

Developing Democracies in Southeast Asia: Theorizing the Role of Parties and Elections¹
Forthcoming in *Southeast Asia and Political Science: Theory, Region, and Method*. Erik
Kuhonta, Daniel Slater, and Tuong Vu, ed. Stanford University Press.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties and elections lie at the center of modern democratic politics. Elections function as the chief means of holding leaders accountable for their actions in democratic societies. Political parties, defined most simply as a group of candidates that run for election under the same label, provide a means of aggregating interests as well as organizing and coordinating voters, candidates, political donors, legislators, executives, and interest groups around a common set of objectives. It is little wonder then that parties and elections are the subject of so much attention from political scientists.

When I was first asked to write this chapter I immediately sat down with a pen and paper and tried to list all Southeast Asia-focused works that have had a major impact on the study of political parties and elections in political science generally. The list was depressingly short. With a few important exceptions, very little work on Southeast Asian parties and elections turns up on reference or reading lists outside of regionally-focused materials. This lack of impact stands in sharp contrast to other areas in which scholars of Southeast Asia have played a more prominent role in advancing our knowledge—e.g. in the study of nationalism, state-building, state-society relations, and the political economy of development. Clearly, the explanation for this state of affairs does not lie in a dearth of bright minds writing about Southeast Asian politics. Nor is it due to a lack of attention to parties and elections by Southeast Asia-focused scholars. In preparation for this paper I began constructing a bibliography of works that had as their primary

focus parties or elections in Southeast Asia. I stopped compiling when the list reached fifteen pages with no end in sight.

Among these works are some outstanding pieces of scholarship. However, with some notable exceptions most of the works on this list are (rich) descriptions of single countries, single elections or single parties.² In addition, scholars have generally paid scant attention to what Southeast Asia can contribute to broader debates in the parties and elections literature. As a result, while the universe of facts at our disposal is much richer because of these studies, the relative lack of theorizing and comparative analysis has hindered the accumulation of knowledge about how elections and parties operate in developing democracies.

To a degree this state of affairs is understandable. In the past, with most of Southeast Asia less than democratic and few electoral outcomes in serious doubt, parties and elections were not the major story.³ In part this view was a misrepresentation of the facts and discounted too steeply the role elections and parties played, even in semi-democracies. Still, it is somewhat understandable that Southeast Asia scholars have not been major contributors to the analytical debates in the field of parties and elections.

Regardless of one's view of the past, however, the peripheral status of parties and elections is no longer appropriate. During the past two decades democratic elections have come to Thailand, Philippines and Cambodia. In Malaysia there is new uncertainty about the future of party politics with the retirement of Prime Minister Mahathir. The *coup de grace*, of course, is the democratic transition underway in Indonesia. Indonesia's prosperity and, more fundamentally, its very survival as a nation depends in part on the success of its democratic experiment. The transitions in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region have Southeast Asia scholars grappling with some of the core questions in the field of comparative parties and

elections. Can democracy work in Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia? If so, what types of electoral and party arrangements are most supportive of that goal and which are inimical to that end? What are the expected consequences of different electoral/party systems for economic governance, corruption, or ethnic/religious harmony? How accurate and appropriate are existing models of party/electoral politics for Southeast Asian cases?⁴

These and other questions relating to parties and elections in Southeast Asia are being asked and answered by a growing number of scholars, both new and established. With the increased focus on parties and elections comes the prospect that studies of parties and elections in the region will emerge as not only important parts of Southeast Asian scholarship, but as vital contributions to our understanding of parties and elections generally. In short, it helps to have a critical mass of scholars working on similar sets of questions, though perhaps in different countries and employing different research methods. As this occurs there is no reason why Southeast Asia scholars cannot contribute to theory development, advancement and refinement in the same way their Latin American counterparts have been doing for the past fifteen to twenty years.

In the pages that follow I review a sample of the literature on parties and elections in Southeast Asia.⁵ As I mentioned above, this literature is quite extensive. I will therefore not attempt in the space allotted to present a comprehensive review. Rather, my goal is to be as representative as possible. Drawing on the literature I argue that Southeast Asia-focused research is at its strongest, and has had the broadest impact, when it meets two conditions: 1. It is theory-driven, and, 2. It is at least implicitly comparative. In a sense, both of these conditions are essentially comparative in nature. With the first we compare our observations to a set of ideas—theories—about how the world works. (These need not be grand, all-encompassing theories, nor

does the primary goal of a study need to be theory creation/development.) For example, we can compare observations about vote buying in Thailand to existing ideas about the role of reciprocity and patron-client relations in Thai society, and/or to theories about how different electoral arrangements affect candidates' incentives to buy votes (Hicken 2007a, 2007b). We might compare the electoral performance of female candidates for public office against existing ideas about the role of women in certain countries and/or against theories about how features of the electoral system can discourage or encourage the nomination of women candidates (Reynolds 1999). Regardless of the topic, the reference to theory, whether developed by the author or imported from elsewhere, puts observations in context, clarifies the contribution (does the study (dis)confirm existing ideas? Does it suggest a new way of looking at the world?), and ultimately enables the study to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in our country, field, or discipline.

The same can be said for the second condition—use of the comparative method. Of course research can be comparative in a number of ways—e.g. across countries, across time within a given country, across units (parties, regions, etc.) within a given country. Regardless, some sort of comparative referent (explicit or implicit) is extremely valuable. For example, consider Benedict Anderson's wonderfully perverse take on murder, movies, and elections in Thailand (Anderson 1990). Students consistently rank this as a favorite in my Southeast Asia and Comparative Elections courses. Why?⁶ The article does not contain any new data—the facts and events described by Anderson were widely reported in the press and fairly well-known, at least to Thai scholars. But it takes someone to analyze the facts, identify patterns, and put events in context, before they can usefully advance our knowledge. Anderson's ability to do this is what resonates with students. He invites the reader to compare the state of the Thai polity in the 1980s

to earlier periods. He argues that the political killings he describes are not just a reflection of the increased violence surrounding Thai elections, they also reflect the growing value of elected office. For the first time elected office is worth competing, fighting, and even killing for. This marks a significant departure from the heyday of the bureaucratic polity in Thailand when elected officials and political parties were virtually without power or influence (Riggs 1966).

In the next section I briefly review some of those works that, like Anderson, bring a comparative, theoretical approach to the study of parties and elections in Southeast Asia. In so doing I highlight areas where studies of Southeast Asian cases have also had an influence on the broader discipline and where there has been a serious accumulation of knowledge. I then discuss three major areas of research in the field of party and electoral studies—areas where theoretically informed work drawing on Southeast Asian cases can, I believe, make an important and immediate impact (and in some cases, is already doing so). The final section concludes.

Consistent with the focus of this volume it is worth highlighting the indispensable role qualitative approaches play in the study of elections and parties. Scholars rely on the careful use of qualitative methods to generate and test novel hypotheses, as well as to confirm/refute existing arguments in the field.⁷ While in recent years quantitative methods have become more commonplace in the study of parties and election, in most cases they complement rather than replace qualitative approaches.⁸ Likewise, qualitative methods will continue to be the foundation of much of the work on Southeast Asian parties and elections, even as the availability of more numeric data allows for greater use of psephology and other quantitative approaches.

2. PARTIES AND ELECTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

No one should mistake my argument for more theoretically-informed comparative work as a denigration of the many largely descriptive pieces of scholarship that exist in the literature.⁹ These studies often accomplish the necessary but relatively thankless task of clearing the brush away so we can better see the lay of the land. This is particularly useful in a region like Southeast Asia where language or logistical/bureaucratic barriers can make it difficult for non-country specialists to get access to information on parties and elections. Things like a summary of national election results from around the region (Nohlen et. al. 2001), a historical review of a region's electoral systems (Hassall and Saunders 1997; Hicken and Kasuya 200; Hicken 2004), a description of the region's party systems (Sachsenroder and Frings 1998), or a catalogue of Filipino political parties (Banlaoi and Carlos 1996), are valuable resources for scholars of parties and elections. In the sections that follow I will make note of some of these brush-clearing contributions while focusing most of my attention on more theoretically-motivated, comparative work. I first review works on elections and electoral systems and then turn my attention to parties and party systems, while recognizing that these two literatures often overlap.

2.1 Elections and Electoral Systems

The Southeast Asia elections literature contains a large number of the type of brush-clearing studies described above. These can be anything from publications focused on cataloging the electoral rules and results for a single country (e.g. Peralta 1977; Rachagan 1980, 1993, Carlos 1998; Carlos and Banlaoi 1996), to analysis of the conduct, results, and implications of a single election within a given country. Such studies appear frequently in journals like *Contemporary Southeast Asian Studies*, *Asian Survey*, or *Electoral Studies* (Liddle 1978, Weiss 2000, Funston 2000, and Croissant and Dosch 2001), in local in-country publications (de Leon

1986, Tirol and Colonel 1992, Nelson 2000, 2001), or are produced by organizations such as IFES, NDI or IRI (e.g. NDI 2001 and IRI 2003). By necessity these studies are heavily descriptive and often serve as the indispensable raw material for further in-depth, theoretically-informed studies.

As useful as these brush-clearing studies are they do not by themselves do much to advance the accumulation of knowledge about parties and elections. For this to occur descriptive data must be grounded within a theoretical and comparative context. The best work on elections in Southeast Asia does just this—using rich empirical data as a springboard to talk about a broader set of theoretical concerns.¹⁰ For example, Feith's *The Indonesian Elections of 1955*, together with his subsequent book, used the election of 1955 and its fallout as a lens through which to analyze the decline of democracy in Indonesia. This sparked a debate about the viability of democracy in Indonesia which still resonates (Feith 1957, 1962, 1982; Benda 1982).

Dwight King's recent book is another such example (2003). While primarily an analysis of the 1999 Indonesian elections the study's strongest contribution comes from the comparison of voting patterns across the 1999 and 1955 elections. Drawing on existing ideas about the way social and geographic cleavages might affect voting in Indonesia, King tests whether voting loyalties have changed in nearly 45 years since Indonesia's last democratic election. Among his findings is the discovery that the 1999 elections largely reproduced the religious, class, and regional voting patterns observed in 1955.

Imagine, for a moment, if King's study had simply focused on voting patterns in 1999. Though still interesting, the lack of a comparative referent would have diluted its power and contribution. It is the marriage of in-depth country knowledge, solid qualitative and quantitative

methods and a theoretically-motivated comparative research design that makes for an extremely interesting study of democratic and electoral reform in Indonesia.

As mentioned in the introduction, where there exists a critical mass of scholars working on similar sets of questions—critiquing and building on one another’s work— knowledge accumulation is more likely to occur. This has begun to occur around the issue of voter behavior in Indonesia. For example, King’s argument in favor of enduring patterns of religious or class-based voting has been challenged on both methodological and empirical grounds by Liddle and Mujani (Forthcoming). They find that sociological variables are weak predictors of voter behavior compared to a voter’s attachment to local or national political leaders. An interesting and fruitful debate between the two sides is emerging that should advance our understanding of voter behavior in diverse polities such as Indonesia.

Another welcome development in the literature is the greater attention being given to the dynamics of elections at the local level. Kimura’s study of electoral politics in the city of Lipa, Philippines is an excellent example, as are Nelson’s and Arghiros’ work on local politics and elections in Thailand (Kimura 1997; Nelson 1998; Arghiros 1995). The need for studies of local electoral politics will only increase as greater decentralization in many Southeast Asian states magnifies the divergence between national and local politics. While the synergistic use and critique of work on local elections outside of one’s particular country is still largely lacking in this literature, the potential is certainly there. When one reads these studies certain common themes emerge—foremost among them being the distinct dynamics of politics in local (usually rural) settings versus those at the national level (or in urban areas).

Another research area that has attracted the attention of a growing number of elections scholars in recent years is the role of money and the influence of business interests. Anek and

Pasuk and Baker chronicle the growing influence of Bangkok-based business interests on elections in Thailand while Ockey, Robertson, and the authors in McVey's edited volume do the same for provincial business interests (Anek 1992; Pasuk and Baker 1995; Ockey 1991; Robertson 1996; McVey 2000). Anusorn, de Castro, and Sidel describe the vital role money plays in fueling the modern campaign machines in Thailand and the Philippines (Anusorn 1995; de Castro 1992; Sidel 1996). In Malaysia Gomez and Jomo have analyzed the vital role business interests play in financing UMNO's electoral efforts (along with the resulting *quid pro quo*) (Gomez and Jomo 1997).

Of these, McVey's edited volume comes closest to a kind of synergy, with each chapter author analyzing the role of provincial business interests in Thai political life from a slightly different perspective combined with McVey's competent synthesis of the state of our knowledge. What is largely missing from the volume is any sort of comparative or theoretical framework. Is the role provincial money plays in elections something unique to Thailand? Probably not. I'm struck, for example, by the similarities between the literature on the provincial elite in Thailand and the work on political clans in the Philippines.¹¹ Considering the Thai experience through a more comparative and/or theoretical lens might better enable researchers to draw new connections and tackle important questions that are of interest not only to Thai specialists, but to parties and elections scholars as well. For example, is there a connection between the role money and money interests play in campaigns and the level of economic or political development? What effect do electoral and campaign finance rules have on the role of money? Do funding and campaign strategies vary with the relative strength of political parties, the state, or private business interests?

2.2 Parties and Party Systems

Like the literature on elections in Southeast Asia, the literature on political parties has mostly focused on the development and state of political parties within a given polity. Yet there here has been some useful cross-fertilization across countries and even across regions. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, a body of literature emerged that aimed to understand the make-up and development of political parties in newly independent states.¹² Southeast Asia scholars were important contributors to this literature. Indonesia experts explored the connection between political parties and *aliran*—underlying religious, social and cultural cleavages (e.g. Lev 1967; and Liddle 1970).¹³ Landé focused on the role of existing patron-client patterns in the types of parties that were emerging in the Philippines (Landé 1965). While these studies were focused on Southeast Asia, the ideas and frameworks they advanced were usefully applied in other comparative contexts.

More recently, scholars working on the Philippines have led the way via a number of interesting and diverse studies attempting to explain why the Philippine party system looks and operates as it does (Kimura 1992; Rocamora 1998; Montinola 1999; Choi 2001; Kasuya 2001; Hicken 2002; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003). These build on the pioneering work of Landé (1965) and Liang (1970) on the development of the Philippine party system. By addressing common questions and generally relying on a theoretically-informed comparative research design significant progress has been made towards understanding the nature of the Philippine party system, and, to some extent, party systems in developing democracies more generally.

Two questions relating to the Philippine party system have received the most attention from scholars.¹⁴ First, how do we account for the weak and under-institutionalized nature of the party system? Second, how do we account for the demise of the stable two party system post-

Marcos? Regarding the first, the conventional wisdom is that party cohesion in the Philippines is minimal—parties are factionalized or atomized, party switching is rampant, and party labels are weak. Parties are generally temporary electoral alliances between candidates who tend to have narrow/local constituencies. Through the work of several scholars, a consensus has begun to emerge about why this is the case. Namely, that the origins of the weak party system can be traced to a combination of three factors: a. a weak state vis-à-vis societal actors (oligarchs) (Wurfel 1988; Tancango 1992), b. early local and national elections under the U.S. colonial administration (Landé 1965; Stauffer 1975; Wurfel 1988; Magadia 1999; Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003), and c. features of the electoral system (Wurfel 1988; Hicken 2002).¹⁵

The death of the stable two party system post-Marcos is a second issue that has received a good deal of scholarly attention. Two sets of arguments exist and the debate between advocates of each has spurred the advance of knowledge on this interesting question. The first group of scholars argues that changes in the structure of local politics in the Philippines account for the end of the two-party system. In the premartial law era bifactionalism at the local level was the norm (Landé 1965, 1971; and Wolters 1984). This began to break down in the 1960s and by the end of the martial law period, multifactionalism was the norm in many localities (Laquian 1966; Nowak and Snyder 1974; Kimura 1992, 1997). Whereas prior to martial law there was no local organizational base for third parties to rely on, this was not the case after martial law. A second group of scholars argues that the shift from local bifactionalism to multifactionalism cannot fully account for the growth in the number of parties post-Marcos (Kasuya 2001; Hicken 2002).

Instead, the blame or credit must go to changes to rules and institutions in 1986. These include changes to rules regulating party representation on election monitoring bodies (Carlos 1997,

Velasco 1999, Tehankee 2002), the shift to synchronized local and national elections (Velasco 1999), and the advent of presidential term limits (Choi 2001, Hicken 2002).

The literature on political parties in Thailand and Indonesia is less developed than for the Philippines, no doubt in part due to their shorter electoral histories.¹⁶ For Thailand the two best known works in English are Kramol's interesting, but now somewhat dated, application of political party theories to the Thai case and Murashima *et al's* edited volume entitled *The Making of Modern Thai Political Parties* (Kramol 1982; Murashima *et. al.* 1991).¹⁷ In Indonesia many scholars have focused on the division between secular and religious parties in both past and more recent elections.¹⁸ The democratic transition underway in Indonesia has also sparked a new interest in the characteristics and implications of the country's emerging party system (Suryadinata 2002; Tan 2002; Ananta *et. al.* 2004). The debate between King and Liddle and Mujani regarding voter motivations has already been discussed. Sherlock's recent study is notable for its careful consideration of the way in which recent changes to Indonesia's electoral rules should affect party strategies and party development (Sherlock 2004). In another study, Tan draws on existing theories of party institutionalization to argue that institutionalization has occurred in Indonesia, but in an incomplete and potentially dangerous way (Tan 2001). Party ties to societal/communal groups are strong, but on other important dimensions of party institutionalization Indonesian parties remain weak. Tan argues this presents challenges for democratic consolidation and stability. Through her use of the Indonesian case Tan has raised questions for the broader field about how we measure and think about party institutionalization.

Studies like those by Tan, King, and others discussed above, reflect a new and positive trend in the study of parties and elections in Southeast Asia. These scholars not only target the country and region-specific literature, but also explicitly engage and critique the theories, models

and debates within political science more generally. This empowers them to move the debates within the field forward and thus contribute to our understanding of parties and elections. While this shift towards theoretical engagement is for the most part a relatively recent development, there is at least one area in the field of party/elections studies where Southeast Asian scholars have, for many years, been leading contributors: namely, the literature on the relationship between parties, elections, and democracy.

While perhaps less well-known than people like Fareed Zakaria (1997) or Larry Diamond (1998), Southeast Asian researchers have been important contributors to debates about parties and elections in less-than-ideal democracies (a.k.a. semi-democracies, demi-democracies, pseudo-democracies, illiberal democracies, half-way democracies, Asian-style democracies, Cacique democracy, etc.). Southeast Asian cases were key pieces of evidence used to drive home the point that the presence of regular elections and political parties does not necessarily signal a transition to a democracy (Zakaria 1989; Chai-anan 1995, 1998; Liddle 1992; Anderson 1988; Neher and Marlay 1995; Gomez and Jomo 1998; Emmerson 1999; Case 2002).

In most Southeast Asian countries there have been extended periods where there was little doubt about the outcome of elections and no hope of holding leaders accountable by voting them out of office. Why then would regimes in these countries bother to hold elections in the first place? What purpose can elections in such polities serve? Edited volumes by Taylor and Anek (1996) tackle these questions head-on as do portions of edited volumes on political legitimacy and political opposition in Southeast Asia by Alagappa and Rodan (1996). We can distill three sets of arguments from this literature. First, elections serve legitimating functions for both domestic and international audiences while victory at the polls can also help provide leaders with a mandate to rule. Second, elections serve as a source of information. Even if there is no

serious threat of removal from office, a small dip in support for the incumbents, a rise in support for the opposition, or a fall in turnout can convey important information about public sentiment to leaders. Indeed, the leadership of Malaysia and Singapore has proved very adept at responding to very small changes in voting patterns with timely reform (of both the carrot and stick variety). Finally, elections can also be a means of social control (Tremewan 1994). They can be used instrumentally by regimes in an attempt to pacify the public, demonstrate the strength of the incumbents, or legitimize certain forms and avenues of participation while delegitimizing others. Elections can also convey information about new opponents and possible sources of opposition. The regime can then respond by co-opting or marginalizing those opponents.

A subset of this literature focuses on the fact of single party dominance alongside regular elections in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (e.g. Tremewan 1994; Case 1996a; Jesudason 1999; Mauzy 2002; Slater 2003; and Mutalib 2003). This literature is concerned both with explaining the emergence of single party dominance in these states, and accounting for these parties' resilience over time.¹⁹ Indeed, Malaysia and Singapore are crucial cases for scholars interested in transitions from single party rule. These are the dogs that haven't barked. During the past decade dominant parties around the globe have given way to more competitive party systems. The LDP in Japan, the KMT in Taiwan, the PRI in Mexico, and closer to home, Suharto's Golkar in Indonesia are just some examples. Yet UMNO and the PAP have remained entrenched in Malaysia and Singapore. What is it about these parties, or the underlying political and social systems, that makes them more enduring and resilient?

Some argue that what makes Malaysia and Singapore different is the ability of the dominant parties in these states to remain relatively unified—avoiding the crippling internal splits that often presage a transition. Jesudason (1996), for one, posits that as long as UMNO

remains unified, single party dominance will continue. Case, on the other hand, argues that while transition is unlikely to come via a split within UMNO, other factors exist that may pave the way for the defeat of UMNO at some future date, though enduring ethnic and religious divisions continue to limit opposition efforts.²⁰

Specifically, Case argues that dominant party regimes eventually lose the ability to control patronage—especially during times of economic crisis when there is economic uncertainty. Conversely, it is during times of crisis that public tolerance for patronage/corruption is at its lowest. In the wake of heightened public discontent “the government is pressed into a posture of baser authoritarianism, perpetuating the limits on civil liberties, while applying new ones to elections.” (Case forthcoming, 34) By doing so, however, the regime undermines its electoral legitimacy and risks triggering a backlash that could lead to its defeat. Case argues that there were signs that such a dynamic was beginning to emerge in Malaysia’s 1999 election, but the persistence of ethnic and religious differences undermined collective action on the part of opposition social forces.²¹

Case’s study is notable for its careful engagement with the existing literature on democratization. He uses evidence from the Malaysian case to provide a useful corrective to some of the prevailing theories in the political science. More such theoretically grounded research on the critical cases of Malaysia and Singapore promises to shed greater light on the process by which dominant party systems end or endure.

3. NEW DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

As the previous discussion makes clear, Southeast Asia scholars have made some important contributions to the literature on parties and elections, particularly regarding parties

and elections in semi-democracies. Still, compared to the contribution of Southeast Asia scholars to other literatures there is room for improvement. Likewise, the field of party and election studies would greatly benefit from quality contributions from Southeast Asia-focused scholars. More cases with which to test theories and hypotheses is always a welcome development but the Southeast Asian cases bring more than simply a potential for increasing ‘n’ to the table. First, the cases of Southeast Asia are a welcome addition to a literature that has been dominated by Western European and, in recent years, Latin American cases. Second, for certain questions the insights to be gleaned from Southeast Asia cases cannot be had elsewhere. Below I discuss three areas where theoretically informed work drawing on Southeast Asian cases could have an important and immediate impact on our understanding of parties and elections. These include first, parties and elections in divided societies, second, institutional engineering and the (unintended) consequences of reform, and third, the causes and consequences of different types of party systems.²² Where appropriate I review existing Southeast Asia contributions to these three areas.

3.1 Parties and Elections in Divided Societies

One of the most crucial questions in democratic theory is whether or not democracy can work in deeply divided societies. Can democratic participation help reduce ethnic or religious tensions, or does it just add fuel to communal fires? Perhaps not surprisingly, the answer is, it depends. Under some conditions democratic elections can mitigate social conflict, but under others they actually can exacerbate existing tensions. The debate in the literature on democracy in divided societies is over what types of electoral and party systems are most conducive to conflict mitigation.²³

Briefly, there are two contending schools of thought.²⁴ The first, championed by Lijphart and dubbed the consociational or powersharing approach, argues that democracy works best when societal cleavages are acknowledged and an effort made to ensure that each group gets a share of power (Lijphart 1977). To do this one seeks to make ethnic/religious groups the building blocks of political parties and then ensure that each group is represented in a ‘grand coalition’ government (Reilly 2003a). As a practical matter this requires the adoption of proportional representation and the creation of ethnically-based political parties. A second approach argues that constructing a political system on a foundation of contentious societal cleavages is inherently unstable. Instead, the centripetalist approach advocates moving the focus of politics away from societal cleavages by creating institutions that encourage moderation and cross-cleavage accommodation and cooperation (See Horowitz 1984, 1991; Sisk 1996; Reilly 2001). Two pillars of this approach are an electoral system that allows for preference voting and vote-pooling,²⁵ and a party system with broad-based parties or party coalitions that transcend cleavage boundaries.

My purpose here is not to critique these approaches, nor advocate one over the other. Rather, it is to point out that Southeast Asia can supply something this literature desperately needs—a fresh batch of relatively understudied cases. The region contains two ethnically, religiously, and geographically divided societies, Malaysia and Indonesia—each of which have, at the moment, functioning political systems. Lying at the other extreme is ethnically diverse Burma—for most of history a political and economic basket case. Important ethnic and religious divisions exist in most other Southeast Asian states as well. The various attempts by countries within the region to manage these divisions, including the use of both consociational and centripetal strategies, have not received much scholarly attention.

A partial exception is Malaysia. Two of the most prominent scholars in this field, Lijphart and Horowitz, have both used the Malaysian case to support their (contradictory) arguments (Lijphart 1977, Horowitz 1995). However, even in this case the frequent manipulation of the electoral and party systems by Malaysia in an effort to moderate ethnic tensions leaves room for further analysis.²⁶ The interesting cases of Burma and Indonesia have been almost completely neglected.²⁷ Particularly intriguing is Indonesia's current attempt to marry elements of the consociational model, proportional representation, with a new system for electing the president of the sort often advocated by supporters of the centripetal approach. Careful analyses of this and other Southeast Asian cases could significantly advance the debate about the democracy in divided societies.

Southeast Asia is also an ideal laboratory for studying the process by which nascent societal cleavages become (or do not become) politicized or particized (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). It is interesting to note, for example, that while religious and ethnic cleavages have given rise to political parties in Malaysia and Indonesia, the same has not occurred in the Philippines or Thailand. Islamic groups in Mindanao are highly politicized, and this is increasingly the case in Southern Thailand, yet this has not translated into any significant effort to form political parties. A thorough analysis of this research question would need to consider a variety of possible variables, but these would include the role the electoral system plays in providing incentives and opportunities for the creation of new parties and the interaction of electoral rules with societal cleavages.²⁸

3.2 Institutional Engineering and the (Unintended) Consequences of Reform

During the past twenty years Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have all either adopted new constitutions or greatly overhauled existing charters. These and other reforms resulted in dramatic changes to the rules pertaining to parties and elections in these countries. Institutional reform is often an attractive option for would-be political reformers for two reasons. First, institutions like electoral rules have independent, predictable, and discernible effects on outcomes. They help determine which actors will have a seat at the table, and contribute to the incentives and capabilities of those actors. Second, although institutional reform is by no means easy, (institutions after all create groups with a vested interest in the continuation of those institutions), electoral rules are arguably more malleable than cultural norms, social structures, or levels of development in the short to medium term. The promise and peril of such institutional engineering is an area of great interest to students of electoral and party systems.

Southeast Asian cases can help shed light on several questions related to institutional reform. First, how do such reforms come about? (Must they always be crisis driven?) Second, how effective are institutional reforms at achieving the goals set out by reformers? Third, is institutional engineering in fact a useful means to bring about changes in the party system?

Consider the cases of Thailand and Indonesia. In both countries much of the blame for past democratic shortcomings and failures was laid at the feet of the party system. As a result, reformers in each country sought to engineer new party systems that would be more conducive to political stability and good governance.²⁹ Among other things they wanted to encourage the development of national political parties—parties that draw broad support from across the country rather than from one particular region or ethnic/religious group. As Reilly states, for Indonesia “the development of such a national party system was seen as an essential step both in

counteracting secessionism and in building a viable democracy.” (Reilly 2003b, 3.) A second, related goal was reducing the number of political parties in an effort to improve government stability and reduce gridlock in the policymaking process. Finally, in the case of Thailand there was also desire to improve party cohesion.³⁰

In an attempt to engineer these party systems an impressive variety of reforms were introduced. These include, for example, adopting vote thresholds (both countries),³¹ switching to single-seat districts (Thailand), adopting stringent branch and membership requirements for political parties (both), adding a national party list tier to the electoral system (Thailand), restricting the ability of politicians to switch parties (Thailand), and requiring a winning president to garner not only majority support, but support across most regions as well (Indonesia). Reform on this scale is relatively rare and represents a golden opportunity for researchers. In essence, we have the chance to field test theories about the effects of institutions and institutional reform.³² Is institutional engineering producing the expected outcomes? If not, what does that say about the validity or generalizability of existing theories?

The scale of the reform effort in Thailand and Indonesia also affords us the chance to better understand how different types of reforms interact with each other. When developing and testing theory one often relies on comparative statics. What happens if we change one particular variable while holding all else constant? This is useful and necessary allowing one to isolate the independent effect of that particular variable. However, in the real world, *ceteris* is never *paribus*. Institutional reform doesn't proceed in isolation of other variables. Economic political conditions, social structures, and other reforms can interact with a particular reform to reinforce or undermine stated goals. In short, reforms may produce unintended consequences.

We can illustrate this point with some examples from the region. In Indonesia the rules designed to encourage national parties and discourage separatism may in fact inflame separatist sentiments, especially when applied to provincial and district elections. The *de facto* ban on provincial or regional parties may effectively block legal, moderate alternatives to groups such as the Free Aceh Movement or the Free Papua Organization (Sherlock 2004, 7). The 1997 Thai constitution introduced a number of reforms designed to change elections from candidate-centered affairs to battles between competing party platforms (e.g. the addition of a party list tier and the elimination of block voting). However, other constitutional reforms, adopted in pursuit of other goals, push in precisely the opposite direction—towards more candidate-centered campaigning (e.g. the method of electing the Senate and smaller electoral districts) (Hicken 2006b). In the Philippines decentralization and a single term limit for the president were adopted with an eye to undoing the extreme concentration of power under Marcos. However, these reforms also changed the nature of the party system and the organization of election campaigning. Finally, also from the Philippines, the reservation of a small number of seats for parties and groups representing marginalized interests has produced some unintended side-effects. While the party list provision has probably resulted in more diverse interests being elected to Congress, it has also partially ghettoized those interests. Mainstream political parties and politicians seem largely content to leave programmatic campaigning and the representation of marginalized interests to party list groups.

Clearly institutional reform, especially on the scale attempted in Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia is both a promising and potentially perilous undertaking. The unintended consequences of institutional reform that result from the type of interactions

discussed above are an understudied topic in the field and one to which Southeast Asian-focused scholars can immediately contribute.

3.3 The Causes and Consequences of Different Types of Party Systems:

A party system is an enduring pattern of electoral competition between parties for public office. The marked differences in party systems across countries (and within a country over time) are of great interest to many scholars. Party systems can differ along any number of dimensions, including the number of parties that compete regularly at the national and lower levels, the stability of the governing and opposition party coalitions, the durability of party loyalties within electorates, and the frequency of new party formation. These differences are interesting because they have real consequences, affecting the quality and nature of democratic representation and accountability, economic governance, and the stability of governments and political systems.³³ There is evidence, for example, that the number of parties in governing coalitions—which is related to the number of parties in the party system—affects the ability of governments to respond to economic shocks (Franzese 2002; MacIntyre 2003). Likewise, voter turnout across countries is positively correlated with various aspects of party systems (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). And some scholars have linked the success of regional parties to secessionist pressures (Filippov, Ordeshook, and Shvetsova 2004).

Because party systems are so vital to the political life of a country, researchers have studied various features of party systems seeking to understand both the causes and consequences of these features. I will briefly review three of these features and argue that Southeast Asia scholars have something to contribute to our knowledge about each. Perhaps the most familiar feature is the number of parties. For measurement, political scientists tend to use

Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) "effective number of parties" index, or N , which gives greater weight to parties that get higher proportions of the vote.³⁴ We know a good deal about the factors that correlate with the effective number of parties in a given electoral district. Specifically, evidence strongly supports the idea that the electoral system and social structure interact to influence the effective number of parties at the district level (Duverger 1954; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Ordeshook and Shvetsova 1994; Lijphart 1994; Amorim and Cox 1997; Cox 1997). A district can tend toward few parties because it uses a restrictive electoral system or because it has few social cleavages. Likewise, a multi-party system can arise as the result of many cleavages or a permissive electoral system.

Southeast Asian cases are certainly useful for evaluating these theories, especially since the region is home to some relatively unusual electoral systems.³⁵ For example, evidence from the Thai case suggests that electoral rules can produce predictable outcomes, even where the electoral system is complex, democracy is new, and political information is relatively scarce (Hicken 2002). The Thai case also highlights the need to consider more carefully the assumptions that underlay existing theories.

Existing theories of electoral systems make predictions at the level of the electoral district but have little to say about how many parties we should expect to see nationally. The possibilities for the number of national parties run the gamut from a few large nation-wide parties, to a large number of regionally-based parties, to extreme party system fragmentation. There is, in fact, often a huge difference between effective number of parties nationally and the effective number of parties locally. (For example, the average effective number of parties at the district level in Thailand is around 3, versus more than 7 nationally.)³⁶ This issue should be of more than just academic interest to Southeast Asia scholars given that fragmented party systems

have been blamed for the breakdown of Indonesian democracy in the 1950s and for a variety of governance problems in Thailand.

There has been little research on how the numerous district party systems in a given country come together to form a national party system, but this is beginning to change.³⁷ Among the variables that seem to affect the size of the national party system is the degree of economic and political centralization. Given the decentralization campaigns underway in several countries, Southeast Asia is an excellent laboratory to study the variables that shape the size of the national party system. Evidence from the Thai and Philippines cases has already shaped debate, suggesting that the concentration of economic and political power cannot account by themselves for the size of the national party system. Instead, concentration interacts with other features of the political environment to shape the national party system (Hicken 2002).

Second, a growing group of scholars is interested in the distinction between programmatic and clientelistic party systems. There are various definitions of political clientelism but most include the direct exchange of goods and services by politicians in return for (expected) political support (Medina and Stokes 2002). In clientelistic party systems these exchanges typify party-voter linkages. By contrast, programmatic party systems contain parties that compensate supporters indirectly through the promise of specific policy packages (Kitschelt et. al. 1999). A portion of this literature focuses on explaining the origins and evolution of programmatic or clientelistic parties/party systems. Others focus on the effects of these party system characteristics on policy outcomes and on the policymaking process (Kitschelt et. al. 1999; Cox and McCubbins 2001; Medina and Stokes 2002; Golden 2002).

There has been a good deal written about clientelism in Southeast Asia, but unfortunately very little of it has thus far engaged this literature. The potential synergies from marrying the

Southeast Asia focused literature with the broader theoretical and comparative literature are significant. One challenge for this literature is isolating and disentangling the relative weight of possible independent variables. Various scholars ascribe the origins of clientelistic or programmatic parties to the level of socioeconomic development (Brusco et. al., 2002), the degree of bureaucratic professionalization (Shefter 1994), electoral rules (Carey and Shugart 1995, Golden 2002, Hicken 2007a), and the nature of executive-legislative design (Blondel 1966; Sartori 1976; Coppedge 1998; Knutsen 1998).

For each of these variables Southeast Asia contains an interesting set of cases. Thailand's rapid economic development over the last 25 years went hand in hand with regular elections. Did rising incomes, urbanization, and greater education lead to changes in the mix of clientelistic versus programmatic appeals? Are differences discernible in the demand for and supply of clientelism between richer and poorer areas within Thailand? Comparing the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore, with their varying levels of bureaucratic professionalization could also yield useful insights. Changes to Thailand's electoral rules offer a chance to study the effect of formal rules on the incentives for clientelism. Cross-country comparisons of the effects of different electoral environments (for example between majoritarian Philippines and proportional Indonesia) are another avenue to explore. Finally, Southeast Asia contains variation in executive-legislative relations that is lacking in places like Latin America. (Studies of party systems in Latin American are by default, studies of presidential party systems). We can, for example, get some useful analytical leverage by comparing Thailand and Philippines. Each has similar levels of economic development, and similar electoral rules, but one is a parliamentary system, and the other is presidential. How, if at all, is this difference reflected in their party systems? In short,

there are still plenty of unanswered questions and quality research drawing on the region has the potential to shape the debates and set new research agendas.

A third oft-studied feature of party system is the degree of ideological polarization (Blondel 1966; Sartori 1976; Coppedge 1998; Knutsen 1998). Usually this concept refers to the ideological distance between parties, with scholars interested in how the degree of ideological polarization affects democratic stability, public policy, etc. In the many countries where ideological differences are the basis for competition between parties this focus is completely appropriate. However, there are other countries where ideology seems to play little if any role in electoral politics, e.g. Thailand and the Philippines. The lack of ideological or programmatic differentiation in these Southeast Asian cases sets them apart from most of their European and Latin American counterparts and raises interesting questions. First, what factors determine the extent to which parties differentiate themselves on the basis of ideological appeals? Second, what are the consequences of a lack of ideological diversity in the party system? How does this affect policymaking, voter turnout, interest representation, capacity for reform, democratic stability, etc.?

Southeast Asia scholars are well placed to begin providing answers to these important questions. Let's consider specifically the second of these questions. What are the consequences of a lack of ideological diversity in the party system? Phrased differently, what are the consequences of the absence of a partisan Left in most of non-communist Southeast Asia? This is an intriguing question for Southeast Asianists, certainly, but also for party and election scholars more generally. The development of party systems in much of the rest of the world takes place in an ideologically diverse atmosphere with parties arrayed along a Left-Right dimension.³⁸ Yet a partisan left did *not* emerge in most non-communist countries of Southeast

Asia. (The exceptions are pre-1965 Indonesia, which I will discuss below, and perhaps more recently the Philippines.) By comparing party and party system development in Southeast Asia with development in other areas of the world it is possible to begin to isolate the effects of a partisan Left on the party system.

By way of preliminary speculation only, let me suggest three hypotheses that might be worth exploring in connection with this question. First, the presence of a partisan Left is a catalyst for the development of programmatic political parties (from across the ideological spectrum). The *raison d'être* of parties on the Left generally includes the promotion of certain sets of policies—e.g. land reform, poverty alleviation, and wage protection. The presence of a partisan Left, campaigning on these types of programmatic appeals, might induce competing parties to respond with alternative programs. Where there is no electoral threat from the Left, other political parties may lack strong incentives to move towards more programmatic campaigning—relying instead on more traditional strategies (e.g. mobilizing patron-client networks).

Closely related to the first hypothesis is a second: the presence of a partisan Left is associated with greater attention by governments (Left or Right) to issues of rural development, social safety nets, and labor protection. In other words the presence of a partisan Left should not only shape the attraction of programmatic appeals generally, it should also shape the mix of specific policies that get placed on the political agenda by whichever party is elected. Where Leftist parties succeed in politicizing an issue it will be difficult for competing parties to ignore it.

The third hypothesis is related to the organizational structure of parties—a key component in Mainwaring and Scully's definition of party system institutionalization. Where a

partisan Left is present parties are more likely to develop a stable, grass-roots organizational apparatus (e.g. local party branches). This hypothesis assumes that Leftist parties typically place greater emphasis on local, grass roots organizing and party building from the ground up than do other parties—an assumption that would first need to be verified empirically. If the assumption holds we might find that, just as parties respond to programmatic appeals by Leftist parties with programs of their own, so too do they respond to electoral threats by adopting some of the Left's organizational strategies.³⁹

Cross-regional comparisons are one way to begin to investigate these hypotheses; but within the region there are also interesting variations to explore. For example, Indonesia is the one Southeast Asian state with a long history of an active, partisan Left in the form of the PKI. Until its destruction in 1965 the PKI was an electoral/political force to be reckoned with. How did this affect party system development in the pre-1965 period? How has the legacy of the PKI shaped the party system since 1965? What are the consequences of the lack of an explicitly partisan Left for Indonesia's newly reestablished democratic party system? The point is not whether these hypotheses turn out to be right or wrong, only that they, and numerous others like them, are worth exploring in the context of Southeast Asia.⁴⁰

To summarize, party systems in Southeast Asian states differ in interesting ways from each other and from party systems in other regions. Exploring the origins and consequences of these differences should yield important empirical and theoretical insights.

4. CONCLUSION

I have said very little in this chapter about the use of various research methods for the study of parties and elections in Southeast Asia. The choice of which method to use—qualitative,

quantitative, or formal—should be driven by the nature of our research question and the types of data that are available. Most of the existing research on Southeast Asian parties and elections relies on qualitative methods and this is likely to remain the case. Indeed, careful qualitative work in one or a few countries is an integral part of the study of parties and elections. However, the use of quantitative methods is also becoming more common as more and better data suitable for large-n analyses become available. The key to Southeast Asia scholars contributing to the core debates in the field is not the use of any particular method, but rather the combination of an engaging research question, sound research design, and careful analysis.

To date, the contribution of Southeast Asia scholars to the field's collective knowledge about parties and elections has been relatively modest. Altering this state of affairs will take a conscious effort by more researchers to engage and add to the broader literature on parties and elections. I've argued that Southeast Asia-focused research is at its strongest and has had the broadest impact when it is theory-driven and (at least implicitly) comparative. Placing more of our work within a theoretical and comparative context will enable us to better connect with scholars outside of the region and contribute to our collective knowledge on parties and elections.

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Notes to Chapter 4

¹ I wish to thank the Bill Liddle, Gabriella Montinola, two anonymous reviewers and the participants of the Stanford workshop on Southeast Asia in Political Science for comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

² Two major exceptions are the use of the Malaysian case by Lijphart (1977) and Horowitz (1985) (both general comparativists) to develop and support arguments about how to construct a stable democracy in divided societies. Lande's (1965) work on parties and factions in the Philippines is work which has had an impact outside of Southeast Asia. These contributions are discussed in more detail below.

³ This perception even holds for the Philippines, which has the longest (albeit interrupted) history of elections in Asia. For many scholars of Philippine politics, parties and elections are seen as epiphenomenal to issues of elite, oligarchic, or clan conflict. Indeed, when I tell Filipinos I study political parties and party systems in the Philippines a common response is, "What parties? What system?"

⁴ Liddle's (2001) edited volume entitled *Crafting Indonesia Democracy* is a good example of scholars grappling with such questions.

⁵ The subject of parties and elections in Communist or Socialist states (i.e. Vietnam, Laos, and pre-1993 Cambodia) is not covered here but is discussed in Dan Slater's chapter.

⁶ Anderson's highly readable tongue-in-cheek writing style is certainly one important factor.

⁷ See for example Sartori (1976) and Horowitz (1985).

⁸ See Cox (1986), Mainwaring and Scully (1995), Kitschelt et. al. (1999), Mainwaring (1999), Shugart and Wattenberg (2000), and Posner 2005.

⁹ Indeed, I would place some of my own work in the category, e.g. Hicken and Kasuya 2003.

¹⁰ See Neher (1976), Kasim (1979), Crouch et. al. (1980), Maisikrod (1992), Sombat (1993), Rahmin (1994), Lande (1996), Croissant et. al. (2002), Antlov and Cederroth (2004), and Liddle and Mujani (2004).

¹¹ Sidel (1996) draws similar parallels between Thailand and the Philippines.

¹² On Africa see Zolberg (1964, 1966). On Latin America see Martz (1964).

¹³ See Lev (1967) and Liddle (1970).

¹⁴ See Hicken (2002) for a more extensive review of attempts to answer these questions.

¹⁵ A fourth factor sometimes mentioned is the presence of a powerful chief executive (e.g. Grossholtz 1964, Banlaoi and Carlos 1999.) Presidentialism is often associated with weak and non-cohesive legislative parties (see Lijphart et. al. 1993, 322). However, one must be cautious regarding the direction of causality (Shugart 1999 and Hicken 2002).

¹⁶ I discuss the literature on Malaysia and Singapore later.

¹⁷ For more recent work in English see King's study of the Palang Dharma and New Aspiration parties in Thailand (1996) and Hicken (2002). Notable research in the Thai language includes Preecha (1981), Manut (1986) Manut et. al. (1988), and Kanok (1993).

¹⁸ For example, see Feith (1957), Geertz (1960), Liddle (1970), Imawan (1989), Chaidar (1999), and Sulisty (2002). See also Lev's work on political parties in Indonesia (1967, 1970).

¹⁹ For the history of early party development in Malaysia (Malaya) see Maryanov (1967).

²⁰ See also Case (1996b).

²¹ The article was written prior to the 2004 election so Case does not have a chance to analyze UMNO's continued success at the polls. Obviously disagreements among the opposition continue to hinder collective action. Perhaps too, the government's ability to rein in some of its

excesses, the change in UMNO leadership, and the relatively quick recovery from the 1997 crisis contributed to its electoral victory.

²² This list is by no means exhaustive of the possibilities.

²³ See for example, McRae (1974), Lijphart (1977), Horowitz (1985, 1991), and Reilly (2001).

²⁴ See Lijphart (1995) and Reilly (forthcoming) for a review of this debate. See Croissant (2002) for a review of consociational versus majoritarian institutions in Asia.

²⁵ Namely, the Alternative Vote, the Supplementary Vote, and the Single Transferrable Vote.

²⁶ Existing studies include MacDougall (1968), Ismail (1979), and Rachagan (1984). During its early history Malaysia's system contained elements of consociationalism but there was a move to a more majoritarian (and/or authoritarian) approach after the riots of 1969.

²⁷ Burma considered several electoral models before adopting a largely majoritarian approach in 1948, though it also employed a Senate that attempted to mirror the ethnic divisions in the country (Silverstein 1977, 1988).

²⁸ See Posner (2005) for an excellent analysis of how societal groups have responded to electoral incentives in Africa.

²⁹ For a discussion of constitutional reform in Indonesia see Liddle (2001).

³⁰ Current debates about constitutional reform in the Philippines echo these same themes.

³¹ In Indonesia parties that do not obtain a certain percentage of the votes cannot run in the subsequent election. Some small parties have maneuvered around this rule by formally dissolving and then reconstituting themselves under a new name.

³² See Hicken (2002, 2007b, 2006,) and Reilly (2003) for some examples.

³³ See Alesina, Roubini, and Cohen (1999), Powell (2000), Persson and Tabellini, (1999), and Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004).

³⁴ There are other measures of the number of parties. The appropriate measure depends on the research question. (See Niemi and Hsieh 2002). The formula for N is the inverse of the sum of the squared proportions of the vote or of the seats. For n parties receiving votes, and for p_i representing the proportion of popular votes received by party i ,

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$$

³⁵ E.g. the block vote in pre-reform Thailand and the Philippines (Senate), mixed-member systems in Thailand and Philippines, and SNTV in Thailand (Senate) and Indonesia (DPD).

³⁶ These figures are for the 1986-1996 elections.

³⁷ See Cox (1997, 1999), Chhibber and Kollman (1998, 2004), Hicken (2002).

³⁸ There is of course variation in the importance of and polarization along this dimension.

³⁹ In less democratic settings we certainly see such transfers occur. The organizational strategies of Golkar and the Indonesian military owed much to the PKI and in fact were designed to undermine and displace the PKI organization throughout Indonesia. So too did the Thai military pursue a counter-insurgency strategy that mimicked the CPT's emphasis on building support in rural villages.

⁴⁰ A full research design would need to account for competing explanations and intervening variables, such as the presence of other (ethnic or regional) cleavages that may form the basis for political parties, electoral institutions, and effect of armed communist insurgencies.