

Workshop: The Party-State Nexus in Asia

Stockholm University, 23-24 August, 2018

Organizers: Eva Hansson, Stockholm University and Erik Moberg, Seoul National University

Abstract:

States in Asia are enmeshed in relationships with political parties. In the socialist and former socialist countries, states and ruling parties have been intertwined for decades. In other single-party systems, party and state institutions have become fused in a variety of ways. In the US-allied regimes, parties with deep historical links to state counter-insurgency projects remain influential. Placing parties in connection to the state is a promising starting point for examining politics in the region.

Despite these facts, much comparative research on democratic Asia understands parties as extra-constitutional bodies that form in response to social interests and electoral incentives. While these models have some value, they fail to capture the deep links between state and parties; they also overlook historic similarities within the region between more and less competitive political systems. Furthermore, thinking in Europe about parties has advanced in the past two decades to draw attention to the ways that relationships with the state inform the very definition of parties and recast the possibilities and limits of contemporary democracy.

There are thus good empirical and conceptual reasons to investigate parties in Asia from the standpoint of the party-state nexus. Doing so can shed light new light on what parties do and whose interests they serve. What is a party? What range of forms do parties take, and how have those forms shifted over time? How do state-party ties shape prospects for and processes of democratization? How do parties' links to the state re-shape the relationship between parties and the social interests they claim to represent? How do state-party ties affect democracy? Particular themes to be addressed include legal governance of parties, party banning, parties under emergency measures, the nexus of party-building and state-making, and the assets and economic activities of parties. Grounded in histories of institutions in the region, this approach stands apart from perspectives that begin with universal models of parties and party systems. A focus on the party-state relationship can serve as a promising and novel framework for comparing parties and political systems in Asia.

In this project, we consider both electoral and one-party regimes, as the theme of the party-state nexus is not limited by regime type. The regional focus includes East and Southeast Asia.

Introduction

Political parties are central to political struggle and the exercise of public power in Asia, just as they are in nearly every country in the world. In much of Asia, boundaries between parties and the state can be murky. When a party member in China or Vietnam is suspected of corruption, should it be state organs or party agencies that investigate? Where does authority lie? When in Taiwan or South Korea the state sets rules for how parties must select leaders and candidates, then are parties being tied more to regimes of public law? How do democratic regimes with long histories of single-party rule – as in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Japan – disentangle party and state? In Malaysia or Singapore, when is the prime minister acting as ruling party head and when as head of government? Where does public authority end and party discretion begin?

All of these questions point to the party-state relationship. If parties are seen in relation to the state, rather than as social or electoral bodies, then these concerns emerge. These concerns are not merely academic. The core issues are of practical significance for many actors. Courts, legislators, election commissions, and civil society groups take positions on questions about the party-state relationship. These actors are directly involved in working through the boundaries that separate parties and the state. Their actions have important implications, as the party-state nexus relates to how interests can be articulated and where the limits of public authority lie.

This project probes these ambiguities of public authority through attention to the party-state nexus in East and Southeast Asia. The suggestion here is that this nexus can serve as an anchor for comparative discussions of parties and political systems in the region. Such an anchor can tie together discussion of different regime types, since these relationships are found across regime types. The focus on the party-state nexus can help to answer basic questions about what parties in Asia are, the organizational forms they take, their links to civil society, and their place in democracy.

Ambiguities of public authority

Parties can be compared according to where they stand in relation to public authority. Parties are frequently presented differently depending on the type of regime in which they operate. In Asia's electoral regimes, parties may portray themselves merely as private groups. That is, they represent social interests and aim to gain power through elections. Such parties are also groups of election professionals. In the one-party states, ruling parties are sources of public authority. The party's authority may be higher than the state's. This is the formal picture.

In truth, boundaries between parties and public authority are more porous and contested in all types of regimes. In several of the region's democracies, there has been a growth in legislation relating to party operations. In Europe and North America, a large portion of such legislation is concerned with the financing of parties. In order to promote fairness or limit corporate influence, regulations are placed on party funding or campaign spending. Public financing of parties is another justification for setting rules on the money matters of parties. In democratic Asia, finance-related laws are less common and less detailed. Japan and South Korea have laws in this area, and a legal infrastructure for parties and electoral politics is emerging in parts of Southeast Asia (Ufen and Mietzner, 2015). Instead of focusing on finance, relatively more regulation is devoted to other aspects of party operations (Reilly, 2006, ch. 6). In Indonesia and South Korea, laws on political parties stipulate that parties must have a nationwide presence. Likeminded people in one portion of the country cannot come together and express their shared interests and visions through a political party. Such laws are made in the name of ensuring national sovereignty is not threatened. They also prevent certain forms of political organizing, even as constitutions guarantee rights to free assembly and political expression (Sö, 2014; Yu, 2014). There is thus an important measure of state authority over how parties, as supposedly independent bodies, can organize social interests.

An expansion of public authority over parties is also evident in laws that restrict the selection by parties of candidates for public elections. Such restrictions may relate to processes of

candidate selection or to requirements to nominate individuals from under-represented groups. In Taiwan, the state stipulates the ways parties nominate candidates (Su, 2016). Concerned that parties did not operate democratically, lawmakers dictated the range of procedures for selecting candidates. In this case, law shapes how parties behave as electoral bodies. In a more common model of parties, the competitive pressure of elections should shape how parties operate. When results are poor, this pressure should make parties adjust their methods. By setting regulations on nomination of candidates, law circumvents the competitive logic of elections. In Taiwan, as in South Korea, legal gender quotas have also been introduced. Parties are required to field at minimum a certain number of female candidates in elections (Huang, 2015; Lee and Shin, 2016). These measures limit the autonomy of parties and make them more like public bodies that ought to be regulated to serve public interests. The point here is not to criticize these laws, some of which may be beneficial for expanding representation. Rather, it is that parties need to be studied in light of transformations which have made them increasingly subject to legislation and courts.

States also, to varying degrees, retain rights to dissolve political parties. Thailand offers an example. The kingdom has seen a continuous judicialization of party politics after the 2006 military coup. Courts have intervened in core political matters such as electoral disputes, executive actions and policy choices and directly in dissolving several consecutively-established political parties related to the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and have made rulings to bar leading politicians from politics for several years in an attempt to demobilize the followers of the red shirt movement that had close ties to the party. Judicialization has occurred to such extent that observers have noted it has “moved beyond judicialisation into areas that suggest abuse of justice or ‘un-rule’ of law” (Dressel 2012). As such, the judiciary has become a proxy in the struggle for political power, the outcome of which is that representative institutions have lost influence and the operations of democratic politics constrained. In South Korea, where democracy is more established, failure to meet requirements on party organization or electoral thresholds have been grounds for party dissolution. More controversially, in 2012 South Korea’s president invoked an article of the constitution in order to disband a minor leftist party. In Taiwan, by contrast, there has been great reluctance to deregister any parties, or even to impose limits on party formation. An effect of using laws to dissolve parties is to transfer authority to the judiciary. When laws are used to limit or dissolve parties, courts have gained expanded responsibility. Courts gain power to deal with challenges lodged by the affected parties. This judicialization of authority and politicization of judicial bodies, noted in other regions (Stone Sweet, 2000; Ginsburg, 2003), may be on the rise in parts of Asia. Such a trend would mean that holders of elected offices are determined less through votes and more by judges. The normative implications of a shifting balance depend, of course, on how vote-getting and courts work in the relevant contexts.

Some similar areas of public control over parties can be found in the region’s less liberal electoral regimes. Controls over party formation can be more legalistic, as in some of the democracies. The Societies Acts in Malaysia and Singapore, for example, specify in great detail the procedures and conditions for registering a political party. These controls can, of course, go well beyond what is found in more liberal places, to the point of impinging directly on rights to organize such as in Vietnam, Laos and China where alternative parties to the party in power are regarded as anti-state and threatening to the political regime itself. As such, the activities of these parties makes them liable for punishment in accordance with criminal law. More fundamentally, in countries where elections have not dislodged a ruling party, any notion that ruling parties and opposition parties fall into the same category of organization seems misplaced. The People’s Action Party (PAP) in Singapore is defined at least as much by its grasp on a vast array of state organs and state-linked agencies as it is by electoral considerations. Organizations from banks and sovereign wealth funds to community groups are tied to the PAP. Within the electoral sphere, claims about electoral integrity have to be squared with the fact that the Election Department reports to the prime minister’s office rather than to an independent body. In a context like this, the ruling party shades into an agent of public authority while opposition parties are subject to regulation by the state.

In the one-party states, too, the party-state relationship can be more contentious than would at first appear. In China as well as in Vietnam, for example, “rule of law” is frequently cited as a new source of legitimacy for the country’s rulers. As party ideology has gradually dissipated as a justification for both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Vietnam Communist Party rule, law has been offered as a basis for claiming the right to rule. The 2013 Constitution of Vietnam guarantees the leading role of the party over state and society. In China, the New Left politicians and intellectuals, in particular, have stressed law as an alternative to democratic and participatory modes of politics (Pan, 2003). If law is to be a source of legitimacy, then the question immediately arises of the relationship between public law and hegemonic parties. What is, for example, the parties’ legal status? Another important dimension relates to how not only political regimes but also hegemonic parties are protected by the security sector. In Vietnam, the role of the army as well as police is not primarily to protect territory and people but to protect the Communist Party’s rule. While the People’s Republic of China (PRC) constitution is formally unambiguous that the party rules the state, in practice the answer to this question is far less clear. The CCP is an enormous organization, with 90 million members and vast assets. It is complex and does far more than simply govern the country. Government offices, party units, and courts deal on a daily basis with matters arising from the activities of members and party organs. Application of commercial law to party enterprises can undermine or interfere with party control. When party members are suspected of wrongdoing, actors must figure out whether an internal party investigation should be launched or whether the courts should be used. Under Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption drive, these issues are especially significant.

These points leave us with an agenda for research. In what ways do relationships with the state shape what parties are and what they do? What variation in such relationships can be found in Asia? What explains that variation? And what are the implications of state-party links for understanding these political systems? By answering these questions, we may be able to shed further light on more fundamental questions about party politics and the limits of democracy in the region.

Historical and regional foundations

The party-state nexus may be an especially appropriate focus for comparative inquiry into parties in Asia. One benefit of starting with this theme is that it applies to a variety of regime types. This allows us to speak in more regional terms not only about parties but also about political regimes. Only a few works have sought to make comparisons across East and Southeast Asia. A purpose of this project is to contribute to the expansion of comparative investigations of Asia’s political parties. These projects (Lye and Hofmeister 2011; Hicken and Kuhonta, 2015) are among the first to attempt to develop broadly comparative discussions about parties in Asia. Placing parties and party systems in Asia in historical contexts of colonialism, state formation, and authoritarian rule (e.g., Slater and Wong, 2013, Hicken and Kuhonta, 2015), such research demonstrates the potential for cross-national studies of parties in the region. The current project aims to build upon these volumes in order to shed further light on parties in the region.

Regional history provides good reasons for making the party-state nexus in particular a reference point for comparison. In much of Asia, parties and states developed together. When states were gaining (or re-gaining) basic capacities to project power, parties were also being built and were involved in these processes. Party-building could influence state-building, and state-building could influence party-building, sometimes resulting in pluralist and fragmented party systems with a variety of small parties unable to rule unless wider coalitions are formed, such as in Thailand before the 1997 constitution or in South Vietnam pre-1975. Comparisons in this regard may also be of relevance for an analysis of political regime trajectories, and the role of political parties in processes of democratization.

For much of the region, states gained shape in the mid-twentieth century in a context of decolonization and Cold War politics. State structures and social mobilization, often articulated through parties, emerged as imperial powers withdrew. Many of the region’s earliest parties formed

in opposition to foreign rule or encroachment. Several parties specialized in guerilla warfare. In places where revolutions succeeded, parties created states. It goes without saying that histories of state-building and ruling parties are intertwined in China, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea. For anticommunist Taiwan, creation of the Republic of China and the Kuomintang (KMT) are also deeply linked.

The nascent Cold War context shaped interactions between party-building and state-building in the region. The United States, where it had influence, pressed for effective rulers who had no tolerance for possible communists and thus engaged in a process which limited mobilization into popular movements that were feared to carry such sympathies. This stance meant support for particular sorts of parties in efforts to project state power. In Taiwan, the organizationally-Leninist KMT crushed dissent while establishing an effective state. In Indonesia, the Golkar party emerged as a hegemonic party for three decades, while other meaningful oppositional parties were made irrelevant as the two other parties (the Indonesian Democratic Party, PDI, and the United Development Party, PDI) that were sanctioned to field candidates were vetted by the state apparatus along with their election materials, speeches, rallies and meetings. The Indonesian case point to the importance of also understanding the role of security forces in cementing hegemonic party rule. This process was supported by military aid from Western countries, primarily the United States. In Korea, the United States ran a military government that ruled the southern portion of the peninsula for three years after 1945. In an atmosphere rife with mobilization, the rulers favored particular political actors over others. Rightwing party activists and state administrators – in the police and other order-related agencies – worked together. Together they strengthened state power and undermined parties outside the right. In Japan, where the state was reformed in the early postwar period, the CIA funded the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), an assembly of factions which would endure as for decades as the ruling bloc. In these places with US support, rightwing or counter-revolutionary forces created public authority while also strengthening certain political parties.

Anticommunist considerations motivated the development of other institutions located at the party-state nexus, while also tilting the balance between different forces in society and shaping their potential to mobilise as political parties with effects for years to come. Security laws constituted one sort of institution. Several of the anticommunist states passed laws banning certain forms of political mobilization. Examples include the Internal Security Act in Malaysia or Singapore, or the Anti-Communist Act passed in Thailand in 1952 by dictator Plaek Pibulsongkram. The last acquired an ominous edge in the late 1960s when dictator Thanom Kittikhorn mandated the establishment of an Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC), giving security agencies the right to try communist suspects in military tribunals instead of civilian courts. Only after a process put in place following the “people’s constitution” of 1997 did public discussion of repealing these laws occur. These laws could be used to keep critics in check and have often targeted left-leaning groups. Such laws can be understood as superseding constitutions, since they impose limits on freedoms granted through constitutions. More broadly, governments in many countries, including Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea, among others, used state power to limit who could participate in public electoral politics. Socialist parties were not permitted in this sphere. With the purview of electoral politics already delineated, rulers could cite the threat of communism in order to disable opponents.

There is thus a regional story behind party-state linkages. Forces operating across the region shaped the ways both parties and states developed. In the region’s democracies, many parties are not primarily responses to electoral incentives. This is especially true in East Asia, where former dominant parties continue to be influential. In several, but not all, Southeast Asian cases strong links emerged between a dominating or hegemonic party and the state. An interesting question arises from the Southeast Asian cases is why in some instances this was the case, while in other cases a fragmented party system emerged. A conceptual starting point that places state-party interactions at the center of analysis has strong grounding.

To recognize the significance of the party-state nexus does not mean that these linkages are equally important for all political systems in the region. Parties in the Philippines, for example, are

notoriously under-institutionalized. The point in focusing on the party-state nexus is that it can provide a basis for comparison. We can make meaningful statements about similarities and differences across East and Southeast Asia by reference to this focus. Cases with “weaker” parties and/or parties with fewer ties to the state may be instructive for the variation they bring to the comparison. In Thailand, the monarchy and armed forces have repeatedly intervened in political life, pushing parties to the sidelines. In contexts such as these, “weak” parties lack deep ties to the state.

The party-state nexus in global perspective

Another good reason to study the party-state nexus in Asia is that research on democracy outside of Asia has also done so. In Europe, there has been a turn toward examining parties in relation to the state. Since the mid-1990s, scholars of European politics have suggested that parties, facing declining memberships and greater financial dependence on the state, ought to be understood in relation to the state rather than to mass bases (Katz and Mair, 1995). As citizen-party links have fallen, states have come to play a larger role in defining and enabling parties. Ingrid van Biezen (2004) argues that parties should be considered “public utilities,” given their public financing and the expansion of regulation on parties. Considering these changes, such scholars argue that new understandings of party democracy are required. For Katz and Mair, many of Europe’s major parties have become “cartel parties” that implicitly collude in order to retain their grip on public power. An alternative interpretation of a similar phenomenon comes from Colin Crouch (2000), who argues that a period of “post-democracy” has emerged in Europe. This political form is associated with a decline in the social and electoral components of party democracy. The state is held up to the firm as a model and stripped of political meaning.

To a limited extent, scholarship on individual Asian countries has picked up on these ideas. In the study of South Korea, for example, political scientist and public intellectual Jang Jip Choi (Ch’oe Chang-jip) refers to “cartel parties” (2012). Choi’s *Democracy after Democratization* begins with a set of observations similar to those of Katz and Mair: declining mass participation in electoral parties, the weakness of party organizations, and the influence of mass media. Choi locates South Korea’s cartel parties in the country’s “conservative democracy.” By this term he means that the Cold War attitudes about politics have lingered, despite a formal liberalization of the political environment. Sociologist (and current Seoul superintendent of schools) Heeyeon Cho (Cho Hŭi-yŏn) (2012) also takes a cue from these European discussions. Cho follows Crouch’s concept of “post-democracy” to understand the failure of South Korea’s democratization to break down the strangle-hold of both political and economic elites on the main levers of influence. Doucette (forthcoming) develops this analysis focusing on the Korean experience but drawing also on regional comparisons, as he shows how with the survival of Cold War geopolitical imaginaries, neoliberal restructuring is constraining the ambitions of democracy movements. A persistence of juridical forms of repression has, according to Doucette, provided fuel to a resilient post-democratic politics. Hewison (forthcoming) goes even further and argues that also the contest for civil society in Southeast Asian countries should be viewed in a movement toward ‘bussinessification’ of organisations of civil society. Not only the state, in other words, can be seen as characterised by the technocratic managerialism associated with post-democracy. A question then is: How does this development affect political parties and their potential to serve as vehicles for representation and also their links to civil society and wider political space? How can political parties be understood in conditions of post-democracy?

There has, however, been little attempt to re-think parties in Asia on the basis of shifts in thinking in Europe. In the region’s democracies, parties continue to be viewed mostly in their social and electoral contexts. It could be, though, that the transformations that have occurred in Western parties have also come to Asia. If that is the case, then there is need for similar reflection on the role of parties in modern democratic and other regime types in the region.

There may be reasons to be reluctant to import concepts such as cartel party or post-democracy to the study of Asia. In Europe, public financing of political parties can be seen as a key

component of the shift toward closer party-state links or as a possibility for parties to exist without being subjected to the control of commercial interests. The introduction of public financing meant that parties should be made to follow rules, as most organizations that benefit from state funds are expected to do. In democratic Asia, though, private sources continue to dominate party funding. Subsidies have begun to appear in some places, but in others even the basic rules on political finance are poorly institutionalized and obscure. An important pillar of the cartel party model may thus be only marginally present. Furthermore, Katz and Mair, as well as Crouch, place their concepts in particular historical narratives relate to the origins of parties in mass mobilization, the bureaucratization of parties over time, shifts in media and the emergence of election specialists, and the rise of concerns about fairness in party competition. To what extent do these narratives fit with experiences in Asia? Since democracy is a more recent arrival in the region, there may be a departure from the European story. Still, processes of institutional change, especially in the region's hegemonic parties, may share traits with Europe.¹

These notes of caution are important, but the aim here is not to claim that a model developed elsewhere is a perfect match with what is found in Asia. Instead of transplanting the European ideas directly, the concerns underlying "cartel parties" and "post-democracy" can be taken as reference points for thinking about similar issues in a distinct historical context. The ideas need to be adjusted to make sense in Asia. What we learn from scholarship on party-state connections in Europe is that parties are variable institutions. They can have larger memberships and be more tied to their constituencies, but they can also develop links to the state. The reasons for a shift toward the latter set of linkages may be more or less relevant in Asia. The sorts of linkages that are important are also likely to be different. Nonetheless, the main point that parties should be viewed in relation to states can be taken seriously.

Re-examining party democracy

The call by Katz and Mair, among others, to re-think the role of political parties in democracy in light of connections to the state can be instructive for reflecting on not only Asia's democracies but can also provide insight into the constraints for possible democratization in other less than liberal political regimes. The key message in the European discussion is that we need revise our expectations for party democracy. We can no longer expect that parties are mostly leaderships of the movements they head. They are also caught up in preserving their access to state and other resources. If parties are defined partly by their links to the state, then the link between parties and democracies should also be viewed differently. This set of concerns ought to be explored in Asia.

A goal of this project is to identify ways that the party-state relationship informs the operation of political regimes in Asia. The concerns here are fundamental but they have not been addressed systematically in the region. A number of questions should be recognized as significant in this regard. Do laws that raise barriers to party formation harm representation through elected offices? Does regulation of internal party matters undermine the ability of parties to aggregate social interests? Do legislators collude to make representation of some specific interests more difficult? Are courts gaining influence at the expense of elected offices? If parties are increasingly becoming regulated bodies, then how are they able to reflect preferences from society? How can parties' ties to civil society and a wider political space be characterized? These questions strike at the core of normative aspects of democracy.

We can also comment from an original viewpoint on questions of democratization. The region includes newly democratized political regimes as well as regimes in which democratization has not yet occurred. How do newer democracies grapple with experiences of disentangling a former hegemonic party from the state? By studying these experiences, we can shed light on the processes of democratization and types of democracy found in the region. These experiences may also hold valuable lessons for the region's future democracies.

Themes

A set of more specific themes can be identified. Individual papers should engage one or more of these themes. Some of the themes listed below are relevant to most or all countries in the region; others are specific to clusters of countries. While the list is not exhaustive and we welcome additions, these themes have received little comparative treatment in the region. The first theme relates to broader historical processes relevant in all cases, while the next four themes address institutional and legal circumstances of relevance for political parties. The last two themes relate to political parties and their role in representation, democratization or reproduction of authoritarian political regimes and their connectivity to interests in society and a wider political space.

Intersection of state-building and party-building. How have processes of state-building and party-building influenced one another? In several places, including the PRC, Taiwan, and Vietnam, political parties developed into armed mass movements that founded states and resulted in ‘party-states’ which more or less fused the parties with their respective states including security forces. In others, such as Malaysia and Singapore, ruling parties have dominated for such long periods that party and state institutions have fused. In South Korea, political figures who led postcolonial counter-insurgency measures had positions both in parties and in the state, suggesting that the main parties are intimately linked to a particular state formation history. Cold War concerns played a large part and foreign governments were crucial for shaping or financing important parties.

Public law and internal party rules. How do rules within parties relate to rules from the state and decisions from courts? Most parties have rules governing their organization, operations, and members. Constitutions and other legal codes can inform those rules, or can stand in opposition to them. How do these sets of rules – party rules versus public law – relate to each other? This question is important in several areas. An example is the legal status of party members. To what extent do parties assume the legal functions of the state in governing party members? Such a question is especially relevant when considering how the state or a party investigates and prosecutes corruption or alleged wrongdoing among partisans. Another example is legal requirement that party members follow party rules. To the extent this is the case, parties effectively become lawmakers of their own. This theme speaks to concerns both in the one-party states and the electoral regimes.

Party assets. What is the state’s authority over party assets? Several ruling parties have acquired substantial assets, including firms, properties, and financial assets. Such assets clearly help fund party activities. The state’s role in governing use of these assets can be a source of tension. This issue is central for the development of political fractions within formally socialist party-states, by some regarded as embryos to new competing political parties, but it is also relevant in democratic regimes like Taiwan. While much international scholarship on the money matters of parties focuses on fundraising, campaign spending, and state subsidies, in parts of East and Southeast Asia the issue of party assets also stands out as significant.

Leadership and candidate selection. In what ways does the state govern internal party processes for selecting leaders and candidates in public elections? These questions are equally relevant for democracies and single-party regimes. All parties must produce leaders for various offices and possibly nominees for elections. In systems based on Leninist principles, party regulations stipulate the *formal* procedures of leadership selection. However, in practice these procedures are often informal and marked by a lack of transparency. It is increasingly common, even in the region’s democracies, to find the state legislating processes for choosing leaders and candidates. This issue cuts to the core of party independence from the state versus control by it, as is the case in hegemonic party regimes.

Party formation and dissolution. To what extent do states reserve rights to dissolve parties? Are such rights used and, if so, through what means? Even in Asia’s democracies, given the existence of internal security acts and national security laws that allow for extra-constitutional detention of activists, do constitutions actually protect multi-party systems? Party laws, especially on registration and organization, might also influence the number of parties. The role of party law in influencing party systems can be explored more systematically in Asia.

Democratization and/or reproduction of authoritarianism. How do post-transition states treat former ruling parties? The more successful new democracies in the region have had to deal with former regime actors who continue to wield power. Taiwan, South Korea, and Indonesia have all faced this task. Struggling electoral regimes, like Cambodia, do as well. In Taiwan, lawmakers and courts have taken measures to address the dominance of the KMT. Unwinding the KMT from the state structure has indeed been a crucial focus of democratic reform in Taiwan (Cheng, 1989; Chu, 1992). In South Korea there has been less concern. In Indonesia, the former ruling party lost power but remains a contender in a multi-party landscape. Identifying and explaining these variations can help us understand the sorts of democracies that are emerging. It also takes discussions of democratization in the region in another direction.

Parties and political representation. Some Southeast Asian countries could be described as having more or less seen an institutionalization of non-representative features of party politics. How can the representative role of parties be understood in different Asian regimes, and are there differences and similarities in historical processes that could help explain the way parties developed in different contexts, including variations in relations between parties and states, and degree of concentration or fragmentation in party systems?

These themes point to a range of dimensions along which parties may vary. The focus on the party-state nexus suggests a common vocabulary for comparing political parties in the region – even in vastly different types of political systems. An exploration of these themes can lead to fresh perspectives on political parties in Asia.

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