

Ethnicity and electoral politics in Indonesia

Convenors: Edward Aspinall, Australian National University

Colm Fox, Singapore Management University

Indonesia is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. It is also the world's third most populous electoral democracy. It thus presents an excellent site for studying how ethnicity can shape, and be shaped, by electoral politics. In times of electoral competition, ethnic identities can become particularly salient and patterns of interethnic contestation are increasingly visible. The process can empower some ethnic groups, marginalize others, or even propel new latent ethnic identities to the fore. Importantly, the outcomes of electoral competition can have enduring effects on the distribution of political rights and economic resources across ethnic groups. Moreover, the vastness of the country and the diversity of its ethnic demography facilitate a comparative approach. Some parts of the country are characterised by fragmented ethnic demography, in which many small groups share a single geographic space; others are dominated by two or three equal groups, with more marked ethnic segregation. In yet other regions, a single group is dominant. In some parts of the country religious identities reinforce ethnic divisions; in others, religious and ethnic identities are cross-cutting. Some areas have long histories of ethnic separatism and communal violence; elsewhere, politics is characterized by inter-group harmony. Participants in this panel will draw on political science, ethnographic and historical approaches to analyse comparative dimensions of the interaction between ethnicity and electoral politics in Indonesia. Together we address questions such as the following: How resilient and widespread are communal voting patterns in modern Indonesian history? How does varied ethnic demography affect the electoral calculations of voters and candidates alike, and thus voting patterns and electoral strategies? Under what conditions are elections dominated by ethnic cooperation and where does ethnic outbidding or competition occur? How does ethnic diversity affect other aspects of democratic life, such as corruption and clientelism? Some papers will draw on statistical analysis of election results and surveys; others will involve close observation of the micropolitics of election campaigns.

Proposed: Double panel format.

Papers: Edward Aspinall and Colm Fox, ANU and SMU

Diego Fossati, Griffith University, Brisbane

Burhanuddin Muhtadi, ANU and Universitas Islam Negara, Jakarta

Karolina Prasad, Tennessee Foreign Language Institute.

Deasy Simandjuntak, Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore

Ward Berenschot, KITLV, Leiden.

Discussant: TBC.