

## **INTRODUCTION**

Consider this paradox: substantial political change including increasing political participation in Southeast Asia in the last decade has often been accompanied by a narrowing of the channels for political contestation. Neither the fact, nor the complexity, of political change in Southeast Asia or elsewhere has totally eluded theorists. Indeed, there is now greater recognition that this political change may be either heading in directions other than liberal democracy, or is manifesting in new variants of liberal democracy. The proliferation of so-called hybrid regime theory and the burgeoning literature on the quality of democracy reflects this. Such work has highlighted how problematic many of the 'Third Wave' transitions to democracy have proved to be. In the process, political institutions have been subjected to unprecedented detailed scrutiny and analysis by transition theorists in the attempt to characterise diverse political regimes.

In acknowledging the possibility of sustainable alternative regimes to democracy, this literature appears to significantly depart from modernisation theory's linear conception of political development that was implicit in earlier transition theory. But how adept is this work in explaining, as opposed to characterising, regimes that don't seem to conform to prevailing ideal types of authoritarianism or democracy? What light can it shed on the particular paradox mentioned above? And just how far has it shifted from the primary assumptions of modernisation theory?

We argue below that, despite opening up the question of sustainable alternatives to liberal democracy, this literature is theoretically constrained in accounting for such possibilities. In part this is due to the persistent preoccupation with understanding how to achieve democratic transition. This tends to steer analysis away from a full understanding of the forces behind different regime directions in favour of prescriptions to correct democratic institutional deficiencies. A related problem is the narrow framework within which analysis is conducted, whereby institutions loom large but their relationships to wider power structures are either ignored or under-theorised. For this reason, much of the debate about preferred institutional design to promote or improve democracy within this literature may be informed by idealist, liberal optimism rather than a realistic assessment of the foundations and dynamics of regime power. This is not to deny attempts have been made to incorporate socio-economic and structural factors into analysis, but these

have not been linked to any wider analysis of capitalist development and its implications for the exercise of power and related conflicts.

The point of this paper is thus to both critically evaluate hybrid regime theory and to try and advance a different approach – one that aims to shift analytical emphasis towards understanding the reasons why political regimes take the forms that they do. Instead of asking whether or not a regime is deficient or defective as a democracy, we advocate examining the changing forms of political participation and representation to ask what is driving such developments. We argue that political regimes need to be identified not in terms of institutional attributes but in terms of the spaces of political participation they establish through certain forms of conflicts which are managed, ameliorated or contained. What is distinctive in our approach is that political regimes are analysed according to both political participation and the forms of conflict that are enabled by various terrains of political participation. The transitions literature with its obsessive emphasis on political culture and consensus neglects to ask what *forms of conflict* are mobilised by particular structures of political participation.

By posing the research problem in this way we shift the focus of analysis from the identification of regime types to the processes of regime transition and refinement, including democratisation, particularly as these relate to underlying social conflicts. Therefore, the question that we need to address is not what the right set of democratic institutions may be, but rather, what kind of social conflicts do currently existing institutions organise into politics and, conversely, what kind of conflicts are organised out of politics? Political spaces are not neutral in their consequences – they can discriminate in favour of some conflicts being addressed while others are marginalised. In other words, the particular structuring of political space within the state – and in relation to the state – tells us a great deal about the nature of the conflicts and their management that are central to defining the political regime.

One of the strengths of this approach is that it enables us to understand political regimes not as some finite set of institutional arrangements and procedures but as a historical process that is being constantly transformed by political struggles and conflicts associated with changing social and economic relations. Therefore, in contrast to procedural accounts identifying democratic and authoritarian regime types, we endeavour to conceptualise democracy as a political project of social groups seeking to create forms of political participation in order to protect or defend their

interests. Authoritarian institutions, similarly, need to be analysed in terms of a project with a social and political base that helps explain the preferred forms of political participation.

In our approach, political regimes are understood as the outcomes and expressions of conflicts and alliances of different interests. This can include economic, political and ideological interests, all of which may be better protected or defended in one historical period through a different political regime than in another historical period. New interests can also be generated by changed historical circumstances, such as economic globalisation, which can shift the balance of forces agitating for one or other form of political regime. The nature of political institutions must therefore be explained in terms of these larger dynamics and the factors shaping them.

Our approach does not mean that we simply subordinate political institutions to underlying social conflicts, but rather that institutions themselves embody certain forms of conflicts and struggles. As such it is not the *quality* of institutions per se that is important but rather the *type* of conflicts that are privileged within various spaces of political participation. This framework allows us to explore the relationship between the emergence of arenas of political participation, such as the rise of informal politics, and new patterns of conflicts and interests. Therefore we ask not whether new institutions are good or bad for democracy, but rather what kinds of conflicts and contradictions do these institutions express?

None of this is to dismiss normative concerns within the hybrid regime and quality of democracy literature about the establishment of democratic regimes. Rather, we maintain that certain forms of conflict being organized out of politics, and the marginalization of related interests, poses a fundamental problem for democratic prospects – and one that the prevailing theoretical literature is not equipped to recognize.

Furthermore, our approach enables us to bypass some of the simplistic distinctions between authoritarian and democratic regimes to focus more sharply on the way spaces of political participations are constituted across a range of ostensibly authoritarian and democratising political regimes. The link between political regimes and conflict, not the characterisation of regime type, is central. Instead of reifying political institutions, we seek to explore the relationship between institutions, and the way conflict is organised and structured as a result of these institutions. We suggest that we can transcend the democratic/authoritarian regime type distinction because

our approach highlights the structuring and organisation of new forms of political spaces in Southeast Asia, and we assess their significance both for democratic regime transitions possibilities and alternative political regime trajectories.

Political regimes viewed through the prism of institutionalism tend to reify institutional attributes so that the identification of attributes of regime types becomes an end in itself. We go beyond institutional analysis of regimes to locate such dynamics within these broader conflicts and alliances of interests and within the dynamics of state transformations and associated power structures. It is this institutionalist approach to political regimes that is most obvious in the burgeoning hybrid regimes and so-called quality of democracy literature. It is nevertheless useful to explore this literature in order to highlight the distinctive ‘conflict’ approach that we take to the analysis of political regimes.

### **THE PERILS OF INSTITUTIONALISM: HYBRID REGIME THEORY AND QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY**

The concept of the hybrid regime first surfaced in the early 1990s (Diamond 1993, O’Donnell 1994),<sup>1</sup> but it has been significantly developed and assumed increasing influence in the ensuing decade or so. Thought to be composed of democratic and authoritarian elements (Ottaway 2003, Case 2002), these regimes have been variously labelled as ‘delegative democracies’ (O’Donnell 1994), ‘pseudo-democracies’ (Diamond 2004, Volpi 2004), ‘defective democracies’ (Merkel 2004, Croissant 2004), ‘illiberal democracies’ (Zakaria 2003), ‘limited democracies’ (Haynes 2001), ‘competitive authoritarianism’ (Levitsky and Way 2002), ‘semi-authoritarianism’ (Ottaway 2003) and as a ‘halfway house’ (Case 1996a). Many of these terms have associated subtypes that attempt to further differentiate such regimes, and it is also not uncommon for some authors to use more than one term to describe essentially the same regime type.<sup>2</sup>

By way of illustrating these concepts of hybrid regime, let us look briefly at some of the more influential variants. O’Donnell (1994) coined the term ‘delegative democracies’ in his analysis of presidential systems in Latin America to describe the way in which strong executives buttressed by electoral methods have often acted outside the process of liberal constitutionalism. Political participation in these regimes is not institutionalised either. O’Donnell (1994: 59-60) argues that delegative democracies ‘rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is

thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office'. Following elections, 'voters/delegators are expected to become a passive but cheering audience of what the president does' (O'Donnell 1994: 60). Croissant (2003: 69) has subsequently elaborated on the mechanisms by which this 'illiberal, super-majoritarian' regime secludes other formal and informal political actors from decision-making and eludes effective horizontal accountability.

Other studies have pointed to how authoritarian governments use electoral methods to effectively neutralise political opponents. Levitsky and Way (2002), for example, coined the term 'competitive authoritarianism' to describe regimes where electoral mechanisms are used to consolidate the power of dominant incumbent parties while elections are substantively fair. Moreover, 'formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority' and they create 'arenas through which opposition forces may – and frequently do – pose significant challenges' (Levitsky and Way 2002: 54). Yet the rules of those institutions are so violated that this regime 'fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy' (Levitsky and Way 2002: 52).

Ottaway's (2003: 3) concept of semi-authoritarian regime emphasises ambiguities 'that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits'. Furthermore, this ambiguous character is deliberate, part of a strategy meant to maintain the appearance of democracy 'without the political risks that free competition entails'. However, despite the constraints on the contest for power, according to Ottaway (2003: 3), semi-authoritarian regimes permit sufficient space for political parties and civil society organisations to form, for an independent press to function to some extent and for some political debate to take place'.

One of the most expansive recent accounts of the hybrid regime is provided by Merkel's (2004) concept of defective democracy, which delineates between four subtypes: exclusive democracy, domain democracy, illiberal democracy and delegative democracy. Crucially, Merkel (2004) argues that none of these democracies are embedded through either internal or external institutions supportive of five interdependent partial regimes essential to genuine democracy: the electoral

regime, political rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern.

The concept of hybrid regimes has been deployed for some time in the analysis of politics in Southeast Asia. Indeed, as early as 1993 Case was adopting the term ‘semi-democracy’ to describe Malaysia (Case 1993, see also 1996a, 1996b). More recently, while emphasising the different degrees of intra elite cohesiveness in Southeast Asia, Case (2002) has depicted countries in terms of various modulations of hybrid regimes. These range from what he calls ‘stable semi democracy’ in Malaysia, ‘unconsolidated democracy’ of Thailand, to the ‘low quality democracy’ of the Philippines. Crouch’s (1996) important work on Malaysia also identified a mix of democratic and authoritarian elements as central to regime stability in that country (see also Crouch and Morley 1993). In their particular elucidation of different hybrid regimes, Levitsky and Way (2002: 54) also refer to Singapore as a ‘façade electoral regime’. This regime is distinguished from competitive authoritarianism on the basis that ‘electoral institutions exist but yield no meaningful contestation for power’ (Levitsky and Way 2002: 54).

In its earliest manifestations, the concept of hybrid regime was seen by some authors to capture what was thought to be a temporary detour from the transition to democracy.<sup>3</sup> Karl (1995), for example, depicted hybrid regimes as unstable and a stepping stone towards eventual democratisation. However, this position has given way more recently to an acknowledgement that these regimes are potentially more enduring. Ottaway (2003: 7), for instance, observes that ‘semi-authoritarian regimes are not failed democracies or democracies in transition: rather they are carefully constructed and maintained alternative systems’. Volpi (2004: 1061) also contends that pseudo-democracy ‘does not simply correspond to a deviation from a “democratic” normative framework and teleological order—a case of liberal democracy minus “x” or authoritarianism plus “y”—but that it forms a distinct analytical category and political phenomenon’. Similarly, defective democracies, according to Merkel (2004: 55), ‘are by no means necessarily transitional’. However, as will be explained below, breaking from the problematic of democratic transition to encompass a wider range of regime possibilities has proved difficult for hybrid regime theorists.

Much of the focus of hybrid regime theory has been on countries that appeared to have made, or were on track to make, transitions to democracy in the early 1990s

but which failed to do so (Reich 2002). In trying to establish the true character of these regimes, then, there has been a heavy preoccupation towards evaluating the democratic credentials of these regimes at the expense of a more open-ended enquiry into regime character. Literature on the quality of democracy, which emanated from the effort to audit institutions in established liberal democracies (Beetham 2004),<sup>4</sup> has been harnessed towards this end, helping to generate detailed check lists of the institutional features of, what has been portrayed as, different versions – and invariably degrees – of democracy.

Terms like defective, semi and pseudo democracy only make sense in relation to a democratic ideal type and the literature on what constitutes quality or good democracy (Morlino 2004), so the integration of this literature into hybrid regime theory is understandable. Yet this preoccupation with measuring degrees of democracy has meant that description of regimes has often taken priority over their explanation. As a result, despite the concession at one level to the possibility of enduring alternative regimes, there is a striking emphasis on the analysis of institutions with a view to prescriptions for their improvement in democratic terms. This is not that far removed from the earlier modernisation and transition theory problematic premised on the assumption that liberal democracy is the natural regime to accompany advanced economic and social development. Moreover, prescriptions about preferred institutional design are rarely informed by a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics and power bases of existing regimes – a theoretical weakness that derives from the failure to locate institutions within wider social, political and historical processes. Instead, institutional reform prescriptions are often derived from an overly technical analysis.

In this vein, Croissant (2003) describes the institutional make-up of the political systems in South Korea and the Philippines, focusing on the powers accorded to the president, the structure of the legislatures and judiciaries and the relationship between the branches of government. These, he argues, are significant for assessing a regime's propensity to become a delegative democracy. Robinson (2003) in his examination of Russia's 'partial democracy' also maintains that the effectiveness of the Duma as 'a policy-making body and check on the executive has been hampered by its institutional structure' (Robinson 2003:152). He cites Ostrow as saying that the Russian legislature has often been gridlocked because of its 'unlinked, dual channel institutional design' (in Robinson 2003:152). As a consequence, he contends,

institutions that were meant to be democratic in fact weaken essential features of democracy. Alternatively, Levitsky and Cameron (2003) turn their attention to the institution of the political party. They argue that the weakness of Peruvian political parties allowed former president Alberto Fujimori to dismantle the institutional checks on his power. Fujimori's success has led to a further weakening of political parties in Peru. Political parties, say Levitsky and Cameron (2003:5), are 'essential to achieving, maintaining, and improving the quality of democracy'. Consequently, they conclude their paper by examining the prospects for the re-emergence of political parties in post-Fujimori Peru.

What is clearly evident in this review of the literature is that the question of regime causation has generally been overshadowed by the new preoccupation with institutional auditing exercises. Moreover, where regime causation has enjoyed serious attention, there have been significant theoretical limitations to this that stem directly from the literature's institutionalist bias.

Certainly in the last decade various transition theorists adopting the hybrid regime concept have recognised the need to broaden their analysis to incorporate observations about factors conditioning the impact and scope of elites in shaping regime directions. Case (1996a: 440-41), for instance, has argued that elite behaviour is grounded in mass attitudes, social bases, and structural forces. Precisely how these are evaluated is the pivotal issue, though. He recommends 'mapping the persistence of semi-democratic regimes' and recognition of the importance of 'constituents' that 'can pose opportunities or constraints for elites and nudge the latter along semi-democratic pathways' (Case 1996a: 457). In a subsequent essay he contends: '...such half-way-houses *can* endure if institutions are designed appropriately to guide elites and mass behaviour along pseudo-democratic lines. Moreover, these institutions may be buoyed by countervailing historical and socio-economic undercurrents with some favouring democracy and others authoritarianism...' (Case 2001: 44). Social conflicts are even recognised as important in shaping political regimes.

Crucially, though, theorisation of these socio-economic factors is underdeveloped. Which particular societal forces seek to constrain or support authoritarian elites and why? Should we understand these forces in terms of classes or groups, or are they less structured? Are the conflicts between societal forces generated or exacerbated by capitalist development, or are they incidental to capitalist development? These are important questions that need address if we are to establish

whether the socio-economic factors highlighted by Case are merely something that elites have to contend with, or whether they fundamentally shape regime forms and possibilities.

To be fair, notwithstanding theoretical limitations of the attempt, Case did at least recognise the importance of social conflict to regime formation and dynamics. Meanwhile, the modernisation theory idea that conflict shaping regime directions principally resides in a struggle of cultural values continues to assert itself and deflect attention from the structured interests often associated with conflict. Morlino (2004), for example, tries to explain the form of regime in terms of cultural traditions and values diffusion – especially among elites – despite references to the importance of the wider social and economic context of this struggle. These references never translate into a detailed or disaggregated identification of the interests or coalitions thereof, an essential precursor to any adequate theorisation of their importance to regime directions.

However, there are signs that the relationship between conflict and the political mobilisation of societal forces is gaining recognition. Hawthorne (2004), for example, presents an interesting argument about the role of civil society in promoting democratisation in the Middle East that goes beyond much of the detailed procedural analysis in the hybrid regime literature. She maintains that civil society activism can only create a democratic opening if accompanied by broader social, economic or political changes. Moreover, she emphasises the need to differentiate between democratic and non-democratic elements seizing opportunities ensuing from these changes. Ultimately, though, her analysis is more developed in describing the contrasting political values of these elements than in explaining them. Nevertheless, this work is important in shifting attention to the political conflict embodied in civil society and the implications of this for regime change (Hawthorne 2004: 19).

Ottaway (2004: 3) reinforces this direction in emphasising the importance of broad-based political organisations, including social movements and unions, for democratic institutions to take root. However, she goes a step further in maintaining that support for democratic ideals need not be essential for some societal forces to support democracy, so long as they can see their interests furthered by such a regime (Ottaway 2004: 6). This position on the contingent nature of support for democratisation by emerging social forces is elaborated on by Ottaway and Carothers (2004). In so doing, these authors expose the limitations of the culturalist account of

persistent authoritarianism in the Middle East. However, the full theoretical potential of this approach is not realised as democratic values tend to be portrayed in monolithic and static terms, rather than something negotiated through processes of conflict and co-option tied to concrete interests.

Ironically, despite the highly normative connotations of his defective democracy concept and the fact that his approach is heavily oriented towards furthering the democracy audit approach to regime analysis, Merkel (2004) has an appreciation of the need to look deeply and historically into how regimes are embedded. Accordingly, he makes the broad recommendation that we should look to the work of Barrington Moore to ascertain the relationship between structured interests and the prospects of particular political regimes. Yet, as is elaborated on below, work building on Moore and other theorists situating political institutions within broader contests between economic and political interests pre-dates the hybrid regime literature. And extending on this work to identify detailed, historically-specific conflicts and coalitions of interests associated with contemporary capitalism is very much at the core of the approach we seek to apply to regime analysis in Southeast Asia.

Our argument is that situating the process of regime change in these contextual and dynamic terms enables us to go beyond the implicit teleological perspective which seeks to measure the quality of democracy against an abstract set of institutional standards. Much of the democratic transitions literature in one way or another seeks to locate actual political regimes against a hypothetical norm. Having found actual regimes in much of the developing world unable to meet these abstract standards, democracy itself is found to be compromised. In contrast, we suggest that what passes in the literature for hybrid regimes of defective or low quality democracy in Southeast Asia and elsewhere is the emergence of a distinctive political project that differs from that which distinguished democracy during the last century. But how do we demarcate these different periods?

### **POLITICAL REGIMES AND REPRESENTATIVE POLITICS**

One way of demarcating these historical periods is through Eric Hobsbawm's (1995) concept of a 'short twentieth century'. For Hobsbawm the short twentieth century in Europe – and it remains a largely Eurocentric periodisation of the twentieth century – was framed by the socialist project, in particular, the social democratic view of liberal

capitalism in Western Europe. In this approach it is not democracy per se that is important but the way democracy itself became intertwined with the broader class project. To quote Eley (2002: 21-22), following the lines of Hobsbawm's 'short twentieth century', '... *social democracy* came to signify not only the most radical form of parliamentary government but also the desire to extend democratic precepts to society at large, including the organization of the economy'. What this argument – and similar arguments of those such as Therborn (1977) and Rueschemeyer, Stephens & Stephens (1992) – underline is the fact that the movements for democracy cannot be disentangled from the process of capitalist industrialisation and its associated social conflicts. *Democratic projects themselves become a constitutive part of these social conflicts.*

In this sense, democracy is embedded within social and political relations. Eley (2002), for example, makes an essential distinction between earlier notions of radical democracy (agrarian?) that were organised around the civic virtue of a society of small property holders and local self government and a project of social democracy. The radical agrarian ideas of democracy reached their zenith in the events of 1848. But the advance of capitalist industrialisation – and the consequent social conflict – was transforming the conditions, the actors and the spaces through which democracy could be pursued. And crucial to this transformation of democracy was not just the emergence of socialist parties but the socialisation of democracy itself in terms of its meaning and purpose.

The social conflict produced by industrial capitalism, then, is an important dimension of the democratic project of the short twentieth century. However, even more significant is the fact that this conflict has found a material expression in political spaces within the state. Above all, this is about structuring new forms of political spaces. What stands out as the core of these new political spaces is the emergence of the structures and organisations of representation – be they through political parties or trade unions. Indeed, the most visible and distinctive strand of this social democracy was the struggle for the representation of those interests and social relations that emerged from the process of capitalist industrialisation. But 'political representation' of this sort required the creation of new forms of political organisations and collective mobilisation. The most important of such organisations was the mass political party linked to various social and political forces and it is

through these organisations that spaces of political participation itself were transformed.

The structure and organisation of conflict through systems of representation provide a window into the changing nature of the social democratic project. These conflicts draw attention to the way in which the social democratic project has collapsed as a result of a complex mix of factors. These relate to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the globalisation of economic relations and associated changes in economic governance, all of which served to constrain the capacities of parties to maintain and consolidate the post war social contract. Equally important were the structural changes within the domestic political economy, such as the movement towards flexible production structures. The cumulative effect of these changes has been a radical transformation of the social democratic project that formed the basis for the short twentieth century.

But perhaps the most dramatic and noticeable transformation has been the decline of the mass political party that was the lynchpin of representative politics. The gradual erosion of the electoral organisational and ideological components of social democracy has weakened the capacity of social democratic parties to sustain the democratic project. In fact Moschonas (2002: 295) argues that ‘social democracy’ is on the verge of a change in identity because it is no longer capable of embodying that:

social experiment of enormous proportions and because it is no longer capable of definitively turning its back on the logic -and politics- of solidarity either. It thus finds itself in a strategic ‘inbetween’ (sic) because its identity is intermediate.

The broader methodological analysis we wish to draw from the foregoing is that political projects find expression in the structuring and organisation of political space. And for much of the twentieth century this political space was provided through the terrain of representative politics. Indeed what is important for this research project is that this transformed social democratic project finds expression in the marginalisation or the collapse of the political spaces of representative politics. This then impels us to think concurrently about the way new political spaces are being formed inside and outside of the state.

All this brings us to our major research question. Considering the decline and marginalisation of the political organisations and the imaginative communities of class, what are the consequences for democracy of the end of the short twentieth century and with it the disassociation of class and political organisation? What we

propose here is that it is not democracy per se that is important, but the way in which representative democracy constitutes a political regime that links spaces of formal political participation (representative politics) with particular structure of class conflict. As we have suggested, one major result of the transformed 'social democratic project' has been the restructuring of the political spaces around which representative politics (and its associated conflicts) were organised. The broader implication of this argument is that the structuring and organising of political space of participation provides us with a means of identifying the nature of a new political project, its key actors and driving conflicts.

But how relevant is this argument outside of Europe? In the Southeast Asian context Hewison and Rodan (1996) have argued that far from democracy being an end point of an ongoing process of modernisation, it has rather ebbed and flowed throughout the twentieth century. More crucially, they note that pivotal to these democratic projects – in what amounts to Hobsbawm's short twentieth century – has been the role of the 'left', a concept used in a broad way to define those movements and organisations committed to the 'socialisation' of economic relations. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it fits into the broad argument made here about the historical specificity of struggles for particular forms of political regimes.

The attempt to build democracy following decolonisation in Asia has had to confront the political challenges associated with the conjunction of unfavourable geopolitical circumstances, late industrialisation and growing economic globalisation. In many countries, the Cold War has reinforced the capacity of authoritarian regimes to obstruct or contain independent labour movements and other potential structures through which social democratic politics can be prosecuted. This history of repression has resulted in the marginalisation of these social forces even in the context of the collapse of centralised and authoritarian structures such as in Indonesia (Robison and Hadiz 2004). If, as Eley (2002), Hobsbawm (1995) and others have argued, the imaginative constitution of class is a pivotal dimension of representative politics, then the history of repression has been to severely weaken those forces that might have sustained such an imaginative constitution of class.

But even more significant here is the fact that the expansion of industrialisation and capitalism has taken place in a context different from that out of which representative democracy matured in Western Europe and elsewhere. Indeed, the idea of representation as a form of politics that acknowledges and institutionalises

conflict is arguably now broadly under attack as a result of the advance of the global neoliberal revolution. But these effects are much more profound in Southeast Asia where patterns of industrialisation and production structures have fragmented the working class in a way that constrains the mobilization and capacity for collective action (Deyo 2001). Southeast Asia is not unique. Roberts (2002) has observed that in Latin American the ‘incongruence between the social “fault lines” of Latin American societies and their institutionalized forms of political representation is unusually pronounced, and it appears to be growing’ (Roberts 2002: 3). The paradox he identifies is central to what we see as a pivotal problem for the prospects of democracy: that neoliberalism has on the one hand led to an extensive program of market reform and disciplines but, on the other hand, these very reforms have undermined the salience of class as a basis for collective action and identity.

Further reinforcing this marginalisation of representative institutions is the pattern of late industrialisation. Late industrialisation has reinforced vertical rather than horizontal relationships between state and civil society. Hence the combination of neoliberalism and late industrialisation has led to the promotion of structures of capitalism characterised by the interdependence and inter-penetration of public and private power. In turn, this inter-penetration of public and private power implies that the boundary between public and private is much more indistinct than is assumed to be in forms of representative politics.

This point was emphasised earlier by Hewison, Robison and Rodan (1993) when they cautioned against expectations that bourgeois and middle classes in Southeast Asia were necessarily forces for independent civil societies and democratisation. More recently, Bellin’s (2000) concept of ‘contingent democrats’ powerfully encapsulates and amplifies this theoretical position, arguing that ‘the peculiar conditions of late development often make capital and labor much more ambivalent about democratization than was the case for their counterparts among early industrializers’ (Bellin 2000: 178). For Bellin (2000: 179), ‘capital and labor will champion democratic institutions when these institutions are perceived as in their material interests’. These approaches take us further in deciphering the nature and determinants of the interests and conflicts alluded to by some hybrid regime theorists. They offer a means by which not only can Merkel’s concept of democratic embeddedness be developed, but by which alternatives to democratic political regimes might be better understood and explained.

Less theorised, but possibly no less important, is the matter of how the context of late development and neoliberal globalization relates to ideology. And what are the ideological legacies of colonialism that mediate the experience of late development in general and neoliberalism in particular?

We posit that neoliberalism involves more than a set of economic programs; it entails a set of structural forces capable of undermining or marginalising the politics of class conflict. The question is, therefore, whether we are witnessing the development of forms of political participation that are alternatives to collective, class-based politics in particular – forms of representation that are historically grounded in social democratic politics. It is not the identification of the quality of democracy or regime type that is primarily important, but the nature of the identification and analysis of emerging forms of political participation and the forms of conflict which they serve to express or repress. Understanding this will shed light on more than the shortfalls of post-authoritarian regimes against democratic institutional criteria, it will also enable us to detect and explain the development of the full range of political regimes and the forms of conflicts associated with contemporary global capitalism.

Hence in trying to understand regime character and trajectories in Southeast Asia, the analysis of *new* political spaces is of paramount importance. If, as Hewison and Rodan (1996) argued, the left was crucial to the ordering of political spaces during the short twentieth century, what defines the nature of the new political spaces that are being organised around the new political projects of participation of the last decade? More crucially, two core questions must be addressed to understand the trajectories of political regimes in Southeast Asia. First, what is the significance of informal patterns of political organisations and mobilisation for representative politics of class conflict? Second, how do formal representative political structures relate to systems of informal power?

## **CONFLICT AND THE ORGANISATION OF NEW FORMS OF POLITICAL SPACE**

We hypothesise that a major restructuring of the state is underway in many Southeast Asian countries. New institutions and sites of governance are being created — often creating institutions with policy delivery capabilities that engage with organisations that are found at the interstices of civil society and the state. A distinguishing mark of

these political spaces is that they seek to promote participation and are prone to use the language of empowerment; but at the same time this is paralleled by the marginalisation of traditional representative institutions and organisations – be they political parties or labour unions. Hence, paradoxically, while many of these institutional forms seek to promote participation, they stand in contradiction to the development of representative institutions seen as the instruments for political participation.

There is obviously a great degree of variation in the nature and form of these new political spaces, but nonetheless they constitute an important shift away from formalised representative structures to more informal associations as centres of decision making. This includes shifts to: civil society organisations rather than political parties; governance through mechanisms such as transparency rather than formal political contestation; direct ‘populist’ appeals rather than deliberation in legislative assemblies; and ‘local’ rather than national level representation.

We therefore ask: Who gets represented? What forms of participation are allowed? What forms of contest are excluded? It is precisely towards an understanding of new forms of participation, and the notions of political representation they embody, that future research needs to be directed. One distinct advantage of this particular focus on political representation lies in the shift in analysis from the institutional attributes of political regimes to the manner in which emerging forms of politics may serve to constrain, as well as open up, avenues of political contestation. Another is the ability to detect and explain differential consequences for organised collective political action and representation resulting from economic liberalisation across the region. We need to examine how dynamics in the global political economy influence the capacities and inclinations of actors within Southeast Asia to articulate certain forms of conflict and suppress others.

New forms of political participation need to be examined in varying ‘post-authoritarian regimes’ where embryonic democracies are thought to be developing (Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines), as well as in authoritarian regimes that nevertheless appear to be undergoing political change, if not democratisation (Singapore and Malaysia). To differing extents, these represent significant departures both from established patterns of authoritarian rule and liberal democratic practices and values. It is our starting point that only through a detailed analysis of new forms of political participation are the various political regime characters, trajectories and

wider implications understood. In particular, such an examination will enable us to test our hypothesis that the paradoxical juxtaposition of democratic and authoritarian elements represents the potential emergence of distinctive forms of political regulation that harness political participation to the foreclosing of certain forms of political contestation. The grounds of resistance and possible factors challenging their consolidation that differ in strength from country to country would also be a necessary part of such an approach.

In exploring emerging political spaces, our approach gives priority to the identification and understanding of forms of conflict that are expressed or repressed through new institutions of political participation. The implications of such discrimination between different forms of political participation and conflict are profound for our understanding of what sorts of political regimes may be emerging and why.

---

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Before the concept of hybrid regime was deployed, Diamond (1989) had already referred to 'semidemocratic countries'.

<sup>2</sup> Case, for example, has not only used the term halfway house, but also semi-democracy (1996a) and pseudo-democracy (2001).

<sup>3</sup> An exception to this is O'Donnell (1994: 56) who observed that delegative democracies 'are not consolidated (i.e., institutionalized) democracies, but they may be *enduring*'.

<sup>4</sup> Beetham has been writing on democracy assessment since the mid 1990s, most notably in the 1999 Audit Unit report on the quality of democracy in the United Kingdom (Weir, Beetham and Boyle 1999).

## REFERENCES

- Beetham, David (2004) 'Towards a Universal Framework for Democracy Assessment', *Democratization*, 11(2): 1-17.
- Bellin, Eva (2000) 'Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor and Democratization in Late Developing Countries', *World Politics*, 52 (2): 175-205.
- Case, William F. (1993) 'Semi-Democracy in Malaysia: Withstanding the Pressures for Regime Change', *Pacific Affairs*, 66 (2): 183-205.
- Case, William F. (1996a) 'Can the "Halfway House" Stand? Semidemocracy and Elite Theory in Three Southeast Asian Countries', *Comparative Politics* 28 (4): 437-64.
- Case, William F. (1996b) *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute.
- Case, William F. (2001) 'Malaysia's Resilient Pseudodemocracy', *Journal of Democracy* 12 (1): 43-57.
- Case, William F. (2002) *Politics in Southeast Asia: Democracy or Less*, London: Routledge.
- Croissant, Aurel (2003) 'Legislative Powers, Veto Players, and the Emergence of Delegative Democracy: A Comparison of Presidentialism in the Philippines and South Korea', *Democratization* 10 (3): 68-98.
- Croissant, Aurel (2004) 'From Transition to Defective Democracy: Mapping Asian Democratization', *Democratization* 11 (5): 156-78.
- Crouch, Harold (1996) *Government and Society in Malaysia*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Crouch, Harold and James W. Morley (1993) 'The Dynamics of Political Change', in James W. Morley (ed.) *Driven by Growth: Political Change in the Asia Pacific*, New York: M.E. Sharp, pp. 313-356.
- Diamond, Larry (1989) 'Preface', in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds) *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, pp. ix-xxvii.
- Diamond, Larry (1993) 'The Globalisation of Democracy', in Robert O. Slater, Barry M. Schutz and Steven R. Dorr (eds) *Global Transformations and the Third World*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Diamond, Larry and Leonardo Morlino (2004) 'The Quality of Democracy: An Overview', *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4): 20-31.
- Eley, Geoff (2002) *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hawthorne, Amy (2004) 'Middle Eastern Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?', *Carnegie Papers Number 44, Middle East Series*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

- Haynes, Jeff (2001) “‘Limited’ Democracy in Ghana and Uganda. What Is Most Important to International Actors: Stability or Political Freedom?”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 19 (2): 183-204.
- Hewison, Kevin, Richard Robison and Garry Rodan (1993) ‘Introduction: Changing Forms of State Power in Southeast Asia’, in Kevin Hewison, Richard Robison and Garry Rodan (eds) *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy & Capitalism*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp.2-8.
- Hewison, Kevin and Garry Rodan (1996) ‘The Ebb and Flow of Civil Society and the Decline of the Left in Southeast Asia’, in Garry Rodan (ed.) *Political Oppositions in Industrialising Asia*, London: Routledge, pp. 40-71.
- Hobsbawm, Eric (1995) *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, London: Abacus.
- Karl, Terry Lynn (1995) ‘The Hybrid Regimes of Central America’, *Journal of Democracy* 6 (3): 72-86.
- Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A Way (2002) ‘The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’, *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 51-65.
- Levitsky, Steven and Maxwell A. Cameron (2003) ‘Democracy without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru’, *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (3): 1-33.
- Merkel, Wolfgang (2004) ‘Embedded and Defective Democracies’, *Democratization* 11 (5): 33-58.
- Morlino, Leonardo (2004) ‘What Is a ‘Good’ Democracy?’ , *Democratization* 11 (5): 10-32.
- Moschonas, Gerassimos (2002) *In the Name of Social Democracy: The Great Transformation, 1945 to the Present*, London: Verso.
- O'Donnell, Guillermo (1994) ‘Delegative Democracy’, *Journal of Democracy* 5 (1): 55-69.
- Ottaway, Marina (2003) *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Ottaway, Marina (2004) ‘Democracy and Constituencies in the Arab World’, *Carnegie Papers No. 48, Middle East Series*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Ottaway, Marina and Thomas Carothers (2004) ‘Middle East Democracy’, *Foreign Policy* 145: 22-28.
- Reich, Gary (2002) ‘Categorizing Political Regimes: New Data for Old Problems’, *Democratization* 9 (4): 1-24.
- Roberts, Kenneth M. (2002) ‘Social Inequalities without Class Cleavages in Latin America's Neoliberal Era’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36: 3-33.
- Robinson, Neil (2003) ‘The Politics of Russia's Partial Democracy’, *Political Studies Review* 1 (2): 149-66.
- Robison, Richard, and Vedi R. Hadiz (2004) *Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in an Age of Markets*, London: Routledge/Curzon.

Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne H. Stephens and John D. Stephens (1992) *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Therborn, Göran (1977) 'The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy', *New Left Review* 103: 3-41.

Volpi, Frederic (2004) 'Pseudo-Democracy in the Muslim World', *Third World Quarterly* 25 (6): 1061-78.

Zakaria, Fareed (2003) *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

-----