as specifically Indonesian patterns or as wider literary responses to unresolved political violence.

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Hasanudin: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible literary works, scholarly studies, and contextual public-memory documents.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible literary works, scholarly studies, and contextual public-memory documents, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of publicly accessible literary works, scholarly studies, and contextual public-memory documents analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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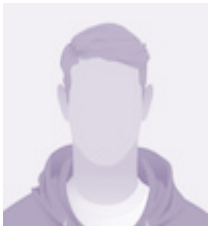
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