

# CENTRING THE INDIVIDUAL IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND POLITICAL STORYTELLING: REFLECTIONS ON THE CANDIDATE'S DILEMMA AND DOING POLITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract:

Indonesian legislative elections have a reputation for being a highly competitive and crowded space in which a sea of candidates battle it out, hoping to be triumphant. They are also sites of contradiction and consternation as rhetoric of corruption-fighting mingles with campaign costs and pressure to spend money. However, these generalisations tell us very little about the lived experiences of individual candidates, their decision-making processes, or the contexts that help, or hinder, them in their electoral race. In this presentation I reflect on ideas of positionality and personal context, and how they shape individual campaigns in Indonesian legislative elections—one of the core themes of my recent monograph, *The Candidate's Dilemma: Anticorruptionism and Money Politics in Indonesian Election Campaigns* (Cornell University Press, 2022). Written several years after completing my original fieldwork, the process of crafting, revising and reimagining this book offered an opportunity to further digest what I witnessed, to consider the data through different lenses, and to discern where the most compelling stories lay amongst the pages of the numerous fieldwork diaries accumulated over 1.5 years of research in Indonesia. This paper will also offer some reflections on the place and positionality of the researcher in conducting such research, considering my own relationship to the topic and informants, and the privilege that underlies undertaking such a project.

**Elisabeth Kramer** is Deputy Director at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) and an Honorary Associate at the School of Languages and Culture. Elisabeth began her academic career researching anticorruptionism in Indonesian elections but her research interests have since broadened, sitting at the scholarly intersection between politics, policy and interest-based advocacy in Indonesia. She has been awarded research grants from the Australian Research Council and the Department of Education and Training (Endeavour Program) to support her research.

Elisabeth's first monograph *The Candidate's Dilemma: Anticorruptionism and Money Politics in Indonesian Elections* (Cornell University Press) was published in 2022. *The Candidate's Dilemma* delves into the lived experiences of candidates to offer a nuanced study of how the political and personal intersect when it comes to money politics, anticorruptionism, and electoral campaigning in Indonesia.



**17 October 2022 (Monday)**  
**4:00-5:30 PM (HKT)**  
**Virtual via Zoom**

How to attend this seminar:

Zoom Registration  
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