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When religion trumps ethnicity: A regional election case study from Indonesia

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Abstract: The authors analyse the 2010 mayoral election in the city of Medan, North Sumatra. Medan is an ethnically and religiously diverse city and the authors treat the elections here as a case study of inter-communal dynamics in local elections in plural regions of Indonesia. The first round of the vote was contested by 10 pairs of candidates and occurred in a climate of cross-ethnic alliance building and appeals that, the authors argue, are typical of broader Indonesian patterns. The second round confronted voters with a choice between a Muslim candidate and an ethnic Chinese candidate who was also a Buddhist. There was a sudden switch in the tone and themes of the contest. A concerted campaign was launched to convince Muslim voters to support the Muslim candidate, with politicians and religious leaders alike suggesting that it was a religious obligation to do so. The campaign proved effective and the Muslim candidate, a member of the province's established political elite, won by a large margin. The article focuses on the campaign teams' strategies, analysing their electoral calculations and the techniques used to appeal to a multi-ethnic constituency. It also considers the role played in the poll by Medan's rich array of ethnic associations. The authors conclude by pointing to lessons of the Medan case for wider patterns of ethnic coalition building in Indonesia. They also describe this election as an example of the 'identity switching' that can take place when political actors choose from multiple and overlapping identity categories in changing political contexts.

Keywords: ethnicity; ethnic Chinese; elections; Islamic politics; Medan, North Sumatra; local politics

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Since 2005, there have been several hundred direct elections of local government heads [*pilkada: pemilihan langsung kepala daerah*] in Indonesia's provinces, districts and municipalities. These elections have heightened scholarly interest in the political dynamics of Indonesia's regions, an interest that had already been sparked by the introduction of decentralization reforms earlier in the decade. Numerous studies of *pilkada* have been produced; most view these elections through the lens of democratization, asking what they mean for the consolidation of democracy or, conversely, the perpetuation of oligarchy in Indonesia (for example, Robison and Hadiz, 2004; Buehler and Tan, 2007; Erb and Sulistiyanto, 2009). Relatively few have focused on their implications for ethnic politics, despite the rich potential they offer in this regard (some exceptions include: LSI, 2008; Tomsa, 2009; Subianto, 2009; van Klinken, 2008).

Throughout the country, as one of us has argued recently (Aspinall, 2011), ethnic symbols and appeals are all but ubiquitous in local direct elections, as is a broad pattern of ethnic coalition-building, with aspirants for political office knowing that they must build coalitions of the biggest ethnic groups in a particular locality if they wish to win office there. Moreover, political party activists believe that voters prefer to vote for candidates from the same ethnic background as themselves, especially when their group represents a large majority in the region concerned. As a result, there has been greater convergence between ethnic population patterns and the ethnic identity of office-holders than was the case under the authoritarian regime of President Suharto, when 'outsiders' (often ethnic Javanese) were appointed to head regions beyond Java without regard for local sensitivities.

In this article, we offer an analysis of the 2010 mayoral election in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra province. A city of 2.1 million people, surrounded by a greater semi-urban region, and Indonesia's fourth most populous urban centre, this city and the province of which it is part have a particularly diverse ethnic make-up. In Medan, diverse ethnic associations tend to the social and economic needs of their communities. Their leaders play important political brokerage roles. In the election, a total of 10 tickets of mayoral and deputy mayoral candidates competed, with the 20 candidates coming from more than 10 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. One of the mayoral candidates who advanced to the second-round run-off, Sofyan Tan, was an ethnic Chinese. It is still relatively rare for Chinese Indonesians to stand for high political office. The winning candidate was Rahudman Harahap, an experienced bureaucrat from North Sumatra's Batak Mandailing ethnic group.

In the article, we provide a detailed analysis of the politics of ethnicity in three crucial phases of the poll: formation of the tickets, electioneering in the first round, and then in the second round. We identify two main trends. First, in the initial two stages, ethnic bargaining, coalition-building and cross-ethnic appeals predominated. In this regard, the pattern we see in this election was similar to that in other multi-ethnic regions of Indonesia, and helps to explain why the violent ethnic conflicts that occurred early in Indonesia's democratic transition have largely been contained. Second, in the run-off election, there was a dramatic escalation of communal tension and mobilization of appeals to communal solidarity. What counted in terms of public discourse at this stage, however, was not so much ethnicity, but religion. Sofyan Tan is a member of the city's minority Buddhist community, and Rahudman Harahap is a Muslim, the majority religious group in the city and the country as a whole. His supporters waged a concerted campaign urging Muslim voters to support Rahudman and depicting the contest as one between Muslims and *kafir* [infidels]. This development caused consternation in the Sofyan Tan camp and among local political actors who emphasize inclusivism and pluralism as core features of Indonesian identity.

Although our analysis focuses on only one political event, and on a city with unusually pronounced ethnic heterogeneity and a distinctive political culture, we argue that the trends we identify help to explain broader patterns of ethnic and communal politics in Indonesia, including the greater political salience of religion *vis-à-*

vis ethnicity. Moreover, our analysis helps to illustrate a phenomenon of more general significance: that of the 'identity switching' that can occur in conditions of political contestation in communally complex societies. The dramatically increased emphasis on religious identity that occurred in the second round was not only a sudden departure from the pattern in the first round, but it was to a large extent unprecedented in the recent political history of Medan. Our study thus resonates with situational analyses of identity politics, illustrating how in conditions where citizens may identify with overlapping and multiple identity categories, political actors can choose to select and emphasize those identities that confer maximum political advantage in a given setting.

Our article begins with a background description of the city of Medan, its ethnic make-up and its recent political history. We then analyse the ethnic coalition-building considerations that informed the creation of tickets in the Medan election. In the third section, we examine the campaigning for the first round, focusing on the appeals that candidates made for inter-ethnic unity and harmony. In the fourth section, we examine the second round of the election, noting the shift from interethnic harmony to religious competition. We conclude by reflecting on the lessons and implications of the Medan case for broader patterns of ethnic and religious politics in Indonesia.

The politics of Medan

Medan is amongst the most diverse of Indonesia's cities, a product of its history as a vigorous commercial centre in a region with a strong plantation economy. This history also makes it hard for both residents and politicians to draw distinctions between indigenous (or 'local son' – *putra daerah*) and migrant populations, as often happens in other parts of Indonesia. The Batak family of ethnic groups originates in the mountainous uplands of the province of North Sumatra, but most Bataks were drawn to Medan and its surrounds in the late colonial and early independence period (Agustono, 2008). They are divided into several distinct sub-ethnic groups, which are further divided into clans [*marga*]. According to the Indonesia Population Census of 2000, Bataks are the largest overall group in Medan, at about 34% of the total population. The census divides Bataks into subgroups including the Tapanuli, the largest subgroup in Medan, followed by the Mandailing, the Toba and the Karo (see Table 1). (The Tapanuli category is an anomalous one that is rarely used in daily life and is probably best viewed as an artefact of the census procedure.)[1] Toba Bataks are mostly Protestants, Mandailing Bataks are almost exclusively Muslims, Karo Bataks are mixed, as are 'Tapanuli' Bataks.[2] Malays, who are Muslims, form 6.6% of the city's population, and in the pre-colonial and colonial periods were the most powerful group in the lowland coastal regions of eastern North Sumatra, which during the Dutch period were divided among several Malay sultanates.

[1] Tapanuli is a geographical rather than ethnic term that refers to the region now divided between the districts of North, Central and Southern Tapanuli in North Sumatra. The main Batak peoples in this region are the Mandailing and Angkola in the South and the Toba Bataks in the North. The term 'Batak, Tapanuli' (ethnic code number 0107) is the only one of the 1,072 ethnic categories used in the 2000 census that includes the word 'Batak' (other Batak groups are described in the code list simply as 'Toba', 'Angkola', etc). One possible explanation for why this category appears in such numbers in the census result is that many respondents who simply identified themselves as 'Batak' to census-takers were entered as members of the 'Batak, Tapanuli' group by coders. We must add, however, that this explanation is speculative on our part.

[2] According to the 2000 census, 55% of the Tapanuli Bataks in North Sumatra are Muslims, while 35% are Protestant and 9% Catholic; Toba Bataks in North Sumatra are 79% Protestant, 12% Catholic and 9% Muslim; Karo are 56% Muslim, 28% Protestant and 15% Catholic, while the Mandailing are 99% Muslim.

Table 1. Ethnic groups in Medan.

Ethnicity	Population	Percentage
Javanese	607,771	31.9
Batak, Tapanuli	280,785	14.7
Chinese	213,987	11.2
Mandailing	178,161	9.4
Minangkabau	166,739	8.8
Malay	125,094	6.6
Batak, Toba	86,169	4.5
Batak, Karo	78,744	4.1
Acehnese	51,047	2.7
Indian	14,682	0.8
Other	101,094	5.3
Total	1,904,273	100

Source: 2000 Indonesian Population Census.

Medan has also drawn large numbers of migrants from beyond Sumatra whose descendants now constitute a large part of the population. The largest single ethnic group in Medan (if we treat the various Batak groups separately) is the Javanese, making up just under one-third of the city's population. Their presence in such numbers dates back to the late colonial period, when many Javanese were brought to work as indentured labourers in the region's plantations. Medan is also home to a significant minority of ethnic Chinese – a consequence of migration of Chinese labour into the plantations of East Sumatra in the nineteenth century (Reid, 1970). The Chinese population of Medan is recognized as having a distinctive culture that largely survived the ban on public expressions of Chinese language and culture under the New Order government. Most ethnic Chinese in Medan speak Hokkien and adhere to Buddhism.

If Medan is a complex ethnic mix, in terms of religion it is a largely Islamic city, with Muslims making up two-thirds of the population (Table 2). Islam acts as a cross-cutting factor, uniting many ethnic groups. This is much less so for the other religions. Most of the Buddhists are Chinese (88% of all Chinese in North Sumatra are Buddhists, according to the 2000 census). The large Protestant minority in Medan is divided into numerous churches and sects, including separate Batak ethnic churches.

Table 2. Religious groups in Medan.

Religion	Population	Percentage
Muslim	1,291,751	67.8
Protestant	345,310	18.1
Buddhist	197,986	10.4
Catholic	55,002	2.9
Hindu	12,888	0.7
Other	1,336	0.1
Total	1,904,273	100

Source: 2000 Indonesian Population Census.

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This diversity has produced a rich complex of ethnic and ethnoreligious associations. Medan has numerous organizations based on ethnic identities, some of which date back to the New Order period, others that emerged during the subsequent Reform Era. They generally espouse a social mission, such as promoting ethnic culture, the maintenance of adat [customary] institutions, holding social activities and engaging in community work. Examples from the Batak community include the Jami'ah Batak Muslim Indonesia, Komunitas Karo Indonesia Provinsi Sumatera Utara, and according to a local newspaper, there are thousands of Batak Serikat Tolong Menolong [mutual help organizations] in Medan based around particular clan names.[3] Founded in 1980, Pujakesuma (Putra Jawa Kelahiran Sumatera – Sons of Java born in Sumatra) is the largest and oldest Javanese organization in North Sumatra. It holds social functions, cultural events and religious rituals for the Javanese community. Several splinter organizations have emerged as a result of political disputes. There are now at least 36 ethnic Javanese organizations in North Sumatra. Their politics are rarely exclusivist; several Javanese organizations do not even require members to be of Javanese ethnicity.[4]

Studies of Medan's political economy have focused on the underbelly of the city's associational life. Medan has a reputation for having a cut-throat political and business culture and a tough street life. In particular, it is known for the prominence of preman [gangster] groups and the patronage networks that connect *preman* to political parties and the ruling elite (Hadiz, 2004, 2010; Ryter, 2000). Though still playing a role, the power of these organizations has markedly diminished due to increased police crackdowns starting in the early 2000s and internal conflicts within *preman* groups. Ikatan Pemuda Karya (IPK), once a dominant *preman* organization, has declined in influence since the death of its founder Olo Panggabean and significant police curtailing of the gambling that sustained it.

More broadly, the patronage politics present during the New Order period have emerged largely intact in post-reform Medan. Reflecting on Medan's first post-Suharto mayoral election in 2000, Hadiz (2004, p 628) described local party politics and competition as a 'game of money politics and thuggery'. Abdillah, elected as mayor by the local parliament in 2000 (before the introduction of direct elections) is typical of these politics. He attained and consolidated power by using his business background and maintaining an extensive network of supportive religious leaders and, more subtly, preman groups (Ryter, 2000). His second term was cut short in 2008 when he and his vicemayor were jailed for misuse of government funds and profiting from government procurements.[5] While many figures in North Sumatra practise the same politics as their predecessors, since the mid-2000s, they have become more vulnerable to prosecution. Like former mayor Abdillah, corruption scandals threaten to engulf both Governor Syamsul Arifin and Rahudman Harahap, Abdillah's replacement in office (and a major actor in the account presented here). In April 2010, Syamsul was named a suspect by Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) for misuse of 102 billion rupiah when he was head of Langkat district. In October 2010, Rahudman was named a suspect by the North Sumatran Attorney General's Office, based on his links to six cases of graft and misuse of government funds from his time as secretary of South Tapanuli district.

Much less discussed in the scholarly literature has been the complex politics of ethnicity in the city. In the past, the lines of patronage that infused political and economic life were also linked to leaders' ethnic, clan and religious identities. Previously, the term 'Rehap Lunas' – an acronym created from the four common Mandailing Batak clan names of Siregar, Harahap, Lubis and Nasution – was used to point to domination by Mandailing politicians of Medan's local politics and the office of the governor during the New Order (Nuryanti, 2004, p 208). In the late New Order years, Malay politicians began to have a greater impact on local politics: Bachtiar Djafar, Mayor of Medan from 1990 to 2000, was ethnically Malay, as was the Governor (1998–2005) Rizal Nurdin. Ethnic Javanese, and especially Chinese, were more politically marginal.

[3] 'Kumpulan Marga Batak Dukung Rahudman-Eldin', Berita Sore, 30 March 2010.
[4] 'Pujakesuma Bukan Hanya Untuk Orang Jawa', Kompas, 11 June 2001.
[5] 'Walikota Medan Divonis 5 Tahun Penjara', Kompas, 22 September 2009.

With the introduction of greater political contestation 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. In the main, the pattern witnessed has been one of cross-ethnic alliance building: thus the current Governor Syamsul Arifin is Malay and head of the Malay ethnic organization MABMI (Majelis Adat Budaya Melayu Indonesia – Indonesian Council of Malay Custom and Culture), but his campaign in 2008 promoted him as 'friend of all ethnic groups' [sahabat semua suku]. When Abdillah faced the voters in the pilkada in 2005, he likewise campaigned on a cross-ethnic platform.[6] However, as we shall see, even previously marginal groups such as the ethnic Chinese have also become more politically assertive. In the regions surrounding Medan, mobilization of ethnic demands has been especially visible in the creation of new districts. Between 1998 and 2008, 16 new administrative districts were created in North Sumatra, some along strongly ethnic lines. A movement to create a new majority-Christian province of Tapanuli also mobilized fierce ethnic and religious appeals. In sum, in the post-Reformasi period, ethnicity has become much more politically salient, both in the city of Medan itself and in the province surrounding it.

The candidates

A total of 10 pairs of candidates contested the first round of Medan's mayoral election in May 2010. Most of them had backgrounds typical of aspiring local government leaders in regional Indonesia, being former bureaucrats, business people or party politicians, some coming from families with long-standing political influence. Several were academics or NGO activists, though these individuals had usually combined their careers with bureaucratic posts. Overall, the candidate profiles exemplified the continued grip on local power by political forces nurtured during the New Order regime that has already been identified in many studies (for example, Hadiz, 2010; Mietzner, 2005, 2010). This aspect of the election, however, is not the focus of our analysis.

One striking fact about these pairs of candidates was that every one was made up of two individuals from different ethnic groups. In this regard, the contestants followed a political norm that has developed throughout Indonesia since 2005: the formation of multi-ethnic tickets to contest local government posts in ethnically plural regions (Aspinall, 2011). What makes the election in Medan different from most (but not all) polls elsewhere is the sheer diversity of Medan's population, and the resulting diversity in composition of the candidate pairs. In some parts of Indonesia, it is usual for the candidate for the regional head position (governor, bupati or mayor) to be from the largest ethnic group in the region concerned and his or (more rarely) her running mate to come from the second largest group. In Medan, the diversity of the population produced highly varied candidate pairings. The following summary of the backgrounds of the five candidate pairs who were placed highest in the first round of voting provides a cross section of this pattern.

Rahudman Harahap has a long history as a bureaucrat. His time in office has not been without controversy, and even as he faced the voters, the media speculated about whether he would be called to answer questions about funds that went missing in South Tapanuli while he was the Regional Secretary in 2007. He was backed by North Sumatra's Governor, Syamsul Arifin, who, as noted above, was himself under investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Crucial for Rahudman's success was the fact that from July 2009 he had already been serving as acting mayor, during which time he developed something of a can-do reputation by clearing up informal traders from street sides and thus improving traffic flow, cleaning drains and organizing other basic improvements in Medan's shabby infrastructure. As a result of this reputation, and the backing of Governor Syamsul, he was from the start a favourite; Golkar endorsed him as its candidate when he was revealed as leading in the private opinion polls it commissioned (this has become a standard tool used by the major political parties when selecting candidates: see Mietzner, 2009; Qodari, 2010). Rahudman's running mate, Dzulmi Eldin, is Malay and a Muslim, and also has a bureaucratic background. He was initially endorsed by Partai Demokrat (the largest party in the city parliament) as its mayoral candidate, but when the party's own internal polling revealed Rahudman to have a strong lead, it struck a deal with Golkar enabling him to run as the latter's deputy.

[6] 'Abdillah Kembali Dipercaya Warga & Pengusaha Medan', Property & Bank, 26 July 2005.

Rahudman's campaign messages prioritized health, education and concern for the poor, and resembled the populist discourse of candidates in other Indonesian districts (see, for example, Sulistiyanto, 2009; Tomsa, 2009). He promised to introduce 24-hour health clinics and build more schools. But otherwise, his programme was vague: he pledged to reform health, education, the bureaucracy and economy, but beyond identifying these broad sectors, provided little detail. Although he had served as mayor for only five months, Rahudman's campaign centred around his incumbency. Accordingly, he appealed to voters to choose the candidate who had already produced results, rather than 'experimenting' with unknown candidates.[7]

Sofyan Tan was a special case. Sofyan Tan is ethnic Chinese and a Buddhist. He comes from a humble Chinese family and grew up in Sunggal, an area known for its graveyards and poverty. He was widely publicized as having overcome adversity and discrimination to become a respected public figure.[8] A successful entrepreneur, he was well known for his charitable and social work. In particular, he had long headed an educational foundation (Yayasan Perguruan Sultan Iskandar Muda) which ran a school that advanced a curriculum based on mutual respect between ethno-religious groups (it has a mosque, church and Buddhist temple on-site) (Nagata, 2003, pp 375–376). He was also an adviser to the Chinese organization Pagubuyan Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia (PSMTI, the Indonesian Chinese Clan Social Organization), a body that was founded in 1998, which runs social activities and aims to unite the clan groups and represent Chinese interests to the government. Sofyan was backed by the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P, Indonesia Democracy Party-Struggle), the secular-nationalist party led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, and by Partai Damai Sejahtera (PDS, the Prosperous Peace Party), a small Christian party that is close to the PDI-P at the national level.

It remains unusual for ethnic Chinese to contest political office in Indonesia. During the authoritarian New Order regime, the Chinese were targeted by discriminatory policies and practices that heightened their status as a 'pariah' entrepreneurial minority: prospering in business, but without a significant political role. Medan, too, has a history of anti-Chinese violence: in 1994, a large workers' demonstration turned into rioting with anti-Chinese overtones; in May 1998, as part of the wave of mobilizations that brought down the Suharto regime, protests against fuel price rises in the city also turned into anti-Chinese riots that lasted several days (Purdey, 2006, pp 113–120). However, in recent years, as in other parts of Indonesia, some ethnic Chinese have taken more prominent political positions (Lan, 2009; Tjhin, 2009). As many as 60 ethnic Chinese candidates competed for seats in national and regional parliaments in North Sumatra in the 2009 legislative elections. Four were elected to the Medan City Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD, the Regional House of Representatives) and two to the provincial DPRD.[9]

In fact, knowing the obstacles that a Chinese candidate would face, Sofyan originally intended to run only for the position of deputy mayor, hoping to use this position later as a springboard for higher office (a common pattern in Indonesia). Initially, he negotiated with both Maulana Pohan and Rahudman Harahap, and according to members of Sofyan's campaign team, a deal on a partnership with the latter was reached. Rahudman left his decision to run with Eldin until a few days before the nomination of candidates closed, leaving Sofyan with little time to decide whether to run and whom to choose as his running mate. Adopting an 'if not now, when?' attitude, he decided to join the contest. Moreover, the PDI-P's leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, was reportedly angered by Golkar's decision to renege on a deal, and rather than not endorsing a mayoral candidate, determined that Sofyan should advance, despite knowing his chance of victory was low. Sofyan's ethnic Chinese supporters felt that they owed a debt of gratitude to Megawati for endorsing one of their own:

> 'We knew it would now be tough. But we also knew we couldn't be half-hearted about it. [If we backed down] we thought that the PDI-P and Megawati would view the Chinese community as not serious, as if we had been gambling and only wanted to make a bet if we knew the cards we'd been

[7] 'Etnis Tionghoa Berperan Membangun Medan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 20 April 2010.
[8] 'Dokter Penakluk Badai', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 11 December 2009; 'Sofyan Tan "Tionghoa Wakil Walikota"', *Waspada*, 21 December 2009.
[9] Anto, 2009. See also 'Gairah Berpolitik Etnis Tionghoa di Sumut Meningkat', Sinar Indonesia Baru, 7 June 2009; 'Pembauran di Sumatera Utara Makin Nyata – 6 Tokoh Tioghoa Duduk di Legislatif', Harian Global, 4 May 2009.

dealt were good ones. We wanted to show we were not like that.' (Interview with Eddy Djuandi, 9 July 2010)

Sofyan selected as his running mate Nelly Armayanti, a lecturer in agriculture at the University of Medan and North Sumatra Islamic University, and a former head of the Medan Electoral Commission who had also been involved in the NGO scene. Sofyan, with an NGO background himself, believed that choosing a woman was desirable in terms of gender equality and for the message it would send to women voters (interview with Wahyudi, 7 July 2010).

Sigit Pramono Asri and Nurlisa Ginting were nominated by a coalition of Islamic parties. Sigit is an ethnic Javanese, born in Asahan in North Sumatra; he is an adviser to the ethnic Javanese group Pujakesuma. He is also a founding member of Indonesia's most significant Islamist party, the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, the Prosperous Justice Party) in North Sumatra and a representative of the party in the provincial parliament. Nurlisa, one of two women running for the deputy mayoral position, is a trained engineer, university lecturer and government bureaucrat who has also played a leadership role in the ethno-regional organization Komunitas Karo Indonesia Provinsi Sumatera Utara (Indonesian Karo Community, North Sumatra Province) since 1998. When interviewed later, Sigit explained, however, that he had been more interested in running with Nurlisa because she was a woman and for the effects that this would have on his campaign; Karo constituted only 5% of the population of Medan, and were thus not a significant voting bloc (interview with Sigit Pramono Asri, 7 July 2010). Sigit and Nurlisa defined their campaign largely in Islamic terms. The press covered many public declarations by Muslim youth organizations and leaders in support of their campaign, which Nurlisa described as being 'shaped by courteous [*santun*] politics and Islamic politics'.[10]

Ajib Shah, who has an Afghan father and a Malay mother, has a long history as a Golkar legislator in North Sumatra. He is from a major political clan (being one of 16 siblings) based in Simalungun, several hours' drive south-east of Medan, where his family is entrenched in business and politics, including in *preman* organizations. His South Asian background does not give him a significant ethnic base, but in legislative elections he was able to rely on his family's connections to political, youth and ethnic organizations in the area where he grew up to secure him a seat. Running as mayor of Medan was a new order of challenge, however, and seeking to reach out to Medan's large Christian Batak community, he ran with Binsar Situmorang, another bureaucrat.

Maulana Pohan is a Muslim Batak and career bureaucrat, and held the position of deputy mayor in 2000–2005. He also ran for election in 2005 as mayor, with Sigit Pramono Asri as his deputy, and backed by PKS. At that time, they garnered around 37% of the votes. His running mate, Ahmad Arif, has Minangkabau heritage, as indicated by his membership of the Pemuda Ranah Minang [Minang Valley Youth Organization]. Minangkabau people originate from the neighbouring province of West Sumatra, but they have a significant presence in North Sumatra and other parts of Sumatra. Arif has also been active in Indonesia's largest modernist Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah, and Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), being a member of the Medan parliament for PAN since 2004. Maulana and Arif were backed by PAN and also by PPP, another Islamic party, plus Partai Patriot, the party created by supporters of the Pemuda Pancasila, a youth/preman group with a strong presence in North Sumatra.

Among the less successful candidates, the pattern of cross-ethnic coalitions was equally prevalent, as was their affiliation to ethnic associations. Thus, Joko Susilo, who ran as an independent, was Javanese and the leader of Pujakesuma; he ran with Amir Hamzah Hutagalung, a Muslim Batak. M. Arif (a Mandailing) ran with Supratikno, another Javanese and leading Pujakesuma figure. Special mention should be made here, too, of Rudolf Pardede, a candidate who was nominated for the election but was ruled out on technical grounds (he could not produce the required valid copy of his high school certificate). Pardede, a Christian Batak, had previously been deputy governor of the province of North Sumatra, and when the governor, Tengku Rizal Nurdin, a Malay Muslim, was killed in an aeroplane crash in 2005, he assumed the governorship. During his

[10] 'Bersinar Ciptakan Politik Santun', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 12 March 2010. However, in Karo parts of town, there were numerous campaign posters featuring Nurlisa dressed in traditional Karo dress (we are thankful to Colm Fox for this observation).

tenure as governor, at least according to some Muslim informants in Medan, he filled many bureaucratic posts with Christians, generating resentment among Muslims (interview with M. Hatta, 9 July 2010). Before the election, Pardede was seen as a favourite; the fact that his candidacy was aborted, in the view of members of the campaign teams of other candidates, meant that the city's large Christian Batak community became an important group of 'swing voters', though one that Ajib Shah was best positioned to target, given that his running mate was the only member of that community in the contest.

What can be concluded from the candidate profiles sketched above? First, the contestants represented the usual mixture of well established bureaucrats, members of local political clans and well connected business people who participate in such elections in regional Indonesia. Sofyan Tan was rather different: being ethnically Chinese meant he was not part of the established political class, and his background in social activism was also exceptional. He tried to make the most of this distinctiveness by emphasizing the theme of 'change' in his campaign materials and by promising to reform the corrupt government bureaucracy. Second, in terms of ethnic composition, the fact that every pair of contestants consisted of individuals from different ethnic groups makes obvious how deeply entrenched this pattern is. It has become conventional wisdom in ethnically mixed areas that this strategy is a necessity. As one North Sumatran PKS politician explained before the poll: 'if [the running mates] are both Mandailing, if they're both Javanese, they aren't going to win . . . homogeneous pairs can lose. They [the political parties] don't take that risk.' (Interview with Mustafa Ismail, 28 October 2009) Choosing mixed candidate pairs was mainly just about generating an image of inclusivity that might appeal to a plural electorate, but, as one member of Rahudman's campaign team explained, ethnic headcounting also played a role:

> 'We do this on the basis of statistics. Though we say we are all Indonesian, the fact is that our people are still cultural, still primordial. That's crucial.' (Interview, Rajamin Sirait, 9 July 2010)

Round 1: ethnic organizations and appeals

The most successful teams in the first round of voting adopted markedly similar campaign strategies. Their campaigns were characterized by general pledges to improve health, education and the lives of Medan's poorest citizens, alongside consistent appeals to a cross section of ethnic constituencies. There was consensus amongst campaign teams that gaining the support of a wide spectrum of ethnic and religious organizations was crucial to success.

Press coverage of the campaign reported on how aspiring mayors and their deputies sought support from within their own ethnic or clan groupings. Sigit Pramono Asri thus posted messages on his Website encouraging the Javanese community to be 'solid' in their choice and unite behind him.[11] His running mate, Nurlisa Ginting, attempted to mobilize votes by appealing to her Karo heritage.[12] Maulana Arif, a Muslim Batak, used his influence within a prominent ethno-religious organization, Jami'ah Batak Muslim Indonesia, to gain its official endorsement.[13] Sofyan Tan targeted the Chinese community, with a special subgroup of his campaign team consisting of activists from Chinese community organizations, notably PSMTI, who worked virtually exclusively to mobilize the Chinese vote.

However, of greater significance were candidates' efforts to identify themselves with groups beyond their own. This was obvious when it came to the Chinese and Javanese communities. It was widely assumed that the Chinese would vote as a consolidated bloc for Sofyan Tan.[14] Even so, other candidates tried to align

[11] 'Pemilih Jawa Solid, Pilkada Satu Puturan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 6 April 2010; 'Jawa Condong ke Sigit', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 14 April 2010.
[12] 'Masyarakat Karo Dukung Bersinar', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 19 April 2010.
[13] Maulana Terharu Dukungan JBMI', *Waspada*, 21 February 2010; 'Jami'ah Batak Muslim Doakan Sumut Kondusif', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 25 February 2010.
[14] 'Sofyan Tan Rebut Suara Tionghoa Maju di Pilkada', *Waspada*, 2 December 2009; 'Nama Sofyan Tan Mencuat', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 28 January 2010; 'Jodoh di Tangan Parpol', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 30 January 2010; 'Suara Tiongoa Masih Solid, Penentu Kemenangan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 30 January 2010.

themselves with, and seek the approval of, Chinese community leaders. Ajib Shah's campaign team was particularly interested in targeting the Chinese, and its efforts were publicized on its Website and in the press. It organized public events attended by prominent Chinese figures, displayed posters indicating support from Chinese community groups, and mobilized Chinese organizations to participate in publicity stunts such as distributing free medicine.[15] Apparently, however, such efforts brought little reward. As we show below, Sofyan Tan succeeded in capturing the Chinese vote, doing well in areas with large Chinese populations.

As the largest ethnic group in Medan, the Javanese were seen as an elusive pot of electoral gold. Commentators and local research institutes made various predictions about whom the Javanese would support, and whether their vote would unite or fracture.[16] Candidates such as Ajib Shah and Maulana Arif tried to demonstrate affiliation with the Javanese community by holding public events, rallies and meetings where Javanese leaders made statements about how this particular pair was the right choice for the Javanese.[17] Ajib Shah elicited the support of the Head of Paguyuban Jawa Bersatu [United Java Society], while Maulana brought the Forum Komunikasi Warga Jawa [Communication Forum of Javanese Residents] on board. However, there is no pattern of Javanese bloc voting in Medan's, or even Sumatra's, recent political history. Those political analysts who were sceptical of a cohesive Javanese vote were proved right.[18] The Javanese community did not vote en masse for any particular candidate. Even the prominent Javanese organization, Pujakesuma, could not inspire its constituents to support its former leader, Joko Susilo, who won only 4% of the total votes (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of Round One, 12 May 2010.

Candidate	Percentage of valid votes
Rahudman Harahap and Dzulmi Eldin	22.20
Sofyan Tan and Nelly Armayanti	20.72
Sigit Pramono Asri and Nurlisa Ginting	14.33
Ajib Shah and Binsar Situmorang	13.72
Maulana Pohan and Ahmad Arif	11.25
Bahdin Nur Tanjung and Kasim Siyo	5.24
Arif Nasution and Supratikno	4.27
Joko Susilo and Amir Mirza Hutagalung	4.23
Sjahrial R. Anas and Yahya Sumardi	2.75
Indra Sakti Harahap and Delyuzar	1.29

Source: KPUD Medan.

Aside from the courting of Chinese and Javanese voters, there were innumerable displays of inter-ethnic and inter-religious campaigning. Muslim candidates visited churches, Toba Bataks participated in Karo adat [customary] ceremonies, and campaign Websites and posters displayed images of candidates dressed up in the traditional costume of any ethnic group but their own. One journalist aptly observed how aspiring mayors and their deputies were fast gaining new family, clan and ethnic affiliations. Thus, at a Karo ceremony, both Rahudman and Eldin claimed to have Karo blood and clan connections, while Maulana 'added' the Sembiring

[15] 'Ajib-Binsar Silaturahmi dengan Masyarakat Tionghoa Medan', Website: http://ajibbinsar.com/news/30 March 2010 (accessed 6 July 2010); 'Etnis Tionghoa Menilai Ajib-Binsar Pasangan Terbaik', Website: MedanPunya.com, 29 March 2010; 'Genta Djiwaku Gelar Pengobatan Gratis', Website: http://ajib-binsar.com/news/28 April 2010 (accessed 6 July 2010); 'Ajib Kian Menguat', *Harian Global*, 30 April 2010; 'Antara Manipulasi Etnisitas dan Politik Uang', *Kompas*, 10 May 2010.

[16] 'Orang Jawa Dalam Pilkada', *Waspada*, 26 January 2010; 'Pemilih Jawa Swing Vooters [*sic*]', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 10 April 2010; 'Pemilih Jawa Solid, Pilkada Satu Putaran', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 29 April 2010; 'Suku Jawa Bisa Buat Sejarah di Medan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 9 May 2010.

[17] 'FKWJ Ajak Warga Jawa Bersatu Dukung Maulana Pohan – Ahmad Arif', Website: http://maulanaarif.com/, posted 3 April 2010 (accessed 6 May 2010); 'Ajib-Binsar Pemimpin yang Merakyat', Website: http://ajib-binsar.com/news/, posted 29 April 2010 (accessed 6 July 2010).

[18] 'Menebak Arah Suara Warga Medan dalam Pemilukada 2010–2015', *Exposnews*, 16 March 2010; Jaringan Pendidikan Pemilih Untuk Rakyat, 'Etnis Mayoritas Tak Menjamin', Website: http://www.jppr.or.id/content/view/952/85/ (accessed 8 July 2010).

Batak clan to his family tree.[19] In the second round, Sofyan Tan pointed to his grandmother's Javanese heritage; in the first round, he also drew on his Karo 'Ginting' marga name.[20]

In the first round of campaigning, therefore, the tone was notably inclusive. The top candidates appealed to a broad spectrum of ethnic, clan and religious communities, knowing that prioritizing one group would be politically damaging. Most candidates emphasized Medan's multicultural fibre, and claimed they were capable of representing all sections of Medan society. Maulana and Ajib Shah tirelessly campaigned amongst small and large ethnic and ethno-religious organizations, reaching out to all possible corners of the community. Ajib Shah was particularly concerned with promoting his team as the 'rainbow pair', with a Muslim running alongside a Christian deputy.[21] His campaign team organized a multicultural festival that was attended by leaders from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Participants wore traditional costumes and there were diverse cultural displays.[22] Rahudman's engaged in activities that would reinforce this message: for example, emphasizing his role in the establishment of Himpunan Tali Persaudaraan, campaign team likewise advanced an image of the incumbent as a nationalist leader who identified with all ethnic and religious groups.[23] Rahudman an organization that promotes positive relations between ethno-religious organizations in Medan.[24] It was difficult, however, to compete with Sofyan Tan's reputation for fostering social inclusiveness. Press coverage highlighted Sofyan Tan's background as an advocate for social justice and minority rights. As a member of a once politically marginalized ethnic group, he was portrayed as a symbol of democratic and social reform.[25] Sofyan's campaign also built upon his existing public profile from his education work, emphasizing his engagement in programmes that promoted inter-ethnic harmony and addressed the needs of the poor.

Candidates and their campaign teams clearly believed the mobilization of ethnic symbols and ethno-religious organizations to be a necessary and profitable endeavour. An examination of the distribution of first-round votes at the subdistrict level suggests that cross-ethnic appeals were largely effective and – with one strong exception that we explain in a moment – it appears voters did not strongly favour candidates who were from their own ethnic group. For example, in every subdistrict with a Javanese majority, a non-Javanese candidate won the most votes. When we correlated the proportion of Javanese residents in each of the 21 subdistricts with the proportion of the vote for Sigit, the top-placed Javanese candidate, we found only a relatively weak positive correlation of 0.48 (the positive correlation between the Javanese population and the result for the non-Javanese Rahudman was stronger, at 0.61: see Table 4). It is also difficult to see a pattern of ethnic bloc voting amongst the Batak sub-ethnic groupings. For instance, although Rahudman is a Mandailing Batak, we identified no significant association between the ethnic Mandailing population and the vote for Rahudman. Rahudman's advantage as the incumbent and his high profile as a long-standing government bureaucrat were more crucial to his success than the support of his own ethnic community.

The one exception was Sofyan Tan. Not only did Sofyan Tan's campaign largely capture the 'reform' vote, but its success in the first round was in part due to his popularity amongst ethnic Chinese voters. In subdistricts where the Chinese made up the largest or second largest ethnic group, Sofyan was generally placed first among the contestants. This occurred in Medan Area, Medan Kota, Medan Maimum, Medan Sunggal, Medan Petisah, Medan Barat and Medan Timur. His highest result was 35% in both Medan Kota and Medan Petisah, subdistricts where the Chinese, according to 2000 census data, were 30% and 27% of the

[19] 'Landek Bersama Warga Karo', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 5 April 2010; 'Antara Manipulasi Etnisitas dan Politik Uang', *Kompas*, 11 May 2010.
[20] 'Ormas Jawa Merapat ke Sofyan Tan-Nelly', *Pos Metro Medan*, 5 June 2010. We are grateful to Colm Fox for the second observation
[21] 'Etnis Simalungun di Medan Dukung Ajib Shah-Binsar Situmorang', *Sinar Indonesia Baru*, 28 March 2010; 'Lintas etnis dukung Ajib-Binsar', *Waspada*, 24 April 2010.
[22] 'Alumni SMAN 1 Jadi Relawan Ajib-Binsar', Website: MedanPunya.com, 25 April 2010.
[23] 'Warga Ingin Pilkada Medan Satu Putaran', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 30 March 2010; 'Bersama Jalin Kerukunan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 1 April 2010; 'Calon Walikota Medan Rahudman Harahap Minta Doa Restu Praeses HKPB Distrik X', *Sinar Indonesia Baru*, 5 April 2010; 'Rahudman-Eldin Punya Nilai Plus', *Waspada*, 15 April 2010.
[24] 'Satukan Kemajemukan Kota Medan, Rahudman Lantik Pengurus HTP', *Pos Metro Medan*, 17 March 2010.
[25] 'Sofyan Tan "Tionghoa Wakil Walikota"', *Waspada*, 21 December 2009; 'Demokrasi Kian Majemuk', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 26 February 2010; 'Sofyan Tan Humanis dan Plural', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 28 April 2010.

population respectively. His lowest results were 11% in Medan Marelan and Medan Belawan, subdistricts where ethnic Chinese made up only 4% of the population.

Table 4. Correlation coefficients of population groups and electoral outcomes in Medan.

Proportion of group in subdistrict population	Round 1			Round 2	
	Rahudman Harahap	*Sofyan Tan*	*Sigit Pramono Asri*	*Rahudman*	*Sofyan Tan*
Muslims	0.735***	–0.746***	0.137	0.928***	
Christians	–0.474*	0.078	0.293	–0.736**	
Chinese	–0.315	0.854***	–0.612**		0.230
Javanese	0.611**	–0.537*	0.483*		–0.528*
Mandailing	0.129	–0.151	–0.278		–0.327

Notes: * $p < 0.5$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. N = 21. For proportion of group in subdistrict populations we used 2000 census data in each of the 21 subdistricts; for the election results we used official KPUD data, also at the subdistrict level. The figures given are Pearson correlations without controlling for other factors such as income.

In fact, though the results indicate that Sofyan won a majority of the Chinese vote, ethnic Chinese organizers in his campaign team stress that turnout in the Chinese community was still relatively low, with many community members sharing the political apathy of the general population. Others suggest that the classic political fear of this community played a role: 'they are still shadowed by fear, they say that if a Chinese candidate wins, it could result in riots' (interview with Halim Loe, 9 July 2010). Even so, at 0.85, the positive correlation between the ethnic Chinese proportion of the population of a subdistrict and the vote for Sofyan Tan was one of the strongest statistical relationships we found when examining the vote.

Round 2: The rise of religion

The results of the first round of voting, which placed Rahudman in the lead and Sofyan second, changed the dynamic of the election, pitting a Muslim candidate from the established political elite against a candidate who was non-Muslim, as well as being a relative political outsider and a member of the ethnic Chinese community. In contrast to the first round, campaigning for the second round (held on 19 June) occurred in conditions of considerable communal tension. Religious discourse suddenly came to the fore, with the dominant issue being whether it was appropriate for a non-Muslim to lead a majority Muslim city. This change occurred despite the fact that the candidates who had been backed by Islamic parties and presented themselves as Islamic candidates in the first round (Sigit and Maulana) had failed to garner much support.

According to many informants, Sofyan Tan's second place in the first round, and thus his entry into the second round, had not been expected by most of his competitors. A member of Rahudman's campaign team believed that this result occurred because the large number of candidates had split the non-Chinese vote. Sigit, the PKS candidate, had earlier expressed a similar view, warning before the first round that the Muslim community's vote would be fractured, and that Muslims in Medan were divided.[26] In fact, the strategy devised by Sofyan's team had been based on a similar assumption. Team members had predicted that a second-round victory would be all but impossible, because they 'would be brought down with the religious issue'. They had hoped to gain the 30% of votes required to win the first round by mobilizing 80% of Chinese voters and 20% of the rest. However, they failed to achieve these targets (interview with Wahyudi, 7 July 2010).

[26] 'Bersinar Ciptakan Politik Santun', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 12 March 2010.

The signature debate of the second round was the question of whether Muslims should vote for a leader who was *seiman* [of the same faith]. Particularly important in placing this theme on the public agenda were leaders of MUI, the semi-governmental Council of Indonesian Ulama [Majelis Ulama Indonesia], an organization that in recent years has played an important role in promoting a conservative interpretation of Islam in public life.[27] The head of MUI in the city of Medan, Moh. Hatta, explained that the organization facilitated meetings where it was agreed that Muslims should support an Islamic leader. The message to MUI affiliates was clear: 'we directed them and they were the ones who then went out to the mosques and the subdistricts [to campaign]' (interview, 9 July 2010).

Particularly prominent in the campaign was Zulfiqar Hajar, the head of the organization's Dakwah [Proselytization] Commission. Zulfiqar is a local preacher and graduate of Al-Azhar Univeristy in Cairo. His organization, Majlis Ta'lim Jabal Noor, cooperates with the Department of Religion in providing education and assistance to haj pilgrims. A meeting at its office a week after the first round of the election was attended by Rahudman and Eldin, as well as by dignitaries from Golkar, the Department of Religion, other local government departments and various Islamic organizations, including radical ones such as Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islam Defenders' Front). At the meeting, according to a report on the Jabal Noor Website, Zulfiqar warned that the Muslims of Medan were at the 'precipice of a pit' because they faced the danger of being ruled by an infidel [*kafir*]. Introducing the theme that was to appear repeatedly over following weeks, he cited Koranic verses that, as he put it, 'forbid the Islamic ummat [community] to elect/appoint leaders from among the non-Muslim *kafir*'. The meeting agreed that they would 'make brochures, bulletins and writings calling on the Islamic community to vote for a leader of the same faith and that preachers at Friday prayers and in their other sermons and lectures should call on the Islamic community to do the same and not to vote for a leader from among the kafir/non-Muslims, because choosing a non-Muslim leader was forbidden in law [*hukumnya haram*]'.[28]

Subsequently, there was media reportage of similar meetings and comments. One newspaper reported on a gathering where the famous Jakarta preacher KH Zainuddin MZ told the audience that 'We are indeed not electing a religious leader, but in electing a leader we still must do so on the basis of religion. This is because we will be held accountable for our actions in the afterlife.'[29] Governor Syamsul Arifin, Moh. Hatta, Rahudman and Eldin were present at this event. Rahudman attended a similar event on 13 June where a preacher, Fahmi Ahmad, told the audience that, 'Muslims who vote for leaders who are *kafir* will receive heavy torment in the afterlife'.[30] The Communication Forum of Preachers [Forum Komunikasi Ustad] endorsed Rahudman–Eldin, as did individual leaders of prominent Islamic organizations.[31] Despite the fact that neither Rahudman nor Eldin had a reputation for Islamic piety or a past history of association with Islamic politics, they and the members of their campaign team also began to paint them in more Islamic colours. One newspaper that described final preparations on the day of the second vote described the Rahudman camp as being enveloped by a 'religious atmosphere' as he conducted final prayers with family and friends.[32]

The campaign to promote 'a leader of the same faith' became systematic at the level of daily religious practice, where it was the repeated theme at sermons in many of the city's mosques, and at all manner of other Islamic gatherings. One observer said that, 'every Friday, every sermon was about that issue alone' (interview with Taufan Damanik, 6 July 2010). Moh. Hatta, the head of MUI, agreed that 'the influence of religion in the second round was strong…on the last four Fridays of the campaign I visited several mosques and they were

[27] For example, MUI worked with various hard-line Islamic organizations to lobby the government to ban the controversial Islamic sect, Ahmadiyah, and has issued edicts opposing pluralism, liberalism and secularism (Gillespie, 2007; ICG, 2008).

[28] 'Jabal Noor Jadi Markas Pemenangan', 20 May 2010, Jabal Noor Website: http://jabalnoor.or.id/?p=241 (accessed 6 July 2010).

[29] 'Pilih Pemimpin Sesuai Porsinya', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 6 June 2010.

[30] 'Kemenengan Rahudman-Eldin, Kemenangan Umat', *Pos Metro Medan*, 16 June 2010.

[31] 'Rahudman-Eldin Merapat ke Muhammadiyah', *Pos Metro Medan*, 5 June 2010; 'Didukung Senior dan Para Ustad', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 8 June 2010.

[32] 'Pilih Kemapanan atau Perubahan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 19 June 2010.

all making the same call… This was very different from the first round when there were many other candidate pairs and religion was not particularly prominent.' (Interview, 9 July 2010)

Although the media did cover some of this sort of activity, they mainly skirted around it. 'SARA', *Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antar-Golongan* [Ethnicity, Religion, Race and Inter-Group], a shorthand term for designating inter-communal tensions that had been proscribed during the Suharto years, became an increasingly prominent topic in the press during the lead-up to the second round of voting. Reports were often vague, and refrained from making concrete accusations against particular people. Usually, a community leader or political commentator would be quoted condemning the politicization of SARA – particularly religion – without referring to a specific incident. Others emphasized the importance of nurturing harmony between the different ethnic groups in Medan.[33] The police even claimed to be sending intelligence agents into the field to follow up any potential SARA issues – once again without referring to the suspicious incidents or individuals that necessitated this reaction.[34]

In response to the campaign that they had already anticipated, Sofyan Tan's supporters designed a campaign that aimed to depict Sofyan as a 'tokoh yang pluralis' [pluralist figure]. They publicized aspects of his track record, such as participation by children from all religious backgrounds in his school, and their access to different places of worship there. Most controversially, they also had photographs of Sofyan taken surrounded by Islamic preachers, and used these in media advertisements and banners displayed around the city. These preachers had been supporters of Maulana in the first round; in most Indonesian elections, the losing candidates direct their supporters to back one or other of the pairs in the second round. In this election, Maulana had decided to back Sofyan. Some of these preachers in turn countered the arguments of Sofyan's opponents with their own interpretations of religious doctrine allowing non-Muslim leaders. Thus, one leaflet referred to Koranic verses noting that God would 'help only those who helped themselves' and that God had 'created humanity in nations and tribes so that they may know one another' and cited medieval jurist, Ibnu Tammiyah, as a source for the claim that 'An Islamic State run by Muslims, who are tyrannical, corrupt and liars, that state will be destroyed, but an Islamic State that is led by a non-Muslim but whose leader acts justly, morally, is not corrupt and not a liar will be better, and that state will prosper'.[35] One Muslim member of Sofyan's team recalled laughingly, 'there are lots of verses that can be used and manipulated in the interests of practical politics' (confidential interview, 7 July 2010).

However, many people thought that Sofyan's use of photographs with Islamic preachers backfired, with some viewing it as manipulation of religious symbols for political ends. One member of Rahudman's campaign team, unsurprisingly critical, said that 'Sofyan ended up not showing his own identity, instead he borrowed the identity of others to protect himself. As a result of this lots of Christians abandoned him, and lots of Muslims felt used.' (Interview with Rajamin Sirait, 8 July 2010) Moh. Hatta, the head of the MUI, described his organization's campaign to encourage Muslim voters to support a Muslim candidate as being a 'reaction' to the fact that Sofyan's team had 'used' Islam, making 'Muslim groups feel emotional' (interview, 9 July 2010). Even some figures who were otherwise sympathetic to Sofyan criticized him on this score. Political commentator Taufan Damanik, for example, argued that seeking the endorsement of religious leaders was tantamount to politicizing religion, and that democracy should instead emphasize 'healthy thinking and rationality in voting'.[36]

In fact, lurking not far below the surface of the religious-themed campaign was the issue of race. In our interviews, when we asked supporters of Rahudman about the campaign to encourage Muslim voters to vote for a Muslim leader, individuals were often quick to point to Sofyan's Chinese identity as a core problem. One

[33] For examples of such reporting, see: 'Hindari Isu SARA di Putaran Kedua', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 25 May 2010; 'Elit Politik Terlibat Isu SARA?' *Waspada*, 27 May 2010; 'Sofyan-Rahudman Sudah Mainkan Strategi', *Waspada*, 29 May 2010; 'Jangan Etnisitas Penentu Pilihan', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 5 June 2010; 'Komisi C: KPU Harus Konfrontir Rahudman-Sofyan Tan', *Waspada*, 6 June 2010.
[34] 'Poldasu Sebar Intel', *Harian Sumut Pos*, 4 June 2010.
[35] The leaflet is available at the Website: http://nbasis.wordpress.com/2010/06/12/mengintip-kiprah-kampanye-untuk-sofyan-tan-lembaga-pemberdayaan-muballighsumatera-utara/kampanye-buruk/ (accessed 10 July 2010).
[36] 'Semua Calon Terjebak Gunakan Isu Sara', 14 June 2010, is available at the Website: http://www.pemiluindonesia.com/pemilukada/semua-calon-terjebak-gunakan-isusara.html (accessed 21 June 2010).

religious leader we interviewed, when asked about the religious campaign, immediately explained it as an expression of 'ethnic sentiment' and a response to 'discrimination' practised by ethnic Chinese who favour their own kind in business affairs. A non-Muslim who was part of Rahudman's campaign team alleged that:

> 'Lots of Chinese aren't really concerned about Medan, when there were riots in 1998, lots of them fled to Penang, to Singapore. It's like they are only seeking profit in Medan, only staying here temporarily, only boarding. They have the mentality of boarders.' (Interview, 8 July 2010)

Informants also recalled anonymous leaflets and SMS messages that warned of the dangers of Chinese dominance, or which supposedly detailed plans for a Chinese takeover. At one point, a PDI-P leader had to deny that Sofyan's campaign team had authored a widely circulated leaflet, purporting to be from the campaign team, entitled 'Chinese movement to support Sofyan Tan and Nelly', which, among other things, said that Sofyan aimed to turn Medan into a 'Chinatown'.[37] Leaflets reproduced on the Majlis Ta'lim Jabal Noor Website, as well as listing various religious directives, included the warning that *kafir* 'betray the Indonesian nation' and then listed several high-profile corruption cases involving Chinese businessmen, noting that 'they are all from the same ethnic group'.[38] Such commentary is a standard part of anti-Chinese prejudice in Indonesia. Insofar as it was linked to religious discourse, the campaign also continued a tradition in Indonesian politics whereby Islamist groups are a source of some of the bitterest opposition to ethnic Chinese.[39]

This is not to say that the campaign against Sofyan took only a religious and ethnic form. Sofyan took a case to the Constitutional Court alleging that the government bureaucracy had been mobilized on behalf of Rahudman's campaign, and that in areas that had voted strongly for Sofyan in the first round, there was a systematic campaign to deprive voters of their chance to cast a second ballot, as well as other irregularities in the administration and counting of the vote. Some, too, saw the timing of the second round – in the holidays at a time when many wealthier members of Medan's Chinese community leave the town – as suspicious. While there was much media and anecdotal evidence to support at least some of these allegations, our own research did not focus on this issue and we do not feel in a position to comment conclusively on it. Certainly, it appears that 'money politics' was a feature of this campaigning, as in other local elections in Indonesia. It is likely that both sides would have spent much more than the amounts they reported to the election commission (Rupiah1.8 billion, or approximately $200,000 by the Sofyan team; Rupiah2.6 billion, or approximately $280,000 by the Rahudman campaign). The Constitutional Court ruled that, while there was evidence of some violations by the Rahudman camp, they did not occur on a scale that would have changed the result.[40] Nor did most of our informants, from either side, believe they were decisive.

Despite the bureaucratic mobilization and the ethnic undertones of some of the negative campaigning, protagonists from both sides agree that the thrust of the campaigning against Sofyan in the second round was on the issue of religion, not race. All agreed, too, that it was the campaign on religion that made the biggest difference in securing Rahudman's victory. A community leader who wished to remain anonymous told the main local newspaper immediately after the poll: 'If Rahudman's opponent had not been a non-Muslim, I guarantee it is not certain that Rahudman would have been elected by the people'.[41] The logic here was simple: a campaign focusing on religion made sense in terms of the city's demographics. Although Medan's ethnic map is complex and fractured, Muslims are a large majority, so mobilizing around the banner of Islam was electorally effective.

The final result was a convincing victory for Rahudman, with 66% of the vote, against 34% for Sofyan, figures that are not too different from the religious composition of the city's population. With a slight increase

[37] 'Soal Selebaran Sopyan Tan: Kami Tak Pernah Membuatnya', *DNA Berita*, 8 June 2010.
[38] The leaflet is entitled '10 Alasan Muslim Untuk Tidak Memilih Orang Kafir Sebagai Pemimpinnya' and is available at the Website: http://jabalnoor.or.id/?p=255 (accessed 9 July 2010).
[39] In particular, various Islamist groups were leading forces in stoking anti-Chinese sentiment around the time of the riots that accompanied the downfall of Suharto (Sidel, 1998).
[40] Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, *Putusan Nomor 68/Phpu.D-Viii/2010*.
[41] 'Rahudman Menang Karena Faktor Agama?' *Waspada*, 20 June 2010.

in the participation rate, it appears that the religious campaign did galvanize many voters. Unlike in the first round of the vote, when the ethnic identity of candidates appeared to have a weak influence on most non-Chinese voters, in the second round there was a very strong correlation between the religious breakdown in each of the 21 subdistrict populations and the election results in those subdistricts. There was a strong positive association between the proportion of subdistrict populations that were Muslim and the vote for Rahudman. At 0.93, this correlation was much larger than any other correlation we found.

Sofyan won with 58% of the vote in Medan Tuntungan and Medan Baru, two majority non-Muslim subdistricts. He also gained a narrow victory in Medan Petisah, where the Chinese constitute the largest group and where there is a significant Christian community (26% of the total population). In Medan Kota, another subdistrict made up of large numbers of Christians and Chinese Buddhists, Sofyan was beaten by a small margin. Among campaigners, there was general agreement that many of Sofyan's new votes came from Christian Bataks who had previously supported Ajib Shah because of his pairing with Binsar Situmorang. This conclusion would appear to be supported: not only did a vote for Sofyan correlate positively with the overall non-Muslim population at the subdistrict level (also, of course, at 0.93), but so too did it correlate (albeit a little less strongly) with Christianity (0.74).

In fact, Sofyan's ethnic Chinese vote may have declined somewhat in the second round, with poll scrutineers noting a lower turnout in booths in Chinese districts that had voted strongly for Sofyan in round one (they ascribed this to a combination of deliberate sabotage, holidays and the anti-Sofyan campaign). Certainly, the positive correlation between Chinese ethnicity in a subdistrict population and a vote for Sofyan was much less strong in the second round than in the first (declining from 0.85 to 0.23). Overall, the picture is one of an election that became polarized along religious lines. Most Muslim voters who had supported other candidates in the first round apparently now voted for Rahudman, although a segment of them of course still voted for his opponent.

Despite the tension in the second round of the campaign, Sofyan Tan's ethnic Chinese supporters were satisfied with the result. Seeing his candidacy as part of a long-term effort to improve the image of the Chinese community and to show that Chinese Indonesians can make contributions not only in the private economy but also in public life, they felt, in the words of one individual, 'very proud and very respected' that Sofyan had achieved such a vote. 'People from becak [motorcycle rickshaw] drivers to vegetable sellers voted for Sofyan. There was recognition of the Chinese community [from non-Chinese citizens]. That was all we wanted.' (Interview with Halim Loe, 9 July 2010)

Conclusion

As we have noted from the outset, the case study of electoral politics presented in this article is about a distinctive context. The city of Medan is unusually ethnically diverse, even by Indonesian standards, and there are distinctive aspects of local political culture that also had a bearing on the race, such as the continuing prominence of *preman* organizations. The fact that one of the leading candidates in the election was ethnically Chinese, rather than from one of Indonesia's many 'indigenous' [*pribumi*] ethnic groups, also gave this election an unusual dynamic.

But with this caveat in mind, the Medan election does highlight several significant aspects of the contemporary politics of ethnicity in Indonesia, some of which point towards promising directions for future research. First, there was the central role played by cross-ethnic coalition building and appeals. Our analysis shows how, at every stage of the election – when choosing running mates, forming campaign teams and campaigning – candidates were acutely conscious that appealing beyond one's own ethnic group was essential to electoral success. Although the ethnic map in Medan is particularly complex, adding intricacy to the coalition-building efforts, similar patterns are visible across Indonesia, but have been almost entirely unstudied. Despite the fact that it is relatively straightforward to identify the ubiquity of ethnic alliance-building, we do not yet know how effective the strategy is, what variations are possible in it, what sorts of coalitions are likely to succeed, the conditions under which electorates vote for candidates from minority

groups, or the answers to a host of similar questions. This is an area of Indonesian politics that is ripe for comparative and quantitative analysis, if the appropriate data can be collected.

Second, our analysis points to the prominent public role played by ethnic associations in Indonesia. Even though many of our informants believed that the organizations themselves were ineffective at delivering large blocs of ethnic voters, the fact remains that every candidate pair sought their endorsement, and many of the candidates themselves were members. Such associations have also been little studied, though there are indications that they are ubiquitous in many parts of Indonesia, not just in North Sumatra (van Klinken, 2008). Their significance in the electoral context points to the possible bearing they may have in other areas of social and political life. For instance, during the transition to democracy, many observers were puzzled by the fact that ethnic rioting (apart from the anti-Chinese episodes of 1998) did not take place in Medan, despite the city's diverse make-up. Could it be that the density of ethnic associational life, along with the pattern of interaction between organizations that electoral politics point towards, is one explanation? Certainly, in the context of our research, we heard many reports from informants about meetings between ethnic and religious leaders and organizations to discuss and ameliorate points of communal tension. It has been argued in other contexts (Varshney, 2002) that dense associational life combined with avenues for cross-communal communication may provide a prophylactic against communal violence; this hypothesis remains to be tested systematically in the Indonesian context.

Third, the analysis indicates both continuity and change in the politics of Indonesia's Chinese minority. In the aftermath of democratization, many observers have noted a dramatic Chinese cultural renaissance in Indonesia, as well as greater Chinese community engagement in politics through mechanisms such as community groups and NGOs. The 2010 Medan mayoral election, especially when combined with the 2009 legislative elections, is dramatic evidence that some ethnic Chinese Indonesians are moving increasingly confidently out of the realm of community politics into mainstream affairs. Indeed, Sofyan Tan's candidacy was not the first time an ethnic Chinese had stood for election to a local government head position. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama was the first ethnic Chinese to be elected as a bupati [district head] in Indonesia when he won the election in Belitung Timur in Bangka-Belitung province in 2005. On the other hand, the very fact that Sofyan Tan's campaign attracted such media attention and public comment points to the novelty of this development, and its relative rarity. Moreover, in both the political caution of many in Medan's Chinese community and the hostility that was directed towards Sofyan Tan's candidacy, we can see that the effects of the old politics of anti-Chinese scapegoating remain influential.

Fourth, and more broadly, our analysis of the Medan election reveals how the political salience of identity categories is determined by context. Most societies are characterized by multiple and overlapping identity categories that political actors can draw upon for the purposes of mobilization: region, ethnicity, class, religion, gender and so on. Recent studies of ethnic politics that seek to go beyond the truism that identities are multiple and contingent have sought to investigate what factors might make one identity more politically salient than alternatives in a given context. In particular, analysts of ethnic identity and electoral politics have investigated how political elites and voters engage specific identities in order to maximize their opportunity for success and to increase their access to resources (for example, see Posner, 2005; Chandra, 2004).[42] Such studies point to how shifts in political institutions and opportunities can bring about a switch in political actors' choice of identity. Our findings support this approach. In the first round of the Medan mayoral election, when most candidates were members of the majority religion but also came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, cross-communal appeals were the dominant mode of electioneering. In the second round, when the choice boiled down to two candidates, there was an abrupt switch of focus to religious identities; suddenly, religious exclusivism trumped ethnic inclusivism. Islam was a means to unite a majority of Medan's ethnic communities against the minority candidate. The shift in public discourse is particularly noteworthy because

[42] Both Chandra (2004) and Posner (2005) also suggest that strategic calculations about how to access patronage resources are an important underpinning of the choices voters make when identifying with ethnic parties or co-ethnic candidates. Our analysis of the Medan election does not investigate voter motivations for supporting co-ethnics or co-religionists, but the work of these two scholars is certainly suggestive of dynamics that might be at play in local Indonesian electoral contexts.

we suspect that much of the public animus that was directed at Sofyan Tan was in private motivated by his Chinese ethnicity rather than his religion; this is certainly what some of our interviews suggest.

While we hesitate to conclude overly sweeping lessons from our single case, this dynamic does seem to lead to a fifth and final concluding point about the relative political salience of religion and ethnicity in Indonesian politics. The dynamics of the second round of the vote suggest that ethnic scapegoating attracts greater social sanction than religious scapegoating, and that religion has greater legitimacy as a source of political authority than does ethnicity. After all, it would have been possible for Sofyan's opponents to attempt to paint the contest as one between a pribumi and non-pribumi candidate, potentially appealing to an even larger constituency. Here our analysis matches those of other scholars who, while noting the decline of the vote for Islamic parties in national elections, have pointed to the growing propensity of mainstream secular-nationalist parties to rely on religious symbols and appeals to secure their legitimacy in the eyes of voters. As Rizal Sukma (2010, p 65) puts it, Islam is 'in the process of being "mainstreamed" into the heart of Indonesia's politics'. Moreover, we can identify relatively few instances when members of religious minorities have been elected to govern majority-Islamic districts or provinces in Indonesia (though we hasten to qualify this observation by noting that systematic collection of data is yet to occur). When such an outcome has occurred, it seems more often than not to have been a result of a minority candidate winning more than the minimum 30% of the vote required for a first-round victory in conditions in which the Muslim vote was split between several candidates.[43] In national-level elections, the tendency is even more stark: none of the presidential or vice-presidential candidates to contest the vote in the last national election were non-Muslims, though they came from a mixture of ethnic and regional backgrounds. Thus, while there were numerous peculiarities in the Medan case, it does point to a much deeper factor: religion is more important than ethnicity in Indonesian electoral politics.

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[43] In West Kalimantan, a majority Muslim province, a Christian governor and deputy were elected in one round of voting in 2008 (LSI, 2008). Central Kalimantan is also majority Muslim, but in the past two gubernatorial elections (2005 and 2010), Agustin Teras Narang, a Protestant Dayak, and his Muslim Deputy were elected to office with a majority of over 40% in the first round of both elections. In both cases, commentators have pointed to the fracturing of the Muslim vote as an important factor in the Christian governors' victories. See 'Pilgubsu: Dilematis Politisi Umat Islam', *Waspada*, 22 February 2008; 'Teras Narang Kembali Pimpin Kalimantan Tengah', *Tempointeraktif*, 15 June 2010.

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