Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................p. 3
2. Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................p. 3
3. Methodology and Data ......................................................................................p. 8
4. The Process of Political Decentralization in Indonesia ....................................p. 9
5. Political Decentralization and Ethnic Conflict in Papua ...............................p. 13
6. Political Decentralization and Ethnic Conflict in Central-Sulawesi .............p. 19
7. Conclusion and Discussion ...............................................................................p. 23
References ............................................................................................................p. 26
1. Introduction

Today, ethnic conflict and secessionism pose a major threat to peace and stability around the world, as ethnic violence within states has become much more prevalent than interstate violence. Ethnic violence often results in the destabilization of the state, or even an entire region. Conflicts in the Balkans, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, India, Darfur, and Iraq are well-known examples of the highly intractable ethnic conflicts that face the world today. It is generally assumed that multi-ethnic societies are more prone to violent conflict than ethnically homogeneous societies. The question of how states can best accommodate multiple ethnicities and avoid the outbreak of ethnic conflict is therefore highly relevant today (e.g. Lijphart 1977; Bermeo 2002; Cederman et al. 2010).

Although it has been commonly accepted that highly centralised political rule can provoke or exacerbate ethnic conflict, the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict is very contentious, and has often been debated by scholars. Whereas it is sometimes argued that political decentralization diminishes ethnic conflict by satisfying the demands of ethnic minorities for greater political autonomy, it could also aggravate ethnic conflict by providing ethnic nationalist leaders with increased political power and resources, which can be used for nationalist aims (e.g. Hechter 2000; Brancati 2006; Erk and Anderson 2009). The absence of a scholarly consensus on the effect of political decentralization on ethnic conflict is problematic, as it undermines the development of appropriate responses to demands of ethnic groups for greater political autonomy (Miodownik and Cartrite 2010, 732). This study will therefore aim to obtain a better understanding of the effects of political decentralization on ethnic conflict. Consequently, the following research question has been formulated: “What are the effects of political decentralization on ethnic conflict?”

2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the term ethnic conflict refers to all forms of small or large scale violence between ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are constituted by people that belong to a common ascriptive category, such as race, ethnicity, religion, language and so on (Brancati 2006, 654). The state often plays an important role in ethnic conflict, as in many cases ethnic conflict is a result of the competing claims of different ethnic groups to state power. When ethnic minority groups have no access to state power and resources, this can lead to calls for increased independence from the central state. Ethnic conflict can thus erupt as a result of the political exclusion of ethnic minorities. The demands of ethnic minority groups in case of ethnic conflict vary, and
can include readjustments of certain policies to promote regional (economic) interests, access to state power and resources, territorial readjustments, or even outright independence. Often, these demands are rooted in the belief that the ethnic group’s political, economic, social and cultural interests are not sufficiently promoted or protected by the central state government (Erk and Anderson 2009, 192; Cederman et al. 2010, 87-88; Miodownik and Cartrite 2010, 732).

Political decentralization can be defined as “a system of government in which there is a vertical division of power among multiple levels of government that have independent decision-making powers” (Brancati 2006, 654). Political decentralization involves the devolution of substantial legislative and decision-making powers and resources from the central state government to subnational governments at the regional or local level. In a decentralized political system, powers and resources are thus purposively shared between the national government and regional and local level governments (Kauzya 2005, 3-4; Brancati 2006, 654-655; Wolff 2013, 32). Proponents of decentralization contend that decentralization is the most appropriate form of governance for multi-ethnic states, as it allows different ethnic groups within the state to obtain a significant degree of political autonomy, while decentralization at the same time provides a relatively cost-effective means to the central government to maintain the state’s territorial integrity. However, it has also been suggested that instead of discouraging ethnic nationalist violence, decentralization might intensify ethnic conflict by encouraging demands for further reaching political autonomy, or even secession. Nevertheless, political decentralization has been implemented in a wide range of countries over the past few decades, including in Spain, Italy, Ethiopia, Colombia, Iraq and Indonesia, and is being debated in many more (Hechter 2000, 7; Bermeo 2002; Kauzya 2005; Brancati 2006, 651; Duncan 2007, 713; Erk and Anderson 2009, 191; Wolff 2013, 38). The relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict remains disputed today, and has been a topic of debate for many years.

According to some scholars, decentralization is likely to inhibit ethnic violence, as it satisfies demands for autonomy by increasing local self-governance through the devolution of power and authority to regional and local level governments. By offering a range of collective goods such as security and military protection, the central government offers the different ethnic groups sufficient incentives to remain within the central state. Political decentralization is thus considered to promote successful accommodation of ethnic diversity while maintaining the territorial integrity of the state (Hechter 2000, 8-9; Bermeo 2002, 105-107; Brown 2009, 1; Erk and Anderson 2009, 193-194). It is often argued that political decentralization reduces ethnic conflict by bringing government closer to the people, giving them the opportunity to take
control over their political, economic and social affairs as a result. By facilitating the participation of ethnic communities in regional- and local level governments, and enabling these communities to exert more influence over the formulation and implementation of policy, political decentralization empowers these communities and promotes political ownership. As ethnic groups gain more political autonomy, incentives to seek an independent state will be reduced, which in turn diminishes ethnic conflict (Kauzya 2005, 5-6; Brancati 2006, 655-656; Miodownik and Cartrite 2010, 733). Kauzya argues that when the process of political decentralization is well-managed, aimed at increasing political participation and equitable in the sense that the division of power and resources is well balanced between the central state government and subnational governments, political decentralization has a strong chance of mitigating ethnic conflict and promoting political stability (2005, 13).

On the other hand, scholars have frequently argued that decentralization could aggravate ethnic violence. In this view, decentralization is a stepping stone towards increased demands for regional autonomy and might even pave the way for the eventual disintegration of the unitary state (Hechter 2000, 7-8; Brown 2009, 1). Several scholars have identified different ways in which political decentralization may intensify ethnic conflict and secessionism. Roeder for example argues that although political decentralization might reduce ethnic conflict in the short-term, it causes political instability in the long term as it traps parties to the conflict between two perils: centralization and dissolution (2009, 208). According to Roeder, political decentralization keeps ethnic conflict alive, as it does not address the question of whether different ethnic communities even belong in a common state at all or whether the state should be dissolved into separate sovereignties. By supporting both the maintenance of the central state’s territorial integrity and the incompatible sovereignty claims of ethnic groups, political decentralization creates a highly vulnerable equilibrium that can disintegrate into a nation-state crisis at any moment (Roeder 2009, 214).

Cornell also states that it is deeply questionable whether political decentralization should be used to prevent or resolve ethnic conflict, and argues that autonomous regions, by their very nature, are conducive to conflict, secessionism and eventual state dissolution (2002, 276). His study of political decentralization in the Caucasian context shows how the institution of autonomous regional governments established the capacity for ethnic groups to challenge the central state’s authority and its policies. Furthermore, he argued that since subnational political institutions are a source of power for regional elites, these elites have a vested interest in increasing their region’s level of self-government. To pursue their own ambitions, regional elites thus become more likely to promote ethnic mobilization in order to put pressure on the
central state government to maintain or increase the region’s level of autonomy (Cornell 2002, 254-256). In Cornell’s view, by promoting ethnic mobilization and creating the capacity for ethnic groups to revolt, political decentralization undermines attempts to create interethnic peace and is thus inherently problematic (Cornell 2002, 275-276).

In Eaton’s study of political decentralization in Colombia, another risk of political decentralization is highlighted (2006). In the Colombian context, political and economic resources that had been transferred to subnational governments were subsequently used to finance a continuation of armed conflict. Eaton’s study shows that when subnational governmental offices are controlled by predatory regional elites, political decentralization can worsen conflict by providing these elites with the political and economic resources that they need to continue their struggle for more autonomy or even secession. Because the central government was too weak to provide public order in Colombia, regional elites were able to abuse decentralization and sponsor political violence (Eaton 2006, 559-560). Eaton thus argues that when implementing a process of political decentralization, the central state government should retain sufficient powers to maintain public order so that abuse can be prevented. In this view, a well-functioning judiciary and effective police forces are important factors for political decentralization to be implemented successfully (Eaton 2006, 561-562). Horowitz also states that a competent legal system is crucial for political decentralization to reduce conflict in ethnically divided societies, as it is needed to prevent regional elites from engaging in corrupt practices, protect regional minorities from discrimination, and to act as an umpire between central and subnational governments in case of jurisdictional disputes (2006, 963).

Much like Eaton and Horowitz, other authors have also acknowledged some of the problems that are associated with political decentralization, and in turn argued that solving these problems might be a matter of ‘getting the institutions right’ (Horowitz 2006, 956; Miodownik and Cartrite 2010, 734). In an effort to explain why decentralization exacerbates ethnic conflict in some cases and not others, Brancati identifies regional political parties as an important determining factor (2006). By empowering regional level governments, political decentralization encourages the growth of regional political parties. It is argued that by mobilizing and reinforcing ethnic and regional identities, strong regional political parties may intensify ethnic conflict. Especially when there is fierce competition between regional parties, ethnic outbidding might occur, which involves political parties trying to gain public support for their goals by cultivating and appealing to ethnic group identities, thereby heightening and politicizing ethnic divisions (Cornell 2002, 255; Brancati 2006, 657-658). Brancati concludes by suggesting that for political decentralization to be effective in reducing ethnic conflict,
institutional mechanisms should be used to limit the power of regional political parties. The design of the electoral system, for example, is important as the electoral system directly influences the number and relative strength of regional political parties (Brancati 2006, 681-682; Erk and Anderson 2009, 196-198).

Somewhat in line with Brancati’s argument, Erk and Anderson argue that institutional design is an important factor in explaining why in some cases political decentralization leads to an intensification of ethnic conflict, whereas in other cases ethnic conflict reduces as a result of decentralization (2009). To avoid a return of ethnic conflict after political decentralization, an appropriate distribution of power between the central state government and subnational governments should be found. Demands for greater political autonomy should be addressed by devolving substantial legislative and decision-making powers to subnational governments, as half-hearted reforms will only intensify these demands further and might make the will to secede become stronger. It is thus assumed that whereas extensive political decentralization can satisfy demands for greater political autonomy, weak political decentralization increases the likelihood of ethnic conflict by encouraging regional political elites to seek more complete dominance of the policy-making process by prying more and more powers from the central state government (Erk and Anderson 2009, 196-198; Miodownik and Cartrite 2010, 743).

Although the theory on the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict is highly contradictory, from the theory it seems as though there are several key components of the implementation of political decentralization that can interact with ethnic conflict dynamics. These key factors are related to institutional design, such as the role of regional political parties, the distribution of power between national and subnational governments, and the ability of the central government to uphold public order. Based on the theory it is therefore expected that political decentralization interacts with ethnic conflict indirectly, and that the implementation of decentralization creates a series of conditions that either cause ethnic conflict to be reduced or aggravated. Several hypotheses about the indirect relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict dynamics can be derived from the theory.

- The more extensive political decentralization is (i.e. the more independent policy-making powers are allocated to subnational governments), the more likely it becomes that ethnic conflict is reduced, whereas the more limited political decentralization is, the less likely it is that ethnic conflict is reduced.
- The stronger the role of regional political parties is, the more politicized ethnic divisions become, and the more likely the occurrence of ethnic conflict is.

- The greater the ability of the central state government to uphold public order is, the less likely it becomes that regional actors can abuse political decentralization, and the less likely it is that ethnic conflict is exacerbated.

3. Methodology and Data

As the previously discussed theory is still unclear about whether political decentralization reduces or exacerbates ethnic conflict, and in which ways, this study aims to gain more insight into the relationship between decentralization and ethnic conflict by exploring an empirical case of ambitious political decentralization. To test the viability of the hypotheses that have been derived from the theory, this study conducts a qualitative analysis of political decentralization in Indonesia after the fall of President Suharto in 1998, and its effects on ethnic conflict in the following period.

Indonesia’s transition from highly centralised rule to far-reaching political decentralization makes an exceptionally relevant case to study the relationship between decentralization and ethnic conflict. First, Indonesia is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, as it has more than 350 ethnic groups scattered across the archipelago (Pratikno 2005, 22; Diprose 2009, 110-111). Furthermore, a near-revolutionary process of political decentralization was initiated in response to the eruption of ethnic conflict and widespread demands for greater regional autonomy after the fall of President Suharto in 1998. In order to contain ethnic conflict, the centralizing tendencies that had characterized the Indonesian state for fifty years were reversed and autonomous regions were created, while significant powers were devolved to these new subnational units. Even though large scale ethno-nationalist violence has mostly disappeared from Indonesia, small scale ethnic conflict still occurs throughout the archipelago from time to time (e.g. Turner 2006, 258; Bertrand 2007, 591-592; Diprose 2009, 109; Wilson 2015, 1317-1318).

In order to ascertain the causal mechanisms that link political decentralization to ethnic conflict, the process of political decentralization in Indonesia after 1998 will be studied, and in-depth case studies of ethnic conflict in the period following decentralization will be conducted. In order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of political decentralization and its effects on ethnic conflict, this study will not only analyse an Indonesian region where violent
conflict persisted after the process of political decentralization was initiated, but also a region in Indonesia where ethnic violence over time largely disappeared. A qualitative method of analysis will be used to assess whether institutional factors related to the implementation of decentralization can explain differences in the level of ethnic conflict in various regions of Indonesia. Although this study will not provide a conclusive answer to the question whether political decentralization inhibits or aggravates ethnic conflict, the analysis will hopefully provide useful insights into how different features of political decentralization affect ethnic conflict dynamics. The in-depth case studies will be written about Central-Sulawesi, where political decentralization alleviated some of the pressures that had induced ethnic conflict in the region, and Papua, where armed ethnic conflict still actively continues today despite offers from the central government to increase Papua’s regional autonomy. Ethnic conflict in both regions has been relatively well-documented, in contrast to many other incidents of ethnic conflict in Indonesia, which allows for a thorough examination of these cases.

In order to be able to conduct in-depth case studies of ethnic conflict in two different regions of Indonesia, the main method of research will be the examination of various written sources. Given that ethnic conflicts are often highly intractable at time of occurrence, the written sources that are used are mainly scholarly articles and book chapters written in hindsight, after the outburst of ethnic conflict occurred. However, non-academic documents about ethnic conflict in Indonesia, published by organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the International Crisis Group will also be used. It is expected that these documents and the academic literature, written in hindsight of political decentralization in Indonesia, will provide insight into the different features of political decentralization and how these affected ethnic conflict dynamics.

4. The Process of Political Decentralization in Indonesia

In terms of geography, religion and ethnicity, Indonesia is an extremely diverse country. As Indonesia has over 350 different ethnic groups within its borders, the new leadership faced the enormous challenge of transforming Indonesia into a single, united country after independence in 1949 (Pratikno 2005, 22; Diprose 2009, 110-111). As it was feared at the time that the vast size and immense heterogeneity of Indonesia could lead to fragmentation, it was believed that ethnic, cultural, and linguistic fragmentation had to be overcome and that diversity had to be replaced by unity in order to consolidate the nation. Both under President Sukarno and President Suharto, efforts to strengthen the nation were accompanied by strong centralization of the
state’s administrative system, which eroded the political autonomy of the regions, and destroyed widely varied forms of local government. The central state increasingly controlled the regions by appointing officials from the central government to leading positions at the local and provincial levels. Especially under Suharto’s New Order regime, there was no room for the accommodation of regional and ethnic diversity, and the Indonesian military violently repressed any form of dissent, including the expression of regional or separatist demands (Aspinall and Berger 2001, 1007; Bertrand 2007, 588-589; Hainsworth et al. 2007, 41-42; Diprose 2009, 110-112). Regional grievances about excessive state violence, the lack of recognition of regional diversity, forced integration into the unified Indonesian state, and processes of political centralization which had eradicated local forms of government, led to an eruption of ethno-nationalist conflict after the fall of President Suharto in 1998. The collapse of the New Order regime provided the opportunity for regional communities to voice their demands for increased political autonomy and renegotiate their position within the state. During this period of great political turmoil, the disintegration of Indonesia was hotly debated, as the central state seemed incapable of containing mass violence in different regions throughout the archipelago (Aspinall and Berger 2001, 1008-1009; Hainsworth et al. 2007, 42; Smith 2014, 1512-1513).

Although the disintegration of Indonesia was thus seriously debated after the fall of the new order regime in 1998, by 2002 the period of large-scale violent conflict had ended, and eventually only East-Timor had claimed and been granted full independence from the central state. Suharto’s successors managed to negotiate and implement a political transition towards a highly decentralized state system, without sacrificing Indonesia’s territorial integrity (Smith 2014, 1512-1513; Wilson 2015, 1320-1321). In an attempt to contain ethnic violence and in response to widespread demands for greater regional autonomy, the interim-government under former Vice-President Habibie initiated a period of political reform, which included far-reaching decentralization. Faced with the threat of territorial disintegration, the central government in 1999 adopted two laws that facilitated both fiscal decentralization and the devolution of substantial legislative and policy-making powers to lower level governments. These laws limited the authority of the central state government drastically, in effect overturning more than four decades of political centralization. Indonesia’s constitution was amended to enshrine principles of regional autonomy and recognize regional diversity (Turner 2006, 258; Bertrand 2007, 592; Carnegie 2008, 520-521; Mietzner 2014, 45-46).

Significant political powers and responsibilities were delegated from the central government to the districts and cities, which together constitute a regional level of government beneath the provincial level, and have their own regional government and directly elected
parliament. Autonomy was devolved to districts and cities and not to the larger administrative unit of the provinces, apparently to prevent the emergence of secessionist movements in territories large enough to pose a serious threat to the unitary state. The central state government retained its powers in only a few public arenas: foreign policy, national security and defence, macroeconomic policy, monetary and fiscal policy, justice, and religious affairs. All other sectors of administrative authority were devolved to the districts and cities (Turner 2006, 258; Diprose 2009 113-114; Schulte Nordholt 2011, 230). Decentralization laws also included fiscal provisions that stipulated the decentralization of financial resources. The central state government had to distribute 25% of national revenue to regional governments, and the revenues that were generated from natural resources would also be shared with regional governments. The budgets of regional governments thus increased markedly, especially as the fiscal decentralization laws allowed regional governments to introduce local taxes to independently generate revenues (Pratikno 2005, 26).

Regional level governments thus became considerably more important than they were during the New Order period, as they became independent and were no longer controlled by the central government. Although the laws that were adopted in 1999 initially stipulated that the politically powerful position of district head would be appointed by the regional parliament (instead of being appointed by the central government as before the reforms), a new law was passed in 2004 which allowed direct elections of regional leaders. It was believed that directly elected district heads would be more responsive and accountable to local public interest, and would enhance democracy at the local level. The direct election system provided regional elites with the opportunity to compete over access to the decentralized political institutions (Choi 2007, 328). It thus seems as though political decentralization successfully reduced pressure on centre-periphery relations and brought an end to ethnic conflict in most regions as it addressed long-standing grievances by providing for regional autonomy arrangements. However, even after significant decentralization and democratization, some of the main causes of conflict such as rampant corruption and identity politics are still prevalent in Indonesia today (Turner 2006, 267; Carnegie 2008, 521-522; Smith 2014, 1516; Wilson 2015, 1318).

Widespread corruption has not been addressed by the political reforms that were implemented after the fall of the New Order regime. As the central government was facing outbursts of violence throughout the archipelago, there was no time for an incremental approach to political reforms, and decentralization was implemented very rapidly. Whereas democratization and decentralization were awarded high priority, reforms to counteract corruption were not shown the same urgency. Fiscal decentralization appears to have shifted
corruption and patronage networks from Jakarta to the districts and cities. Corruption and impunity have thus once again been embedded in Indonesian politics, only this time around at local level governments, as local politicians, bureaucrats, police officers, and influential business people collude to appropriate public funds for personal enrichment (Wilson 2013, 1323-1324; Smith 2014, 1521-1522). In present-day Indonesia, it is especially in the judiciary that corruption is flourishing, which seriously undermines the establishment and consolidation of the rule of law. High levels of corruption undermine professionalism and independence, which is worrisome as the judiciary is crucial in preventing violent conflict and resolving ethnic and religious disputes. Local branches of the Indonesian police force are also markedly corrupt, and furthermore often greatly overstretched and understaffed, which limits the ability to play an effective role in maintaining public order. Police ineffectiveness and a weak judicial system greatly undermine the establishment of the rule of law, and limit the ability of the central and regional governments to maintain public order. Therefore, disputes between local ethnic groups still have a chance to grow violent (Schulte Nordholt 2011, 235; Smith 2014, 1515; Wilson 2015, 1323-1324).

With political decentralization, regional leaders gained wider authority and more financial resources. As regional forms of governance gained importance, regional identity politics subsequently also flourished and became paramount in access to regional leadership positions. The transfer of power from Jakarta to regional governments created room for contention over access to regional authority between various local groups based on ethnicity and religion. Local elites became embroiled in power struggles in attempts to control the recently empowered regional governments, mobilizing their ethnic constituencies politically in order to be able to compete for access to regional authority. Ethno-religious identities thus became increasingly politicized, as local politicians manipulate and exacerbate ethnic tensions for their own political gains, at times leading them to engage in ethnic outbidding to gain public support. When local elections are contested along sensitive identity lines, ethnic or religious tensions in the region might be heightened (Davidson 2005, 172-173; Pratikno 2005, 32; Turner 2006, 259; Diprose 2009, 114; Mietzner 2014, 51-52). Although party politics are relatively unimportant at the regional level, as only national political parties are allowed to participate in regional elections, the process of local elections in present-day Indonesia is shaped by power struggles between local elites that compete over access to regional political institutions, financial resources and patronage networks (Johnson Tan 2006, 107-108; Choi 2007, 351-352; Schulte Nordholt 2011, 236-237).
Suharto’s successors initiated the process of political decentralization because they saw regional autonomy as a way to diminish ethnic conflict and stabilize the country by making governments more responsive and accountable to local communities. Decentralization and regional autonomy allowed local communities to take control over their own political affairs and return to local forms of governance and resource management. It was thus expected that decentralization would lead to better protection of the interests of ethnic minorities (Duncan 2007, 713; Mietzner 2014, 53) Although larger ethnic groups generally benefited from increased regional autonomy, smaller (indigenous) ethnic groups do not always share the same benefits. These minority ethnic groups often remain excluded from local politics, allowing larger ethnic groups to design policies that work against the interests of ethnic minority groups. The rights of these ethnic minorities seem to be insufficiently protected, as the judiciary in Indonesia is infamous for high levels of corruption and ineffectiveness. When regional governments are not inclusive of the ethnic minorities in their region, and ethnic groups’ access to political representation is unequal, the risk of heightened ethnic tensions increases (Duncan 2007, 722-723; Diprose 2009, 116-117).

In sum, the implementation of decentralization policies in Indonesia played a major role in averting a severe crisis of the nation state, mostly by addressing long-standing grievances about repressive centralization through recognition and accommodation of regional diversity and by meeting demands for increased regional autonomy. Political decentralization thus helped to stabilize centre-periphery relations (Mietzner 2014, 46). However, although the implementation of political decentralization in Indonesia has ameliorated past tensions, it also created conditions that might stimulate new ethnic tensions at the local level (Diprose 2009, 130). The next section of this study will analyse ethnic conflict dynamics in Papua and Central-Sulawesi, and how these dynamics were affected by the implementation of political decentralization.

5. Political Decentralization and Ethnic Conflict in Papua
When analysing conflict in Indonesia, it soon becomes clear that Papua constitutes the most complex region in the archipelago, which has been home to over 200 indigenous ethnic groups, and additionally hosts a large migrant population from the rest of Indonesia. Violence in the province continues almost on a daily basis, which makes it the deadliest conflict in Indonesia. In Papua, the central government faces a series of conflicts, and violence is a result of multiple sources of tension. Conflict in Papua is characterized not only by an ethno-nationalist struggle
for independence, but also by tensions between indigenous Papuans and non-Papuan migrants, inter-ethnic conflict that is often tied to local elections, and disputes related to land rights and resource extraction. The struggle for independence is often seen as a form of ethnic conflict, as it is perceived by many as the struggle of native Papuans against the racially and culturally different, ‘foreign’ Indonesians (Kivimäki and Thorning 2002, 661; Timmer 2007, 470; ICG 2012, 1; Kaiwai et al. 2014, 433).

A low-intensity armed struggle for independence has been ongoing ever since Netherlands New Guinea was officially incorporated into Indonesia in 1963. Papuans experienced the process of integration into the Indonesian state as coercive, and armed resistance by guerrilla fighters of the OPM (Free Papua Movement) was a direct result of the central government’s assimilationist policies, the denial of indigenous rights, and brutal repression of dissidence by the Indonesian armed forces. After the fall of Suharto, a large civilian movement for Papuan independence furthermore mobilized (Kivimäki and Thorning 2002, 660; Bertrand 2007, 590; Bertrand 2014, 180-181). Processes of democratization and political decentralization and the secession of East Timor actually bolstered the independence movement in Papua, as people’s perceptions that Papuan independence was right around the corner were strengthened. As the momentum of the pro-independence movement in Papua gathered, and the Indonesian state was facing a serious erosion of its authority after the fall of President Suharto, the central government decided to concede enhanced regional autonomy to Papua and Aceh in the form of special autonomy laws in an attempt to divert secessionist challenges to its sovereignty. In the period between 1998 and 2001, a more accommodative and culturally sensitive approach to secessionist demands was therefore adopted (Kivimäki and Thorning 2002, 665-666; McGibbon 2004, 12-14; Kaiwai et al. 2014, 434).

However, the government’s commitment to the accommodative approach to Papuan demands wavered as political dynamics changed in Indonesia and the central government reconsolidated its authority in most regions. Government officials started to fear that granting special concessions to Papua’s pro-independence movement would lead to renewed demands for enhanced regional autonomy in other regions of the archipelago. As the secessionist struggle in Papua continued, it was increasingly perceived as a serious threat to national unity, and therefore pressure on the government to restore security in the province mounted. Under President Megawati, Indonesian state policy towards Papua therefore shifted from a conciliatory approach to a more repressive one (McGibbon 2004, 39-40; Bertrand 2014, 184-185; Smith 2014, 1516). Although Megawati supported the adoption of the special autonomy law, her government cracked down on the pro-independence movement. Megawati furthermore
took steps to undermine Papuan unity and the pro-independence movement, for example by issuing a law that split Papua into two separate provinces in 2003. Megawati’s repressive approach perpetuated indigenous Papuans’ sense of alienation toward the Indonesian state and undermined support for special autonomy almost completely. In effect, violent conflict between indigenous Papuans and the military forces escalated in 2004 and 2005, with violent incidents occurring throughout the Papuan province (McGibbon 2004, 54-55; Bertrand 2014, 184-185; Smith 2014, 1518-1520).

Whereas democratization and political decentralization were implemented throughout the entire Indonesian archipelago, these reforms were complemented by special autonomy laws in Papua and Aceh, where demands for independence were more forceful than in other regions. In Papua, authority and fiscal resources were not only decentralized to the districts and cities like in other regions of Indonesia, additional powers were also granted to the government at the provincial level. Special autonomy thus constitutes enhanced political decentralization. The special autonomy law for Papua appears to be a genuine effort by the central government to accommodate Papuan demands, as it provides new areas of local authority, additional financial resources, and much enhanced control over the province’s natural resources (Bertrand 2007, 594-595). Most significantly, whereas like in other regions a main legislative body was established in the form of the DPRP (the Papuan People’s Representative Assembly) which represents all people in Papua, the special autonomy law also stipulated the establishment of a new assembly specifically to represent indigenous Papuans. The Papuan People’s Assembly (MRP) included local customary groups and was given the mandate to protect and promote the rights and customs of indigenous Papuans. To address significant grievances about coercive integration and past human rights abuses by the security forces, the law furthermore provided for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Bertrand 2007, 595; Bertrand 2014, 181-182). The special autonomy law for Papua represents an historic attempt at political reform in Indonesia, and many of its provisions went a long way towards accommodating key demands made by Papuan leaders. The law recognized distinct political, economic, and cultural rights for Papua and granted the province special status within Indonesia. It furthermore affirmed the principle of diversity, and aimed to guarantee minority ethnic rights by enabling political participation through the establishment of an ethnic institution at the provincial level and by setting up affirmative action programmes (McGibbon 2004, 23).

Notwithstanding, the special autonomy law that was adopted in 2001 immediately met with strong resistance in Papua. Opponents of the law argued that it represented a unilateral initiative imposed by the central government, and that it was not the result of a genuine dialogue
with the Papuan people. Although the provincial government had drafted the law, the national parliament eventually adopted a strongly diluted version of the draft, eliminating provisions for a referendum on independence five years after the adoption of special autonomy (Kivimäki and Thorning 2002, 663; McGibbon 2003, 25; Bertrand 2014, 182). The implementation of the special autonomy law was delayed time after time, and it was not until 2006 that the first regulation (out of an estimated 29) required for implementation was adopted. This was partly due to the failure of weak and corrupt local governments in Papua to implement regulations effectively. Furthermore, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a mandate to address past human rights abuses was never established, meaning that a key element of the law was not implemented. Although the special autonomy law came into effect in January 2002, it took four years before the MRP, the institution with a mandate to protect and promote the rights of indigenous Papuans, was created. Eventually, the MRP did manage to gain some legitimacy, as its membership included well-respected Papuan leaders and the institution became an important critical voice in the defence of the Papuan people. Nevertheless, many Papuans believe that the MRP lacks the ability to effectively represent their interests, as the assembly only holds consultative powers (McGibbon 2004, 34-35; Bertrand 2014, 185-186). All in all, indigenous Papuans have become increasingly frustrated with the fact that special autonomy has meant little more than rising budget allocations and top-down attempts at accelerating economic development. Despite this focus on economic development, almost fifteen years after the adoption of the special autonomy law, Papua remains one of the most underdeveloped regions in Indonesia, creating widespread disillusionment among Papuans (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 32; ICG 2012, 23; Bertrand 2014, 187; Kaiwai et al. 2014, 434).

It was thus not necessarily the content of the special autonomy law that provoked renewed resistance and conflict, but mostly the process of implementation. The central state’s strategy to minimize concessions to separatist demands that was adopted during Megawati’s presidency backfired, and violent conflict intensified. Special autonomy ultimately failed to reduce secessionist conflict in Papua, as it provided too few incentives for local leaders to abandon the struggle for independence. Although the special autonomy law that came into effect in 2002 represented a genuine effort by the state government to accommodate Papuan demands, special autonomy was diluted throughout the following years and was never fully implemented. It therefore did little to address Papuans’ most significant grievances, instead perpetuating ethnic secessionist conflict. Up to the present day, the OPM continues its low-intensity armed struggle for independence, and large-scale demonstrations for independence frequently turn violent (ICG 2012, 3; Bertrand 2014, 175-176).
In Papua, political decentralization led to administrative fragmentation. The province has experienced greater administrative division than any other region of Indonesia. Whereas in 1999 Papua was a single province with only 10 districts and cities, it has been subdivided into two separate provinces (Papua and West-Papua) with 42 districts and cities. While in the early 2000’s administrative division in Papua was driven by the central government in an attempt to weaken the independence movement, nowadays it is mostly local elites pushing for further administrative divisions as they are seeking access to power and financial resources (ICG 2007, 2; Nolan et al. 2014, 409-410). Leaders of minority ethnic groups regularly demand the creation of new administrative units, as this generally entails an increased transfer of financial resources from Jakarta to the newly created local government. Another incentive for the creation of new administrative units is the promise of employment opportunities in the civil service. In fact, the size of the civil service in Papua has tripled from 37,000 in 2000 to almost 115,000 in 2013. Local political elites are thus incentivized to seek further administrative division as they are looking to gain access to financial resources and positions of political power (Nolan et al. 2014, 413-415). As a result of the increased importance of local level governments, local elections have become highly competitive, with electoral disputes often falling along ethnic lines. Violent ethnic conflict frequently surrounds local elections in Papua, with one of the most serious outbreaks of violence occurring in the district of Puncak between 2011 and 2012. In Puncak, like in most cases of electoral violence in Papua, local politicians mobilized support along ethnic divisions. Violence subsequently broke out between the supporters of two political contenders when one of them contested the election results and claimed he had been cheated out of victory. Electoral violence in Puncak has killed dozens from two different indigenous ethnic groups. Political decentralization has thus transformed political dynamics in Papua, as fiercely competitive local elections nurture new conflicts and strengthen ethnic identities (ICG 2012, 19-20; Nolan et al. 2014, 419-421).

The decentralization of financial resources to both provincial and regional level governments (the districts and cities) gave these governments’ budgets an enormous boost, which led to growing corruption and widespread misuse of special autonomy funds. The central government, however, turns a blind eye to the misuse of these funds to reward local elites that support Papuan integration into the unitary state. Papuan political elites have pragmatically accepted Indonesian authority over Papua and the opportunities it provides for personal career advancement. As a result, local communities have increasingly become disillusioned with corrupt local political elites that do not seem to genuinely represent their interests (McGibbon 2004, 28; Chauvel 2006, 184-185; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 38). Although the
province was flooded with money from Jakarta, development programs did not lead to significant economic improvements for Papuans, and local government officials instead reverted to allocating patronage to local communities in order to maintain popular support. Personal patronage heightened ethnic cleavages, as patronage was often distributed on the basis of ethnic loyalties, creating inequalities within local communities. This obviously creates unstable situations, as ethnic tensions increase and minority ethnic groups mobilize against corrupt elites (McGibbon 2004, 37; Timmer 2007, 478). It is clear that in Papua, political decentralization has created dominant political elites with access to government authority and abundant financial resources. Regional political elites have been shown to play an obstructive role that heightened ethnic tensions between local communities, in turn stimulating the occurrence of ethnic conflict.

Administrative division in Papua furthermore led to a significant increase in the presence of military and police forces in Papua. In the province, both the military and police forces remain under the authority of the central state government, meaning that the security forces do not consult with the Papuan government regarding their operations in the province. As the Indonesian state maintains an administration in Papua largely without the consent of the indigenous population, the government relies heavily on the security forces and the threat of the use of force to impose its authority (Chauvel 2006, 190-191; Bertrand 2007, 596-597). Nevertheless, the central government has not managed to fully re-establish public order, as both pro-Indonesia and pro-Independence militias are still active in the region. The OPM is often involved in violent disputes over local elections, as it is common for the disgruntled losing community to side with the OPM to contest the election results. OPM operations are often followed by disproportionate counter-insurgency actions by the security forces, deepening local resentment. Some activities of pro-Indonesia militias have been tolerated by the military and police forces, such as efforts aimed at defending the non-Papuan migrant population. (Kivimäki and Thorning 2002, 657; Nolan et al. 2014, 430-431). The prominence of the security forces is one of the main drivers of conflict in Papua, as they are often accused of supporting militias that fight the independence movement, engaging in illegal business and corruption, and perpetrating human rights abuses against indigenous Papuans. Although the special autonomy law enshrined the protection and promotion of ethnic minority rights, these rights were eroded as continuing human rights abuses against indigenous Papuans by the security forces went by largely unchecked, highlighting the impunity with which military and police personnel continue to act in Papua. Improved oversight of the police and military forces thus seems crucial to build trust between Papuans and the central government. However, in the absence of a strong
independent judiciary, human rights violations against indigenous Papuans, perpetrated by the
security forces have peaked in recent years. A weak judiciary and the absence of independent,
eutral security forces to uphold public order have allowed the continued occurrence of ethnic
conflict in Papua (McGibbon 2004, 27; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 45; ICG 2012,
26-27).

6. Political Decentralization and Ethnic Conflict in Central-Sulawesi

Central-Sulawesi is one of a number of provinces located on the island of Sulawesi, and it is a
highly diverse region in terms of ethnicity and religion. Between 1998 and 2001, large-scale
collective violence resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. Much of the communal violence
in the province has been concentrated in the Poso district. In Poso, religious divides largely
coincide with ethnicity. Whereas most Christians are of the indigenous Pamona ethnicity and
live in the highlands, Muslims are mostly Buginese and Gorontalo people living in the coastal
areas, seen by the Pamona as ‘newcomers’ to the district as a result of historical migration
dynamics (Diprose 2008, 408-409). Although the conflict played out along religious fault lines,
with local groups organising around their Muslim and Christian identities, it is important to
note that violent conflict in the region was not about religion per se, as people did not fight
about religious doctrines or practices. Instead, conflict was driven by local political elites who,
in their struggle for access to power and financial resources, mobilized popular support along
religious and ethnic fault lines, and exploited grievances about differential access to the state
and economic and political marginalisation of some of the groups involved (Aragon 2001, 47;
Diprose 2008, 405-406).

During the New Order period, state-sponsored development projects created an influx
of Muslim migrants, producing a demographic shift which increased Muslim presence relative
to indigenous Christians, who by that time already constituted a minority group. As the number
of Muslim immigrants increased, the economic sector in Poso became dominated by Muslim
entrepreneurs. Muslim entrepreneurs took up land that indigenous Pamona regarded as theirs
by custom to enter the booming Cocoa business, contributing to the economic marginalization
of the Christian Pamona people (Aragon 2001, 56-57; Aragon 2007, 49; Van Klinken 2007,
75). Muslim immigrants not only dominated the economic sector in Poso, political institutions
also became increasingly controlled by Muslims. In order to ease fears about Muslim
dominance, the central government appointed roughly equal numbers of Muslims and
Christians to key positions in Central-Sulawesi, guaranteeing a religious balance in local

In 1998, the end of the final term of the district head of Poso was approaching, and as laws for political decentralization had been announced, it increasingly became clear that the authority of the local government was about to increase significantly. As the position of district head would become a much more powerful post than before, fierce competition among local political elites to replace the district head ensued. Candidates for the position of district head built public support along religious and ethnic lines. Eventually, both the Christian and Muslim communities were represented by one main contender (Van Klinken 2007, 77-79). As a result of great political uncertainty about who would succeed the incumbent district head and fears about the prospect of political exclusion, political rioting broke out in December 1998 in Poso city, leaving the capital of the district of the same name in tremendous turmoil for a week. The police forces, who had little experience with communal conflict, were unable to control the situation. However, fighting diminished due to heavy rains, and the elections for the district legislative passed peacefully in 1999 (Aragon 2001, 60-62; Van Klinken 2007, 80-81).

Nevertheless, in early 2000 tensions had risen again as neither of the main contenders had been appointed as the new district head. Instead, another Muslim candidate that lacked popular support had been appointed as district head as a consequence of ‘money politics’. This candidate had handed out generous amount of money to the members of the district assembly who then elected him as district head. As it was about to be announced who would fill the key position of district secretary (second in charge to the district head), the Muslim political elite threatened that violence would again break out if their favoured candidate would not be appointed as district secretary. The subsequent appointment of an apolitical bureaucrat marked the beginning of the second phase of the conflict, with violent political riots once again breaking out in April 2000. In the first two phases of the conflict, conflict occurred only in Poso city, and it was mostly Christian neighbourhoods that suffered serious damage (Aragon 2001, 64; Van Klinken 2007, 81-82).

In May 2000, the Poso conflict entered its third phase, as the Christian community, which increasingly faced political exclusion due to a lack of representation in the district government, mobilized to retaliate against Muslim dominance. This time around, the victims were mostly Muslims, as Christians were seeking retribution for the violence of the previous
phases of the conflict, which had been perpetrated with impunity mostly by Muslims. At this point, violence spread from Poso city to the entire district, leading the number of internally displaced persons to reach 425,000, nearly emptying the city and its surrounding towns. Violence escalated, with the estimated death toll between May and June rising to 800. More than 3500 houses were destroyed across 20 different villages. The 28th of May marks the single worst atrocity, as Christian militias killed approximately 80 unarmed Muslims that were seeking shelter in a Mosque just outside Poso city (Aragon 2001, 66-68; Van Klinken 2007, 82-83). In April 2001, three leaders of the Christian militia were sentenced to death as they were held responsible for the outburst of violence a year earlier. The judgement created great resentment among the Christian community, leading to renewed attacks on mosques and Muslim neighbourhoods. In response, fighters from Laskar Jihad, a militant Islamist organization that had no links with the traditional religious associations in the region, arrived in Poso district, leading to another significant upsurge in violence in June and July, which constituted the fourth phase of the conflict (Aragon 2001, 72-73; Aragon 2007, 57-58; Van Klinken 2007, 84).

In Poso district, local political elites encountered new opportunities for personal enrichment as a result of decentralization laws that significantly enhanced the political authority and financial resources of the district government. The 1999 political decentralization laws thus revitalized local politics, which gave renewed prominence to religious and ethnic competition in the province. The onset of the conflict in 1998 can be seen as a result of the increasing economic and political marginalisation of indigenous Christians, and as a consequence of great political uncertainty after the disruption of informal power sharing arrangements between Muslims and Christians. In this period of political transition, local political elites mobilized popular support along religious and ethnic divisions in attempts to gain access to power and financial resources, exploiting economic and political grievances of local communities in the process. The use of identity politics by local political elites heightened tensions between local communities, and eventually led to the outbreak of large scale ethnic-religious conflict and the loss of countless lives (Aragon 2001, 77; Van Klinken 2007, 76; Diprose 2008, 409).

In contrast to the highly obstructive role played by local political elites, the constructive role played by local religious elites and community leaders helps to explain how a solution to violent conflict was eventually found in Poso. As religious leaders were quite influential, their involvement in efforts to diminish conflict was especially important. Throughout the Poso conflict, the leaders of traditional religious associations went through significant efforts to bring an end to the violence. During the first and second phases of the conflict, Islamic and Christian
religious leaders publicly cooperated and visited areas afflicted by conflict to urge people to bring an end to the disturbances (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 57-58). During the third phase of the conflict, a joint assembly of the heads of Sulawesi’s provinces and religious and local community leaders was held to discuss the recent escalation of conflict. Together the leaders called upon Muslim and Christian communities to cease hostilities, and the leaders resolved to ask the central government for assistance in resolving the conflict (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 58). Later, in November 2001, one of the most prominent religious leaders of the Christian community went to Jakarta to ask the government to help resolve the conflict in Poso. By doing this, pastor Tubondo signalled that the Christian community was ready for peace. In response, the central government hosted peace talks between the Muslim and Christian communities. Both communities sent delegations that included community leaders, academics, and religious leaders. The Malino Peace Declaration was subsequently concluded in December 2001. The leaders who had participated in the peace talks were thereafter divided into working groups that were tasked with disseminating the peace accord at the community level. Community and religious leaders thus turned into agents of peace. The Malino Peace Declaration marked a turning point in the Poso conflict, as violence dropped significantly (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 60-61).

Besides revitalizing local politics which in effect stimulated religious identity politics and heightened ethnic-religious tensions, political decentralization had another indirect effect on local conflict dynamics. As local political elites competed for access to political power and financial resources, they pushed for the creation of new districts in Central-Sulawesi province. Local communities also lobbied for administrative division, reflecting their desire to increase local ownership of political affairs. Eventually, Poso district was subdivided in 1999 and again in 2003, creating three separate districts with their own local governments (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 58). While at first three ethnic-religious groups competed for access to the Poso district government, the Muslim Gorontalo, the Muslim Buginese and the Christian Pamona could each hold power in one of the districts once Poso had been subdivided. The Christian Pamona no longer faced political exclusion as administrative division enabled them to gain access to the local government in their own district. Administrative fragmentation furthermore created more jobs in the civil service, which reduced competition for power between local political elites in the new districts. Political decentralization and subsequent administrative division of the Poso district thus helped to relieve grievances about political marginalization (Diprose 2008, 411-412; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 58-59).
At the end of the New Order period, the judiciary and local security forces in the Poso district were too weak to contain the violence that first broke out in December 1998. As national political instability had severely weakened the security sector, it was extremely difficult to find solutions to communal conflict in the absence of an effective and independent judiciary. The judiciary was too weak to act against the main perpetrators of violence, as after the first two conflict phases only a few witnesses had been questioned and even fewer suspects had been taken into custody. Moreover, the security forces had little experience with communal conflict, which prevented them from acting effectively (Aragon 2001, 66; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 61-62). After the third phase, however, it seemed like the judiciary finally achieved some control over ethnic-religious violence in Poso district, as the local judge imposed death sentences on three Christian leaders that were held responsible for some of the atrocities committed during this phase of the conflict. Some 90 other perpetrators of violence were taken into custody and sentenced, signalling that law enforcement was being used much more extensively than earlier on in the conflict. The Malino Peace Declaration underlined the importance of law enforcement, and it led to more military and police forces being deployed in Poso, which started to effectively enforce the law by arresting perpetrators of violence and taking preventive action that made it more difficult for conflict actors to mobilise. As the central government in the course of time succeeded in re-establishing its ability to maintain public order in Poso, it also managed to bring an end to violent conflict (Aragon 2001, 72-73; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2011, 62).

7. Conclusion and Discussion
This study aimed to answer the research question: “What are the effects of political decentralization on ethnic conflict?” In order to answer the research question, several hypotheses about the indirect relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict dynamics were derived from the theory. Based on the theory, this study has assumed that the implementation of political decentralization creates a series of conditions related to institutional design that either cause ethnic conflict to be reduced or exacerbated. This section will discuss how empirical reality in Papua and Central-Sulawesi, as examined in the case studies, relates to the hypotheses that were formulated, and how the findings of this study contribute to the existing theory on the effects of political decentralization on ethnic conflict.

The first hypothesis predicted that extensive political decentralization would help to mitigate ethnic conflict, whereas limited reforms are less likely to reduce ethnic conflict. In the
case of Central-Sulawesi, no evidence was found to link the extent of decentralization to ethnic conflict dynamics. In the case of Papua, at first glance, the findings seem to contradict the first hypothesis. Based on the theory, it would be expected that ethnic conflict in Papua would be reduced after the introduction of special autonomy, as the law was supposed to devolve a widespread array of independent powers to both provincial and regional level governments. Instead, Papua remains home to the deadliest ethnic conflict in the entire archipelago. When studying the process of political decentralization in Papua closer, however, the continuance of ethnic conflict is indeed in line with the expectations, as the actual implementation of special autonomy has been severely lacking. Special autonomy has been characterized by limited, half-hearted reforms that clearly have only intensified secessionist demands and perpetuated ethnic conflict. It seems as though in the case of Papua, political decentralization has kept ethnic conflict alive by failing to address Papuan independence aspirations.

According to the second hypothesis, the role of regional political parties is important in explaining ethnic conflict dynamics. Strong regional elites are expected to heighten the politicization of ethnic divisions, and make the occurrence of ethnic conflict more likely. The case studies seem to confirm this hypothesis, as both in Central-Sulawesi and Papua predatory regional political elites mobilized popular support along sensitive ethnic divisions in order to gain access to political power and financial resources, heightening tensions among local communities in the process. Political decentralization changed the dynamics of local politics both in Papua and Central-Sulawesi, making local elections increasingly competitive, in turn incentivizing local political elites to exploit ethnic divisions and local grievances for their own electoral gains. In both cases, the obstructive role played by regional political elites contributed significantly to the outbreak of ethnic conflict. In Central-Sulawesi, however, the constructive behaviour of influential religious elites helps to explain how ethnic conflict eventually diminished, again highlighting the important role of regional elites in ethnic conflict dynamics.

As for the third hypothesis, it is predicted that the ability of the central state government to uphold public order is an important factor in explaining ethnic conflict dynamics. As the case studies show, the obstructive role of the security forces and the absence of a strong and independent judiciary have perpetuated ethnic conflict in Papua. Likewise, in Central-Sulawesi, the inability of the judiciary to act effectively against perpetrators of violence and the limited experience of the security forces with dealing with communal conflict allowed ethnic conflict to escalate. The case study of ethnic conflict in Central-Sulawesi also shows that once the central state government managed to re-establish its ability to maintain public order in the Poso-
district, it also managed to bring an end to violent conflict, further confirming the importance of a well-functioning judiciary and effective security forces in reducing ethnic conflict.

In sum, the findings of this study confirm the assumption that political decentralization affects ethnic conflict dynamics indirectly, by creating a set of conditions, related to institutional design, that either cause ethnic conflict to be reduced or aggravated. These findings in the case of Indonesia have a bearing on the existing theory on the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic conflict. The examination of two cases has suggested that political decentralization does not necessarily lead to a mitigation of ethnic conflict, and that there is indeed a real risk that political decentralization could perpetuate ethnic conflict by failing to address the question of whether different communities belong in the same state or whether an ethnic community should be entitled to its own state. Especially when ethnic communities demand outright independence, political decentralization might not provide sufficient incentives to abandon the secessionist struggle. However, it has also been established that when ethnic communities are more amenable to solutions that fall short of full independence, political decentralization has a good chance of promoting political stability and reducing ethnic conflict. From the findings of this study it seems like factors related to institutional design are indeed important. For political decentralization to successfully diminish ethnic conflict, it is important that political decentralization is both extensive and fully implemented, and that a well-functioning judiciary and effective security forces are present to prevent regional actors from abusing political decentralization for personal gains.

It is important to note, however, that this study has its weaknesses and limitations. The narrow focus on three institutional factors risks omitting other features of political decentralization related to institutional design that could potentially affect ethnic conflict dynamics. More attention could for example be given to the level of inclusiveness of local level governments after political decentralization, and how this affects ethnic conflict. Equal access to government power and resources for different ethnic communities might be an important factor in reducing ethnic conflict, as the political marginalization of ethnic minorities could give rise to renewed tensions between ethnic groups, but this assumed link warrants further research. Additionally, in this study, the relationship between administrative division and ethnic conflict dynamics appears to be contradictory. As it has been shown that political decentralization is likely to lead to administrative division, future research could focus more on how administrative division affects ethnic conflict dynamics, as this remains unclear for now. As this study attempted to gain a better understanding of how institutional features of political decentralization affect ethnic conflict, the scope of institutional factors that has been examined
could thus have been wider. Moreover, since it is difficult to generalize the research findings, further research on the indirect effects of political decentralization on ethnic conflict in different countries could prove whether or not the research findings also apply to other cases and thus have a broader empirical bearing.

References:


*United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. DPADM Discussion Paper.*


*South East Asia Research* 21(1): 105-129.

*Democratization* 22(7): 1317-1337.