
LOCAL ELECTIONS AND AUTONOMY IN PAPUA AND ACEH: MITIGATING OR FUELING SECESSIONISM?

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Since the 1960s, scholars of separatism have debated the impact of regional autonomy policies and general democratization measures on the strength of secessionist movements in conflict-prone areas. In this heated academic discussion, supporters and critics of political decentralization advanced highly divergent arguments and case studies. On the one hand, numerous authors have identified regional autonomy and expanded democratic rights as effective instruments to settle differences between regions with secessionist tendencies and their central governments.² In their view, regional autonomy has the potential to address and ultimately eliminate anti-centralist sentiments in local communities by involving them more deeply in political decision-making and economic resource distribution. They point to cases such as Quebec in Canada, where the support for the separatist Parti Québécois dropped from almost 50 percent in 1981 to only 28.3 percent in the 2007 elections.³ Other examples of successful autonomy regimes frequently mentioned by pro-autonomy academics and policy-makers include Nagaland in India, the Miskito

¹ The author would like to thank Edward Aspinall, Harold Crouch, Sidney Jones, Rodd McGibbon, and an anonymous reviewer for their useful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² See for instance George Tsebelis, "Elite Interaction and Constitution Building in Consociational Societies," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2,1 (1990): 5–29; John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, "Introduction: The Macro-Political Regulation of Ethnic Conflict," in *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation*, ed. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (London: Routledge, 1993); Ruth Lapidot, *Autonomy: Flexible Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997); and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peoples Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000).

³ The decline of the Parti Québécois was accompanied by the meteoric rise of the populist right-wing Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which supported a maximum degree of autonomy for Quebec within the Canadian state.

territories in Nicaragua, Galicia in Spain, South Tyrol in Italy, Gagauzia in Moldova, and Crimea in the Ukraine.⁴

However, an equally influential group of researchers has argued that granting regional autonomy and more democracy provides separatist movements with the resources they need to further their secessionist cause.⁵ According to these scholars, the implementation of policies offering greater regional autonomy allows separatist groups to gain experience in government, sharpen local identities, and prepare the infrastructure for the sought-after independent state. These authors can highlight examples like Scotland, where the separatist Scottish Nationalist Party used the Scotland Act of 1998, which gave the region increased autonomy, to grow into the largest party in the territory by 2007. Others again have introduced an analytical distinction between regional autonomy and democracy, maintaining that these two factors can influence the intensity of separatism in very different ways. Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, for example, has concluded that while the implementation of autonomy provisions often reduces demands for secession, this is more likely to occur in states with low levels of democracy than in those that offer generous democratic rights and freedoms.⁶ Accordingly, Cunningham submits that “in order to curtail violence associated with autonomy or independence movements, governments must provide order and limit the opportunity and incentives for extra-systemic violence generally.”⁷

In Indonesia, the debate about the interrelation between autonomy and secessionism has been the subject of a major policy discourse. At the core of this dispute are disagreements over the most effective approach to the provinces of Papua and Aceh, where separatist rebellions launched under the New Order continued well into the post-authoritarian transition after 1998. Nationalist politicians typically argued that generous autonomy offers would lead to Indonesia’s disintegration, insisting that only military force could quell the rebellions. More liberal figures, on the other hand, believed that the state needed to make substantial concessions to the two provinces if it wanted to reduce their levels of anti-centralist hostility.⁸ As a compromise between

⁴ These examples are highlighted in Svante E. Cornell, “Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus—Cases in Georgia” (PhD dissertation, Uppsala University, 2002); Frans Schrijver, “Regionalism after Regionalisation: Regional Identities, Political Space, and Political Mobilisation,” paper presented at the AAG Pre-Conference, University of Colorado at Boulder, CO, April 3–5, 2005; and Thomas Benedikter, “The Working Autonomies in Europe: Territorial Autonomy as a Means of Minority Protection and Conflict Solution in the European Experience—An Overview and Schematic Comparison,” (Bolzano/Bozen: Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker, 2006).

⁵ Authors who have presented this view include Milica Bookman, *The Economics of Secession* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1992); David J. Meyer, “A Place of Our Own: Does the Ethnicization of Territorial Control Create Incentives for Elites to Conduct Ethno-Political Mobilization? Cases from the Caucasus in Comparative Perspective,” paper presented at the Fifth Annual Convention of the ASN, New York, NY, April 2000; Dimitry Gorenburg, “Nationalism for the Masses: Popular Support for Nationalism in Russia’s Ethnic Republics,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53,1 (2001): 73-104; and Dawn Brancati, “Decentralization: Fueling the Fire or Dampening the Flames of Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism,” *International Organization* 60, 3 (2006): 651–685.

⁶ Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, “Evaluating the Success of Regional Autonomy Regimes,” paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, August 31–September 3, 2006.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸ Rodd McGibbon, *Secessionist Challenges in Aceh and Papua: Is Special Autonomy the Solution?*, Policy Studies 10 (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2004).

these two diametrically opposed policy approaches, both Papua and Aceh were given special autonomy status in 2001, but this neither included meaningful provisions for more democratic participation of their citizens nor a cessation of the military campaign against the rebels. International observers consequently maintained that despite Indonesia's generally successful process of democratization, Papua and Aceh were still subjected to continued military operations, restrictions on political activity, strong social control mechanisms, and widespread intimidation of voters during general elections. In his assessment for the Freedom House, for example, Edward Aspinall asserted that while "the political system [in Indonesia] is open and democratic in its basic structures, and multiple actors compete to assert influence," in Papua and Aceh "governance problems of all kinds have been amplified, and security forces have committed egregious human rights abuses."⁹

The half-hearted implementation of special autonomy amidst continued repression between 2001 and 2005 not only failed to reduce separatist sentiments in both provinces, but arguably made them worse. Many Papuans and Acehnese viewed the failure of special autonomy to deliver any tangible benefits as final proof that the central government had never seriously intended to improve their living conditions. Given the lingering discontent in both territories, however, the Jakarta government began to introduce important changes from 2004 onwards. To begin with, in the last days of Megawati Sukarnoputri's presidency, parliament passed a new law on local government that introduced the direct election of local government heads for the whole of Indonesia.¹⁰ While the law guarded against potential separatist candidates by requiring them to be nominated by existing national parties, the special autonomy regulations for Papua and Aceh granted both areas additional rights as far as the nomination of candidates was concerned. Overall, the new electoral framework was a remarkable departure from the previous practice, which had reduced the risk of anti-establishment candidacies by holding the elections in local parliaments filled with politicians sympathetic towards the center. Before the new regulations could be applied, however, the government granted even more wide-ranging concessions to Aceh. Under the Helsinki agreement signed with the separatist Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) in August 2005, the Indonesian government allowed for independent candidates to contest the local elections, and even conceded the establishment of local political parties in Aceh.

This article discusses the impact of the 2006 local elections in Papua and Aceh on secessionist sentiments in both provinces. Analyzing the polls within the context of the autonomy legislation for both areas and their larger socio-political setting, the discussion highlights two highly diverse trends. On the one hand, both provinces have witnessed victories of political leaders known for their past or present association with pro-independence groups. In both Papua and Aceh, the winners of the elections owed their triumphs to the successful use of anti-Jakarta sentiments, populist rhetoric, and

⁹ Edward Aspinall, "Countries at the Crossroads: Indonesia," Freedom House Country Reports, <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=7&ccrpage=31&ccrcountry=117>, accessed on August 16, 2007.

¹⁰ In the initial government draft for the direct local elections, the Megawati cabinet proposed to strengthen the grip of the Ministry of Home Affairs on governors and district heads, effectively "recentralizing" local government. Most of these suggestions were rejected by the Indonesian parliament, however, and thus did not make it into the law passed in September 2004.

ethno-nationalist symbols. In the same vein, their rise to power has given former independence fighters, some of whom had been jailed in the past, access to the infrastructure and resources of the state, seemingly confirming the skepticism of Bookman¹¹ and others toward generous autonomy regulations. On the other hand, however, there were also indications that the elections may, over the longer term, erode the secessionist tendencies in Papua and Aceh. Post-election opinion surveys in Aceh noted a rise in confidence in the central government, very much in line with Gurr's model of successful autonomy regimes.¹² By the same token, the elections also exposed core-periphery tensions between ethno-regional centers and marginalized hinterlands in both Papua and Aceh; these cleavages may potentially undermine the very distinct politico-historical identities from which separatist movements typically draw their strength. With these two divergent trends at work, it is too early to judge if the elections and the autonomy frameworks within which they were held will reduce or exacerbate separatist attitudes in both provinces. There is no doubt, however, that the current experiment stands a better chance of increasing sympathies for the central government than the mixture between military oppression and broken promises of autonomy that was applied in the 2001–2005 period.

Local Elections in Papua: Special Autonomy, Internal Divisions, and the Unitary State

The election for the governor of Papua in March 2006 took place against the backdrop of continued tensions between Indonesia's easternmost province and the central government in Jakarta. In 2001, the Indonesian parliament had passed the special autonomy legislation for Papua, which was designed to overcome widespread dissatisfaction with Jakarta's rule since the gradual integration of the province into Indonesia had begun in 1962.¹³ Many Papuans had suffered under the tight grip of the New Order's military apparatus, and they had watched with frustration as the area's rich natural resources were extracted largely for the benefit of Jakarta's politico-economic elite and international investors.¹⁴ Since the 1960s, a small-scale guerrilla group named OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, Free Papua Organization) had launched occasional attacks on military posts and other institutions associated with the central government, but its influence was limited to a few locations in the interior of Papua (or Irian Jaya, its official name then). After Suharto's fall in 1998, a new movement emerged that tried to take advantage of the temporary weakness of the central government to push for Papua's independence from Indonesia. This

¹¹ Bookman, *The Economics of Secession*.

¹² Gurr, *Peoples versus States*.

¹³ Under an agreement between the Dutch and Indonesia signed at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in August 1962, the Netherlands had to transfer authority over Papua (then known as West New Guinea) to a UN-led temporary executive authority in October 1962. The UN, for its part, then had to transfer the administration to Indonesia in May 1963. The agreement also stipulated that Indonesia was obliged to organize an Act of Free Choice in order to determine if Papuans wanted to remain within the Indonesian state or become independent. The Act of Free Choice was eventually held in 1969, confirming the status of the province as a part of Indonesia. Although widely viewed as manipulated, the outcome of the Act of Free Choice was endorsed by the UN in November 1969.

¹⁴ Richard Chauvel and Ikrar Nusa Bhakti, *The Papua Conflict: Jakarta's Perceptions and Policies*, Policy Studies 5 (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2004), p. 24.

movement, which pledged to achieve its goal with nonviolent methods, included not only human rights activists and *adat*¹⁵ leaders, but also many established politicians in Papua's local government. In order to contain the initiative, Indonesia's government and parliament offered to grant Papua the status of a special autonomy province, which was eventually enacted through law in November 2001.

Besides regulating the institutional and financial relationship between Papua and the capital, the special autonomy law also included provisions concerning the election of Papua's governor. These provisions differed in three important ways from the national legislation that determined the process for local elections in the rest of Indonesia. First, candidates for the governorship had to be native Papuans. The "nativeness" of Papuans, in turn, was defined to include all persons "of Melanesian race, comprising native tribes in the province of Papua" and those "accepted and acknowledged by the *adat* community as being native Papuan."¹⁶ This formulation constituted a compromise between two factions in the Papuan team that had drafted the law, with one group proposing to reserve the governorship for indigenous Papuans only, while the other argued that long-term immigrants, who made up around 40 percent of the province's inhabitants, should not be excluded. In order to provide for a fair selection process, the right to establish whether a particular candidate was eligible for the governorship was handed to the MRP (Majelis Rakyat Papua, Papuan People's Council), the newly created semi-governmental body consisting exclusively of native Papuans.¹⁷ The second special condition was that gubernatorial nominees in Papua needed to have at least a bachelor's degree, while equivalent candidates in the rest of the nation only had to present a high school certificate. Finally, the law also stipulated that persons who had been imprisoned for political reasons should be allowed to stand as candidates in the elections. This clause, which differed from the national regulations, was designed to accommodate former supporters of independence who had served sentences for "treason" and "subversion" charges.

While the law introduced important changes, it initially maintained the indirect electoral mechanism applied in the rest of the archipelago. Based on Law 23 of 1999, governors, mayors, and district heads (*bupatis*) were to be elected by their respective regional legislatures. The Papuan parliament had used this framework when it elected seasoned Golkar politician Jaap Solossa as governor in 2000, one year before the special autonomy law was enacted. Solossa, a strong supporter of special autonomy who warned that independence was an unrealistic goal, had defeated Abraham ("Bram") Atururi, a retired marine brigadier-general and former vice-governor of the province.¹⁸ In 2004, however, the national parliament passed a new law regarding local government, which introduced direct local elections for all Indonesian provinces, cities, and districts. The government addressed the Papuan case in particular sections of this law and in subsequent implementing regulations, combining the new electoral

¹⁵ *Adat* is the Indonesian term for custom or tradition.

¹⁶ "Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 21 Tahun 2001 Tentang Otonomi Khusus Bagi Propinsi Papua," Jakarta, 21 November 2001, Paragraph 1 (t).

¹⁷ The "nativeness" of the candidates for the MRP had been established by electoral committees at each administrative level. In the absence of a clear definition of "Papuanness," however, local officials made decisions by using their instincts and public perceptions rather than objective criteria.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, "Dividing Papua: How Not to Do It," Asia Briefing No. 24, (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003), p. 4.

mechanism with the concessions made to Papua under the 2001 special autonomy legislation. Thus the next gubernatorial elections in Papua, which had to be held before the conclusion of Solossa's term in November 2005, would not only be direct, but the candidates would also have to meet the additional criteria outlined under the special autonomy provisions. Obviously, the central government and its supporters hoped that this new electoral format would help to reduce the frequently expressed discontent in Papuan society over the lack of responsiveness and accountability of its elected representatives.

The MRP and the West Irian Jaya Dispute

Before the elections in Papua could be held, two major obstacles had to be overcome. First, the Megawati cabinet appeared unwilling to move forward with the creation of the MRP. Without the MRP, however, the electoral process lacked the one institution that could confirm the eligibility of nominees. Megawati had inherited the bill for Papuan special autonomy from her predecessor, Abdurrahman Wahid, and although she had allowed it to pass into law, the president made no secret of her deep suspicion of the arrangement. Consequently, she allowed her Minister of Home Affairs, the retired lieutenant-general Hari Sabarno, to delay the establishment of the MRP throughout her term, citing technicalities and a general fear that the new institution might acquire a political role unintended by the authors of the law. Megawati's failure to implement the core element of the Papuan special autonomy provisions led to widespread frustration with the central government in Papua and even turned political moderates into proponents of a more radical stance vis-à-vis the Indonesian authorities.¹⁹

The process of establishing the MRP only resumed after Megawati's loss to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the presidential election of September 2004. Shortly after Susilo's inauguration, he issued a government regulation that established the MRP and set broad guidelines for its operations.²⁰ The process of selecting the members for the MRP consumed a lot of time, however, and could not be completed before the initially scheduled election date of October 2005. This delay further complicated the already protracted situation: because Solossa's term expired in November 2005, before an election could be held, the government had to appoint an acting governor to fill the vacancy and organize the upcoming polls. Instead of naming a neutral career bureaucrat, however, the central government asked Solossa, who was running for reelection, to stay in his job. This was in clear violation of existing laws, which did not allow acting governors to contest the election. For this reason, his opponents boycotted the subsequent stages of the electoral process, declaring they would not reengage until after Solossa had surrendered the governorship. This stalemate was unexpectedly resolved by Solossa's death of an apparent heart attack in December 2005. The Jakarta government then installed an official from the Ministry of Home Affairs as acting governor, and the Papuan KPUD (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Daerah, Local Elections Commission) scheduled the gubernatorial ballot for February 2006.

¹⁹ "PP Tentang MRP Harus Segera Diterbitkan," *Suara Pembaruan*, September 6, 2003.

²⁰ "Presiden Hadiah PP MRP ke Rakyat Papua," *Bali Post*, December 26, 2004.

The delay in creating the MRP had outraged many Papuans, who viewed it as an indication that the central government was trying to backtrack on concessions made in the special autonomy law.²¹ However, there was an issue that created even more controversy: the unilateral establishment of West Irian Jaya province by the Megawati government. The dispute over the legality of the new territory, carved out of Papua and inaugurated by presidential decree in January 2003, was the second major factor delaying the gubernatorial elections. The key objection of the Papuan elite in Jayapura towards the creation of West Irian Jaya was that it had been established without the consent of the MRP, which was required by the special autonomy law. Papuan leaders thus called on President Megawati to postpone the establishment of the new province until the MRP was installed and able to take a decision on the matter. Much to the disappointment of Jayapura, however, the central government ignored these requests. With the help of several government agencies, acting governor Bram Atururi succeeded in consolidating his authority in Manokwari, the capital of the disputed territory.²² At the time of the national elections, Atururi managed to hold elections for the legislature in West Irian Jaya in April 2004, a vote that led to the establishment of a provincial legislature. With a fully developed provincial administration, an electoral commission, a local parliament, and representation in the national legislature, the infrastructure of the new province was now so deeply entrenched that Susilo's government, which took office in October 2004, found it difficult to return West Irian Jaya to its pre-2003 status. Even the Constitutional Court, asked by the opponents of the split to revoke the 2003 presidential instruction, could not arrive at a clear-cut decision. In November 2004, it declared the government regulations underpinning the creation of West Irian Jaya unconstitutional, but explicitly acknowledged the *de facto* existence of the province.²³ It even mandated the government to issue legal guidelines that would clarify—i.e., confirm—the status of West Irian Jaya.

The dispute over West Irian Jaya not only fueled discontent with the central government among Papuans, but also had serious consequences for the gubernatorial elections. Since 2004, West Irian Jaya had had its own KPUD, which was responsible for eight districts and one municipality—and around a quarter of Papua's approximately two million voters. With the tacit approval of the central government, the KPUD of West Irian Jaya began to prepare its own gubernatorial polls, which were scheduled for July 2005. Accordingly, the Papuan KPUD in Jayapura could only make preparations for an election that would include the nineteen districts and one municipality under its authority.²⁴ The government-sponsored plan for separate gubernatorial polls in West Irian Jaya and Papua became the most dominant and divisive issue in the relationship between Jayapura and Jakarta on the one hand, and Jayapura and Manokwari on the other. Jayapura-based politicians insisted that separate elections in West Irian Jaya constituted a blatant breach of the special autonomy legislation and other government regulations, which did not allow for elections to be held in the territory before the MRP had ruled on the division itself. The

²¹ Interview with Yan Ayomi, chairman of the Golkar Faction in Papua's Provincial Parliament, Jayapura, July 25, 2005.

²² McGibbon, *Secessionist Challenges in Aceh and Papua*, p. 60.

²³ "Meski UU Pemekaran Papua Gugur, Provinsi Irijabar Sah," *Kompas*, November 12, 2004.

²⁴ Interview with Yohanis Bonay, member of the Papuan KPUD, Jayapura, July 27, 2005.

central government, however, argued that the Constitutional Court had confirmed the existence of West Irian Jaya, and that therefore the elections could proceed. The MRP, for its part, finally issued its ruling on the West Irian Jaya case in February 2006, saying that a public consultation it had conducted found overwhelming opposition to the split. In consequence, it recommended that the gubernatorial elections be held for the whole territory of Papua, after which the issue of territorial divisions could be referred to the MRP again for further deliberation.²⁵

The MRP recommendations came too late, however, and thus had no realistic chance of implementation. To begin with, the central government was determined to move ahead with the gubernatorial election in West Irian Jaya. Eventually, the vote was held on March 11 and resulted in a compelling win for Atururi. Moreover, by early 2006 even the elite in Jayapura had already given up on the idea of a united Papuan election. The KPUD of Papua had finalized the preparations for the elections in the area under its control, and most politicians wanted them to move forward without waiting for the resolution of the West Irian Jaya dispute. Although they did not have a clear idea about how to deal with West Irian Jaya after the polls, the majority of politicians in Papua proper believed that a governor equipped with a strong popular mandate would be better positioned to represent Papuan interests vis-à-vis the central government than a caretaker from the Ministry of Home Affairs.²⁶ In addition, many candidates for the governorship became impatient with the numerous delays, having already spent billions of Rupiah to maintain their network of supporters. Any further postponement would have added an intolerable new burden to their already stretched budgets. In view of that, the Papuan elections were scheduled for March 10 (after an additional delay for logistical reasons), and the various campaign teams began to set their electoral machines in motion.

The conflict over West Irian Jaya eroded the positive momentum that the gubernatorial elections in Papua were supposed to develop. Designed to give Papuans a bigger voice in their own affairs, the electoral contest instead took place amid heated debates over the continued interventionism of the central government. Ironically, had the Jakarta government allowed the matter of dividing the province to proceed according to the regulations enshrined in the special autonomy law, it is likely that the MRP would not only have approved one or two new provinces, but probably six or seven. The MRP consultations in West Irian Jaya had concluded that while many societal leaders objected to the specific boundaries of the province, they were not generally opposed to dividing Papua into several territories. On the contrary, some local strongmen demanded even smaller provinces for their home areas. In Fak Fak, for example, the MRP was told that the population there wanted its own province, which should be autonomous from Manokwari, Jayapura, and Sorong.²⁷ This shows that there

²⁵ Interview with Frans Wospakrik, Deputy Chairman of the MRP, Jayapura, March 9, 2006.

²⁶ Interview with John Ibo, Jayapura, January 6, 2006.

²⁷ Majelis Rakyat Papua, *Hasil Konsultasi Publik Panitia Khusus Pemekaran Provinsi Papua Tanggal 19 Januari–03 Februari 2006. Buku II. Tim Sorong: 1. Kabupaten dan Kota Sorong; 2. Kabupaten Raja Empat; 3. Kabupaten Sorong Selatan* (Jayapura: Majelis Rakyat Papua, 2006). Providing further evidence for this trend, in early 2007 a senior Papuan politician set up a committee to push for the establishment of Papua Barat Daya, comprising the city and district of Sorong, South Sorong, Raja Empat, and Teluk Bintuni. This new province, if approved, would be carved out of West Irian Jaya. See "Propinsi Papua Barat Daya, Dideklarasikan," *Cenderawasih Pos*, January 16, 2007.

were a number of intra-Papuan divisions that, if allowed to play out democratically, had the potential to undermine the very concept of pan-Papuan nationalism that had so far stimulated the drive for independence. Instead, the perceived intervention by conservative politicians in Jakarta united most Papuans in the all-encompassing campaign against West Irian Jaya, and conveniently papered over the conflicts within Papuan society itself. The significance of these internal divisions became evident in the campaign strategies of the various candidates for the governorship, which were defined by the demarcation lines between Papua's dominant ethnic, social, and political groups.

Elections and Identity: The Dispute over "Papuanness"

In spite of the almost unanimous opposition against the creation of West Irian Jaya, the gubernatorial elections revealed deep internal divisions in Papuan society. One of the major cleavages sharpened by the electoral contest was that between native Papuans and immigrants from other Indonesian islands. The immigrants, who are mostly from Sulawesi and Java and dominate economic life in the province, were not eligible to run for the governorship, but they nevertheless had voting rights. They thus formed a huge voting block that candidates in the electoral race found difficult to ignore. Naturally, immigrants to Papua had political, social, and economic interests that were often diametrically opposed to those of their native Papuan counterparts. Immigrants were largely concerned with personal safety and the security of their investments, and as a vast majority of them were Muslim, they demanded freedom to practice their religion in the predominantly Christian province. Native Papuans, on the other hand, tended to be openly suspicious that immigration into Papua was facilitated as part of a deliberate long-term policy by the central government to shift the demographic composition of the territory in favor of non-Papuan Indonesians. Therefore, they expected promises from the gubernatorial candidates to halt immigration, implement economic policies that exclusively favored Papuans, and protect their Christian religion from what they viewed as Indonesia's increasing Islamization. These significant gaps in electoral expectations created difficult challenges for the candidates, who needed to address the concerns of immigrants without alienating their core constituency of native Papuans. How hard it was to keep this delicate balance was illustrated by the campaign of Dick Henk Wabiser, a retired admiral. Trying to attract votes from the immigrant population, Wabiser initially pledged a heavy-handed approach to Papua's internal security problems. However, as he came to recognize that native Papuans felt unhappy with this platform, Wabiser changed tactics in the middle of the campaign and suddenly proposed drastic measures to curb immigration. Consequently, both immigrants and native Papuans turned their backs on him, leading to the collapse of Wabiser's campaign.

The elections not only highlighted the deep divide between native Papuans and immigrants, however. They also raised questions concerning the very concept of "Papuanness" that had so far served as the bond between Papua's many diverse groups and constituencies. This confusion over what exactly constituted Papuanness became evident in the discussions within the MRP over the eligibility of the various nominees. As a result of these debates, Muhammad Musa'ad and Komaruddin Watubun, who were both running for the vice-governorship, were disqualified from

the race, revealing multiple layers in Papuan ethnicity that defied precise definitions. Musa'ad had been born to a Papuan mother and a father of Arabic descent, whose family had arrived in the area of Fak Fak in the 1800s. Musa'ad's Muslim family had played a key role in developing the town, and formed part of an aristocratic elite that had wide networks among local tribes and clans. For that reason, Musa'ad believed that both conditions spelled out under the special autonomy law applied to him—he was both a native Papuan by birth and was accepted by *adat* leaders as a member of the Papuan community.²⁸

Confident that he would pass the verification process, Musa'ad left for Jakarta when the MRP held its meeting on the issue in November 2005. He felt further reassured when the chairman of the MRP, Agus Alue Alua, phoned him to report about the proceedings. According to Alue, the special committee of the MRP in charge of verification, which comprised *adat* leaders, had recommended that all candidates be declared eligible to contest the election.²⁹ The plenary session of the MRP, however, delayed its endorsement of the recommendation to the following day. When the session opened again, some MRP members demanded a vote on the recommendation, saying that Papuans were only those with “black skin and frizzy hair.”³⁰ Their protestations pointed to the failure of the MRP to establish clear criteria to determine the eligibility of candidates. Consequently, the discussions between the MRP members became increasingly emotional and ended only when the matter was put to a vote. Out of 42 members, 8 voted for the acceptance of Musa'ad as a native Papuan, 27 voted against, one abstained, and the rest walked out.

The MRP decision triggered violent protests by Musa'ad's supporters. Musa'ad had been nominated as running mate to Lukas Enembe, a fiery politician from the central highlands. Suspecting that then governor Solossa had influenced the MRP decision in order to prevent Musa'ad from attracting the majority of Muslim votes, Enembe's fanatic supporters attacked the KPUD office in Jayapura and demanded that the verdict of the MRP be overturned.³¹ They only ceased their protests after it was announced that Musa'ad had appointed another Muslim candidate to replace him as Enembe's vice-gubernatorial nominee.

In the other case before the MRP, that of Komaruddin Watubun, the political implications were much less sensitive, as his nomination was controversial even within his own party.³² Nevertheless, the basis for his exclusion from the elections was shaky. Komaruddin, who originated from the Kei Islands and had been living in Papua since his childhood, pointed out that the special autonomy law defined native Papuans as

²⁸ Interview with Muhammad Musa'ad, Jayapura, March 7, 2006.

²⁹ Kelompok Kerja Adat (Pokja) MRP, *Pertimbangan Persetujuan Tentang 5 (Lima) Pasangan Calon Gubernur dan Wakil Gubernur*, Jayapura, November 16, 2005.

³⁰ International Crisis Group, “Papua: The Danger of Shutting Down Dialogue,” Asia Briefing Paper No. 47 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2006), p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³² Komaruddin was the chairman of the provincial chapter of PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) in Papua, which had nominated him to run for vice-governor on Barnabas Suebu's ticket. However, PDI-P's general chairwoman, Megawati Sukarnoputri, refused to endorse Komaruddin because he belonged to a group of Megawati critics within PDI-P. Thus even if the MRP had not disqualified Komaruddin, Megawati would most likely have sacked him before his nomination became official.

originating from the Melanesian race, and that the Keiese fell under that definition.³³ The Kei Islands belong to the province of Maluku, but geographically they are as close to the Papuan mainland as Biak, for example. Since the colonial period, the Keiese have occupied a large number of bureaucratic and educational positions in Papua, and many of them have resided there for several generations. Inter-marriage, mostly with Papuans from the coast, has further strengthened their ties to the province. In Komaruddin's case, he had also received written declarations from *adat* leaders that he was acknowledged as part of the Papuan community, thus clearly fulfilling one of the alternative criteria set out under the special autonomy provisions. Accordingly, despite the absence of protests, Komaruddin's exclusion from the election further contributed to the controversy about the way "Papuanness" was defined, and how existing regulations were applied.

The tensions triggered by the disqualifications indicated that the more competitive electoral format presented the Papuan elite not only with great opportunities, but also with considerable risks. On the one hand, the direct elections offered Papuans the chance to play a greater role in the management of their own affairs, claim more resources for their local needs, and build the institutional, economic, and educational infrastructure of the province according to their own developmental agenda. According to authors like Meyer³⁴ and Gorenburg³⁵, the assumption of greater powers by local elites in special autonomy areas can, in fact, make these elites so powerful that they eventually increase—rather than reduce—their demands for independence. However, the Papuan case also demonstrates that more electoral competition in special autonomy territories has the potential to expose internal divisions that can complicate the scenario outlined by Meyer and Gorenburg. In Papua, the election highlighted long-established primordial and socio-political cleavages, with the debate over the role of immigrants and the definition of Papuanness being only the first in a long list of intra-Papuan disputes that erupted in the course of the ballot. These dynamics helped to confute the frequently held view that Papuan politics are largely dictated by the conflict between a united Papuan society on the one hand and the interventionist Jakarta government on the other. Apparently, the ambition of Papuan elites to increase their autonomy from the Indonesian capital was not only obstructed by ultranationalist politicians in Jakarta, but also by severe friction within Papuan society itself.

Ethnic and Regional Divisions: Coast versus the Interior

Papua's socio-ethnic fragmentation into tribes and clans has been well documented in anthropological terms,³⁶ but it was one cleavage in particular that gained great

³³ Interview with Komaruddin Watubun, Deputy Chairman of Papua's Provincial Parliament, Jayapura, March 8, 2006.

³⁴ Meyer, "A Place of Our Own."

³⁵ Gorenburg, "Nationalism for the Masses."

³⁶ Rodd McGibbon explained that "312 tribes exist in Papua from a total indigenous population of less than 1.5 million people. The largest tribes in Papua are the Dani and Dani/Ndani, inhabiting the densely populated regions of the interior and its fertile valleys, and the Biaks, who inhabit the coastal region of Biak-Numfor. These three broad tribal groupings each comprise approximately 150,000 people—double the population of the next largest tribes. The seven largest tribes have a combined population that amounts to 80 percent of the total indigenous population. The remaining 20 percent are divided into some 300 tribal groups of which two-thirds have a population of less than 1,000 people. To make matters even

political significance during the gubernatorial election: the ethno-regional division between coastal Papuans and their counterparts from the interior. This division had historical roots, but the ballot further sharpened its demarcation lines. Since the colonial period, Papuans from coastal areas had enjoyed significantly better educational opportunities, which enabled them to occupy key positions in the bureaucracy and the private sector. As a result, Papuans from Biak, Serui, Sentani, Sorong, and Fak Fak have dominated political and social life in the province, with local government, churches, and non-governmental organizations typically run by figures from these coastal regions. People from the interior, on the other hand, have traditionally felt underprivileged. According to Rodd McGibbon, “the socio-economic changes from the 1970s reinforced this basic cleavage and intensified the sense of disadvantage in the densely populated areas of the interior.”³⁷ Many members of tribes from the interior, most notably from the Lani and the Dani, have increasingly left their valleys in search of employment opportunities in the urban centers. In the cities, however, people from the interior find it hard to compete with immigrants from Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Java, leading to social and economic imbalances that tend to further consolidate the marginalization of central highlanders.

At the same time, many coastal Papuans have moved into the interior, filling the additional bureaucratic jobs that have become available since the drastic increase of districts in Papua and West Irian Jaya from 9 to 29 between 1998 and 2004. This two-way flow of intra-Papuan migration has intensified the tensions between the two broad groups, and has also given rise to distinctly socio-ethnic tones in the political competition. In recent years, Papuans from the interior have often complained about the fact that no one representing their group has ever obtained the governorship. Jaap Solossa had been the last in a series of coastal Papuans in that position, and like most of his predecessors, he had handed numerous top jobs in the bureaucracy to members of his clan or other influential figures from his home region.³⁸

The challenge launched by the central highlands to the political superiority of the coastal areas was epitomized in the candidacy of Lukas Enembe, the deputy *bupati* of Puncak Jaya district in the interior of Papua. Enembe’s campaign, which was supported by the Christian party PDS (Partai Damai Sejahtera, Party of Peace and Prosperity), drew its strength from a simple appeal to the tribes of the interior to break the monopolistic grip of coastal Papua on the governorship. While preparing his gubernatorial candidacy, Enembe made the acquaintance of Musa’ad, who had co-authored Papua’s special autonomy law and was courted by several Islamic parties to represent them in the elections. Musa’ad eventually became Enembe’s running mate, adding a strong Muslim element to Enembe’s predominantly ethnic platform. This religio-ethnic blend was maintained even after Musa’ad’s disqualification by the MRP. Despite protests of Enembe’s supporters against the decision, Musa’ad finally

more complex, each tribe is organized into subtribes, clans, and subclans.” See Rodd McGibbon, *Plural Society in Peril: Migration, Economic Change, and the Papua Conflict*, Policy Studies 13 (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2004), p. 31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁸ The tendency of incumbent governors to distribute key posts among their own constituency was reflected in the popular acronym SOS, which stood for “Semua Orang Sorong” (Everybody Is from Sorong) or “Semua Orang Serui” (Everybody Is from Serui), depending on the sitting governor’s hometown. Solossa was from Sorong.

surrendered to the MRP's judgment and invited a Muslim banker, Arobi Ahmad Aituarauw, to replace him.³⁹ Declaring that it was a religious obligation for Muslims to vote for him, Arobi—as the only Islamic candidate in the race—was able to bind a large number of immigrants to Enembe's campaign.

Table 1: Results of the 2006 Gubernatorial Election in Papua

| NO. | NAMES OF CANDIDATES | VOTES | PERCENTAGE | PARTY AFFILIATION |
|-----|---|---------|------------|--|
| 1 | BARNABAS SUEBU — ALEX HESEGEM | 354.763 | 31.5 % | PDI-P-LED COALITION |
| 2 | LUKAS ENEMBE — H. AROBI AHMAD AITUARAUW | 333.623 | 29.6 % | PDS-LED COALITION (INCLUDING ISLAMIC PARTIES) |
| 3 | JOHN IBO — O ASKALIS KOSSY | 258.475 | 22.9 % | GOLKAR |
| 4 | CONSTANT KARMA — DONATUS MOTTE | 112.033 | 9.9 % | COALITION OF SMALL PARTIES |
| 5 | DIRK HENK WABISER — SIMON PETRUS INAURY | 67.671 | 6.0 % | PARTAI DEMOKRAT-LED COALITION |

Enembe's impressive performance in the elections (he unexpectedly finished second, with 29.6 percent of the votes) highlighted the continued volatility of intra-Papuan tensions. Enembe's campaign message—that it was now time for a candidate from the interior to assume the governorship—resonated well with ethnic highlanders, and provided him with a fanatical and numerically significant support base.⁴⁰ During the campaign, Enembe announced that his leadership style as governor would be "traditional," further strengthening his appeal to politically archaic tribal communities that sought to facilitate the rise of one of their leaders to the governorship. Enembe's campaign so openly relied on primordial sentiments that he was able easily to brush aside criticisms of his lack of a detailed political program. Accordingly, the remark by one of his critics that "Papua seeks to elect a governor, not a tribal or *adat* leader"⁴¹ had

³⁹ Musa'ad had spent a week visiting mosques and other Islamic meeting places to recruit a replacement. Arobi only agreed to run after no other Muslim nominee of Papuan origin (a rather rare combination) was found. Interview with Muhammad Musa'ad, Jayapura, March 7, 2006.

⁴⁰ Fifty-five percent of all voters were concentrated in the major central highland districts—Pegunungan Bintang, Yahukimo, Tolikara, Jayawijaya, Puncak Jaya, Paniai, and Mimika—with additional central highlanders living in other districts.

⁴¹ Remark by a political commentator on TVRI's local television channel in Jayapura, March 8, 2006.

no measurable effect on his ratings in the preelection opinion polls. In fact, despite the candidate's poor performances in the televised debates with his rivals in the election, Enembe's following grew steadily, and by the end of the campaign, he had overtaken several candidates with well-entrenched power networks and more sophisticated political platforms. Ultimately, he got within a hairsbreadth of winning the elections. The final figures put Enembe only around 20,000 votes behind the leader, with a total of more than 1.1 million votes cast.⁴² Claiming that there had been irregularities during the vote count in the district of Yahukimo, Enembe lodged a complaint with the Supreme Court and asked it to overturn the result. However, as they had done in most other cases that involved complaints over local election results, the judges decided to reject the lawsuit and confirm the official KPUD figures.

Enembe's narrow defeat was largely caused by his inability to claim the exclusive support of ethnic highlanders. Although at Enembe's final campaign event a prominent tribal leader claimed that the interior's approximately 750,000 votes had already been secured for his campaign, the reality on the ground was different. Each of Enembe's four competitors, who all originated from coastal regions, had posted candidates from the interior as their running mates. With each of these four vice-gubernatorial nominees laying claim to support from their respective tribes, Enembe's chances of uniting the central highland behind his campaign had been seriously diminished.⁴³ This trend was aggravated by Enembe's relatively low name recognition, both at the provincial level and in the highlands themselves. Prior to the campaign, only 40 percent of voters had heard of Enembe, the lowest figure for all gubernatorial nominees.⁴⁴ Although his popularity skyrocketed during the campaign, the preelection surveys demonstrated that many voters in the interior did not view Enembe as an authoritative figure with the potential to command the undisputed loyalty of the highland communities. Consequently, significant sections of the highland electorate supported those vice-gubernatorial candidates who originated from their respective tribes or regions, instead of throwing their support behind Enembe.

The ethnic differences dividing Enembe from his rivals were not the only indication of Papua's regional fragmentation. Beyond Irian Jaya Barat, several regions in Papua had long sought the establishment of their own provinces,⁴⁵ and they viewed the election campaign as a perfect opportunity to promote their own interests. Most importantly, politicians in Merauke believed that it was now the right time to launch their initiative for the creation of South Papua. Residents in the area around Merauke, many of them Catholics, have for decades felt marginalized by the largely Protestant capital of Jayapura, and their demands for an administrative split from Papua proper had increased since the dispute over West Irian Jaya. John Gluba Gebze, the *bupati* of

⁴² "Tinggal Beda Seribuan," *Cendrawasih Pos*, March 20, 2006.

⁴³ Members of Enembe's campaign team could not even reach agreement among themselves when asked about the ethnic affiliations of their nominee. Some claimed he was a Dani, but others suggested that the tribe of the Enembe, to which the candidate belonged, was too independent to be categorized as Dani. The heated debate that this question triggered among the candidate's own supporters indicated how difficult it was to establish a claim to represent all highland tribes. Interview with Enembe supporters, Jayapura, March 5, 2006.

⁴⁴ "Hasil Survey Pilkada Propinsi Papua 2006," *Lingkaran Survei Indonesia*.

⁴⁵ Richard Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation*, Policy Series 14 (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2004), p. 77.

Merauke and chairman of the local Golkar branch, led the campaign to create South Papua.⁴⁶ In his ambition to accelerate the establishment of the province, he even engaged in political extortion of his own provincial party chairman and Golkar's nominee for the governorship, John Ibo. When Ibo came to Merauke to campaign for his gubernatorial candidacy, Gebze publicly declared that the Golkar party in Merauke would only support him if he signed an agreement to facilitate the inauguration of South Papua by 2007, at the latest.⁴⁷ Trailing in the opinion polls, Ibo reluctantly agreed.

In response, John Ibo's main competitor, Barnabas Suebu, promised to grant the southern regions their own administrative unit, but refrained from committing to a new province. Instead, he offered to support the partition of Papua into Western Papua, Southern Papua, Northern Papua, and Central Highland Papua, with each region headed by a resident (following the administrative terminology of the Dutch colonial government).⁴⁸ If these areas insisted on having their own governors, however, then Papua could serve as a supra-provincial entity led by a governor-general. Enembe, for his part, simply reminded the electorate in Merauke that no Meraukan had ever held the governorship and promised that, if they supported him this time, he would make sure that the next governor, after himself, came from Merauke.

Ethnic and local identities were clearly significant in determining electoral behavior, but other factors played a role as well. Barnabas Suebu, the eventual winner of the elections, attracted many voters with his modern approach to electoral campaigning, which put more stress on image-building in the media and the development of policy platforms than on primordial affiliations. Using his solid cross-tribal popularity, Suebu established a strong lead in the opinion polls and ultimately won the governorship with 31.5 percent of the votes. Besides his promise to allocate more funds for community development programs in the villages, there was one issue in particular that propelled Suebu to victory: his criticism of the central government, accompanied by rumors that he was sympathetic towards the idea of Papuan independence—which the candidate only half-heartedly denied.

The "M" Factor: Between Special Autonomy and "Merdeka"

The issue of Papuan independence was the elephant in the room during the entire campaign. Candidates neither expressed support for it nor discussed it in any detail, yet there were widespread discussions among voters about the preferences of the various candidates. Given the nature of this "hidden" campaign, it is difficult quantitatively to assess its impact on the electoral behavior of Papuans. The losing candidates, however, were certain that Suebu's victory was due to his image as a tacit supporter of independence. John Ibo, for example, accused Suebu of having promised voters that Papua would gain independence one year after his election.⁴⁹ Although there was no evidence for this allegation, it was quickly picked up by another unsuccessful nominee, Dick Henk Wabiser. Wabiser demanded that the governor-elect

⁴⁶ "Suara Pecah dari Selatan," *Suara Perempuan Papua*, March 6, 2006.

⁴⁷ "John Ibo Ditawarin Pembentukan Provinsi Papua Selatan," *Cendrawasih Pos*, February 9, 2006.

⁴⁸ Interview with Barnabas Suebu, Jayapura, March 8, 2006.

⁴⁹ "Heran Dengan Hasil Coblosan," *Cendrawasih Pos*, March 15, 2006.

undergo a “special examination” (*litsus*) to establish his loyalty to the Indonesian unitary state, insinuating that Suebu had campaigned on a platform that advocated independence.⁵⁰

The depiction of Suebu as a supporter of independence was somewhat ironic, given that he had been a key figure in Papua’s political establishment since the New Order. A senior member of the Golkar party, Suebu had been governor of Irian Jaya between 1988 and 1993. His political career had foundered, however, following several run-ins with then President Suharto. After a term as ambassador to Mexico, Honduras, and Panama, Suebu returned to Indonesia in 2002 and became an outspoken analyst and observer of Papuan affairs. In 2003, he had called Megawati’s decision to split Papua “unconstitutional,” leading him to believe that he had damaged his relationship to the PDI-P chairwoman irreparably.⁵¹ In the same vein, he had criticized then-governor Solossa, a fellow Golkar cadre, for not doing enough to implement the special autonomy law to the letter. Despite his non-involvement in formal politics, Suebu maintained close relationships with both Papuan activists in Jakarta and key social groups in the province, and the idea that he should try a second run for the governorship was first proposed in these circles.

To Suebu’s surprise, it was Megawati who offered him the gubernatorial nomination of her party. Megawati was not known for easily forgiving her critics, and Suebu’s closeness to Papuan groups that demanded independence seemed to provide an additional disincentive for the nationalist-unitarian PDI-P to nominate him. But in early 2005, Megawati invited him to Bali to discuss his candidacy, and he found her sympathetic. In the meeting, she queried him about his links to pro-independence circles and tried to verify rumors that one of Suebu’s children was going to get married to UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan’s son (which she would have viewed as an attempt to internationalize the Papua problem).⁵² Suebu laughed off this gossip as the result of “unprofessional intelligence reporting,” and subsequently explained his stance on Papuan independence and special autonomy. He asserted that Papua was deeply split between supporters of independence and those who advocated continued association with the Indonesian state, and that his main task would be to bridge these diametrically opposed aspirations. According to Suebu, the most suitable compromise in this regard was special autonomy, which he pledged to implement consistently. He told Megawati that Jakarta’s failure to uphold the special autonomy legislation had given the biggest boost to the pro-independence movement, and that only a visible improvement in the living conditions of ordinary Papuans could increase their acceptance of the Indonesian state. After a long discussion, Megawati expressed satisfaction with Suebu’s clarifications and announced that PDI-P would nominate him for the governorship. It was this concept of special autonomy as the bridge between the pro-independence movement and supporters of the Indonesian state that Suebu subsequently presented at most of his campaign appearances ahead of the election.

⁵⁰ “Siap Terima Kekalahan,” *Cendrawasih Pos*, March 14, 2006. *Litsus* was a notorious instrument of social control during the New Order, comprising security checks run by the armed forces on every candidate for political office, or even on ordinary citizens applying for jobs. If any connection to the communist “coup” in 1965 or to other dissident groups was found, the candidate was declared ineligible for the post he or she had applied for.

⁵¹ Interview with Barnabas Suebu, Jayapura, March 8, 2006.

⁵² *Ibid.*

If Suebu appeared to have profited from his careful handling of the independence issue, some of his rivals were less successful. John Ibo, for example, felt that his criticism of Indonesian rule was so well known to the Papuan electorate that it was unnecessary to stress this point further. On the contrary, he deemed it important to convince conservative elements in the Jakarta elite that he would be able to cooperate with the central government if elected as governor.⁵³ The background to this decision was an incident at the funeral of Jaap Solossa, whom Ibo had replaced as Golkar's candidate for the governorship. At Solossa's grave, the military and police commanders of Papua approached Vice-President Jusuf Kalla, who, as chairman of the Golkar party, had decided that Ibo would run. In front of Kalla, both security officers questioned Ibo's loyalty towards the Indonesian state, triggering nervous discussions in the Golkar camp about how to deal with this problem.⁵⁴ Eventually it was agreed that Ibo would run full-page advertisements in several Papuan dailies, swearing allegiance to the Indonesian state and stating that Papua's integration into the republic was final. The ads ran in early January 2006, and many of Ibo's supporters believed, in retrospect, that they helped to seal his defeat. The polling figures for Ibo began to decline, and many Golkar officials at the grassroots level gradually switched their support to Suebu, who had continued to cultivate the party despite his nomination by PDI-P. When even Kalla indicated that he was convinced of Suebu's victory, a large number of Golkar functionaries saw no reason to continue backing the party's official nominee and started to campaign for Suebu instead. One of Ibo's deputies bitterly recalled that "when our own party leaders began to approach Suebu with offers of cooperation, that basically killed our campaign."⁵⁵

Another candidate who got entangled in the politics of independence was Dick Henk Wabiser. The experienced navy pilot had been the commander of Papua's naval base between 2002 and 2004, following in the footsteps of former governor Freddy Numberi, who had moved on to join the Wahid and Susilo cabinets. Apparently, Wabiser had hoped that many voters would reward him for his struggle to uphold the unitary state of Indonesia in Papua, but he had misjudged the political mood. Many Papuans were highly critical of the security apparatus, particularly for their heavy-handed approach to critics of Indonesian rule. Wabiser consequently finished last in the elections, a failure due not only to strategic mistakes made in planning his campaign, but also to the negative image of the armed forces in territories with high levels of military operations.

Election Aftermath: Suebu's Village Development Program

The gubernatorial election in Papua was an essential element of the central government's plan to offer more autonomy and democratic rights to the residents of the conflict-torn province. The ballot provided citizens with a rare opportunity to discuss issues, express dissatisfaction with the *status quo*, and vote for the politician who they thought represented their interests best. For political analysts, the electoral

⁵³ Interview with John Ibo, Jayapura, January 6, 2006.

⁵⁴ Interview with Helmi Hiamahu, Deputy Chairman of Golkar's Papua branch, Jakarta, November 13, 2006.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

contest provided invaluable insights into the dynamics of intra-Papuan tensions, anticipating some of the possible trends that could dominate Papuan politics under fully implemented special autonomy. But while the election was important as an act of democratic participation and a catalyst of political interaction, the quality of the elected governor and his administration were (and will continue to be) equally crucial in determining the impact of the ballot on the level of secessionist sentiments in Papua. Much of the literature on regional autonomy regimes focuses on the way elected leaders capitalize on the expanded authority granted by the central government. In this regard, pessimistic authors such as Bookman⁵⁶ or Brancati⁵⁷ warn that executives elected in special autonomy regions can use their new powers and resources to consolidate regional identities and create bureaucratic infrastructures as embryos for future independent states. On the other hand, scholars like Lapidoth⁵⁸ believe that if governments in special autonomy regions use their resources effectively to support economic growth and political stability, this will reduce rather than intensify demands for separation from the state to which the autonomous region belongs.

In the Papuan case, it is too early to make conclusive judgments about the possible impact of the Suebu governorship on the extent of separatist attitudes in the Papuan elite and society. To be sure, Barnabas Suebu has made good on many of his campaign promises, replacing key bureaucrats and revamping the mechanism through which the special autonomy money is allocated and spent. Previously, the funds were channeled through the administrations of districts and subdistricts, which used most of the allocations for “operational expenses” and only very little for development projects in the villages. In his first provincial budget as governor in 2007, Suebu shifted the balance between spending on social empowerment, infrastructure projects, and the state apparatus heavily towards the first two components, which now make up 45 and 28 percent of the total budget, respectively.⁵⁹ In addition, as announced during the campaign, he allocated around 300 billion Rupiah (US\$33.3 million) for block grants to all 2,600 villages in Papua, providing them with around 100 million Rupiah each for development programs. In June 2007, Suebu personally toured hundreds of villages in Papua to introduce the scheme, promising that communities that used the money wisely would get more in the next fiscal year, while those wasting the funds on consumption would see their allocations terminated.⁶⁰ Although it is still unclear if Suebu’s idea will work as planned, it already has made some conservative elements in the Jakarta elite nervous. Like the skeptics in the scholarly debate on regional autonomy regimes, the former head of BIN (Badan Intelijen Negara, State Intelligence Agency), Hendropriyono, publicly expressed his suspicion that the new development funds would strengthen the separatist movement rather than weaken it.⁶¹ However, any assessment of the relevance of such suspicions will have to be suspended until the social, economic, and political impact of Suebu’s program can be objectively evaluated.

⁵⁶ Bookman, *The Economics of Secession*.

⁵⁷ Brancati, “Decentralization.”

⁵⁸ Lapidoth, *Autonomy*.

⁵⁹ “Papua Governor Heads Out on Ambitious 2,600-Kampung Tour,” *Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2007.

⁶⁰ “Suebu Minta Pemborong Tak Kerjakan Proyek di Kampung,” *Cendrawasih Pos*, June 9, 2007.

⁶¹ “Gubernur Klarifikasi ke BIN,” *Cendrawasih Pos*, July 11, 2007.

While predictions about the effect of increased democratization and expanded autonomy rights on Papuan society are currently premature, it appears that many local elite figures are so deeply entrenched in the paradigm of secessionism that developmental or political concessions may be unable to change their minds. The July 2007 congress of the DAP (Dewan Adat Papua, Papuan Customary Council), which is probably the most influential organization of informal leaders in the province, underscored that phenomenon. Unimpressed by the new electoral rights and the government's promises to increase the total budget allocations for Papua to around 18 trillion Rupiah (around US\$2 billion) each year, most speakers at the congress demanded a referendum on the independence of Papua from Indonesia. One DAP leader called the special autonomy funds "the sweets used to lure Papuans into their own eradication."⁶² Another speaker warned that "if Papua remains within the Indonesian unitary state, it will result in the extinction of the Papuan people by Indonesia."⁶³ The congress made national and even international headlines because a group of dancers had carried the flag of Papuan nationalism during the opening ceremony, leading to the investigation of several DAP leaders by Papuan police and calls by ultraconservative politicians in Jakarta to crack down on the independence movement. With many Papuan elites unwilling to change their pro-independence stance for ideological and historical reasons, it remains to be seen what impact the new policy approaches will have on ordinary Papuans at the grassroots level.

Preliminary Conclusion: The Elections in Papua- Whose Victory?

In concluding the discussion on the gubernatorial elections in Papua, it is important to note their very mixed implications for the relationship between Papua and Indonesian political leaders. Obviously, many in the central government had hoped that a strong supporter of Papua's integration into the Indonesian republic would emerge as the winner. The victory of a pro-Indonesian figure such as the former vice-governor Constant Karma would have allowed the government to "sell" the election result domestically and internationally as a resounding endorsement of Indonesian rule in Papua. Instead, Suebu's rise to power pointed to the dissatisfaction among ordinary Papuans with the political *status quo*, and it raised concerns within conservative circles in Jakarta that the new governor might use the resources and authority now at his disposal to catalyze, rather than contain, the anti-Indonesian attitudes in Papuan society. In this regard, they particularly feared that Suebu would fill key positions in the Papuan administration with his loyalists, making it more difficult for the central government to supervise policy implementation on the ground. To some extent, this has indeed occurred, with Suebu even managing to have a career bureaucrat with longstanding experience in Papuan community development appointed to the powerful post of provincial secretary. In much the same manner, Suebu has gained control over substantial financial resources, which he immediately used to fund his long-planned village empowerment projects. Many central governments that grant more powers to their autonomous regions are worried that newly elected leaders of such territories could "amass resources to challenge the state

⁶² "Isu Referendum Mengemuka," *Cendrawasih Pos*, July 5, 2007.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

more forcefully,"⁶⁴ and Indonesia's national leadership is certainly concerned that Suebu may be a case in point.

But the election also displayed trends that, in the longer term, could help to erode secessionist sentiments in Papua. To begin with, while Suebu's victory reflected deep discontent among Papuans with their status in the Indonesian unitary state, it also confirmed the credibility of the electoral process. Despite serious administrative and logistical shortcomings, the vote had been largely fair and transparent. There was no doubt that Suebu was the genuine winner of the ballot, contradicting skeptics who had little faith in the ability or will of the central government to hold professional polls in Papua. The fact that a retired military officer did not stand a chance in the elections, for example, disproved the myth of the armed forces' omnipotence in the province, and could potentially strengthen the confidence of Papuans in electoral procedures. Thus while the introduction of democratic competition may have helped critics of Indonesia's rule in Papua to gain power, it was an important first step in addressing the continued doubts of many Papuans about the representativeness and responsiveness of the political system.

Besides increasing the credibility of the democratic process, the election also highlighted significant divisions within Papuan society that have the potential to weaken demands for the creation of an independent Papuan state. The electoral competition sharpened the multiple ethnic, religious, and regional differences among Papuans, even triggering heated debates about the concept of "Papuanness" itself. These dynamics continued after the election, with Suebu encountering serious difficulties in maintaining the unity of Papua as an administrative, political, and cultural entity. Most importantly, the new governor finally had to endorse the *de facto* existence of West Irian Jaya. In a contract Suebu signed with Atururi in Biak in April 2007, the two provinces agreed on resource-sharing arrangements that effectively codified the separation between the two areas. West Irian Jaya was subsequently renamed as West Papua, and while both sides maintained that the central government still needed to integrate the new province into the special autonomy framework, the split now seemed irreversible. In addition, regional powerbrokers continued to push for the establishment of their own provinces. In February 2007, the initiative to create South Papua was officially launched, and other areas were considering similar moves.

Moreover, Suebu had to give up his opposition to the creation of more districts in his province. In early 2007, Suebu had asked the central government to stop the inauguration of six new districts, triggering noisy protests from the areas concerned.⁶⁵ Suebu then had to acknowledge that he did not fully understand the institutional process that had led to the establishment of the new districts, and he eventually withdrew his request. These events suggested that the decision of the central government to grant more authority to Papuans to deal with their own affairs has forced Papuans increasingly to address their internal social fissures, drawing some attention away from their problematic relationship with Indonesia's central government. Hence, from the Indonesian perspective, the risk of handing greater powers to groups with potential secessionist aspirations appears to have been balanced

⁶⁴ Cunningham, "Evaluating the Success of Regional Autonomy Regimes," p. 4.

⁶⁵ "Tiga Kabupaten Kecewa Dengan Surat Gubernur," *Cendrawasih Pos*, February 17, 2007.

by the increased pressure on those groups to deal with complicated issues of governance, confront expectations from the grassroots level to perform, and mitigate tensions within their own communities. What is more, these trends did not only emerge from the local elections in Papua; they would also characterize the polls in Aceh, which were held in December 2006, six months after the Papua ballot.

Local Elections in Aceh: GAM between Fragmentation and Victory

The election in Papua was the result of a protracted, but largely domestic political process. There was little international interest in the ballot, with only very few aid agencies, foreign journalists, or diplomats taking notice. By contrast, the local elections in Aceh were at the center of an internationally negotiated peace agreement, attracting intense attention from donors, foreign governments, reporters, and academics. This discrepancy in international involvement in Papua and Aceh reflected different perceptions of the two conflict areas both abroad and in Jakarta. First of all, the separatist movement in Aceh was much better organized than its counterpart in Papua and had long posed a significantly bigger threat to the central government. Since the early 1950s, several waves of armed conflict had seriously undermined Jakarta's authority over the province, with Acehese leaders demanding more political rights and a fairer distribution of Aceh's rich natural resources. In the most recent of these waves, the Free Aceh Movement, or GAM, had since 1976 fought for independence from Indonesia, launching substantial guerrilla campaigns against Jakarta's troops. After Suharto's downfall, it had even temporarily controlled about "70 to 80 percent" of Aceh's territory.⁶⁶ Approximately ten thousand people had died in the separatist war, and many more had fled to neighboring countries—most often Malaysia. Even several years after the end of the New Order, the intensity of the conflict had showed no sign of fading—until the tsunami of December 2004 brought most of the combat activities to a halt.

The OPM in Papua, on the other hand, had been a highly disorganized assembly of local resistance groups, which often counted less than a dozen members each. The challenge posed by their military powers was negligible for Jakarta, and most foreign governments—except for Australia and some Pacific nations—did not consider Papua a serious problem for their regional security interests. In addition, after the fall of Suharto, the character of the human rights violations committed by the armed forces in Papua had gradually changed from the systematic atrocities prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s to a regime of "chronic low-level abuse," which was less closely scrutinized by international observers.⁶⁷ Particularly after 2003, there have been very few incidents in Papua that could be classified as gross and systematic violations of human rights. In Aceh, on the other hand, the central government had launched an all-out military campaign against GAM in May 2003, following the collapse of a "cessation of hostilities agreement" negotiated in late 2002 under the auspices of the Switzerland-based Henry Dunant Centre (HDC). The difference between the high levels of

⁶⁶ Kirsten E. Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement (GAM): Anatomy of a Separatist Organization*, Policy Studies 2 (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2004), p. viii.

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, *Papua: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*, Asia Briefing No. 53, (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2006), p. 1.

international attention to Aceh and the global indifference to Papua widened even further after the humanitarian intervention triggered by the tsunami swept a large number of foreign aid agencies into Aceh. In the words of one aid official, the rapid and massive arrival of foreigners in previously tightly controlled Aceh turned the province from “North Korea into Woodstock” in a matter of days.⁶⁸ The multi-billion-dollar reconstruction programs forced Indonesia to open up Aceh to foreign militaries, aid workers, and journalists, subjecting the province to an unprecedented level of scrutiny. At the same time, however, the central government grew increasingly nervous about Papua. Trying to avoid a level of internationalization similar to that in Aceh, it implemented restrictions that made it increasingly difficult for foreigners to gain entry into Papua.

Despite the divergent levels of international engagement, the elections in Papua and Aceh also featured significant similarities. In both provinces, new provisions for local elections had been enshrined in their 2001 special autonomy laws, but in neither region were such elections held in the period between 2001 and 2005. This was due to the intentional ambiguities in the laws, delaying tactics by the central government, and internal power struggles in both regions. The special autonomy law for Aceh had gone even further than the legislation on Papua— it theoretically opened the door for direct elections of the governor, district heads, and mayors at a time when no such regulation was under discussion at the national level. Similar to the developments in Papua, however, the governor of Aceh had been elected only one year earlier for a five-year term, using the old electoral framework. In that ballot, Abdullah Puteh had won a large majority in the provincial legislature, and after the special autonomy law was enacted, Puteh insisted that he be allowed to serve out his term before the new direct mechanism could be applied. In 2002, he even suggested that no popular ballot could be held before 2010.⁶⁹ Trying to prevent any moves towards direct elections, the incumbent governor exerted continuous pressure on the local parliament to delay the drafting of the implementing regulations, or *qanun*, for the direct polls.

However, weakened by ongoing corruption investigations, which led to his arrest and imprisonment in November 2004, Puteh was unable to hold up the drafting process. In early 2004, the Acehnese parliament passed a *qanun* on the local elections, which regulated some of the details left out in the 2001 Law. Most importantly, the *qanun* introduced the possibility of independent, non-party candidates participating in the elections, something the central government expressed serious concerns about.⁷⁰ Jakarta officials argued in November 2004, shortly after Susilo’s inauguration, that the *qanun* stood in open contradiction to the new Law on Local Government, which regulated the direct elections of governors, district heads, and mayors all across Indonesia, and which did *not* allow for non-party nominees. The issue was about to develop into one of the most serious tests in the relationship between Aceh—now led by Puteh’s deputy, Azwar Abubakar—and the central government, when the devastating tsunami of December 2004 turned Aceh’s world upside down.

⁶⁸ “Tsunami Response Offers Lessons for Islamabad,” *Financial Times*, October 12, 2005.

⁶⁹ “37 Anggota DPRD NAD Dukung Pilsung Kepala Daerah,” *Radio Nikoya Banda Aceh*, August 16, 2002.

⁷⁰ “Pilkada Langsung di Aceh Buka Peluang Calon Independen,” *Kompas*, November 10, 2004.

Trauma and Peace: From the Tsunami to Helsinki

The tsunami hit Aceh more than eighteen months after the Megawati government had launched its full-blown military campaign against the separatist rebels. During the war, the Indonesian side had managed to push the guerrillas back into the mountains, where GAM was no longer able to maintain its widespread network of effective taxation. Cut off from its funding base, GAM leaders had throughout 2004 reconsidered their strategy, and many within the organization believed that a new approach was necessary.⁷¹ Thus, when the Indonesian government, through Vice-President Kalla, delivered an offer to start up fresh negotiations in late 2004, GAM agreed. It was in this period of renewed contacts that the tsunami suddenly struck, exerting a catalyzing effect on the efforts to reach a political settlement of the conflict. Pressured by international donors to suspend hostilities to allow for Aceh's undisturbed reconstruction, representatives of the Susilo government and GAM met in Helsinki in February 2005 for peace negotiations. In what Edward Aspinall described as a "shift of historic proportions,"⁷² GAM for the first time indicated that it was prepared to accept "self-government" within the Indonesian republic instead of independence. In this context, the local elections became a crucial issue. Given the ongoing negotiations and the extent of the destruction inflicted by the tsunami, it seemed impossible to hold elections by October 2005, the schedule required by Indonesian law. Both GAM and Susilo's negotiators therefore began to view the elections as part of the peace process, with each side lobbying for concessions from the other. GAM demanded that it be granted the right to form a local political party to participate in the 2009 legislative elections, and prior to that, to field independent candidates in the upcoming gubernatorial and district ballots.⁷³ The Indonesian government initially rejected both proposals, saying that they "contradicted" the constitution.⁷⁴ Instead, it offered to let GAM use existing national parties to nominate its candidates.

The disagreement over the terms of the elections almost caused the failure of the peace negotiations. Indonesia's refusal to allow local political parties and independent candidates angered the GAM negotiators, who viewed the concession as a *conditio sine qua non* for the settlement.⁷⁵ Jakarta's representatives, on the other hand, held deep suspicions of GAM's political intentions, fearing that the rebel group might use the elections to achieve independence at the ballot box. In addition, mindful of Habibie's

⁷¹ Damien Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh: A Personal Account of the Helsinki Peace Process* (Jakarta and Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2006), p. 20.

⁷² Edward Aspinall, *The Helsinki Agreement: A More Promising Basis for Peace in Aceh?*, Policy Studies 20, (Washington, DC: East West Center Washington, 2005), p. 26.

⁷³ Initially, GAM even requested that fresh legislative elections be held quickly after the signing of the peace accord, thus bringing forward the official schedule, which stipulated that the next elections had to take place in 2009. After it became clear, however, that this was an unrealistic demand (the only other time that Indonesian elections had been held earlier than originally scheduled in the last thirty-five years were the elections of 1999, which required a Special Session of the MPR), GAM asked for the opportunity to file independent candidates.

⁷⁴ Ironically, Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled in July 2007 that barring independent candidates from participating in local elections was unconstitutional, and it asked the Indonesian government to revise the regulations accordingly. The majority of the judges believed that the Indonesian constitution not only tolerated, but in fact called for, the candidacy of independent candidates.

⁷⁵ Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh*, p. 100.

failed reelection bid after the East Timor referendum in 1999, the central government was worried that handing too many concessions to GAM could deliver highly explosive campaign ammunition to Susilo's political opponents. At the end, however, the Indonesian government had to give in. When it turned out that GAM would walk away from the Helsinki negotiations if its demands for electoral participation were not met, Kalla allowed the Indonesian delegation to agree to the movement's requests.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the Helsinki peace accord signed in August 2005 included a stipulation that required the Indonesian executive and legislature to create the legal framework for local political parties in Aceh within eighteen months, and although it was not explicitly stated in the document, an understanding was reached that independent candidates would be able to participate in the elections for governor and district chiefs. The Indonesian government, for its part, announced that it would accommodate these changes to Aceh's electoral system in the new Law on the Governance of Aceh, which was widely seen as the centerpiece of the Helsinki agreement.

The failure of the Helsinki accord to regulate explicitly the issue of independent candidates offered conservative elements in the Jakarta government and legislature the opportunity to undermine GAM's preparations for the provincial and district polls. In the government draft for the Law on the Governance of Aceh, which was sent to parliament in February 2006, no mention was made of independent candidates, and senior officials once again suggested GAM could ask already established parties to nominate its leaders.⁷⁷ Only after massive demonstrations in Aceh, and warnings from GAM that it viewed this move as a violation of the Helsinki agreement, did parliament decide in April that non-party candidates would be permitted to run in the upcoming elections.⁷⁸ The regulation was limited to the 2006 ballot only, however, as lawmakers assumed that in subsequent elections GAM would be able to file candidates through its own political party. After the passing of the law in August 2006, the Acehese parliament drafted a new *qanun* on the local elections that mostly reflected the *qanun* already passed in 2004 and another one issued in 2005. At that time, the central government had vetoed the paragraph allowing independent candidates to participate in the elections, but now the Law on the Governance of Aceh provided a clear legal foundation for the new electoral mechanism. The Acehese legislature further decided that candidates for governor or district head had to collect signatures of support from 3 percent of the population in their respective territories. It also defined, rather controversially, the ability to read the Qu'ran as one of the criteria determining whether a potential nominee was qualified to run.

The passing of the Law on the Governance of Aceh allowed the government to finally determine the date for Aceh's local elections. Given the lengthy process of verifying the numerous independent candidates, and various other logistical problems, voting day was set for December 11, 2006. Voter registration had already begun earlier in the year, supported by Germany's development organization GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, Association for Technical Cooperation).⁷⁹ The United

⁷⁶ Farid Husain, *To See the Unseen: Kisah di Balik Damai di Aceh* (Jakarta: Health&Hospital Indonesia, 2007), p. 113; Kingsbury, *Peace in Aceh*, p. 154.

⁷⁷ "Wapres: Calon Independen Tak Ada Dalam MoU Helsinki," *Kompas*, February 5, 2006.

⁷⁸ "Calon Independen Disepakati," *Serambi*, April 21, 2006.

⁷⁹ "Kartu Pemilih, KIP Butuh Dua Hari," *Serambi*, November 28, 2006.

Nation's Development Program established a special office in Aceh to provide assistance for the elections, working closely with Aceh's Independent Electoral Commission (Komisi Independen Pemilihan, KIP). Their efforts included public information campaigns, the training of election officials, and the difficult task of registering Aceh's more than 2.6 million voters, many of whom had become refugees after the tsunami and were constantly moving from one address to the next. In contrast to the situation in Papua, however, donors provided millions of dollars in assistance, turning Aceh's election into the local ballot with the biggest amount of external funding ever held in Indonesia. Therefore, despite the logistical challenges that prevailed in the aftermath of an unprecedented natural disaster, and the political sensitivities in play following decades of conflict, Aceh's gubernatorial and district elections were reasonably well managed, allowing the candidates and voters to focus on the electoral competition rather than the technical issues associated with it.

The field of candidates in Aceh's gubernatorial elections presented a highly heterogeneous mix between figures from Aceh's Indonesian elite and GAM-affiliated ex-rebels. As in many other Indonesian elections, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, retired security officers, party politicians, and civil society leaders entered the race for the governorship. Azwar Abubakar, the acting governor until late 2005, was considered one of the leading candidates, given his personal wealth and access to Aceh's bureaucratic apparatus. Besides being the provincial chairman of PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party), Azwar had also secured the support of the influential Islamic party PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party). In exchange for its support, the former governor promised PKS that he would cover the costs of the campaign and accepted Nasir Djamil, a PKS legislator, as his running mate.⁸⁰ One of Azwar's main competitors was Malik Raden, the former head of Aceh's education office and a member of Indonesia's Regional Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah, DPD). Malik was a well-connected activist and bureaucrat, with links to religious, political, and sports groups.⁸¹ He was nominated by Golkar, whose chairman, Sayed Fuad Zakariah, ran as Malik's vice-gubernatorial nominee. Other candidates from the Indonesian political establishment included Djali Yusuf, Aceh's former military commander; Tamlicha Ali, another retired general; Iskandar Hoesin, a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, who had unsuccessfully run for the governorship in 2000; and Ghazali Abbas Adan, a former member of Indonesia's General Assembly, who had been a vocal critic of Indonesian rule in Aceh, but had refrained from officially joining GAM. Under normal circumstances, these candidates alone would have provided a broad variety of views and personalities, just as in other Indonesian local elections. But the ongoing peace process gave Aceh's elections a unique twist, with much of the public attention focused on GAM's internal debate about its nominees for the ballot.

⁸⁰ Interview with Nasir Djamil, Jakarta, September 15, 2006.

⁸¹ Interview with Malik Raden, Banda Aceh, October 8, 2006.

Conflict and Triumph: GAM's Political Transformation

As in Papua, the local elections were as much a test for the critics of Jakarta's policies as they were for the central government itself. In Papua, the elections had exposed not only deep dissatisfaction with Indonesian rule, but also significant social and political rifts among the indigenous population. In Aceh, similar processes were at work. Most importantly, the elections undercut the institutional solidity of GAM, which for decades had been able to withstand the superior military power of Indonesian troops largely because of its much-admired internal cohesion. Since the late 1970s, the GAM leadership, exiled in Sweden, had maintained a remarkable degree of control over its field troops, with many local commanders accepting orders sent to them by phone or short-messaging service.⁸² By the same token, there had been no serious questioning of the Swedish exiles' right to determine GAM's strategy during the Helsinki talks, and field commanders meticulously followed their instructions when the details of the agreement were carried out. As the elections approached, however, this solidity suddenly crumbled. Serious divisions emerged, with younger district commanders openly challenging the authority of the old leadership in Sweden to decide GAM's approach to the upcoming ballot. The conflict resulted in the almost complete isolation of GAM's government-in-exile from the political process in Aceh itself, and facilitated the rise of a new class of GAM leaders, who are likely to take over the leadership of the organization in the years to come.

The two factions within GAM have given conflicting accounts of the reasons for this fragmentation. There is little doubt, however, that the imminent gubernatorial ballot contributed significantly to the escalation of tensions. The elections drew a clear line between the "old guard" in Sweden and the so-called "young Turks" on the ground in Aceh.⁸³ The younger critics of Sweden's leadership included Irwandi Yusuf, an American-trained veterinarian who had been imprisoned on treason charges before becoming GAM's representative on the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), the body charged with overseeing the peace process; Muzakkir Manaf, the former supreme commander of GAM's troops in Aceh, who after August 2005 became the head of the GAM office for the demobilization and reintegration of its veterans, the KPA (Komisi Peralihan Aceh, Aceh's Transitional Committee); Muhammad Nazar, the extroverted chief of SIRA (Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh, Information Center for a Referendum in Aceh), an association of formerly pro-independence students; Sofyan Dawood, a charismatic guerrilla leader who had often acted as spokesperson for the troops; and Bakhtiar Abdullah, GAM's international spokesman, who was the only senior Sweden-based figure who broke ranks with the exiled government. On the other side of the divide were Malik Mahmud, the prime minister of the cabinet-in-exile; Zaini Abdullah, GAM's foreign minister; Zaini's younger brother, Hasbi, who had been a marginal figure during the guerrilla struggle but who emerged as a favorite in the competition for GAM's gubernatorial nomination; and Zakaria Saman, GAM's defense minister and main arms procurer, who now headed the political section of the Majelis GAM, GAM's executive council.

⁸² Schulze, *The Free Aceh Movement*, p. 13.

⁸³ International Crisis Group, "Aceh's Local Elections: The Role of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)," Asia Briefing No. 57 (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2006), p. 3.

Naturally, both sides blamed the other for the escalating tensions. Irwandi asserted that Malik had committed several blunders during the peace process, among others by allowing Indonesia to maintain a large number of security troops in the province.⁸⁴ More importantly, however, Irwandi suggested that Malik had failed to live up to his promise of democratizing GAM's hierarchical political structures. In particular, Irwandi's supporters referred to a meeting in Stockholm in early 2006, during which Malik had allegedly pledged that GAM's candidate for the gubernatorial elections would be determined through a strictly democratic process.⁸⁵ In their view, this stood in open contrast to Malik's persistent promotion of Hasbi Abdullah as GAM's candidate for the upcoming ballot. Even after a specially convened GAM congress in May 2006 resulted in the gubernatorial nomination of Nashruddin bin Ahmed, a former GAM negotiator, Malik continued to work for Hasbi's candidacy. When Nashruddin suddenly declined the nomination, the young Turks consequently claimed that he had done so after strong pressure from Malik's circle.⁸⁶

Following Nashruddin's withdrawal, Irwandi and his supporters demanded that a new vote on the nomination be held, and they were certain that they had the numbers to win the contest. Malik, however, insisted that Hasbi ought to be the GAM candidate since he had come in second, after Nashruddin, in the May congress. Unable to reach an agreement with his opponents, Malik finally declared that GAM would not send an officially endorsed candidate into the race, but would allow its members to stand individually.⁸⁷ As a result, Hasbi teamed up with Humam Hamid, a sociologist and activist nominated by the Islamic party PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, United Development Party).⁸⁸ Hasbi even agreed to run only as Humam's deputy, further fueling the anger of Irwandi's group, which viewed this move as a betrayal of GAM's decades-long struggle. Determined not to support Hasbi's campaign, Irwandi declared that "we did not fight for thirty years to help the candidate of a Jakarta-based party to win the governorship."⁸⁹

The old guard around Malik, on the other hand, believed that Irwandi's approach had the potential of damaging the still volatile peace process. Not only were they uncertain about GAM's chances of winning the governorship single-handedly, they also thought that an exclusive GAM nomination could play into the hands of hardliners in the Indonesian political establishment who continued to lobby against the Helsinki accord. "It is much better to bridge the differences between GAM and the Indonesians by a joint candidacy—both sides will win, nobody loses," explained Hasbi Abdullah.⁹⁰ Malik viewed Humam Hamid as an ideal partner—he had close links with Indonesian bureaucrats and military figures, but was untainted by the corruption of

⁸⁴ Interview with Irwandi Yusuf, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006.

⁸⁵ Interview with Muhammad Nazar, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "GAM Batal Ajukan Calon Gubernur," *Kompas*, June 1, 2006.

⁸⁸ Before the Helsinki accord, Humam Hamid had planned to forge a coalition with PKS, working towards establishing a team with Nasir Djamil as his candidate for the vice-governorship. However, PKS sought financial compensation for the deal, asking for sums that Humam could not afford, and after GAM's entry into the political arena, Humam approached the leadership in Sweden to discuss the possibility of a joint ticket. Interviews with Humam Hamid, Banda Aceh, November 15, 2005, and Jakarta, July 18, 2007.

⁸⁹ Interview with Irwandi Yusuf, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006.

⁹⁰ Interview with Hasbi Abdullah, Banda Aceh, October 8, 2006.

previous Acehese administrations. Under his potential governorship, GAM could learn its way in political and administrative affairs, place some of its leaders in key bureaucratic positions, and prepare the organization for the 2009 legislative elections. This evolutionary concept, Malik believed, suited GAM better than their opponents' radical strategy, which intended to take over the provincial administration for GAM and, as Irwandi put it, "rock the boat a bit."⁹¹ In addition to these paradigmatic differences, the Swedish leadership also viewed Irwandi as an uncontrollable and unreliable cadre: according to Hasbi, GAM officials had asked Irwandi several times if he intended to run for the governorship, to which the latter allegedly replied that he had no such plans.⁹² Thus Malik's circle was outraged when Irwandi announced his candidacy as an independent nominee in August 2006, with Muhammad Nazar as his running mate.⁹³ The lingering conflict between the two camps had finally come into the open.

Initially, it appeared as if the split within GAM had seriously damaged its electoral prospects. With two GAM-affiliated pairs in the race, and several well-connected and affluent competitors from the Indonesian establishment running high-profile campaigns, GAM officials began to prepare for a possible defeat. In interviews, members of both camps stressed that an electoral loss would be acceptable, and that GAM's real goal was to transform itself into a political party and to dominate the provincial legislature through the 2009 elections.⁹⁴ Several opinion surveys seemed to confirm this trend: two national pollsters, who had an excellent track record in predicting the outcome of local elections in the past, showed Azwar Abubakar and Malik Raden as the leading candidates.⁹⁵ Another poll by an international survey institute one week before the elections saw Humam and Hasbi slightly ahead, but still far from overcoming the 25 percent threshold needed for an outright win. In the same poll, Irwandi stood at 7 percent, in fourth place.⁹⁶

Developments on the ground pointed in a different direction, however. Defying the unfavorable poll numbers, Irwandi gradually emerged as the only candidate who could credibly represent GAM's anti-establishment, populist, and ethno-nationalist agenda. There were several reasons for this. First of all, Irwandi had taken control of the GAM network, winning the support of almost all field commanders. Muzakkir Manaf, who had initially been forced by Malik Mahmud to support Humam and Hasbi, withdrew this backing at the beginning of the campaign in late November 2006, sending a clear signal to his subordinates that they were not obliged to mobilize the

⁹¹ Interview with Irwandi Yusuf, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006.

⁹² Interview with Hasbi Abdullah, Banda Aceh, October 8, 2006.

⁹³ "Pasangan Irwandi-Nazar Dideklarasikan," *Acehkita*, August 27, 2006.

⁹⁴ Interviews with Irwandi Yusuf, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006; Muhammad Nazar, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006; and Hasbi Abdullah, Banda Aceh, October 8, 2006.

⁹⁵ Interviews with Sayed Fuad Zakariah, Jakarta, November 16, 2006; and Saiful Mujani, head of the Lembaga Survei Indonesia (Indonesian Survey Institute, LSI), Jakarta, November 9, 2006.

⁹⁶ The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) did not publish the poll figures on individual candidates at that time for fear of being accused of political intervention in the elections. The author obtained the figures from a source involved in organizing the survey.

Table 2: Results of the 2006 Gubernatorial Election in Aceh

| NO. | NAMES OF CANDIDATES | VOTES | PERCENTAGE | PARTY AFFILIATION/INDEPENDENT |
|-----|--|---------|------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | IRWANDI YUSUF — MUHAMMAD NAZAR | 768.745 | 38.2 % | INDEPENDENT |
| 2 | AHMAD HUMAM HAMID — HASBI ABDULLAH | 334.484 | 16.6 % | PPP |
| 3 | MALIK RADEN — SAYED FUAD ZAKARIA | 281.174 | 13.9 % | GOLKAR, PDI-P, AND OTHERS |
| 4 | AZWAR ABUBAKAR — NASIR DJAMIL | 213.566 | 10.6 % | PAN, PKS |
| 5 | GHAZALI ABBAS ADAN — SHALAHUDDIN ALFATA | 156.978 | 7.8 % | INDEPENDENT |
| 6 | ISKANDAR HOESIN — SALEH MANAF | 111.553 | 5.5 % | COALITION OF SMALL PARTIES |
| 7 | TAMLICHA ALI — HARMEN NURIQMAR | 80.327 | 3.9 % | COALITION OF SMALL PARTIES |
| 8 | MUHAMMAD DJALI YUSUF — SYAUQAS RAHMATILLAH | 65.543 | 3.2 % | INDEPENDENT |

population for Sweden's nominee.⁹⁷ Irwandi, who as a senior figure in the AMM and KPA had managed the economic reintegration programs for former GAM fighters, was hugely popular among the field troops, outclassing the aging and uncharismatic Hasbi.⁹⁸ In the same vein, Nazar's SIRA apparatus proved invaluable in organizing urban activists for Irwandi's campaign. Moreover, Irwandi was the only candidate who spoke out against the deficiencies of the Law on the Governance of Aceh. While

⁹⁷ "GAM Tarik Dukungan di Pilkada NAD," *Suara Merdeka*, November 28, 2006.

⁹⁸ "Hope for Moderate in Aceh," *The Australian*, December 9, 2006.

most other nominees played it safe by only raising the standard issues of economic development, education, and infrastructure, Irwandi pledged to push aggressively for changes to the law. Finally, most observers had underestimated the extent of Acehese discontent with the Jakarta-connected provincial bureaucracy and the political class that ran it. Among previous governors, senior bureaucrats, and military figures, Irwandi stood out as the only candidate convincingly calling for radical change. The strategy of the Swedish leadership, which had tried a “soft” approach in order to avoid destabilizing the peace process and to adapt GAM slowly to the new political framework, was failing.

Irwandi’s eventual victory in the elections—with a staggering 38.2 percent of the votes—shocked the Indonesian authorities as much as experienced political analysts. With a gap of more than 20 percent between the winner and the second-placed pair Humam and Hasbi, the political “avalanche”⁹⁹ was so overwhelming that none of Irwandi’s opponents filed electoral complaints with the courts—almost a routine in other Indonesian provinces. Apparently, most Acehese voters had not stated their preferences accurately to the survey institutions and had waited until election day to make their choice known. While it has still not been scientifically established why the opinion polls were so far off the mark, one Acehese observer offered his personal interpretation of this phenomenon. Based on his own observations, he speculated that many villagers had been suspicious when the pollsters came to their houses, fearing that the Indonesian government would register them as GAM members if they declared their support for Irwandi. Thus, according to this observer, most Acehese had kept their political leanings secret until they went to the ballot box.¹⁰⁰

Despite the shock, however, the Indonesian government displayed no public signs of irritation, for the time being at least. Susilo instructed his military leaders and cabinet members to express their unambiguous acceptance of the election results, and, in an unprecedented move, the president in January 2007 even welcomed Irwandi and Nazar in the state palace before their inauguration, something he had not done with any other governors-elect.¹⁰¹ If the Indonesian government gave a controlled response to the election outcome, Irwandi tried to echo it accordingly. Addressing widespread concerns that he and his deputy continued to harbor separatist sentiments, Irwandi asserted that the question of Aceh’s place in the Indonesian republic had been settled once and for all in Helsinki. He promised to cooperate effectively with the provincial legislature controlled by national parties and said that he would not “cleanse” the bureaucracy of anti-GAM incumbents.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Irwandi insisted that he would use his governorship to “test how far the Indonesian government is prepared to go in granting Aceh real and effective autonomy.”¹⁰³ So far, the result of this test is still pending.

⁹⁹ SMS communication with Irwandi Yusuf, December 11, 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Phone interview with Rizal Sukma, December 11, 2006.

¹⁰¹ “SBY Tak Khawatir Aceh Merdeka,” *Jawa Pos*, December 13, 2006; “SBY Endorses Irwandi Leadership,” *Jakarta Post*, January 12, 2007.

¹⁰² “Wawancara dengan Calon Gubernur NAD Irwandi Yusuf,” *Jawa Pos*, December 13, 2006.

¹⁰³ Interview with Irwandi Yusuf, Banda Aceh, October 9, 2006.

Regional and Ethnic Divisions: The Problem of Acehese Identity

Irwandi's victory was resounding, and there could be no doubt that it constituted a victory for GAM as a whole. But the elections had also exhibited significant divisions within GAM and Acehese society, posing difficult challenges for Irwandi's rule. In terms of GAM's internal affairs, the electoral win followed a process of deep fragmentation. The once solidly united organization split into two major camps, a process that affected its potential to act as a coherent political group. Most importantly, the two factions did not reconcile after the polls, with the relationship between Malik and Irwandi remaining fragile at best. As GAM transforms itself into a political party and prepares for the 2009 elections, these divisions are unlikely to improve its political standing. From the perspective of the Indonesian government, however, GAM's internal power struggles were not without merits. These conflicts absorbed much of GAM's political attention and energy,¹⁰⁴ shifting its focus from anti-Jakarta rhetoric to issues of organizational consolidation and domestic governance in Aceh. In the longer term, this shift has the potential to alleviate secessionist demands within GAM and the Acehese community in general.

Besides eroding GAM's institutional coherence, the ballot also further questioned the concept of a united Acehese identity. Far from being a homogeneous ethnic and social entity, Aceh consists of numerous, highly diverse groups, whose conflicting political choices were clearly visible in the election results. Irwandi had won in fifteen out of Aceh's twenty-one districts and municipalities, and GAM had taken the positions of *bupati* or mayor in Sabang, Pidie, Lhosksomawe, Aceh Utara, Aceh Timur, Aceh Barat, Aceh Jaya, and, in another election in June 2007, Bireuen. These were mostly areas in which ethnic Acehese, who make up around 70 percent of the population of the province, constituted the dominating social constituency. But while they won convincing victories in GAM's strongholds, Irwandi and local GAM candidates lost in many of the central and southeastern districts where ethnic non-Acehese, like Gayo, Javanese, Alas, Aneuk Jamee, and Tamiang, formed the majority of the population.¹⁰⁵ In those areas, nominees filed by national political parties mostly won the local elections, with Golkar taking six and coalitions between other parties obtaining five district head positions.¹⁰⁶ In the years preceding the Helsinki agreement, anti-GAM militias had concentrated their activities in such ethnic non-Acehese territories, supporting the military in its campaigns against the rebels. While the influence of the militias declined significantly after the peace process began, the

¹⁰⁴ Michael Morfit, "Staying on the Road to Helsinki: Why the Aceh Agreement was Possible in August 2005," paper prepared for the International Conference, "Building Permanent Peace in Aceh: One Year After the Helsinki Accord," Jakarta, Indonesian Council for World Affairs, 2006, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ Irwandi lost in Aceh Tengah, Aceh Timiang, Aceh Singkil, and Bener Meriah to candidates from the Indonesian establishment, and was beaten by Humam and Hasbi in Pidie and Banda Aceh due to internal GAM splits. Generally, the share of votes for GAM candidates was much lower in the central and southeastern districts than in the northeast and southwest. In North Aceh, Irwandi gained 60.6 percent of the votes; in Bireuen (his home district), 62.1 percent; in East Aceh, 48.7 percent; in South Aceh, 62.4 percent; in Aceh Barat Daya, 49.8 percent; and in Aceh Jaya even 70.8 percent. In Aceh Timiang, on the other hand, he only gained 19.4 percent; in Bener Meriah, 17.5 percent; in Aceh Tengah, 13.9 percent; and in Aceh Singkil, 11.1 percent.

¹⁰⁶ In Bener Meriah, for example, there are about 60 percent ethnic Gayo, 20 percent Javanese, and 20 percent Acehese. A Golkar candidate won the race there, and, as stated above, it was one of the few areas that Irwandi could not win. See International Crisis Group, "Aceh's Local Elections," p. 12.

elections once again pointed to the deep divide between Aceh's ethnic heartland in the Northeast, which heavily supported GAM and its political goals, and the culturally diverse districts at the margins, which traditionally favored continued inclusion in the Indonesian republic.

As in Papua, the ethnic and regional cleavages in Aceh were reflected in demands for the establishment of separate provinces. Key politicians from Aceh Tengah, Aceh Tenggara, Aceh Singkil, Gayo Lues, and Bener Meriah have called for the creation of "Aceh Leuser Antara" (ALA), while senior leaders in Aceh Barat, Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh Jaya, Nagan Raya, and Simeulue have proposed to establish the new province of "Aceh Barat Selatan" (ABAS). Launched in 2001, the initiatives for the two new provinces immediately drew suspicions of having been engineered by the armed forces or the intelligence apparatus in order to weaken the pro-independence movement.¹⁰⁷ But just as in Papua, the involvement of the security forces tainted what otherwise appeared to be a genuine sentiment against control by the capital of Banda Aceh and its largely ethnic Acehnese elite. After 2005, the peace process catalyzed the two initiatives, with leaders of both groups trying to capitalize on the radical change going on in the province.¹⁰⁸ GAM, however, managed to include a guarantee on the borders of Aceh in the Helsinki accord, fixing the boundaries in their 1956 format.¹⁰⁹ Against the protests from ALA and ABAS activists, the central government assured GAM that it would honor the borders as stipulated in the agreement—for the time being. The election results, on the other hand, are likely to boost the campaign of at least the ALA leaders: in none of the districts participating in the ALA initiative did a GAM candidate win the post of *bupati*, and Irwandi's electoral performance there was much weaker than in the ethnic Acehnese areas. It is possible that ALA and ABAS protagonists will revive their campaign under Irwandi's rule as governor, particularly if the latter drives a confrontational course against Jakarta. The central government, for its part, could also use the ALA and ABAS initiatives as issues to turn against Irwandi should the governor make good on his pledge to "rock the boat."

Election Aftermath: GAM's Entrenchment in the Political Infrastructure

In regards to the risk that newly elected leaders in autonomous regions could use their fresh resources to lobby against the unitary state, Irwandi's rise to power presented the central government with a significantly greater challenge than Suebu's election in Papua. Several reasons accounted for this difference. To begin with, while Suebu had obtained the governorship, he had no independent political network that could back up his work in the provincial administration with grassroots mobilization and advocacy operations. Despite his close relationship with Golkar and PDI-P politicians, he was not in control of either party. Moreover, the Papua branches of

¹⁰⁷ "Tak Terakomodasi dalam RUU NAD: Tiga Kabupaten di Aceh Menuntut Propinsi Baru," *Kompas*, August 4, 2001.

¹⁰⁸ There were significant differences in the intensity of the campaigns for ALA and ABAS, however. Most importantly, the initiative to create ALA was launched before the ABAS campaign got underway. Furthermore, while ALA activists organized noisy street protests in Jakarta after the Helsinki accord in order to demand their own province, ABAS operators kept a much lower profile. See "Keputusan Ulama Perti, Penting Maknanya," *Serambi*, June 3, 2006.

¹⁰⁹ "Pemekaran Propinsi Dinilai Melanggar MoU," *Acehkita*, December 5, 2006.

Golkar and PDI-P reported to nationalist central leaderships in Jakarta, which were certain to reject any activities of the provincial administration that could be interpreted as direct or indirect support for pro-independence aspirations in Papua. In addition, Suebu was confronted with *bupatis* who had mostly been elected before he took office, leaving him with no personal loyalists in the top echelons of district-level governments. By contrast, Irwandi controlled large segments of GAM's military and political apparatus from the province down to the village level. This network continued to be available for him after the election, serving as an important political instrument to galvanize aspirations, spread information about policies, and prepare the field for their implementation. Most importantly, GAM candidates had won eight district head positions in Aceh's most populous areas, and with one prominent exception (Pidie), the new GAM *bupatis* were all Irwandi loyalists. Accordingly, Irwandi was much better positioned than his Papuan counterpart to entrench himself in the political infrastructure of the state and gain control over its resources.

Under Irwandi's rule, senior GAM figures gained important posts in his administration or used their connections to secure lucrative government contracts. In one prominent example, Nur Djuli, a key GAM leader in exile before 2005, was appointed head of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA, Badan Reintegrasi Aceh) in 2007. The BRA was in charge of channeling around 800 billion Rupiah (US\$88.8 million) to ex-combatants and victims of the conflict, with former GAM members being among the most generously compensated recipients.¹¹⁰ In addition, numerous ex-GAM fighters were given positions at the Aceh Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR, Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi Aceh), which managed the post-tsunami rebuilding efforts and reported expenditures of 7.8 trillion Rupiah (US\$866 million) in 2006 alone.¹¹¹ However, the opportunity to hire GAM cadres for jobs in the bureaucracy was limited by Indonesian regulations that reserved certain positions to officials with a particular rank in the government hierarchy. Thus Irwandi often had to turn to university lecturers or bureaucrats who had not been members of the movement but were known for their pro-GAM sentiments in the past. Those former GAM leaders who could not be accommodated in the government or its various sub-environments typically built up businesses and sought contracts from the administration. According to Edward Aspinall, "in virtually every region, they have established companies and cooperatives and transformed themselves into contractors or *'kontraktor.'*"¹¹² Most of these former GAM guerrillas "are active in the construction industry: building houses, public offices, roads, bridges, irrigations channels, and other infrastructure, and supplying sand, rocks, and other building materials."¹¹³ Overall, the entrenchment of former GAM elements in Aceh's political and economic system has become significantly deeper than anybody, including GAM itself, could have expected when the Helsinki accord was signed in 2005.

But GAM's penetration of formal political institutions and economic patronage networks was accompanied by negative side effects commonly associated with such

¹¹⁰ "Let Us Manage Aceh's Natural Resources, Say Local Leaders," *The Jakarta Post*, June 15, 2006.

¹¹¹ BRR, "Realisasi Anggaran BRR Sebesar 7,8 Trilyun," press release, Banda Aceh, December 29, 2006.

¹¹² Edward Aspinall, "Guerillas in Power," *Inside Indonesia* 90 (2007), online at <http://www.insideindonesia.org>, accessed on August 17, 2007.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

sudden ascensions to political power. Most significantly, the pre-election tensions within GAM continued under Irwandi's rule. In July 2007, the Malik faction in GAM announced the establishment of its new political party, Partai GAM. The party flag displayed GAM's old separatist symbol, outraging not only the central government, but also many GAM figures allied with Irwandi Yusuf. Feeling that they had not been sufficiently involved in the creation of the party, several senior GAM leaders stayed away from the inauguration ceremony and later expressed disappointment over the choice of the party symbol. With access to government resources and the future leadership of the former independence movement at stake, such intra-GAM cleavages are likely to mark Acehese politics for years to come. Moreover, corruption now emerged as a serious issue for GAM. While Irwandi tried to portray his administration as an antipode to the corrupt Indonesian predecessor governments, GAM "itself is organized in a way which finds an easy fit with the patrimonialism which pervades Indonesia's polity and economy."¹¹⁴ Former GAM guerrillas competed for jobs, projects, privileges, government subsidies, and other benefits, and mostly expected that standards of transparency and meritocracy be suspended in their favor. This problem, which had the potential to damage GAM's reputation and undermine the effectiveness of governance as a whole, was compounded by widespread political and economic extortion committed by former GAM members. This "low-level intimidation and harassment"¹¹⁵ tainted what otherwise had been a successful process of integrating GAM into Indonesia's political framework.

Preliminary Conclusion: The Elections in Aceh - Whose Victory?

Similar to the elections in Papua, the Aceh ballot supplied valid arguments to both the supporters of autonomy regimes in heterogeneous states and those who believe that "ethnofederal solutions," which were "designed to mitigate centrifugal forces, instead may end up strengthening them."¹¹⁶ On the one hand, GAM's success has disappointed the central government, which had hoped that the Acehese electorate would reward it for the generous autonomy concessions enshrined in the Helsinki accord. Instead, voters in Aceh expressed their rejection of the old power networks, rebuffing Acehese politicians with close links to Jakarta and overwhelmingly supporting nominees associated with the former separatist movement. GAM, which less than two years earlier had still led an armed rebellion for Aceh's independence from Indonesia, now entrenched itself in the political institutions of its former enemy and gained access to the resources of the state. The ex-rebels controlled the governorship and eight district administrations in Aceh, obtaining political power to determine future policies and abundant resources to distribute jobs, subsidies, and state contracts among former combatants. Many officials in the central government and anti-GAM elements in Aceh were deeply concerned about this accumulation of power and resources in the former rebel movement. In a hearing at the national legislature in Jakarta in July 2007, a former leader of an anti-GAM militia in Aceh complained that "GAM already controls the government, they have entered the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict*, p. 7.

system, they also can decide on policies; if they gain entry into the legislature in 2009, it is only a short step for them to propose a referendum."¹¹⁷ While these fears were most profound in the circles of conservative nationalists and former GAM opponents in Aceh, they also reflect a skeptical (and increasingly influential) stream in the scholarly literature on the possible drawbacks of autonomy regimes.

There are, however, equally strong indications that the elections in Aceh may, in the longer term, undermine secessionist sentiments in the province. In a public opinion survey held by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) around six weeks after the elections, 64 percent of respondents said that the relationship between Aceh and the central government had improved during the past year.¹¹⁸ Only 4 percent believed that it had deteriorated. An overwhelming majority—92 percent of Acehnese—was confident that the elections had been “mostly fair” or “completely” fair, a significant vote of confidence for the electoral procedures of a province with a long-established history of engineered ballots. In consequence, while the central government has not profited immediately from the introduction of competitive elections in Aceh, it may benefit in the future from the restored credibility of the electoral process in the eyes of ordinary Acehnese. This, in turn, may help to convince Acehnese citizens that the central government is, in fact, serious about offering wide-ranging and effective autonomy concessions to the conflict-ridden province.

In an additional trend that may weaken the separatist tendencies in Aceh, the elections put GAM under extreme pressure as an organization. With GAM now controlling the provincial administration, it will have to provide evidence that it can rule better than its predecessors. Many of the policy challenges of the coming years—from post-tsunami reconstruction and reintegration of veterans to restructuring the economy as the oil reserves dry up—have the potential to turn the electorate against GAM if it fails to handle them well. For example, the head of KIP, Muhammad Jaffar, stated that “it’s time to give GAM the chance to administer Aceh, (but) if it turns out that they do not deliver, then we’ll choose other leaders.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, the internal fissures within GAM before and after the elections have raised doubts about its long-term prospects as an effective and united political machine. Authors like Aguswandi have warned that GAM’s failure to maintain unity may create splinter groups, as had happened with the MRLF in the Philippines or the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland.¹²⁰ While this could potentially trigger renewed low-intensity conflict, it may ultimately undercut GAM’s claim to be the sole representative of Acehnese grievances and aspirations. Finally, the elections have also questioned the concept of Acehnese identity, which was previously defined by advocacy of a united Acehnese struggle against Indonesian repression. By contrast, the elections laid bare important cleavages between the ethnic Acehnese in GAM strongholds and marginalized non-Acehnese groups in the hinterland. These divisions will make it more difficult for GAM in the future to summon its version of Acehnese identity to oppose the central government. Aspinall, for example, convincingly argued that as GAM begins “running a

¹¹⁷ “2009, Eks GAM Kuasai Legislatif dan Eksekutif,” *Suara Merdeka*, July 17, 2007.

¹¹⁸ International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Public Opinion in Aceh after the Pilkada,” findings from an IFES Survey, fieldwork dates: January 25 to February 4, 2007.

¹¹⁹ “Elections Provide Chance for Ex-Rebels to Rule Aceh,” *Jakarta Post*, January 17, 2007.

¹²⁰ Aguswandi, “GAM’s Party Good for Aceh’s Peace, Stability,” *Jakarta Post*, July 17, 2007.

government, rather than opposing one, it's possible that the heightened sense of Acehese identity and grievance with Jakarta which underpinned the conflict will fade."¹²¹

Local Elections in Papua and Aceh: Mitigating or Fueling Secessionism?

Before assessing the impact of electoral democratization in Papua and Aceh on the level of secessionist sentiments in both provinces, it is important to discuss briefly the implementation of special autonomy laws in these regions before direct elections of local government heads were introduced in 2005. Both Papua and Aceh had been granted special autonomy status in 2001 without substantial concessions in terms of democratic rights and liberties. The indirect electoral mechanism for governors and district heads was effectively maintained, and local political parties or independent candidates were not allowed. Instead, the special autonomy laws in both provinces focused heavily on resource distribution and symbolic references to the cultural identity of the dominant religio-ethnic groups. In Papua, the MRP was offered to the indigenous population as a body of cultural representation, while Aceh experienced the gradual implementation of Islamic law. In retrospect, it is evident that none of these concessions managed to reduce the separatist attitudes in the societies of Papua and Aceh. If anything, the fact that the special autonomy packages did not include new democratic rights, and that their eventual implementation was half-hearted at best, probably helped to fuel secessionist tendencies in both provinces rather than mitigate them. The delay in the creation of the MRP and the split of Papua into two provinces enraged and united Papuans in their political opposition to the central government, and the continued military operations under special autonomy in Aceh consolidated the view among many Acehese that the Indonesian capital was unlikely ever to change its repressive approach. Thus, contrary to Cunningham's findings that autonomy regimes in states with low levels of democratic development tend to be more successful in reducing separatist sentiments,¹²² it is rather obvious that the withholding of democratic concessions under the special autonomy legislations for Aceh and Papua between 2001 and 2005 failed to have any mitigating impact on the secessionist demands in both areas.

It is against this backdrop of the continuous failure of previous government approaches to Papua and Aceh that the current experiment with more democracy and expanded autonomy rights must be judged. By breaking with the security-oriented strategies of the past, the Indonesian government took a considerable risk, and it deserves credit for that. It was not only skeptical scholars like Brancati who suggested that political decentralization arrangements do not necessarily reduce secessionism, but actually have the potential to intensify separatist tendencies by "supplying groups at the regional level of government with the resources to engage in [...] secessionism."¹²³ In fact, many conservative elements in Indonesia's parliament, executive, media, and even civil society warned of the same danger. More importantly,

¹²¹ Edward Aspinall, "Aceh: Elections and the Possibility of Peace," Australian Policy Forum: 06-37A, December 18, 2006.

¹²² Cunningham, "Evaluating the Success of Regional Autonomy Regimes," p. 17.

¹²³ Brancati, "Decentralization," p. 652.

developments during and after the elections in Papua and Aceh seemed to confirm some of these suspicions. In both cases, fierce critics of Indonesian rule in their territories won the governorship; in Aceh, the former independence movement even obtained eight district head positions in addition to the provincial top job. Subsequently, the new rulers entrenched themselves deeply in the political infrastructure of the state. Suebu in Papua used his newly acquired powers to launch his long-planned village development project, triggering accusations from his political foes that he was trying to shift government funds to the OPM. In Aceh, Irwandi appointed former GAM members to positions in both the BRR and BRA, with multi-million dollar budgets under their control. While Jakarta's critics reaped the benefits from the democratic opening, there appeared to be no immediate downturn in the secessionist attitudes in Papua and Aceh. In Papua, the DAP congress in July 2007 was still dominated by demands for independence, and while many Acehnese believed that the relationship with the central government had improved, GAM's continued popularity was highlighted by its landslide victory in the district of Bireuen in June—six months after Irwandi had taken office.

But the ascension of central government critics to political power through democratic elections in Papua and Aceh was counterbalanced by trends that, in the long run, could potentially tone down demands for independence in both provinces. First of all, the ballots highlighted significant ethnic, political, and social divisions in the societies of Papua and Aceh. In Papua, residents of the central highlands challenged the political hegemony of the coastal areas, arguing that they were victims of systematic discrimination by the ethno-regional center in Jayapura. The Acehnese election result, on the other hand, pointed to stark differences between the ethnic Acehnese areas, mostly in the north and east of the province, and non-Acehnese districts in the central and southeastern parts. Accordingly, the elections helped to reinforce the point that neither province conformed to the standard of "ethno-territoriality." Ethno-territorial units are those autonomous regions that were "explicitly created as a homeland for an ethnic group,"¹²⁴ allowing them to display such high levels of internal coherence that secession becomes a particularly attractive option. By contrast, Papua's internal splits and the presence of a large number of immigrants all across the province made the creation of such an ethno-territorial entity an almost impossible task. In the same vein, Aceh's now GAM-led government needed to be careful not to overemphasize its ethnic exclusivity, since that would most likely encourage new attempts by ALA and ABAS to create their own provinces.

In addition, the electoral victories of anti-Jakarta forces in both Papua and Aceh exposed these groups to high public expectations that they may find difficult to meet. In Aceh, large sections of the population had supported GAM for decades as the romanticized antithesis to the rule by established Indonesian forces. As Jakarta's fiercest adversary, GAM was seen as committed to fighting government corruption, misuse of power, and rampant human rights abuses. Not unexpectedly, the first half-year of GAM in government suggests that the movement itself is prone to the same kind of transgressions previously blamed on the Indonesian authorities, demonstrating the complexity of the governance issues now at hand. Some of GAM's internal post-election fissures showed just how intense the performance pressure on the former

¹²⁴ Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict*, p. 6.

rebels has become. In Papua, Barnabas Suebu is confronted with similar challenges. During the campaign, he promised to distribute development funds directly to the villages, thus circumventing the notoriously corrupt bureaucracy. While he has launched the program in 2007, it is still unclear if it will achieve its goal of empowering poor Papuans at the grassroots level. Some Papuan civil society leaders have already criticized the project, saying it will encourage consumptive spending rather than support sustainable development.¹²⁵ The central government, despite its irritations over the defeat of the candidates linked with it, will observe with interest (and in some cases, no doubt, *schadenfreude*) the manner in which the new Papuan and Acehese administrations deal with these immense expectations.

The increased credibility of the electoral process in Papua and Aceh was another factor that supported the view that “a self-governing intra-state region—as a conflict-solving mechanism in an internal armed conflict—is both a theoretical and, very often, a practical option for the parties in such conflicts.”¹²⁶ The victories of declared opponents of the central government in both autonomous regions provided the electoral system with an extent of public acceptance that many skeptics had deemed impossible for areas that had suffered from such notoriously high levels of political intervention and manipulation in the past. While the triumph of anti-Jakarta figures initially shocked the central government, it arguably did more to improve the latter’s reputation in both territories than a possible win of pro-establishment figures would have achieved. By allowing its critics to assume executive responsibilities in Papua and Aceh, the Indonesian center finally delivered a signal that it was serious about granting substantial autonomy rights to its politically most sensitive provinces—something it had been reluctant to do in the past, with disastrous consequences for its image in both Papua and Aceh.

While this article has largely focused on the particular circumstances of local elections in Indonesia’s autonomous provinces of Papua and Aceh, it has also pointed to a number of trends visible in other ballots across Indonesia. Most importantly, the role of political parties was extremely limited. In Aceh, independent candidates supported by GAM defeated the nominees filed by the largest political parties, which were mostly seen as members of corrupt and unresponsive “cartels.”¹²⁷ In Papua, Barnabas Suebu was nominated by PDI-P, but ran an independent campaign organized by a professional consulting firm. This reflected a general trend in Indonesia’s local elections, where affluent non-party figures purchased nominations from cash-strapped parties, but ran their campaigns largely without the latter’s involvement. The weakness of the parties paved the way for personality-driven elections, with charisma, financial resources, and popularity substituting for policy-oriented, party-dominated campaigning. Ultimately, the ballots in Papua and Aceh provided further evidence for a phenomenon that had emerged from the around 330 local elections held in Indonesia between 2005 and 2007: the indispensability of

¹²⁵ Interview with Frans Maniagasi, Jakarta, September 18, 2006.

¹²⁶ Kjell-Åke Nordquist, “Autonomy as a Conflict-Solving Mechanism: An Overview,” in *Autonomy: Applications and Implications*, ed. Markku Suksi (The Hague: Kluwer, 1998), p. 59.

¹²⁷ Dan Slater, “Indonesia’s Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power after Democratic Transition,” *Indonesia* 78 (October 2004): 61–92.

effective grassroots networks for electoral success. GAM had a formidable network of former fighters spread throughout the villages, who mobilized voters for Irwandi and other GAM candidates on the ground. Barnabas Suebu, for his part, profited from his informal connections with bureaucrats, teachers, priests, and activists at the grassroots level—most of whom he had groomed during his first term as governor in the 1980s. The triumph of grassroots appeal over institutional party politics has facilitated the rise of independent political operators as major players in Indonesia's local affairs, and the established parties are well advised to draw their conclusions from this trend if they don't want to be overrun by it.