

PERSPECTIVE

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West Kalimantan Gubernatorial Election 2018: Identity Politics Proves Decisive

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The West Kalimantan gubernatorial election on 27 June 2018 saw Malay Muslim candidate pair Sutarmidji and Ria Norsan becoming governor and vice governor respectively with 51.56% of the vote.
- Supported by a mixed coalition of nationalist and Islamist parties, Sutarmidji-Norsan defeated the Dayak Christian candidate pair of Karolin Margret Natasa and Suryadman Gidot.
- A multi-ethnic, multi-religion province with a history of communal violence, West Kalimantan was identified as a potential hotspot for sectarian identity-based campaigning in the aftermath of the religiously-charged Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017.
- Strong evidence of heightened identity politics was observed throughout the campaign season from all camps. Fake news and hoaxes on social media encouraged Dayak Christians and Malay (and Javanese) Muslims to vote along ethnic and religious lines.
- Consistent with other regions in Indonesia, the candidates' persona and personal history mattered much more than party affiliations in the West Kalimantan gubernatorial race. Local issues such as dynastic politics, resource distribution, and rural infrastructure were also important for voters.

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INTRODUCTION

Along with compatriots in 16 other provinces across the Indonesian archipelago, residents of West Kalimantan province went to the polls on 27 June 2018 to choose a new governor and vice-governor in nation-wide simultaneous regional elections (Pilkada). The winner of the race was Sutarmidji, the popular two-term mayor of Pontianak, and his running mate Ria Norsan, two-term regent of Mempawah. Both men are ethnic Malay Muslims. The pair won with over 51% of the vote in what was a tight race coloured by heated identity-based politics involving ethnicity and religion.

West Kalimantan is a resource-rich, multi-ethnic province mostly populated by Dayaks, Malays, Chinese, and Javanese and Madurese migrants. With a long history of communal violence and voting along ethnic and religious lines in local elections, identity-based campaigning had always featured prominently in West Kalimantan elections.¹ However, this Pilkada saw divisive ethno-religious rhetoric being drummed up to dangerous levels by all camps, even by the province's standards.

In the aftermath of the religiously-charged 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial race that saw ethnic Chinese Christian governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama not only lose the election but also jailed for blasphemy, there were fears that the same pattern of sectarian campaigning would be replicated in other regions. Organisations such as the Indonesian Electoral Monitoring Agency (Bawaslu) and Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) had identified West Kalimantan as the most likely hotspot for amplified Islamist and nativist rhetoric that could result in communal conflict.²

Indeed, this Pilkada was particularly divisive because the contenders represented opposing ethnic and religious sides that have been competing for local dominance: the Malay Muslims and the Dayak Catholics/Christians.

On one side was Sutarmidji-Norsan, who were backed by a mixed coalition of Golkar, National Democrats (NasDem), People's Conscience Party (Hanura), and the Islamist parties Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and National Awakening Party (PKB). Their main opponent was the Dayak Catholic pair Karolin Margret Natasa and Suryadman Gidot, backed by Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), to which President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo belongs, and Partai Demokrat (Democrats). Karolin had a strong base among Dayak voters because her father was the outgoing governor Cornelis. Complicating the picture and splitting the Dayak Catholic/Christian vote was the mixed Dayak Catholic-Malay Muslim pair Milton Crosby and Boyman Harun, backed by the national opposition party Gerindra and the National Mandate Party (PAN).

With their victory, Sutarmidji-Norsan made history by being the first Malay Muslim pair to have been directly elected to West Kalimantan's top office. Their win effectively ended a decade of Dayak Catholic dominance in the province under Cornelis. Many of the province's non-Muslims blamed the election result on amplified religious rhetoric, which they said was heavily influenced - and even sponsored - by Islamist and national opposition groups from outside West Kalimantan.

In this article, the West Kalimantan Pilkada is examined against the backdrop of the province's relatively recent history of ethno-religious and socio-economic tensions, and within the contexts of national politics in the aftermath of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, and the national-level coalitions formed in the lead up to the 2019 presidential and legislative elections. While national politics and heightened Islamist rhetoric from Jakarta did influence the West Kalimantan election, local issues such as long-standing rifts both between and within Malay and Dayak communities, resistance against dynastic politics, and dissatisfaction with resource management and uneven regional development were critical issues for voters.

DAYAK POLITICS IN THE POST-SUHARTO ERA

One of Indonesia's largest provinces, West Kalimantan is populated by approximately 4.5 million residents.³ Unlike most other provinces in Indonesia, West Kalimantan has a unique demographic make-up where the number of Catholics, Christians, and Buddhist (around 45% of the population) almost equals the number of Muslims. The ethnic Dayaks make up almost 43% of the population, making them the most dominant ethnic group, followed by the Malays (25.66%), Javanese (8.7%), ethnic Chinese (8.2%), and Madurese (6.3%).⁴

The Malays are overwhelmingly Muslim, as are the Javanese and Madurese who mostly came to the province in the 1980s and 1990s under the New Order regime's transmigration programme that saw millions of people (mostly from Java) resettled in the less densely populated outer islands in order to open new agricultural lands and relieve over-population in Java. The majority of the Dayaks are Catholic or Christian, and they have historically been in a loose (and often uneasy) political alliance with the ethnic Chinese who are predominantly Christian, Buddhist or Confucianist.

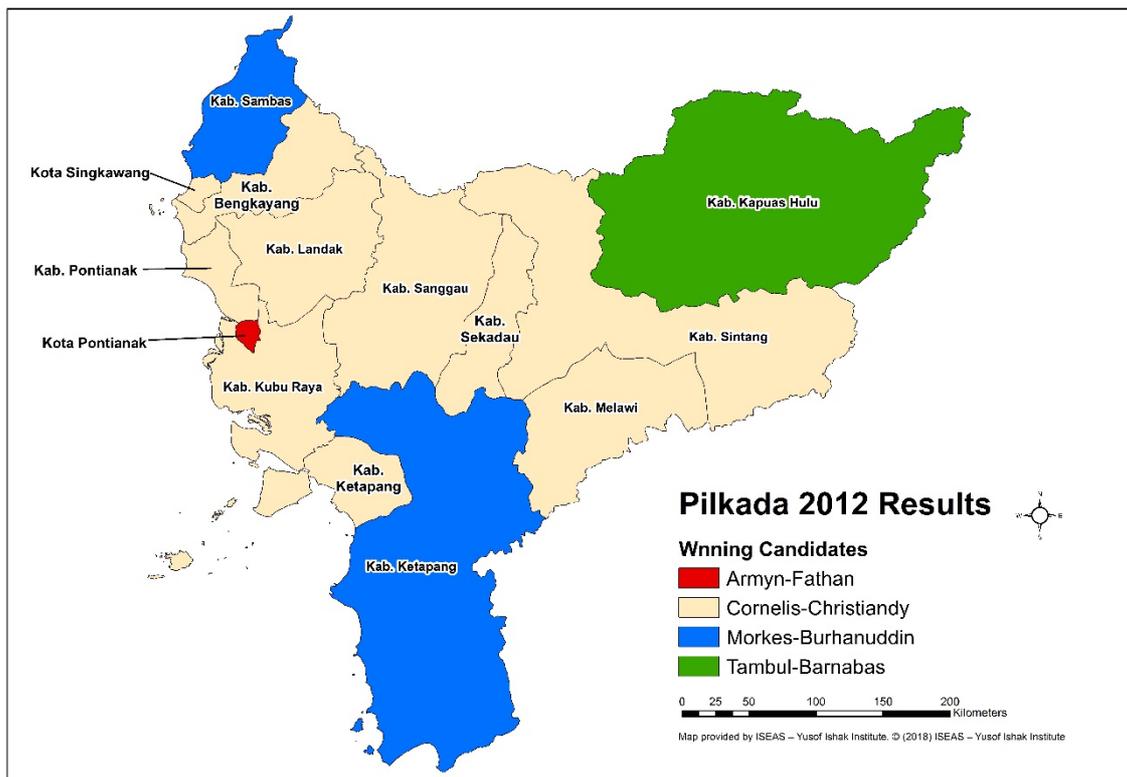
Under New Order rule, West Kalimantan was administered by Jakarta-appointed ex-military governors from Java or from elsewhere outside the province. Following the fall of the New Order, West Kalimantan witnessed a sudden surge of political activity among the Dayaks to take charge of what they consider to be their native land. Dayak elites and their supporters demanded that the Habibie government appoint Dayaks as district heads in many parts of the province. The central government relented, in part to appease angry Dayak community leaders following the conflict with the Madurese in 1999.⁵

In 2003, Usman Ja'far, a Malay Muslim businessman, was elected by the provincial assembly (DPRD) as West Kalimantan's first locally-born governor in almost four decades. However, after serving one term, Ja'far lost his re-election bid in 2007 when the Dayak Catholic former Landak regent, Cornelis, won the province's first direct gubernatorial election with over 43% of the votes. The coalition between Cornelis and ethnic Chinese Christian, Christiandy Sanjaya (supported only by PDI-P), proved to be successful in unifying Dayak and Chinese voters. Other tickets in that election comprised of mixed Malay Muslim and Dayak Catholic candidates. But Cornelis's all non-Muslim ticket proved an electoral success.

The 2007 Pilkada set the pattern for subsequent elections and taught aspiring local politicians a valuable lesson about the importance of ethnic and religious identity politics in winning votes. The candidacy of three Malay Muslims meant that the Malay and Muslim votes were split three ways. On the other hand, Cornelis' campaign focused very much on Dayak identity and the

need for Dayaks as the “*orang asli*” (indigenous people) of West Kalimantan to reclaim leadership of the province.⁶ Quite predictably, Cornelis-Christiandy won in districts known to be the strongholds of Dayaks and ethnic Chinese, such as Bengkayang, Landak, Sanggau, Sekadau, Sintang, Melawi, Kapuas Hulu, and Singkawang.

Figure 1: 2012 West Kalimantan Gubernatorial Election Result by District



*Map: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute © 2018
Data source: Indonesian Electoral Commission*

This identity-based rhetoric was replicated again in the 2012 election that resulted in Cornelis-Christiandy’s re-election with an even stronger win of 52.13% despite new tactics employed by their Malay Muslim opponents. In 2012, two of the candidate pairs were all-Malay Muslim tickets, while one was a mixed Malay-Dayak pairing. Again, Malay and Muslim votes were divided among the three Malay Muslim candidates. As seen in Figure 1, Cornelis-Christiandy replicated their 2007 results by winning in districts dominated by Dayaks and Chinese.

In both elections, Cornelis had promised to increase the number of Dayaks in the provincial bureaucracy, particularly in senior leadership positions. True to his word, during his two terms as governor, the percentage of Dayaks occupying Echelon Two⁷ civil servant positions were increased from only 8.57% in 2006 to 50% in 2013.⁸ Cornelis also prioritised infrastructure building in interior areas predominantly populated by Dayaks.⁹

However, Cornelis’ aggressive pro-Dayak policies drew the ire of Malay elites, the Javanese and Madurese, and local Muslim groups who felt marginalised by Dayak Christian dominance. Even among the Dayaks, rifts emerged, especially among those who felt that Cornelis was consolidating too much power around his own family and personal networks.

Accusations that Cornelis was attempting to create a political dynasty became rife when his eldest daughter Karolin was elected as a national MP for West Kalimantan in 2009. Karolin was re-elected for a second term in 2014, and she went on to win the local election in 2017 to become the regent of Landak district, following in her father's footsteps.¹⁰ The announcement of Karolin's candidacy for governor in late 2017, only six months after becoming Landak regent, was the final straw for Cornelis' detractors.

IDENTITY POLITICS, LOCAL RIFTS, AND CONSPIRACIES

At the same time, identity politics in the province had become much more intense following the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the Ahok blasphemy case. On 4 November 2016, the same day as the first mass anti-Ahok protest in Jakarta, a large mob of protesters, many of whom declared affiliation with the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI), gathered near Pontianak's "Chinatown" area of Gajah Mada Street to stage a solidarity protest demanding Ahok's jailing for blasphemy. In a video that emerged following the protest, Sutarmidji as the mayor of Pontianak could be seen among the protesters. He promised to personally lead the next protest if Ahok was not charged for blasphemy.¹¹

Sutarmidji would later claim that he only made the promise in order to calm the angry mob and prevent them from ransacking local ethnic Chinese shops.¹² Regardless of his intentions, Sutarmidji's actions during the 4 November protest made him the new champion of Malay and Muslim groups bent on ending Dayak Catholic dominance in the province.

By the time the three candidate pairs were announced in January this year, West Kalimantan had effectively split into two opposing sides. Unlike in previous elections, however, this time the Malay Muslim factions were solidly behind the only Malay Muslim pair.

Here, party coalitions were built based on opportunism and local deal-making, rather than on ideological/religious motivations, as is typical in most elections around the country. While that Sutarmidji-Norsan were supported by opposition Islamist party PKS, commonly associated with a conservative Muslim agenda, they were also supported by Golkar, Hanura, NasDem, and the moderate Muslim party PKB, all of whom are part of President Jokowi's governing coalition. These parties did not have any strong ideological or religious agendas.¹³

Before the official announcement of candidates, there were rumours that Prabowo's Gerindra party was going to support Karolin. However, Gerindra quickly announced that while they had considered Karolin, they were throwing their support behind Milton Crosby.¹⁴ Gerindra was soon joined by PAN in supporting Milton-Boyman.

Later, Karolin revealed that Gerindra indeed initially planned to support her, but then switched allegiances because of what she argued was a larger conspiracy by opposition forces from Jakarta to split the Dayak Christian vote and defeat PDI-P in West Kalimantan. Karolin stated:

"Everyone knows that Milton [Crosby] was only put up as a candidate to weaken the Dayak support for me... Gerindra initially chose me, but then they switched to Milton... They must have struck a deal with PKS and the other parties to increase

Sutarmidji's chances of being elected... Just look, Milton-Boyman's campaign team is not trying hard because he's just a puppet."¹⁵

Indeed, the proposition that Milton-Boyman was the Islamist coalition's puppet candidate pair had widespread traction, both among West Kalimantan's political elite and the public alike. Sutarmidji-Norsan's and Milton-Boyman's camps denied allegations of collusion, but speculations remained rife until voting day.

At a personal level, Milton Crosby had a long history of conflict with Cornelis, particularly over the proposed creation of a new province, Kapuas Raya, which would include the eastern districts of Sintang, Kapuas Hulu, Melawi, Sekadau, and Sanggau. The five districts have long complained about the lack of infrastructure development and of neglect by Pontianak. The application for the five regencies to secede was submitted to the central government in 2013, but it is currently on hold following the 2014 moratorium on the creation of new administrative regions.

During his two terms as regent of Sintang, Crosby was a very outspoken proponent of Kapuas Raya province, and was critical of Cornelis for not lending enough support to the cause. Crosby argued that Cornelis was not supportive of the idea because he wanted to centralise power over all of West Kalimantan under his family.¹⁶

Sutarmidji on the other hand promised that Kapuas Raya would be an independent province within two years of his administration, although it is unclear exactly what he can do to convince the central government to lift the moratorium on new administrative regions.¹⁷ Nevertheless, part of the speculation is that Crosby agreed to be a puppet candidate to ensure Sutarmidji of victory because he has his real sights on becoming governor of Kapuas Raya if and when the new province is created.

During the campaigns, ethno-religious themed attacks were common. Black campaigns against Karolin were much more rampant compared to attacks against the two other candidates. Similar to other areas in Indonesia where the Pilkada was being held, such as West Java, videos, memes, and texts were circulated on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp urging Muslim voters not to vote for a Christian. The anti-Dayak and anti-political dynasty sentiments were also strong.

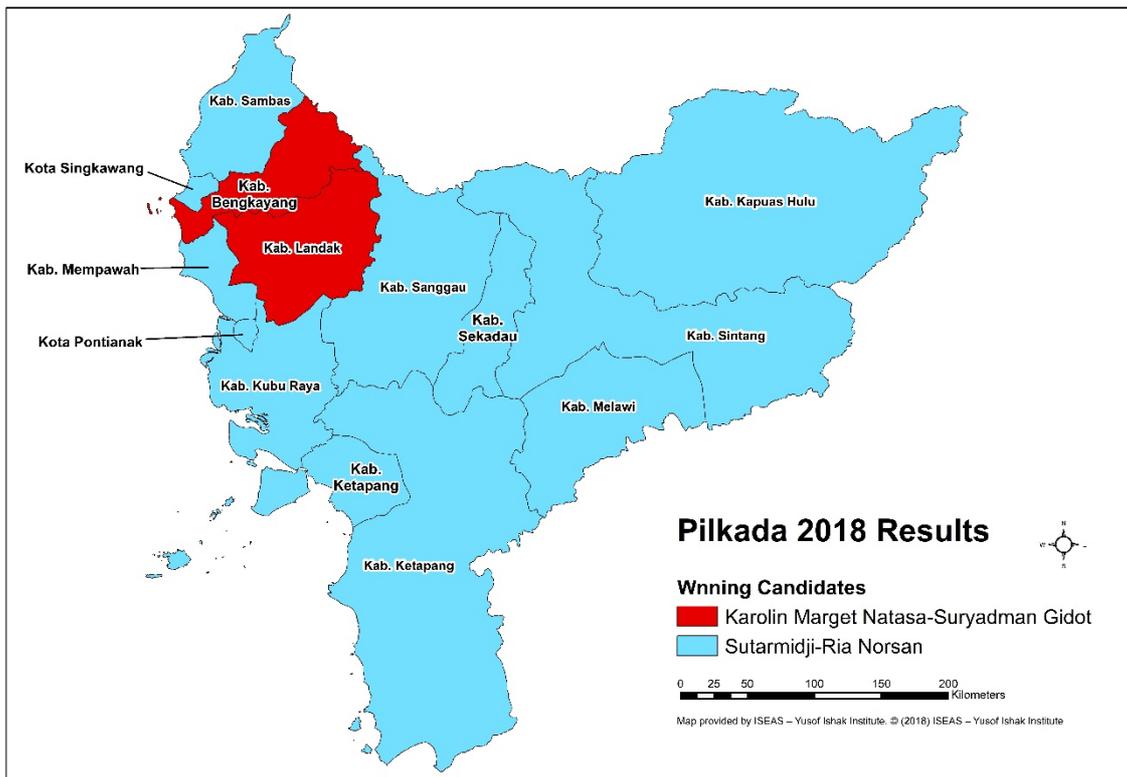
A damaging blow against Karolin's campaign happened in early June when a video emerged on social media that featured her father Cornelis giving a speech at a Dayak event calling Malays and Muslims "colonisers of the Dayak people".¹⁸ Karolin's camp claimed that the video was edited to make Cornelis look guilty, but soon after, Malay People's Association (POM) reported Cornelis to the police for hate speech.

INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

In the end, Sutarmidji-Norsan won the election with over 51% of the votes.¹⁹ Obtaining only around 42% of the votes, Karolin-Gidot lost with a wider margin than initially predicted.

Looking at the geographic breakdown of districts won in Figure 2, it can be seen that Karolin-Gidot were only able to win in their home districts of Landak and Bengkayang, and the ethnic Chinese stronghold of Singkawang. This result is in stark contrast to Cornelis-Christiandy’s dominance in previous elections where they won in all Dayak areas, including Kapuas Hulu, Melawi, Sanggau, and Sekadau.

Figure 2: 2018 West Kalimantan Gubernatorial Election Result by District²⁰



*Map: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute © 2018
Data source: Lingkaran Survei Indonesia Denny JA*

Looking more closely at the breakdown of vote percentages per district in Table 1, it can be clearly seen that while Milton-Boyman only managed around 6.5% of the total votes in the province, their share of votes was largest in the Dayak areas that Karolin-Gidot did not manage to win. In other words, particularly considering how narrow Sutarmidji’s winning margins were, Karolin could have won these districts (and a larger share of votes overall) had Milton not contested the election and split the Dayak vote.

In this regard, if there was indeed a larger opposition/Islamist conspiracy to win the election for Sutarmidji by splitting Karolin’s Dayak support through Milton Crosby’s candidacy, then it was a strategy that worked.

Table 1: Breakdown of Quick-count Results by District

Districts	Sutarmidji-Norsan	Karolin-Gidot	Milton-Boyman
Bengkayang & Singkawang	32.03%	63.76%	4.21%
Pontianak	78.92%	19.70%	1.38%
Kubu Raya & Mempawah	68.92%	25.92%	5.39%
Landak	6.08%	91.60%	2.31%
Kapuas Hulu, Melawi & Sintang	42.85%	41%	16.16%
Sanggau & Sekadau	44.90%	42.30%	12.80%
Sambas	74.17%	22.60%	3.23%
Kayong Utara & Ketapang	56.45%	36.92%	6.64%

Source: Lingkaran Survei Indonesia Denny JA

Following the election, Karolin-Gidot’s camp was slow to concede defeat, causing some tension and unrest in the process. Karolin’s recorded message that was circulated on social media following Sutarmidji’s apparent victory was not to concede and congratulate Sutarmidji, but to tell her supporters to be vigilant against vote-rigging and resist the opposition’s intimidation tactics, adding that votes from interior areas were still being counted. It took Karolin two weeks to finally concede defeat when the Electoral Commission (KPU) declared that Sutarmidji had won. In the meantime, there were reports of intimidation of Malay and Javanese communities by Karolin’s Dayak supporters, and small-scale rioting happened in Karolin’s district of Landak two days after the election, prompting fear of more widespread violence.²¹ However, in the end, no large-scale rioting or violence happened.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

West Kalimantan society is now more divided than what it was before the Pilkada. With a Malay Muslim now leading the province, many Dayak Christians and ethnic Chinese are worried that they will find themselves marginalised. There are also concerns that Sutarmidji-Norsan’s victory will embolden local Islamist factions and hard-line groups like the FPI in West Kalimantan.

Governor-elect Sutarmidji has promised to lead the path of reconciliation in West Kalimantan. This will be an uphill task given that many of Sutarmidji’s critics accuse him of cultivating and benefitting from widening ethno-religious rifts.

The Dayak Christian political forces that supported Karolin are now setting their sights on the 2019 legislative elections, with Cornelis running for the national parliament on a PDI-P ticket.²² This indicates that the struggle for power and influence between competing religious, ethnic, and dynastic factions in the province is far from over.

While the worst-case scenario of widespread communal violence that many analysts feared did not occur in the 2018 West Kalimantan Pilkada, the utilisation of identity politics during this election was more amplified compared to previous elections.

The results of this election need to be placed within the province's broader historical context of already existing ethno-religious rifts and struggles for power over land and resources. Because of its unique demographic make-up, West Kalimantan has been prone to divisive identity politics and elite transactional politics for some time. However, the introduction of amplified Islamist narratives in grassroots electoral campaigning is certainly a trend that needs further monitoring, particularly in the lead up to the presidential and legislative elections in 2019.

¹ Davidson, J. & Kammen, D. (2002) 'Indonesia's Unknown War and the Lineages of Violence in West Kalimantan', *Indonesia* **73**, pp. 53-87.

² 'The West Kalimantan Election and the Impact of the Anti-Ahok Campaign', <http://understandingconflict.org/en/conflict/read/68/The-West-Kalimantan-Election-and-the-Impact-of-the-Ahok-Campaign>, accessed 10 July 2018.

³ Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (2010). *2010 Indonesian National Census*. Jakarta: BPS.

⁴ Ananta, et. al. (2016) *Demography of Indonesia's Ethnicity*. Singapore: ISEAS.

⁵ Tasanaldy, T. (2012) *Regime Change and Ethnic Politics in Indonesia: Dayak Politics of West Kalimantan*. Leiden: KITLV Press, p. 1.

⁶ 'Pilkada pada Tarikan Politik Identitas' ('Pilkada and the Pull of Identity Politics'), <https://olahraga.kompas.com/read/2012/06/01/01582764/pilkada.pada.tarikan.politik.identitas>, accessed 22 July 2018.

⁷ At the provincial level, Echelon Two civil servant positions include senior leadership positions such as special staff and assistants to the governor, State Assembly secretary, bureau chiefs, and directors of state hospitals and other key public service providers.

⁸ Hatrioni, J. & Wardani, S. (2014) *Politik Etnis Pada Masa Pemerintahan Gubernur Cornelis di Kalimantan Barat Tahun 2007 Hingga 2013*. Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia.

⁹ Ibid. See also 'Cornelis Buka Isolasi Pedalaman Kalbar' ('Cornelis Opens Up the West Kalimantan Interior From Isolation'), <https://www.kompasiana.com/hentakun/552df5a56ea834f7038b4580/cornelis-buka-isolasi-pedalaman-kalbar>, accessed 23 July 2018.

¹⁰ A less successful attempt to enter politics was made by Cornelis' son-in-law Fransiskus Diaan (Sis) who ran in the 2015 Kapuas Hulu district election. Sis lost despite heavy campaigning and endorsement by Cornelis.

¹¹ 'Sutarmidji Siap Pimpin Demo Ahok Jika Konteksnya Seperti Ini' ('Sutarmidji Ready to Lead Anti-Ahok Demonstration Within These Contexts'), <http://pontianak.tribunnews.com/2016/11/06/sutarmidji-siap-pimpin-demo-ahok-jika-konteksnya-seperti-ini>, accessed 23 July 2018.

¹² Interview conducted on 24 June 2018.

¹³ For more on the different patterns of national and local-level party coalitions in the 2018 Pilkada, see Warburton, E., Simandjuntak, D. & Setijadi, C. (2018) 'Indonesia's 2018 Regional Elections: Between Local and National Politics', *ISEAS Perspective* **31**.

¹⁴ 'Gerindra Pastikan Tak Akan Dukung Karolin Dan PDIP' ('Gerindra Confirms It Will Not Be Backing Karolin'), <http://www.kantorberitapemilu.com/read/2017/10/11/6018/Gerindra-Pastikan-Tak-Akan-Dukung-Karolin-Dan-PDIP>, accessed 24 July 2018.

¹⁵ Interview conducted on 8 June 2018.

¹⁶ Interview conducted on 4 June 2018.

¹⁷ ‘Gubernur Kalbar Terpilih Prioritaskan Pemekaran Provinsi Kapuas Raya’ (‘West Kalimantan Governor-Elect Prioritises the Creation of Kapuas Raya Province’), <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2018/07/26/18433851/gubernur-kalbar-terpilih-prioritaskan-pemekaran-provinsi-kapuas-raya>, accessed 25 July 2018.

¹⁸ ‘Sebut Melayu dan Islam Penjajah, Cornelis Dilaporkan ke Polisi’ (Calling Malays and Muslims Colonisers, Cornelis was reported to the Police’), <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1050868-sebut-melayu-dan-islam-penjajah-cornelis-dilaporkan-ke-polisi>, accessed 31 July 2018.

¹⁹ Until the time of writing in early August 2018, the Indonesian Electoral Commission (KPU) still has not released the final election results along with the vote breakdowns, and their regional elections information website is still down, prompting rumours of hacking. However, they have confirmed Sutarmidji-Norsan as the election winner in West Kalimantan. The analysis in this paper is based on quick-count data released by local polling agency Lingkaran Survei Indonesia (LSI) Denny JA, the only pollster that conducted quick counting in West Kalimantan.

²⁰ The district of Mempawah was known as the district of Pontianak in past regional elections.

²¹ ‘Soal Hoaks Rusuh di Kalbar, Polri Imbau Tokoh Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi’ (‘Regarding Hoxes of Unrest in West Kalimantan, Police Chief Warns Community Leaders Not To Be Provoked’), <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/06/30/16092081/soal-hoaks-rusuh-di-kalbar-polri-imbau-tokoh-masyarakat-tak-terprovokasi>, accessed 4 August 2018.

²² ‘Mantan Gubernur Kalbar Cornelis Maju Jadi Caleg DPR RI dari PDI-P’ (‘Former West Kalimantan Governor Cornelis Moves Forward as Legislative Candidate for DPR RI From PDI-P’), <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2018/07/18/05553551/mantan-gubernur-kalbar-cornelis-maju-jadi-caleg-dpr-ri-dari-pdi-p>, accessed 4 August 2018.

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