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Candidate-Centric Systems and the Politicization of Ethnicity: Evidence from Indonesia

Colm A. Fox

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Ringkasan dalam Bahasa Indonesia

Kapan dan mengapa calon mempolitisasi etnisitas? Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa sistem pemilu yang berpusat pada calon (candidate-centric) mendorong calon untuk menonjolkan etnisitas. Berdasarkan pengodean laporan kampanye di surat kabar Waspada (Medan) dari pemilu 1997 hingga 2014, saya menunjukkan bahwa politisasi etnisitas justru menurun selama masa transisi demokrasi, ketika Indonesia masih memakai sistem yang berpusat pada partai dan krisis ekonomi mendorong calon berkampanye dengan agenda reformasi dan pembangunan nasional. Setelah sistem menjadi lebih berpusat pada calon menjelang Pemilu 2009, calon mulai berkampanye melalui hubungan lokal mereka dengan kelompok etnis dan agama.

Candidate-centric systems and the politicization of ethnicity: Evidence from Indonesia

When and why do electoral candidates politicize ethnicity? From the literature, we might expect this behaviour to occur during democratic transitions or under proportional rules. However, empirical support for these arguments is mixed. This article presents a new approach, arguing that candidate-centric rules offer candidates incentives to politicize ethnicity. The argument is tested in Indonesia with empirical evidence drawn from coding newspaper reports on campaign events, endorsements and group appeals. Indonesia used party-centric rules from 1997 to 2004, and even though the country democratized during this period, the politicization of ethnicity actually declined. I show how party-centric rules, coupled with a national economic crisis, encouraged candidates to campaign on broad national platforms of reform and development, thereby appealing to the poor rather than to ethnic groups. Between 2004 and 2009, the system became more candidate-centric and the politicization of ethnicity increased. I argue that changes in the system freed candidates from national party platforms and motivated them to campaign on their local connections with ethnic groups. This study is particularly pertinent amidst the push for direct candidate-centric elections in the developing world and the lack of literature on how such rules could affect ethnic politics.

Introduction

In multi-ethnic societies, election campaigns can be contentious affairs. Their effect on inter-ethnic relations can be particularly acute, as politicians' campaign methods frequently sharpen ethnic divisions, reducing elections to zero-sum struggles for power and domination between increasingly hostile ethnic groups. When and why do elections become ethnicized, and under what conditions do candidates choose to politicize ethnicity?

The most prominent answer to this question focuses on the nature of transitional elections in ethnically diverse countries. It argues that in an environment with weak institutions, strong ethnic bonds, and nascent partisan attachment, candidates can bolster support by appealing to voters' emotional allegiances to their tribe, language group, region or religion. Such appeals often ethnicize transitional democratic elections, making them particularly divisive and prone to violence.[1]

However, the present article shows that this argument cannot explain patterns of ethnic campaigning in Indonesia, one of the largest and most ethnically diverse democracies in the world. Analysing empirical evidence from a content analysis of pre-election newspaper reports in an ethnically diverse region of Indonesia between 1997 and 2014, I show that the politicization of ethnicity actually declined during the election campaign of 1999, which marked a democratic transition. Candidates in this election emphasized national economic development and government reform, rarely appealing to religious or indigenous identities. This pattern changed in 2009 when candidates began to mobilize the support of local religious, indigenous and community groups in their election campaigns. Why did Indonesian candidates downplay ethnicity in the transitional election in 1999, but more overtly rally ethnic support since 2009?

To explain this pattern, I draw on insights from the personal vote literature, putting forward an institutional argument to explain changes in ethnic campaigning. This literature has shown that electoral rules can affect how candidates campaign. Specifically, when candidates need personal votes, they are more likely to campaign on personal attributes, their constituency service, and local agendas, whereas in other situations they campaign on the party label and national issues.[2]

In 1997 and 1999, Indonesia used a closed-list proportional representation (PR) electoral system. These rules gave political party leaders considerable power over candidates and offered candidates strong incentives to promote the political party, voice the party line and campaign on prominent national issues. Because Indonesia's democratic transition had been sparked by a devastating financial crisis and pent-up grievances over rampant government corruption, the key national issues were economic development and government reform. As a result, candidates' campaign activity in 1999 consisted largely of party rallies at which they stood loyally alongside party leaders and promoted democratic development, a tough stance on corruption, and economic development. Where they did aim their appeals at any population segment, candidates largely targeted those most affected by the financial crisis—i.e. the poor—more than any particular indigenous or religious groups.

Between 2004 and 2009, there was a shift from party-centric to candidate-centric rules for legislative elections—specifically, a change from closed-list PR to open-list PR. Candidates now had to compete for personal votes to get elected. ~~Between 2004 and 2009, Indonesia's electoral system become more candidate-centric due to two key changes. First, with regard to the executive branch, direct elections for district heads, governors and the president were introduced. Second, on the legislative side, the electoral rules changed from closed-list PR to open-list PR.~~

~~Now, candidates for both executive and legislative positions had to compete for personal votes to get elected.~~ This shift to a candidate-centric system had a dramatic impact on campaigns. From the literature, we would expect candidate-centric rules to create incentives for candidates to emphasize their personal attributes and constituency service, and they did. But beyond that, candidate-centric elections also encouraged candidates to appeal to local ethnic and community groups. The evidence indicates that they increasingly attended smaller ethnic-group campaign events rather than large party rallies, campaigned with local ethnic leaders rather than party leaders, crafted more ethnic appeals, and switched the focus of their messages from the platforms and performance of parties to their own personal traits, experience and service.

Although candidate-centred elections can forge tighter connections between constituents and their representatives, thus increasing accountability, this research shows that it can also increase the politicization of local ethnic groups. Even though Pomper observed a similar phenomenon in the US in the 1960s, the ways in which candidate-centric rules shape ethnic politics have been overlooked in the literature on ethnic politics and democracy.[3]

The politicization of ethnicity

Why do candidates politicize ethnicity in elections? A simple answer is that it works or, at a minimum, that they believe they can mobilize some support from their ethnic kin through such appeals. The literature on ethnic politics offers a range of explanations as to why elections and, more broadly, politics might be organized along ethnic lines. One explanation emphasizes people's strong psychological attachments to their ethnic kin and the tendency of ethnic groups to try to improve their status and self-esteem by dominating and denigrating other ethnic groups. In this competitive world, it is not just self-esteem but the very survival of ethnic groups is at stake, making it easy for politicians to mobilize the electorate for ethnic voting and other forms of divisive behaviour.[4]

A second view contends that ethnic groups are motivated not by self-esteem but by differing cultural or social values; for example, ethnic groups want to speak their own language, attend their own schools and have public policies tailored to their specific needs and values.[5] According to a third view, ethnic groups are not motivated by status concerns or differing values, but by the pursuit of scarce material resources, such as jobs, government contracts, handouts and subsidies. Ethnicity, in this view, often plays an important coordinating and informational role in the pursuit of scarce resources.[6]

Although group status, differing values, and competition over resources can all drive ethnic mobilization, there are particular times and contexts when these root causes become most acute. Critical junctures—times of abrupt structural shocks such as economic collapse, social upheaval, regime change and war—are associated with the politicization of ethnicity and are particularly detrimental to inter-ethnic relations.[7] These turning points can alter inter-group

power relations, intensify contestation over differing cultural values, and increase competition over policy and access to resources.

Many scholars have focused on transitions to democracy as a major critical juncture and found that such junctures trigger ethnic mobilization and conflict. Snyder and Mansfield, who have done the most prominent work in this area, connect democratization with the politicization of nationalism and ethnicity through the actions of aspiring politicians. In emerging democracies with weak institutions, politicians have strong incentives to use belligerent ethnic and nationalist rhetoric to mobilize electoral support along ethnic lines. Although this rhetoric helps politicians to attain support, it also increases the risk of ethno-nationalist conflict.[8] Other scholars have reported similar findings. During transitions to democracy in multi-ethnic states in Africa, Asia and the former Soviet Union, Reilly highlighted the emergence of ethno-nationalist parties—that is, parties that drew their support from one ethnic group or region and espoused nationalist or separatist agendas.[9] Meanwhile, several works have linked democratization with ethno-nationalist mobilization and ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic countries.[10] In sum, this literature suggests that during transitions to democracy in multi-ethnic countries, a common way to gain voters' support is to appeal to their fears and turn electoral politics into a competition between ethnic groups. The main problem with this argument is that many multi-ethnic countries have successfully transitioned to democracy without much ethnic contestation.[11]

Overall, much of the ethnic politics literature draws a direct line from the politicization of ethnicity to inter-ethnic contestation or ethnic conflict. However, the use of ethnicity in election campaigns is often more subtle and less divisive. In fact, it can be quite inclusive when candidates reach out to multiple ethnic groups. As a result, this article conceptualizes the politicization of ethnicity during campaigns in a more neutral fashion. It involves the use of

campaign messages, signals, or activities by candidates to invoke ethnicity. Moreover, in politicizing ethnicity, candidates may invoke their own ethnicity or reach out across ethnic groups by appealing to ethnic categories they do not belong to.

~~Other literature on constitutional engineering focuses on the impact of institutions, particularly electoral rules, on the politicization of ethnicity. The most prominent argument here is that proportional representation (PR) rules politicize ethnicity whereas majoritarian rules depoliticize ethnicity.[12] Scholars have argued that PR and multi-seat districts enable small, ethnically oriented parties to form, because minority groups can win seats only by appealing to their ethnic kin for support. In contrast, under majoritarian rules, parties need broader support to win elections, so they form nationally oriented parties and make more inclusive appeals. This explanation may seem logical, but the empirical evidence to support it is mixed.[13]~~

The politicization of ethnicity and candidate-centric systems

~~This article takes a different approach to the relationship between institutions and ethnic politics. Drawing on the personal vote literature,~~ This article~~it~~ focuses on the constraints and incentives that aspiring candidates face. ~~This~~ It draws on the personal vote literature,~~—~~which takes a methodologically individualist approach,~~, placing~~ It places candidates at the centre of the analysis and ~~—~~has shown that the electoral system affects candidate behaviour in predictable ways. Electoral systems range from candidate- to party-centric, and various electoral rules can cause the system to lean one way or the other. For example, nonpartisan rules and open-list PR make it more candidate-centric, whereas closed-list PR makes it more party-centric.[14]

Under candidate-centric electoral rules, the candidate's personal reputation is most important and voters are most concerned with the candidate's character, responsiveness and

ability to meet their needs. Candidates in this situation enjoy greater independence in how they campaign and have strong incentives to use personal vote strategies, tending to highlight their personal attributes, develop close relationships with constituents, pursue particularistic policies and engage in pork-barrel politics.[15] Under party-centric rules, on the other hand, the party's reputation is more important and what matters most to voters is the standing, ideology and platform of the candidate's party. Voters want to know about parties, not the individual candidate. Therefore, candidates have less independence as to how they campaign and strong incentives to toe the party line. They are also less closely connected with constituents and they primarily promote their political party and broader programmatic policies.

Most of these findings come from developed countries such as the US, and the studies have not explicitly looked at the effect of candidate-centric rules on ethnic politics. However, some research suggests that candidate-centric rules might have an important effect on ethnic politics in the developing world. We know that candidate-centric elections offer strong incentives for pork-barrel spending. We also know that, in many developing countries, pork-barrel spending is frequently distributed along ethnic lines.[16] Combining these two insights suggests that candidate-centric elections could exacerbate an already ethnicized politics of pork, increasing the salience and politicization of ethnic identities.

Pomper offers some empirical evidence that connects candidate-centric rules and the politicization of ethnicity. He compared partisan (party-centric) and nonpartisan (candidate-centric) municipal elections in the US, finding that under candidate-centric rules, the candidates were responsible for financing and organizing their own campaigns. Untethered from the party label, they more frequently engaged in ethnic mobilization to attain support, campaigning

through ethnic associations such as Italian social organizations, black churches and local ethnic media. This pattern ultimately resulted in higher levels of ethnic voting.[17]

Making a distinction between candidate-centric and party-centric electoral systems can help us to understand candidates' ethnic campaign strategy. Under party-centric rules, a candidate's campaign strategy is largely dictated from above, i.e. by the political party. Candidates have strong incentives to appease party leaders, promote the party's reputation and platform, and target partisan voters. In contrast, under candidate-centric rules, candidates have more freedom to control their campaigns and tend to look below, i.e. to their constituents. They have strong incentives to promote their personal reputation and to mobilize members of organized groups at the local community level.

These incentives result in different campaign strategies. Under party-centric rules, candidates' campaigns emphasize their connection to the political party along with the party's performance, platform, ideology, and the quality of leadership. They engage in party rallies with leaders and other candidates, seek endorsements from regional and national party leaders, and make verbal appeals to the party faithful. Under candidate-centric rules, candidates appeal directly to members of organized local groups. Depending on the society, these groups may be ethnic or non-ethnic. However, in many multi-ethnic democracies around the world, ethnic groups are the most organized and salient groups at the local level, with the result that candidates have strong incentives to appeal to ethnicity. Campaign strategies in these contexts stress ethnic identity, character, work experience, local community service, and personal connections with local groups and institutions. Candidates also organize more intimate campaign events with particular ethnic and community associations, seek endorsements from the leaders of these entities, and verbally emphasize their support for such groups. Appealing to local groups and

emphasizing personal attributes helps to establish a personal reputation as responsive and builds trust with the group targeted. For an illustration of this argument, see Figure 1.

[Figure 1 here]

Of course, candidates can and do use both types of appeals in their campaigns. However, I contend that they will place greater emphasis on party-centred campaign strategies when the rules are highly party-centric. Conversely, as the rules become more candidate-centric, candidates will de-emphasize the party; in addition to promoting their personal attributes, they direct their campaigns towards organized (and often ethnic) groups at the local level.

Institutional change in Indonesia

Indonesia is a particularly good place to test this theoretical argument for two reasons. First, it is an ethnically diverse country where attachments to religious and indigenous ethnic groups are particularly salient. Second, Indonesia has experienced two significant institutional changes in the last two decades: a transition to democracy in 1999 and a shift from a party-centric to a candidate-centric system between 2004 and 2009. Studying the politicization of ethnicity through these time periods can illuminate the impact of both democratization and candidate-centric rules.

Historically, Indonesia's electoral system has been party-centric and controlled by one hegemonic party, Golkar. After gaining independence from the Dutch, Indonesia had a brief period of democracy, holding its first democratic election in 1955. However, the election and subsequent efforts by President Sukarno did not ease the increasingly hostile political

competition between Indonesia's main rival factions. After an attempted coup in 1965 and an anti-communist purge, the country slid into a long era of authoritarianism under a military general, Suharto. Six national elections were held during Suharto's autocratic rule, between 1971 and 1997. In these elections, competition was restricted to three parties: an Islamic party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, or PPP), a secular-nationalist party (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or PDI), and the governing party, Golkar. The elections were merely a façade, however, because a sophisticated system of electoral manipulation and intimidation ensured Golkar's continued domination. These elections were also quite party-centric, following a closed-list PR formula under which seats won by a party were allocated to candidates in the electoral district according to their order on the list. This arrangement allowed party leaders to control which of their candidates would get seats, fostering party discipline and loyalty.[18]

In the second half of 1997, the Asian financial crisis hit Indonesia. Amidst the flight of capital, a plummeting rupiah, mass demonstrations and riots, Suharto was forced to resign. Accounts claim that Suharto's regime fell because the corrupt system supporting it collapsed due to internal forces and external pressures from a student-led democracy movement.[19]

In the wake of this dramatic change, democratic elections were held in 1999. They allowed for genuine multiparty competition but remained party-centric, using the same closed-list PR formula. Over 40 new parties formed and competed in the 1999 election and the subsequent one in April 2004; most of these were secular-nationalist or moderate Islamic parties.[20]

The next major change in the legislative electoral rules came in 2009, when the electoral system went from a closed-list PR system to a full open-list PR system.[21] This meant that seats won by a party in a given electoral district were allocated to the candidates in that district who

received the greatest number of votes. These elections were more candidate-centric because candidates competed against others from their own party for personal votes in order to win a seat.

These changes offer an ideal opportunity to test the impact of institutional change on the politicization of ethnicity during Indonesia's legislative elections. ~~Between 2004 and 2009, Indonesia's electoral system become more candidate-centric in two ways. With regard to the executive branch, direct elections for district heads, governors and the president were introduced. Previously, the holders of these positions had been appointed by their respective legislative bodies. These elections were candidate-centric in several respects: candidates largely financed and managed their own campaigns, they could be supported by multiple parties, and constituents (whose attachment to parties was already weak) voted for an individual, not a party. Second, the rules for legislative elections changed in the 2009 election from closed-list PR to open-list PR. This meant that seats won by a party in a given electoral district were allocated to the candidates in that district who received the greatest number of votes. These elections were more candidate-centric because candidates competed against others from their own party for personal votes in order to win a seat.~~

~~These changes offer an ideal opportunity to test the impact of institutional change on the politicization of ethnicity during elections.~~ First, we can compare the authoritarian 1997 election campaign with the transitional 1999 election, which occurred rather quickly after Suharto's demise and before major constitutional changes were enacted. In this environment of weak democratic institutions, we would expect candidates and parties to politicize ethnicity.[22] Second, we can compare the party-centric 1997–2004 campaigns with the candidate-centric 2009 and

2014 campaigns (Table 1). If my argument is correct, we should see a change in campaign strategies towards higher levels of ethnic politicization under candidate-centric rules.

[Table 1 here]

Studying election campaigns and ethnic politics in Indonesia

In systematic studies, ethnic voting patterns are often used to measure ethnic politicization.[23] While they can offer valuable insights on how voters vote, they provide no information on the appeals made by candidates in elections. We must assume from voting patterns that candidates actively politicized ethnicity in some way if their support comes overwhelmingly from a certain group. While less common, systematic studies on how candidates campaign, allow us to identify specific instances when candidates actively politicize ethnicity. The advantage of these studies is that they help us uncover what might drive ethnic politicization in the first place.

To study how candidates campaign I draw data from regional newspaper reports on campaigns in the province of North Sumatra between 1997 and 2014.~~To study this period of institutional change, data are drawn from regional newspaper reports on campaigns in the province of North Sumatra between 1997 and 2014.~~ This empirical strategy offers several advantages. First, pre-election regional newspaper reports offer extensive, detailed information on local candidates' and party campaigns that can be compared over time.[24] Previous studies in other parts of the world have shown that a content analysis of these pre-election reports can uncover a wealth of detailed information on election campaigns, such as the location of campaign events, candidate endorsements, appeals to ethnic groups, the salience of candidate

attributes, and the prevalence of particular issues.[25] In addition, pre-election reports in regional Indonesian papers tend to faithfully reflect the positive image and appeals that candidates and parties want to project. The reports contain little editorial comment, political analysis or critique; in fact, they are often written by or in conjunction with candidates and campaign managers.[26] The newspapers have a financial motivation to engage with candidates and publish these positive, uncritical reports because candidates and parties will often buy and freely distribute large numbers of copies, thereby providing much-needed extra revenue for the newspaper.[27]

Second, in terms of the region, North Sumatra is a particularly good place to study ethnic politics, as it is one of the more ethnically diverse provinces in Indonesia and has rich ethnic traditions.[28] Islam is the majority religion, claiming 66% of the population, but there is a large Protestant minority (27%) as well as smaller numbers of Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus. Ethnicity is even more fragmented among a number of Batak indigenous groups as well as the Javanese, Malay, and Indonesian Chinese, with no dominant group. As in other parts of Indonesia, religion and indigeneity are salient forms of identity in the people's daily lives and inter-ethnic relations. Social life often revolves around indigenous and religious rituals, ceremonies, prayer groups, and festivals,[29] and occasionally inter-ethnic tensions come to the fore. In 1998, protests calling for reform turned into riots that targeted the Chinese minority in the capital city of Medan by looting their shops.[30] Christian churches' attempts to acquire operating permits have also been a source of tension, and in recent years some churches have been burned down.

A final advantage of this approach is that is it offers some control over potentially mitigating local and regional factors. Both the data source and regional variables are held constant over time, allowing us to test how changes in the institutions have affected campaigns.

~~North Sumatra has historically had perhaps the most vibrant and widely read regional press in Indonesia, and several newspapers are published in Medan.~~North Sumatra has historically had a vibrant and independent regional press, with several major newspapers published in Medan.[31] After surveying these newspapers, I selected *Waspada* for my in-depth study. *Waspada* is the longest-running daily paper in the region, broadly popular across indigenous and religious groups in North Sumatra and well known for its extensive local election coverage. In addition, it had the same owner throughout the study period. Print versions of *Waspada*'s pre-election reports were gathered from archives in Indonesia and the US on the last five legislative elections (1997, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014). Every pre-election report in the three weeks preceding each election was photographed and stored digitally in a database. This three-week window was chosen because the bulk of reports on the campaigns were published during this time. The articles that qualified as pre-election reports included paid advertorials on candidates' and parties' campaigns, reports on campaign events (party rallies, community events, door-to-door campaigns, etc.), and interviews with local party leaders and candidates.

I composed a comprehensive codebook for coding the reports during eight months of fieldwork in Medan. In developing the codebook, I consulted with research assistants, experts on the local media, constituents, campaign managers and journalists on interpretation of the reports and on the use of ethnic campaign appeals. Using a simple random sampling technique, I read and coded every second report. The substantive coding involved identifying references to (1) campaign events, (2) elite support or endorsements, and (3) explicit appeals to particular social groups.[32]

With regard to the first of these categories, reports usually focused on one campaign event, such as a political rally, a meeting with an indigenous youth group, or a candidate's

participation in a community-level mosquito eradication event. Second, endorsements were defined broadly for coding purposes; there were some explicit and official endorsements by associations and elites, but implicit support in the form of attendance by particular elites and institutional leaders at a candidate's campaign event was more common. Finally, explicit appeals to ethnic and non-ethnic social groups were defined as a candidate's positive statement of support or admiration for a particular group. For such an instance to be coded, the candidate had to mention the group by name or use a term closely related to the group.

For purposes of analysis, each aspect of a campaign (i.e. a religious event, indigenous event, religious endorsement, etc.) was stored as a binary variable, equal to 1 if present in a report and 0 if not. This method allowed me to see how campaigns changed from one election to the next. For example, I could calculate whether the percentage of reports describing religious-related campaign events increased or declined over time. I used these data and insights from the reports to assess whether and how democratization and a candidate-centric system affected the politicization of ethnicity.

Democratization and the lack of ethnic politicization

To study the impact of democratization, Table 2 compares data from the 1997 authoritarian election campaign and the 1999 transitional election. The 1997 and 1999 figures indicate the percentage of reports that mentioned (at least once) a religious or indigenous event, endorsement or group appeal. The figure for "Change" represents the percentage of increase or decrease in 1999 relative to 1997. If democratization had a politicizing impact on ethnicity, we should see an increase in these percentages, but that is not the case. With the exception of religious events, the figures indicate a decline in each of the categories examined.

[Table 2 here]

If candidates and parties were not mobilizing ethnic and religious groups in significant ways, how were they campaigning for support? In terms of events, large political rallies and street parades (*pawai*), prominent during the authoritarian years, were the most common type of campaign event, particularly for the larger parties. Similar to previous elections, at these events constituents were entertained with popular music and *dangdut* (a genre of Indonesian music); given free gifts such as party T-shirts, pens and staple foods; and introduced to the party's new candidates. In terms of endorsements, local religious, indigenous or community elites played little or no role; rather, regional and national party leaders voiced support for the party and their candidates.

The 1999 election, which occurred amidst the pain of a devastating financial crisis, did exhibit a shift in the kinds of appeals made. Candidates and party leaders from an array of new

parties spent much of their time criticizing Golkar and its leadership, emphasizing the need for democracy to flourish, calling for political reform, and promising to stamp out corruption once and for all. When candidates did make identity-group appeals, they often appealed to working-class occupational groups and the poor, those most affected by the financial crisis. In these appeals, they emphasized issues of social justice: they appealed to fishermen by criticizing the large fishing companies, to farmers by proposing land reform, and to labourers by arguing that wages were too low and that the government had continually ignored workers and their rights.

While many new parties formed for the 1999 elections, the new party system, to some degree, reflected the system from the 1950s—one that was rooted in traditional sociocultural divides or what is termed aliran (streams) in the Indonesian literature.[33] In 1999, the political parties were largely divided in terms of their views on the role of Islam, with the main cleavage between nationalist and Islamic parties. Candidates in these parties toed the party line and their appeals corresponded with their party's orientation; for example, Islamic appeals were almost totally limited to the Islamic party candidates, whereas the nationalist party candidates occasionally used nationalist appeals but eschewed explicit religious appeals.

~~When candidates made religious or nationalist appeals, these tended to correspond with the ideology of the political parties; for example, Islamic appeals were almost totally limited to the Islamic parties, whereas the nationalist parties occasionally used nationalist appeals but eschewed explicit religious appeals.~~

Overall, there is no evidence of an increase in the politicization of religious or indigenous groups during the transitional election of 1999. This finding is all the more striking when one considers the swiftness with which the transitional election was held—before democratic institution building and constitutional reform, and under a cloud of serious ethnic conflicts in

various parts of Indonesia. The events, endorsements and rhetoric of the 1999 campaign suggest that the context of the election (held during a severe national financial crisis) and the use of party-centric rules were important factors in shaping campaigns and mitigating ethnic politicization. ~~The parties and candidates continued to engage in large party rallies and focused their attention on the immediate issues of poverty, corruption and political reform, basing their appeals on economic interests rather than ethnic identities.~~The parties and candidates continued to engage in large party rallies, and national party leaders played prominent roles focusing their campaigns on the immediate issues of poverty, corruption and political reform, basing their appeals on economic interests rather than ethnic identities.

Candidate-centric systems and the rise in ethnic politicization

To study the impact of a candidate-centric system, I compared campaigns before and after 2009 (see Table 3). The first column of figures presents the total percentage of reports from the three party-centric elections (1997–2004) that mention a type of event, endorsement, group appeal or candidate attribute. The second column presents the data for the candidate-centric 2009–2014 reports. The "Change" column shows whether these percentages rose or declined. In line with the argument, the data show a rise in religious and indigenous events, endorsements and group appeals, plus community events and endorsements after the shift to candidate-centric rules. To test for statistical significance, I performed separate binomial logit regressions on each dependent variable (religious event, indigenous event, etc.), with an individual report as the unit of analysis. The values in the last three columns present the estimate, its standard error, and the odds ratio for the independent variable *candidate-centric rules* (equal to 1 for open-list PR elections, held in 2009 and 2014, and 0 for the previous elections). With the exception of appeals

to religious groups, the rise in all indigenous and community-oriented aspects of campaigns was statistically significant.

[Table 3 here]

In contrast to the minimal effects of democratization, the shift toward a more candidate-centric system had a sweeping impact on campaigns, and in particular on the politicization of ethnicity. One of the biggest changes in election campaigns was a move from large party rallies in 1997–2004 to smaller campaign events with community-based, indigenous and religious groups in 2009 and 2014. The number of constituents attending these events tended to range from 20 up to a few hundred—far fewer than the numbers at the mass rallies. Community group visits were the most common type of event in 2009 and 2014. In these events, candidates typically visited a neighbourhood and spoke with a small group of residents.[34] They also frequently used community service and sports events as campaign opportunities. There were many reports of candidates providing free mobile medical care to poor neighbourhoods, hosting sports events or working with residents to fumigate areas of mosquitos, clean ditches and plant trees.

The frequency of campaign trips to meet local religious and indigenous groups also rose in 2009 and 2014, relative to the earlier elections. Candidates attended indigenous ceremonies, dances and music events; engaged in rituals such as receiving the traditional indigenous Batak cloth (*ulos*); and occasionally were accepted into the indigenous group by receiving a clan name (*marga*). Candidates also met with religious groups. They paid visits to women's Islamic groups, religious youth groups, Islamic schools, mosques and church congregations. Activities involved

prayers, readings from the Koran, discussions of the group's needs and promises of financial support. The reports on indigenous and religious events were often accompanied by photos of the candidate meeting the group while wearing their indigenous or religious clothing. Overall, the mass rallies that had been a staple of Indonesian campaigns became less prominent. With the shift to a more candidate-centric system, most campaign activity now involves smaller events that often target local ethnic and community groups.

Since 2009, a far more diverse range of local elites, associations, and groups have come out to endorse candidates. The percentage of reports that mentioned support from local religious leaders and associations more than doubled in the 2009–2014 period, while indigenous support increased almost tenfold. To secure support from these groups, candidates visited local religious and indigenous leaders, Islamic and indigenous youth associations, Islamic schools and foundations, and local mosques. Seeking support from Islamic women's groups—small groups of local women who often meet for Islamic recitation—also became a popular tactic in 2009 and 2014. Notably, the nationalist (non-Islamic) party candidates were the ones primarily adopting this strategy. Compared to previous years, indigenous elite support was much more diverse, with elites representing Gayo, Batak Pakpak, Batak Mandailing, Batak Karo, Minangkabau, Javanese and Indonesian Chinese groups.

The percentage of reports that mentioned candidate support from community associations and leaders increased almost fourfold in the 2009 and 2014 elections. Community groups were involved in various aspects of local development, including the environment, health, education and sports. Candidates also reached out to local social associations, especially alumni groups from local high schools and universities in Medan. In addition, support from occupational groups

was no longer confined to civil service associations but also came from leaders in various other occupations, including pensioners, teachers, agricultural workers and transportation workers.

The 2009 and 2014 reports also specifically named the elites who supported and actively engaged with candidates—for example, at community service events. This tendency was in particularly sharp contrast with the 1997 election reports, in which elites were passive bystanders at rallies, identified simply as community, youth, religious, or indigenous leaders rather than by name. This change was not due to a sudden improvement in journalism, but because candidates actively sought to highlight the support of a particular local figure. Overall, with the shift to a candidate-centric system, candidates relied less on party leaders for support and instead sought support from a more diverse range of local elites and associations, the most prominent of these being local community, religious and indigenous bodies.

The main impact of the move to a candidate-centric system on candidate outreach strategies has been a rise in religious and indigenous appeals and a decline in appeals to occupational groups. In 2009 and 2014, religious (specifically Islamic) appeals by both Islamic and nationalist party candidates have increased. In addition, the percentage of reports invoking indigenous groups has increased threefold, with candidates appealing to a wider range of indigenous groups. Candidates usually emphasized their personal connection to the group or highlighted the importance of preserving the group's culture and traditions. Meanwhile, there has been a decline in appeals to class-based groups, specifically occupational and marginalized groups, which was particularly stark when compared to the salience of class during the 1999 campaign. Notably, appeals to women have increased in recent years. This rise can partly be attributed to more female candidates taking part in elections,[35] more exposure in the press[36] and

more strenuous efforts by candidates to secure women's votes through campaign visits to women's prayer groups.

One striking change clearly illustrated the shift in election coverage from parties to candidates. Beginning in 2009, news reports have invariably contained a candidate's name; previously, they used the party name. From 1997 to 2004, news articles generally described party rallies and extensively quoted party leaders on their party's platform and past achievements. But from 2009 onwards, the narrative of election reports has been driven by individual candidates' identity, character, work experience and constituent service. Candidates have increasingly referred to their local indigenous identity in these reports, which frequently depict them as dressed in traditional or indigenous clothing. It has also become commonplace for local candidates to claim that people need a *Putra Daerah* ("son of the region") representative in the legislature. Compared to the "Jakarta drop-ins" (i.e. people who live primarily in the capital), candidates who are natives of and still live in the region can develop stronger local connections, which can help to increase their personal support. Candidates' character has become a prominent theme, with many portraying themselves as humble, compassionate, empathetic, honest and hardworking individuals. More column inches are dedicated to candidates' professional achievements and work experience—for example, their leadership roles in political, business, ethnic and non-ethnic organizations, or their work experience in specific professions such as law, education or medicine. Finally, many reports described candidates' personal efforts to help constituents, such as providing legal and medical care for individual residents or delivering personal assistance to earthquake and flood victims.

Overall, the move to a candidate-centric system has been accompanied by a rise in appeals to local religious, indigenous and community groups. In addition, candidates rather than

parties have become the main protagonists in election reports, which pay much closer attention to their individual identity, character, experience and constituent service.[37]

To conclude this section, two important points need to be made on the positive nature of candidates' campaigns and their use of patronage. While the tone of appeals was not explicitly coded, it became clear during the analysis that candidate messages were largely positive and that candidates avoided any negative appeals against particular ethnic groups. Moreover, it was common for candidates to visit, get endorsed by, and appeal to ethnic groups they did not belong to. In a country where indigeneity and religion are an important part of social life, these small ethnic and community events provided candidates with an opportunity to interact with voters from their own, and from other, ethnic groups. There, they promoted their image and disseminated affect-based messages, keying into the expressive or physic aspect of voting.[38] However, candidates' need for personal votes has also provided voters with the leverage to extract material benefits from candidates at these events. Aspinall argues that with the switch to open-list PR, voters have increasingly demanded material benefits for themselves or their communities and that small campaign events provide voters with an ideal opportunity to ask for, or receive, individual or collective gifts.[39] With the introduction of candidate-centric elections, ethnic and community groups are increasingly serving as prominent social networks through which candidates both cultivate personal relationships and spread patronage. They provide a conduit though which candidates act on voters' physic and material interests.

Competing explanations

Several factors other than the introduction of a candidate-centric system could explain the decisive shift observed in campaigns from 2009 onwards. One of these is decentralization. After

the 1999 election, an extensive decentralization programme was implemented across Indonesia, offering substantial revenue and expenditure autonomy at the sub-provincial district level (*Kabupaten/Kota*). It is possible that the availability of more revenues at the local level made candidates more attentive to local ethnic and community needs in the elections after 1999. Second, the number of parties has fluctuated from one election to the next. An election with numerous parties might create incentives for parties to appeal to smaller indigenous groups, whereas the presence of fewer parties could foster appeals to larger groups based on religion or social class. Finally, the ideology of parties—specifically, whether they are Islamic or secular-nationalist in nature—may affect campaigns. Potentially, shifts in the proportion of Islamic parties from one election to the next could increase or decrease the frequency of Islamic appeals.

To account for these competing explanations, I ran regressions on the religious and indigenous aspects of campaigns and included decentralization, the number of parties, and the Islamic or nationalist orientation of parties as controls. ~~I set the *decentralization* variable at 1 for all election reports after the introduction of decentralization (2004–2014) and 0 otherwise.~~I set the *decentralization* variable at 1 for all election reports after the introduction of decentralization (the 2004, 2009 and 2014 elections) and 0 otherwise (the 1997 and 1999 elections). *Number of parties* represents how many parties competed in each election. The *Islamic party* variable was coded as 1 for each report from an Islamic party and 0 for those from secular-nationalist parties.[40] For events I created a “combined" dependent variable which encompassed reports with religious or indigenous events. The same was done for endorsements and group appeals. This facilitated more tests on the impact of candidate-centric rules on the politicization of ethnicity.

[Table 4 here]

Table 4 shows that in these regressions, all the variables for candidate-centric rules were positive and statistically significant. Meanwhile, the control variables did not have a systematic impact and were largely insignificant. Alternative regression models also indicated that candidate-centric rules had a significant impact on all religious and indigenous aspects of campaigns (see the Appendix). Overall, in line with the argument, the data indicate that the rise in religious, indigenous and community-oriented aspects of campaigns was associated with a shift to a more candidate-centric system. Moreover, this change cannot be attributed to decentralization, the number of parties or their Islamic or nationalist orientation.

Conclusion

The findings from this article have important implications for institutional design and our understanding of ethnic politics. They move beyond simplistic views on ethnic manipulation by elites, macro-level arguments on democratization, or debates on PR versus majoritarian systems. Instead, they focus on how institutional change can affect political boundaries and structure candidates' campaign strategies, determining whether candidates are guided from above by national party leaders or appeal more intently to local groups within their electoral district.

Whereas others have emphasized the impact of institutional change on political boundaries and ethnic politics, specifically studying the effect of candidate-centric rules is important for two reasons.[41] First, in terms of theory, it clarifies how political boundaries affect ethnic politics. The introduction of candidate-centric rules is a clear example of an institutional change that shrinks boundaries; it also opens up new lines of enquiry. Does the change in

political boundaries affect what identity groups, or categories, become politicized? Moreover, does politicization vary depending on the level of group attachment, their degree of internal organization or the relative size of groups within the political boundaries? It should be noted that the empirical findings from this paper are confined to candidates, not voters, so future work would need to be done on how candidate-centric rules and campaigns might affect ethnic politicization among voters.

The second reason for studying the impact of candidate-centric rules on ethnic politics is more practical and policy-relevant. In recent years, institutes and development organizations like the World Bank have been pushing for greater political decentralization, particularly in developing countries where ethnicity is salient. This decentralization usually involves direct local elections, often under candidate-centric rules, with the aim of increasing local accountability and strengthening personal connections between voters and their representatives. The evidence from Indonesia suggests that candidate-centric rules do indeed reduce the distance between candidates and the people: candidates have become the main protagonists in election campaigns, and constituents are provided with more information about and have more time to engage with candidates. However, a more ominous trend accompanies this pattern. This study's findings also indicate that candidate-centric rules can motivate candidates to shore up their support through exclusively indigenous or religious appeals and campaign strategies. Evidence suggests that this pattern of appeals has occurred to some degree in the highly candidate-centric district head elections in Medan in 2011 and again in Jakarta in 2017.[42]

Fortunately, ethnicization in Indonesian election campaigns has not directly resulted in any significant inter-ethnic electoral violence to date. Ethnic politics has remained localized and quite fragmented, resisting the development of deep and enduring cleavages. But additional

comparative work is warranted to consider whether the present findings are also observed in other countries and to identify any contingent factors that might make candidate-centric electoral systems particularly prone to inter-ethnic violence. This is a critically important issue at a time when major global organizations are pushing political decentralization as a solution to governance issues in developing nations around the world.

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1 Snyder, *From Voting to Violence.*
2 Carey and Shugart, "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote"; Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen, "Looking for Locals."
3 Pomper, "Ethnic and Group Voting."
4 Connor, "Beyond Reason"; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict;* Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds.*
5 Rabushka and Shepsle, in *Politics in Plural Societies*, contend that this tendency makes democracy infeasible in ethnically diverse societies; Lijphart, "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies," emphasizes the importance of institutional design to foster accommodation and compromise.
6 Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition"; Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed;* Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics*. For a review of different approaches to ethnicity and ethnic politics, see Hale, *Foundations of Ethnic Politics*, 13–32.
7 Bertrand, "Ethnic Conflicts in Indonesia"; Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence*.
8 Mansfield and Snyder's works "Democratization and the Danger," "Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength," and *Electing to Fight* use these domestic factors to explain why democratizing countries are prone to international war. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, applies the same argument to explain the detrimental effect of democratization on internal ethnic conflict.
9 Reilly, "Political Engineering."
10 Cederman, Skrede, and Hug, "Elections and Ethnic Civil War"; Mousseau, "Democratizing with Ethnic Divisions"; Saideman et al., "Democratization, Political Institutions."
11 Other literature on constitutional engineering focuses on how proportional electoral rules (PR) politicizes ethnicity while majoritarian rules can depoliticize ethnicity. Unfortunately, the empirical evidence for this argument is mixed, see Huber, "Measuring Ethnic Voting."
12 Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies;* Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.*
13 Evidence in support of this line of argument comes from Sisk and Reynolds, *Elections and Conflict*, and Reilly, *Democracy*, whereas Huber, "Measuring Ethnic Voting," presents evidence for the opposite view.
14 On what types of rules that make a system more or less candidate-centric, see Carey and Shugart, "Incentives to Cultivate Personal Vote"; Samuels, "Incentives to Cultivate Party Vote."
15 For American politics, see Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, *The Personal Vote*; Fenno, *Home Style.* For other countries, see Anagnoson, "Home Style"; Lancaster and Patterson, "Comparative Pork Barrel Politics"; Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen, "Looking for Locals."
16 Caselli and Coleman, *On the Theory*; Fearon, "Why Ethnic Politics."
17 Pomper, "Ethnic and Group Voting."
18 In reality, Golkar party leaders could alter the lists at any time, providing them with even more power over candidates. See King, *Half-Hearted Reform*, 29.
19 Aspinall, *Opposing Suharto*; Robison and Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia*.
20 To prevent the formation of indigenous parties that would appeal to regionally concentrated indigenous groups, the rules required parties to have a party apparatus across the country. See Aspinall, "Democratization and Ethnic Politics," 296.
21 A semi-open list was used in 2004. Voters could choose a party or candidate, but in order for a candidate to get elected out of order they needed to get enough votes to equal or surpass a full party quota. Only two DPR candidates succeeded in winning the full quota.
22 For a detailed explanation of the sequencing and slow pace of institution building in Indonesia, see Horowitz, *Constitutional Change.*
23 For example Basedau et al. "Ethnicity and party preference" Houle "Does ethnic voting harm democracy?" Huber "Measuring ethnic voting," and Posner *Institutions and Ethnic Politics.*
24 Other data sources include radio and television reports, online sources, and party or candidate campaign literature. Unfortunately, these sources suffer from a severe lack of available archives on past elections. The available data are often patchy, difficult to compare and limited to only the most prominent politicians or parties. This is a common problem in developing countries with

information-poor environments.

25 Previous studies of newspaper reports have highlighted each of these features (campaign events: Horowitz, "The Ethnic Logic of Campaign Strategy"; candidate endorsements: Kahn and Kenney, "The Slant of the News"; ethnic appeals: Chandra and Wilkinson, "Measuring the Effect of Ethnicity"; Kuenzi and Lambright, "Campaign Appeals"; candidates' attributes: Balmas and Sheafer, "Candidate Image in Election Campaigns"; issues: Sulkin, "Campaign Appeals"). Although Indonesian regional newspapers have become a major source for databases on incidences of conflict. See Varshney, Tadjoeddin, and Pangabean, "Creating Datasets."

26 This insight comes from several informants in Indonesia who were either directly involved in campaigns or are close observers of Indonesian elections.

27 This point was made by a number of campaign managers and journalists in North Sumatra and other regions of Indonesia.

28 On ethnicity, nationalism, and modernization in North Sumatra during the colonial and post-colonial era, see Liddle, "Ethnicity, Party."

29 Bowen, *Islam, Law, and Equality*; Davidson and Henley, *The Revival of Tradition;* Fealy and White, "Introduction."

30 Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia*. On ethnic riots during the transition in other ethnically diverse districts, see Toha, "Political Competition."

31 During the New Order, media analysts considered Medan's Waspada and Mimbar Umum dailies as major successes in terms of their longevity and independence (Hill, "The press in New Order Indonesia" 119). The province's press flourished after 1999. Journalist sources estimated that 120 newspapers were being published in the province by 2010.

32 The codebook is available from the author's website at www.____.

33 Aliran originates from Clifford Gertz's writings on the three cultural streams of Javanese people. See Ufen, From Aliran to Alignment," on aliran and how it relates to the Indonesian party system before and after the fall of Suharto.

34 Often the participants may have been of a particular ethnic or religious group, but if the affiliation was not explicitly mentioned in the article, I coded it as "community".

35 Quotas were introduced to boost female representation. See Shair-Rosenfield, "The Alternative Incumbency Effect."

36 *Waspada* introduced a special section of interviews with women candidates in 2009, entitled *Kasih Caleg Perempuan* ("Affection for Female Candidates"). These new candidates often emphasized the importance of voting for a female leader, the struggle for gender equality, and efforts to empower women and help female entrepreneurs.

37 Studies on Indonesia's highly candidate-centric district and provincial elections introduced in 2005 also found that candidates reached out to indigenous, religious, and local community groups to a relatively high degree in their campaigns. See the edited volume, Erb and Sulistiyanto, *Deepening Democracy in Indonesia?*

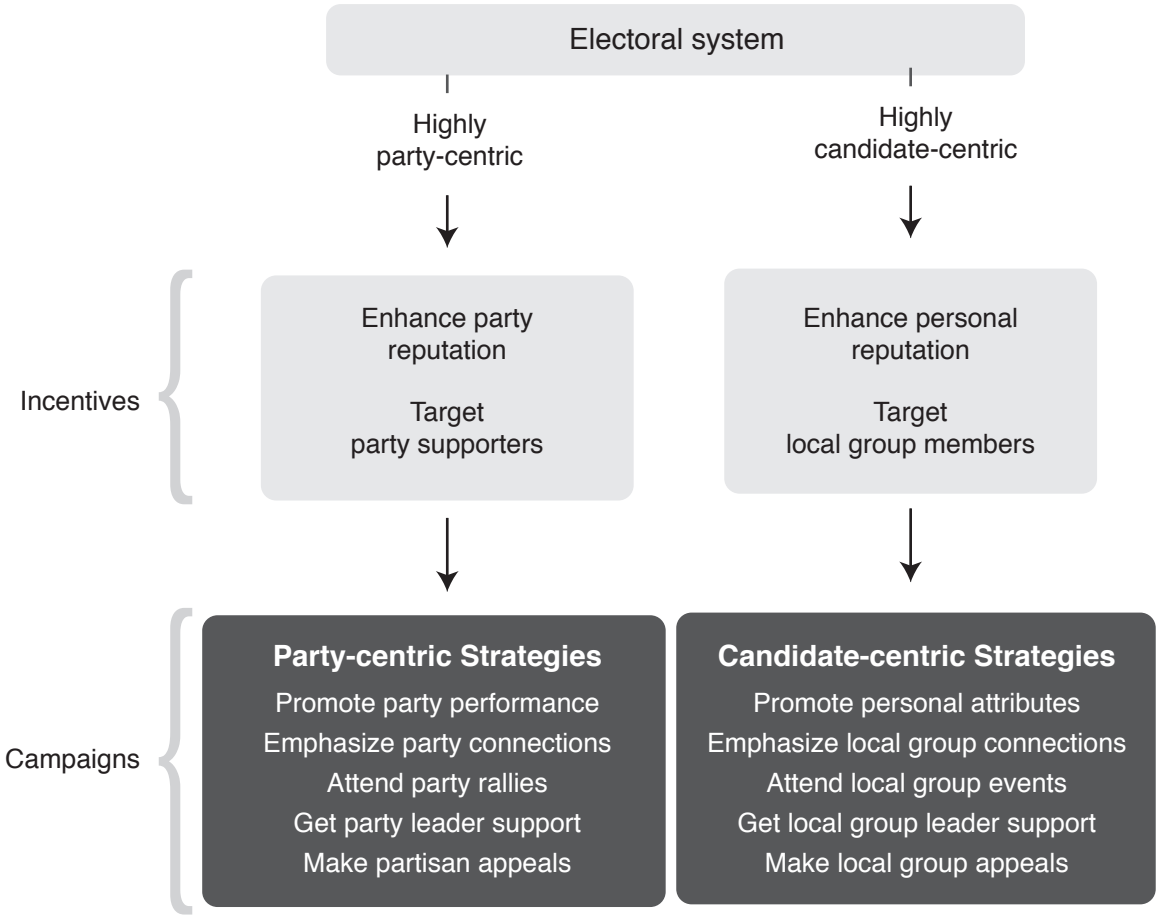
38 For examples on the expressive nature of voting see, Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* and Schuessler, "Expressive Voting." They argue that voting is about affirming your ethnic or political identity and not about instrumental consequences.

39 Aspinall, "Parliament and Patronage" describes how these gifts take form of donations to associations, gifts to voters, or vote-buying.

40 The main Islamic parties were Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Partai Kedadilan Sejahtera, Partai Bulan Bintang and Partai Bintang Reformasi. See the Appendix for a full list of parties.

41 Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics.*

42 Aspinall, "When Religion Trumps" and "Interpreting the Jakarta Election."


Electoral system
Highly party-centric
Highly candidate-centric
Incentives
Enhance party reputation
Target party supporters
Enhance personal reputation
Target local group members
Campaigns
Party-centric Strategies
Promote party performance
Emphasize party connections
Attend party rallies
Get party leader support
Make partisan appeals
Candidate-centric Strategies
Promote personal attributes
Emphasize local group connections
Attend local group events
Get local group leader support
Make local group appeals