UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Engineering Identity:
The role of the state in shaping ethnic and civic identity in Singapore and Malaysia

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Political Science

by

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The Dissertation of Kai Ostwald is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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This dissertation examines how states actions shape the effects of ethnic diversity. Specifically, the three constituent chapters demonstrate the ability of public policies and political institutions in Singapore and Malaysia to alter key aspects of inter- and intra-ethnic interaction among their respective populations. The findings provide evidence for the extensive role that political activity plays in how ethnic diversity manifests itself across a range of contexts.

The first chapter examines the impact of Singapore's National Service program on the ethnic and civic identities of conscripts. It isolates the effects of the program by exploiting a natural experiment that introduces exogenous variation in the intensity of socialization and contact between conscripts of different ethnicities. It finds that conscripts exposed to higher levels of socialization and contact demonstrate higher salience of potentially unifying civic identities and lower salience of potentially divisive ethnic identities. These effects are remarkably durable, as they remain observable in former conscripts who completed their National Service decades ago. The findings demonstrate the significant potential of public policy to shape patterns of inter- and intra-ethnic behavior through socialization and inducing contact between citizens.

The second chapter examines the impact of Malaysia's electoral rules on the politicization of ethnicity. It demonstrates that the country's dominant political party has sought to secure its grip on power through the use of malapportionment, which concentrates electoral influence in a relatively narrow segment of the electorate. The disproportionate importance of this group to electoral outcomes has led the government to maintain policies that ensure its support—in this case, policies that increase the salience of ethnic divisions—despite their deleterious effects on national cohesion. The chapter provides insights into why ethnically divisive policies and rhetoric are deeply entrenched in Malaysia.

The third chapter examines the impact of Malaysia's divisive policies and highly politicized ethnic cleavages at the micro-level. Using survey experiments, it demonstrates that the state's actions, together with inherent ambiguities in the Malay identity, have fundamentally altered the nature of the Malay ethnic identity by imbuing it with an explicitly political component. Two surveys provide evidence that large segments of the general population use

political affiliation in their ethnic categorization of self-identifying Malays. This finding makes two important contributions. From a theoretical perspective, it challenges existing conceptualization of ethnic identity, which assume that only descent-based attributes are used as criteria for ethnic group membership. From a practical perspective, it demonstrates at a micro-level how politicizing ethnic identity can increase the intensity of ethnic conflict.

INTRODUCTION:

The study of ethnic politics has held a prominent position in social science research since the mid-twentieth century. Perhaps the central point of convergence in this body of scholarship is that the effects of ethnic diversity on economic, social, and political outcomes are significant but not deterministic. In other words, it is generally conceded that a wide range of intervening factors alter the relationship between ethnic diversity and important outcomes. This dissertation examines how state political activity affects the manifestations of ethnic diversity in the highly diverse Southeast Asian states of Singapore and Malaysia. The three constituent chapters use innovative research designs and measurement strategies to advance the understanding of how particular political decisions shape intra- and inter-ethnic interactions. The findings demonstrate the central and often subtle role that state actions play in structuring the relationship between ethnic diversity and important outcomes.

1. Chapters:

The first chapter examines the impact of Singapore's National service program on the ethnic and civic identities of conscripts. The program, which has conscripted nearly all Singaporean males for a period of at least two years since 1967, was instituted to address dual needs: first, to increase the defense capabilities of the small city-state, and second, to bridge ethnic and social divisions. It has numerous unique features that make it particularly well

situated to shape identities. Most importantly, it has elements of a total institution, as conscripts are removed from their private spheres and immersed in a highly structured environment designed to increase the salience of shared collective identities at the expense of individual identities. In addition, conscripts enter National Service at a highly formative age; for many it is their first experience away from home and the first opportunity to meaningfully interact with others from different backgrounds. Both features may increase the potential impact of contact and socialization, the two key mechanisms through which identities can be shaped.

Two methodological challenges arise in any attempt to determine whether a national level program has measurable large-scale effects. The first is causal identification, as the effect of the target program must be isolated from all other influencing factors. This is made particularly difficult in the case of Singapore's National Service, as the universal male conscription does not leave an effective control group. The second is the challenge of measuring complex social phenomena. Again, the National Service case is particularly difficult, as ethnic and civic identities are inherently unobservable and subject to social desirability bias. The chapter provides innovative solutions to overcoming both constraints. It isolates the effects of National Service by capitalizing on a natural experiment in the unit assignment process that introduces exogenous variation in the intensity of contact and socialization that conscripts are exposed to. It uses anchoring vignettes and survey experiments to indirectly measure observable behavioral and attitudinal manifestations of identity.

The chapter presents clear evidence that the National Service program has durably altered the identities of conscripts in ways that have strong theoretical and practical importance. Specifically, it finds that conscripts who were exposed to higher levels of

socialization and contact demonstrate higher salience of potentially unifying civic identities and lower salience of potentially divisive ethnic identities in a variety of contexts. These effects are remarkably durable, as they are still observable in former conscripts who completed their National Service decades ago. This chapter demonstrates that public policies have the ability to substantially shape patterns of inter- and intra-ethnic behavior in their populations in ways that can meaningfully alter the effects of ethnic diversity.

The second chapter examines the consequences of the Malaysian government's attempt to maintain power through manipulation of electoral rules. It argues that malapportionment—which grants some electoral districts a disproportionately large influence—has led the Malaysian government to politicize ethnic identities in order to secure the ongoing support of key voting blocs. The chapter begins by establishing the level of malapportionment in Malaysia, which ranks among the highest in the world. It proceeds by demonstrating that—contrary to claims by the government—malapportionment is highly partisan in nature, as it primarily over-represents districts that are considered government strongholds.

These electoral distortions have two primary consequences. First and most apparent, they provide the ruling coalition with a nearly insurmountable electoral advantage. During the 2013 general election, for example, malapportionment transformed a 4% *deficit* in the popular vote for the ruling coalition into a 20% seat *advantage* in parliament. By credible estimates, the opposition would require a greater than 15% advantage in the popular vote to secure a bare majority in parliament. This leads to the second and less recognized consequence: by continually increasing the electoral influence of select districts, the ruling coalition is able to retain power with the support of an increasingly narrow segment of the electorate. This creates

incentives to make policy decisions that primarily benefit that narrow coalition, even when those decisions alienate broader swathes of the population. This desire to retain power at all costs, together with the ability to manipulate electoral rules, explains why the ruling coalition has continually implemented policies that politicize ethnic cleavages, despite the clear increase in ethnic tensions that have accompanied those decisions.

The third chapter examines how consistently politicizing ethnicity in Malaysia has altered the very nature of the Malay ethnic identity. Malaysia's dominant United Malays National Organization (UMNO) has instituted a system of *de facto* tiered citizenship in which ethnic Malays, who constitute a majority of the population and are recognized as the indigenous inhabitants of the country, are granted a range of political and economic privileges. The policy decisions to implement this vast affirmative action program appear to have inextricably intertwined political affiliation and ethnic identity in the minds of many. This observation raises two core questions. First, can policy decisions fundamentally alter the nature of an ethnic identity? Second, and closely related, can political affiliation become a component of ethnic identity, so that political affiliation becomes part of the criteria used in the classification of ethnic identity?

Chapter three uses survey experiments in Malaysia to provide insights into those questions. The experiments function as follows: hypothetical individuals who self-identify as Malay but have a degree of ambiguity in their identity are described in some detail. Two elements of the descriptions are randomized. First, the degree of identity ambiguity is altered between low (for example, a self-identifying Malay individual is described as having a Chinese *grandmother* and thus being ¾ Malay) and high (the same individual is described as having a Chinese *mother* and thus being only ½ Malay). Second, the political affiliation of individuals is

randomized between pro-government and pro-opposition. Respondents are then asked whether they consider the individuals to be legitimate members of the Malay community. Widely accepted conceptualizations of ethnic identity would suggest that there should be a negative relationship between the degree of ambiguity and classification as a Malay (the more ambiguous the identity, the less likely they are to be classified as Malay). Political affiliation, by contrast, should not affect classification as a Malay, as political affiliation does not meet the commonly accepted decent-based criterion of ethnic characteristics.

The results from Malaysia do not follow these expectations. Rather, political affiliation plays a strong role in the classification of individuals: when a respondent and individual share political affiliation, respondents are significantly more likely to classify the individual as Malay. While the degree of ambiguity has a small effect in the expected direction, it narrowly misses conventional levels of statistical significance. The same experiment conducted in Singapore, which has an ethno-culturally similar Malay community but has not strongly politicized ethnic cleavages, presents strikingly different findings: there the Malay identity functions as expected, in that the degree of ambiguity plays a role in ethnic classification, but political affiliation does not.

Chapter three's findings make two significant contributions. From a theoretical perspective, they challenge existing conceptualizations of ethnic identity, which assume that only descent-based characteristics are used to comprise ethnic identities. Instead, the findings support the postulation that ethnic identity does not universally follow one set of narrowly defined characteristics, but rather that its forms and behavioral manifestations vary broadly according to social and political context. From a practical perspective, the findings demonstrate one of the subtle dangers of politicizing ethnic identity. Malaysia's far-reaching

affirmative action programs, and the sometimes divisive rhetoric that accompanies them, have politicized ethnicity and infused ethnic differentiation into nearly all dimensions of Malaysian life. Through this, ethnicity can be used to intensify conflict with adversaries, as demonstrated in the chapter; rather than reject Malay political adversaries on political grounds alone, adversaries are frequently rejected on personal grounds by being denied full recognition as members of the ethnic group with which they identify. This form of personal rejection has a far greater delegitimizing effect than political rejection.

In conjunction, each of the three chapters presents a discrete perspective on the role of the state in structuring the relationship between ethnic diversity and important outcomes. The chapter on Singapore's National Service demonstrates the potential of public policy to shape ethnic and civic identities in ways that reduce the divisiveness of ethnic cleavages. The chapter on malapportionment in Malaysia's political system provides insight into why the ruling coalition has pursued policies that exacerbate ethnic cleavages, despite alienating a significant portion of the electorate and increasing the risk of conflict along ethnic lines. The chapter on Malay identity demonstrates at the micro-level how politicizing ethnic identity can profoundly alter the nature of identity, in this case by imbuing the Malay identity with an explicitly political element that increases the intensity of conflict.

2. Cases:

Singapore and Malaysia are uniquely situated to provide insights into the ability of the state to alter the relationship between ethnic diversity and outcomes. This is primarily because the type of ethnic diversity endemic to both countries is becoming increasingly prevalent around the world, making their developmental experiences widely relevant. Specifically,

diversity in Singapore and Malaysia is the product of colonial-era mass migration from dissimilar regions of the world, and as such, it is characterized by a large cultural distance between ethnic groups and few cross-cutting cleavages. This presents unique political challenges that are becoming increasingly prevalent throughout the world as globalization and mass migration become ubiquitous phenomena. The policy approaches that Singapore and Malaysia have experimented with in areas like education, housing, affirmative action, and the integration of different religions—especially Islam—into a secular state framework, all offer valuable lessons to countries that are struggling to formulate effective responses in these areas. Additionally, several important policies in both countries were implemented in a manner that facilitates making causal inferences about their effects. In short, Singapore and Malaysia constitute something of a laboratory for the political approaches used to manage the type of ethnic diversity emerging throughout much of the world. This dissertation begins to draw out some of their lessons.

3. Data:

Preliminary research for the dissertation project made clear that existing data on local ethnic and civic identities in Singapore and Malaysia was insufficient to measure the effects of key state political actions. Consequently, I designed two household surveys with extensive embedded experiments to build a proprietary dataset capable of providing meaningful insights. Generous funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), University of California's Pacific Rim Research Program (PacRim), and the Center on Emerging and Pacific Economies (EmPac), as well as extensive institutional support from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, enabled an ambitious project scope. Primary data collection

began in late November 2012 and concluded in mid-July 2013. Despite the high expense and considerable difficulty of conducting research on politically sensitive issues in semi-authoritarian Singapore and Malaysia, my team of enumerators collected nearly 1,100 responses using a stratified probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling strategy in Singapore and the Malaysian island of Penang, as well as over 600 non-random responses. The survey's measurement strategy relies on extensive use of vignettes and experiments to capture the salience of ethnic and civic identities through their behavioral and attitudinal manifestations. This approach offers the additional benefit of minimizing the risk of social desirability bias. Extensive focus groups and targeted interviews compliment the survey data, which will be used for additional research beyond the scope of this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE:

Using Policy to Engineer Identity:
The effect of Singapore's National Service on ethnic and civic identities

Abstract:

Can states use public policy to shape ethnic identities in ways that alter the outcomes of ethnic diversity? Excellent scholarship has focused on a range of explanations for why there is significant temporal and geographic variation in the salience of ethnic identity. The role of public policy, however, has often been overlooked, despite its ability to shape the conditions under which ethnic groups interact. This paper exploits a natural experiment in Singapore's National Service program to determine whether a large-scale policy program can reduce the divisive potential of ethnic diversity in a context plagued by deep ethnic divisions. I use an innovative measurement strategy based on vignettes and survey experiments. I find considerable evidence that the program has durably altered conscripts' behaviors in inter- and intra-ethnic interactions. The analysis demonstrates the central role that policy can play in determining the salience of ethnic identity, which in turn determines the outcome of ethnic diversity. Beyond this, the findings shed light on the conditions under which policy can effectively shape identities and outcomes.

A cursory glance at research from multiple academic disciplines suggests that few things are more debilitating for a country than an ethnically diverse population. Whether it is through an increased potential for civil conflict, reduced levels of trust, or inadequate provision of public goods, ethnic diversity is associated with relatively poorer social, political, and economic outcomes. Yet the relationship between diversity and those outcomes is not a simple one. In fact, ethnic diversity only affects outcomes strongly where ethnic identities are highly salient and become the basis for division in the public sphere. What determines whether ethnic identities become salient enough to strongly affect important social, economic, and political outcomes? Structural factors like the relative size of groups are frequently identified as a key determinant (Fearon 2003; Posner 2004a; Chandra 2004). Institutional factors – especially electoral systems – have also featured prominently in comparative explorations (Lijphart 1977; Horowitz 1985; Roeder and Rothchild 2005). Other influential studies have looked towards areas like the structure of civil society (Varshney 2002), the logic of resource allocation (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972), incongruence between national and state boundaries (Gellner 1983), the historical construction of identity (Laitin 1986), or the instrumental usage of ethnicity by political elites (Brass 2003). Largely absent from this exploration, however, has been an explicit focus on the role of public policy. This paper brings this element of the state back into the forefront by exploiting a natural experiment to examine the role that public policy can play in determining the salience of ethnic identities.

I structure this paper around the following central question: Can states engineer the identities of their citizens to shape important outcomes? More precisely, can public policy reduce the divisive potential of ethnic diversity by reducing the salience of ethnic identities and increasing the salience of unifying civic identities? The relatively conscribed recent

emphasis on policy in studies that seek to explain variation in the salience of ethnicity is surprising for two reasons. First, modern high-capacity states have a remarkable ability to shape the social, economic, and political frameworks within which ethnic groups interact. Specifically, public policy areas like education, housing, and military service can be used to foster meaningful interaction between ethnic groups, which can have the effect of reducing the salience of ethnic identities under the right conditions (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Dunning 2010; Samii 2013). States can also inculcate inclusive civic identities into their populations that can act as alternatives to ethnic identities, providing a bridge between ethnic groups (Smith 1991; Transue 2007). Together, this gives states at least a theoretical ability to influence how ethnic diversity affects important outcomes.

There are also reasons, however, to be skeptical of the power of policy. While it may be easy to implicitly accept, for example, Eugen Weber's (1976) argument that the French state turned its regionally fractured population into a cohesive nation over the course of nearly a century by building roads, public schools, and a mandatory military service, contemporary cases are in several respects more complex and difficult than 19th century France. To begin, many post-colonial diverse countries have a history of ethnic conflict, which may exacerbate the effects of ethnic difference (Van Evera 2001). Yet even in cases without a history of conflict, ethnic diversity is increasingly the result of mass migration from dissimilar regions of the world, which is likely to result in social structures with relatively few natural cross-cutting cleavages and large cultural distance between ethnic groups. This greater cultural distance between groups amplifies the salience of ethnicity, even where migrant groups are relatively small in size (Fearon 2003; Baldwin and Huber 2010). This presents new – and in many respects unprecedented – challenges for the state.

A number of key questions emerge from this. First, can states purposefully alter identities in difficult cases with a history of ethnic conflict where diversity is the result of mass migration? Second, can states purposefully alter identities in the relative short term, in other words, over the course of years rather than decades or centuries? Third, if it is possible to alter identities over the relative short term in complex cases, which mechanisms are responsible and which conditions are critical? This paper addresses these questions. I focus on the case of Singapore because it fulfills important criteria: first, its high level of diversity is the result of migration from distant parts of the world, leaving relatively few natural cross-cutting cleavages. Second, it has a history of ethnic conflict, increasing the salience of ethnicity. Third, it also has invested heavily in policies designed to reduce divisiveness of ethnic diversity. I focus on its flagship National Service program due to its perceived transformative effects, the ability to identify its treatment mechanisms (*socialization* and *contact*), and its mode of implementation.

Making inferences about the program's efficacy, however, requires that I overcome two core problems that complicate research into the ability of states to shape the identity of their citizens. First, it is generally difficult to make causal inferences about individual public policies. This is because they are rarely implemented using approaches like randomized controlled trials (RCT) that are designed to isolate causality. In lieu of this, the ability of researchers to disaggregate the effects of individual policies from the countless other things happening concurrently in complex societies is limited. Second, meaningfully measuring identity is difficult, because identity is largely unobservable, context dependent, and multi-dimensional (Chandra 2006). I provide solutions to both of these constraints. First, I use a causal identification strategy that exploits exogenous variation in the intensity of Singapore's National Service treatment. This allows me to make robust causal inferences about the

program's efficacy. Secondly, I measure identity indirectly by capturing its observable manifestations through survey experiments combined with conventional observations. This measurement strategy minimizes the risk of bias and ensures that the measurements are capturing dimensions of identity that have clear practical and theoretical consequences. The analysis is based on original data compiled through a survey conducted in Singapore in 2012 and 2013. These data are complemented by interviews and focus groups run during the same period.

This research makes several contributions. First, I find considerable evidence that Singapore's National Service program has been highly effective at shaping identities in ways that reduce the divisive potential of ethnic diversity. This finding does not displace the importance of research that focuses on structural factors, institutions, or histories, but it does suggest that we need to take policy decisions seriously when trying to understand variations in the effects of ethnic diversity. Secondly, I provide important insights into the conditions under which contact and socialization can purposefully shape identity. Specifically, I find that the mechanisms have a substantial impact only when individuals are removed from their private spheres and immersed in treatment environments. More moderate treatment intensities that allow individuals to maintain their private sphere existences do not appear to significantly alter identities. This has important implications for other policy areas like education, housing, and employment that also rely on the contact and socialization mechanisms. Lastly, this paper makes methodological contributions by demonstrating a measurement strategy that captures theoretically and practically relevant changes to the microfoundations of ethnic and civic identities while minimizing the risk of measurement bias.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section one reviews the literature on the determinants of ethnic salience and argues that the role of policy is frequently neglected. Section two establishes why Singapore's National Service is an ideal case to test whether public policy can purposefully shape ethnic and civic identities. Section three describes the research design while section four discusses the data, measurement strategy and empirical tests of three key hypotheses. Section five offers concluding remarks.

1. Theory

Why should we be so concerned with the salience of ethnic identity in the public sphere, and by extension, whether public policies can systematically shape the salience of those identities? The evidence that ethnic diversity is associated with a range of negative political and economic outcomes is strong. High levels of ethnic diversity, for example, have been linked with outcomes like an increased likelihood of civil war (Collier *et al* 2003), weaker economic growth (Easterly and Levine 1997), poor governance (La Porta *et al* 1999), and inefficient public goods distribution (Alesina *et al* 1999; Habyarimana *et al* 2007). But in each case, the relationship between ethnic diversity and the outcome of interest is contingent upon ethnic identity being salient and influencing behavior. The ubiquitous social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) provides insights into why this is the case. It contends that individuals are constantly classifying others around them into either an in-group or an out-group category – in other words, into an 'us' and a 'them'. The consequences of this bifurcation affect not just individual-level interpersonal matters like propensity to trust and evaluation of others, but also shape the nature of collective behavior. In short, when ethnic identity becomes the basis

for dividing the social or political sphere into in-groups and out-groups, ethnic diversity can impede collective action, harm governance, and facilitate mobilization for conflict.

What determines why ethnicity is salient in some circumstances but not others? Social science scholarship has focused strongly on the role of structural factors, particularly the relative sizes of ethnic groups. Posner (2004a & 2004b) provide the clear examples of this approach by arguing that ethnicity becomes salient when groups are large enough to mobilize for the purposes of political competition. While less explicit, this logic informs older work like Rabushka and Shepsle's (1972) pioneering application of game theory logic, as well as recent work like Fearon (2003) and Chandra (2004), among many others. The assumption that relative group size can be used to capture the effects of diversity also informs the ubiquitous Ethno-linguistic Fractionalization (ELF) measure, which appears widely in cross-national research. Other influential studies explain variation in the effects of ethnic diversity without focusing explicitly on its underlying salience. Lijphart (1977) and Horowitz (1985), for example, examine how electoral systems shape the incentives for political mobilization along ethnic lines, but they make an implicit assumption that the underlying salience of ethnic identity is not fluid. Varshney (2002) makes a compelling case that networks and patterns of civic engagement explain why "sparks" can trigger ethnic violence in some cities but not in others, but also takes the underlying salience of ethnic identity as relatively invariable.

While structural factors, electoral systems, and historical legacies play an important role in determining the salience of ethnic identity, modern high-capacity states also have—in theory—a remarkable ability to alter the salience of ethnic identity. Through control over policy areas like education, housing, employment, and military service, states can alter the extent and quality of inter-ethnic interactions in ways that impact the salience of ethnic

identity. Policy, for example, can shape the degree to which economic and social inequalities are structured along ethnic lines, which directly impacts salience (Horowitz 1985). Closely related, policy can also shape the nature of the civic framework in which ethnic groups interact, in that a strong and inclusive national identity has the capacity to supplant ethnic identities and bridge differences (Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1995; Miguel 2004; Transue 2007, Robinson 2013); clearly, a national identity will be more suited to bridging difference if it is based on civic features like citizenship and loyalty to a secular constitution and/or national ideology, rather than on ethnocultural features like kinship, race, language, and religion (Meinecke 1962; Smith 1991; Brown 2000).

This paper builds on previous research that has sought—either explicitly or implicitly—to demonstrate the significant role the state's policy decisions have in shaping the salience of ethnic identity in two ways. First, I utilize a research designs that allows me to make causal inferences about a particular policy. This allows me to test whether a modern high-capacity state can purposefully alter ethnic identity in the relatively short term, even in a difficult case marked by an absence of natural cross-cutting cleavages and a history of ethnic conflict. By focusing on mechanisms and the conditions under which they function, I provide insights into the transferability of particular policy approaches. Second, I use a measurement strategy that provides insights into the microfoundations of identity change by capturing how subtle shifts in ethnic and civic identities impact individual-level attitudes and behaviors in inter-ethnic interactions. In other words, rather than relying on abstract and vague notions of identity change, I focus on measurable behavioral and attitudinal changes that have clearly identifiable theoretical value.

2. Singapore, Military Service, and Mechanisms

I begin the empirical analysis with a brief discussion of the case that I structure this paper around. Multiethnic Singapore provides an ideal test for the question of whether public policy can be used to shape ethnic and civic identities.[1] This has three main reasons. First, Singapore is a relatively difficult case because its diversity is the product of mass-migration from dissimilar regions of world and it has a history of ethnic conflict. Second, Singapore has implemented a civic variety of national identity, which in theory should provide a framework into which the constituent ethnic groups can effectively integrate, as well as a common identity that can supplant ethnic identities in key situations. Third, Singapore has implemented a large-scale National Service program whose stated purposes are to increase the country's defense capabilities *and* to foster civic ideals in its citizens. Importantly, this program has exogenous variation in the intensity of its treatment, which functions as a natural experiment that allows me to make robust causal statements about its effects.

Singapore is a small island of roughly 700 square kilometers located at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia. It was sparsely inhabited when the British East Indian Company arrived in 1819 to establish a trading post. Its strategic location and free port status led to rapid commercial success and expansion. The demand for labor was filled predominantly with economic migrants from China and India, rather than through the region's indigenous Malays. As a consequence, few in the largely uneducated and overwhelmingly male population viewed the commercial entrepôt as a permanent home, instead maintaining loyalties with their countries of origin. This population was divided into distinct groups that

[1] I discuss some limitations with using Singapore as a case later in the paper, as well as in a more extensive discussion in the appendix.

had neither language, religion, culture, nor sense of intertwined destiny in common. The fractured nature of the population was entrenched by colonial policy, which maintained a strict geographic segregation of the groups, and coupled ethnic identity and economic activity. This produced what Furnivall (1944) termed a *plural society*, in which multiple ethnic groups share a common territory but maintain distinct identities and do not mix outside of the marketplace. Not until the 1930s did sizable numbers of families begin to settle in Singapore with the intention of making a permanent home on the island. While this altered the social environment, it did not substantially reduce the depths of the ethnic divides. The quick defeat of the British during the Second World War and the rapidly changing political dynamic in London in the following years sealed the fate of the colonial era. Following a failed attempt to secure an economic hinterland through merger with Malaysia in 1963, Singapore found itself a fully independent country in 1965.

Conditions facing the country at independence were daunting. Aside from the flourishing port, Singapore had little industry and no natural resources. It faced threats from hostile neighbors and remnants of a Malayan communist movement domestically (Doner, Ritchie and Slater 2005). Most importantly, despite the show of nationalism during the independence celebrations, little tied the members of Singapore's main Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic groups together, and instances of ethnic violence in 1950 and 1964 appeared to substantiate fears of ethnic conflict (Clutterbuck 1985). In response to this, political capital was immediately focused on creating unity and a sense of shared destiny among the population. The chosen nation building model was oriented towards fostering a civic Singaporean national identity that could subsume the constituent ethnic identities in the public sphere (Brown 2000; Barr & Skrbis 2008).

Singapore's National Service program was established in 1967 as one of the government's first major policy initiatives. Its creation addressed dual needs. The first was to rapidly build defense capacities without putting undue strain on limited state resources (Huxley 2000). Second, Singapore's leadership felt that conscription and military service could play a powerful role in shaping a new generation of Singaporean citizens. A booklet, distributed by the government in 1967 to announce the implementation of National Service in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), makes this aim explicit:

> The community in Singapore… is not a closely knit one. National Service will provide an opportunity for all races to come to know one another better in an environment in which they will be taught to love their Nation, to understand social obligations and develop civic mindedness and strength of character. The aim of National Service is not only to train our youths to be efficient fighting men skilled in the arts of war, but also to be good citizens imbued with the values and principles of any free, democratic and self-respecting Nation. Above all, National Service is the supreme test by which the Nation will know those who have in them true and unswerving loyalty to our people, the concern for their well-being and an abiding faith in our nationhood. (Singapore: MID 1967)

Singapore began limited conscription and an extensive public relations push to win support for the program almost immediately following its announcement in 1967. The *Enlistment Act* of 1970 expanded conscription to all male citizens and permanent residents, and stipulated a full-time service period of 2 to 2.5 years together with yearly reservist liabilities now extending to the age of 40 for non-officers (50 for officers). In the mid-1970s, the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and the Singapore Civil Defense Force (SCDF) began taking a small portion of conscripts (under 15%) to complete their National Service obligations within their ranks. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), which takes the vast majority of National Service conscripts, is itself divided between the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. Roughly 90% of SAF conscripts are assigned to the Army, as the Air Force and Navy, besides being

far smaller organizations, are also primarily composed of professional personnel. Exemptions to National Service are nearly non-existent; very few are given health exemptions due to the extensive need for non-combat service personnel, economic hardship for family dependents is no longer recognized, and conscientious objector exemptions do not exist. In short, all strata of society, from the poor to the children of government officials and the economic elite, complete service.

National service – or more broadly, military service – has a long history of being seen as a 'school for the nation' capable of transforming the identity of a citizenry *en masse* (Weber 1976; Posen 1993). Its impact occurs primarily through the two mechanisms of *socialization* and *contact* (Krebs 2004). Socialization involves the transmission of norms and values, and occurs in households, schools, and countless other contexts. The military, however, may be particularly effective at socialization, as it can act as a 'total institution' that controls more elements of the environment than is possible in a civilian setting (Lovell & Hicks Stiehm 1989). Conscripts are removed from society and immersed in a fully structured environment where their behavior is perpetually monitored and shaped through a combination of powerful incentives and punishments, often occurring at the group level to further foster mutual reliance and cohesion. Singapore's conscripts typically begin service at age 18 and are away from home for the first time, making them especially impressionable. Uniforms, standard issue haircuts, and supplanting names with ranks remove elements of individual identity to allow greater space for the transmission of the collective identity that is to trump all potentially divisive identities—whether ethnic, religious, or economic in nature—in matters of public importance.

The second key mechanism through which National Service shapes identity is contact. Aside from completing the structured elements of National Service like exercises, parades, and

drills shoulder-to-shoulder, many conscripts are also subject to a form of intense managed cohabitation. Those who live in barracks experience a type of intimate togetherness that remains shielded and private in civilian life; they eat together, sleep together, brush their teeth together, shower together, and pass what are often countless hours of tedium together. Importantly, this contact occurs in a context where unity is fostered, superficial difference are erased, hierarchies are based on clearly structured (non-ethnic) ranks, and the key conditions stipulated by Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998) are fulfilled.

3. Research Design

Precisely measuring the ability of Singapore's National Service program to shape identity is made difficult by its policy of universal male conscription, which obviates all reliable control groups.[2] Even pre- and post-surveys are problematic, as they cannot disaggregate between the effects of the service and the effects of independent maturation over the significant two-year period. I overcome this by exploiting exogenous variation in the intensity of the socialization and contact treatments. National Service conscripts are typically assigned to one of two types of units: "stay-in" units that live together in barracks for the duration of their service, or "stay-out" units that work 8 to 10 hour shifts daily on base but live at home in the civilian world for portions of their service. Conscripts from stay-in units receive substantially more intensive and longer exposure to the socialization and contact treatments than do conscripts from stay-out units. Importantly, the criteria used to assign conscripts into stay-in or stay-out units are orthogonal to identity, making the treatment intensity exogenous

[2] Using similar-aged females as a control group is problematic given the myriad of other potential differences between genders besides National Service conscription

and allowing us to isolate the effects of National Service on civic and ethnic identity. I will briefly review the unit assignment process and then show a balance table to substantiate this claim.

Unit assignment has a health component and a random component. Figure 1.1 gives a stylized account of the process.[3] All potential conscripts undergo a basic medical screening prior to conscription that accords them a health grade. This grade is based on system functionality of sight, hearing, locomotion, and basic cognition, rather than physical fitness. Poor scores can be the result of issues as serious as a heart condition or as minor as flat feet or scar tissue, and often conscripts are unaware of the condition prior to the screening. A 'passing' score designates conscripts as 'combat-fit', while a non-passing score designates them as 'non-combat fit'. Combat-fit conscripts proceed to basic military training (BMT) geared towards combat training for a period of typically two to four months, depending on fitness levels. Those who are classified as non-combat fit proceed to shorter versions of BMT geared towards non-combat vocations like logistics, communications, maintenance, administration, and other supporting roles like drivers, medics, and guards. Following BMT, conscripts are assigned to units. Most combat units are stay-in, which means that conscripts live together in barracks for the duration of their two year service. On the other hand, most non-combat technical and support units are stay-out units, in which conscripts work for 40 to 50 hours per week in a military facility, but typically live at home for a large portion of their service period. There is an important exception, however, in that some combat units are stay-out and some non-combat units are stay-in. The reasons for this are idiosyncratic and variable. For example,

[3] The National Service program has been in operation for over 40 years, during which time it has undergone significant change, including to the unit assignment process. The description I provide is a generalization that captures the basic process throughout the program's evolution. Additional details can be found in the online appendix.

a particular combat unit may be stay-out because its barrack facilities are under renovation, or a technical unit may be stay-in because of the isolated geographic location of its duties, despite those being functionally identical to the activities of another (stay-out) technical unit.

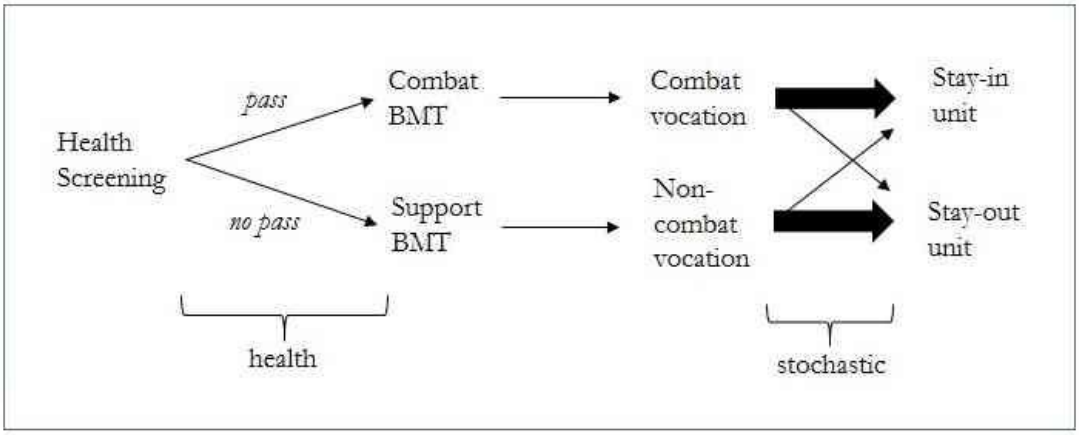

Figure 1.1: Unit Assignment Process

Thus whether a conscript completes his National Service in a stay-in unit or a stay-out unit is determined on two levels. The first level is health, as most healthy males are likely to be assigned to combat roles, most of which are in stay-in units. The second level is stochastic, as some combat units are stay-out, despite having identical functions to stay-in combat units, while some technical and service units are stay-in, despite fulfilling nearly identical functions to equivalent stay-out units. Taken together, assignment into a stay-in vs. stay-out unit is orthogonal to identity.

The main objection that might be raised to this is that health may not be fully independent of identity. In order for this to bias the assignment process, one of two possibilities must be true. The first is that a particular type of household (in this case, one that is "hyper-ethnic" or "hyper-civic") is more likely to produce an individual who does not pass

health screenings. Some health issues, like obesity, are not randomly distributed and may be systematically related to households in which strong identities are inculcated. But obesity does not qualify conscripts for service exemption or immediate assignment into stay-out units; instead, obese conscripts are required to complete a slightly extended version of BMT before unit assignment. Much of the health screening, focuses on congenital and non-fitness related health issues, which are highly unlikely to be systematically related to identity. The second possibility is that an individual who does not pass health thresholds, regardless of background, may be inclined to a particular type of identity (hyper-ethnic or hyper-civic), perhaps due to psychological consequences of the health issues. There is no clear theoretical reason to expect a tendency towards one pole of the ethnic – civic continuum over another, so it likewise seems unlikely that this could introduce a systematic bias, particularly since anecdotal evidence suggests a significant number of the health issues are discovered during the screening (meaning conscripts were previously unaware of them). Additionally, the effect of a potential bias would be mitigated by the stochastic element of unit assignment.

Though no data on this is publically available, existing qualitative accounts and extensive interviews support the notion that a balance of ethnic groups, socio-economic groups, and educational attainment levels can be found in both types of units. I create the balance table (Table 1.1) below using my own proprietary data from 165 randomly selected Singaporean males who have completed National Service. The t-test demonstrates that there are no statistically significant differences between the stay-in and stay-out units on important observables like income, religiosity, educational attainment, or age.[4] A chi square test likewise

[4] All data come from the survey conducted in 2012 and 2013. Income is on a scale from 1 to 8 (highest); religiosity is on a scale from 1 to 4 (highest); educational attainment is on a scale of 1 to 6 (highest).

suggests that the distribution of ethnic groups across unit types is likewise roughly proportional.

Table 1.1: Unit Type Balance Table

	Income	Religiosity	Educational Attainment	Age	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Total
Stay-in	4.23	1.93	4.59	41.8	54	14	13	82
Stay-out	3.99	2.03	4.37	39.7	52	20	10	83
PR	0.40	0.52	0.50	0.30	0.85	0.30	0.53	

Despite the uniform service length of two to two-and-a-half years, the experience of National Service varies dramatically between stay-in and stay-out units. Conscripts from stay-in units are exposed to substantially greater levels of socialization and contact than are conscripts from stay-out units. Conscripts from stay-in units are immersed in the National Service treatment 24 hours a day for 7 days a week for significant portions of their service period, which fully disrupts and displaces previous patterns of life. Stay-out unit conscripts, by contrast, experience National Service much like a 40 hour per week job that allows them to live at home and maintain many elements of their previous social patterns. As a consequence, the socialization experienced by stay-in unit conscripts is much greater than that experienced by their stay-out unit colleagues. This difference is even more pronounced in terms of contact. Interactions between conscripts from stay-out units approximate those of a typical workplace, where professional and public sphere norms structure behavior. Contact between conscripts in stay-in units is vastly more intimate due to the cohabitation in barracks; conscripts sleep shoulder to shoulder in shared halls, they wake together, shower together,

brush teeth together, eat together, train together, and relax together. Stay-out unit conscripts not only lack the additional contact and socialization that their stay-in colleagues receive, but perhaps more importantly, they also remain immersed in the social structures that they grew up in, since the vast majority live at home during their period of service. Put differently, National Service structures both the public and private spheres of stay-in unit conscripts, while stay-out unit conscripts are largely able to maintain their prior private sphere existences. The difference between the stay-in and stay-out experiences, then, is not just about the amount of time together spent as a unit, but also about the quality of the time spent together.[5]

I isolate the effects of Singapore's National Service through the difference between conscripts who receive an intensive treatment (stay-in units) and those who receive a more moderate treatment (stay-out units). The main disadvantage of this research design is that it captures only a portion of the National Service's effects; the outcome I measure is the difference between *intensive* and *moderate* treatments of socialization and contract, rather than *intensive* and *no* treatment of the mechanisms, as is the case in most policy analysis. The consequence of this is two-fold: first, it increases the likelihood that we will find no effect of National Service, even if in actuality there is an effect (type II error). Second, the magnitude of the effect we do capture will be just a portion of the full effect of National Service.

4. Data, Measurement, and Empirical Tests

The data for this analysis come from a survey conducted in Singapore in late 2012 and 2013. The survey has innovative features both in terms of its approach to measurement (it

[5] The appendix illustrates the typical difference between stay-in and stay-out experiences through a stylized 24-hour schedule.

relies on embedded experiments, vignettes, and other indirect measures of identity) and mode of administration (Android tablets, which allow extensive randomization and reduce bias). It was available in three languages and was administered by local university students. We used a stratified probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling strategy to ensure a representative sample. Malay and Indian ethnic minorities were slightly oversampled. Based on comparisons with published data on key observables like income, age, language preference, and income, the sample does not have any significant bias. In total, Chinese respondents make up 62% of the sample, Malay 17%, and Indian 17%, with a small remainder identifying as 'other'. The Department of Statistics in Singapore gives the following demographic data for 2012: Chinese (74%), Malay (13%), and Indian (9%). Additional details on the survey and data can be found in the online appendix. The survey was complimented by extensive focus group discussions and interviews.

Measuring identity is inherently problematic due to its unobservable, multidimensional, and contextual nature (Abdelal *et al* 2009). The most immediate problem to contend with is social desirability bias. This becomes a risk in contexts where concerted efforts have been made to socialize populations in particular issue areas. The inculcation of 'correct' and socially desirable responses to specific – especially sensitive – situations makes it nearly impossible to discern between responses motivated by social desirability and those motivated by genuine underlying beliefs. We might expect Singapore to be subject to this bias, given that the population has been socialized from an early age to display loyalty to the Singaporean identity and to eschew openly professing potentially divisive identities. The second challenge derives from the subjective and context specific nature of identity. As argued, the intention of nation building programs like the one in Singapore is typically not to transform *all* facets of

identity or obviate ethnic identity entirely, but rather to increase the salience of a civic national identity in the public sphere and in matters concerning the public good. This requires that measurements of identity be situated in clear contexts with theoretical and practical importance.

I address these issues by measuring identity indirectly through its observable attitudinal and behavioral manifestations using vignettes and experiments. Given the multidimensional and context dependent nature of identity, I employ three dependent variables, each of which can be seen as unique slices of a broader question: can Singapore's National Service reduce the potential divisiveness of ethnic diversity? The tests are designed to minimize the risk of measurement bias and capture contextualized manifestations of ethnic and civic identities that have clear significance to social, political, and economic interactions. The sample for all three tests is limited to males who have completed National Service.

The first dependent variable (DV1) measures *intra-ethnic cohesion*, specifically, the tendency of respondents to close ranks with coethnics in the face of challenges, thereby excluding co-nationals from different ethnic groups. Intra-ethnic cohesion is the result of making the in-group / out-group (*us* and *them*) distinction along ethnic lines, which results not only in social and political fragmentation at aggregate levels, but also in interpersonal bias at individual levels (Tajfel and Turner 1986). I test whether respondents from stay-in units have a lower tendency towards intra-ethnic cohesion than members of stay-out units.

The second dependent variable (DV2) directly measures the relative strength of *ethnic and civic identities*. Respondents are asked to imagine that their neighbor moves away, after which they are presented with a series of potential new neighbors to choose between. One of the choices is between a coethnic family from Malaysia (with which ethnocultural attributes are

shared) and a non-coethnic family from Singapore (with which Singaporean civic attributes are shared). The preference for neighbor, then, functions as a proxy measure for the relative strength of ethnic and civic identities. I test whether respondents from stay-in units have a lower propensity to prefer the non-Singaporean coethnic relative to respondents from stay-out units.

The third dependent variable (DV3) uses an embedded experiment and a difference-in-difference design to measure ethnic bias in *tolerance and perceptions of justice*. Specifically, it measures the extent to which respondents punish non-coethnics differently than coethnics for an identical crime using. I test whether the level of ethnic bias is lower in respondents from stay-in units than from stay-out units. This experimental nature of this approach is highly resistant to social desirability bias, so it functions as an effective robustness check.

DV1: The Effect of National Service on Intra-Ethnic Cohesion

Does Singapore's National Service reduce the propensity of individuals to close ranks with coethnics in public settings with matter of political importance? This type of intra-ethnic cohesion increases the divisive potential of ethnic diversity and presents significant risks when it is an automated and reflexive response. If National Service is effective at strengthening the relative salience of civic identities at the expense of ethnic identities in the public sphere, we should observe a lower tendency to advocate intra-ethnic cohesion among respondents from stay-in units relative to those from stay-out units.

H1: Respondents who completed National Service in stay-in units have a lower tendency towards intra-ethnic cohesion in matters of public significance than those who completed National Service in stay-out units.

The dependent variable is based on a survey question that is embedded in a broader set of questions on social cohesion. After answering questions on social cohesion among other social groups, respondents are asked whether they think they would be better off if their own ethnic group also stuck together more frequently.[6] To simplify interpretation, I dichotomize the dependent variable: I code *Ethnic Cohesion* '1' when respondents say that their ethnic group should 'always', 'often', or 'sometimes' stick together "when it comes to politics and other important public issues." I code it '0' when respondents say that their ethnic group should 'rarely' or 'never' stick together. I use two models to test the hypothesis. Model 1 is a treatment only model. Model 2 is the treatment plus controls for age, income, educational attainment, and the two minority ethnic groups.[7] *NS stay-in unit* is a dummy denoting a stay-in unit; the reference group is stay-out unit. *Age* spans from 20 to 64 years old, though I code it in 5 year increments to facilitate interpretation. *Income* captures monthly income on a scale of '1' (lowest)

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[6] The full text of the question is as follows: *Some people think that they would be better off if their ethnic group stuck together more often when it comes to politics or other important public issues, because the group's interests might be better protected. Do you think that the [Chinese / Malay / Indian / your ethnic group] in Singapore should stick together when it comes to politics and other important issues? A)* No*, they don't need to stick together; B) They rarely need to stick together; C) They should sometimes stick together; D) They should often stick together; E) They should always stick together.* [Note that the question is modified based on the ethnicity of the respondent, so that Chinese respondents see "Chinese" in the question, etc.] Respondents reported approaching the question very reflexively during focus group discussions, which mitigates the concern of social desirability bias. Note, however, that if present, social desirability would bias against findings, which would shrink the size of the measured effect.

[7] Four respondents declined to report their age, which leads to them being dropped from the model with controls for age. Replacing the missing values with mean age has no discernable effect on findings.

to '8' (highest). *Education* is educational attainment, coded on a scale from '1' (lowest) to '6' (highest). *Malay* and *Indian* are dummy variables coded one for respondents from those groups, leaving the majority Chinese group as the reference group. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, I use a logit model. An ordered logit model estimates similar effects (not shown), suggesting that the findings are not an artifact of the cut-off point. Table 1.2 reports marginal effects.

Table 1.2: Effects of Unit-Type on Intra-Ethnic Cohesion

	(1)	(2)
	Intra-ethnic cohesion	Intra-ethnic cohesion
Stay-in unit	-0.163**	-0.164**
	(0.077)	(0.081)
Age		-0.012
		(.016)
Income		0.010
		(0.026)
Education		-0.055
		(0.052)
Malay		.262**
		(0.100)
Indian		-0.078
		(0.117)
Observations	165	161

Robust standard errors in parentheses
Logit model, marginal effects shown
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

We see from Table 2 that respondents from stay-in units are significantly less likely to advocate intra-ethnic cohesion than are their former colleagues from stay-out units. This result is robust to controls for age, household income, educational attainment, and the main ethnic

groups of Singapore. Respondents from stay-in units are 16.3% less likely (model 1) than respondent from stay-out units to advocate intra-ethnic cohesion (16.4% in model 2 with full controls). While it narrowly misses conventional levels of significance, education also appears to reduce the tendency towards ethnic cohesion at a rate of roughly 5.5% per level of attainment. This corresponds to a reduction of roughly 15% when moving from a primary school to university education. Interestingly, Malay respondents are significantly more likely to advocate ethnic cohesion than are respondents from both the majority Chinese group and the Indian minority group. Clearly, National Service unit-type is a strong predictor of attitudes towards intra-ethnic cohesion. We can safely interpret this as evidence that National Service has a substantial impact on shaping the salience of ethnic identity in a theoretically and practically relevant manner.

It is particularly noteworthy that since the average age of respondents was around 40 years old, we are in most cases measuring the effects of National Service a significant time after the treatment. This suggests that the effects are remarkably durable. A series of robustness checks substantiates this assessment.[8] There are several explanations for the durability of the National Service treatment, including the formative age of conscripts at the time of service and the fact that conscripts are liable to be activated for reservist duties of up to 40 days per year until age 40 (50 for officers). Interestingly, there is no indication of heterogeneous treatment effects, meaning that National Service appears to have roughly comparable effects on conscripts from each ethnic group.[9]

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[8] Substituting generation dummies (20s, 30s, 40s, etc.) for the age variable does not substantially alter the results. Testing for interaction effects using the generation dummies likewise does not suggest substantial decay of treatment effects, though the relatively small sample prevents definitive conclusions.

[9] I test for interaction effects. While the relatively small sample size does not allow me to reach definitive conclusions, there is no indication of heterogeneous treatment effects. The coefficients are

It is useful to briefly discuss the implications of this finding. What we measure is the difference in outcomes between conscripts who were exposed to an intensive form of National Service (stay-in unit) and those who were exposed to a more moderate form (stay-out unit). While I have no way of accurately estimating the total effect size due to the lack of reliable control group (there are no comparable males who receive no National Service treatment), there are strong indications that the moderate stay-out treatment does not substantially alter identity.[10] This suggests that simply bringing adults together in a professional environment – even for 8 hours per day over the course of two years – is not enough to meaningfully alter their identities in lasting ways. That transformative effect results from removing them from their private spheres and immersing them in a new and highly controlled environment.

DV2: The Effect of National Service on Civic Identity

This test is a direct measure of the relative strength of civic national identity. Respondents are asked to imagine that their neighbor moves away and are told that people often have preferences for who they would like to have as neighbors.[11] They are then shown seven pairs of families and asked to express their preference for new neighbors in each pair.

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also in the expected direction when I restrict the sample to respondents from each ethnic group and then estimate the relationship between unit type and the dependent variable.

[10] Two observations support this assertion. First, few focus group and interview participants from stay-out units described their experience as highly formative. Most suggested a high degree of continuity during their period of service, largely as a result of living at home. Second, the effect size captured by using the difference between unit types is already the strongest predictor of intra-ethnic cohesion. It is hardly plausible that moving from no treatment to moderate (stay-out unit) treatment would have a similar effect size as moving from moderate (stay-out) to intense (stay-in), as this would make the total effect significantly greater than any other factor tested by a large margin.

[11] The full question reads as follows: *"Good relationships with neighbors are an important part of a healthy community. People often have preferences about who they would like to live near, sometimes for practical reasons like shared experiences, language, or culture. Imagine that the neighbor who lives next to you moves out. Who would you prefer to have as your new neighbor?"*

To reduce the risk of bias, the first several pairs are not contentious. For example the first choice is a between a Chinese family from Beijing, China, and a Singaporean Chinese family. The next choice is between a European family from England and a family from the Philippines. After several further easy pairs, respondents are given the difficult choice between a coethnic family from Malaysia with whom they likely share ethnocultural attributes like mother tongue, religion, traditional culture, and physical attributes, and a non-coethnic family from Singapore with whom them share civic attributes.[12] If Singapore's National Service is effective at inculcating a strong civic identity that supersedes ethnic identities in the public sphere, we would expect respondents from stay-in units to have a relatively lower preference for the coethnic Malaysian family over the non-coethnic Singaporean family.

H2: Respondents who completed National Service in stay-in units are relatively less likely than respondents from stay-out units to prefer a shared ethnic identity over a shared civic identity when choosing new neighbors.

The dependent variable *Coethnic Preference* is dichotomous, coded '1' when respondents prefer a coethnic family from Malaysia over a non-coethnic family from Singapore. The other variables are identical to those from the previous model. Given the dichotomous nature of the DV, I use a logit model with robust standard errors. Table 1.3 below reports marginal effects.

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[12] For example, an Indian respondent would get the choice between an ethnic Indian family from Malaysia and an ethnic Chinese family from Singapore. It should be noted that the ethnic Indian and Chinese communities in the Malay Peninsula (Singapore and Malaysia) have developed cultures that are highly distinct from those in their ancestral homelands. Furthermore, the political border between Singapore and Malaysia—which splits many families—arguably does not have a substantial impact on local Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnocultural attributes.

Table 1.3: Effects of Unit-Type on Strength of Civic Identity

	Coethnic Neighbor	Coethnic Neighbor
Stay-in units	-0.129*	-0.143*
	(0.075)	(0.076)
Age		-0.003
		(0.015)
Income		0.030
		(0.023)
Education		-0.008
		(0.045)
Malay		0.073
		(0.104)
Indian		-0.220*
		(0.093)
Observations	165	161

Robust standard errors in parentheses
Logit model, marginal effects shown
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Models 1 and 2 provide strong support for the hypothesis that Singapore's National Service has been effective at increasing the strength of a unifying civic national identity. In the treatment-only model 1, we see that respondents from stay-in units are almost 13% less likely to prefer a coethnic Malaysian over a non-coethnic Singaporean as a neighbor, relative to respondents from stay-out units. Model 2 uses full controls, which slightly increase the magnitude and significance of the **stay-in unit** dummy. Educational attainment plays no clear role in this tendency. While it just misses conventional levels of significance, there are indications of a positive relationship between income levels and propensity to choose coethnic neighbors. It is also interesting to note that respondents from the Indian minority group are far more likely to prefer (by 22%) non-coethnic Singaporean neighbors over coethnic

Malaysian neighbors, relative to the majority Chinese or minority Malay ethnic groups. Similar to the first test, there is no indication of significant decay in the effects of National Service.

DV3: The Effect of National Service on Ethnic Bias in Tolerance and Justice

Does Singapore's National Service reduce ethnic bias in the areas of tolerance and justice? Tolerance of difference has widely been recognized as a necessary condition for a liberal society, particularly in the presence of substantial diversity. How do we determine whether Singapore's National Service is effective at inculcating the civic ideal of unbiased tolerance and justice? Given the sensitivity of this topic, direct questions will likely elicit social desirability bias, as few respondents would willingly admit, for example, that they would punish a perpetrator more or less harshly for any given crime depending on the perpetrator's ethnicity. Using experimental methods and randomization allows us to overcome this threat. I embed the following vignette into the survey that describes a white-collar crime in which a wealthy perpetrator has cheated on taxes:

> [NAME], a 46 year old businessman, owns a successful import business that has made him quite wealthy. A recent audit of his company revealed that he has cheated on his taxes in the past. It is estimated that he paid about 50,000 dollars too little in taxes. The court has required [NAME] to repay the taxes and has imposed a fine of 5,000 dollars. How long, if at all, do you think he should be sent to prison?

I then ask respondents to assess the most fair and appropriate punishment for that crime. The vignette explains that the perpetrator was given a fine, but allows respondents to prescribe a prison sentence of between two weeks and ten years, as they deem appropriate. To capture the role of ethnicity in the assessment of justice, I randomize the name of the perpetrator, which acts as an indirect identifier of their ethnicity. In other words, for roughly $1/3^{rd}$ of respondents, the vignette will describe a perpetrator with a Chinese name, for $1/3^{rd}$ a

Malay name, and for the final 1/3rd an Indian name. This allows us to directly measure the effect of ethnicity on the perception of justice *for groups* of respondents. Imagine the following example as an illustration: If we gave this question to 300 Chinese respondents, roughly 100 would see the scenario with a Chinese perpetrator, a further 100 with a Malay perpetrator, and the remaining 100 with an Indian perpetrator. If justice was blind, we would expect the average level of punishment prescribed to be the same across all three groups, because the ethnicity of the perpetrator was not a factor in the assessment of the appropriate punishment. Conversely, if ethnicity was highly salient and a decisive factor in the assessment of justice, we would expect to see differences in the average level of punishment prescribed between the three groups. The most likely outcome, as predicted by the Social Identity Theory, is that the negative bias shown towards (out-group) non-coethnics would result in harsher punishments for Malay or Indian perpetrators. I use this method to test whether Singapore's National Service effectively reduces ethnic bias in the assessment of justice.

H3: Respondents who completed their National Service in stay-in units have less ethnic bias in their assessments of justice than respondents from stay-out units.

The dependent variable is *Punishment*, which is on a 10-point scale ranging from '1' for no prison time to '10' for 10 years prison time. Prison time roughly doubles between each point on the scale. The main explanatory variable is *Coethnic*, which is a dummy that is coded '1' for responses where the respondent and the perpetrator are from the same ethnic group (for example, a Chinese respondent and a Chinese perpetrator). The reference group are those responses where the respondent and the perpetrator are from different ethnic groups (for

example, a Malay respondent and an Indian perpetrator). If there is no ethnic bias in the assessment of justice, we would expect the *Coethnic* dummy to be insignificant, since *on average*, responses from coethnic dyads would not be significantly different from non-coethnic dyads. On the other hand, if there is significant ethnic bias in the assessment of justice, we would expect the *Coethnic* dummy to be significant, as *on average* the punishment prescribed for a coethnic perpetrator would be different than for non-coethnic perpetrators. I run two separate models, one for Stay-In unit respondents and the other for Stay-Out unit respondents. Despite the categorical nature of the dependent variable, the relatively large range of choices (1-10) reduces the risk of bias, allowing me to use a standard OLS model with robust standard errors. An ordered logit model produces similar results.

Table 4.1: Effect of Unit-Type on Bias in Tolerance

	(1)	(2)
	Stay-in Punishment	Stay-out Punishment
Coethnic perpetrator	-0.309	-0.876*
	(0.511)	(0.510)
Constant	3.612***	4.104***
	(0.316)	(0.299)
Observations	82	83
R-squared	0.005	0.037

OLS regression, robust standard errors

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

These results are again suggestive of a clear National Service unit effect. The *Coethnic* dummy for stay-out unit respondents is negative and statistically significant, meaning that *on average* respondents prescribed a more lenient punishment to coethnic perpetrators (by .87 units, which corresponds to roughly one month) than non-coethnic perpetrators for the identical crime. The *Coethnic* dummy for stay-in unit respondents, on the other hand, is not significant, and while negative, the coefficient is considerably smaller. In other words, we have evidence that, *on average*, there is greater bias in the assessment of justice from stay-out unit respondents than for stay-in unit respondents. Examining predicted effects at the margins provides further insight. Respondents from stay-in units and stay-out units prescribe roughly similar levels of punishment to coethnic perpetrators (3.30 and 3.23) respectively. We see divergence, however, in the predicted effects for non-coethnic perpetrators, where the prescribed punishment levels are 3.61 and 4.10 respectively. In other words, it appears that respondents from both unit types punish coethnics similarly, but stay-out unit respondents punish non-coethnics relatively more harshly than do stay-in unit respondents.

Unlike the first two tests that directly capture attitudinal manifestations of identity, this test utilizes a difference-in-difference design that captures variation in responses across the two unit types to a randomly assigned treatment. As this nuanced approach produces smaller effect sizes, the limited statistical power of the small sample size is more apparent, principally in that the difference between the effects for stay-in and stay-out unit respondents is not statistically significant at conventional levels, despite the strongly suggestive findings. I run a power test using simulations to determine the predicted sample size necessary to reach

significance given the current parameters of the two models.[13] Figure 1.2 below illustrates the results. The *y-axis* shows the t-statistic of the difference in responses to the treatment between respondents of the two unit types. The *x-axis* captures sample size and demarcates the current sample size of 165 observations. The dots indicate the point estimates from the simulations, to which a line is fitted for ease of interpretation. We estimate that the model would be adequately powered to detect a difference in effect sizes at the 90% confidence level (t-statistic = 1.645) with approximately 650 responses. Reaching the 95% confidence level (t-statistic = 1.96) would require roughly 1,000 responses.

[13] First, I assumed that the coefficients from the model were the "true" population parameters of interest. I set these values and then used them with two randomly created binary variables, one representing the treatment variable and the other representing the in-group, out-group condition. Since these binary variables are both coded 1 approximately 25% of the time, I took draws from two binomial distributions *n* times with a probability of .25. I used these random variables and their interaction as the observed data with the "true" model coefficients to generate y data with error. Error for the simulation was drawn from a normally distributed variable with mean 0 and standard deviation of 1.69. The 1.69 value was the spread that generated a similar t-statistic for simulations in which n=165, the number of observations in the original study. I repeated this simulation 1000 times for different numbers of observations such that n varied from 100 to 1000. Not surprisingly, as n increases, it becomes more and more likely that a statistically significant relationship will be found.

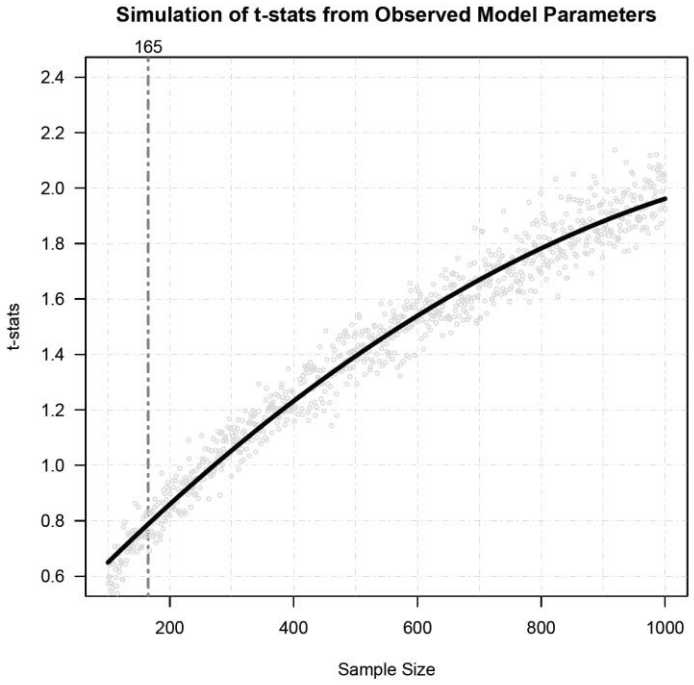

Figure 1.2: Tolerance Experiment Simulation

Reaching full confidence in the findings of this test clearly requires additional respondents. Yet given the statistically significant *Coethnic* dummy for stay-out respondents, in conjunction with the findings from the intra-ethnic cohesion (DV1) test and the test of civic vs. ethnic preferences (DV2), this test provides additional confidence in the assertion that the National Service program has substantial and durable effects on the identities of conscripts.

5. Conclusion

This project investigates whether states can use public policy programs to meaningfully shape the identities of their citizens in ways that reduce the divisive potential of ethnic diversity. Important works central to the social science canon like Weber (1976) and Anderson (1991) assume that this is feasible, yet I add two complicating conditions increasingly relevant

to countries around the world. First, can policy meaningfully engineer identities in the relative short term; in other words, can it have a substantial impact over the course of years, rather than decades or centuries? Second, can policy alter identities in complicated social systems without cross-cutting cleavages where ethnic diversity is the result of migration from dissimilar parts of the world? This paper focuses on Singapore's National Service program for insight into those questions. Three sets of empirical tests strongly suggest that the program has been successful at inculcating unifying civic ideals that can supersede ethnic divisions, thereby fundamentally reducing the divisive potential of ethnic diversity.

These results rely on overcoming two important methodological challenges, namely causal identification of the National Service program and meaningfully measuring ethnic and civic identities. The identification strategy used to enable causal inferences relies on exogenous variation in the intensity of the National Service treatment between two types of units -- specifically, between stay-in units that live on base and receive the full intensity of the program, and stay-out units that live off of base and receive a conscribed treatment intensity. In all three empirical tests, respondents from stay-in units are measurably different from stay-out unit respondents in ways that have clear theoretical and practical importance. The first test demonstrated that respondents from stay-in units have a lower propensity to advocate intra-ethnic cohesion in matters of public importance, which we can think of as a necessary condition for the formation of ethnic divisions. The second test demonstrates the clear effect that the National Service program has on civic identities; when given the choice of new neighbors, respondents from stay-in units are relatively more likely to prefer a Singaporean family from a different ethnic group (with whom they share civic affiliations) than a Malaysian family from their own ethnic group (with whom they share ethnocultural attributes like mother

tongue, religion, and cultural traditions). The third test suggests respondents from stay-in units have less ethnic bias in their perceptions of tolerance and justice than do their former colleagues from stay-out units.

The evidence presented here strongly suggests that identity can be selectively shaped in the relatively short-term through carefully formulated public policy, even in difficult contexts. This has important consequences for other multiethnic states with similar patterns of ethnic diversity. The magnitude of the change produced by the National Service program is substantial. Given that this is a single program among several others, it suggests that a coherent and consistent policy approach can effect far-reaching change to the inter-ethnic dynamic of a country. The findings can also be read as support for the contact hypothesis under particular conditions, as well as the ability of civic national identities to subsume ethnic identities. The latter point is particularly relevant to the almost ubiquitous "who are we?" debates occurring throughout Western Europe and North America, as it suggests that reactionary attempts to shift national identities back towards the ethnocultural end of the spectrum will constrain the ability of civic identities to bridge ethnic divides.

The findings also provide insights into the conditions under which identity can be meaningfully and durably engineered. Most importantly, there is strong support that this process functions most effectively when policy creates an immersive environment in which the lines between private and public spheres are blurred. Simply bringing individuals into contact with one another without inducing a clear break with the previous patterns of social interaction appears to be insufficient to engender far-reaching change. This has strong policy implications, as relatively few policy areas beyond national service, education, and housing have the ability to create such environments. These environments are also likely to require

much more political will than parties in most democratic states are able to muster in the current climate where migration-induced diversity is among the most contentious of political issues.

Clearly Singapore is also an exceptional case; its small size, lack of rural hinterland, and powerful state gives it extraordinary penetration into society and a remarkable ability to shape social environments. The efficacy with which it has maintained the 'survival narrative'—which argues that Singapore faces existential threats on multiple fronts and so requires a strong state coupled with certain sacrifices on the part of the populace—also creates unique conditions. For one, fully open political competition and the unconstrained development of civil society have been hindered. This grants the state a greater capacity to dictate policy and shape the national identity, both of which face greater constraints in more liberal systems. Singapore's ability to maintain two years of universal male conscription for over four decades, during which time many countries have either reduced or entirely phased out mandatory military service in response to social and fiscal pressures, is a clear example of this. Nonetheless, Singapore certainly qualified as a difficult case following its independence due to the lack of cross-cutting cleavages in its population and the history of ethnic conflict. Furthermore, even if its National Service program is not directly transferable to other states, it does provide a clear demonstration of the potential of policy to alter identity, as well as important transferable insights into the conditions under which that potential can be maximized.

This study leaves several important questions unanswered. Foremost among these is the question of mechanisms. Singapore's National Service impacts identity primarily through intensive socialization and contact. These are closely related mechanisms, but understanding the relative importance of each could greatly facilitate the formulation of more widely implementable programs, both in the area of military service and in areas like education,

housing, and labor policy. The empirical tests used in this paper do not gain sufficient traction on the individual mechanisms to effectively disaggregate their relative effects. That remains an important task for further research. It is also unclear whether the transformative effect of the stay-in unit experience could be achieved in a substantially shorter time frame. Malaysia implemented a National Service program of its own in 2003 (*Program Latihan Khidmat Negara* - PLKN), which selects 20% of 18 year olds by lottery to complete three months of service. Much like with the stay-in units of Singapore's National Service, the PLKN program requires conscripts to live together in a camp, presumably exposing conscripts to the same socialization and contact mechanisms responsible for the transformation of Singapore's conscripts. Yet a preliminary analysis of data from Malaysia does not indicate a measureable difference in salience of identity among respondents who completed the PLKN and those from their age cohorts who were not selected. This contrast in efficacy between programs is interesting, but it is difficult to confidently ascribe responsibility for it to the variation in program length. The content of the socialization and the quality of the contact are likely to be as important as the duration of exposure to them. These variables likewise require study before policy recommendations on transferable elements of the program can be confidently made.

The principle motivation for this study is to add to the nuance with which the interaction between ethnic diversity and politics is studied. Excellent scholarship has demonstrated that relative group size plays a significant role in structuring how ethnic diversity affects social and political outcomes, but this scholarship has also largely neglected the ability of states to further shape the relationship between diversity and outcomes through concerted public policy efforts. Singapore's National Service program demonstrates how state policy can engineer identities in ways that have clear theoretical and practical significance. Specifically, it

demonstrates the capacity of socialization and contact mechanisms to shape the microfoundations of ethnic and civic identities in ways that reduce the divisive potential of ethnic heterogeneity.

6. Appendix

6.1 National Service:

Publicly available data on Singapore's National Service is relatively limited. Information on some aspects of it—including the BMT assignment process which leads to unit assignments—can be found on its comprehensive website (www.NS.sg). Several additional important details are discussed below.

The unit assignment process discussed in the paper is necessarily stylized, given the structural changes that have occurred over the nearly 45 years of NS. Nonetheless, the basic process, particularly as it concerns the relationship between health and unit type, have remained largely unchanged. Two important qualifications should be made. As discussed, the health evaluation is based on non-fitness related criteria. Conscripts who have no underlying health issues but do poorly in a discrete fitness test have been subject to extended versions of Basic Military Training (BMT). Currently, the length of added BMT is contingent on the score in a physical fitness test together with BMI. This means that overweight conscripts are likely to spend—on average—slightly longer in BMT than their physically fit colleagues. The relatively short duration of extra BMT (often in the vicinity of one month) in tandem with the relatively small amount of conscripts subject to extra BMT means that this is unlikely to impact findings in a discernable manner.

An additional noteworthy exception to the general process are a small portion of high achieving conscripts with strong academic backgrounds, who are selected for additional training to become specialists in the School of Infantry Specialists (SCS, formerly SISPEC) or officers in the Officer Cadet School (OCS). Following this additional training of 6 or 9 months respectively, specialists and officers are then also assigned into stay-in or stay-out units in

combat, technical, or service areas for the remainder of their service. An OCS conscript who is assigned to a stay-out unit will have been exposed to greater levels of socialization and contact (12 months) than most other conscripts from stay-out units (0 to 3 months). This is again not a significant concern, however, because this biases against my hypotheses and affects only a small portion of conscripts.

The distinction between stay-in and stay-out units is a frequently discussed but ultimately informal one. A portion of conscripts also describe their units as "shift" units, which alternate between living on base and living in the civilian world for the duration of their National Service. In many respects, the dynamic within these units resembles those from stay-out units, so I cluster them for the sake of the analysis. Any potential bias from this decision biases against my hypotheses, since it reduces the variation between the two treatments.

Below (Figure 1.3) is a stylized account of a typical service day for typical stay-in and stay-out unit conscripts (though as previously discussed, there is immense variation in experiences). Beyond the obvious difference in time spent together, a few things are noteworthy. First is the extent to which the stay-out unit schedule allows for maintenance of previous patterns of social interaction within the home and established social circles. Second is the qualitative difference in the collective tasks between the unit types. Whether informal like showering and sleeping together or formal like joint field exercises and physical drills, many of the tasks experienced in stay-in unit have a far greater capacity to bond conscripts together and socialize them towards a common identity than do the more pedestrian administrative and individual tasks performed within typical stay-out units.

Hour	Stay-in	Stay-out
00:00 – 00:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
01:00 – 01:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
02:00 – 02:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
03:00 – 03:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
04:00 – 04:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
05:00 – 05:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)
06:00 – 06:59	Morning drills	Sleep (home)
07:00 – 07:59	Shower, joint breakfast	Shower, breakfast (home)
08:00 – 08:59	Joint free time	Commute to base
09:00 – 09:59	Group field exercises	Office work
10:00 – 10:59	Group field exercises	Office work
11:00 – 11:59	Group field exercises	Office work
12:00 – 12:59	Joint lunch	Joint lunch
13:00 – 13:59	Joint free time	Office work
14:00 – 14:59	Partnered weapons training	Office work
15:00 – 15:59	Partnered weapons training	Office work
16:00 – 16:59	Sports and recreation	Office work
17:00 – 17:59	Sports and recreation	Commute to home
18:00 – 18:59	Shower, joint dinner	Free time (home)
19:00 – 19:59	National education class	Dinner (home)
20:00 – 20:59	Joint free time	Free time (home)
21:00 – 21:59	Joint free time	Free time (home)
22:00 – 22:59	Joint free time	Free time (home)
23:00 – 23:59	Sleep (base)	Sleep (home)

Figure 1.3: 24 Hour Schedule by Unit Type

6.2 Data:

Data collection for this project and a parallel project in Malaysia began in December 2012 and was completed in late 2013. Surveys were administered primarily using Android tablets. The data from this paper were collected using a stratified probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling strategy. The structure of housing in Singapore facilitates this approach. Over 80% of the population live in public housing (known as HDBs), which are divided into districts. Key demographic indicators for each district are available from the Housing

Development Board, which manages the housing program (HDB 2008). These indicators allow for stratification of HDB districts into four strata based on the average age and income of households in each district, which vary substantially based on when the districts were developed. Private housing constitutes a fifth stratum. I assigned a probability of selection to each stratum based on its proportion of Singapore's total number of households. Before data collection outings I used a random number generator to select a stratum, then again to select a district within that stratum (using PPS), and then a final time to select a block within that district. The team of enumerators then went door to door to administer the survey using Android tablets connected to the internet via local hotspots created by 3G modems and battery-powered routers or smartphones. Data were recorded for both successful and failed interviews.

Whenever possible, data collection teams consisted of five members, of which three were Chinese who speak Mandarin and some Chinese dialect, one was a Malay-speaking Malay, and one was a Tamil-speaking Indian. Where the identity of the household could be discerned from external features, a coethnic enumerator attempted to make contact. When it could not be discerned, the next available enumerator attempted contact. In total, enumerator and respondent were coethnics in roughly 60% of surveys completed. The survey was available in English, Mandarin, and Malay. Enumerators are undergraduate students from local universities. The survey includes a wide range of questions and embedded experiments on social, economic, and political issues, and took on average 34 minutes (sd = 11) to complete. While over 460 responses were collected, only about 1/3 of respondents completed National Service. This is due to the exclusion of females, citizen males who turned 18 before the

introduction of National Service in 1967, and current citizens who became naturalized after the age of 18.

The response rate for the survey was 40% when an enumerator was able to make contact with a household, with some variation across ethnic groups (Chinese 38%; Malay 45%; Indian 65%). I test for interviewer effects in each of the models in the empirical analysis by using a dummy for non-coethnic enumerator / respondent dyads. Those responses are not discernibly different from coethnic enumerator / respondent combinations, so I conclude that the combination of enumerator / respondent ethnicity does not bias responses. This is likely due to the fact that the survey is self-contained on the tablet, so enumerators typically do not see responses. This should also provide further protection against social desirability bias. Item non-response is low due to the structure of the survey on the tablet, as respondents reported feeling inclined to enter a response before advancing to the next question / page. Very few respondents (under 3%) aborted the survey after beginning it.

6.3 Singapore as a case:

Several issues must be addressed regarding the use of Singapore as a case. First, as is the case with all national histories, there are competing narratives in the case of Singapore. The history I present here is similar to the narrative endorsed by the state, which has been contested by some scholars. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in the nuances of historical interpretation. One main point of contention might be the extent to which Singapore faced instability due to ethnic tensions. While we may debate the significance of the ethnic conflicts in 1950 and 1964, it is clear that they occurred and it is clear that they increased tensions. Additionally, it is also clear that Singapore resembled Furnivall's (1942) plural society,

in which there was little meaningful interaction between ethnic groups at the mass level. There certainly was also no strong unifying identity that could act as an alternative to traditional identities. These suffice, I believe, to categorize Singapore as a 'difficult' case.

Second, the efficacy of Singapore's National Service program raises normative questions about the performance of the state and Singapore's dominant People's Action Party (PAP). These issues are likewise beyond the scope of this paper; my intention here is to establish whether and how Singapore's National Service program affects ethnic identity in meaningful ways, not to endorse or challenge the efficacy of the state. Third, Singapore is an exceptional case on many dimensions, which raises concerns about generalizability. Establishing the extent to which Singapore's NS program is transferable to other contexts is also beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I use the program to demonstrate the state's ability to shape identity in meaningful ways, even in difficult cases that lack natural cross-cutting cleavages. Beyond this, I use the case to provide initial insights into the conditions necessary for identity to be changed in profound ways.

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CHAPTER TWO:

How to Win a Lost Election: Malapportionment and Malaysia's 2013 General Election

Abstract:

Allegations of electoral irregularities loomed large prior to and following Malaysia's 13th General Election in May 2013. Yet while these irregularities elicited strong reactions domestically and internationally, they are unlikely to have played a significant role in shaping the election's outcome. Rather than how the game was played, it was the very rules of the game itself that are responsible for returning UMNO and its *Barisan Nasional* coalition into power for the 13th consecutive time, as Malaysia's electoral institutions quietly transformed the incumbent coalition's 4% deficit in the popular vote into a 20% winning margin of parliamentary seats. This is largely the result of substantial variation in the size of electoral districts, which had the effect of delivering parliamentary seats to *Barisan Nasional* with significantly fewer votes than were required by the opposition to secure its seats. This article has two primary aims. First, it seeks to better understand malapportionment in Malaysia by examining the degree of distortions at multiple institutional levels. It demonstrates these distortions to be exceptionally high from a comparative perspective. Second, it seeks to better

understand the factors responsible for the size variation of electoral districts, specifically the extent to which the non-partisan factors stipulated in the constitution can explain the variation. Several tests are conducted using new data on the density of voters in electoral districts. The results strongly indicate a partisan element to malapportionment. This creates an institutionalized bias against the opposition and risks increasing polarization in the Malaysian polity. In addition, by increasing the electoral influence of select districts, the ruling coalition is able to retain power with the support of an increasingly narrow segment of the electorate. This creates incentives to make policy decisions that primarily benefit that narrow coalition, even when those decisions alienate broad swathes of the population. Thus, malapportionment is an important component of the explanation for why the ruling coalition has continually implemented policies that politicize ethnic cleavages, despite the clear increase in ethnic tensions that have accompanied those policies.

Introduction:

Malaysia's incumbent *Barisan Nasional* ruling coalition was returned to power in the country's May 5th 2013 general elections for the 13th consecutive time, despite facing unprecedented pressure from a unified opposition. The election was arguably the first in Malaysia's history in which the outcome did not appear certain in the weeks preceding it. Perhaps as a function of the election's uncertainty, scrutiny of it in terms of both the underlying procedures and its execution reached unprecedented levels. The most visible manifestations of this were the widespread allegations of electoral irregularities both prior to and following the election. Although several of those allegations appear credible—most notably the flawed electoral rolls and indelible ink that could be easily removed—it is unlikely that they had a decisive effect on the outcome. Instead, is it Malaysia's electoral institutions that delivered the election to *Barisan Nasional* by transforming a 4% deficit in the popular vote into a 20% advantage in legislative seats for the incumbent coalition, mainly through levels of malapportionment that rank among the highest in the world. This article examines in detail the degree of malapportionment across several levels of Malaysia's political institutions. It finds them to be exceptionally high relative to international norms. It then examines the factors responsible for the district size variance and argues that partisan bias appears to play a substantial role. The consequences of this are numerous and include increased polarization and long-term instability of the political system itself. Malapportionment in Malaysia explains the recent general election outcome. As importantly, it provides significant insights into the institutional factors driving much of political development in Malaysia.

The first section of this article provides an overview of Malaysia's electoral institutions and briefly discusses how electoral institutions can be used to shape political outcomes. The

second section examines the extent of distortions in Malaysia's electoral institutions. The third section examines the causes of variation in electoral district size and assesses whether distortions are designed to bolster support for the incumbent coalition, rather than address more justifiable needs. The fourth section examines the consequences of malapportionment for Malaysia's political system.

1. Electoral Institutions:

Malaysia has relied on regular elections to constitute its government since gaining independence from the British in 1957.[1] The institutions governing these elections are modeled after the Westminster parliamentary system. The 222 members of Malaysia's *Dewan Rakyat* – the lower Parliamentary house which forms the government – are selected from single-member districts using plurality (SMP) rules (also referred to as first-past-the-post). As in all parliamentary systems, the political party or coalition with the majority of parliamentary seats forms the government. Since independence, Malaysian politics have been dominated by the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), which was formed to represent and protect the rights of Malaysia's indigenous Malay community. Together with its junior coalition partners (MCA – the Malaysian Chinese Association, and MIC – the Malaysian Indian Congress), UMNO-led coalitions, known as the Alliance until 1973 and *Basian Nasional* (BN) since then, have never held fewer than 60% of parliamentary seats.

Electoral systems can impact political outcomes through one of two broad avenues. First, electoral systems dictate who can and who cannot vote. Malaysia's nearly universal

[1] The nine states of peninsular (West) Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957 as the Federation of Malaya. In 1963, Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo (sometimes referred to as East Malaysia) together with Singapore joined the peninsular states to form the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore left the federation in 1965, leaving Malaysia with its current 13 state form.

enfranchisement of adult citizens limits the impact of this mechanism. The second major avenue is through the formula that determines how votes are translated into parliamentary seats (Taagepera and Shugart 1989). Systems that utilize multiple-member electoral districts and proportional representation (PR) rules tend to produce outcomes that closely reflect the popular vote. By contrast, single-member district plurality (SMP) systems as used in Malaysia are particularly sensitive to the nuances of electoral rules, as even subtle changes can significantly shape outcomes.

The process of delineating the boundaries of the districts that elect representatives to parliament can have a particularly strong effect on outcomes in SMP systems and can be easily manipulated for political advantage. In a practice known as gerrymandering, district boundaries are deliberately drawn to aid a particular party, for example, by strategically splitting a territory where an opposition has majority support and integrating those pieces into surrounding districts where the opposition's supporters will be in the minority. In addition to taking away opposition safe seats, entirely new electoral districts might also be created in areas that are likely to support the incumbent party, essentially manufacturing new incumbent safe seats. Malapportionment arises when districts are created in such a way that the number of voters per district varies substantially across districts. Since each district only sends one representative to the legislature, this has the effect of increasing the influence of voters in the smaller districts. Politically engineered malapportionment can institutionalize significant bias into an electoral system by reducing the level of popular support incumbent parties require to maintain control of power.

In Malaysia, the responsibility for proposing district boundary changes falls to the nominally independent Electoral Commission (EC), which is comprised largely of civil

servants appointed by the head of state following the advice of the Prime Minister. Delineation recommendations are submitted to the Prime Minister for amendment and must then be approved by a simple majority parliamentary vote, effectively politicizing the exercise (Sothi 1993). Creating additional districts requires a 2/3^{rds} parliamentary majority, which UMNO-led coalitions have always held prior to the 2008 general election. The 1956 Reid Commission recommended a stringent limit on inter- and intra-state district size variation to constrain disparities, but the limits were relaxed in 1962 and removed entirely in a 1973 constitutional amendment that vaguely endorsed an unspecified "measure of weightage" in favor of rural districts (Lim 2002). The EC has undertaken regular delineation exercises at intervals between eight to ten years since Malaysia's independence, making boundaries relatively dynamic over time. The number of districts has also significantly increased from 104 in the first post-independence general election in 1959 to 222 in 2013.

2. Malapportionment in Malaysia:

Since independence, Malaysia's electoral system has used malapportionment to increase the weight of rural votes. This has been justified on two fronts. First, low population density and limited infrastructure in rural areas impose constraints on the ability of representatives to reach their constituents, necessitating a relatively smaller number of rural constituents per representative to ensure adequate contact. Secondly, it has been argued that increasing the weight of rural votes is necessary to ensure the political domination of the Malay and non-Malay indigenous population (often called *bumiputera*, or 'sons of the soil)[2], who make

[2] *Bumiputera* – or "sons of the soil" – are recognized as Malaysia's indigenous population. Ethnic Malays make up a large majority of the *bumiputera* population, while ethnic Chinese and ethnic Indians are the largest minority groups at roughly 23% and 7% of the population.

up a disproportionately large portion of the rural population (Election Commission 1974, 1984). It should be noted that, while not undisputed, the principle of *bumiputera* political supremacy has wide support from across the political spectrum and was an integral part of the pre-independence negotiations between the British and elites from the dominant Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic groups. Despite the precedence of malapportionment in Malaysia, two areas require careful examination. The first is degree: while nearly all SMP systems have some level of malapportionment, excessive levels introduce significant normative and practical costs. The second concerns the reason for its usage: while it may be justifiable to utilize a limited measure of malapportionment to improve representative/constituent contact and bolster *bumiputera* representation, its partisan usage to entrench power is less defensible and introduces further risks.

Malaysia's 13th general election can for all intents and purposes be viewed as a two-party contest between the incumbent BN coalition and the opposition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) coalition, as virtually all electoral districts were contested by candidates from both sides.[3] Table 2.1 displays results of the popular vote, seat allocation, and PR margin for all of Malaysia, as well as for Peninsular and East Malaysia independently. Immediately evident is that PR won the popular vote by a strong margin. To put the result into perspective, PR's 4% popular vote margin at the national level is greater than the margin in 3 of the 4 last presidential elections in the United States, while its 7.7% margin in Peninsular Malaysia is greater than all but one US presidential election since 1984. Malaysia's electoral rules, however, turned this 4% PR margin into a nearly 20% *deficit* in terms of seat allocation.

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[3] The *Barisan Nasional* coalition is formally recognized by the Registrar of Societies. While this is not the case for the PR coalition, its three constituent parties – *Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR),* Democratic Action Party (DAP), and the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)* – coordinated campaigning efforts and seat allocations, acting as a *de facto* coalition.

Table 2.1: Vote Shares and Seat Allocations in Malaysia

	Barisan Nasional		Pakatan Rakyat		PR Margin	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
Total	47.4	59.9	50.9	40.1	3.5	-19.8
Peninsular Malaysia	45.6	51.5	53.3	48.5	7.7	-3.0
East Malaysia	51.5	84.2	33.1	15.8	-18.4	-68.4

Source: Election Commission data

The substantial disparity between BN's vote share and seat allocation indicates significant malapportionment. Samuels and Snyder (2001) propose a method for measuring malapportionment that enables a systematic comparison of Malaysia with other countries.[4] This formula yields a score of .1725 for Malaysia, which means that 17.25% of seats are allocated to districts beyond what an equitable share based on their number of voters would give them. Table 2.2 puts Malaysia's score into context by comparing it with lower chamber malapportionment in ten fully developed countries as well as nine countries roughly at or below Malaysia's level of development in terms of per capita GDP. Countries using SMP systems, like Malaysia, are bolded. Two observations are immediately evident. First, the level of malapportionment in Malaysia is significantly higher than in fully developed democracies, *as well as* in many countries below Malaysia's level of development. Second, Malaysia's level of malapportionment is not an inevitable consequence of using an SMP system, as several countries using similar systems rank among the lowest in terms of malapportionment.

[4] The formula is $MAL = (1/2)\sum \left| s_i - v_i \right|$ where s_i is seat share as a percentage of total legislative seats and v_i is vote share as a percentage of total voters for all districts.

Table 2.2: Malaysia's Malapportionment from Global Perspective

USA	**0.0144**	**Philippines**	**0.0144**
New Zealand	0.0163	Thailand	0.0455
Switzerland	0.0193	Sri Lanka	0.0483
Australia	0.0300	Mexico	0.0636
Germany	0.0344	**India**	**0.0684**
UK	**0.0456**	Turkey	0.0859
Japan	0.0462	Indonesia	0.1323
Austria	0.0643	**Malaysia**	**0.1725**
Canada	**0.0759**	**Zambia**	**0.1782**
Singapore	**0.0815**	**Ghana**	**0.1814**

To better understand the high level of malapportionment in Malaysia, it is useful to disaggregate it into subnational-level units. Table 2.3 shows malapportionment at the state level. The first column displays the percentage of Malaysia's 222 lower house seats that are allocated to each state. The second column displays the percentage of Malaysia's registered voters that are found in each state. The third column displays the degree of over- or under-representation in terms of lower legislature seats. The fourth column displays the percentage of popular vote for BN and determines sorting in descending order. For example, Johor has 26 seats allocated to it, which constitutes 11.71% of the total lower legislature seats. It has 12.15% of Malaysia's registered voters, however, so the state is under-represented by almost exactly one parliamentary seat. In other words, it has almost exactly one parliamentary seat less than it should, given its number of voters, if seats were allocated in proportion to their number of voters.

Table 2.3: Malaysia's Malapportionment at State Level

	% Seats	% Voters	Seat Diff	% BN
Sabah	11.71	7.61	9.1	64.0
Sarawak	13.96	8.20	12.8	62.7
Perlis	1.35	1.03	0.7	55.7
Pahang	6.31	5.57	1.6	55.6
Johor	11.71	12.15	-1.0	55.0
Melaka	2.70	3.32	-1.4	53.9
Negeri Sembilan	3.60	4.20	-1.3	52.7
Kedah	6.76	7.87	-2.5	51.5
Terengganu	3.60	4.71	-2.5	51.5
Kelantan	6.31	6.94	-1.4	46.3
Perak	10.81	10.53	0.6	45.3
Selangor	9.91	15.41	-12.2	40.6
WP Kuala Lumpur	5.41	6.11	-1.6	35.3
Penang	5.86	6.35	-1.1	32.2
Peninsular Malaysia	74.33	84.19	-21.9	45.6
East Malaysia	25.67	15.81	21.9	51.5

Source: Election Commission data

Table 2.3 provides several important insights. First, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak are highly overrepresented at the expense of Peninsular Malaysia. Based on the number of registered voters, 22 seats – nearly 40% of Sabah and Sarawak's current total – would need to be shifted from East Malaysia to Peninsular Malaysia for seat allocations to be equitable based on voter numbers. Second, even within Peninsular Malaysia there is significant variation in apportionment, with largely urbanized Selangor being particularly underrepresented. Third, there appears to be a strong political component to the malapportionment, as states in which BN received a high degree of support are overrepresented, while most states in which BN did relatively poorly are underrepresented.

The electoral district level yields further insights into the extent of malapportionment in Malaysia. Table 2.4 provides basic summary statistics for the 222 *Dewan Rakyat* districts in aggregate and by *Barisan Nasional*- and *Pakatan Rakyat*-held districts. The size disparity between the extremes is noteworthy, highlighted by the nearly tenfold difference in number of voters between the smallest district (Putrajaya with 15,791 voters) and the largest (Kapar with 144,159 voters), both located in the relatively urbanized Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area. Most consequential, perhaps, is the large difference in size between BN-held and PR-held districts; clearly the incumbent BN fared significantly better in smaller districts than its opponent.

Table 2.4: Malapportionment Summary Statistics

	smallest	25%	median	mean	75%	Largest
All districts	15,791	41,588	56,000	59,580	77,761	144,159
Barisan Nasional	15,791	32,324	43,876	46,624	57,268	101,041
Pakatan Rakyat	36,550	64,601	78,148	78,941	90,795	144,159

Source: Election Commission data

Just how much more successful BN was in smaller districts is illustrated in figure 1, which displays all 222 districts arranged in size from smallest to largest. BN districts are denoted by a dark grey filling, while PR districts are light grey. It is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which BN dominated in smaller districts, forming a nearly solid block for smallest 1/3rd of the district spectrum. In concrete terms, BN won all of the 37 smallest districts and won 83 of the 86 smallest districts. The middle 1/3rd of the district spectrum is mixed ground with a roughly equal proportion of BN and PR districts, while the largest 1/3rd of spectrum is composed primarily of PR districts.

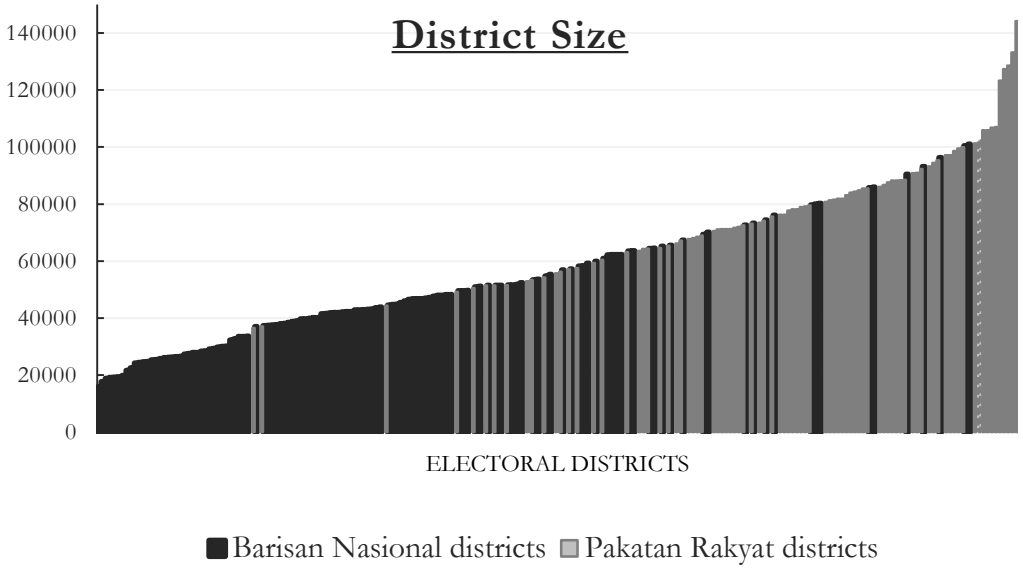

Figure 2.1: District Size by Coalition

3. Determining District Size:

What accounts for BN's domination in smaller districts? Is BN simply more effective at securing support in small electoral districts, or are the small districts themselves a product of districting manipulations designed to bias electoral outcomes towards BN? Closer inspection of the districts themselves, specifically of the factors driving the size variations, provides important insights. To simplify significantly, we might arrive at two general explanations to account for the malapportionment. The first is that district size is determined predominantly by non-partisan factors like population density and the proportion of *bumiputera* voters. This is the explanation generally endorsed by the state. In fact, as has been noted, giving low population density and *bumiputera* majority districts some limited measure of 'added weighting' in electoral contests receives in-principle support from many across the political spectrum. In this scenario, BN's domination of small districts may simply be the result of its

relative success at securing support from low population-density *bumiputera* majority areas. The second explanation is that district size is also determined by explicitly partisan factors, specifically that districting is done in such a way as to bias the outcome of elections in BN's favor by decreasing the district size in generally pro-BN areas *independently* of population density and *bumiputera* majority.

Making robust causal inferences about whether partisan manipulation is the primary cause of district size variation requires extensive data on how historical levels of support are related to boundary change in past delineation exercises. This analysis is beyond the scope of this article. Several simpler approaches, however, beginning with a visual examination of the data, can nonetheless provide compelling insights. If district size is determined predominantly by non-partisan factors, then we would expect to see three things: 1) a positive relationship between population density and district size; 2) a negative relationship between proportion of *bumiputera* voters (or at least, *bumiputera*-majority districts) and district size; and 3) no clear *independent* relationship between support for BN and district size. In other words, if district size is predominately determined by non-partisan factors, we would be unlikely to see significant size variation between two districts with equal population densities and bumiputera majorities, even if one district was strongly pro-BN and the other strongly pro-PR. On the other hand, if BN support is an important factor in district size, we might expect a pro-BN district to be significantly smaller than a pro-PR district, even if both were bumiputera majority and similar in terms of population density.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the relationship between district size (in number of registered voters) and the voter density (logged) for PR- and BN-held districts using data on district area

from Greenberg and Pepinsky (2013).[5] There is a strong positive relationship between voter density and the size of electoral districts, as urbanized high-density districts are clearly larger than their low-density rural counterparts. On the party dimension, PR secured a large portion of its seats in high-density districts, while BN dominated in low-density districts. The most interesting observations, however, are those from the mid-density districts that fall between five and seven on the logged scale (demarcated by the vertical lines), where both PR and BN hold a sizable number of seats. Despite the comparable voter densities in this cluster, many of BN's seats fall far below the 50k voter line, while nearly all of PR's seats fall above the line. Two observations follow from this: First, there seems to be significant variation in district size that is not explained by voter density, and second, BN's districts seem to be on average significantly smaller than PR districts *even at comparable levels of voter density*.

[5] Note that voter density is used rather than population density, as the argument concerns the density of *voters* rather than the density of residents. Voter density can be interpreted as the population density of registered voters.

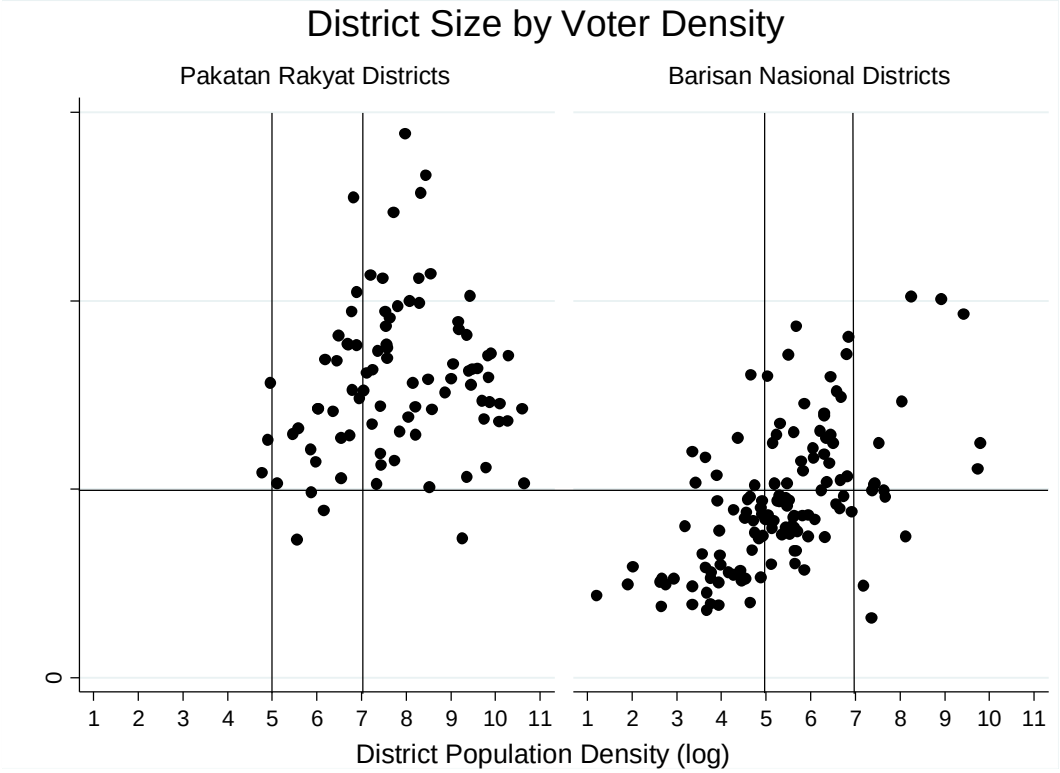

Figure 2.2: District Size by Voter Density

Available data allow us to run one additional set of tests to comprehensively examine district size variation in a multi-causal manner. Table 2.5 displays the results of five regression models. Each of the models estimates the relationship between a number of key explanatory variables and the dependent variable District Size, which captures the number of registered voters in each electoral district. Voter Density is a logged measure of the density of voters; as the units increase we move from low-density rural districts to high density, largely urbanized districts. Given the stated pro-rural bias in Malaysia, we would expect a negative relationship between this measure and the DV. Bumiputera is the percentage of *bumiputera* (Malay in Peninsular Malaysia; Muslim and non-Muslim Bumiputera in East Malaysia) in each district. We would expect this to have a negative effect on District Size. Note that it is correlated with

Voter Density, as rural areas tend to have a high proportion of *bumiputera*. East Malaysia is a dummy variable coded as 1 for districts in East Malaysia, which vary from larger Peninsular Malaysia in their demographic makeup and political dynamic. Barisan Nasional is a dummy variable coded as 1 for districts held by BN following GE13. Given the historic low level of support for BN in GE13 and the fact that BN has lost a large number of seats in the past two elections (while picking up very few new ones), I suggest that we can think of a post-GE13 BN-held seat as indicative of relatively robust moderate to high areal pro-BN sentiments which likely predate the previous delineation exercise of 2003 and the addition of a new district in 2006. Thus, if district size was explained predominantly by voter density and *Bumiputera* majority, rather than by pro-BN sentiments, we would not expect the Barisan Nasional dummy to be strongly correlated with district size. Model 1 includes all districts in Peninsular and East Malaysia, while Model 2 is restricted to Peninsular Malaysian districts. Model 3 is limited to all *bumiputera*-majority districts, while Model 4 is limited to *bumiputera*-majority districts in Peninsular Malaysia. Model 5 uses state level fixed effects. All models use OLS regression with robust standard errors.

Table 2.5: District Size Models

District Size	(1) Voters	(2) Voters	(3) Voters	(4) Voters	(5) Voters
Voter Density (log)	3,262***	3,672***	3,354***	3,388***	3,896***
	(838.0)	(1,054)	(830.2)	(1,167)	(934.5)
Bumiputera	28.73	44.30			-68.95
	(55.17)	(60.99)			(70.78)
East Malaysia	-17,784***		-15,820***		
	(2,470)		(2,502)		
Barisan Nasional	-20,457***	-21,019***	-23,174***	-23,815***	-16,955***
	(3,363)	(3,759)	(3,799)	(4,064)	(3,144)
Constant	53,827***	50,333***	56,860***	57,079***	54,633***
	(7,957)	(9,734)	(6,706)	(8,979)	(9,021)
Fixed Effects	no	no	no	no	yes
Observations	222	165	162	114	222
R-squared	0.567	0.397	0.599	0.426	0.687

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Looking at Model 1, we see that there is a strong relationship between District Size and Voter Density; as Voter Density increases by one unit on the logged scale, districts gain roughly 3,250 additional voters. The percentage of Bumiputera in a district does not have a statistically significant independent effect on district size. The East Malaysia dummy is highly significant and negative, meaning that at comparable levels of voter density and *bumiputera* percentage, districts in Sabah and Sarawak have roughly 17,750 fewer voters than Peninsular districts. Lastly, the Barisan Nasional dummy is highly significant. This tells us that even when holding the effects of district Voter Density and Bumiputera percentage constant, BN-held districts have on average over 20,000 fewer voters than comparable PR districts. Limiting the analysis only to Peninsular districts (Model 2), to *bumiputera*-majority districts in all of Malaysia

(Model 3) and Peninsular Malaysia alone (Model 4), or using state-level fixed effects (Model 5), does not change that fundamental finding: in each model, BN-held districts are in the order of 20k voters smaller than we would predict based on their voter densities and percentage of *bumiputera*. What conclusions can we draw from these results? First, a substantial portion of variation in district size is clearly being driven by something other than voter density or *bumiputera* majority alone. Second, support for BN is highly correlated with smaller district sizes, even after controlling for voter density. If we believe that current BN support is a reasonable proxy for pre-delineation areal BN support, then this finding is strongly indicative of significant partisan manipulation of district boundaries designed to entrench BN power and fundamentally bias against the opposition. But even if we dismiss the utility of current BN support as a proxy for historic levels of areal support, it is difficult to conceive of credible alternatives to the partisan manipulation explanation, especially in light of the existing work that uses alternative approaches to reach the same conclusion (see especially Ong and Welsh 2005; Wong *et al* 2010).

4. Consequences of Malapportionment:

Single-member district plurality systems always produce some level of malapportionment. But typically the distortions are minor and it is exceedingly rare that the party which wins the popular vote doesn't take power. In the rare instances when this does occur, the popular vote is typically split almost equally between parties, leaving neither contestant the decisive winner. Malaysia's 13th general election cements the country as an absolute outlier by comparison. Its electoral system allowed the incumbent BN to win a comfortable 20% margin of parliamentary seats while *losing* the popular vote by a significant

4% margin. This level of distortion carries several consequences. From a normative perspective, the electoral system in its current form fundamentally violates the 'one-person, one-vote' principle central to democratic theory. To be clear, while limited distortions may be defensible under particular circumstances, allowing a single vote from Malaysia's smallest district to be more influential than nine votes from the largest district located in the order of 50 kilometers away cannot be reconciled with the basic requirements of democratic theory, particularly when that distortion appears to be driven primarily by partisan bias.

The distortions created by the electoral system also have a number of practical consequences. Since Malaysia's high degree of malapportionment greatly amplifies the influence of voters in small districts, BN does not need to reach beyond a relatively narrow segment of society to maintain a simple parliamentary majority. This reduces the government's incentives to pursue genuine reconciliation with broad segments of the fractured population, especially if those efforts risk alienating key voting blocs. The most visible manifestations of this are the continued mobilization of ethnic identity and rhetoric advocating *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy). Both of these are unquestionably deleterious to inter-ethnic relations, but appear effective in delivering vote to BN in stronghold districts. The prospects for any meaningful reform under BN—whether curtailing particularistic economic policy or moderating ethnic rhetoric—are improbable so long as over-represented voters remain weary of reforms. In essence, the magnitude of malapportionment in Malaysia enervates the power dividing dynamic of SMP systems that Horowitz (1985) and Roeder (2005) argue promotes compromise and provides stability to heterogeneous polities, as incentives to implement broadly inclusive policies dissipate as the electoral system concentrates influence in the voices of a narrow demographic.

An even more concerning scenario exists: if the level of malapportionment renders a PR electoral victory impossible short of extraordinary circumstances, then political stakes on both sides of the spectrum amplify substantially. Occluded from access to power through the ballot box over the long-term, disenfranchisement from institutionalized politics would likely increase among opponents of BN, as would the incentives to resort to extra-institutional channels. On BN's side, if political survival can be assured exclusively by securing the support of a narrow voting bloc, that support may be pursued at all costs, even if those include strategically deepening societal divisions. It is debatable whether the electoral system's distortions have crossed this threshold, but it is clear that current level of malapportionment would require an overwhelming advantage in the popular vote for PR to overcome the institutional bias against it. More concretely, the smallest 112 seats – enough to secure a parliamentary majority – contain less than 1/3rd of all voters. Of those smallest seats, roughly 90% were won by BN in GE13, of which fewer than 10% were won by a margin of less than 8%. Additionally, just under half of those seats are from the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, where a distinctive dynamic of highly personalistic politics makes penetration by PR candidates difficult. This degree of institutionally manufactured partisan entrenchment introduces a substantial risk of instability into the Malaysian political system over the long-term. Given the lack of EC independence, the prospects for significant reductions in levels of malapportionment in upcoming delineation exercises are limited, since BN has few incentives to endorse such a move but would incur substantial risks through it. Yet while an abrupt departure from the status quo is unlikely, the demographic shifts brought on by continued urbanization will have the effect of incrementally adding to malapportionment. The only viable

long-term escape from this trap is to restore the independence of the EC and reintroduce limits on intra- and inter-state malapportionment.

5. Conclusion:

Malaysia's incumbent *Barisan Nasional* coalition emerged victorious from the country's contentiously fought 13th General Election, despite the opposition *Pakatan Rakyat* coalition winning the popular vote by a healthy four percent margin. While many of the irregularities in Schedler's (2002) 'Menu of Manipulations' were alleged, they are unlikely to have changed the ultimate outcome given the vote margin of almost 3.5% with which BN won its 112th seat, the minimum needed to secure a parliamentary majority. Instead, Malaysia's electoral institutions delivered the election to BN by translating a 4% deficit in the popular vote into a 20% advantage in legislative seats for the incumbent coalition through levels of malapportionment that rank among the highest in the world. The consequences of these electoral distortions are significant and risk growing further if decisive reform of the electoral system is not undertaken.

6. Acknowledgements:

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CHAPTER THREE:

The Perils of Politicization: Politics-Driven Ethnic Classification of Malaysia's Ethnic Malays

Abstract:

The commonality in nearly all conceptualizations of ethnic identity is that the attributes which comprise it are descent-based in nature. This paper presents evidence that challenges this proposition. It argues that ethnicity can become so highly politicized that political affiliation becomes a *de facto* component of ethnic identity alongside ascriptive attributes like mother tongue, religion, or physical characteristics. When this occurs, individuals may use political affiliation to categorize the ethnic identity of others. I demonstrate this empirically through experiments embedded in surveys administered in Malaysia. These provide evidence that political affiliation plays a strong and independent role in how ethnic Malays with an ambiguous identity are categorized. This politics-driven ethnic categorization has two consequences. First, it challenges dominant conceptualizations of ethnic identity by demonstrating that non-ascriptive attribute like political affiliation can become an integral component of ethnic identity. Second, it demonstrates how politicizing ethnic identity can increase the intensity of conflict, as political conflict is personalized and adversaries are

personally de-legitimized by being denied recognition as member of the ethnic group with which they identity.

1. Introduction:

Much thought and debate has gone into converging on a general conceptualization of ethnic identity. While disagreement remains around its situational fluidity, it is almost universally conceded that the attributes which comprise it are descent-based in nature (Weber 1978; Horowitz 1985; Varshney 2002; Fearon 2003).[1] This typically includes such things as religion, mother tongue, and physical characteristics. It does not, however, include political affiliation, which is deemed to lack the relatively 'sticky' and 'visible' characteristics of ascriptive attributes (Chandra 2006). Thus, while it is not uncommon for ethnic identity to be a necessary condition for inclusion into a political identity, it is typically assumed that *relatively mutable* political identities cannot become a necessary condition for inclusion into *relatively immutable* ethnic identities. This paper challenges this proposition by demonstrating that under particular circumstances the relationship between political and ethnic identities can become reversed, so that political affiliation becomes a criteria for recognition in an ethnic identity alongside widely accepted ethnic attributes like tribe, religion, mother tongue, and physical characteristics.

An example from Malaysia illustrates this phenomenon. All of Malaysia's first six prime ministers have identified as members of the majority Malay ethnic group and have represented the dominant United Malay Nationalist Organization (UMNO) party.

[1] As Chandra (2006) writes in summarizing conventional definitions of ethnic identity, they are "a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent" (p. 397).

Interestingly, however, none of the prime ministers were unambiguously Malay, as each had some degree of mixed ethnic background.[2] The complex relationship between their political and ethnic identities is most clearly evident in Mahathir Mohamad—the country's longest serving prime minister—who has Malay and Indian roots. To his political supporters, he is seen as a defender of the Malay 'race' and champion of *ketuanan Melayu* (dominance of the Malay ethnic group). By contrast, many of his political adversaries label him a *mamak*, the Malay term for a Muslim Indian, thereby denying his Malay identity. This pattern, where political affiliation plays a pivotal role in the classification of ethnic identity, finds many examples throughout Malaysian politics.

This paper examines the phenomenon of *politics-driven* ethnic classification and asks whether political identity can become a *de facto* necessary condition for inclusion into an ethnic group. I present evidence from survey experiments in Malaysia that suggests political affiliation *is* widely used by the general population to categorize other non-elites into ethnic groups, at least in cases where there is ambiguity in identity. This finding challenges dominant conceptualizations of ethnic identity used throughout the social sciences, which assume that ethnic classification is purely *descent-driven*, being based exclusively on possession of descent-based attributes. The survey experiment works as follows: I describe two hypothetical Malaysian citizens who self-identify as Malay but have some ambiguity in their identities. I randomly vary two elements of each description. First, I vary the degree of ambiguity, from

[2] The diverse genealogical roots of Malaysia's six post-independence Prime Ministers (PM) are seldom publicized but widely discussed. Malaysia's first PM, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was half Thai and at least three of his four marriages were to non-Malays. Malaysia's second PM, Abdul Razak Hussein, and his son, the current PM Najib Razak, have strong Bugis ancestry from Sulawesi. The third PM, Hussein Onn, had partial Turkish roots, while the fourth PM, Mahathir Mohamad, has familial connections to Kerala in India. The fifth PM, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, has both Arab and Chinese roots.

more ambiguously Malay to less ambiguous Malay, where the latter fulfills a greater portion of descent-based criteria. Second, I vary the political affiliation of the individuals between pro-government and pro-opposition. This allows me to test the relative significance of descent-driven and politics-driven ethnic classification. I present the two vignettes to 600 randomly selected Malaysian citizens, who are asked whether they consider the individuals to be Malay.[3] Surprisingly, in both vignettes the degree of ambiguity plays only a weak role in ethnic classification. By contrast, political affiliation proves pivotal in the classification of ethnicity; respondents are roughly 20% more likely to classify the vignette individuals as Malay when they share a political affiliation, relative to when they support opposing political factions. Remarkably, this pattern holds across genders, ethnic groups, generations, classes, and political affiliations. The experimental nature of this methodological approach avoids concerns of social desirability bias that would otherwise complicate the inquiry.

Malaysia is a compelling case for an exploration of the relationship between ethnic and political identities for two reasons. First, the Malay identity of the country's indigenous—and largest—ethnic group is intrinsically ambiguous, as it has been highly porous historically and has relatively low hurdles for legal inclusion. While it might be possible to identify a small community of *Melayu jati*—pure Malays—a large majority of the Malay population has some degree of non-Malay background. Second, the Malay identity has been highly politicized. Malays in Malaysia enjoy a wide range of constitutionally enshrined political and economic privileges *vis-à-vis* the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. Given how extensively these

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[3] These questions were part of a larger survey conducted in Singapore and the Malaysia island of Penang in 2012 and 2013. This research was made possible by generous funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the University of California's Pacific Rim Research Program (PacRim), and the Center on Emerging and Pacific Economies (EmPac), as well as through the institutional support of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) and the Penang Institute.

privileges structure society, few aspects of intra- and inter-ethnic interactions remain free of political intervention.

The politicization of identity is key to explaining the findings. I argue that three related psychological mechanisms drive the tendency for respondents to classify political allies as Malays. First, there is a deeply engrained notion that Malays are the rightful political leaders of Malaysia. Consequently, the perception—or perhaps even reality—is that their support is required for political rule be fully legitimate. This drives a tendency to classify political allies as Malays and political opponents as non-Malays where there is some degree of ambiguity in their identity. Second, Malays and other indigenous groups are conferred a wide range of advantages through what could be called one of the world's most extensive affirmative action programs. Respondents may prefer that the benefits of this program—which extend to education, employment, and pricing, among many other areas—confer primarily to 'friendly' political allies, rather than to 'unfriendly' political opponents. Lastly, the politicization of ethnic identity has inextricable linked politics and ethnicity. Through this, ethnicity can be used to intensify conflict with opponents; rather than reject Malay political adversaries on impersonal political grounds alone, they can be personally delegitimized by denying them full recognition as members of the ethnic group with which they identify.

The central role of politicizing ethnicity plays in driving the findings is confirmed through a robustness check. I run the same test in neighboring Singapore, whose ethnic Malay population can be considered highly similar from an ethnocultural perspective (Roff 1967; Rahim 1998; Milner 2009). Relative to Malaysia, however, Singapore has not strongly differentiated policy along ethnic lines and has made efforts to depoliticize ethnic identity. There, ethnic classification descent-driven rather than politics-driven; the degree of ambiguity

plays a strong role in whether the individual is classified as a Malay, while political affiliation is irrelevant.

The consequences of these findings are two-fold. From a conceptual perspective, the evidence that a non-ascriptive attribute can act as an ethnic attribute underscores the complexity of ethnic identity and challenges efforts to converge on a narrow and universally applicable conceptualization. The existence of politics-driven ethnic classification also demonstrates the powerful role that psychological forces play in shaping the boundaries of social groupings, which consequently increases the situational fluidity of those boundaries. Perhaps more importantly, the findings have significant practical implications by demonstrating how politicizing ethnicity can increase the intensity of political conflict, something widely implied in the ethnic politics literature (Horowitz 1985, for example) but seldom empirically demonstrated. In the case of Malaysia it is explicit, as politics-driven classification can result in individuals being personally de-legitimized by being denied recognition as members of the ethnic group with which they identify. Following Taylor (1994), this constitutes a denial of a fundamental human need and is consequently highly deleterious to coexistence in diverse societies. The same dynamic, while more subtle, is evident in a range of cases, for example when an African American Republican is accused of being "not Black enough" or otherwise a traitor to his/her community by political adversaries.

This paper proceeds as follows: the second section reviews the dominant conceptualization of ethnic identity, focusing particularly on the relationship between ethnic and political identities. It also lays out a theory for how politicizing ethnic identity can infuse it with an explicitly political component. The third section discusses the Malay identity and examines the political environment in which it is embedded in Malaysia. The forth section

presents the survey experiment and its findings. The fifth section conducts a robustness check by examining findings from neighboring Singapore. The sixth section discusses the consequences of the findings and concludes the paper.

2. What is ethnic identity and what is it not?

Ethnic difference has long been viewed as a self-evident fact of social organization and has consequently played an integral role in political theory from the time of the Greeks onward. As is common with 'self-evident' truths, however, ethnicity has been treated with a significant degree of ambiguity. In the simplest terms, ethnic groups have been distinguished from other social groups in that they are typically perceived by constituent members to be basic, natural, and fixed. Underlining this are the perceived kinships, 'shared memories', and myths of common ancestry that nearly all ethnic groups possess (Weber 1978; Horowitz 1985; Fearon 2003). Other conceptualizations focus on the shared symbols, values, and norms that distinguish groups from one another (Barth 1970; Geertz 1973). Contrary to exaggerated contrasts between "primordialists" and "constructivists", nearly all modern conceptualizations concede that ethnic identities are socially constructed, in other words, that group boundaries are the product of deliberate or undeliberate social construction. The main distinction to be made, rather, is between those who see group boundaries as relatively fluid (Brass 2003; Brubaker 1996; Chandra 2006; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Laitin 1986 and 1998; Posner and Laitin 2001; Posner, Eifert, Miguel 2010; Varshney 2003) and those who see them as relatively sticky once established (Geertz 1963; Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Anderson 1991; Van Evera 2001).

Efforts have been made to more precisely define what differentiates ethnic identities from other group identities. Chandra (2006) conceptualizes ethnic identity as being composed

of shared ethnic attributes, which can be distinguished from non-ethnic attributes by two characteristics. First, ethnic attributes are relatively *sticky* and cannot be readily acquired or altered over the course of a lifetime. Second, ethnic attributes are relatively *visible*, without which ethnicity could not function as an efficient social differentiator. While Chandra's conceptualization is more restrictive than most, it shares with nearly all others the importance of descent; the attributes which fulfill the sticky and visible criteria and are typically thought to constitute ethnic identities—like mother tongue, physical characteristics, religion, caste, or tribe—are all descent-based in nature.

The relationship between political and ethnic identities is an important one. Ethnic identity is frequently used as the basis for political mobilization, as its sticky and visible nature facilitates excludability, which in turn enables the targeted distribution of patronage (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; Horowitz 1985; Chandra 2004). Thus, in systems with ethnic parties, ethnic identity becomes a necessary condition for inclusion into political identities. The inverse arrangement, where a political identity becomes a necessary condition—i.e. an attribute—for inclusion into an ethnic identity, would require political identity to be as sticky and durable as other descent-based attributes to be feasible. As it is almost universally conceded that political affiliation does not meet this standard, it appears that it should be excluded as a potential ethnic attribute according to the conventional conceptualization of ethnic identity.[4] But is this universally true, or can political affiliation act as a *de facto* ethnic attribute under certain

[4] Note that there is a documented tendency for political affiliation to be transmitted through generations via socialization (Campbell, Converse, Miller, Stokes 1960; Jennings, Stoker, Bowers 2009). This alone does not qualify political identity as a descent-based ethnic attribute due to the many other channels through which political identities can be formed. The same is true through the transmission of political identities through genetic channels (Smith, Alford, Hatemi, Eaves, Funk, Hibbing 2012). In short, even in these conceptualizations, political affiliation lacks the hard stickiness and visibility of ethnic attributes.

conditions? I argue that two conditions open the door to this possibility. First, an ethnic identity must have a degree of ambiguity sufficient to contest an individual's inclusion as a full member of the group. Given the multidimensional and context dependent nature of many contemporary ethnic identities (Chandra 2006), this degree of ambiguity is not limited to Malaysia or altogether atypical. Second, ethnicity must be highly politicized so that group membership has clear political and economic consequences. When these two conditions are met, political affiliation can become a determining factor for inclusion into an ethnic identity in particular cases.

I suggest that three psychological mechanisms are primarily responsible for politics-driven ethnic classification. The first arises when the support of a particular ethnic group is necessary for a political movement to be seen as legitimate, for example, when an ethnic group is broadly recognized as holding a rightful claim on political sovereignty. The need for political movements to capture the support of the sovereign ethnic group may lead individuals—whether knowingly or not—to view political allies as legitimate members of the sovereign ethnic group, while rejecting the legitimate membership of political adversaries.[5] Secondly, when significant political and economic benefits are conferred to members of a particular ethnic group, individuals may prefer that those benefits only confer to their political allies, leading them to again reject the group membership of political adversaries. Lastly, given the psychological importance of recognition as established by seminal works like Taylor (1994) and Lijphart (1977), individuals may reject the chosen ethnic identities of political adversaries in a bid to personally de-legitimize them.

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[5] It is important here to distinguish between the elite and mass levels. Political elites may willingly distort the ethnic classification of political allies and adversaries in an attempt to manipulate patterns of mobilization (Brass 2003). This intentional and instrumental distortion is largely absent at the mass level, where there are no clear strategic reasons to systematically distort classifications.

3. The Malay Identity in Malaysia

While ethnic identities in many countries are politicized and contain a degree of ambiguity, there are few cases where this is more pronounced than with the Malay ethnic group in Malaysia. This makes that group ideally situated to examine the phenomenon of politics-driven ethnic classification. We begin with an overview of ethnic diversity in Malaysia.

The population of Peninsular Malaysia is often characterized as having three main constituent groups.[6] These are—with current household proportions—the Malays (60%), Chinese (23%), and Indians (9%), as well as the diverse non-Malay indigenous (1%), the ignominiously-labelled 'others' (<1%), and non-citizens (6%) comprising the remainder (Malaysia: Department of Statistics 2010). This simple classification, which is legally codified, has its origins in colonial administration. The Malays are recognized as the indigenous population, while the Chinese and Indian populations have roots in a period of heavy immigration between 1850 and 1930, when European capitalists and British administrators required large numbers of laborers to operate tin mines and plantations. The British administrators coupled ethnicity and economic activity, and instituted a *de facto* policy of geographic segregation. The result was a solidification of ethnic boundaries and the emergence of what Furnivall (1944) termed a plural society in which constituent groups had little meaningful interaction outside of the marketplace.

[6] Malaysia is composed of eleven states and two federal territories on the Malay Peninsula, together with the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. A large portion of economic activity occurs in Peninsular Malaysia, where roughly 80% of the population resides. The British Malayan colony did not extend to East Malaysia, which only joined the Malaysian Federation in 1963, 6 years after Malaya's independence. To this day, East Malaysia's population and political patterns remain distinct from those in the Malay Peninsula. For this reason, I—like many other analyses—limit my focus to Peninsular Malaysia.

The typical highly stylized account of Malaysia's ethnic diversity describes clear boundaries delineating group difference. Malays are Muslim, speak Malay as a mother tongue, and have a rural village-based traditional culture. Chinese are Buddhist or Christian, speak a Chinese dialect as mother tongue, and are typically urban. Indians are Hindu or Muslim, speak Tamil or another South Asian language as mother tongue, and are likewise predominantly urban. All three are phenotypically distinct. This stylized account, however, betrays the remarkable intra-group diversity and the frequent ambiguity at the fringes of group boundaries. This is particularly the case for the Malay group.

The Malay label has multiple connotations. In the broadest sense, it refers to the indigenous inhabitants of the Malay archipelago—which includes the thousands of islands that today form Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines—most of whom speak an Austronesian language. In a narrower sense, it refers to the coastal inhabitants on either side of the Strait of Malacca in East Sumatra and the western Malay Peninsula whose ancestors spoke the Malay language. Given the importance of the Strait of Malacca to at least three major ancient trade-based empires (Srivijaya, Majapahit, and Melaka), as well as over a millennium of contact with traders from the Indian subcontinent and China, this population had extensive contact with outsiders (Andaya and Andaya 2001). Through that period, significant numbers of Bugis (from Sulawesi), Minangkakbau (west Sumatra), Javanese, Acehnese (north Sumatra), Arabs, and South Asians settled in the Malay Peninsula. A significant rate of intermarriage brought some integration with the local Malay population, though the assimilation was incomplete (Andaya and Andaya 2001).

The contemporary connotation of the Malay identity derives from the narrower conceptualization, has colonial origins, and is a product of an attempt to retrospectively

nationalize history. Colonial British administrators in Malaya imported an essentialized paradigm of racial categorization, clearly distinguishing the migrants from China and the Indian subcontinent from the—still very diverse—peninsular Malay-speaking population. Over time, that indigenous population was homogenized into a single identity, as reflected by the continuous broadening of the Malay category in colonial censuses (Hirschman 1987).[7] As Malaya moved towards independence following the second world war, Malay elites mobilized the 'indigenous' Malay populations under the umbrella term *bumiputera* (sons of the soil) in order to secure special privileges *vis-à-vis* the 'immigrant' Chinese and Indian populations. This was most immediately manifested in the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the—ethnic—political party which coordinated Malaysia's independence in 1957 and remains in power through this day.[8] The colonial racial categories—and their inherent simplifications—had been conveniently institutionalized by the post-colonial leadership, in no small part because the ethnic basis of political mobilization prevented mobilization on other fronts and provided a potentially durable future minimum winning coalition, as the unified Malay population constituted just over 50% of the electorate (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972).

Two characteristics of the contemporary Malay identity require additional examination. The first is its inherent degree of ambiguity, particularly at the fringes of the group boundary. At the ethnocultural level, this is a function of the incomplete

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[7] The 1871 and 1881 censuses had separate categories for the various populations from the Malays archipelago. By 1891, the census had a macro-category termed 'Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago'. By 1911, the macro-category was called 'Malay population', which was then disaggregated 'by Race', completing the evolution towards a unitary group, albeit with diverse origins.
[8] Malaysia has been ruled by an UMNO-led coalition since independence, known as the Alliance prior to 1973 and as *Barisan Nasional* since then. While the coalition is ostensible multi-ethnic—the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) have been the principle junior partners—UMNO has set the terms of the agreement and has largely advanced a Malay-centric agenda.

homogenization of the Malay identity, particularly in regards to migrants from other parts of the Malay Archipelago, and to a lesser extent from the Middle East, China, and the Indian subcontinent. While these constituent components of the Malay group can seamlessly coalesce into a unitary entity in response to perceived external challenges—whether European or non-indigenous Asian in nature—the internal divisions remain extant and are frequently activated (Nagata 1974).[9] In addition to the ethnocultural ambiguity, the legal criteria for inclusion into the Malay category adds the potential for additional ambiguity. The early Malay nationalist efforts to expand and institutional the Malay identity as a unitary voting block required reducing the barriers to entry into the group while restricting exit options. Constitutional provisions achieve both aims. The criteria for legal recognition as a Malay are fairly lax, defining a Malay as "a person who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks Malay, [and] conforms to Malay custom" (Article 160).[10] The constitution also stipulates that all Malays are Muslim and expressly forbids Muslims to renounce their faith, essentially occluding exit from the group.

Both the ethnocultural and legal elements of Malay identity contain a degree of ambiguity. From the ethnocultural perspective, few self-identifying Malays do not have some roots—even if distant—in the lands and cultures away from the Malay Peninsula. Each of Malaysia's first six (Malay) prime ministers, for example, has had roots outside of the peninsula. From the legal perspective, no clear thresholds are stipulated for criteria that are ultimately

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[9] In a study of Penang's Malays, for example, Nagata (1974) identifies four Malay subgroups: *Melayu jati* (pure Malays), *Jawi Peranakan* (Malays with partial Tamil heritage), Malays with partial Arab heritage, and Malays with Indonesian heritage. These groups acted in unitary manner under some circumstances, but readily drew internal distinctions in others.

[10] In practice, entering the Malay identity—*masok Melayu*—typically requires fulfilling the legal criteria *and* having an additional claim to inclusion through familial proximity, often intermarriage or adoption.

continuous in nature, nor is it clear precisely what constitutes the requisite 'Malay custom' that must be practiced, given that many facets of the traditional rural Malay culture do not find home in contemporary Malaysia's urban environments (Husin Ali 2008). It is important to be precise about the effects of this ambiguity: seldom is it an issue in everyday life and self-identifying Malays are with few exceptions widely recognized as Malays. Furthermore, the coethnic identification rate—the rate at which individuals are able to accurately distinguish between members of their own group and other groups—appears by all accounts to be very high, far higher than in sub-Saharan Africa, for example.[11] Rather, the main effect of the ambiguity is that it provides an avenue to contest the authenticity of an individual's Malay identity; on one facet or another of the ambiguous and complex Malay identity, a significant portion of self-identifying Malays could be accused of falling short of the ideal type, and thus, of not being full and legitimate members of the Malay community. This type of ambiguity is different than that resulting from cross-ethnic marriages where elements of both identities are retained, about which there has been recent innovative research (Adida 2012). In that case, a mixed-identity individual may credibly claim membership into multiple identities. Despite the prevalence of mixed backgrounds in the case of the Malay identity, an individual who self-identifies as Malay would typically not be able to claim membership in other identities, as the category is exclusive of other backgrounds.

The second noteworthy element of the contemporary Malay identity is its highly politicized nature. This is manifested in the concept of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy), which sees the Malay Peninsula as *Tanah Melayu* (Malay land) with Malays as the rightful rulers

[11] Habyarimana *et al* (2007), for example, determine that the rate at which individuals in their Uganda-based study correctly classify others as coethnics and non-coethnics is only about 50%.

vis-à-vis the 'immigrant' Chinese and Indian populations. The roots of this lie in the colonial period; to facilitate expansion of territorial control into the Malay Peninsula beginning with the Pangkor Agreement in 1874, British administrators installed themselves as 'advisors' to traditional Malay rulers, who were granted extensive—though frequently hollow—privileges in exchange for accepting the 'advice' of colonial rulers on nearly all matters aside from Islam and Malay culture (Cowan 1961; Andaya and Andaya 2001). As it became clear that Malaya would gain independence following the Second World War, British administrators proposed the creation of the Malayan Union in 1946, which was to grant equal rights to the Malay, Chinese, and Indian populations residing on the peninsula. Led by the ethnic Malay UMNO party, Malay elites mobilized opposition to the Union. British administrators, fearing that unrest would threaten Malaya's extensive foreign-owned assets, relented and proposed the Federation of Malaya in 1948. This restored the 'special position' of the Malays and paved the way towards independence in 1957 under the Constitution of Malaysia, which codified a wide set of Malay privileges. These include making Islam the official religion of the Federation (Article 3), elevating the Malay sultan to head of state (Article 32), designating Malay as the official language (Article 152), and empowering the state to 'protect the special position of the *bumiputera*', of which Malays make up the large majority (Article 153). In conjunction, these provisions entrenched the ethnic differentiation of colonial administrators, facilitated mobilization along ethnic lines, and created a political hierarchy in which—whether realized or not—Malays occupied the top rung. The organization of political parties along ethnic lines reinforces the politicization of ethnicity.[12]

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[12] The core parties of the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) ruling coalition (United Malays National Organization—UMNO; Malaysian Chinese Association—MCA; Malaysian Indian Congress—MIC) restrict membership along ethnic lines. *Gerakan*, a BN component party, is nominally multiethnic, but is in practice overwhelmingly Chinese. The core parties of the opposition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR)

This ostensible political superiority, however, was not reflected in economic position of Malays prior to and in the years following independence. Under British rule, the vast majority of Malays were locked into a rural subsistence economy, and hence were largely excluded from commercial activity and economic modernization. Following ethnic riots between Malays and Chinese in 1969, which were framed as resulting from the economic marginalization of the Malays, UMNO introduced what easily ranks as among the world's most extensive set of affirmative action policies under the banner of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970.[13] The constituent policies provided Malays and other *bumiputera* with advantages *vis-à-vis* the Chinese and Indian communities in a range of areas, including facilitated access to the civil service and education, advantages in private and public sector commerce, and a range of other privileges including tiered pricing for property and access to licensing (Milne 1986; Gomez and Jomo 1999; Jomo 2004; Gomez and Saravanamuttu 2013). There is substantial debate about the extent to which the NEP and its successors have successful brought equity to Malaysia's social and economic structures. Clearly, access to education for rural Malays has improved, particularly during the first fifteen years of the program (Lee 2012), which in turn has contributed to the development of a Malay middle class. On other outcomes, however, the results are less positive. For example, it is widely accepted that the NEP has led to substantial intra-ethnic wealth inequality, as well as deep

coalition (the Islamic *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*—PAS; the Democratic Action Party—DAP; *Parti Keadilan Rakyat*—PKR) are all nominally multiethnic, but in practice tend also to be structured largely along ethnic lines.

[13] The NEP formally expired in 1990. It was replaced by the National Development Policy (NDP) in 1991, which largely carried forward its predecessor's policies, and the New Economic Model (NEM) in 2010. The NEM was intended to scale back pro-*bumiputera* policies, but the Bumiputera Economic Empowerment policies, announced in the wake of Malaysia's 13th General Election in 2013, extended NEP-like advantages in the areas of education, equity, non-financial assets, entrepreneurship and government delivery.

structural distortions in the private and public sectors due to widespread patronage and rent-seeking (Gomez and Jomo 1999; Gomez 2002). Most importantly, the NEP entrenched ethnic differentiation and a *de facto* ethnic hierarchy in broad swathes of Malaysia's economic and social sectors.

4. Empirical tests

As argued, the Malay identity in Malaysia is highly politicized but has intrinsically ambiguous boundaries. Under these conditions, we might expect that three psychological mechanisms lead to politics-based ethnic classification, where political affiliation plays a central role in whether self-identifying Malays with an ambiguous identity are recognized as legitimate members of the Malay ethnic group. Testing this, however, is not without difficulty. As ethnicity is highly politicized in Malaysia, there is a risk that individuals would provide socially desirable or strategic responses to a direct question. I overcome this by embedding an experiment into a survey conducted in Malaysia in early 2013. I used a stratified probability sampling strategy to produce a representative sample of respondents in urban Penang, which is a highly developed island on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The survey asked a wide range of biographical questions and included several other embedded experiments designed to measure the salience of ethnic and civic identities. It was available in Malay, Chinese, and English.

The experiment functions as follows: I describe an individual who self-identifies as Malay but has a degree of ambiguity in his identity sufficient to contest the authenticity of his group membership. I randomly vary two components of the individual's description. First, I vary the degree of ambiguity in his Malay identity. Second, I vary the political affiliation of the

individual between government supporter and opposition supporter. The description is as follows:

> Hazlan Ismail is a 39 year old man from Johor. He grew up as a Malay, even though his **[mother/grandmother]** is Chinese and he can understand some Chinese. He lives in a mixed neighborhood in JB and he is raising his two children as Malays. He works as an accounts executive in an office and is a **[Pakatan Rakyat / Barisan Nasional]** supporter.
>
> Would you think of Hazlan Ismail as a Malay or as something else (mixed, Chinese, other, etc)?

In other words, a randomly selected 50% of respondents will see Hazlan Ismail described as having a Chinese **mother**, while for the other 50% he has a Chinese **grandmother**. Conventional conceptualizations of ethnic identity, in which ethnic categorization is descent-driven, would predict that those respondents who see the *less* ambiguous description (Chinese grandmother, i.e. ¾ Malay) would classify Hazlan Ismail as Malay more frequently than those who see the *more* ambiguous description (Chinese mother, i.e. ½ Malay). The same process occurs with political affiliation: half of respondents see Hazlan Ismail described as a pro-opposition—***Pakatan Rakyat***—supporter, while the other half see him described as a pro-government—***Barisan Nasional***—supporter. If politics-driven ethnic categorization is occuring, respondents will be more likely to classify Hazlan Ismail as Malay when he is a political ally (when he supports the same political party as the respondent) than when he is a political adversary (when he supports a different political party than the respondent). These expectations lead to the following testable hypotheses:

H1 – Descent-Driven Ethnic Categorization: Survey respondents are more likely to classify the less ambiguous Hazlan Ismail (¾ Malay) as Malay than the more ambiguous Hazlan Ismail (½ Malay).

H2 – Politics-Driven Ethnic Categorization: Survey respondents are more likely to classify the political ally Hazlan Ismail as Malay than the political adversary Hazlan Ismail.

Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, I use a logit model. I code the dependent variable *Malay* [is Hazlan Ismail a Malay?] as '1' when the response is 'yes' and as '0' when the response is 'no'. I code *Less Ambiguous* as '1' when Hazlan is ¾ Malay and as '0' when he is ½ Malay. I code *Political Ally* as '1' when respondent and Hazlan share a political affiliation and as '0' when they have opposing political affiliations. Model 1 reports only two treatment variables. Model 2 reports additional observational relationships from biographic variables. *Education* is years of formal education. *Age* is coded in five year increments. *Income* is total household income reported on a seven point scale from '1' (lowest) to '7' (highest). The ethnicity of respondents is captured with a series of dummy variables: *Malay* is coded '1' for Malay respondents and *Indian* is coded '1' for Indian respondents, which leaves Chinese respondents as the main reference category. *Barisan Nasional* is coded '1' for respondents who support *Barisan Nasional*, which leaves *Pakatan Rakyat* supporters as the reference group. The table reports marginal effects.

Table 3.1: Determinants of Malay Classification

	(1) Malay	(2) Malay
Experimental relationships:		
- Less Ambiguous	.065	.067
	(.040)	(.042)
- Political Ally	.199***	.195***
	(.038)	(.039)
Observational relationships:		
- Age (5 yrs)		-.001
		(.007)
- Education (yrs)		.017*
		(.008)
- Income		.007
		(.014)
- Malay		.077
		(.053)
- Indian		.018
		(.060)
- Barisan Nasional		.239***
		(.045)
Percent classifying Malay:	64%	64%
Observations	599	583
Log-likelihood	-380	-351
Chi-Square	27.63	52.83
BIC	-3050	-2953

Standard errors in parentheses

Logit model, marginal effects reported

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.10

We begin the interpretation of findings with the experimental relationships. Averaging across all permutations, roughly 64% of respondents classify Hazlan Ismail as Malay. While the coefficient for the degree of ambiguity—*Less Ambiguous*—is positive, it narrowly misses conventional levels of significance (p-value = .11). In other words, contrary to expectations of descent-driven ethnic classification, whether Hazlan is presented as being ¾ Malay or ½ Malay

plays at best a weak role in the likelihood that respondents will classify him as a Malay. By contrast, political affiliation—*Political Ally*—is strongly statistically significant; when respondents and Hazlan Ismail share the same political affiliation, respondents are on average about 20% more likely to classify Hazlan as Malay relative to when he is a political adversary. In short, we find strong evidence for the politics-driven classification argument, in that political affiliation *is* being used as a criterion for categorizing the ethnic identity of Hazlan Ismail. Another way of stating this is that 74% of respondents classify Hazlan as Malay when he is presented as a political ally, while only 53% view him as Malay when he is a political adversary.

The observational relationships yield other interesting insights, as they indicate the general impact—independent of the experimental interventions—of various biographical factors on the propensity to classify Hazlan Ismail as Malay.[14] *Age* and *Income* have no discernable effect, while *Years of Education* has a small positive effect: for every additional year of formal education (all else held constant), respondents are on average 1.7% more likely to classify Hazlan as Malay. This amounts to a roughly 17% difference when moving from a primary level education to a university education, a significant jump which appears to reflect greater support for social choice as levels of education increase. When controlling for political party, there is no statistically significant difference between respondents from the three main ethnic groups. Relative to (opposition) *Pakatan Rakyat* supporters, however, pro-government *Barisan Nasional* supporters are 23% more likely to classify Hazlan as Malay (again, controlling for the ethnicity of the respondents).[15]

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[14] Sixteen observations (2.6% of total) are lost due to missing data, typically because respondents declined to give age or income.

[15] A contingency within the *Pakatan Rakyat* coalition has advocated for the end of differentiating policy along ethnic lines. This finding likely reflects a tendency by some *Pakatan Rakyat* supporters to

While the biographical controls from model 2 capture the independent effect of each variable on the probability that respondents classify Hazlan as Malay, they do not capture potential variation in the strength of the *Political Ally* effect across the subgroups. I test for heterogeneous treatment effects through a series of interaction terms. To begin, I interact the two experimental treatments, *Less Ambiguous* and *Political Ally*. With a p-value of .75, the interaction term is not significant, indicating that the political ally effect occurs independent of the degree of ambiguity. The only statistically significant interaction is the age control, as the *Political Ally* effect grows roughly 2.6% stronger for every five years age bracket. This suggest that the *Political Ally* effect is less pronounced among younger respondents than older ones. In short, the political ally effect on the classification of Malay identity is remarkably consistent across important socioeconomic and political subgroups. It is present through the full spectrum of educational attainment, income, ethnicity, and political affiliation in our representative sample.

This approach to testing the hypotheses has both inherent strengths and weaknesses. The experimental nature allows us to make robust causal inferences about the independent effects of political affiliation and identity ambiguity. Furthermore, this approach mitigates against the social desirability bias that may handicap more direct measurement approaches, whether qualitative or quantitative in nature. On the other hand, legitimate concerns might be raised about two aspects of the approach. The first is that it relies on a very limited information. It is possible that the effect would be different if more extensive information, including perhaps visuals or patterns of speech, were made available. Likewise, it is possible

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react against classification along ethnic lines as a political statement. In other words, the choice by some *Pakatan Rakyat* supporters not to classify Hazlan as Malay is driven by a general rejecting of ethnic classification, rather than Hazlan's degree of ambiguity or political affiliation

that the effect reflects only a first impression which may not survive sustained interactions. The second potential concern is that the test addresses someone with a particularly high degree of ethnic ambiguity, and that a self-identifying Malay who has no obvious connection to a non-Malay identity might not be subject to the same scrutiny. I cannot provide concrete evidence to counter either concern with the available data. However, I contend that while a greater volume of information or a lesser degree of ethnic ambiguity might alter the magnitude of the effects, the underlying effect itself should remain. Regarding the amount of information, for example, we see the effect play out in attacks on elite political adversaries, about whom a vast body of information is typically available. And while a Malay political adversary with no ethnic ambiguity might not be labelled a Chinese or Indian, they might well be cast as an illegitimate Malay who has betrayed their brethren of 'true' Malays.

5. Robustness Checks

I run two robustness tests to strengthen evidence for the argument that conditions present in Malaysia lead to politics-driven ethnic categorization. I begin with a second test run in Malaysia. This tests functions similarly to the one above, but the ambiguity of the described individual is the result of adoption rather than mixed heritage. Specifically, I describe a young woman of Tamil (Indian) descent who was adopted by a Malay family as a child and now identifies as Malay.[16] As before, I randomly vary the degree of ambiguity and her political affiliation. The former is varied by altering her age at adoption between age 2 (low degree of ambiguity) and age 10 (high degree of ambiguity). Little socialization occurs before the age of

[16] Adoption of children with South Asian heritage into Malay families is not uncommon in Malaysia, so this scenario is entirely credible.

two, so an individual adopted then would be raised almost exclusively in the culture of her adopted family. By contrast, an individual adopted at age 10 would be significantly socialized in the culture of her biological family. The vignette reads as follows:

> Noor Mawar Haqq is a 26 year old woman who lives in Penang. When she was born her name was Chirapathi, but she was adopted by a Malay family when she was **[2/10]** because her family was very poor. She looks partly Indian because her parents were Tamils, but she thinks of herself as Malay because of the family that adopted her. She will soon be married to a Malay who runs a provision shop. Both of them support **[PR / UMNO]**.
>
> Would you think of Noor Mawar Haqq as a Malay or as something else (mixed, Tamil, other, etc)?

Across all permutations, only 49% of respondents classify Noor as a Malay (relative to 64% in the case of Hazlan Ismail). Aside from this difference, however, the findings corroborate the previous results. The degree of ambiguity (adopted at age 2 / age 10) does not have a statistically significant effect on the probability that Noor is classified as Malay. By contrast, political affiliation is again strongly determinant; when Noor is a political ally, respondents are about 17% more likely to consider her a Malay relative to when she is a political adversary. With a standard error of .040, the coefficient of .172 is highly statistically significant. Stated differently, 58% of respondents classify Noor as Malay when she is a political ally, which drops to 41% when she is a political adversary. This finding strengthens confidence that the effect of political affiliation on the classification of ethnicity is robust to different kinds of ethnic ambiguity.

The second robustness test is a repeat of the Hazlan Ismail survey experiment administered in neighboring Singapore, which makes a compelling comparison to Malaysia. Singapore once belonged to the Federation of Malaysia and there is a long history of

population exchange between the two territories. In analyzing Malay activity across the two countries prior to independence, Lily Zubaidah Rahim writes that Malays were 'merely changing rooms and not changing houses' (1998, p 15-16).[17] In ethnocultural terms, the Malay identity is highly similar—if not identical—in the two countries (Roff 1967; Lian 2001).Yet while the Singapore state maintains the same colonial ethnic categories that Malaysia does, there are important differences between the two countries. Singapore does not, for example, strongly differentiate public policies along ethnic lines. The Singaporean identity is more civic in nature and does not have the explicitly ethnocultural elements of Malaysia's national identity. Political competition in Singapore—as constrained as it may be—is not structured along ethnic lines to the extent of Malaysia's system. While strong social pressures regulate the Malay identity in Singapore, the legal codification of boundaries and prohibition on renouncing the identity that exist in Malaysia find no equivalent in Singapore.[18] In conjunction, these factors lead the Malay identity to be less politicized in Singapore than in Malaysia. Given this, we would expect extensive politics-driven ethnic categorization in Singapore. I give the same description of Hazlan Ismail to respondents in Singapore, changing only his location to Singapore from Johor, Malaysia. I again randomize the degree of ambiguity and political affiliation.[19] Table 3.2 shows the results.

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[17] *Orang Melayu hanya tukar bilik dan bukan tukar rumah...*

[18] Inclusion in Singapore's Malay community is intrinsically more voluntaristic. Legal recognition for inclusion in the category is based on the principle that any person—regardless of ethnic origin—can be considered Malay so long as they consider themselves Malay and are generally considered Malay by the Malay community (Tham 1993).

[19] I randomly alter the whether Hazlan has a Chinese mother or grandmother, and whether he supports the People's Action Party (PAP) or the opposition.

Table 3.2: Determinants of Malay Classification in Singapore

	Malay
Less Ambiguous	.249*
	(.123)
Political Ally	.138
	(.118)
Percent classifying Malay:	78%
Observations	45

Robust standard errors in parentheses
Logit model, marginal effects reported
*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.10

Across all permutations, 78% of respondents in Singapore classify Hazlan as Malay, compared to 64% in Malaysia.[20] The higher percentage is likely a function of the greater voluntaristic element of the Malay identity in Singapore, given that Hazlan self-identifies as a Malay in the description. More importantly, the classification of ethnicity functions as we predict in Singapore, given that the second condition is not fulfilled; the degree of ambiguity has a statistically significant effect on the probability that a respondent will classify Hazlan as Malay (nearly 25% more likely when Hazlan is ¾ as opposed to ½ Malay), while political affiliation does not. This demonstrates that in an environment where ethnicity is not highly politicized, the Malay identity conforms with the standard conceptualizations of ethnic identities, and categorization is largely descent-driven. In other words, the political component of the Malay identity that we identify in Malaysia is a function of Malaysia's political environment, rather than an intrinsic characteristic of the broader Malay identity itself.

[20] A two sample test of proportions to establish whether the difference between Singapore and Malaysia provides a z-score of 1.77, which corresponds to a .076 p-value.

6. Conclusion

This paper challenges the dominant conceptualization of ethnicity as a collective identity that is comprised exclusively of descent-based attributes. It argues that under certain conditions, politicizing ethnicity can lead to political affiliation becoming a *de facto* component of ethnic identity alongside ascriptive attributes like mother tongue, religion, or physical characteristics. This results in politics-driven ethnic categorization, where political affiliation is used as a criterion in the ethnic categorization of individuals whose identity contains sufficient ambiguity to challenge the legitimacy of their membership in the ethnic group with which they identify. This phenomenon is pronounced in Malaysia's Malay identity, as demonstrated through two survey experiments administered to a random sample of citizens in Penang, Malaysia.

The experiments describe a self-identifying Malay and randomize the degree of ambiguity in their ethnic identity—for example, whether the individual is ¾ or ½ Malay—and their political affiliation. In both experiments, respondents are significantly more likely to categorize the individuals as Malay when they share the same political affiliation. The degree of ambiguity plays a much weaker role in the categorization. In other words, ethnic categorization is substantially politics-driven, rather than descent-driven. By contrast, the same survey experiment run in neighboring Singapore, which has an ethno-culturally similar Malay community but where ethnicity is not as strongly politicized, produces expected results: the degree of ambiguity strongly impacts classification of ethnicity, while political affiliation has no statistically significant impact.

These results have a number of important theoretical implications. Foremost is that we have clear evidence of a non-descent-based attribute being routinely used as a criterion for

ethnic group membership. This runs contrary to nearly all conceptualization of ethnic identity, but especially to attempts to converge on a precise and narrow conceptualization (Chandra 2006). There is no simple reconciliation between dominant conceptualizations and this empirical finding. If we argue that the Malay identity should not be considered an ethnic identity on the basis of the non-descent-based attribute, then narrow conceptualizations of ethnic identity lose nearly all their analytic value, given that the Malay identity is universally conceived of as an ethnic identity by Malaysian citizens, as well as by a range of prominent scholars (Lijphart 1977; Horowitz 1985; Hirschman 1987; Varshney 2003). This suggests broader umbrella conceptualizations, especially those like Fearon (2003) where classifications at least partially reflect popular sentiments, may have the most universal applicability.

The findings also underscore the inherent fluidity of ethnic identity. Previous research has focused on the situational fluidity of ethnic identity from the *self-identification* perspective; individuals typically have multiple potential ethnic identities which they choose between depending on context (Nagata 1974; Chandra 2006). By contrast, I demonstrate the variability in how *others* assess the ethnic membership of individuals based on their potentially fluid political affiliation.[21] As argued, the primary difference between influential conceptualizations of ethnic identity concerns its *degree* of fluidity (as opposed the artificially dichotomized contrast between primordial and constructivist conceptualizations). Given that political affiliation can be readily changed relative to true ascriptive characteristics, these findings lend

[21] It might be argued that political affiliation may lose much of its potential fluidity in a highly polarized system as the costs of 'political defection' increase. Thus, while political affiliation may not become as immutable as true descent-based attributes, it could become sufficiently sticky to become functionally identical. This argument does not bear out in the case of Malaysia, where party defections among Malay political elites are not uncommon.

strong support to conceptualizations that view ethnicity as relatively mutable, particularly those in which ethnicity assumes an instrumental purpose (Brass 2003).

The mechanisms I propose as explanations for the findings highlight the central role that psychology—particularly emotion—plays in intra-and inter-ethnic interactions. Unlike at the elite level, where categorization of a political ally or adversary's ethnicity may be intentionally distorted for strategic reasons, the mass-level distortions we see in Malaysia are likely the result of a subconscious bias towards political allies and against political adversaries, which is strongly reminiscent of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986). While relatively few studies in comparative ethnic politics explicitly examine the role of emotion (though see Horowitz 1985, Peterson 2002 for examples), there is a strong tradition of this in political psychology.

The infusion of emotion and politics into the classification of ethnicity has clear—and rather ominous—practical consequences. Foremost, it can transform abstract political disagreement into a deeply *personal* attack; rather than rejecting a political adversary on an ideological dimension alone, political adversaries can be personally de-legitimized by denying their membership in the ethnic group with which they identity. Withholding recognition in this manner is tantamount to stripping an individual of their dignity, as argued by Taylor (1994) and other scholars of multiculturalism. This dynamic carries significant costs not only at the individual level, but at the aggregate level as well, as it increases the intensity of conflict and the potential for widespread instability.

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