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Do Ethnic Politics Matter? Re-assessing the Role of Ethnicity in Local Elections in Indonesia

Arizka Warganegara, Department of Government Studies, Lampung University, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia and Paul Waley, School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

Abstract: While recent scholarship has investigated the role of money politics in Indonesia, much less has been said about the part played by sentiments of identity. We argue here that ethnicity and religion remain crucial to an understanding of the processes of local politics and electioneering. We have coined the term ethnicity- and religion-based organization (ERBO) and used it as a basis for an examination of ethnicity and religion based identity politics in Lampung, the southernmost province of Sumatra. Ethnic identity dovetails largely with religious identity and is a dominant force in the local politics of Lampung, a province that, while multi-ethnic, has a population consisting overwhelmingly of migrants who relocated from the island of Java primarily as a result of the transmigration programme. ERBOs are the vehicle used by local leaders to channel ethnic sentiment and translate it into votes; they are often instrumental in selecting and campaigning for candidates, ensuring voter turnout and arranging rewards. Reflecting ethnic sensitivities, however, some ERBOs refrain from entering the political domain and direct their energies to social and cultural spheres. In presenting this evidence, we seek to qualify recent claims that ethnicity no longer plays an important part in Indonesian politics.

Keywords: ethnicity; local politics; elections; transmigration; Indonesia

Introduction: ERBOs and the Dynamics of Ethnic Politics in Indonesia

Much of the recent literature on the nature of local politics in Indonesia has focused on the role of money politics and collusion between politicians and local elites (for example, Aspinall and Berenschot, 2019). That money politics, expressed through relations of patronage and clientelism, remains central to the workings of electioneering and politics more generally has been widely evidenced (Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016). It should not, however, obscure the continued significance of ethnicity and religion as motivating factors in shaping local politics. Indeed, we argue here that Aspinall and Berenschot's claim (2019, 132) that, despite the multi-ethnic nature of Indonesia, "the political importance of ethnic identities is muted" is in need of qualification. The instrumentalist emphasis in commentaries on Indonesian politics, it might be said, needs to be tempered with an admixture of constructivist complexity.

With this in mind, our article makes a claim for the continued importance of ethnic and religious identity in Indonesia's local politics, and further for its centrality in areas impacted by transmigration. We argue that ethnicity and religion, sometimes wrapped together in a larger sense of identity, are pivotal forces in local politics. In consequence of this, a specific contribution of this article lies in its examination and evaluation of the activities of ethnicity and religion-based organizations (ERBOs) in the conviction that they tell a previously underplayed story of ethnic and religious involvement in local elections and politics. Their significance, this article argues, lies in their centrality in local politics and specifically, in many cases, to the process of selecting candidates, campaigning for them and managing the patronage system of vote and reward, as well as in all cases to fostering and strengthening ethnic and religious identity more generally. This is not to devalue the significance of clientelism and money politics nor to suggest that identity and money politics occupy two different domains but rather to cast light on some of the intricacies of Indonesia's local politics.

Indonesia's diversity is such that events in one province can never be considered truly representative, but we believe that Lampung, the southernmost province on the island of Sumatra, furnishes broader lessons for the archipelago. As a consequence primarily of the longstanding policy of transmigration, native Lampungese find themselves in a distinct minority in the province (13% in 2010), while Javanese, nearly all descendants of transmigrants, are in the majority (64%). Farmers from Balialso moved to Lampung during the many decades of the now defunct transmigration programme. In some parts of Lampung, including Metro and East Lampung, two of the three areas that are the particular focus of this article, Javanese represent 72% and 81% of the population respectively, and native Lampungese 8% and 10% (Central Statistical Bureau of Indonesia 2013). Many of those who self-identify in the census as Javanese are second, third or even fourth generation transmigrants. Nevertheless, despite the passage of generations, they retain a strong sentiment of Javaneseness. This is expressed in the use of Javanese as the language of everyday communication, as well as in music and a whole host of cultural symbols. The third of our case studies areas is Bandar Lampung, the provincial capital, and here there is a different picture, with a mix of ethnicities. Ethnic Javanese form the largest group with 45%; native Lampungese make up 16%, while Sundanese and Bantenese together represent about 20% of the population. Many of these groups from the west of Java have migrated of their own volition, in particular those from nearby Banten.

This sense of ethnic identity, intensified by transmigration, is expressed too in the existence of a dynamic ethnic and religious associational life, involving native Lampungese just as it does Javanese. It is built around a number of prominent organizations, which we here call ethnicity and religion based organizations, some of which play an important role in local political affairs; others, however, exempt themselves from overt political activity while retaining an influential position in local life. This article analyses the role of these organizations in the domain of electoral politics and identifies different approaches that ERBOs take to supporting candidates for political office. It does not attempt, however, to gauge the effectiveness of ERBOs as vote-winning machines; this was beyond the compass of our research.

Indonesian politics have been transformed, at least at one level, since the ousting of President Suharto in 1998. Out of the ashes of the unrest that accompanied his downfall arose a different politics built around open elections and decentralization. The introduction of local elections (*pemilukada*) changed the nature of local politics. Indonesia now has a multi-tiered political structure, with elected heads and councils at both provincial and regency/city level with strong powers at this lower level. The new era of decentralization did not, however, change certain important aspects of Indonesian politics, which are still characterized at both central and local levels by opaque arrangements that lead to the formation of entanglements between politicians and business people. The giving of gifts and of cash is a routine feature of elections, as is the promise of specific help in return for votes, with political brokers featuring prominently (Berenschot et al., 2018). Local and national politics are also characterized by political parties whose role is weakened by a multi-representative constituency system that leads to tenuous party affiliation and intense personal rivalries. Unlike some other ethnically diverse countries, Indonesia has no ethnically based political parties. These features of the Indonesian political system also make room for the activities of ERBOs in harnessing ethnic and religious sentiment as a weapon of mobilization.

The term ERBO is our own coinage. Others working on Indonesia have referred to ethnic organizations (Berenschot and van Klinken, 2018) and ethnic associations (Aspinall, 2011).

Interestingly, Aspinall et al. refer to "ethnic and ethno-religious associations" (2011, 33) in their study on local elections. We would argue that organization is a better fitting term than the looser association; these are rules-based membership bodies. We also contend that it makes sense to bring ethnic and religious organizations together under the same rubric. On the face of it, ethnic and religious organizations might appear incompatible – what, one might ask, has the world's largest Islamic organization, NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), got to do with a body like Lampung Sai, which is local, specific and ethnic-based? In answer to this, we would point firstly to the fact that some ERBOs, as we show below, contain a nearly total ethnic and religious overlap in their membership; NU, for example, has a preponderantly Javanese membership in Lampung. Secondly, we identify below similar electoral tactics and similar interventions in local politics. Both ethnicity-based and religion-based organizations represent at a broader level the intrusion of identity issues into politics. Thirdly, NU has close if tacit links with the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB). It had itself been actively involved in political elections until state oppression of political Islam set in under Suharto, and remains an important force in the wings of national politics (author, 2021). Finally, there is an overlap in ethnic and religious identity among several of the ERBOs we consider here.

ERBOs are an important feature of the Indonesian political landscape, especially in those parts of the archipelago such as Lampung, West Kalimantan and Southeast Sulawesi that have large migrant and heterogeneous populations. Indeed, capitalising on ethno-religious sentiment is one of the key strategies used by Indonesian politicians to attract voters. ERBOs are constituted at both national and local level. Of those we consider below, several are nationally constituted, including NU, while PATRI represents Javanese transmigrants throughout the country. Others are local, among them Lampung Sai, the ERBO that seeks to bring together Lampungese in their home province and preserve their political and cultural identity. Some ERBOs, such as Lampung Sai, are politically active, campaigning for individual candidates as well as standing for a broader platform of community rights. Others, such as PATRI, claim political neutrality, but have an impact on local politics nonetheless. In some cases, two ERBOs represent the same ethnic group, while others such as Lampung Sai campaign actively for inter-ethnic support. Larger ERBOs sometimes dissipate their strength by failing to agree on a single candidate for an election, as has happened with NU, an issue noted also by Aspinall et al. (2011) in their research on the Medan mayoral elections of 2010.

Our claim for the continued importance of identity in local Indonesian politics is not advanced as part of an argument that ERBOs create antagonistic or conflictual politics. In contemporary Indonesia, and indeed in Lampung, they generally do not. Nor are we arguing that ERBOs exert their presence in a sphere divorced from clientelist relations in general and patronage links in particular. While we acknowledge the ubiquity of clientelist practices, our inquiry focuses on the role played by ERBOs in identity politics. At the same time, however, it is important to note that ERBOs perform a wide range of functions beyond their political activities. They often sponsor activities seeking to preserve or strengthen ethnic culture by, for example, holding music and drama performances. Alongside this, they have a social and economic role, helping members in their work-related endeavours, assisting them in the creation of jobs and providing connections that aid them in developing their business. They also provide advice and practical assistance for the welfare of their members.

The research was conducted as follows. Having chosen our three areas for focus, based on their differing experiences of transmigration, we used purposive sampling to select participants, based on their role and position and on their knowledge and experience of specific issues that

formed part of our research. Forty-four people from various backgrounds were interviewed. Among our interviewees were senior officials, including the head and secretary of Lampung Sai and national and local heads of PATRI, NU and the two ERBOs representing Balinese in Lampung, as well as local politicians and a former Lampung provincial governor. For a 'street level' view, we interviewed a number of transmigrant descendants. We also analysed data taken from documents and newspapers (printed and online). The interviews were conducted from October 2015 to March 2016, with some more recent follow-up interviews. In addition, we also closely observed the 2020 local elections and their overall context, updating and adding new information to this study. The article continues with a review of competing understandings of the mechanisms and motives behind local political activity. After a subsequent overview of the ERBOs that play significant roles in Lampung, we analyse them in greater detail, with a particular emphasis on the nature of their involvement in local elections. We conclude by arguing that greater attention be directed towards ethnic and religious identity and sentiment in analyses of local politics in Indonesia.

Conceptualising Ethnic Politics in a Patronage Democracy

Definitions of ethnicity have long been a source of discussion and disagreement, and it is not our intention here to rehearse these debates (see, for example, Chandra, 2006, and Wimmer, 2008). Chandra's influential work has led to widespread acknowledgement of the usefulness of a constructivist approach, whereby ethnicity should not merely be represented by "descent-based attributes", but rather should incorporate a wider array of features that make reference to individuals and populations in different contexts (Chandra, 2012, 11).

The ubiquity and multi-faceted nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity is nowhere more apparent than in Indonesia (Goebel, 2013). No single definition of ethnicity is sufficient to reflect the complexity of the Indonesian context with its great demographic diversity. The complexity and multi-tiered nature of ethnic identity is apparent in the case studies we give below. Nevertheless, the Indonesian government in its national census, conducted every 20 years, defines ethnicity simply based on self-identification at the time the survey is conducted (Ananta et al., 2015). In our experience, most respondents, who are likely to be heads of household, provide an ethnic identification that tallies with their father's ethnic group. If a child is born to parents of mixed ethnicity -- a Javanese father and a Lampungese mother, for example – he or she will almost certainly identify him or herself as Javanese in the national census.

Ethnic identity should not, however, be considered in static terms. A sense of what today is called ethnicity – Who, for example, is Malay? What does it mean to be Malay? – developed relatively recently in the peninsula and archipelagic worlds, designed and implemented first by the colonial powers (Shamsul, 2013; Goebel, 2013). While the creation of a sense of ethnicity (*suku bangsa*) was used by colonial authorities to enhance their rule, during the first two eras of presidential rule in Indonesia, under Sukarno and then Suharto, the government suppressed what it saw as potentially divisive forces, concentrating instead on nation-building and the national language (Ananta et al., 2015). Indeed, because of fears of instability, questions concerning ethnicity remained off the national census until 2000. However, the reform era brought ethnicity to the forefront of Indonesian politics. Reviving old colonial notions, precedence was given in local politics to those who were 'native to the locality' (*putra daerah*), alongside a renewed emphasis on local custom (*adat*) (Goebel, 2013). In some parts of Indonesia, including West Kalimantan and Maluku, this led to a period of sharp conflict, now largely abated (Bakker, 2015; Peluso, 2017).

It is not only considerations of ethnicity that play themselves out on the Indonesian political scene. Islam has become an increasingly important factor, especially since the fall of Suharto, who saw the Muslim faith as a potentially dangerous source of alternative power. There are several elements to the role Islam plays in Indonesia's political landscape. It can be seen to exert influence in mainstream politics. A number of political parties retain or have developed links with Muslim organizations, the prime example being that of the National Awakening Party, which originated out of NU. President Joko Widodo's vice president, Ma'ruf Amin, had been Supreme Leader of NU until his appointment, which itself was widely seen as an attempt to keep moderate Islam 'on side' as a balance against the transnational Islamist movement (Chew, 2019). This in turn suggests a broader attempt to co-opt Islamic forces – a response, at least in part, to a tendency for Islam to become the 'site' of protest, often linked to more radical Salafist positions (Kayane, 2021). The classic case is that of the removal in 2017 of Jakarta's Christian and ethnic Chinese governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama on spurious charges of blasphemy. The significance of religion as a factor in electoral politics was illustrated by the 2010 mayoral race in Medan in 2010, reviewed in more detail below.

As already suggested, much attention has been applied to money politics, clientelism and patronage. Recent studies have clarified and illustrated in fascinating detail the techniques used by politicians and voters alike to obtain the rewards they seek – whether votes or money and favours in return for votes – as the lubricating element in Indonesian local elections and politics more broadly – see, for example, the various chapters in Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016). The distribution of resources has been central to this literature. The importance of a weak political party system, the informalized nature of citizenship and the role of brokers in organising support and distributing favours have all been examined in some detail (Berenschot, 2018; Berenschot and Van Klinken, 2018; Hicken et al., 2022). ERBOs are largely missing from this picture. In related research, however, we have found that control over resources has followed a logic of ethnicity-based distribution between elites and voters. In some contexts, such for example as that of Lampung, local leaders supported by particular ERBOs distribute local government infrastructure projects in favour of their ERBO supporters (author, 2018).

Considerations of ethnicity and identity politics more broadly have not, however, been totally absent from recent research. Some scholars have provided extensive analysis of the imbrication of ethnicity with patronage, local elites and electoral politics in particular locations in Indonesia. Tanasaldy (2012), for example, analyses Dayak politics in West Kalimantan, probing conflictual political interests that exist between Dayaks and Malays. Van Klinken (2008), on the other hand, emphasizes the diminishing role of ethnicity in local politics. He concludes that ethnic organizations such as the South Sulawesi Family Association (KKSS) fail to mobilize their members in support of particular candidates in subnational elections due to a lack of internal consolidation caused by a polarization of interests among its members.

Building in part on Van Klinken's conclusions, Aspinall's (2011) work on local politics leads him to claim that the issue of ethnicity is of lesser importance in subnational elections. His core arguments are these: "In few places do ethnic politics now constitute an organizing framework for political life…. Ethnicity is becoming less important in Indonesian politics, not more" (2011, 295). Later in the same article, in a comment of particular relevance to this article, he states that: "Even the largest ethnic associations appear to have little ability to deliver blocs of voters in elections" (ibid., 302). Aspinall is careful to note that there are still some places, such as in Kalimantan, where "ethnicity will likely remain an important factor in local politics. But

such places are the exceptions to the general rule of soft ethnic identity politics that predominates in most of Indonesia" (ibid, 310).

In their research on the 2010 mayoral election in the north Sumatran city of Medan, however, Aspinall and colleagues take a somewhat different line and reach a number of conclusions that are relevant to our study (Aspinall et al., 2011). The election, they find, was shaped by both ethnic and religious sentiment; in the electoral run-off, they argue that religion trumped ethnicity in voting intentions, with a majority of voters opting for a Muslim candidate against his non-Muslim ethnic Chinese rival. But they also note that "ethno-religious associations" played a prominent role, especially in the first round of voting before the run-off, and they call for further study into the role of such associations in electoral politics. Medan indeed presents itself as an informative point of comparison to Lampung. Indonesia's third largest city, Medan is multi-ethnic and pluralist. There are at least 36 Javanese associations in Medan. Not least in light of the sheer number of these associations, Aspinall and colleagues go on to argue that, "in in the post-Suharto period, there has been significant politicization of ethnicity, with ethnic constituencies and associations suddenly being viewed as potential sources of electoral strength" (2011, 34).

A particularly interesting feature of the literature, highlighted by the comment in Aspinall et al.'s (2011) work on Medan, is the paucity and brevity of references to the role of ERBOs. Where mention is made of ethnic associations, the tendency is to see them as holding declining influence and impact on local politics (van Klinken, 2008). However, ERBOs have flourished since the downfall of President Suharto, aided in part by an increase in the size of the middle class. Members of these organizations have been characterized as well educated and more interested in participating in politics and getting involved in ethnic based group activities (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Fennema, 2004). The reforms of 1998 and thereafter enabled citizens to make the choice to engage in civil-society activities, resulting in the establishment of a considerable number of ERBOs. Indeed, ERBOs can be seen as part of a blossoming of civil society in the post-Suharto reform era (Reuter, 2009; Noor, 2012).

The next sections introduce and analyse each of the ERBOs in terms of size and strength and political involvement in local elections.

The Diversity of Lampung's ERBOs

In response to the political decentralization and democratization that took place after 1998, several ERBOs emerged in Lampung with ethnic and religious values forming the basis of their organizational missions. The eight most important organizations today are: PATRI, representing transmigrants and their descendants; Lampung Sai, bringing together 'native' Lampungese but open to all inhabitants of the province; the coastal Javanese migrant community organization Penginyongan; two Sundanese migrant community organizations, Sunda Ngumbara and Pajar; Puwnten, a community organization for Bantenese migrants; the Lampung Balinese organization, PBL; the Indonesian Chinese Clan Social Association, PSMTI; and the Indonesian Religious Council of Hindu, PHDI (see Table). Further, there is another important organization, one that we here treat as an ERBO and that plays an important role in the local politics of Lampung, namely NU. The nature of these ERBOs reflects the patchwork of ethnicities in the province, a consequence primarily of the transmigration programme.

In this article we categorize ERBOs according to the different strategies that they adopt in local politics, which we refer to as consolidator, intermediary and broker. Consolidator ERBOs have as their prime rationale the consolidation of sentiment and support within, but also sometimes reaching out beyond, their ethnic or religious group. Intermediary ERBOs lend their political support to candidates who share their ethno-religious background, playing a leading role in candidate selection and voter mobilisation, while broker ERBOs are those that support candidates from whatever background in the belief that their community will stand to gain from the candidate's electoral victory through the introduction of economic policies beneficial to their community. These categories can be overlapping and are intended to be purely interpretive. All three work to reinforce voters' sense of ethnic identity and, to a lesser or greater degree, expect voters to choose, where possible, a candidate from the ethnic group whose interests they represent.

In the sections that follow we focus in more detail on the three largest ERBOs, Lampung Sai, PATRI and NU. We preface that, in this section, with a synoptic summary of the nature of the political involvements of the other principal ERBOs in Lampung, each of which adopts differing criteria for membership and different approaches to political representation and activity. A number of ERBOs represent the interests of people from specific areas within the island of Java. Two of these, Pajar and Sunda Ngumbara, draw their support from the Sundanese community. Pajar is a provincial organization while Sunda Ngumbara is national, with the governor of West Java as head of its advisory board. They are open to Sundanese and their descendants but also to interested people of other ethnicities. Neither has been recorded giving any support for particular candidates in Lampung's local election, even though one Sunda Ngumbara leader attempted to participate in Bandar Lampung's mayoral election in 2020 but failed to be nominated. These two ERBOs are less active in politics and more focused on ethnic-based social and cultural activities. They can be seen as primarily consolidator organizations.

Puwnten restricts its membership to Bantenese, with the exception of a few invited 'guest' members. Bantenese are generally among the poorer segments of society and, together with Sundanese, represent about 12 percent of Lampung Province's population. While it has a small number of formal members, Puwnten enjoys a much larger base of informal Bantenese supporters. Puntwen adopts a muscular political strategy of community empowerment, recognizing, however, that "we are still in the process of developing Bantenese sentiment among our members" (interview, 29 January 2015). It is actively involved in local election processes through discussions and rallies within the community, proposing candidates when possible, and working to bring out the ethnic Bantenese vote to support them. But, according to our informants, it also follows a political strategy of supporting any candidate whom it believes will deliver economic and political benefits to the Bantenese community (interviews, 29 January 2015 and 16 February 2016). For example, the organization supported two candidates in the 2015 local elections for city/ regency councils, both of whom were Lampungese without any personal link to the Bantenese community. We would categorize Puwnten therefore as a broker ERBO, and also presumably (but we lack the evidence) as an intermediary.

As with Puwnten, Penginyongan insists on ethnic ties as the requirement for membership while relying on more widespread informal support; this is drawn exclusively from Javanese of Inyong ethnic extraction, hailing from three districts in Central Java. It became clear through our interviews that if an Inyong candidate gets elected, Penginyongan members are expected to have input into local infrastructure plans, thus providing a clear economic motive behind

their political support (interview, 20 December 2015). Where there is no member candidate, the organization supports candidates with close kinship ties or those who are deemed to be economically and politically beneficial. Penginyongan can therefore be seen as both an intermediary and a broker ERBO.

Table: The characteristics of ERBOs in Lampung

Name of organisation	*Membership*	*Political role*	*Example of political involvement in elections*
PATRI (Perhimpunan Anak Transmigrasi Republik Indonesia)	transmigrants and their descendants only	consolidator	minimal involvement, only once, in gubernatorial election in 2008
Lampung Sai	open to everyone	consolidator and intermediary	gubernatorial elections in 2008; involved in supporting a candidate in Bandar Lampung's mayoral election in 2020
Sunda Ngumbara and Pajar	Sundanese and their descendants but also open to interested people of other ethnicities	consolidators	limited; one senior member of Sunda Ngumbara ran as candidate, but as an independent, in Bandar Lampung's mayoral election in 2020
Puwnten	Bantenese and their descendants only	broker and intermediary	local elections for Bandar Lampung mayor in 2015 and South Lampung regency head in 2015
Penginyongan	Penginyongan and their descendants (from Central Java) only	broker and intermediary	local elections for South and North Lampung regency heads in 2015
PHDI (Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia)	Hindu believers only (making up majority of Lampung Balinese)	consolidator	unidentified
PBL (Paguyuban Bali Lampung)	Lampung Balinese only	broker and intermediary	local elections for South and Central Lampung regency heads in 2015
PSMTI (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia)	Indonesian-Chinese only	consolidator	unidentified

NU	Exclusively for Muslims	consolidator and intermediary	local elections for East Lampung's regency heads in 2015 and 2020 and gubernatorial elections in 2018

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Two influential organizations, the Hindu religious council PHDI and the Balinese Lampung council, PBL, represent the Balinese community in Lampung with a certain amount of crossover in membership. PHDI is actually a nationwide religious organization that is not restricted to Balinese members but open to all Hindu believers. The majority of the approximately one million Balinese living in Lampung moved there as part of the transmigration programme (Seregig 2014, 81), but a significant minority made their way over as spontaneous migrants, some of them at the invitation of others who had successfully transmigrated some time before. As a religious organization, PHDI tends to stay neutral in political matters, acting as the medium to consolidate Hindu people, not only in Lampung but across Indonesia. There is no evidence that PHDI has supported a particular candidate during a local or legislative election in Lampung. A leading PHDI member told us, however, that, "While we do not have any affiliation with political parties and do not officially support any candidate in the election, we have a special structure which accommodates and facilitates the political activities of our members" (interview, 16 February 2016; see also PHDI, 2021). PHDI can therefore be categorized as a consolidator ERBO.

PBL was established in 2005, when direct elections were introduced into local politics. It plays an important role for the Balinese in Lampung as the centre of political interest internally and externally and can be considered both an intermediary and a broker ERBO based on its involvement in several local elections in Lampung. PBL has typically provided support in two ways. Firstly, as an intermediary, it fosters and supports Balinese candidates directly. The organization's leader explained in interview that PBL's political goal is to install as many Balinese as possible as either local leaders or member of local councils, and more specifically to have five to eight Balinese members elected to the local council in every district or city in Lampung Province (interview, 3 February 2016). Secondly, in its broker role, as with Penginyongan, support is given to non-Balinese candidates who are thought to be politically and economically beneficial to the organization.

One of the largest Indonesian-Chinese community associations, the Indonesian Chinese Clan Social Association, PSTMI, emerged as a response to the political and cultural alienation the community had experienced under the Suharto regime (Suryadinata, 2001) and to the anti-Chinese riots of 1998 (Herlijanto, 2004; Siddik, 2010). According to its internal rules, PSMTI is a social and cultural organization specifically for the Indonesian-Chinese and not affiliated with any political party (PSMTI, 2017). PSMTI applies exclusive criteria to membership, meaning that only Indonesian-Chinese are eligible to join; it has branches at the national and provincial levels in Indonesia. At this stage, PSMTI's main goal in Lampung as elsewhere is to obtain parity of treatment as a fully Indonesian organization. Its primary focus is on promoting Chinese culture, even if, in the Indonesian context, there will always be a political edge to this. We can see PSMTI therefore as a consolidator organization, strengthening the ethnic consolidation of the Indonesian Chinese.

These, together with the three to be discussed below, are the most prominent ERBOs in Lampung, but there are many others, some of which can be called upon by politicians to support their campaigns. This was the case, for example, when the Javanese Shadow Puppetry Association, which focuses on the preservation of Javanese culture, was used by a candidate in 2005 and 2010 to convey his political mission to voters.

Leading Lampung ERBOs and their Differing Positions

PATRI: Representing Transmigrants in Lampung

The two largest ERBOs in Lampung, excluding NU, which we discuss in the following section, are PATRI and Lampung Sai. These provide a significant contrast in terms both of organization and of political involvement, their centrality in provincial politics reflecting their respective relationship with the transmigration programme. PATRI is national but politically reticent. Lampung Sai is provincially based, and designed to promote the political fortunes of Lampungese in a province where, as we have seen, they are vastly outnumbered by transmigrants.

PATRI was established in 2004 in Jakarta, roughly a hundred years after the initiation of the transmigration programme in Indonesia. According to Muhajir Utomo, the former national leader of PATRI, the six-year wait after the fall of Suharto before the creation of a formal organization for transmigrants and their descendants had much to do with the desire of transmigration leaders to respect the values of local populations and their political activities (interview, 7 October 2015). Muhajir Utomo ran in a gubernatorial election in 2008 but was beaten by a Lampungese candidate, Sjachroedin, the long-serving head of Lampung Sai. PATRI withheld political support from Muhajir Utomo in the election, with the apparent result that many PATRI members cast their votes elsewhere.

PATRI is strict and exclusive about its membership; anyone who is interested in joining the organization must be a transmigrant or descendant or have ties through marital status (PATRI, 2019). PATRI has a larger membership than the other ERBOs in Lampung and has, therefore, the potential to bring political support to a particular candidate in local elections by capitalising on transmigrant sentiment. Indeed, there have been circumstances in which PATRI has mobilized in favour of a particular candidate. We heard that in 2005, shortly after PATRI's formation, the candidate for East Lampung regent "received massive support from many Javanese groups such as PATRI. The campaign tagline was also clear at that time: Javanese must vote for the Javanese candidate" (interview, 7 October 2015). While it is evident therefore that ethnicity retains its political salience, PATRI has appeared unwilling to engage in political activity, especially in support of a particular candidate, and this has contributed to some electoral success for Lampungese at the level of provincial governor and to a pattern of Javanese-Lampungese pairings at regency and mayoral level. Instead, PATRI concentrates on activities that promote Javanese culture and common socio-economic interests among its members such as Javanese puppet shows and business start-ups. Thus it clearly acts to reinforce a sense of ethnic identity among Javanese transmigrants in Lampung.

Several of our interviewees shared the sentiment expressed by Muhajir Utomo: "We still have a feeling that we are transmigrant descendants. Well, let the Lampungese become political leaders in their homeland; let us just become professionals" (interview, 7 October 2015). However, for some transmigrant descendants, this position can be frustrating. Two of our

interviewees, one a second-generation transmigrant and the other a third-generation transmigrant, told us they would be more comfortable if the elected local leaders were Javanese transmigrants rather than Lampungese (interviews, 24 January and 1 February 2016).

Despite Utomo's ultimately unsuccessful campaign for governorship in 2008, we saw no evidence that PATRI gave any organizational support to a particular candidate in local elections. We would categorize it therefore as a consolidator ERBO for its work to protect and enhance the cultural and socio-economic interests of its members and thereby reinforce ethnic identity.

Lampung Sai, Projecting Native Sentiment and Interests

Lampung Sai is a native ethnicity-based organization, founded in Jakarta in 1968 by prominent Lampungese who were living and working in the Indonesian capital. It was established to bring Lampungese living outside the province together. After the political reforms in 1998, Lampung Sai became a more political organization and began to make demands at a time when the political barometer was swinging towards greater power in local politics for *putra daerah*. In the early 2000s, the issue of the political position of *putra daerah* helped Lampung Sai establish its importance, as it did for the East Kalimantan Dayak Association in East Kalimantan (Schiller, 2007). Both organizations represent the native population in their territories and both argued that privileges for the *putra daerah* are essential to counter-balance Suharto-era policies of national integration, for which the transmigration programme was the paradigmatic mechanism.

Native organizations such as Lampung Sai tend to see their role as being to compete in local politics and challenge other ethnicity-based organizations. For example, Lampung Sai has implemented a number of campaign strategies to win over majority Javanese sentiment in local elections, often appealing directly to Javanese voters. Its principal success came through its support for its then chairman Sjachroedin in his campaign for the provincial governorship, a post he held from 2003 to 2014, including his one ballot-box victory in the 2008 direct election. It later helped two of Sjachroedin's sons win local government elections in the province.

There are a number of strategies used by Lampung Sai to widen political support for Lampungese: these include the deployment of local values known in the Lampungese language as *mawarei*, the organising of cultural events and the use of political taglines (author, 2022). *Mawarei* is a customary Lampungese way of inviting people from different ethnic groups to adopt expressions of Lampungese culture. Lampung Sai has organized a number of inter-cultural festivals involving cultural events presented by inter-ethnic groups in Lampung (interview, 26 October 2015). The application of a campaign tagline, *Lampung itu satu*, "Lampung is one", has been important in appealing to Javanese voters in local elections. These strategies have played their part, we can safely conclude, in helping Lampungese compete in local politics. Indeed, in 2018, 7 out of 15 regents and mayors, were Lampungese, more than any other ethnic group. According to our discussions with political leaders in Lampung, Lampung Sai's campaign on inclusive values increased the level of inter-ethnic support Sjachroedin received during his 2008 campaign (interview, 22 October 2015). However, this alone was not sufficient. The strategy was complemented by forming an inter-ethnic partnership with a Javanese running-mate. This compares in interesting ways with the more tactical coalition-building that Aspinall and colleagues noted in the 2010 mayoral in Medan.

The search for a Javanese candidate to become Sjachroedin's deputy was undertaken by Lampung Sai leaders prior to the opening of the election nomination period. Their first choice was the then head of PATRI, Muhajir Utomo. However, Utomo rejected the proposal. In short, the issue of native political privilege in the early 2000s, driven by Lampung Sai, was successful in bringing some Lampungese into positions of power after a long period during which they had been marginalized politically. Lampung Sai is a consolidator ERBO, working not only to bring Lampungese together but also to reach out and appeal to Javanese and members of other ethnic groups through the propagation of an inclusive strategic agenda. It is also an intermediary through its work and campaigning in support of member politicians.

The Informal Political Role of NU in Subnational Elections

This section discusses the role of NU in the local politics of Lampung and specifically in East Lampung Regency. Although NU is a religious organization and – at least officially – politically neutral, it is politically active and has supported several candidates, in national as well as in local elections in recent years. For example, the former leader of NU, Ma'aruf Amin, was paired with Joko Widodo in the 2019 presidential election, and served as vice president from 2019 to 2024. NU actually formed its own political party to run in the first Indonesian national elections in 1955. However, after a number of decades it withdrew from such direct political activities as a consequence of the political marginalization of Islamic interests under the Suharto administration. With Suharto's overthrow, NU returned to the political scene. Abdurahman Wahid, the fourth president of the Republic of Indonesia (1999-2001), had been national leader of NU between 1984 and 1999 and was founder of the National Awakening Party (PKB), which has always been associated with NU. Wahid's aim behind forming this party was to accommodate the political interests of NU members in elections.

While a member of NU is not automatically a party member and vice versa, many members of NU support PKB. The heartland of NU is in Java, and its popularity in Lampung is closely linked to the prevalence in so many parts of the province of transmigrants from the island. It is hard to ascertain meaningful figures for NU membership in Lampung. According to a recent survey conducted by a leading pollster, 16 percent of voters in the province are active members (*anggota aktif*) of NU, while another 16 percent consider themselves inactive members (*anggota tidak aktif*). However, an additional 34 percent of voters declare a cultural affinity to NU (*pemilih yang merasa NU kultural*).[1] This at least gives a sense of the organization's strength and popularity, particularly in the Javanese transmigrant community.

In the context of subnational elections in East Lampung, the candidate who served as elected head of the regency from 2016 to 2019, Chusnunia Chalim, is a second-generation Javanese transmigration descendant and is a member of NU, as well as being a PKB member. Her father is an Islamic teacher who taught at Lasem Islamic boarding school in Central Java before migrating to East Lampung, where he established an Islamic boarding school. Her grandfather was one of the founders of NU. After her stint as East Lampung regent, she served as provincial deputy governor until 2023.

In the regency elections in East Lampung in 2015, NU members provided political assistance to Chalim and her running mate. For example, some senior leaders of NU urged several times for unity amongst NU members in giving political support to Chalim (interview, 27 January 2016). The former national leader of NU, Said Aqil Siradj, went on record with a clear statement in support of Chalim, a position that was corroborated by interviewees (interviews,

24 December 2015 and 27 January 2016). This show of support was in contrast to the previous two elections, in 2005 and 2010, when a lack of organizational solidarity occurred because there was more than one candidate from NU. NU also supported Chalim in gubernatorial elections in 2018, as well as providing support for the successful candidate in East Lampung's regency elections in 2020.

Political support for Chalim and her running-mate was provided by NU in a number of specific ways designed to mobilise members to come out and vote for her. NU Women's Organization undertook campaigning and distributed gifts such as stickers, religious books and Islamic veils both to members and to non-members alike (interviews with NU officials, 26 and 27 January 2016). In each of their 24 sub-district and 264 rural village offices in East Lampung they had an official who was responsible for mobilising their members to vote for their candidate (interview, 27 January 2016). Alongside the Women's Organization, NU deployed a so-called *tim sembilan* or "team of nine", to strengthen internal solidarity and mobilize potential voters, especially NU members. This is a standard campaigning tool for NU; the East Lampung team consisted of local Islamic teachers and board members of NU (interviews with NU officials, 26 and 27 January 2016). Indeed, while we were not able to verify this, it is likely that campaigning occurred also through the medium of worship-related activities (interview, 28 January 2016). It is not unusual for Islamic teachers to speak out in favour of particular candidates, mobilising votes among NU members. The relationship between NU's Islamic teachers and their former students is often quite strong, especially those students who have been to Pesantren schools (Kusama, 2014; Saxelbøl, 2002).

Our research supports the general argument of the contributors to Aspinall and Sukmajati's edited volume (2016) on the informal politics of patronage and the role of brokers, with politicians tending to trust the clientelist structure that they themselves have created rather than depending on political party machinery to mobilize voters. But the case of NU's political role in East Lampung provides new evidence that the patronage model of exchanging political interests between elites and voters does not always simply take the form of mutual economic interest. While gift-giving is more or less ubiquitous, the relationship between NU candidate and NU voter can extend well beyond the transactional field of exchange to embrace a broader sense of religious and cultural identity.

Although very different to Lampung Sai in its aims and constitution, NU can also be classified both as a consolidator and an intermediary ERBO. As a faith-based organization, NU claims political neutrality, but the case of East Lampung shows how deeply involved it can be in political campaigning for a member candidate – a clear intermediary role, mediating between the candidate and the voters. At the same time, NU is by its nature a consolidator ERBO, consolidating sentiment within the organization.

Ethnicity, Political Patronage and Transmigration

We have suggested above that identity politics and patronage politics should not be considered as distinct phenomena. In this last substantive section, we set identity politics within a broader context of the complex web of factors affecting local election politics in our case study sites in Lampung.

As the case of NU shows, identity politics is inextricably intertwined with the material benefits that patronage politics confer. Vote buying proliferates. In Metro, we were told of how, in the

2015 mayoral elections, candidates chose their own relatives to visit homes and 'recruit' votes through the donation of money or gifts (interviews, December 2015 and January 2016). The homes visited belonged to those of residents from the same ethnic group, thereby reinforcing a nexus between ethnicity and patronage politics. Indeed, in Metro, with its 72% Javanese population, we found that ethnicity, political networks, transmigration descent and money politics were bound together and complemented one another, while in East Lampung (81% Javanese) voter 'appropriation' through gift-giving was performed by NU members.

In both of the Javanese-dominated areas of Metro and East Lampung, ethnicity remains the cornerstone of electoral politics, but ethnicity should not be considered in isolation. One commentator has argued that Javanese sentiment cannot be mobilized for political advantage in elections in Lampung because the rivalry between the Lampungese and Javanese fundamentally is based on "various economic [issues] especially land ownership" rather than ethnicity alone (Tirtosudarmo, 2016, 171). However, that there are issues around land ownership is attributable to the transmigration programme and is therefore tightly bound in with questions of ethnicity. In Bandar Lampung, where transmigration is not a central social reality, patronage politics play a more prominent role. Patronage too is a complex phenomenon, well beyond the purview of this article (Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016). Money and gift-giving are certainly important at all stages of local politics in Lampung: pre-election, during the election itself and post-election. In Bandar Lampung the 'downstream' impact of patronage politics has been pivotal. The office-holder has used his position to curry favour with voters and enrich his election war chest (author, 2018).

Other factors carry weight too, among them the role of certain influential corporations. Large plantation companies have been active supporters of successful native Lampungese gubernatorial candidates (author, 2018). Ruling elites have played instrumental roles in creating inter-ethnic coalitions and retaining thereby their own positions of power (Syukri, 2022). We can see this through the coalition-building and inter-generational power-retention policies of the Sjachroedin and Chalim families, as well as the leading toles in political parties played by some ERBO heads.

None of this, however, belies the centrality of ERBOs in transmigration-impacted areas of Lampung. Indeed, were it not for transmigration, it is difficult to imagine that ERBOs would play the same prominent role in local politics. In those areas that are heavily impacted by transmigration, ERBOs are far more central to local political life than political parties; candidates consider them more reliable and they elicit stronger sentiments among voters than do political parties. ERBOs are involved in and influence the course of local politics through a number of key actions, through the selection of candidates, through the provision of support, including financial support, and through activities designed to bring reward at the ballot box. While ERBOs may be inefficient vote-winning machines (van Klinken, 2008), we can see from the Lampung experience that they are nonetheless important as facilitators and mediators of political campaigns.

Conclusion: the political role of ERBOs

In this article, we have argued that ethnicity and religion continue to play a significant role in Indonesia's local politics, and we have coined the term ERBO to define and encapsulate their organizational role where previously no single conceptualizing term had existed. We have demonstrated their significance in the specific terms of ERBOs participating in local elections

through involvement in the choice of candidates for local political elections and mobilizing and campaigning on their behalf, but also in the broader sense of consolidating ethnic sentiment and by inference political solidarity. Here, we conclude by summarising the respective positions of the ERBOs we have examined in this article.

The various strategies adopted by ERBOs in Lampung show both their internal dynamics as well their distinctive approach in dealing with local politics. Our categorization of ERBOs – consolidator, intermediary and broker – serves to highlight the various positions they adopt. Some – Puwnten, Penginyongan and PBL – are actively involved in selecting, promoting and campaigning for candidates from their own ethnic group, but when no such candidate is forthcoming, they support others whom they believe will benefit their community. Lampung Sai and NU, while very different from each other in their aims and approach, look to rally their own communities while advancing the cause of their candidates. Both employ a number of political strategies to campaign for and, in the case of Lampung Sai, win voters over to their chosen candidates. The remaining ERBOs that we have examined here are for varying reasons less politically active. The largest of these, PATRI, representing the majority transmigrant population, prefers not to flex its potential political muscle for fear of stoking anti-transmigrant sentiment. At the same time, it sponsors various expressions of Javanese cultural sentiment and, as with PSTMI for ethnic Chinese, supports activities designed to enhance the social and economic well-being of Javanese transmigrants. Without the sense of ethnic togetherness that these ERBOs nurture, ethnic identity would no longer occupy such an important position in local politics. Our categorization of ERBOs, while as yet preliminary, is designed both as a framework for comparison across Indonesia and possibly beyond, and as a yardstick against which to measure future developments.

Discussing the political role of ERBOs, especially in Lampung, involves a complex narrative. Our research, however, affirms the continued strength of ethnic identity politics in those parts of Indonesia heavily impacted by transmigration but sees this as being closely intertwined with patronage politics. It also shows that ethnicity and religion, wrapped up in a larger sense of identity, often act in concert in shaping voter intentions. In some cases, as with PHDI, religion and ethnicity are part of the same 'identity bundle'. Even where the identity match is less than totally complete, as with NU, whose traditional support base lies in East and Central Java, it is clear that a very significant overlap exists. NU acts as reminder that to understand the activities of ERBOs, their influence on voters, and their importance in local politics we need to consider the impact of the prolonged historic transmigration programme as shown also by the cases of PATRI and PBL. Lampung's ERBOs are further evidence of how the prolonged transmigration policy has created contentious ethnicity-based political dynamics (author, 2022).

It might be claimed that Lampung is in some way exceptional. It is after all the province that has received the highest number and largest proportion of transmigrants and so might be seen as an outlier. Migratory movements, however, are integral to the nature of the archipelago; transmigration is but the most significant manifestation. Thus, ethnicity and religion remain "politically salient" characteristics of voting patterns and local politics in much of the country (Aspinall et al., 2011, 35). While they currently do not give rise to the unrest witnessed in several provinces in the early years of the century, they remain central to electioneering and the hues of local politics. Nowhere can this be seen better than in Lampung.

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