Ethnic Representation in Pacific Asia:

A Report for the Southeast Asia Rules-Based Order Project

Professor Benjamin Reilly

School of Social Sciences

University of Western Australia

35 Stirling Highway

Perth WA 6009

AUSTRALIA

Introduction

This paper charts the shifting approaches to ethnic representation in Pacific Asia - that is, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. I argue that changing approaches to the political representation of ethnicity are evident over time, based on a comparative study of parliamentary and cabinet formation. Using case studies of electoral reform and cross-temporal institutional analysis, I show that the prevailing approaches to ethnic inclusion have become more integrative, co-opting minorities within dominant parties or via broad multi-ethnic coalitions. With few exceptions, most of the region has abandoned the idea that social cleavages of ethnicity, region or language should be replicated directly in the political architecture of the state, seeking instead to aggregate social cleavages into majoritarian multiethnic institutions. This marks a significant change from earlier decades, and highlights a regional shift towards more 'centripetal' models of ethnic conflict management.

At first glance, the democratic politics of Pacific Asia – that is, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific – does not appear propitious for ethnic inclusion: most democracies are new or fragile; societies are divided along multiple ethnic, linguistic, religious and other cleavages; and institutional structures are mostly majoritarian, privileging presidentialism, dominant parties and majority rule over the representation of minorities. But over time, changing approaches to the political management of ethnicity are also evident. Using case studies of electoral reform and cross-regional institutional analysis, in this paper I will show that the prevailing

approaches to ethnic inclusion have become more integrative, co-opting minorities within dominant parties or via broad multi-ethnic coalitions.

In the past, states such as Burma (now Myanmar), Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Fiji sought to manage diversity via ethno-religious party systems, ethno-federalism or reservations for minorities, with several cases of executive powersharing, along the consociational model. Today, political inclusion in Pacific Asia more often takes a centripetal approach, via cross-voting electoral processes, pan-ethnic political parties, and oversized, multiethnic executive governments. With few exceptions, most of the region has abandoned the idea that social cleavages along ethnic or region lines should be replicated in the political architecture of the state, seeking instead to integrate minorities into majoritarian multiethnic institutions.

I have argued previously that this marks a regional shift towards more 'centripetal' models of ethnic conflict management.[1] Centripetalism is a theory and practice of ethnic conflict management which seeks to promote centrist politics in ethnically divided societies by creating institutional incentives for cross-ethnic behavior in elections, parliaments, parties and other representative bodies. In contrast to the more 'consociational' approaches once common in Asia, which typically sought to reify and formalize ethnic divisions in the political system via reserved seats and

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[1] For more on this, see Benjamin Reilly 2006, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

communally-based parties, centripetal strategies seek to promote inter-ethnic accommodation by diluting the salience of ethnicity in democratic electoral politics.[2]

This regional shift from one model of ethnic representation to another has taken place against the backdrop of uneven and partial democratization and even greater variation in economic development. The region today includes a full spread of regime types: electoral democracy in Indonesia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and most of the Pacific Islands; soft-authoritarian 'quasi-democracy' in Singapore and Malaysia (although now potentially open to change in Malaysia at least); resilient Communist regimes in Laos and Vietnam; military-electoral juntas in Thailand and Fiji; an absolute monarchy in Brunei; and an ongoing democratic transition in Myanmar.

Indonesia, the world's third largest democracy, represents a paradigmatic case of democratization amidst diversity: its predominantly Muslim population of 270 million people includes minority communities from all the world's major religions and over 300 hundred ethno-linguistic groups. Since the fall of the autocratic Suharto regime in 1999, a carefully-sequenced process of constitutional reform has seen direct presidential elections introduced, the end of the military's formal role in parliament,

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[2] See Donald L. Horowitz 1985, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict,* University of California Press, Berkeley; Benjamin Reilly 2001, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

and major decentralization of power to the provincial and local level.[3] Despite Indonesia's immense challenges - including corruption, money politics, and poor educational attainment, maternal health and other human development indicators - formal democracy has survived, and in some ways deepened, over this period, with a free press, regular elections and several peaceful transitions of government. I argue that one reason for this maintenance of electoral democracy in a situation of enormous social and economic diversity is the centripetal package of institutions adopted by Indonesia over the past decade, which have prevented ethnic differences from assuming a central role in the political process. As will be discussed below, centrist candidates and parties who can command broad-based support are deliberately advantaged by the rules of the game of Indonesian democracy.

Indonesia's neighbours, Singapore and Malaysia, have taken a different approach to the management of ethnicity, maintaining regular and fraud-free elections but restricting free political expression via quasi-authoritarian political systems expressly designed to favour their party-state 'partocracies': the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore and the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in Malaysia, respectively. Both states feature salient if relatively latent ethnic divisions, with a clear majority community (Chinese in Singapore, Malays in Malaysia) and minorities headed by the opposite community (Chinese in Malaysia, Malays in Singapore) in each case. Until the breakthrough electoral victory by the Pakatan Harapan ("Alliance of Hope") multiethnic coalition at Malaysia's general election in May 2018, on the back of a

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[3] See Edward Aspinall (2011), 'Democratization and Ethnic Politics in Indonesia: Nine Theses', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 11(2): 289-319; Donald L. Horowitz (2013), *Constitutional Change and Democracy in Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

pan-racial reform movement, neither Singapore nor Malaysia had experienced a change of government, with incumbents relying on draconian national security laws, electoral gerrymanders, a compliant judiciary and a pro-government press to maintain their rule. A last-minute attempt to further gerrymander Malaysia electoral boundaries shortly before the 2018 election failed spectacularly as the creation of additional Malay-majority seats ended up aiding the Pakatan due to the size of the swing against the government.

Other states are in political transition, although to what remains unclear. In 2015, Myanmar's first free elections since the 1960s brought the current government led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) to power, in what is another standout transition. Since then, however, the new government has struggled to manage the reality of governing a country with a history of ethnic grievance, separatism and repression – elements of which have continued and indeed deteriorated under democratic rule. Civil liberties, press freedoms and particularly the rights of ethnic and religious minorities all appear to have declined under the NLD government.[4] So has support for the NLD itself – recent by-elections in late 2018 saw the NLD lose 6 of 13 seats, mostly to ethnic parties but also one seat to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the party of the former authoritarian government. Under its current quasi-presidential Constitution, the military retains a quarter of parliamentary seats and are guaranteed several key government ministries, in a model which resembles Suharto-era Indonesia. This will

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[4] See Justine Chambers, Gerard McCarthy, Nicholas Farrelly and Chit Win (eds), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places, Politics* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2018).

inevitably hamper any possibility of Myanmar moving to a more democratic system in the immediate future.

The Philippines, which has the longest record of electoral democracy in Southeast Asia, is also be in transition, but in the other direction – with clear democratic deterioration under current President Rodrigo Duterte. Like other Southeast Asian countries the Philippines is split along multiple linguistic and territorial cleavages, and also at a religious level between the Catholic majority and a Muslim minority concentrated in the southern region of Mindanao (Duterte's home, even though he is Catholic). Despite a long record of formal democracy, elections have tended to reinforce deep-rooted practices of clientelism, in a party system characterized by personalism and patronage.[5] In 2016, Duterte promised to transform the Philippines into a federal-parliamentary system. If effected, this would bring new possibilities of regional power-sharing and shifting alliances on the floor of parliament, but would be unlikely to drastically transform the existing problems of a political system dominated by family dynasties and weak parties without other significant reforms to the electoral system and the broader political economy of the Philippines.[6]

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[5] For an analysis of the Philippines' 'democratic deficit', see Paul D. Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora, 'Strong Demands and Weak Institutions: The Origins and Evolution of the Democratic Deficit in the Philippines', *Journal of East Asian Studies* 3 (2003), 259-292.

[6] See Benjamin Reilly 2019, 'Electoral System Redesign: Comparative Experiences in Southeast Asia,' in Paul D. Hutchcroft (ed), *Weak Parties and Strong Patronage: The Case for Electoral System Redesign in the Philippines* (Manila: The Asia Foundation).

Today, it is Timor-Leste – a country born out of the crucible of a liberation struggle and the international intervention which followed its 1999 vote to separate from Indonesia – which is now the region's highest-ranked democracy, based on Freedom House data.[7] The Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea are all classified as electoral democracies but not as fully free countries due to the ongoing restrictions on civil liberties (although for different reasons – the Philippines due to the deterioration of civil rights under Duterte, Indonesia as a matter of government policy towards religious minorities such as the Ahmadis, and Papua New Guinea primarily due to concerns about public security). The Pacific Islands, bar Fiji, are also all categorized as electoral democracies – one reason for Pacific Asia's surprisingly good showing on aggregate democracy rankings in recent years, according to Freedom House.[8]

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[7] 'Timor-Leste's status improved from Partly Free to Free due to fair elections that led to a smooth transfer of power and enabled new parties and candidates to enter the political system.' See Freedom House 2018, *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*. New York: Freedom House.

[8] 'Over the past five years, the Asia-Pacific region has been the only one to record steady gains in political rights and civil liberties as measured by Freedom House. Although it is home to China, where over half the world's Not Free population lives, and North Korea, the least free country in the world, a number of Asia-Pacific countries have made impressive gains in the institutions of electoral democracy—elections, political parties, pluralism—and in freedom of association.' Ibid.

Consociational histories

In part because of their close historical experience with the politicization of ethnicity, Pacific Asian states have long engaged in overt 'political engineering' of ethnic representation. In earlier decades, this tended towards formal guarantees for minorities, via states and provinces based around ethnic communities, ethnically-exclusive political parties, reserved seats for specified minorities, ethnically-mandated voter registers and so on. Over time, however, reforms have tended to shift away from these quasi-consociational models towards more majoritarian and centripetal forms of democracy, privileging multiethnicity over monoethnic approaches.[9] Reform trends include a shift from ethnic to non or pan-ethnic governing parties; from simpler to more complex electoral systems; and from parliamentary to presidential or semi-presidential government.

In many cases these reforms were justified not just as way to manage ethnic relations but as part of a package of changes needed for economic development. As one recent book-length study of Southeast Asia observed, "political elites deliberately constructed a set of centripetal democratic institutions that facilitated the emergence of democratic developmental states… [and] enabled and enticed political parties to provide the public goods and policies needed to get growth going."[10] As will be discussed below, these deliberate constructions included electoral and party

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[9] See Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity: Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[10] Michael Rock, *Dictators, Democrats and Development in Southeast Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 233-4.

reforms which sought to limit the political expression of ethnicity, extend the reach of governing parties, and in so doing also restrict potential challengers to the established order.

In most but not all cases, this involved a shift away from the ethnic parties, grand coalitions and communally-reserved seats which had been a feature of Asia's colonial inheritance.[11] In Burma, for example, "the principle of institutional separation by ethnicity was ingrained during the colonial period"[12], including reserved parliamentary seats and ethnic 'councils' to look after the interests of intermixed or dispersed minorities.[13] Post-colonial Indonesia's short-lived democratic incarnation in the 1950s was also cited as an example of Southeast Asian consociationalism.[14] A list PR electoral system combined with guaranteed representation for specified numbers of Chinese, European, and Arab minorities[15] saw religious-communal

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[11] See Benjamin Reilly, 'Political Reform and the Demise of Consociationalism in Southeast Asia' in Aurel Croissant and Marco Bünte (eds), *The Crisis of Democratic Governance in Southeast Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[12] Ian Holliday, 'Voting and violence in Myanmar: nation building for a transition to democracy', *Asian Survey*, 68:6 (2008), 1050.

[13] J.S. Furnivall, J.S., *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 169.

[14] Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

[15] See Allen Hicken and Yuko Kasuya, 'A guide to the constitutional structures and electoral systems of east, south and southeast Asia', *Electoral Studies* 22 (2003): 135.

parties routinely included in (short-lived) grand coalition governments, on the consociational assumption that "ethnic and other demands would be articulated through the party system and conflicts would be settled through negotiation and compromise in the parliament".[16] A similar bargain underpinned Malaysian democracy, with ethnic parties representing distinct communities combined with explicit guarantees for its Muslim majority in what is considered the clearest example of consociationalism in Asia.[17] More contentiously, at times both Fiji and Singapore have also been claimed as consociational cases in the scholarly literature.[18]

The one feature shared by all is that they proved incompatible with open, competitive democracy. Either democracy or consociationalism, or both, were abandoned in almost every case. In Indonesia, the 1950-7 parliament represented virtually the full spectrum of the country's social diversity, but its inability to maintain a stable political centre led directly to the end of democracy in 1957 and four decades of authoritarian rule. The guarantees for minorities were abandoned and not reintroduced. Burma's post-independence democracy survived for 14 turbulent years until 1962, before being overthrown in a military coup which had strong ethnic motivations. The

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[16] William Liddle, 'Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia', in Andrew Reynolds (ed), *The Architecture of Democracy: Constitutional Design, Conflict Management and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 286.

[17] See, for instance, William Case, *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy* (Monash: Monash Asia Institute, 1996).

[18] See R.S. Milne, ''The Pacific Way' – Consociational Politics in Fiji', *Pacific Affairs* 48:3 (1975), 413-431; N. Ganesan, 'Democracy in Singapore', *Asian Journal of Political Science* 4:2 (1996), 63-79.

country's 1974 Constitution then abandoned the ethnic states model, although these were recreated, in slightly different form, in the current 2008 Constitution. Fiji was the subject of repeated coups in 1987, 2000, 2006 and a military takeover in 2009, all justified on ethnic grounds. In Singapore and particularly Malaysia, carefully-managed governing coalitions managed to maintain consociational vestiges, but only under the guise of majority-dominated quasi-democracy.

Consociational features have not disappeared completely. For instance, grand coalitions encompassing all significant parties have been tried in several Pacific Asian countries, albeit with limited success. Cambodia introduced a mandated grand coalition cabinet under its 1993 UN-tailored constitution, but this arrangement never functioned democratically and was effectively abandoned in 1997 (but briefly reinstated in 2003). Fiji's short-lived 1997 multiracial Constitution, modelled on South Africa's, also abandoned mandatory power-sharing after the 2006 coup. In Indonesia, the first democratically-chosen post-Suharto President, Abdurrahman Wahid, forged a series of dysfunctional all-party cabinets from 1999 to 2001, before he was impeached by the legislature. Most recently, Timor-Leste instituted an informal grand coalition incorporating both major parties, CNRT and Fretilin, and most minor ones too, in 2015 -- which fell apart in 2017 due to rising concerns about corruption, nepotism and lack of accountability, spurring a return to more familiar patterns of alternation rather than combination of the two main parties in government.[19]

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[19] L.M. Beuman 2016. *Political Institutions in East Timor: Semi-presidentialism and democratization.* London: Routledge

The most recent failure of the grand coalition model is in Malaysia, where a multiparty alliance representing the country's three main ethnic groups has been the foundation of all governments since 1955. However, increasingly blatant and nepotistic governance, underpinned by preferential treatment for Muslim Malays, particularly in rural areas, saw many Chinese, Indian and urban Malays estranged by a creeping Islamisation and growing resistance to affirmative action policies. Voters increasingly turned away from the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition. In 1990, the opposition won the Chinese vote, but lost the Malays due to their fear of losing political and religious dominance. In 1999, the opposition won the Malay vote, but many Chinese stuck with the coalition, fearing ethnic unrest. In 2013, the opposition coalition won 51 per cent of the total vote, but its Malay-Muslim support was only around 40 per cent, and the BN was able to hold on to power.

It was not until the 2017 re-appearance of former prime minister (1981-2003) Mahathir Mohamad that the core Malay vote split. The breakthough 2018 election saw the wining Pakatan Harapan alliance comprise the multiethnic Keadilan party at its core as well as Mahathir's Parti Pribumi Bersatu, which is Malay-based, and the Democratic Action Party, a traditionally Chinese party that for the first time fielded non-Chinese candidates with some success. By contrast, the parties representing Chinese and Indian interests in the Barisan coalition were wiped out, as minority voters outside Borneo shifted overwhelmingly to Pakatan. While the form of a multiethnic coalition has been maintained, the new government is clearly much more multiracial in composition and orientation than the now defunct Barisan Nasional, in which the Malay nationalist UMNO was the undisputed big brother, with satellite

parties representing Chinese and Indian minorities.[20] But while multi-ethnic in composition, as a new government Pakatan is unlikely to stray from the core position that ethnic Malay's special status must be protected, or that Islam is the country's official religion – particularly as UMNO has now joined hands with the Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party (PAS) on an Islamist agenda including expanding Sharia law.

Elsewhere, just as formal powersharing guarantees have been abandoned, so have other key precepts of the consociational model: parliamentarism, proportionality, and ethnic parties representing distinct social segments. At present, all the electoral democracies in Southeast Asia have presidential (Indonesia, Philippines), quasi-presidential (Myanmar) or semi-presidential (Timor Leste) systems, despite the scholarly concerns about the stability of this model in new democracies.[21] While Indonesia and Timor Leste combine this with PR elections, a notoriously "difficult combination"[22], both states have also moved to restrict the proportionality of these systems in practice. In Indonesia, district magnitude is constrained, with a maximum

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[20] As a signal of this new multi-racialism in Malay politics, one of the first cabinet appointments by the new government was of a Chinese representative, Lim Guan Eng to the position of Finance Minister, the first time this position has been held by a non-bumiputera.

[21] Juan Linz, 'The Perils of Presidentialism', *Journal of Democracy* 1 (1990), 51-69; John Gerring, Strom Thaker and Carola Moreno. 'Centripetal Democratic Governance: A Theory and Global Inquiry', *American Political Science Review*, 99:4 (2005), 567-581; Jose Antonio Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[22] Mainwaring, Scott, 'Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy: The difficult combination', *Comparative Political Studies*, 26:2 (1993), 198-228.

of 10 members per district (and numerous 3 and 4 seat districts); and a 3.5% electoral threshold now applies, making it difficult for smaller parties to win seats.[23] The 'open list' system adopted in 2009 is a further restriction on the kind of PR espoused by consociational theory.

In Timor Leste's young democracy, the party system has not formed around ethnic issues, despite the ample opportunity provided by a highly permissive electoral system and ethno-linguistic divisions between eastern *lorosaes* and western *loromonus*. Following a violent flirtation which mobilized these quasi-ethnic divisions in 2006-7, the two main party groupings have focussed instead on non-ethnic issues such as economic growth and anti-corruption initiatives, and also raised the electoral threshold to 4 percent (rather than the effective threshold of 1.5 percent) to deter splinter groups. Electoral incentives for smaller parties to run as coalitions have also been introduced, spurring the formation of inter-party alliances.[24] Similarly, Timor Leste's two-round model of presidential election enables smaller parties to run in the first round but requires an absolute majority for victory, a model which has been found in comparable contexts to promote better democratic outcomes than plurality

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[23] See Benjamin Reilly, 'Electoral Systems' in William Case (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[24] This *apparentement* (joint ticket) coalition allows parties to pool their votes with others elections. See Arend Lijphart 1994, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems. A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies 1945–1990*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1994), p. 150.

elections.[25] All of this has contributed to Timor Leste's emergence as the top-performing democracy in Southeast Asia according to both Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit's annual Democracy Index.[26]

Myanmar represents the main exception to these trends aiming to dilute the impact of ethnicity in electoral politics. Attempts to manage the politics of ethnicity have bedeviled the country since its birth as Burma, with the 1947 Constitution including explicit recognition of ethnicity via an upper house designed to give minorities a stake in the national government. A 125-seat "House of Nationalities" granted explicit representation to Shan, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Karens and other minorities, including four seats reserved for Anglo-Burmese. This was abandoned in 1974 as part of Prime Minister Ne Win's "Burmese road to socialism", but reintroduced in the third (and current) 2008 Constitution. Each of the country's "major ethnic national races" are now recognised in a quasi-federal structure. Seven ethnic 'states' (mostly in the highlands peripheries) are designated for groups such as the Shin, Karen and Shan, while seven 'regions' in the central lowlands represent the Burman (Bamar) majority.

Myanmar's eight designated national races are themselves based on an official list of 135 ethnic minorities, which is unsurprisingly a hugely consequential and contested designation. This is most apparent in relation to the officially recognized Rakhine (who, like the vast majority of the population, are Buddhist), but not the Muslim Rohingya, both of whom live mainly in Rakhine State. These have been the subject

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25 Cynthia McClintock, *Electoral Rules and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

26 See freedomhouse.org and eiu.com.

of successive waves of ethnic cleansing by the military and are deliberately not recognised as an ethnic nationality in government policy, rendering them stateless by successive Myanmar administrations, including the newly-elected National League for Democracy government. This is in sharp contrast to the treatment afforded officially-designated groups elsewhere in the country, where minorities are not only permitted but encouraged to form parties and contest elections, with both minority voters and candidates designated according to their ethnicity on the electoral roll.

Myanmar has thus emerged from decades of dictatorship with a political model which actively promotes ethnic minority representation. It has also introduced new forms of ethnic representation, such as the "Ethnic Affairs Ministers" which today are elected in most states exclusively by voters from recognized ethnic minorities. These ministries are allocated to each official minority group which can claim a population of 0.1 percent or greater of the total population, excepting their own home state (e.g. there is no Mon ethnic affairs minister in Mon State), or those where they comprise a majority of their state/region, or where a state/region already has a self-administered district or self-administered zone dedicated to those ethnic groups.[27] This means that only a tiny number of voters can be needed to elect each Minister.

Today, Ethnic Affairs Ministers are elected in all but one of Myanmar's states and regions. Currently 14 different ethnic groups are eligible to vote for at least one

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[27] Thus despite being a recognized minority group and meeting the criteria for an Ethnic Affairs Minister, the Danu, Kokang, Naga, Palaung, and Wa people are ineligible to elect a minister because they enjoy self-determination within a designated Self-Administered Zone or Division.

Ethnic Affairs Minister, although they may only do so if they reside within the state for which the minister is elected. In total there are 29 Ethnic Affairs Ministers in state legislatures, with numbers ranging from 1 to 7 in each state. While elected from a specific district to the legislature, they explicitly represent their geographically dispersed ethnic group, and are accountable only to them for the purposes of re-election via ethnic designations on the electoral roll.

This can be considered as an usual form of providing guaranteed representation and office holding to minority groups. Ethnic seat reservations also persist elsewhere in Asia – particularly in India and other South Asian states, most of which maintain some form of reserved seats. India, the totemic example of democracy in the developing world, has long reserved seats for scheduled castes and tribes, as well as for some other groups (eg Anglo-Indians), to ensure greater diversity of representation – even if, in contrast to the Myanmar approach, these minority representatives are elected by *all* voters, not just members of the minority in question. Pakistan and Nepal also maintain reserved seats for ethnic minorities, as does Taiwan for its indigenous groups.[28] Each of these same states have also introduced gender representation quotas, highlighting the inter-connection between

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[28] On Taiwan, see Kharis Templeman 2018, 'When Do Electoral Quotas Advance Indigenous Minority Representation?: Evidence from the Taiwanese Legislature', *Ethnopolitics* 17:5, 461-484.

reservations for ethnicity and quotas for gender[29], in what could be interpreted as a

revival of consensual electoral mechanisms in Asia.[30]

The Shift to Centripetalism

Centripetal approaches to ethnic conflict management aim to promote inter-ethnic

accommodation and moderation in the political process. One way to encourage this

is by making campaigning politicians dependent for votes on groups other than their

own base. Politicians elected with cross-community support can be expected to

promote more moderate and centrist strategies and outcomes in polarized situations

than those relying on one group alone, which tends to have the opposite effect.

Particularly under conditions of electoral uncertainty, office-seeking politicians

presented with institutional inducements to gain additional votes from non-core

supporters have an incentive to moderate their political rhetoric and broaden their

policy positions to pick up potential voter support. Likewise, voters given the

opportunity to influence the election of representatives from other groups are unlikely

to elect ethnic firebrands from rival communities. While some votes will always be

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[29] Htun argues that, since gender is a cross-cutting aspect of identity while ethnicity tends to be reinforcing, women receive candidate quotas in parties while ethnic groups get legislative reservations in parliament. See Mala Htun, 'Is Gender like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups', *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(3) 2004, pp. 439-458.

[30] See Benjamin Reilly and Yuko Kasuya, 'Electoral Systems' in David Law, Holning Lau and Alex Schwartz (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Constitutional Law in Asia*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

lost to the extremes, centripetal systems can maximize the electoral rewards available to candidates occupying the political center, with flow on effects for ethnic policy.[31]

Indonesia's contemporary political system displays a range of centripetal incentives. These include cross-regional party registration and presidential election requirements; a necessity for broad cross-party coalitions to both nominate presidential candidates and form executive government; and a highly ambitious and (mostly) non-ethnic model of administrative decentralisation. While each of these has roots in Indonesian history – only three putatively pan-ethnic parties were allowed under the Suharto era of "guided democracy", for instance, while ethnic federalism has long been rejected by Indonesian elites – they flowed from Indonesia's turn-of-the-century democratic transition, in which political fragmentation and secessionism were seen as a primary threats to Indonesian security. For instance, a range of leaders including former president Megawati made the case that party proliferation in general, and ethno-regional parties in particular, would undermine Indonesia's national integrity and prospects for development.[32] As a result, Indonesian parties are today required by law to establish an organizational network across the nation's vast archipelago, no easy task in a nation of 17,000 islands – with the exception of

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[31] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, op cit.

[32] See Hillman, Ben (2010), *Political Parties and Post-Conflict Transition: the Results and Implications of the 2009 Parliamentary Elections in Aceh*, Centre for Democratic Institutions Policy Paper 1/10, Canberra: Centre for Democratic Institutions.

Aceh, under the terms of the peace deal there.[33] This "national party" scheme requires parties to have branches and permanent offices in all 34 provinces, in at least 75 percent of the municipalities in each province, and in at least 50 percent of the sub-districts within each /municipality. Parties which fail to do so cannot run in national or even local elections. National parties with a cross-regional organizational basis are thus privileged, winnowing the party system over time.

These attempts to manage and limit ethnic mobilization, particularly of a secessionist form, have largely succeeded. The much-feared breakup of Indonesia has not occurred, and secessionist movements have largely abated in most part of the country. Indonesia experts have emphasized the importance of party aggregation in particular. Meitzner notes that while Indonesia's first democratic experience in the 1950s was characterized by centrifugal forces, "the competition between parties in the contemporary democracy exhibits centripetal tendencies, stabilising the political system as a whole".[34] Aspinall argues the cross-regional party registration laws "increased the incentives for political actors in plural regions to cooperate across ethnic lines in their pursuit of political power and resources … rules governing political parties and elections effectively excluded local parties from electoral contestation, preventing ethnicity from finding a foothold in the party system".[35]

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Mietzner, M. (2008). 'Comparing Indonesia's Party Systems of the 1950s and the Post-Suharto Era: From Centrifugal to Centripetal Inter-Party Competition'. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,39*(3), 431-453 at 431.

[35] Aspinall, 'Democratization and Ethnic Politics in Indonesia', *op cit.*

Indonesia's two-stage, double-majority model of presidential elections follows a similar logic, encouraging aspiring presidents to form cross-regional coalitions by requiring the support of a quorum of the legislature in the nomination process. Once past this nomination threshold, presidents are then required to gain not just a majority of the vote, but a spread of votes across different parts of the country in their actual election. Only parties or coalitions controlling 20 percent of lower-house parliamentary seats or winning 25 percent of the popular vote in the preceding parliamentary elections are eligible to nominate a presidential candidate. That candidate must then gain both a nationwide majority and at least 20 percent of the vote in over half of all provinces to avoid a runoff. The evidence in support for such mechanisms, also used in Nigeria and Kenya, is mixed, with varying analyses of the extent to which they are useful in muting ethnic conflict and electing broad, pan-ethnic presidents.[36] The Indonesian evidence to date favours a positive interpretation, with the two most recent presidents (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo) each gaining the broad support required in the electoral law for their election victory, and defeating hard-line opponents – including former generals Wiranto and Probowo, each of whom might easily have won under a different electoral system.[37]

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[36] See Allison McCulloch (2013) 'Does Moderation Pay? Centripetalism in Deeply Divided Societies', *Ethnopolitics*, 12(2), 111-132. See also Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p. 55.

[37] As centrist moderates, winning presidents Yudhoyono (in 2009) and Widodo (in 2014 and again in 2019) both easily met the nomination threshold and also amassed the necessary spread of votes across the archipelago in their first-round election victories.

With the exception of political Islam, which has long divided Indonesian politics between orthodox, syncretic and more fundamentalist interpretations, centrist positions and appeals are today a feature of Indonesian politics on most policy issues. A 2017-2018 Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI) survey of 508 parliamentarians found that "parties were clustered closely together, mostly around the centre of the spectrum" with "only one issue area that produced clear and consistent ideological differentiation: religion." But even on this issue, the party system tends towards moderation: "even though there is clear differentiation among parties on the role of religion in politics, the parties overall are not strongly polarised on this issue; i.e. we do not see clustering of parties at opposite ends of the spectrum." [38]

Nonetheless, Islam's role in public affairs remains the key issue in Indonesian politics – nowhere more so than in Aceh, which was exempted from two key national laws as part of a 2005 peace agreement to resolve the long-running separatist conflict. The special autonomy provisions for Aceh permit the application of Sharia Law and also allow local parties to compete in national elections. Elsewhere, religious immoderation appears to be on the rise in the run up to the 2019 elections. These elections will also be the first where both legislative and presidential elections are held concurrently – previously, legislative and presidential elections be held at least three months apart, enabling legislative parties or coalitions that surmounted the seat/vote thresholds to stand presidential candidates. When Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled that this sequential timing was unconstitutional, the

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[38] See http://www.newmandala.org/mapping-indonesian-political-spectrum/

legislature chose to use the results of the 2014 election results as the threshold instead. This resulted in a replay of 2014, with Jokowi (supported by PDI-P and Golkar) again taking on Prabowo Subianto (supported by Gerindra and the Prosperous Justice Party, PKS).[39]

Whether the centripetal aspects of Indonesian system can hold into the future is a key question. One positive factor has been Indonesia's "big bang" decentralization, which has devolved political and fiscal authority to 34 provincial and over 500 hundreds district jurisdiction. This proliferation of administrative regions has multiplied points of power, shifting the locus of political contestation across a greater range and to a lower level within the political system, fragmenting Indonesia's political map and broadening the possibilities for ethnic coalition building. This has also led to a propensity to split potentially separatist provinces such as Papua into new units to undercut potential ethnic identification and mobilization.[40] In a cross regional survey, Breen has argued that such "hybrid" federal or quasi-federal

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[39] See https://insidestory.org.au/indonesian-democracys-gathering-clouds/. The same process can be problematic for presidential elections too. In 2015, Prabowo faced trouble getting enough party support to be on the ballot.

[40] See Krzysztof Trzciński, 'The Consociational Addition to Indonesia's Centripetalism as a Tactic of the Central Authorities: The Case of Papua', *Hemispheres: Studies on Cultures and Societies*, 4:31 (2016), pp. 5-20.

arrangements, in tandem with multiethnic political parties, represent a distinctive regional approach to conflict management in Asia.[41]

Elsewhere, centripetal reforms have been more tokenistic. Singapore's Group Representation Constituencies requires parties to offer candidate lists featuring designated ethnic minorities on their ticket – an arrangement which necessitates a degree of cross-ethnic voting, as voters choose between competing multiethnic lists. These majority-enhancing rules were introduced by the governing PAP to sandbag their parliamentary majority by enabling the plurality vote-winner to be awarded every seat in a multi-member district. In recent years, however, they have also had the unintended effect of aiding the opposition Workers Party, who have become Singapore's first meaningful parliamentary opposition for many years by winning just one GRC in 2015 -- taking all six seats and also ensuring the representation of minority Indian and Malay representatives on the opposition as well as the government benches. While such representation is relatively tokenistic, as Tan observes it includes clearly centripetal objectives: "to minimize candidate-based voting on ethnicity, gender or other traits … this prevents the politicization of local or ethnic issues. To be electable, parties have to be inclusive, focus on crosscutting

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[41] Michael Breen 2018, *The Road to Federalism in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka: Finding the Middle Ground*. London: Routledge.

issues to appeal to the wide-spectrum of voters in the multi-member constituencies".[42]

Another example of weak cross-ethnic incentives is the Philippines' party list system for some 20% of the House of Representatives, introduced in the 1987 Constitution as a way of increasing minority and sectoral representation in Congress. Voters are given a separate ballot for the party-list seats, and any party, group or coalition receiving at least 2% of the votes wins a seat, up to a maximum of three seats in total. Originally only 'marginalized groups' such as youth, labour, the urban poor, farmers, fishermen and women could compete for seats, with each group limited to a maximum of three seats. In 2013, however, participation in the list was expanded to include parties not organized along sectoral lines and who do not explicitly represent marginalized groups.[43] As any party which can claim "a track record in representing the marginalized and underrepresented sectors"[44] can now stand, it is common practice for politicians to use the party list to enter Congress when their relatives have already filled up the district seats. As a result, while party list seats have made Philippines politics more representative, "it has also partially ghettoized those

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[42] Netina Tan, 'Manipulating electoral laws in Singapore', *Electoral Studies* 32 (2013) 632–643, at 635. Tan reports that three-fifths of the total GRCs were designated to have at least one Malay candidate in the team, with the rest filled by an Indian or other minority candidate.

[43] See Crisline Torres-Pilapil, 'The Origins of the Party-List Electoral System in the 1986 Constitutional Commission', *Social Science Dilman* 11:1 (2015), 85-125.

[44] Ibid, p. 86.

interests".[45] Combined with a ban on the five strongest parties competing in the party list contest, and a three-seat limit for each list regardless of their vote share, this has encouraged a proliferation of organizations representing underprivileged groups – and arguably undermined the push for more coherent party politics.

By contrast, the use of limited preferential voting (LPV) in Papua New Guinea provides a stronger model of centripetal incentives in a highly fragmented tribal society. This system enables voters to express up to three preferences between candidates, rather than a single ordinal choice, with these preferences used to calculate the most broadly supported candidate if no-one wins an absolute majority of the vote. A similar system encouraged cooperative campaigning behaviour in the country's pre-independence period.[46] These more accommodative campaign patterns were repeated in the recent elections, although there are questions about the extent to which they have become institutionalized in what appears to be a failing democracy.[47] Benefits of greater inter-tribal cooperation and improved security have been evident, but not changes to other problems such as money politics and gender

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[45] Hicken, Allen 2008, 'Developing Democracies in Southeast Asia: Theorizing the Role of Parties and Elections' in Erik Kuhonta, Dan Slater, and Tuong Vu (eds), *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 95.

[46] See Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies*, ch. 4.

[47] R.J. May, Ray Anere, Nicole Haley and Kathy Wheen 2011, *Election 2007: the Shift to Limited Preferential Voting in Papua New Guinea* (Port Moresby: National Research Institute).

equity which continue to afflict PNG democracy.[48] In 2017 the PNG government announced plans to abandon LPV and return to first-past-the-post elections, even as Solomon Islands considers similar reforms. Fiji's brief and unhappy experience with a modified ticket vote form of the alternative vote is often cited by critics.[49]

An upcoming test case for centripetal elections and ethnic conflict is the autonomous PNG island province of Bougainville, which is scheduled to hold a referendum on independence in 2019 under a Peace Agreement, signed in August 2001, which ended a bloody civil war that raged on the island throughout the 1990s. Multiple elections have been held since 2005 via preferential voting applied in reserved seats (but with all electors voting) for women, youth and ex-combatants as well as to presidential elections – a model which has helped relatively moderate leaders such as John Momis triumph over separatists such as James Tanis. In addition to mainland PNG, different forms of preferential or ranked-choice voting systems have been found to have moderating influences in established democracies such as

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[48] See Peter Brent, 'Review of Limited Preferential Voting in Papua New Guinea' (Honiara: UNDP Policy Paper, November 2017). See also http://devpolicy.org/did-changing-electoral-systems-change-election-results-png-20170502/

[49] See Jon Fraenkel, 'The Alternative Vote System in Fiji: Electoral Engineering or Ballot-Rigging?' *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 39(1): 1-31 (2001); Jon Fraenkel and Bernard Grofman, 'Does the Alternative Vote Foster Moderation in Ethnically Divided Societies? The Case of Fiji,' *Comparative Political Studies* 39(5): 623-651 (2006).

Australia and more recently the United States.[50] However, whether they can facilitate similar processes can occur in deeply-divided societies or post-war contexts such as Bougainville is an ongoing debate within the literature.[51]

The Move to Multiethnic Government

Asia's move away from the grand coalitions and ethnic guarantees inherent in consociationalism towards more fluid and centripetal models has not been uniform. While moving towards majoritarianism, many Pacific Asian states have also grafted more 'consensual' elements into their politics, including an increasing application of gender quotas and a shift towards more inclusive oversized (but not grand coalition) executive governments. Such multiethnic coalitions today form the core of government in Pacific Asia's electoral democracies governments – Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Island states.

This represents something of a challenge to the scholarly literature. Building on Riker, most political science models of coalition formation predict that governments will form around minimum-winning coalitions – that is, coalitions which include no

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[50] Benjamin Reilly, 'Centripetalism and Electoral Moderation in Established Democracies', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 24(2), 2018, pp. 201-221.

[51] Allison McCulloch, *Power-sharing and Political Stability in Deeply Divided Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2014); John Coakley and Jon Fraenkel 2017, 'The Ethnic Implications of Preferential Voting,' *Government and Opposition*, 52(4): 671-697.

more parties or factions necessary to maximize the spoils of office.[52] Much of the ethnic conflict literature also conceptualizes ethnic groups as coalitions seeking to monopolize state rents for their own group.[53] Common to both literatures is the assumption that coalition formation is a rational exercise aimed at maximizing the returns to those involved, be they office-seeking candidates, parties, or ethnic groups: especially in parliamentary systems "there is a powerful logic behind the formation of minimum winning coalitions".[54]

This logic fails a basic empirical test in Pacific Asia, where oversized cabinets are by far the most common model of government formation, and have been for years.[55] Malaysia's Barisan Nasional represents the longest lasting example of a pan-ethnic grand coalition governing model – to the extent that successive opposition groupings have tried to replicate it, from Anwar Ibrahim's *Pakatan Rakyat* at the 2008 general elections (which fell apart after a standoff between the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party and the Islamist Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS) on to the latest

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[52] William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

[53] See Alvin Rabushka and Ken Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus, OH: Merrill, 1972); Daniel Posner, 'The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi', *The American Political Science Review*, 98:4 (2004), 529-545; idem, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[54] C. Volden and C.J. Carrubba 2004, 'The Formation of Oversized Coalitions in Parliamentary Democracies', *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(1), p. 521.

[55] See Reilly, *Democracy and Diversity*, op cit, chapter 7.

iteration, *Pakatan Harapan*, under the unlikely leadership of 92-year old Mohamad

Mahathir (who brought the former core parties of the PKR and DAP back together

with different Malay parties, the National Trust Party (AMANAH), and the Malaysian

United Indigenous Party (PPBM), split-offs from PAS and UMNO respectively).

Pakatan's shock victory in the 2018 elections was effectively a revolt against

cronyism and kleptocracy which cut across ethnic lines, as issues of social class and

economic disparity (and also religious piety) outweighed, at least temporarily, more

familiar ethnic considerations.[56]

In Indonesia, all cabinets since the emergence of democracy in 1999 have been

either oversized or grand coalitions. The current cabinet is a case in point: the 2014

elections saw President Widodo's PDI-P party win only 19% of seats in parliament,

and even with new coalition partners such as Hanura still commanded less than

majority support within the legislature (48.5%). He could have easily recruited a

smaller party to ensure a minimal winning cabinet. Instead, in typical Indonesian

fashion, he turned to some of his former opponents in Golkar, the former governing

party of Suharto, and the islamist National Awakening Party (PAN), bringing them

into his governing coalition and sacrificing some of his former supporters in the

process. This gave him the support from almost 70% of the members of parliament –

a highly oversized coalition that makes less sense in rational actor terms than it does

when viewed as continuity with Indonesian governance practice.[57] Like former

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[56] Chin-Huat Wong, 'Just Lost an Election? Join the Winning Side', *New York Times*, 28 May 2018.

[57] Dan Slater (2018). 'Party Cartelization, Indonesian-Style: Presidential Power-Sharing and the Contingency of Democratic Opposition', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 18(1), 23-4.

president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, dubbed the 'moderating president'[58], Jokowi (as Widodo is known) sought to forge alliances across the full range of Indonesian parties, seeing broad-based coalitions as a way of expanding presidential power by ensuring that no single partner can become too strong as a rival. Indonesia is an example of the new trend towards 'coalitional presidentialism', in which a range of legislative and budgetary tools must be used by presidents lacking single-party legislative majorities to sustain cross-party support.[59]

Timor Leste, in which every government since independence has been an oversized coalition, is another example. All governments have been oversized since the country's emergence as an independent state – ever since the first elected Fretilin government, which could easily have governed alone, chose to include four independents in cabinet.[60] The National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) coalition, which took over in 2007 after a period of intense conflict extended this practice, to the point of including the key opposition parties in government too, while in early 2015, as noted earlier, former independence movement leader and

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[58] See, for example, Aspinall, E., Mietzner, M. and Tomsa, D. (2015), 'The moderating president: Yudhoyono's decade in power', in Edward Aspinall, Marcus Mietzner and Dirk Tomsa (eds), *The Yudhoyono Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Stability and Stagnation*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp.1–22.

[59] See Paul Chaisty, Nic Cheeseman and Timothy J. Power, *Coalitional Presidentialism in Comparative Perspective: Minority Presidents in Multiparty Systems*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

[60] Dennis Shoesmith, 'Timor-Leste: Divided Leadership in a Semi-Presidential System', *Asian Survey* 43:2 (2003), 231-252.

prime minister Xanana Gusmão joined with opposition Fretilin leader Rui Araújo to effectively create a de facto grand coalition between Timor-Leste's two largest parties – the National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) and Fretilin.[61] The subsequent election of Fretilin's Francisco "Lú-Olo" Guterres as president seemed to solidify this de facto accord, but it was not popular with the public and fell apart in late 2017. In May 2018, after nearly ten months of political uncertainty, the Change for Progress Alliance (AMP), a three-party oversized coalition led by Gusmão, took charge.[62]

Oversized multiparty coalitions were also the rule in Thailand prior to the current military junta. All governments from the resumption of democracy in 1992 until the military coup of 2006 were composed of broad, oversized coalitions designed to ensure cross-regional representation and, more importantly, provide a buffer against possible defections. Former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's governments included a range coalition partners, limiting the ability of factional players to undermine cabinet stability. Following his 2006 overthrow in a military coup, Thaksin's sister Yingluck maintained a similar approach to cabinet formation after Thailand's return to democracy in 2010, reaching out beyond her Pheu Thai party to include additional coalition partners. Since her ouster in yet another coup, Thailand has been under an increasingly chauvinist form of military rule. Promised elections in

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[61] https://asiapacificreport.nz/2017/07/20/in-timor-leste-more-power-sharing-likely-but-election-had-to-pick/

[62] The AMP combined Gusmão's CNRT with Taur Matan Ruak's Popular Liberation Party, or PLP, and the smaller youth-focused party KHUNTO in a pre-election coalition.

2019, if they are held, are likely to see a resumption of the coalition model, especially given the incentives for party fragmentation in the proposed electoral law.

One downside of oversized multiethnic coalitions is their impact on opposition parties. Needing to include ever more parties to ensure a healthy parliamentary majority comes at the cost of discipline and coherence. Both the Indonesian and Timor-Leste cases highlight the dangers of coopting all parties into government, nullifying opposition. In Timor-Leste, the two-year grand coalition saw a surge in corruption as "government came to resemble a cartel, with every parliamentary party represented in the cabinet and government legislation routinely passed without opposition".[63] In Indonesia, the dysfunction of Wahid's grand coalition experiment has seen this model abjured by future Presidents in favour of a *Gotong Royong* (mutual co-operation) model, in which some but not all opposition parties are co-opted into cabinet.[64] Such *kabinet pelangi* ('rainbow cabinets') carry a range of problems of their own, not least the need to expand the number of parties in government well beyond a minimal-winning coalition, and to dole out ministries accordingly. Compounding this has been the fractionalization of Indonesia's party system: at the most recent 2014 election, the top-three parties could still not form a legislative majority, with the highest ranked party (PDIP) winning only 19% of seats, with a number of Islamist parties also taking seats. Jokowi's eventual Awesome

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[63] Edward Aspinall, Allen Hicken, James Scambary and Meredith Weiss (2018), 'Timor-Leste Votes: Party and Patronage', *Journal of Democracy*, 29(1):153-67, at 158.

[64] See Dan Slater (2004), 'Indonesia's Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power after Democratic Transition', *Indonesia* 78: 61-92.

Indonesia coalition included an ideologically incoherent range of parties including PDI-P, Hanura, PAN, PPP, Nasdem and eventually PPP and Golkar comprising 337 of the 560 seats in parliament.[65]

Despite winning an overwhelming electoral victory in November 2015, Myanmar's new National League for Democracy government also formed an oversized executive which included two members of the former ruling party, the USDP, several independents, and an ethnic minority party, in cabinet.[66] Moreover, despite the long history and protected position of ethnic parties in Myanmar, minority representation today takes place predominantly *within* the ruling party than via ethnic parties, which collectively won only 9 percent of elected seats in the 2015 elections, with only two parties (the Arakan National Party and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy) achieving any serious representation – a situation exacerbated by the new government's appointment of a Bamar governor in Rakhine State in 2016. [67]

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[65] For a recent analysis, see Saiful Mujani, R. William Liddle, and Kuskridho Ambar (2018), *Voting Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[66] Under Myanmar's constitution, three ministers – of Border Affairs, Defence and Home Affairs – are appointed by the National Defence and Security Council, while the military retains a quarter of seats in the national legislature.

[67] Ethnic parties made a comeback in by-elections held on 1 April, 2017. While the NLD still won nine out of the 19 seats contested nationwide, it performed poorly in ethnic areas, losing seats that it had previously held in Mon, Rakhine and Shan states to ethnic parties. This pattern continued in a further round of by-elections held in October 2018, when the NLD could only win 6 out of 13 seats.

Since then, however, there has been a marked swing against the government, particularly in ethnic minority areas, where popular sentiment has solidified against Suu Kyi and her party. This is perhaps not surprising: over the past two years the military has expanded its actions against some ethnic insurgents, and peace deals that would affect ethnic minority areas in the north and northeast have gained little traction. This has seen a number of ethnic parties merging in order to present a more united front at the next elections, due in 2020.[68]

In sum, the Asian experience suggests that traditional models of coalition formation need to be reconsidered in ethnically-divided or post-conflict states. As a recent cross-national study observed, "Rational group leaders would prefer to build minimum winning coalitions to increase their own payoffs. However … the uncertainty surrounding group coherence induces a risk-return trade-off for the formateur in coalition bargaining … larger coalitions reduce the benefits from coalition membership but decrease the risk of a coalition failure due to group fragmentation."[69] This is precisely the kind of behaviour that we see in Pacific Asia.

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[68] Justine Chambers and Gerard McCarthy 2018, 'Introduction: Myanmar Transformed?' in Justine Chambers, Gerard McCarthy, Nicholas Farrelly and Chit Win (eds), *Myanmar Transformed? People, Places, Politics*. Singapore: ISEAS.

[69] Nils-Christian Bormann and Martin Steinwand 2016. 'Power-Sharing Coalitions and Ethnic Civil War', paper presented to the American Political Science Association annual meeting, 1-4 September 2016, Philadelphia, PA, p. 1.

Conclusion

Across Asia, aggregation of different ethnic constituencies, either within governing parties or at the presidential or executive level, is increasingly key to electoral victory. Sometimes (as in Indonesia) this verges on a cartel model, with all opposition parties co-opted into government, thus neutering potential threats and ensuring that no one partner can become too strong as a rival. Mostly, however, it simply involves spreading ministries across a much wider range of parties than is necessary to maintain a governing coalition. Similarly, multiethnic parties today form the core of government in Pacific Asia's electoral democracies governments – that is, Indonesia, Timor Leste, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and most of the Pacific Island states. Recent breakthrough elections in the formerly-ethnicised party systems of Myanmar and Malaysia saw putatively multiethnic parties triumph (albeit with the main majority group at their core) – suggesting that the locus of ethnic politics in Pacific Asia is shifting to within political parties. As Breen has noted, "the strength of multiethnic parties is a feature of Asian politics ... these multiethnic parties effectively replaced ethnic or non-ethnic parties that are representative of the dominant group. Ethnic parties are only in place to represent minorities, and mostly at the unit or subunit level."[70]

Both phenomena – the dominance of oversized multiethnic coalitions, and the shift from ethnic to multiethnic ruling parties or coalitions – have the effect of heightening the importance of cross-ethnic coordination at both the party and executive level.

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[70] Michael Breen, *The Road to Federalism in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka: Finding the Middle Ground.* London: Routledge, 2018, p. 188.

They also challenge prevailing expectations inherent in much of the scholarly literature, particularly the consociational school of ethnic conflict management and orthodox models of coalition formation. Despite this lack of conformity, multiethnic parties and broad-based governing coalitions have clearly been embraced as a recurring phenomenon of Asian political development. Not for the first time, the patterns of Asian democracy seems to contradict what many political scientists would expect.[71]

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[71] See Benjamin Reilly, 'An Elephant's Graveyard? Democracy and Development in East Asia', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2017, pp. 162-83.

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