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Democracy in Southeast Asia: A year of Elections

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PRAXIS: A REVIEW OF POLICY AND PRACTICE

Democracy in Southeast Asia: A Year of Elections

Compiled and with an introduction by Jacob I. Ricks*

In the year from May 2018 to May 2019, 6 of the 11 Southeast Asian states held major elections. The outcomes demonstrate the broad and mixed uses and impacts elections have in the region, ranging from what many consider to be a major democratization event in Malaysia wherein a coalition of opposition parties finally unseated the long-standing Barisan Nasional (BN), to the continued consolidation of single-party rule in Cambodia under Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP). With so many elections happening in short order, we at *Asian Politics & Policy* felt that this is an opportune moment to compile a set of perspectives on these elections, based on a single theme. We reached out to an exciting group of junior scholars on Southeast Asia, all of whom have conducted extensive fieldwork in their countries of specialization in recent years. We asked each of these six path-breaking researchers to briefly address the election, discuss its impact, and offer an evaluation on the state of democracy in the country. Their responses are found below, chronologically ordered by election date.

Before turning to the short essays, though, it is useful to provide some context to Southeast Asian elections. In recent years, proponents of liberal multi-party democracy have become somewhat disillusioned with the state of politics in the world. Multiple essays have been written bemoaning the decline of democracy (see Freedom House, 2019; Plattner, 2015), with many pointing to America's recent failures in upholding democratic standards of previous years (Abramowitz, 2019; Galston, 2018) and others highlighting the influence of Chinese and Russian models opposing democratic values (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2018).

Following this trend, observers have also lamented democratic declines in Southeast Asia (Kikuchi, 2018). Regional threats to democracy have been assigned to the U.S.-China rivalry (Stromseth & Marston, 2019) as well as the

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continued strength of authoritarians (Pepinsky, 2017). Prominent examples used to describe democratic backsliding include Myanmar's utter lack of capacity (or will) to deal with violence against the Rohingya minority, the persistent presence of Thailand's military in politics since 2006, the Philippine state's extrajudicial killings in its war on drugs, as well as an increase in the curbs on free speech throughout the region. Based on these events, some evaluations of the future of democracy in Southeast Asia portend a great deal of doom and gloom.

At the same time, we have seen some very promising signals. Malaysia has recently experienced its first ever alternation in government, wherein the BN peacefully stepped aside upon losing an election. In Indonesia, another national election has come and gone, extending the country's over 20-year democratic streak. And, despite the Rohingya crisis, Myanmar has made impressive strides from where it was only 10 years ago.

In other words, democracy activists in the region are seeing mixed outcomes, with much to worry about but also some important things to celebrate. Indeed, if we look at Freedom House scores across all 11 Southeast Asian countries over the last decade, we see that the most common trend is incremental change rather than drastic events that altered the country's regime type (Table 1). Consistency in these scores could be construed as democratic stagnation in some cases, such as in the Philippines and Indonesia, where political leaders have chipped away at democratic institutions in recent years, as discussed below. The exceptions to incremental change are Thailand, which transitioned from a partly free democracy to a military junta, and Myanmar, which moved from a complete military junta toward greater semblance of democracy.

We, therefore, invite our readers to reflect on the place of elections in regional political trends as you engage the following six essays. These elections, with the possible exception of Malaysia, are continuations of historical developments rather than one-off critical junctures in history. Our six contributors provide important insights allowing us to better understand these events; they also grant us a chance to hear from some of the most promising junior scholars working on the region.

Malaysia's General Election: A Surprise Transition

May 9, 2018

Elvin Ong, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, University of British Columbia

On 9 May 2018, Malaysia experienced an unprecedented transition in political power. The ruling BN lost power for the first time since the country's independence. The opposition Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition and its allied political parties won 121 seats in the 222-seat legislature, followed by the BN with 79 seats, and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) with 18 seats. Voter turnout was just above 82%, the second highest turnout since 1990. Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, PH's leader and Malaysia's former Prime Minister from 1981 to 2003, became Prime Minister for the second time. He had defected from the BN just 2 years earlier in February 2016.

PH's electoral victory came as a surprise to many political observers, as most pre-election survey data suggested that BN had a small lead. Furthermore, BN's

Table 1. Freedom House Aggregate Scores for Southeast Asian Countries (2009–2019)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	10-year Change
Brunei	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	29	29	28	29	-1
Cambodia	32	32	29	30	29	30	31	32	31	30	26	-6
Indonesia	66	65	65	65	65	64	64	65	65	64	62	-4
Laos	13	13	12	12	11	12	12	12	12	12	14	+1
Malaysia	49	49	49	49	48	47	46	45	44	45	52	+3
Myanmar	2	2	5	14	26	26	25	28	32	31	30	+28
Philippines	60	57	61	62	63	63	63	65	63	62	61	+1
Singapore	48	48	48	52	52	51	51	51	51	52	51	+3
Thailand	44	44	42	52	53	54	33	32	32	31	30	-14
Timor-Leste	62	62	62	62	63	63	65	65	65	69	70	+8
Vietnam	22	21	20	19	19	20	20	20	20	20	20	-2

Note: Aggregate Scores are the sum of values for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, with 0 being not free and 100 being most free.
Source: Freedom House.

fearsome party machinery continued mobilizing voters, and its pre-electoral gerrymandering of electoral boundary districts threatened to splinter opposition support. Even more, constant intra-alliance bickering over seat and candidate allocation among PH's component parties drew significant despair at the opposition's perceived incoherence. Only Invoke, a PH-affiliated think tank, correctly predicted the size of PH's win, at least in the peninsular Malaysia.

In hindsight, various indicators portended BN's historic downfall. In the first instance, PH's announcement of Tun Dr Mahathir as its future Prime Minister in the event of electoral victory was a masterstroke. As Malaysia's former Prime Minister for 22 years, Tun Dr Mahathir's leadership of a prospective cabinet would reassure moderate Malay voters that their ethnic and religious rights would be secured. This helped PH to win a larger number of electoral districts where Malays are the majority ethnic group. In addition, Tun Dr Mahathir's deep experience in governing Malaysia would also reassure economic voters who were skeptical of PH's lack of governing experience.

By contrast, BN's leader Prime Minister Najib Razak was uninspiring, to say the least. He had been mired in a global money laundering scandal involving hundred millions of US dollars from the 1MDB investment fund for close to three years by the time of the elections. Suspicion of Najib's unexplained wealth grew further when his wife, Rosmah Mansor, was observed in public carrying luxury handbags and wearing flashy diamond rings. Voters also closely associated Najib with the BN government's new and unpopular 6% Goods and Service Tax (GST) which was widely blamed for rising inflation and stagnating wages.

PH also edged ahead on the policy and communication front. They launched a comprehensive, 150-page manifesto, quickly followed by a simplified version pledging to fulfill 10 promises within 100 days of winning power. Among those, the pledge to abolish the GST proved to be the most popular. Relentless social media outreach campaigns and WhatsApp posts made sure that their policy proposals went viral.

The BN, for its part, did not offer much in terms of new policy, beyond the usual. New policy proposals announced in the final days of campaigning—such as income tax exemptions for all Malaysians below 26 years old and two additional public holidays prior to the start of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month—reeked of desperation. Its Trump-invoking slogan of "Make my Country Greater" (*Hebatkan Negaraku*) was also somewhat bizarre. Malaysians have no special affection for the United States or Trump. Furthermore, BN had a lackluster public relations strategy, relying on mainstream TV channels and newspapers to communicate its campaign messages rather than social media.

It has now been more than a year since PH's victory. Some milestones have been achieved, such as eliminating the GST as well as lowering the voting age to 18 years old. Yet, many enthusiastic PH supporters have found themselves disappointed with the pace and depth of political and economic reforms implemented thus far. At least three reasons have been cited for such discouraging results. First, the United Malays National Organization's overt cooperation with PAS has created a Malay-Muslim alliance that has successfully pushed back against some of PH's proposed policies. Second, bureaucrats sympathetic to the long-ruling BN continue to thwart PH's policy implementation process. Third, PH lacks the two-thirds majority in Parliament necessary for constitutional amendments.

Another critical problem looms on the horizon. Questions remain over who will succeed the 94-year-old Tun Dr Mahathir when he steps down in a few years. A pre-electoral agreement to transfer power to Dr Anwar Ibrahim, the deputy leader of PH, appears to be tenuous at best. Some within PH favor Azmin Ali, the Minister of Economic Affairs and former Chief Minister of the state of Selangor. Intra-PH wrangling could remain protracted right up to the next elections.

Regardless, is Malaysia more democratic than before? The short answer is a qualified yes. The press now has more freedom to criticize the government and is more balanced in its reporting. Independents and moderates have been appointed to head the judiciary, the election commission, and the anti-corruption commission. On the legislative front, authoritarian “fake news” legislation passed under the BN regime has been repealed, although the BN-appointed senate has delayed its full repeal. The government has also moved to decriminalize peaceful street protests.

But democratic consolidation is a long process that requires continued effort by committed democrats over many years. The sedition law criminalizing certain critical speech remains in place and has been wielded against anti-monarchy critics. The previously unfair rules governing elections, such as electoral boundaries that exhibit gross malapportionment, remain unchanged. Whether democracy takes root in Malaysia depends on the degree to which its political elites commit to play by fair rules of the game and the willingness of ordinary Malaysians to hold their leaders accountable at the ballot box.

Timor-Leste’s Parliamentary Election: Back to Business as Usual

May 12, 2018

James Scambray, Lecturer of International Business, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University

On May 12, 2018, East Timor went to the polls for the second time within a year. The 2017 election had left the winner of that election, the Revolutionary Front for East Timorese Independence (FRETILIN), led by Mari Alkatiri, without a clear majority. Attempts at coalitions with two minor parties, the People’s Liberation Party (PLP) and Enrich the National Unity of the People of Timor (KHUNTO) ended in acrimony, leading to an extended political impasse. Both these minor parties had run on an anti-corruption campaign stridently critical of the spending regime of Kay Rala ‘Xanana’ Gusmão—the former leader of the armed resistance to the Indonesian occupation—and his ruling National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT). Paradoxically, both these parties then abruptly joined the CNRT in a coalition named the Alliance for Change and Progress (AMP) that won a governable majority in the 2018 election.

East Timor’s elections and politics have always largely been a two-horse race. FRETILIN, the party derived from the main resistance movement, has maintained pretty much the same percentage of votes since the first parliamentary elections in 2007. A large bloc of voters is loyal to FRETILIN, partially due to its highly effective political network built and honed during the resistance. However, Gusmão’s CNRT has only been able to rule through a series of unstable coalitions. The basis for the often bitter rivalry between these two parties and

their leaders is more related to factional divisions during the resistance rather than any clear policy differences, and voting patterns at a national level still largely reflect these lines. Then there is another bloc which, due to these historical differences, will simply never vote for FRETILIN. Most of this bloc have been loyal to Gusmão and the CNRT, while a substantial proportion is captured by a constantly changing array of minor parties.

The PLP's reformist agenda and its cohort of young and educated urban activists raised hopes of a new political consciousness that would finally transcend this binary contest. Yet both the PLP and KHUNTO were still able to garner a similar level of support in the 2018 elections—in coalition with the CNRT—without any mention of corruption. Both of these minor parties also gained the bulk of their support from rural areas where they mobilized family and former resistance networks. Like patronage-based democracies anywhere, for the bulk of the population, highly personalized promises of benefits such as scholarships, jobs or pensions or the prospect of a helpful relative in parliament still trump broader policy platforms—which are in any case almost identical across all parties.

The implications of the latest result are considerable. The government is pressing on with an extravagant south coast resources project including an oil refinery, two ports, a gas plant, and a highway, the length of the entire south coast. There is little coherent plan or regard for feasibility and an almost total lack of due process. Legislation was recently passed to remove oversight of the country's Audit Chamber which had earlier blocked the award of a USD 719 million contract for a component of this project. The highway has now collapsed in a number of sections, only months after work commenced, raising serious questions about both transparency and the government's ability to manage a project of this magnitude. Revenue is now dwindling as production from the last remaining oil fields winds down, which also raises questions about whether they can actually pay for it or not.

Even after the PLP joined the CNRT, there was still hope that they might exert a progressive influence on the CNRT's spending program, with more focus on human capital such as education and health. This has proved to be far from the case. In direct contradiction of its 2017 campaign rhetoric, the PLP's position has ranged from supine to vociferous endorsement. The main form of opposition has come from the nation's President, Francisco 'Lú-Olo' Guterres, a FRETILIN member, who has blocked the inauguration of nine cabinet members who are being investigated for, or have been charged with corruption. Unlike the previous impasse, which resulted in a rapid economic downturn and the closure of over 300 companies, however, the Government's majority enables it to pass budgets. The centralization of decision making under Gusmão over the last decade, whereby there is little consultation with relevant ministries in major expenditure decisions, ensures that the delay in filling cabinet posts has had minimal impact.

Given current constellations of party alliances and voting patterns over the last decade, should another election be held now, there is little indication that the status quo would be significantly altered. The lack of an effective opposition and open debate means that there is no curb on government plans. With no alternative natural resource revenue in sight, at current expenditure rates, the country is widely predicted to run out of money in less than a decade. Apart from the dire

consequences for future generations of this young nation, it will be interesting to see how a lack of the patronage funds that drive election campaigns and party loyalties will translate into political change; if it will result in increased political fragmentation, for example, as seen in the Solomon Islands or, more optimistically, a more policy-based democracy with real debate and differences between parties and candidates. Either way, some hard decisions will need to be made very soon by both politicians and the voting public.

Cambodia's General Election: Backsliding and Single-Party Consolidation **July 29, 2018**

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Cambodia's national election in 2018 was another step backward for democracy in the country. The 2018 elections were largely uncompetitive as the CPP, the ruling party led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, ran without any major opposition. A 19 smaller parties participated in the election, but none of them won a single seat in the National Assembly. The royalist party, FUNCINPEC (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia), had a brief resurgence after the return of Norodom Ranariddh and removal of other opposition parties. They came in second with nearly 6% of the votes, but still fell short of any seats. All 125 National Assembly seats are now held by the CPP.

In the years prior to the election, the CPP took steps to ensure that any threat to their control was minimized. The main opposition party, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) led by Kem Sokha and Sam Rainsy, was declared illegal in 2017 and disbanded. Sokha was arrested in 2017 and kept in jail on charges that are seen as politically motivated. Rainsy has remained in exile from Cambodia on-and-off since 2005; his exile was lifted, briefly, for him to return for the 2013 elections. Additionally, the former leadership of the CNRP was barred from political activity on accusations that they were trying to overthrow the government. A new law, drafted in 2017, disallowed political parties from associating with anyone charged with a criminal offense—in this case, either opposition leader (Prak Chan Thul, 2017). Critically, the opposition party called for a boycott of the elections as there was no genuine representation among the candidates (Nachemson & Sokhean, 2018). Despite the CNRP's efforts, the "clean finger" campaign that advocated abstaining failed to keep voters at home, and voter turnout reached its highest point in history at 82%; however, there were reports that the get-out-the-vote efforts included threats to those who would otherwise abstain. In addition to dismantling its main opposition, the CPP-led government shuttered media outlets, threatened online participation, and shrunk the already limited space for civil society.

Due to the deteriorating political environment, domestic and international election monitoring groups declined to participate. The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL), the long-time election monitoring group, announced months before the election that it would not participate in 2018 due to the growing concerns by civil society organizations that they would be targeted with political accusations (Vicheika, 2018). International observers also declined to participate in the election, citing concerns about the political

environment and the fairness of the election before a single ballot had been cast. Both domestic and international alternative monitoring groups, whose legitimacy is questioned, were brought in after the usual monitors declined to participate.

Democracy has been in retreat in Cambodia since 2013. The 2013 elections were a brief optimistic moment for a robust opposition in the country, as they won their largest-ever share of seats in the National Assembly. However, the 2013 election, one could say, was too close to comfort for the CPP, with a narrow win by the CPP in a race that many suspected was marred by irregularities. Following the 2013 elections, the country saw protests that ended with the security forces shooting at protestors, killing four, and a ban on gatherings in public spaces in January 2014. The assembly ban was lifted in August 2014. A stark warning was sent in 2016 when a leading political analyst, Kem Ley, was murdered in broad daylight on a Sunday morning in Phnom Penh. While the state claims no direct involvement, they have blocked further investigations into the murder (ASEANMP, 2019). Whether or not there was any state involvement in his murder, the treatment of the investigations has contributed to the chill in the political environment. Furthermore, the 2017 commune elections had a mixed effect on the future of democracy in Cambodia, with both parties finding reason for optimism: The CPP held a strong majority, but the CNRP gained seats.

The key development emerging from the 2018 election was the establishment of single-party control over the entire national assembly. The CPP used legal mechanisms, in addition to intimidation and threats of violence, to secure the landslide victory. Beyond rhetorical threats from CPP leadership that the country would return to civil war if the CPP lost, the ruling party used other mechanisms to threaten the opposition and shrink space for civil society. The shifts in the democratic space took place prior to the election through the creation of new laws and restrictions, as well as the use of the court, to block opposition. The 2018 national election was another step away from democracy in Cambodia.

Thailand's Parliamentary Election: Authoritarian Staying Power and Polarization

March 24, 2019

Aim Sinpeng, Lecturer of Comparative Politics, University of Sydney

On March 24, 2019, Thailand held its first full elections since 2011. The results show an enthusiastic but polarized electorate: at a 75% turnout, 8.4 million voters supported the military's successor party, Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), 7.9 million votes went to the pro-democratic red-shirted Pheu Thai Party (PTP), and nearly 6.2 million votes went to a brand-new liberal democratic party, the Future Forward Party (FFP). The PPRP managed to cobble together a grand coalition of 19 political parties to form a new government headed by the former 2014 coup leader and authoritarian incumbent, General Prayuth Chan o-cha. The 2019 elections did not bring Thailand back to democracy, as Ricks (2019) rightly points out, they merely paved a way for authoritarian continuity.

Thailand's contemporary politics is marked by democratic ambivalence, anti-democratic mass mobilization and support for military involvement in politics.

For over a decade, Thailand was embroiled in a perniciously polarizing conflict between supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his allies, popularly known as the “red shirts” and the conservative nationalist-royalist “yellow shirts.” When the yellow shirts reinvented themselves as the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), they called for military intervention, increased political power of the monarchy and reforms to Thailand’s political system that would guarantee good and moral leaders (Sinpeng, 2019a). Public opinion surveys have documented a decline in support for democracy as the most preferred political system. Thailand’s experiences with democracy were also flawed: the 1990s coalition governments were unruly, unstable and highly corrupt while majoritarian democracy under Thai Rak Thai and its successor parties was polarizing, authoritarian and often alienating.

This short article argues that the March 2019 elections appear to produce three negative outcomes for Thailand’s prospect for democracy. First, Thai politics has become more polarized with the electoral success of a new populist liberal democratic party, the FFP. The emergence and electoral success of the FFP, a vehemently anti-military, anti-coup and anti-old politics organization, serves as the biggest populist threat to the conservative ruling elites who had fought hard through multiple military and judicial interventions to regain political dominance (Hicken & Selway, 2019). While FFP and Pheu Thai share the same political adversary, FFP is far more radical in its ideological opposition to the conservative elites, which in turn increases the cost of compromise, making politics a zero-sum game (McCoy et al., 2018). The relentlessly anti-elite populist communication style of the FFP politicians, which is more confrontational than their Pheu Thai counterparts, has a potential to cause further rift in Thai society by increasing the social distances between two opposing camps, known as “affective polarization” (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Sinpeng, 2019b). Societies marked by deep polarization, especially with an affective dimension, are at risk of open and violent conflict as politics is increasingly seen as black and white. Polarization is largely discourse-driven and, since being seated in parliament, FFP politicians have openly clashed with the PPRP-led ruling elites. Ironically, the arrival of a new liberal democratic party on the political scene may make authoritarian regression even more likely.

Second, the electoral popularity of an authoritarian successor party, PPRP, may make authoritarian regression more likely in the future even if Thailand manages to transition back to democracy. While electoral victories of authoritarian successor parties are not inherently negative for democracy, PPRP success will be detrimental to Thailand. Reactive authoritarian successor parties, which are created in response to an imminent transition to democracy are most likely to lead to authoritarian regression because they cherish the authoritarian past, their leaders are not committed to democratic norms and they are motivated to hinder any process toward democratization (Loxton, 2015). PPRP campaigned on its authoritarian successes (especially their populist projects) and fear of chaos and disorder. Their slogan “Want peace and order? Choose uncle Too [Prayuth]” skillfully stoked fear among Thais who have shown preferences for authoritarianism in times of crisis. Having won the popular vote at the ballot, PPRP now has the popular mandate and political legitimacy to reaffirm its authoritarian commitment.

Finally, the elections have legitimized authoritarian institutions forged under the junta that will have long lasting negative impact on the country's future democratic path. These authoritarian institutions were created to ensure authoritarian survival. With the 2017 constitution in place, the electoral system was redesigned to thwart the victory of large parties like Pheu Thai and the Senate was fully appointed by the junta and could choose a prime minister. Members of the supposedly independent Election Commission of Thailand were also hand-picked by the junta for a 7-year term. The March 2019 elections were then used to legitimize the prolongation of authoritarian rule, with the same authoritarian incumbents at the country's helm.

In many ways, the 2019 election results were not surprising: they demonstrate the contestation over what should be the appropriate political system for Thailand with different visions of democracy—majoritarianism or liberalism—however, and authoritarianism on the other. But the victory of the authoritarian camp may finally prompt those in the pro-democracy camp to decide what kind of democracy they actually want. Until then, authoritarianism is here to stay in Thailand.

Indonesia's General Election: Democracy in Retreat?

April 17, 2019

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On 17 April 2019, over 154 million Indonesians, representing over 80% of registered voters, cast ballots in the presidential and legislative elections. The most significant race was the presidential rematch between the incumbent, President Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi), and Prabowo Subianto. Jokowi comfortably won the elections, gaining 55.5% of the vote over Prabowo's 44.5%. In another echo of the 2014 election, Prabowo again initially refused to concede the election. After the General Elections Commission officially declared Jokowi the winner on May 21, Prabowo's supporters violently protested the results. Spanning two days, these riots were the worst episodes of electoral violence since 1999. The post-election uncertainty only ended when Prabowo accepted the Constitutional Court's ruling that his allegations of systematic electoral fraud were unsupported by evidence.

While the economy, infrastructure, and Indonesia's relationship with China were key issues during the 2019 elections, religion was arguably the most significant concern. The competition between Jokowi and Prabowo was yet another iteration of the recurring political fissure between Islamism and pluralism. Prabowo leaned further into Islamist rhetoric in his 2019 campaign. For example, Prabowo and his running mate Sandiaga Uno signed an Integrity Pact written by Muslim hardliners to publicly commit to their Islamist agenda (IPAC, 2019, p. 8). Prabowo's gains in Muslim-majority constituencies outside of East and Central Java suggests that this strategy was fairly effective (Pepinsky, 2019).

Prabowo leaned further into Islamism in 2019 due to the increasing relevance of Islamist groups. Once considered politically marginal, Muslim hardliner groups have become increasingly well organized and mainstream. Supported by structural factors such as the growing conservative attitudes of Indonesia's

middle class (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018, p. 484), Muslim hardliner groups crystallized into a powerful political force with their campaign against the alleged blasphemy of Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, the then-governor of Jakarta. The 212 movement—named for the massive rally of 22 December 2016—not only fulfilled their mission to oust Ahok, but helped these groups forge and/or strengthen bonds with other organizations and political parties, thereby increasing their political clout.

In contrast to Prabowo, Jokowi emphasized pluralism in his campaign. Granted, he did not ignore the growing power of the 212 movement. For example, he selected Ma’ruf Amin, a key figure in the 212 movement, as his running mate. As the chairman of the quasi-state body Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI) and the Supreme Leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Islamic organization in the world, Amin’s religious credentials increased the ticket’s electability. Though he gestured toward Muslim conservatives, Jokowi’s camp was seen as pluralist for a number of reasons. His party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), has long been associated with pluralism. The parties in his coalition consisted of nationalist and Islamic parties that embraced Pancasila, the official state ideology that requires adherence to one of six monotheistic religions. Jokowi’s association with his former vice-governor Ahok (IPAC, 2019) and his repressive ban of the Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) only served to increase opposition from the Islamist camp. Ultimately, NU’s support at the ballot box (Shofia & Pepinsky, 2019) and massive gains in areas with significant religious minorities (Pepinsky, 2019) propelled the Jokowi-Amin ticket to victory.

What does the 2019 election suggest about the state of democracy in Indonesia? The results are mixed. Some developments in the election and post-election period suggest that democracy in Indonesia is backsliding. Both Prabowo’s catering to the Islamist vote and Jokowi’s selection of Amin demonstrates the mainstreaming of Islamist ideas. These ideas—such as the infringements on minority rights—have undermined democratic quality in Indonesia (Soedirgo, 2018, pp. 191–192) and will likely continue given that polarization on the Islamist-Pluralist spectrum is unlikely to dissipate any time. The willingness of these groups to utilize violence upon losing electoral contests is also deeply concerning, demonstrating the weakness of democratic norms. Finally, Jokowi’s post-election actions suggest that he is unlikely to shy away from the authoritarian tendencies he displayed in his first term (Power, 2018). During the post-election riots, he restricted messaging apps and social media. More recently, he suggested that he would not renew the legal permit of the Islamic Defenders Front, the most prominent Muslim hardliner group in the country. In addition to further alienating Islamists if the group is made illegal, the ban would be another example of Jokowi’s willingness to place limits on freedom of speech and association—particularly those of his opponents. These acts set up a problematic precedent that may lead Indonesia away from democracy procedurally and substantively.

The news is not all dire; there are positive elements of the elections that deserve recognition. Indonesia’s democratic institutions appear to be highly resilient. Despite Prabowo’s allegations of fraud, both election observers and the Indonesian electorate generally believe that the 2019 elections were free and

fair. Given the scale of the election—six million people working at over 800,000 polling stations—is no small feat (Bland, 2019). Similarly, Prabowo contested the electoral results through formal channels, accepting the Constitutional Court's rejection of his case. In short, Indonesia's political elites appear to be operating within the "rules of the game." In light of the developments that counter democratic norms, however, whether or not these rules continue to be democratic, remains to be seen.

The Philippine Elections: Has politics changed under Duterte?

May 13, 2019

Nico Ravanilla, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of California San Diego

As the final votes were tallied and winners proclaimed, the May 2019 midterm elections in the Philippines delivered a resounding message to the world: President Rodrigo Duterte—notwithstanding his "political outsider" status and notorious reputation—remains wildly popular among the Filipino people. Nine of the 12 senatorial seats up for grabs were taken by Duterte's allies. The opposition coalition, Otso Diretso, was shut out. A 45% of seats in the Lower House were won by politicians under Duterte's party, PDP-LABAN.¹

Political pundits and experts on Philippine politics, alike, viewed these results as a sign of the greater consolidation of Duterte's power that would allow him to bolster his legislative agenda, including some of his most controversial policies and proposals. Three years ago, Duterte won the presidency on a tagline of "change is coming." The midterm election results seemed to indicate that more change is sure to come.

But while one may view the election outcome as Duterte's victory in consolidating the political elites around him, there is an alternative, though no less valid, reading of the results; it was yet another victory for the small subset of elites who have always shrewdly played and won the game of patronage. Indeed, a closer look at how the recent midterm election compares with previous midterm elections suggests that, as far as politics is concerned, change hasn't really come.

Patterns of Philippine Midterm Elections

Midterm elections in the Philippines have always been a spectacle of patronage politics marching on, from one coalition's funeral to another. Since the first midterm election post-1986 EDSA Revolution, politicians have organized themselves into coalitions under a party label that vied for dominance in the Batasan (House of Representatives) and the Malacañang Palace (official residence of the Philippine president). These party labels capture extant if short-lived patronage linkages among candidates across different levels of elective offices.

While there may be competing party labels (read: patronage networks) that vie for power before elections, once elections are over, the victors coalesce into a "mega" patronage network—what is commonly referred to as a "grand coalition". It is in everyone's best interest to coordinate and maximize political benefits as well as streamline the mobilization of the administration's campaign machinery during elections. As is often the case, these patronage networks have

Table 2. Legislators Switching Allegiances During Midterm Elections to Align with the President's Patronage Network Since Post-EDSA Revolution

	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016	2019
Election ^a	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M
President's party	Ramos LAKAS-NUCD	Ramos LAKAS-NUCD	Estrada LAMMP	Arroyo ^c LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	Arroyo LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	Arroyo LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	Aquino LP	Aquino LP	Duterte PDP-LABAN	Duterte PDP-LABAN
Dominant party in Lower House	LDP	LAKAS-NUCD	LAKAS-NUCD	LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	LAKAS-CMD/ KAMPI	LAKAS-LP	LAKAS-LP	LP	PDP-LABAN
Share of switchers (%) ^b		70%		54%		83%		18%		49%

^aElection is either Presidential (P) or Midterm (M).

^bShare of re-elected legislators who belonged to the dominant party in the previous election who switched to align with the president's party.

^cEstrada stepped down in January 2001 and Vice President Arroyo was sworn in as interim president.

Source: Author. Data drawn from Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

the tendency to consolidate around the presidency by midterm elections if not before (see Table 2).²

In a patronage democracy like the Philippines, politicians have little allegiance to party labels and are constantly in search of the greatest access to patronage resources (Hutchcroft, 2008). Consequently, old coalitions die when new coalitions are formed, as Table 1 shows. But the same subset of political elites (typically members of political dynasties) constitute the core of these coalitions.

The midterm elections in 2019 was no exception to this dynamic of patronage politics. As it became clear that Duterte and his drug war policy's popularity was not waning, most legislators previously aligned with the dominant patronage network under the Liberal Party banner abandoned ship and realigned with Duterte and his party, PDP-LABAN. As a result, PDP-LABAN, which previously occupied 1% of the seats in the Lower House, is now the body's largest party. However, LP, which previously held the most number of seats, now only occupies 6% of the seats. By 2019, hence, the LP patronage network has all but disappeared, and a new patronage network centered on Duterte had been created.

Change Hasn't Come with the 2019 Midterm Elections

Nothing about the May 2019 midterm elections results is out of the ordinary when viewed in light of previous Philippine midterm elections in recent memory. Duterte may have come to power as a clear outsider in 2016, but by allowing the traditional political elites to switch allegiances and persist under his leadership, he has decidedly replicated the patronage politics that he stood against in the first place. At the end of the day, the Philippines has reverted back to politics as usual, with a new patron in Malacañang. This is not all that surprising: the formal electoral institutions (e.g., multimember plurality system) have not changed, and therefore the political incentives that they generate (e.g., intra-party competition, personality-based campaigning, and retail vote-buying) also remain unchanged (Ravanilla, 2019).

This is not a good news for democracy. But it also is not necessarily a bad news. For as long as the small subset of entrenched political elites who have always dominated the political arena vie for power, they shall on their own accord, temper Duterte's authoritarian tendencies and preserve a modicum of democracy—electoral institutions (however badly they need to be reformed), and functioning (though captured) legislative and judicial bodies, to name a few—as these help maintain their legitimacy. The Philippines may remain a patronage democracy, but a democracy it remains.

The populist wave may have perturbed the political equilibrium in 2016, but the results of the 2019 midterm elections indicate that politics seems to be regressing back to its steady state. Whether Duterte and his new patronage network will double-down on the brutal drug war, reinstate the death penalty, or legislate the lowering of the age of criminal liability, remain to be seen. Now that Duterte has de facto control of both legislative houses, these changes may very well take place. But then again, without the need to prove himself to the establishment or ruling elite now that he is no longer the outsider, he may very well tone down his stances on these constitutionally dubious and democratically norm-defying policy proposals.

Notes

¹This is in stark contrast with only 1% of the seats in the House of Representatives won by a PDP-LABAN candidate in 2016, when Duterte was elected.

²The only midterm elections where legislators did not switch allegiance to the president's party was in 2001. This was because President Estrada resigned by January 2001 and then Vice-President Gloria Arroyo was sworn in as interim president. As a result, the dominant party in the Lower House did not switch from Ramos' party to Estrada's, but immediately jumped on Arroyo's bandwagon by midterm elections in 2001.

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