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Is there an Asian type of party?

Recent trends towards electoral engineering in many Asian countries seem to suggest that at least some party systems in the Asia-Pacific region are becoming increasingly similar. As governments are attempting to enhance political stability and curb fragmentation along potentially polarizing social cleavages, observers like Benjamin Reilly have even begun to speak of an emergent Asian model of electoral democracy. Focusing on parties and party systems in Southeast Asia, this paper will firstly critique Reilly's thesis against the background of recent political developments in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. It will then proceed to examine if, and if yes to what extent, the alleged convergence in party systems has also been reflected in growing similarities in political parties themselves. In other words, the paper seeks to answer the question whether there is something like an Asian type of political party in the making and, if so, whether this party type can be adequately located within existing party typologies. Gunther and Diamond's recent typology of fifteen species of parties will be used as a reference point in order to determine whether Southeast Asian parties are indeed becoming increasingly similar or not.

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Travelling to Southeast Asia: Problems with the Lipset/Rokkan Approach

How is a theoretically grounded comparison of parties and party systems in Southeast Asia possible? In contrast to approaches focussing on institutionalization, the impact of formal institutions such as electoral systems, or the influence of clientelism and patronage, the cleavage approach by Lipset and Rokkan offers a sociological model that explores major social divisions translated into the structure of a party system. But the travelling of such a 'Western' concept engenders certain problems. The two 'revolutions' generally never occurred and at least some of the four 'classic' European cleavages are typically absent or unimportant. Parties are usually not the European-like disciplined mass organizations, and primordial divisions overshadow economic divides. This paper analyses the party systems of electoral

authoritarian and electoral democratic regimes in the region in order to assess the adaptability of 'Western' concepts and to identify some of the most salient features of Southeast Asian party systems.

Get Institutions Right: Religious Party Mobilization in Democratic Indonesia

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The electoral performances of religious-based parties since democratic transition in 1998 have caused intriguing debate about the future of political Islam in Indonesia. A prevailing view that emerged from the debate is that influence of Islamist and religious-based parties are collectively in decline. Moreover, it is argued that the power of Islamist ideology and the function of religion in politics more generally continue to be minimal to complement the existing view that Indonesian Islam is moderate and will not threaten the secular-nationalist vision of the nation after democratization.

This article offers an alternative analysis and understanding of the influence of religious-based parties. It does so by investigating *variation* in electoral performances *among* religious parties to emphasize the function of institutions, as much as ideology, in evaluating the future of political Islam and the function of religion in Indonesia's young democracy.

The article seeks to resolve two interconnected puzzles with regard to the function of religion in electoral politics: (1) why PKS is maintaining its popularity and political relevance while others are not; and (2) why PKS is able to make drastic ideological readjustment (read: moderation) relatively efficiently, while maintaining relative internal coherence within the party organization. The answer to both questions lies in the level of institutionalization, a familiar thesis in the literature of comparative politics and democratic consolidation.

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Cleaving Clientelism: The “Populist”/“Reformist” Cleavage in Thailand and the Philippines

Some recent comparative studies of Southeast Asian party systems have posited a dichotomy between unstable clientelist-based party systems of the Philippines and Thailand and the more sturdy, milieu-grounded parties of Indonesia and Malaysia. The argument runs that the translation of major ethno-religious cleavages into the party system gives parties deep social roots, immunizing them from the worst effects of patronage. Purely clientelistic party systems, by contrast, are socially shallow, explaining why parties can appear and disappear quickly, destabilizing the polity.

While not rejecting this view entirely, I will argue it is only a half truth. In the Philippines and Thailand, clientelist-based party systems did prove unstable given their susceptibility to populist politicians who weakened their country’s respective party systems by garnering overwhelming electoral support after only one election (Estrada in the Philippines in 1998, Thaksin in Thailand in 2001). But I will suggest that “populism” with its authoritarian tendencies and reactionary “reformism” by antagonized elites has created a cleavage around which parties are increasingly constructed in both countries. This quasi-class character of parties (mixed with strong regional as well as urban/rural elements in Thailand) has proved extremely polarizing. One is even tempted in hindsight to argue that earlier, more purely clientelist-based party systems in both countries then offered greater hopes for democratic consolidation. Nonetheless, the paper will consider whether – a little less than a decade after the elitist “people power coup” against Estrada - the 2010 election in the Philippines can be seen as evidence of the institutionalization of the “populist”/“reformist” cleavage. The two major presidential candidates of the two oldest political parties there are campaigning with these competing political narratives. In Thailand, by contrast, the “populist threat” has led pro-royalist elites to resort to coups (one openly military, one civilianized), street protests, and judicial “activism” to topple and harass Thaksin and his proxies. Given the continued popular appeal of pro-Thaksin forces, the next elections (which must be held by 2011) are likely to ratchet up Thailand’s political volatility yet another notch.

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Abstract:

Navigating the "Secret Garden": Candidate Selection in Thai Political Parties

The Thai political sphere is best characterized as ever-changing, and the party world is no different. The Thai party system would, according to most criteria, be characterized as weakly institutionalized (see e.g. Huntington 1968, Mainwaring 1998, Randall and Svåsand 2002). Even major parties regularly appear and disappear and politicians often change parties. Internal party procedures are, using Freidenberg and Levitsky's (2006) words, however better described as informally institutionalized.

This paper builds on in-depth study of candidate selection in two Thai political parties: the Democrat party and the now defunct Thai Rak Thai party. While the Democrat party is one of the oldest political parties in Asia and often described as being formally institutionalized, the Thai Rak Thai was a short-lived party often described as being centered around its founder, Thaksin Shinawatra. This paper shows, however, that candidate selection in both parties was conducted in a similar vein and that it can be described as informally institutionalized, exclusive and localized.

Because of the ever-changing formal political surroundings, Thai political actors strive to ascertain stability that can last beyond constitutional changes and regime alterations. This stability is not found within the political parties themselves, but instead in clientelist networks. This paper demonstrates how candidate selection procedures in Thai parties are informally conducted in a manner that allows for clientelist practices to influence who becomes a political candidate and, consequently, a parliamentarian.

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2009. Men in Politics. Revisiting Patterns of Gendered Parliamentary Representation in Thailand and Beyond. Ph.D. Thesis. Department of Government, Uppsala University.

2009. Gendered Parties – making the male norm visible in Thai politics in Rydström, Helle: *Gendered Inequalities in Asia*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

2009. "Thailand - approaches to the gender paradox" in Gelb, Joyce & Palley, Marion: *Women and Politics around the World*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

2008. "Reluctant Tigers: Economic Growth, Erratic Democratization Processes, and Continuing Political Gender Inequality in Southeast Asia" in Chong, Terence: *Globalisation and its Counter Forces in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: ISEAS.

The Environmental Challenge to Single-Party Rule: the Case of Bauxite Mining in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

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Abstract

Popular opposition to bauxite mining in the Central Highlands of Vietnam has plunged the Vietnamese Communist Party into an unprecedented maelstrom of critique and public debate. The possibility of Chinese mining companies provoking an environmental disaster in a politically sensitive and militarily strategic region of Vietnam has spurred revolutionary hero General Giap along with other prominent military and political figures to speak out publicly against the national bauxite policy, inciting a debate that has overflowed into the halls of the national assembly, the courts, the press and the internet. Furthermore, the Party's traditional tactics for managing dissent by controlling public opinion, dividing opposition and containing conflict have been confounded by an issue that has united a wide range of social groups through re-articulations of nationalism and national territory based on natural resource extraction and generated an alternative language for political dissent to the outlawed discourses of multi-party democracy and human rights. This paper will explore how the materiality of mining, discourses of nature and nation, and the organization of environmental politics are challenging the traditional capacities of the Party to manage dissent and then examine their potential implications for Vietnam's current political structure.

Party Typologies and Single-Party Systems: The Case of Communist Vietnam

by Tuong Vu

The study of single-party systems has not progressed very far since the 1970s with the work of Samuel Huntington. At the same time, Giovanni Sartori's efforts to include these systems in a comprehensive typology ranging from one-party to multi-party systems have been much

criticized. In this paper, I address this debate and argue that the comprehensive typology is useful both for the comparison of single-party systems to other systems and for the study of single-party systems. I then combine Huntington's and Scott Mainwaring's concepts of party institutionalization to examine the Vietnamese case. The combination is novel because whereas Huntington's concepts were developed for single-party systems, Mainwaring's theory was created to compare party institutionalization in democratic systems in Latin America. Vietnam is a major country in Southeast Asia with a single-party system. Unlike existing accounts that study the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) in isolation, I distinguish it from Vietnam's single-party system and examine their separate evolutionary paths. The evidence suggests that the VCP had experienced decay long before the 1980s while the single-party system only started weakening after market reform. The party's efforts at institutional adaptation since market reform only slow down the rate of decay in the VCP, but have been unable to halt the decline of the single-party system. The Vietnamese case not only offers many interesting points of contrast with other Southeast Asian cases but also suggests the usefulness of a comprehensive typology for studying single-party systems.

The Choice of Candidate-Centered Electoral Systems in New Democracies: Case Studies of Indonesia and the Philippines

Jae Hyeok Shin *University of California, Los Angeles*

Why do personalistic parties flourish in some new democracies? Personalistic parties, which are undisciplined and focused on delivering individual or local benefits, are believed to harm government accountability and performance, and hence to weaken citizen support for democracy in the long run. Many scholars argue that these parties thrive because of candidate-centered electoral rules, which encourage candidates to cultivate personal reputations with constituents (instead of party policy reputations). Yet it is seldom obvious why such rules were adopted in the first place.

I hypothesize that political leaders in new democracies sometimes choose candidate-centered electoral institutions in order to increase their electoral chances in the upcoming first democratic election, even though such institutions may harm their long-term interests. Social contexts (voter demands) and institutional settings (pre-existing electoral rules) greatly affect this institutional choice.

The paper examines the cases of two Southeast Asian new democracies—Indonesia and the Philippines—and finds that (a) voter demands shape party members' institutional

preferences, (b) the effects of party member's preferences on the electoral system choice are conditional on the expected dominance of the parties who have access to government resources in the subsequent election, and (c) pre-authoritarian democratic electoral systems and authoritarian electoral institutions serve as focal points in analyzing electoral system choice in that post-authoritarian negotiations over new electoral institutions start with whether or not to maintain the old institutions.

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Anti-party Attitudes in Southeast Asia

Parties are commonly lamented in Indonesia. Talking heads hope the president will appoint technocrats rather than partisan hacks to ministerial posts. Asked which party puts the people's interests first, most respondents in an opinion poll suggest no party puts the people's interests first. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the Philippines, with its constantly shifting landscape of parties, vehicles for personalities and established families. Discourse in Singapore suggests that the country is too fragile for multiple, competing parties. Only one party has the competence and long-term view for Singapore's best interest, government mouthpieces argue. Why are parties derided? How pervasive is the anti-party sentiment? And what does it mean for politics and party systems in Southeast Asia?

Anti-party attitudes are relatively little studied. Scholars of mainly European political systems have examined the phenomenon, particularly in light of the "crisis of parties" in the West, as citizens are less likely to join or identify with political parties. However, anti-party attitudes appear to be significant in developing countries as well. Sukarno used and cultivated anti-party attitudes in the 1950s to replace Indonesia's democracy with his own "guided" version. Suharto nurtured anti-party attitudes to support his authoritarian New

Order for thirty years. In many parts of Southeast Asia, one can find contemporary parties derided as self-interested, divisive, and corrupt.

In this paper, the author will examine attitudes toward parties in a variety of Southeast Asian political systems, including authoritarian, semi-democratic, and democratic systems. She will discuss the motive factors for attitudes toward parties and consider how these have impacted politics and party systems in the region.

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Punchada Sirivunnabood

Local Political Party Branches in Thailand

Just as local party branches were becoming less significant in many Western countries due to the emergence of the catch-all as well as cartel parties, local party branches were rapidly being established in Thailand. Within a few years (1998-2000), more than a thousand local branches were set up by large and small political parties. In this study, I give particular focus on the Democrat Party (DP) of Thailand and its branch promotion policy. In a break from other political parties, the DP has devoted more human and material resources to branch development since its inception in 1946. In 2008, the DP controlled the largest number of party branches out of any party, approximately 200 branches across the nation.

Focusing on the formation of the party branch promotion policy and internal power structure in branches, this study explores the relationships between three party actor—the headquarters, parliamentarians and branch members—in order to answer the following questions: Why did political parties in general and the DP in particular devote significant resources to build up the branch system? What factors explain variation across and within parties over time in their branch promotion policy as well as the operations of local branches located in different geographic regions? Through a combination of interviews and fieldwork, this study demonstrates that while the DP center influenced the formation of branch policy

according to various leaders' own incentives, its constituency parliamentarians dominated the internal structure and operation of many branches. The domination of parliamentarians frequently overrides the party affiliation among branch members. However, in districts where concrete support for the DP exists, branch members strongly assist both the party and politicians in elections. This evidence distinguishes the DP from other Thai parties, in that branches cannot simply be assumed to be political tools of parliamentarians.