

**REGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

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**Comparing Regime Continuity and
Change: Indonesia, Thailand and
Malaysia**

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In recent years there have been some dramatic changes of political leadership in the Asia–Pacific region, and also some dramas without leadership change. In a few countries the demise of well-entrenched political leaders appears imminent; in others regular processes of parliamentary government still prevail. These differing patterns of regime change and regime maintenance raise fundamental questions about the nature of political systems in the region. Specifically, how have some political leaders or leadership groups been able to stay in power for relatively long periods and why have they eventually been displaced? What are the factors associated with the stability or instability of political regimes? What happens when longstanding leaderships change?

The **Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific Project** will address these and other questions from an Asia–Pacific regional perspective and at a broader theoretical level.

The project is under the joint direction of Dr R.J. May and Dr Harold Crouch.

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**COMPARING REGIME CONTINUITY
AND CHANGE:
INDONESIA, THAILAND, AND MALAYSIA**

William Case

A vast literature has accumulated about democratic preconditions, transitions, and consolidation in developing countries, highlighting the centrality of these themes in comparative politics today. Further, much of this discussion has been collated among the geographic areas through which democracy's 'third wave' (Huntington 1990) has recently passed, enabling specialists to control for important contextual variables. In explaining regime openings in the relatively uniform settings of South America, southern Europe, eastern Europe, and East Asia, for example, area specialists have been able to analytically set aside such disparate, though significant, features and legacies as bureaucratic authoritarianism, latifundist agriculture, Soviet antecedents, new NIC statuses, Catholicism, Confucianism, and varying degrees of ethnic or cultural complexity. This has permitted, in short, much comparative work, the testing of relatively uncluttered causal statements across a number of cases. Then, after sketching out bold regional generalizations, specialists have been able to factor in fine country uniquenesses, specifying with even greater exactness the relationships between democratic pressures and outcomes.

Among students of Southeast Asian politics, however, the utility of comparative methods and democratic perspectives has been less clear. It is a commonplace that Southeast Asia, historically at the crossroads of diverse political, economic, and social currents, limits analysis to country-specific studies and narrow, *ad hoc* explanations. Moreover, in even those few countries where democratization has recently taken place (i.e., Thailand and the Philippines), it remains unconsolidated, while other countries in the region have avoided significant opening altogether. Throughout much of Southeast Asia, then, observers have detected at most a slight liberalization, brought on by mild

increases in the structural autonomy of top conglomerates, the lobbying capacity of business associations, and the fluctuating aspirations of the new middle class. These categories, however, seem to promise no further progress toward democracy, and they may, in the short term, even weaken it. After pressing successfully for their own political inclusion, their next impulse has been to shut the door tightly behind themselves.

Nonetheless, this paper searches for ground on which to make very general sense of politics in Southeast Asia, drawing on the concepts and insights of the recent democratization literature. To make this more manageable, inquiry focuses on Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. Of course, even after limiting study to these countries, one still finds their incongruities daunting, noting in particular that while all fall short of stable democratic regimes, they do so in very different ways. But if we are guided by a suitable framework and set of research questions, we discover also that these cases have more in common than cartographic nearness. First, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, like all countries, feature national leaders and elites — an entryway, I will argue, for at least broad-stroke analysis. Secondly, because political life in these settings remains heavily ‘state-dominated’ (Hewison, Rodan and Robison 1993). The nature of elite statuses and power shows some important resemblances across the board. Thirdly, these countries are all ranked at upper-lower or lower-middle income levels, yet they are the region’s largest, high-growth economic performers. One expects to find at least some parallels, then, in the rapid transformations of their social structures and attitudes. Finally, if we cannot yet speak about democratic stability in these countries, we can attempt at least to classify and account for the regime forms that they do display, giving special attention to the traits that may hold up, roll back, or hasten regime opening. In taking this approach, we can begin to assess — on a rough, though common, basis — the nature of the regimes that result and the likelihood of change.

Leaders, elites, societal audiences, and regimes

In this section, my purpose is to help articulate an analytical framework, one which when applied across regimes in Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia will maintain its parsimony and cohesiveness. In doing this, I draw on the neo-elite paradigm developed by Field, Higley, and Burton, treating relations between national leaders and state elites, and between these configurations and their

societal audiences, as distinct from, and causally prior to, the forms regimes take. Higley and Burton define regimes as ‘basic patterns in the organization, exercise, and transfer of government [state] decision-making power’ (Higley and Burton 1989:78). Hence, a regime does not involve state position holders or institutional arenas so much as procedures, the ways in which state positions are filled and institutions are operated. Further, a regime can be roughly categorized as stable or unstable, depending on the extent to which state power may be subject to ‘irregular seizures, attempted seizures, or widely expected seizures by force’ (*ibid.*:20). Such questions about stability are often dismissed as uninteresting, surviving from an earlier era of enquiry about the functions and persistence of political systems. But as we will see, it remains valueless to analyze regimes as authoritarian, democratic, or some permutation of these forms without first investigating the likelihood of their lasting.

After determining a regime’s underlying stability, one proceeds reasonably to assess its authoritarian or democratic content. Following on from Huntington (1990:7), regimes can be thought of as democratic to the extent that state position holding and policy making are shaped by liberal participation and electoral contestation — the right of societal audiences freely to organize opposition parties and voluntary associations, and then to support them through meaningful voting, free speech, and litigation. This is to understand democracy, then — as all regimes must be understood — in terms of political procedures. To push further and speak of ‘economic’ or ‘social’ democracy is to confuse procedures with substantive preconditions or outcomes, thereby sacrificing analytical power. As Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1990) make clear, socio-economic equality may help precipitate democracy (as land reform has in Taiwan, perhaps, and welfare programmes have in South Korea), and it may flow later from democracy as policy outputs. Conversely, deep inequalities may either hinder democracy’s consolidation or hasten its collapse (as in Brazil in 1964). In no case, however, is it fruitful to consider these variables as one and the same (Burton, Gunther and Higley 1992: 2).

One thus conceptualizes four basic regimes, that is, stable and unstable forms of democracy and authoritarianism. But because some regimes depart from ideal types, one can also envision some intermediate forms, labelling them — with reluctance — as ‘semi-stability’ and ‘semi-democracy’ (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1990:7-9)¹. One does this reluctantly because while such categories must in some way be named, this particular way is unsatisfactory on two counts.

First, many scholars contend that objectivity is compromised by the strong normative preference for stability and democracy that these terms imply. One can only respond by admitting a personal preference for stability, at least in its democratic form, but denying that this is permitted to colour analysis. Secondly (and more seriously), semi-stability and semi-democracy cannot be adequately understood as mere mid-points on continuums, destined to tip over into one ideal type or another. Though many authors warn that 'betwixt-and-between cases' or political 'half-way houses' are shot through with frailties (Huntington 1990:12; Di Palma 1990:157), Crouch describes the resilience of semi-democracy in Malaysia, the contrary pressures that in pushing the state both ways at once leave its regime form firmly in place (Crouch 1993:133-137). As such, Malaysia may be better plotted somewhat off the four-cell table of regime types than somewhere near its centre, displaying a complexity that cannot fully be captured by an authoritarian/democratic dichotomy or the nether-world precariousness that semi-democracy suggests.²

But whatever the forms that regimes might take, how can we account for these outcomes and the possibilities of change? Huntington, in *The Third Wave* (1990), highlights the role of elites in effecting transitions,³ but then seems to credit the regimes that result with lives of their own. He portrays authoritarian regimes as intrinsically susceptible to change: whether the state that operates them promotes economic growth or fails to, it generates strong societal pressures for openness (*ibid.*:35). Democratic regimes, on the other hand, are said to be more naturally stable, offering avenues for peaceful changes of government rather than irregular seizures of state power (*ibid.*: 263). Similarly, in itemizing ten causes of democratic transition in *Democracy and Developing Countries*, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1990:25-29) list political leadership, though attach no special importance to it, giving more stress to the roles of two-party systems, parliamentary legislatures, and judiciaries. This is in keeping with the accent on institutions in Linz's earlier work, 'the broad thrust of which ... was that the failure of institutions exacerbated political conflict and failed to prevent the breakdown of democratic regimes in Europe in the interwar years and in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s' (Hagopian 1993:479-80; Hagopian refers to Linz 1978). But in giving regime procedures and institutional arenas such innately determinative properties, we are denied the tools necessary for more fully explaining them. Democratic regimes fall as regularly as authoritarian ones do, and parliamentary institutions seem as helpless to prevent this as

presidential systems are. Hence, we need to look *outside* regime forms in order to account for them.

One way to do this is to recognize the pivotal role of national leaders and state elites. No doubt regime procedures and institutional arenas, once in place, feed back on and guide the elite interaction that precedes the causality flows more heavily from elites to regimes, driving transitions or underpinning continuity. Put another way, a regime form is only as sound as the elite-level commitments on which it rests. Field and Higley define elites as 'persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially' (Field and Higley 1985:8). In the 'statist' setting of Southeast Asia, most such organizations are still state-based, comprising executive cabinets and 'councils', powerful bureaucratic apparatuses, and security forces. Moreover, a national leader — a president, prime minister, monarch, *eminence grise*, or 'strong man' — may sometimes emerge who helps shape relations between state elites, either enforcing or disrupting their patterns of behaviour. Among contemporary leaders in Southeast Asia, one thinks of Suharto, Mahathir, Lee Kuan Yew, and Ne Win. On the other hand, a leader's actions may prompt state elites collectively to assist or restrain him or her. Some good examples of the latter outcome are President Marcos's removal in 1986 and, in India, Prime Minister Gandhi's defeat by hastily unified Janata leaders in 1977. But whatever configurations emerge between leaders and elites, they have strong consequences for regime forms.

Thus, after discovering the organizational bases of elite statuses, one next assesses the ways in which elites interact, noting in particular the intensity with which they carry out their competitions. In most Southeast Asian settings, elites compete ruthlessly, creating conditions in which it is foolhardy for any single faction to act with restraint. Such configurations may be punctuated overtly by elite-level conflicts and societal violence (as occurred in 'Old Order' Indonesia), or they may give rise to tense deadlocks that persist quietly for long periods (which may describe 'New Order' Indonesia). In both instances, however, elite relations are marred by distrust, producing regimes that are fundamentally unstable.

In other, rarer, cases elites act with what different authors have described as 'consensual unity' (Higley and Burton 1989:18-19; Burton, Gunther and Higley 1992:11), elite 'solidarity' (Putnam 1976:121-122), or, in plural societies,

elite 'coalescence' (Lijphart 1977), or 'conciliatory attitudes and regulatory behaviour' (Nordlinger 1977:54). In organizing their relations in these ways, elites construct and abide by 'rules of the game' which, while in many ways unique to particular settings, seem universally to involve two broad kinds of restraint. First, elites eschew strategies that undercut directly the statuses of other elites, thereby sparing one another's organizational resources and core interests. Put simply, elites who are unified may compete vigorously, but they do not do so at all costs. Secondly, when these elites move outside their configurations to attract mass support, they undermobilize the most serious grievances of their societal followings.⁴ In these circumstances, elites may issue ethnic, class-based, or regionalist appeals, but they stop short of inciting serious unrest. Taken together, these kinds of restraint mean that state elites who are unified do not mount coups and takeovers against one another, and, by refusing to inflame mass discontents, they remain able also to contain societal challenges. This absence of coups and uprisings offers the practical hallmark of regime stability, a record that among the cases covered in this paper is evident only in Malaysia.

By investigating state elites on another dimension — in terms of their attitudes toward, and relations with, societal audiences — we can assess the authoritarian or democratic content of their regimes, as well as the likelihood of change from one form to the other. In Southeast Asia, elites possessing strong state resources have faced fragmented societies, enabling them usually to adopt dismissive attitudes and top-down controls. This has involved blunt exclusion, highly skewed patrimonialism, or tight corporatist mechanisms that have at most offered uneven responsiveness. Such attitudes and relations have typically produced authoritarian regimes. More rarely, however, elites have conceded the right of societal audiences to organize autonomously. Where this has resulted in bottom-up access to state policy making and recruitment, we can probably classify the regime as semi-democratic or democratic.

However, in assessing the ways in which elite-mass relations affect a regime form, it is important also to note that elites have not simply accepted mass attitudes as given. Whether elites have maintained relations with societal audiences characterized by control or autonomy, and whether they have operated regimes that have been authoritarian or democratic, they have often sought actively to convince these audiences about the rightfulness of their arrangements. In short, just as elites sometimes agree over game rules, they may

strive to embrace societal audiences in validating ideologies or 'mentalities' (Linz 1975:264). Thus, in any account of the politics that emerge between state and society, one must observe the ways in which state elites claim legitimacy, and the ways in which societal audiences respond.

In turning to discuss changes from authoritarianism to democracy, we begin with a question. If it is true that elites in Southeast Asia have possessed enough state power and ideological creativity that they have not had to democratize or even to maintain such democratic procedures as colonial experience may have left them, under what circumstances would they choose to do so? Let us consider some different motivations. As we have seen, disunified state elites, in seeking ruthlessly to bolster their standings or weaken those of their rivals, appeal frequently to the ethnic loyalties, class positions, or strong regional allegiances of societal audiences. In this same spirit, some elite factions may denounce their rivals as undemocratic, then energize new support for themselves through specious pledges to democratize politics. In *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, it is perhaps O'Donnell and Schmitter's primary thesis that breakups of ruling coalitions pave the way to democracy (1986:15-36). But while deftly charting the pathways to such breakups, they are less able to elaborate the causes, or, indeed, the consequences for democracy if elite disunity persists. The assumptions of the neo-elite paradigm lead us to expect that any democratic procedures growing out of elite rivalries must eventually be rescinded by disgruntled elite factions, or perhaps even by the faction that had initially advocated them once its drive for ascendancy is complete. In these cases, the rhetoric of democracy is but one more stratagem in the kit of warring elites. Equally, when elite factions battle to a standstill, creating rare and fragile apertures through which societal audiences can nudge regimes open further, elites may temper their conflicts just enough that they are able again to close them. This pattern corresponds in many ways to Huntington's (1990:276) notion of regime 'replacement', and of the several modes of democratization that he considers, he rightly regards this one as least likely to consolidate. As examples, consider Thailand's brief democracy during 1973-76, and perhaps its redemocratization in 1992.

In contrast, when state elites who are unified choose to democratize, they are not motivated by desires to weaken one another's statuses. Rather, they seek to retain — even strengthen — their unity, calculating that in some contexts democracy imposes fewer costs on their statuses and relations than maintaining

steep authoritarian vigilance. Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992:43) observe that 'democracy may soften, but it certainly does not eliminate the differences of power, wealth, and status in class-divided societies'.⁵ As such, elites can insulate their core interests by making some democratic concessions to societal audiences. More specifically, unified state elites who democratize consent to electoral challenges, but not to the loss of their incumbency advantages or the resources with which to contest office again if they are beaten. In this same way, the bourgeoisie consents to fiscal and regulatory controls, but not to the nationalization of its capital.⁶ But though democracy may buffer elite statuses, Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (*ibid.*:42) contend that it delivers real gains to societal audiences, prompting 'redistributive state action' and generally elevating human dignity. A democratic regime, in short, has something for everyone. Further, in delineating some conciliatory pathways to democracy, Huntington (1990:276) describes 'transformations' carried out from above, and 'transplacements' negotiated between state and society. He notes also that these are the routes that most favour consolidation. To date, there have been no examples of transformations or transplacement in Southeast Asia.

But in scouring for factors that may adumbrate such transitions in Indonesia, broaden Malaysia's semi-democracy, or consolidate full democracy in Thailand, analysts have focused most attention on societal audiences. In terms of class structure, they have scrutinized the bourgeoisie (Robison 1985; Robison and Goodman 1992:321-27), the middle class (Tanter and Young 1990; Kahn and Loh 1992) and the working class (Lane 1991) though have learned that meaningful pressures for democracy have emanated from these sources only in Thailand, and perhaps fleetingly in Malaysia. Taking another tack, analysts have conceptualized civil societies enlivened by rapid economic growth, bristling with new business associations and activist NGOs (Anek 1992; MacIntyre 1990). But as Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992:141) remind us, while a 'denser civil society is generally favourable to democracy, in some cases it can act as a conduit for authoritarian ideas'.⁷ This latter contingency has been strongly evident in Indonesia and, to a lesser extent, in Malaysia where state elites have manipulated much associational life. Social structures are said to favour democracy in still another way, however: the presence of ethnic, cultural, or religious pluralism — and further, the rapid reinvention of these identities — outrunning state capacity to contain them

(Huntington 1984:102-105). But if, as Crouch (1993:152) contends, 'communalism' has prevented in Malaysia the full closure of semi-democracy, it seems at the same time to have discouraged any additional opening. Indeed, the full venting of ethnic passions appears to jeopardize the democracy that permits it more than it places a check on authoritarian responses. On this score, it may be observed that while state elites in Indonesia face a far more differentiated society than Malaysia's, they have had rarely to relax their authoritarian controls. In sum, class structures, civil society, and social structures may cut in a variety of ways. To see which way, one must investigate elites, in particular the attitudes they hold and the relations they forge with societal audiences.

To summarize, I have presented in this section a loose though 'complex' framework, one which asserts the primacy of inter-elite relations for the stability of regimes, yet recognizes the significance of elite-mass relations for any regime opening. More specifically, we can conceptualize inter-elite relations as unified or disunified, and elite-mass relations as controlled or autonomous. These attitudes and relations combine to produce four 'ideal' regime types: stable and unstable forms of authoritarianism and democracy. Between these categories, one can also describe some hybrid postures, though they may display some outlying features rather than residing simply on continuums.

In applying this framework, I explore three regime outcomes in contemporary Southeast Asia. My intention is to give equal weight to these cases, rather than running with a single story-line against which to bounce the others. Briefly, I attribute the authoritarian regime in Indonesia — and its appearance of stability — to astute personalist leadership, muted elite rivalries, and control over societal audiences. In sharp contrast, Thailand's unstable democracy emerges from uneven national leadership, perennial elite disunity, and episodically strong and autonomous societal pressures. And Malaysia's semi-democratic regime — in some ways bordered by the outcomes in Indonesia and Thailand — is explained by skilful national leadership, sustained elite unity, and fluctuating levels of societal tensions and claims. The next section of this paper, then, assesses relations between leaders and elites in these countries and the stability of the regimes that result. The third section considers the ways in which state elites control or empower societal audiences, thus unfolding in authoritarian or democratic politics. And the last section briefly assesses some prospects for the transition to, or the consolidation of, political democracy.

Elite relations and regime stability

As Southeast Asia continues to grow economically, scholars busily track the movement of state elites into markets (see, for example, Mc Vey 1992). A new generation of elites appears even to be abandoning the state in order to ground itself more squarely in the world of big business. The children of Indonesia's President Suharto, holding no bureaucratic posts yet heading vast conglomerates, are often cited as examples of this. But the centrality of the state in Southeast Asia — as the organizational basis of elite statuses and as an explanatory variable — persists. As Migdal (1988:16) makes clear,

even when the state is in the process of shedding whole bureaus and rule-making functions — 'in deregulating society' — no one can doubt that when markets now take over these functions the state still authorizes the new arrangement. And, if there are those who do not play by the market rules, the state will use its authority to enforce contracts made in the marketplace.

To the extent that this is true in Indonesia, Suharto's children have only been able to leap into business because Suharto remains president, insulating their dealings and warding off criticisms. In short, while one explains regime stability in terms of elite attitudes and relations, elite statuses must still be understood primarily in terms of the state. Let us briefly identify in Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia which state organizations are most salient, then examine the unity or disunity between their elites.

Indonesia

Politics in Indonesia, even more than in most other Southeast Asian countries, has been confined to the state-elite level. Robison (1992:45) writes that 'the fundamentally unique feature of Indonesia's New Order is that the source of political power and political leadership lies within the state apparatus itself, and that political power and bureaucratic authority are appropriated and integrated by the officials of the state'. He notes also, however, that this was not always the case, characterizing the Old Order under Sukarno as distinctly more 'populist'. To understand how this change occurred, let us quickly trace out some key shifts in elite statuses and relations.

During the 1950s, Indonesia was beset by a series of Muslim and ethnic rebellions in its outer islands. This prompted President Sukarno, the national leader, to react with military force, quelling these rebellions and greatly truncating the party system that had given expression to them. In turn, state elites in the military, their claim on state power already strengthened by their role in the 'revolution' against Dutch colonialism during 1945-49, and their expropriation of Dutch enterprises in 1957, extended their authority over state organizations through 'a doctrine of the "middle way" (neither fully military nor fully civilian government)' (Liddle 1991:446). Sukarno tried to push the military back, forging new links to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), one of the few parties still permitted to mobilize the masses. But while seeking corporatist balance, Sukarno bogged down instead in an elite-level deadlock, then finally a show-down during 1965-66 which he was helpless to mediate. It remains unclear which side triggered the conflict, but it enabled the military to crush the PKI leadership and slaughter its mass following. Moreover, in doing this, it re-energized Muslim groups in rural areas through which to carry out the bloodletting (Hefner 1991:208), but then turned on them also, leaving the military finally ascendant. Liddle concludes that the lesson military elites 'learned from these experiences was the importance of establishing and maintaining, first, unity among themselves and, second, tight control over others ... most especially Muslims, regionalists, and Communists' (Liddle 1991:447). Thus, while steadily stripping Sukarno of his power, the military tightened its hold over the state bureaucracy. It began also to finance its activities by collaborating with Chinese capitalists and disseminating state contracts (Crouch 1988:284-285), and it organized societal support through its political vehicle, the GOLKAR (*Golongan Karya*, 'Functional Groups').

But analysts differ about how well military elites have maintained their unity over time. Liddle (1991:451) claims that 'discontented members of the core elite' have voiced remarkably few grievances, while Vatikiotis (1993: 61), in an informed journalistic account, sketches a mosaic of deep factional and generational cleavages. Between these poles, Robison distinguishes elites in the command structure of the ABRI (Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia) and Defense Ministry on the one hand, from retired officers who have taken high-level posts in the cabinet, bureaucracy, and state secretariat (*Sekneg*) on the other. The strains between the leaders of these organizations have been evident

since 1974 when General Sumitro, directing *Kopkamtib*, the military security apparatus, lost a power struggle to General Moertopo, the head of the executive-based OPSUS (Special Operations Office). This involved the mobilization of 'outsider' student groups and culminated in the Malari riots in Jakarta — key indicators of elite disunity — and it brought about 'a major shift of power and influence to the Presidential Palace' (Robison 1992:50).

Indeed, to the degree that divisions have existed in the military, it has sprung from uncertainty over how to respond to General Suharto's rise from its ranks to become president in 1968. Since assuming the presidency, Suharto has steadily strengthened it, removing it from the military and clinging to it interminably. In particular, analysts note his accumulation of patronage resources, his use of *Sekneg* to dispense state contracts, his off-budget charitable foundations (*yayasans*), and his vast family wealth. Vatikiotis (1993:58) writes that 'among Suharto's key talents has been his ability to defuse threats to his rule and then mostly co-opt those responsible'. Military elites, resentful over their slippage in status and narrowing access to state enterprises and commercial opportunities have sometimes let student groups mobilize to vent grievances — most recently to oppose Suharto's re-election bid in 1992. They have also plotted the downfall of state elites closely associated with Suharto, first opposing Sudharmo's ascension as state secretary, for example, then forcing him out as vice president. Suharto has responded in ways that, while skilful, have been unguided by unity over game rules: appointing non-Muslims or non-Javanese as top military commanders, ordering surprise promotions and transfers, rerouting patronage, and crisscrossing the military with competing intelligence agencies. But because Suharto has done this astutely, using his paramountcy as national leader to exploit the splits in the military that his very paramountcy has caused, he has prevented the military from moving concertedly against him.⁸ Further, when the military recently increased its pressure by unleashing student activists, Suharto responded in equal measure, mobilizing Islamic sentiments through his sponsorship of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI).

In sum, in this dynamic between the national leader and state elites, Suharto has combined patrimonialist inclusion with artful division. The military has thus benefitted enough that it has shielded the state from societal challenges; it has been divided enough that it has been unable to mount its own challenge against the national leader in an effort to regain its earlier standing. Thus, paradoxically,

the disunity of Indonesia's elite configuration has been fashioned into an appearance of regime stability. But President Suharto is now 70 years old, and his departure from power may mark the collapse of the tenuous balancing mechanisms upon which Indonesia's regime has rested. In this situation, disunity between elites may at last come to light.

Thailand

In Thailand elite statuses have also centred heavily on state organizations. Indeed, that debate persists over Riggs's description of the country during the 1960s as a 'bureaucratic polity' intimates the extent to which the term still has some relevance.⁹ The paramountcy of bureaucratic and military elites did not, however, emerge from any revolt against a colonial power — Thailand being the only territory in Southeast Asia not formally to have been colonized. Rather, after King Chulalongkorn had undertaken administrative reforms in the late nineteenth century, bureaucratic and military elites who had grown out of those reforms overthrew the monarchy in 1931. Further, this new coalition of state elites kept power for itself, rather than sharing it with party-based governments and societal electorates. Seeking to justify this, Thai military elites have drawn upon a legacy similar to that of the Indonesian military: while the ABRI alludes regularly to its role in driving out colonialism, the military in Thailand can claim to have prevented colonialism from ever arriving. They have also resembled Indonesian military elites in another way, forming a 'partnership' with local Chinese capitalists that dates back to the Phibun governments of the 1940s and 1950s (Chai-Anan 1986:243). In these ways, elite statuses in Thailand have primarily involved military and bureaucratic organizations or, more precisely, the strategic areas of overlap between them.

Chai-Anan (1989:320) records also, however, that historically, 'although the new military-bureaucratic elites formed the only organized political group in society, they were not united', carrying out their competitions and ratifying their power relations through nearly twenty coups, attempted coups, and counter-coups between the revolution of 1932 and 1993. Indeed, only during the 1960s was the national leader, Field Marshal Sarit, able to impose a set of elite relations that dampened instability. Further, though Sarit died in 1963, his revival of many monarchical powers enabled the king, Bhumibol Adulyadej, to

take up a new mediating role. This was also a period, however, during which the basis for rapid economic growth and social change was laid, setting the stage for new struggles over business assets among military elites, and creating new societal expectations that were spearheaded by student groups. In this context, a brief interlude of democracy surfaced between elite factions in 1973, though it was capped by an unusually brutal coup three years later. But while military elites were then able over the next decade and a half to block new societal upsurges, they persisted in their pattern of disunity.

In tracing some of the factional lines that hardened after 1976, Chai-Anan describes a milieu of societal 'polarization' and 'fragmentation' between army generals (*ibid.*:316). Specifically, a faction of 'Young Turks', drawn from Class 7 at the Chulachomklao Military Academy, withdrew its support from General Kriangsak as prime minister in 1980 in order to help General Prem Tinsulanond to power. The Young Turks then attempted a coup against Prem, but failed to win tacit consent from the king (Keyes 1987:104). To ward off additional coups, Prem sought support from the army commander, General Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth. During the 1970s Chaovalit had been linked to the 'Democratic Soldiers ... a group of self-styled intellectual officers' (Hewison 1993:165). But when launching his own career as a politician during the 1980s, Chaovalit turned to the 'Class 5 Conservatives' under General Suchinda Kraprayoon, and he permitted them to fill top positions in the the military and police. The Class 5 Conservatives were thus well placed to overthrow Prem's elected successor, Chatichai Choonhavan, in 1991, after he had appointed a member of the Young Turks to his government.

The Class 5 Conservatives were no more able, however, to forge elite unity. By repudiating the results of the elections that they held in 1992, and in harshly suppressing the mass protests that followed, they encouraged the king to move against them. This resulted in the resignation of Suchinda and the formation of a new civilian government led by the Democrats. However, it is too soon to conclude that this has finally ended disunity between military elites, or between them and civilian politicians, thereby completing Thailand's progress to stable democracy. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* (20 May 1993:19) reports that despite the elevation of new military commanders, Suchinda has remained in Bangkok and 'is still regarded by officers of the previously powerful Class 5 of Chulachomklao Military Academy as their leader'.

Hence, in examining Thailand's political record, one is struck by the disunity that has existed between elites, as well as the inability of national leaders to contain it. This configuration has been marked by an absence of formal game rules (for example, enduring constitutions), and it has been reflected in a drumbeat of irregular power seizures. But one should not push this too far, arguing the elites have shown no restraint at all. Indeed, some analysts contend that because coups have been carried out so regularly in Thailand, they constitute the model pattern for transferring state power (Chai-Anan 1986:252-54). Accordingly, one may detect some strands of informal agreement over the ways in which military elites should ascend their hierarchies (for example, taking the 'classic route' as commander of the First Army, garrisoned in Bangkok, *ibid.*:247) and the methods they should use in mounting their coups. In particular, coup makers have refrained from mobilizing grievances among outsider student movements, labour organizations, peasants, or religious groups. Further, though coups have sometimes involved violence, military factions have largely spared one another, inflicting it instead on societal audiences. Generals who have lost these competitions have then been permitted to avoid trials by leaving the country (for example, Thanom, Praphat, and Narong in 1973, and the Young Turk leader, Colonel Manoon in 1985), perhaps returning later to compete yet again (for example, Thanom in 1976). Finally, in regulating these activities, the king has monitored coups, sanctioning some attempts while advising against others. Thus, in surveying political succession in Thailand over a sixty-year period, Neher (1992: 586) concludes that coups and coup attempts have been 'smooth enough' that they have not disrupted policy making or administration.

But despite these elements of restraint, the elite configuration in Thailand remains riddled by personalist loyalties and military factions, leaving it even less unified than Indonesia's. Further, the coups that have resulted, however clinically they have been executed, must be understood as seizures of state power. And their astonishing regularity in Thailand only confirms the instability of the country's regime.

Malaysia

The forbearance shown by state elites in Malaysia stands in contrast to the muted rivalries between Indonesian elites and the more clear-cut disunity evident in Thailand. To investigate this briefly, we can focus on two ways in which elites have agreed on the distribution of state power: across the organizations that make up the state, and between the country's ethnic communities. We will see that in Malaysia, cooperation between state elites has generally persisted, while ethnic relations have gradually been adjusted, giving the country's regime form an unusual level of stability.

First, while elite statuses in Malaysia — like the other cases in this study — have mainly been based on state organizations, they have clustered around a governing party coalition more than the bureaucracy or military. The origins of this configuration lie in colonial experience. Very briefly, like the Dutch in Indonesia and reforming monarchs in Thailand, the British built an elaborate bureaucracy in the 'protectorate' of Malaya, staffing its middle and lower levels with local aristocrats. They also formed a small, indigenous military force, the Malay Regiment. But unlike the Dutch who (by waging, then losing, a violent colonial struggle) brought local military and bureaucratic elites to the fore, and Thai monarchs whose absolutism provoked a coup by the military and bureaucracy, the British relinquished power peacefully to a party coalition. Further, by interacting cooperatively with the leaders of this coalition, as well as the leaders of other state organizations, the British helped forge consensus over their power-sharing arrangements. This consensus has endured. Since independence in 1957, while the governing coalition's name and make-up has changed, national leaders and elites have maintained its centrality amid a wider webwork of unified relations.

The pivotal party within this coalition, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), recruited aristocratic civil servants into its leadership positions during the 1950s and 1960s. In later decades, the UMNO greatly enlarged the bureaucracy, expanding agencies and budgets with which broadly to dispense patronage and re-energize its support. But while top bureaucrats took new roles in the UMNO, and bureaucratic resources mounted steadily, this did more to strengthen the hand of the UMNO than the power of the bureaucracy. Similarly, UMNO leaders have maintained their paramountcy over the military,

relying on close familial ties and patronage links. In these circumstances, military elites have been content to seek benefits from the government, rather than to transcend or oust it, a posture that has not been disturbed by any bolder claims to nationalism than the government has put forth (given the military's modest role during decolonization), or any assertions of greater virtue or technocratic efficiency (given the government's nearly continuous record of economic growth). Overall, one may thus observe that at the state level, relations between elites have been unified in Malaysia, sparing the governing coalition the executive and military coups that commonly clog governments elsewhere in the region.

Cooperation between Malaysian elites has been evident in another way, enabling them to surmount a second, more unusual, kind of challenge. Most countries in Southeast Asia, of course, contain minorities of 'overseas' Chinese that collectively have prospered more than 'indigenous' populations have done. Generally, though, they have either been assimilated culturally (as in Thailand and the Philippines) or circumscribed tightly (as in Indonesia and Indochina), thereby easing or suppressing societal grievances over inequalities. But in Malaysia's 'divided' or 'plural' society, the Chinese community has made up nearly one-third of the population. It has thus been sizeable enough that it was able earlier to sustain a mass-level uprising (that is, the Emergency during the 1950s), and economically powerful enough that it has blunted government policies through investment 'strikes' and capital flight (for example, helping secure amendments to the *Industrial Coordination Act* during the late 1970s and 1980s). But it should not be supposed that because the Chinese community has been large and economically powerful, Malay state elites have been forced to accommodate it. One can readily think of instances in which the state has uprooted vital economic minorities (for example, East Indians in Uganda and *kulaks* in Stalinist Russia), even to the point of waging ethnic civil wars (as in Sri Lanka). That Malay elites have accommodated Chinese elites, then, tolerating their business activities and even sharing out state power, must be attributed more to choice and negotiation than a simple functionalist account would suggest.

Specifically, during negotiations over decolonization, ethnic Malay and Chinese elites concluded a constitutional 'bargain', apportioning the lion's share of state power to the Malays, but restraining them from impinging

seriously upon corresponding Chinese control of the economy.¹⁰ To then close this deal, these elites exchanged enough of their resources that they all enjoyed something of both worlds. UMNO leaders, granting the state licences and contracts that sustained Chinese business, in turn received campaign contributions, 'secret funds', and memberships on the boards of Chinese-owned companies. Top Chinese businessmen, for their part, were given some political voice through the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in the governing coalition. In this way, 'when the whole scene is surveyed, in its social, economic and political aspects, it becomes clear that a kind of short-term rough justice between the claims of the communities [was] in fact...attained' (Milne 1967:41).

To be sure, elite relations in Malaysia have periodically been strained. At the state level, factionalism erupted within the UMNO during the 'May thirteenth' crisis in 1969, after the death of Prime Minister Tun Razak in 1976, and after the UMNO's bitter party election in 1987. But in each case, conflicts were resolved within the UMNO's framework of informal game rules, specifying strong prerogatives for party leaders and soft punishments for challengers. These struggles were sometimes embedded in broader ethnic tensions, however, prompting the UMNO to adjust the 'bargain'. In particular, many Malays, angered by their economic inequalities with the Chinese, abandoned the UMNO during the 1969 election. The UMNO won this election, but was weakened, and, in trying to regain Malay support, it triggered severe ethnic rioting in Kuala Lumpur. New UMNO leaders increased their control over the governing coalition, then used state power to range deeply into the economy, invoking the New Economic Policy (NEP) in order to acquire equity and managerial positions for favoured Malays. But despite the grievances that this spawned among the Chinese, what stands out is the extent to which they have been able still to participate in the country's politics and economy. Overall, it may be concluded that elite unity in Malaysia — evident between top position-holders in state organizations and across the representatives of ethnic communities — has sustained regime stability since independence.

To sum up, state elites in Indonesia, based largely in the overlap between the military and bureaucracy, must probably be categorized as disunified. But this disunity has been both muted and exploited by an astute national leader, giving Indonesia's regime form a strong appearance of stability. Conversely, in Thailand appearances of profound elite disunity and regime instability — often worsened by rash leadership actions — seem mitigated by understandings over

how to mount coups, thereby leaving undisturbed some key areas of policy making. The fundamentally unstable character of Thailand's regime, however, remains plain. And in Malaysia, elites have consistently maintained their unity, even while adjusting the terms of their relations. The effectiveness with which they have done this has been reflected in the unusual continuity of their politics.

Elite-mass relations and regime openness

In examining the extent to which a regime is authoritarian or democratic, one builds on the prior analysis of state elites to assess their relations with societal audiences. Put simply, state elites may strive to control, or respect the autonomy of, diverse societal audiences. Controlled relations range from a harsh exclusion of societal audiences to various amounts of clientelist, patrimonialist, or corporatist inclusion. Though sometimes benign, these regimes rigidly structure participation and contestation, thereby corresponding with O'Donnell and Schmitter's (1986:57-64) notion of 'hard' authoritarianism. Some combination of these approaches describes politics in Indonesia. Relations involving greater societal autonomy, however, may produce 'soft' authoritarianism, 'hard' democracy, or a fully democratic regime. 'Soft' authoritarianism features liberal participation without electoral contestation, a regime in which state elites permit societal audiences to form opposition parties and voluntary organizations, but refuse to hold regular or meaningful elections. 'Hard' democracy features contestation without participation, a state's reliably calling elections, even as it suppresses opposition groups and candidates. A 'full' democracy, finally, is characterized by both participation and contestation, to the point where organized societal audiences are able effectively to contact, and electorally to replace, the state's top position holders. Since independence, state elites in Malaysia have synthesized elements of soft authoritarianism with hard democracy to produce a semi-democratic regime. State elites in Thailand have operated a variety of regime forms, though since 1992 their politics have been formally democratic.

Indonesia

Under Indonesia's New Order, state elite attitudes toward societal audiences have involved steeply hierarchical relations and tireless control. Many authors

have noted President Suharto's patriarchal style, his embracing of state elites and societal representatives in the 'big GOLKAR family' (*keluarga besar* GOLKAR), while fusing mass populations in rural *koperasi* (cooperatives). Top bureaucrats, through a process of cultural *kewajen* ('Java-ization'), have revitalized their ancient *priyayi* statuses before ordinary petitioners, thereby projecting a marked haughtiness (van Langenberg 1990:134). And military elites, still wary of revolutionary Communism, revivalist Islam, and fissiparous ethnic and regionalist identities, remain vigilant against societal impulses to organize autonomously.

Through schematic 'mentalities', developmentalist promises, and a repertoire of dire warnings, state elites have sought to imbue societal audiences with outlooks that complement their own. The vague tenets of Indonesia's official state ideology, *Negara Pancasila* (Pancasila State), intimate the virtues of consensus and unanimity, while official notions of 'organicism' and 'integralism' stress the inseparability of state and society. In grounding these ideologies, the military has directly filled posts in the GOLKAR and state bureaucracy, then sanctioned its roles with additional doctrines of *dwifungsi* (dual function) and *karyawan*. Societal audiences, in turn, have remained deactivated, trussed up in corporatist ties or dispersed as the 'floating mass'. The Constitution of 1945 (*Undang-Undang Dasar '45*), finally, and the State Policy Outline document (GBHN) overlay these concepts and activities with fastidious legalism (*hukum*).

State elites assert that societal acceptance of these terms has brought a quarter-century of political stability, economic development (*pembangunan*), and social harmony. They contrast this record with the consequences of freer societal action under Sukarno's Old Order. In particular, they portray the ethnic rebellions, religious upheavals, and economic stagnancy during the 1950s as having germinated amid democratic openness, erupting finally in the horrific mass violence during 1965-66. On this score, van Langenberg (*ibid.*:127) notes that state elites have used 'the historical memory of the killings' in order to fabricate legitimacy. More generally, after declaring the appropriateness of strong state power, state elites have cited their legacy of delivering the goods as earning them the right to wield it.

This state control of societal audiences — made manifest in ideological themes, broad cooptation, and harsh coercion — has produced a 'hard' authoritarianism. Accordingly, scholars have found scant space in which to

debate the precise mode of politics in Indonesia, plotting it along a short continuum from 'restricted pluralism' to 'totalitarian ambitions' (MacIntyre 1990:6-21; Tanter and Young 1990:215-88). We can perhaps capture Indonesia's regime most finely by examining it on the twin dimensions of liberal participation and electoral contestations. In terms of participation, business firms, professionals, industrial workers, peasants, and other societal audiences have been tidily collated into functional groups, then linked through the GOLKAR to state elites. The cracks within and between these corporatist pillars have been sumptuously plugged with patronage. In addition, a spectrum of opposition parties has been collapsed into two official, catch-all organizations, the PPP (Development Unity Party), which amalgamates Muslim groups, and the PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party), containing nationalist and Christian groups. These party vehicles, weakened by their artificiality and 'internal tensions' (MacIntyre 1990:25), have also been barred from canvassing support at the village level. Similarly, societal associations have been hampered by the 'ORMAS' legislation (Law on Social Organizations) passed in 1985, requiring that they all accept Pancasila as their philosophical basis (*azas tunggal*). Hence, while some authors maintain that these associations can still exploit some quiet resistance strategies, they concede that 'open or outright opposition to the government is currently impossible' (Eldridge 1990:511). In terms of participation, then, Indonesia's regime form is profoundly illiberal.

On the contestation axis, elections for the House of Representatives (DPR) have been scrupulously held under the New Order government every five years. But while elections have been regular, they have been neither competitive nor meaningful in terms of top state positions. 'Civil servants, community leaders, and the electors are all pressured into working for or voting for GOLKAR....[producing a] ritual with a predictable outcome' (van Langenberg 1990:131). State elites calculate that predictable elections, like all rituals which promise certainty between scenarios of chaos, fetch some political legitimacy. Certainty is further assured by removing power over policy making to the president and key ministers, none of whom sits in the DPR. Instead, the president is accountable to the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) which elects him — though only after he has secured the appointments of half of its delegates. This very limited electoral contestation, then, together with low levels of societal participation, produce in Indonesia a deeply authoritarian regime form.

Thailand

In Thailand, state elites have maintained fewer controls over society than in Indonesia. However, this cannot be ascribed to bureaucratic and military elites, drawn traditionally from upper-class families in Bangkok, having respected the autonomy of societal audiences. Keyes (1987:74-75) writes that 'members of the bureaucracy [have] assumed that their superior status [has] entitled them to determine what [is] best for the populace without being held accountable to representatives of the people'. One also gets a sense of military attitudes from recent statements made by General Suchinda Kraprayoon: 'I will definitely not play politics. This is not in my character... I cannot go begging for votes... I cannot lower myself' (*Bangkok Post*, 6 March 1990:163, cited in Hewison 1993:163). Hence, in Thailand, elites have so distrusted the motivations of societal audiences that their 'true' preferences would probably have been to operate a stable authoritarian regime. Their own disunity, however, has prevented this, interrupting broad patrimonialist networks and tight corporatist structures. In consequence, elite behaviour toward societal audiences has oscillated between zealous repression, casual clientelism, and moments of bewilderment and quiescence, producing unstable cycling between authoritarian, semi-democratic, and occasionally democratic regime forms.

In these circumstances, state elites have been unable to attach lasting ideological doctrines to their politics. While the military has historically linked its claim to state power to its fight against communism, a task that has spurred a rural developmentalist mission, the value of this message has plainly receded (Neher 1992:603). Bureaucratic claims to state power have been based on expertise, but they often diverge sharply from public perceptions of inaccessibility and corruption. And Thailand's political parties, during their short stays in office, have turned more on personalities and contracts than issue areas and programmes. In seeking legitimation, then, state elites have had to reach outside their own procedures and policies. Specifically, General Sarit resuscitated the monarchy during the early 1960s, holding it aloft as a symbol of grand-benevolence and continuity. Further, state elites have relied on the Buddhist *Sangha* (monastic order), inviting monks to perform rituals at state functions, and arranging their hierarchy to parallel the machinery of provincial administration (Keyes 1987:140).

But even though state elites have been severely disunified and denied ideological cover, they have generally kept competition over state power to themselves. In other words, while overthrowing governments and sparking irregular changes between authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes, elites have avoided opening the regime so widely that they have freely admitted societal audiences. Chai-Anan records that between 1932 and 1987, periods of semi-democracy added up to more than 34 years, and fully authoritarian regimes existed for thirteen years. Combined democratic experience, however, totalled only six years (Chai-Anan 1989:322).

Within this rapid pendulation, one thus observes that state elites have most commonly operated semi-democracies, a regime form that was perhaps best articulated under Prem Tinsulanond's government during the 1980s. In terms of participation, this meant that student, labour, and farmer groups were allowed to organize — 'albeit on a restricted basis' (Keyes 1987:101) — and that the state, while retaining ownership of most electronic media outlets, permitted a free print media. Given this scope for societal autonomy, semi-democratic politics under Prem could be classified as moderately liberal.

On the contestation axis, however, while state elites took care to hold elections, they did so to strengthen support for their own positions rather than to open up avenues for new position-holders. During Prem's tenure, the House of Representatives was freely elected, but its activities were checked by a Senate made up mostly of appointed military and civilian bureaucrats. Further, as in Indonesia, state power was shifted to the executive, overseen by a prime minister who neither sat in the assembly nor was a member of any party. Chai-Anan (1989:39) thus concludes that 'electoral participation by the masses [was] ritualistic or mobilized participation rather than voluntary political action'. In short, Thailand's semi-democracy featured some fairly autonomous societal organizations, but little real chance for those organizations to gain electoral access to state power.

But state elites in Thailand have also confronted societal audiences that, since the 1970s, have been inspired by greater socio-economic change than has occurred in Indonesia. Thus, at junctures where deep elite stalemates have coincided with surges in mass resentments, democratization has at least briefly peeped through. In Neher's account, Thailand's first significant democratic 'interregnum' occurred in 1973 when organized student movements

brought intramilitary rifts into the open, and important generals, outraged by the policies of [Prime Minister] Thanom ... refused to put down the student revolt. Moreover, the king, who was appalled by the violence and who provided moral support to the students, caused many in the military who revered his work to be reluctant to use force, and in the absence of a unified military response, the revolt succeeded (Neher 1992:590; see also Keyes 1987:84).

However, the student movement that prompted the regime change and the Democrat Party that came later to power were no better able to maintain elite unity and stability. Indeed, one may note the ambivalence of Thailand's democratic forces when factions of right-wing students emerged, the Democrat Party 'broke into left, centre, and right groups, with none willing to support the other' (Neher 1992:592) and the king, swiftly reassessing democracy's worth, endorsed the military's return to power in 1976.

Similarly, Thailand's quick regime changes in 1988-92 can be understood in terms of elite disunity coupled with new societal groups which, while increasingly activist, remained ambivalent about the forms that regimes should take. Briefly, Thailand stumbled through a democratically elected Chart Thai government during 1988-91, an authoritarian regime under the National Peace Keeping Council during 1991-92, a semi-democratic Samakhitam government under General Suchinda from March until May 1992, and finally, redemocratization ushering in a Democratic-led coalition in September. It is uncertain, however, whether Thailand's new democracy will be consolidated. Though it is doubtless more costly now for military elites to seize power, they may calculate that it is more costly still to remain in the barracks while their honour is despoiled and their benefits withdrawn. Moreover, though much has been made of the democratic sentiments of Thailand's rising bourgeoisie and its cellular-phone-toting middle class, it is notable that these entities greeted the 1991 coup with vague approval, that top business executives as readily joined General Suchinda's cabinet in 1992 as they had that of the Chart Thai government (*ibid.*:599, 602)¹¹ and that images of the middle class leading protests against Suchinda in 'Black May' have not been confirmed by available data (King 1992:1113-4). Hence, while Thailand today features a regime that in terms of participation and contestation appears fully democratic, the rise of elite-mass attitudes necessary to sustain it are not clear.

Malaysia

Since independence in 1957, state elites in Malaysia have remained much more unified than elites in Indonesia and Thailand. They could thus have probably maintained their regime's stability, regardless of whether it took an authoritarian, semi-democratic, or democratic form. Let us briefly investigate the reasons, then, that state elites in Malaysia have plumped almost continuously for semi-democracy.

On the one hand, elite attitudes toward mass populations have involved strongly patrimonialist controls, swaying elites toward an authoritarian regime. Within the Malay community, elite-mass relations have often been described as 'feudal', marked by a 'culture of deference' and 'obligatory followership' (Kessler 1992:148, 155). Similarly, in writing about the Chinese in Malaysia, Pye (1985:255) asserts boldly that 'the system of authority is unambiguous: one party and one man run the entire enterprise, everyone is expected to join in the consensus, and any deviant is automatically classified as a subversive'. Thus, in taking these ethnic communities together, Means (1975:153,195,214) concludes that 'elites tend to treat the public very patronizingly by making emotional and manipulative appeals, suggesting a rather low opinion of the ability of the public to participate rationally and sensibly in the political process'. Moreover, the rivalries between these communities have stiffened elite notions of control, impelling UMNO leaders to accumulate state power through which to enforce 'Malay dominance'.

At the same time, this Malay dominance has fuelled Chinese resentments, encouraging many Chinese to support opposition parties, Mandarin primary schools, and various cultural displays. In addition, Chinese businessmen remain able to shift their capital from Malaysia's economy to overseas markets. The UMNO thus recognizes that it would be costly — though, I submit, not impossible — to close off all avenues for autonomous Chinese organization. Crouch (1993:152) writes:

the very division of society into communal segments in itself constitutes a built-in check on the use of authoritarian powers. Malay political leaders are aware that any attempt on their part to establish an exclusively Malay regime would meet with enormous resistance from the non-Malay part of society. Not only would they face social

upheaval and the risk of civil war but would have to deal with economic disruption if Chinese skills and capital were withdrawn.

In this same way, when confronting Islamic revivalism among the Malays, state elites have been able to contain it (and in some instances to coopt it), but would find it difficult to eradicate completely. In sum, while unified state elites in Malaysia could operate a variety of stable regimes, they have evaluated semi-democracy as the least costly way to balance societal forces and perpetuate their statuses.

In seeking legitimacy for these arrangements, it may be observed that ideological appeals are less articulated in Malaysia than in Indonesia, though more so than in Thailand. Put very simply, the UMNO has anchored its right to rule in the indigene status of its Malay following, a 'prior occupation' and 'ownership of the country' (Horowitz 1985:202-203). This has translated into a broad proclamation of 'Malay dominance' (*ketauanan Melayu*) over the 'Land of the Malays' (*Tanah Melayu*) (Crouch 1993:151). But the UMNO has sought also to legitimate its paramourcy before the Chinese, gathering subordinate Chinese parties into its *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) coalition and relying on them to magnify the UMNO's forbearance on some issues into an image of power sharing. State elites thus allude to the '*Barisan way*', the special needs of a 'multiracial society', and the virtues of a 'Malaysian identity'. Surveying this uneven, though significant, power-sharing, Zakaria has characterized ethnic relations as 'hegemonic with accommodationist elements' (Zakaria 1986:235). It can probably also be said that these appeals have succeeded in winning legitimacy before most Malays without utterly alienating the Chinese, or at least without disturbing a Chinese acquiescence born of the recognition that things could be worse.

Let us briefly sketch out Malaysia's semi-democracy in terms of liberal participation and electoral contestation. In terms of participation, state elites have generally allowed opposition parties, professional associations, trade unions, and many other kinds of cause-oriented and cultural groups to organize and operate at modest levels. On the other hand, the government has acted systematically to cap such participation, registering and circumscribing groups through the *Societies Act*, extending a near monopoly over media ownership that greatly tames public expression, and applying a range of security provisions against ardent critics. One thus concludes that while participation has been fairly

autonomous in Malaysia, it has not been uncontrolled, and rarely has it been permitted to shape policy making directly.

With respect to contestation, the government has reliably held elections since independence in 1957. The prime minister, put up by the party that wins these elections, has remained ascendant over the military and bureaucracy, thus highlighting the meaningfulness of his office. But while opposition parties are able to get into Malaysia's parliament, they are hindered in winning the majorities necessary to control it, and even in winning in the legislative assemblies of more than a few states. Election day, then, presents only a 'snapshot' of propriety, obscuring a period beforehand marred by severe malapportionment of districts, a short campaign period, bans on outdoor opposition rallies, and the government's partisan use of media channels, state equipment, and off-the-cuff development grants. In these circumstances, Crouch (forthcoming, Chapter 4) observes that 'the Malaysian electoral system... [has been] so heavily loaded in favour of the government that it is hard to imagine that the ruling coalition, as long as it remained united, could be defeated in an election'. In sum, a murky liberalism and electoralism have combined in Malaysia in a semi-democracy.

But for reasons having largely to do with deep economic recession and loss of patronage, the governing UMNO split into two parties in 1988. Put very briefly, many middle-class Malays who had been nurtured by the NEP were cast suddenly adrift causing them to view the UMNO less as a conduit to business success than as a barrier. The UMNO (*Baru*) (New UMNO) remained in power under Prime Minister Mahathir, while the *Semangat '46* (Spirit of '46) went into opposition under the former Finance minister, Tengku Razaleigh. In this way, factionalism within the UMNO gave rise to a more competitive party system leading up to the 1990 general election. But as Malaysia's economy recovered, the UMNO (*Baru*) was able to renew its patronage flows and recover support, revealing that many middle-class Malays were less interested in mounting political opposition than in sharing in boom cycles. Thus, by the time the 1990 election was held, middle-class Malays felt little need to change the government — and even less need to press for regime change that would in future elections make regular, democratic changes of government possible. In consequence, Razaleigh's *Semangat '46* performed poorly at the polls, and the party has since been hollowed out by a procession of defectors to the UMNO (*Baru*). Thus,

despite the deep socio-economic changes in Malaysia that converged recently in new prospects for regime openness, state elites were able to perpetuate a semi-democracy, snatching back concessions once pressures abated.

To summarize, in the three countries covered in this paper, state elites have held attitudes toward societal audiences that have been largely dismissive, disposing them strongly to favour authoritarian regimes. Under Indonesia's New Order, elites have muted their rivalries enough that they have been able to act on these preferences, thereby perpetuating a 'hard' authoritarianism. Moreover, they have deadened any lingering societal autonomy with elaborate 'mentalities'. Conversely, in Thailand, disunified elites have been unable to moderate their factional behaviour, or even fully to control their societal audiences. In these circumstances, elite struggles and societal upsurges have fuelled nearly continuous change between authoritarian, semi-democratic, and democratic politics. As such, there are few reasons for thinking that Thailand's present democracy will persist. Malaysia, finally, presents still another set of outcomes, framed by Indonesia's hard authoritarianism and Thailand's unstable democracy. Put simply, while elites in Malaysia have remained unified enough that they would probably have been able to maintain any regime form, they have operated a semi-democracy. In this context, they have controlled some societal audiences, yet eased controls over others, enabling them to conserve state resources without endangering their statuses. These arrangements have made rigid legitimating mentalities unnecessary, permitting elites to spin some light slogans and shibboleths.

Conclusion

We conclude by asking how well this elite-centred framework has addressed problems of regime stability and democracy. In taking a first, disaggregating, cut that posits elites as the main causal variable, some deficiencies in the framework might seem immediately to crop up. Put simply, because elites are only elites in the context of organized followings, one might doubt the utility of investigating them separately. Attempts to go further, analyzing inter-elite relations apart from elite-mass relations, would therefore appear still more problematic. In short, movement on one axis must impact on the other. Thus, while elites may find scope for manoeuvre, as they draw nearer in consensual unity they must gradually grow distant from their societal audiences. The

reverse would also seem true. In growing more responsive to their followings, elites may re-energize their statuses, but they trade off their solidarity with other elites. Expanding this logic would also suggest that the state cannot clearly be distinguished from the society in which it is located.

Turning from elites to what in the framework have been identified as dependent variables, questions emerge about separating stability and instability from authoritarianism and democracy. Is it not possible that a regime becomes more or less stable precisely because it has been opened or closed. Indeed, many observers contend that regimes can only be made stable by opening them up fully to the just demands of societal audiences. Contrarily, many governments claim that opening up regimes to unruly mass publics is what puts stability at risk. Whichever view might be right, they both articulate a strong dynamic between a regime's major dimensions. Hence, to disaggregate stability and democracy, like separating elites from their audiences, is to overlook their interconnectedness, indeed their inextricability, causing grave distortions in analysis.

This shades into a final question about whether the gulf injected by the framework between inter-elite and elite-mass relations on one side, and regime outcomes on the other is not also contrived. For many observers, elite attitudes and relations *are* the regime form; their game rules *are* the regime's procedures. Any explanations teased from the false separation between them must quickly bog down in tautologies.

But this query, at least, can be dealt with fairly quickly. In Thailand, for example, while a democratic regime now formally exists, elite-level commitments to it remain doubtful. This disparity between subdued motivations and formal procedures makes plain the disjunction between elite attitudes and regime outcomes. It enables us also to predict that Thailand's democracy will not persist. In this same way, it may be noted that appearances of regime stability in Indonesia are belied by elite-level tensions, held only in abeyance by an artful national leader. We can thus predict that regime change will occur in Indonesia with the passing of that leader, though toward some new form of authoritarianism, rather than democracy. Conversely, the persistence of semi-democracy in Malaysia has depended on elites underutilizing the opportunities for mobilization that the regime has formally made available to them. In turn, we have little trouble in differentiating analytically between inter-elite relations and formal regime outcomes.

More generally, to deny the separability of elites from masses and their relations from regimes is in many ways to repack the old black box of political systems. It is probably also to shift inquiry about authoritarianism and democracy back to levels of socio-economic development, class or ethnic structures, political culture, and the like. But as we know, these factors are all notoriously wayward. For example, in challenging the correlation between development and democracy, O'Donnell (1973) shows in his classic study of bureaucratic-authoritarianism that it was in South America's richest countries during the 1960s and 1970s that democracy collapsed. Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992) demonstrate that the bourgeoisie and middle class are as likely to enter state-capital alliances that reconfirm authoritarianism as they are to lead any democratic change. Similarly, multiethnic social structures have been variously understood as prompting states to adopt strong 'control models' (Lustick 1979), and as generating autonomous 'intermediate groups' which can resist state controls. Finally, as Huntington (1990) has pointed out, if all societies were forever imprisoned by their political cultures, democracy would nowhere have emerged. It is thus difficult to see how we can explain the impact of these structures and forces upon politics without recognizing the coherence and direction given to them by leadership and elites. As such, elites may deserve a new look in the literature, and they may offer the basis for a comparative approach to explaining regimes in Southeast Asia.

Notes

¹ Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1990:7-9) writes:

partially stable regimes are neither fully secure nor in imminent danger of collapse. Their institutions have perhaps acquired some measure of depth, flexibility, and value, but not enough to ensure the regime safe passage through severe challenges....Semi-democratic regimes exist where the effective power of elected officials is so limited, or political party competition is so restricted, or the freedom and fairness of elections so compromised that electoral outcomes, while competitive, still deviate significantly from popular preferences; or where civil and political liberties are so limited that some political orientations and interests are unable to organize and express themselves.

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- 2 The parallel to this may be that totalitarianism, as understood by Linz, was not simply an extrapolation from democracy through authoritarianism and thus more of the same. Its dimensions were instead distinctly different (see Linz 1975:175-411).
 - 3 Huntington writes that 'negotiations and compromise among political elites were at the heart of the democratization processes.... Whether the initiative for democratization came from the government, from the opposition, or from both, at some point the key players reached agreements on the crucial aspects of the democalization process and the new system that was to be created' (Huntington 1990: 165-66).
 - 4 At this point, the distinction between elites and regimes becomes clearer. While a democratic regime may formally permit the full venting of mass grievances, unified elites, guided by informal game rules, resist doing so.
 - 5 They also note that 'democracy could only be consolidated where elite interests were effectively protected' (*ibid.*:150).
 - 6 One example of this is Chile's experience under Allende's elected government.
 - 7 Elsewhere, Rueschemeyer *et al.* write: 'the state has many ways of shaping the development of civil society. It can cease or obstruct the organization of different class interests; it can empower or marginalize existing organizations; it may succeed in cooptation and, in the extreme, use whole organizational networks as conduits of hegemonic influence' (*ibid.*: 67).
 - 8 Michael van Langenberg writes that 'it is impossible to identify any major faction in the ruling elite which would want to risk political stability by challenging Suharto too far' (van Langenberg 1990 :138).
 - 9 Keyes writes that 'pressures from outside groups and from internal tensions between technocrats and old-style officials have not yet led to a transformation of the bureaucratic polity, but the civil service elite can no longer manipulate the instruments of state power for their own ends with total impunity' (Keyes 1987:144).
 - 10 Safeguards for Chinese business activities are contained in Article 153, Section 9 of the Malaysian Constitution which states that 'nothing in this Article shall empower Parliament to restrict business or trade solely for the purpose of reservations for Malays... '.
 - 11 In analyzing the elections that brought the Samakhitam party to power, Neher (1992:599) writes about the 'unseemly move among candidates toward wealthy parties, with no concern whatsoever for the stance of the party on issues or ideological direction. For the majority of the candidates, the only concern was which party made the best money offer'. He records also that after Suchinda took power, 'most of the cabinet members were wealthy business executives and military leaders....[and that] the appointed senate...was dominated by leading military officers, top bankers, wealthy industrialists, and business executives' (*ibid.*:602).

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