

Voter Turnout in Democratizing Southeast Asia A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Participation in Five Countries

Scot Schraufnagel, Michael Buehler, and Maureen Lowry-Fritz

Abstract

We consider alternative explanations for variation in voter turnout rates across the five countries in Southeast Asia that the Polity IV database suggests are most “democratic.” Research on voter turnout in Western states has typically drawn connections between institutional, demographic, political, and economic variables and turnout levels. In this essay, we test each group of predictors and attempt to begin the process of isolating the factors that are most relevant to electoral participation in Southeast Asia. The research finds that many traditional explanations for voter turnout are inadequate. Yet, high-quality formal democracy, combined with poor economic conditions, can reasonably predict voter turnout in the countries studied. In the end, the research qualifies our results in an attempt to prompt a more thorough discussion and understanding of democratization in the region.

Keywords: Southeast Asian politics, voter turnout, election laws, political corruption.

Southeast Asia has been viewed as exceptional in the developing world in terms of economic growth and economic potential. This has caused increased attention to the region and concern with government stability and democratic potential. Political science has rediscovered Southeast Asia in recent years for several reasons. First, the variance of regime types within a relatively confined geographical area has provided scholars with opportunities to generate new

Scot Schraufnagel is Associate Professor and director of graduate studies for the Department of Political Science at Northern Illinois University. <sschrauf@niu.edu>

Michael Buehler is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and a Faculty Associate at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University. <mbuehler1@niu.edu>

Maureen Lowry-Fritz is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at Northern Illinois University. <mlowryfritz1@niu.edu>

hypotheses about democratization and to elaborate on existing ones.¹ Second, some of the most dramatic regime changes of recent years have occurred in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, for instance, has become the world's third largest democracy within just a decade. Likewise, political events related to democratization in Malaysia and Thailand have made world headlines on several occasions in recent years. Third, home to nearly half a billion people, the sheer number of people living in Southeast Asia makes it a region hard to ignore.

Our study explores the determinants of voter turnout in the five countries in Southeast Asia that the Polity IV database suggests are the most "democratic" in the region, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. We do not examine voter turnout in the nation-states of the region where democracy and electoral activity are less well-developed for several reasons: these cases are likely anomalous; accurate data are less available; and theory is currently too underdeveloped to prompt meaningful cross-national empirical tests. Participation is intimately linked to the concept of democracy.² Therefore, studying voter turnout may offer considerable insight into the state of democracy across Southeast Asia. For instance, other scholars suggest that low voter turnout can be seen as evidence of less support for the state, particularly in countries undergoing democratic transition.³ Moreover, the act of voting as a form of political participation is commonly associated with the degree to which policy outcomes represent citizen preferences.⁴ Still further, voter turnout is often used as a yardstick for democratic "progress" in old and new democracies as well as in democracies "in the making," as Southeast Asian countries often are characterized.⁵

Furthermore, we are motivated by a lack of systematic examination of democratic development in Southeast Asia and by the belief that the regional application of models of voter turnout in cultural contexts other than the Western industrial world enriches our understanding of citizen participation, generally. The political environment in which elections are held in the five countries studied has changed considerably in recent decades. The emergence of relatively independent middle classes in the context of rapid economic

¹ Erik M. Kuhonta, Dan Slater, and Tuong Vu, *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 25.

² Arend Lijphart, "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unsolved Dilemma, Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (1997): 1-14.

³ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Political Identities and Electoral Sequences: Spain, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia," *Daedalus* 121, no. 2 (1992): 123-139.

⁴ James G. Gimpel and Jason E. Schuknecht, "Political Participation and the Accessibility of the Ballot Box," *Political Geography* 29, no. 5 (2003): 5-17, and Lijphart, "Unequal Participation."

⁵ Tatiana Kostadinova and Timothy J. Power, "Does Democratization Depress Participation?: Voter Turnout in the Latin American and Eastern European Transitional Democracies," *Political Research Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2007): 363-377.

growth;⁶ a mass media that is more difficult to control; and an international environment that since the demise of the Cold War is more willing to shun military dictatorships and emphasize transparency and accountability⁷ have all democratized these polities to varying degrees *independent* from the introduction of competitive elections. Elections have acquired new meaning as a consequence.

We approached our research question in full awareness of the many democratic deficits in the region. Moreover, there is no pretension that we have developed a comprehensive story about all the factors that influence voter turnout in the region, let alone all the factors that contribute to the quality of democratic governance in the nation-states we study. However, we forge forward in an effort to begin to unravel possible causal relations between a host of variables and voter turnout to initiate a discussion of cross-national correlates. We then scrutinize our discoveries, assessing critically the correlates uncovered in the last section of this essay. Our examination of the dynamics of voter turnout in the region is incomplete. But, we are motivated by the scarcity of research which explicitly addresses the issue of voter participation rates, from a comparative perspective, in the region's political settings that are more self-governing than others.

Models of Voting Turnout

Electoral institutions, demographic considerations,⁸ the quality of democracy,⁹ and economic factors¹⁰ have all been tied to cross-national variation in voter

⁶ John T. Sidel, "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy Revisited: Colonial State and Chinese Immigrant in the Making of Modern Southeast Asia," *Comparative Politics* 40, no. 2 (2008): 127-147.

⁷ Mushtaq Khan, "Rent-Seeking as Process," in *Rents, Rent-Seeking and Economic Development: Theory and Evidence in Asia*, ed. Mushtaq Khan and Jomo Kwame Sundaram (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70-144.

⁸ Mark N. Franklin, "Electoral Participation," in *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*, ed. Lawrence LeDuc, Richard Gene Niemi, and Pippa Norris (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 216-235; Harold F. Gosnell, *Why Europe Votes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1930); and Herbert Tingsten, *Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1937).

⁹ Roger Scully, Richard Wyn Jones, and Dafydd Trystan, "Turnout, Participation and Legitimacy in Post-Devolution Wales," *British Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 3 (2004): 519-537; Kostadinova and Power, "Does Democratization Depress Participation?"; and Daniel A. Smith, "Consolidating Democracy: The Structural Underpinnings of Ghana's 2000 Elections," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 4 (2002): 621-650.

¹⁰ James H. Fowler and Cindy D. Kam, "Patience as a Political Virtue: Delayed Gratification and Turnout," *Political Behavior* 28, no. 2 (2006): 113-128; Gopal Krishna, "Electoral Participation and Political Integration," *Economic and Political Weekly* 2, nos. 3/5 (1967): 179-190; and Alexander C. Pacek, "Macroeconomics: Conditions and Electoral Politics in East Central Europe," *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 3 (1994): 723-744.

turnout. Originally, voter turnout models were developed and applied to Western industrial democracies;¹¹ consequently, less is understood about the relationship between these factors and voter turnout in different regions of the world. In analyses of non-Western cases, the results have been mixed, and there has been minimal discussion regarding the disparate effects expected and found. To illustrate, high unemployment has been a mobilizing factor in certain countries, but in other instances, high unemployment, perhaps indicative of economic deprivation, has been associated with lower electoral participation.¹²

We begin with a brief theoretical discussion specific to the region and follow this with empirical tests of the relationship between turnout and some conventional variables. Unfortunately, a small sample size challenges our empirical analysis. Because our intention is to initiate a generalized discussion, we are not satisfied by a simple case-study approach of only one or two countries. But, even when examining five countries, there still is not a sufficient number of elections to conduct meaningful multivariate testing. In the end, we base our analysis on an original dataset of nineteen parliamentary elections that took place in the five countries from 1998 through 2011. The analysis is limited to the most recent time period because of inconsistent experiences with democratic elections prior to 1998. The nineteen cases do afford an opportunity to perform crosstab analyses, of the type that often leads to more significant quantitative work in the future. We hope to be able to expand on the analysis as the number of democratic elections in the region grows. For now, our intention is to begin to test the external validity of some traditional variables used to explain cross-national variation in voter turnout rates.

The Southeast Asian Context

One of Southeast Asia's unique features is the region's institutional, demographic, political, and economic diversity. A turbulent history accounts for variegated patterns of state formation across the region and the emergence of political systems whose institutional arrangements differ in important ways.¹³

¹¹ Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, "The Not So Simple Act of Voting," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. Ada Finifter (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 1993): 193-218; Franklin, "Electoral Participation"; Robert W. Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 2 (1987): 405-423; Lijphart, "Unequal Participation"; and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (1986): 17-43.

¹² Robert A. Jackson, "Differential Influences on Latino Electoral Participation," *Political Behavior* 25, no. 4 (2003): 339-466, and Steven J. Rosenstone, "Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 1 (1982): 25-46.

¹³ Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55-114.

The region is also a cultural mosaic where some of the world's most ethnically and religiously diverse countries are located.¹⁴ Finally, rapid urbanization and the emergence of capitalist classes with distinct identities and strengths are indicative of the region's dramatic economic changes over past decades.¹⁵

With all the socio-political and economic diversity, the task of ascertaining valid generalizations is substantial. Yet, the regional focus provides an opportunity to hold some factors constant that could be inadvertently excluded due to measurement limitations or theoretical deficiencies. Moreover, we do not claim there is no variation in those factors, assumed constant, across Southeast Asian nation-states. However, we would expect this variation to be substantially smaller than between Southeast Asian states and Western industrialized cases or even between nation-states in other parts of Asia.

Two characteristics of the politics in Southeast Asia are worth emphasizing. The region as a whole showed signs of democratization relatively late compared to the rest of the world. Watershed events occurred toward the *end* of the third wave of democratization, including the demise of President Marcos in the Philippines in 1986, the implementation of the People's Constitution in Thailand in 1997, and the fall of President Suharto in Indonesia in 1998. The relative novelty of these democratic accomplishments may have a positive influence on citizens' attitudes toward newly gained political freedoms. Hence, we speculate that civil and political liberties will have a measurable influence on voter turnout values.

In addition, the region shows an interesting anomaly with regard to Lipset's observation about the correlation between a nation's affluence and its propensity to establish a democratic political system.¹⁶ Lipset's hypothesis, which has seen a revival of sorts in political science in recent years,¹⁷ does not hold true in Southeast Asia. Brunei, Malaysia, and Singapore are the region's most affluent countries but also less democratic than poorer Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, causing comparativists to label these latter countries "electoral overachievers."¹⁸ We would therefore expect anomalous relationships between economic affluence and voter turnout. In other words, electoral participation should be higher in poor countries.

¹⁴ Susan J. Henders, *Democratization and Identity: Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

¹⁵ Sidel, "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy Revisited."

¹⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959): 69-105.

¹⁷ Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction," in *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, ed. Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-49.

¹⁸ Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "An 'Arab' More than a 'Muslim' Electoral Gap," *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 3 (2003): 30-44.

Empirical Tests

The dependent variable in this research is the proportion of the voting-age population that casts votes in parliamentary elections. Much previous work that mentions electoral participation in Southeast Asia has looked at turnout of registered voters;¹⁹ however, this manipulation prevents any test of the effect that automatic voter registration (as occurs in Indonesia) might have on voter turnout. Moreover, there are voting irregularities in Singapore,²⁰ where during the three most recent national elections only a little more than 39 percent of the voting-age population was registered to vote. If we studied only voting turnout of registered voters, we would misrepresent the level of electoral participation occurring in Singapore.

Table 1 shows the election years, countries, voter turnout in each election, and the average turnout in each country for the time period of the study. The table shows that Indonesia has experienced the highest level of citizen electoral participation (81.9 percent) and Singapore the lowest level of voter turnout (36.9 percent). Turnout values for the nineteen elections cluster nicely by country, albeit not perfectly. The research now turns to isolating possible systematic influences on the country average values.

Institutional Considerations

We begin by examining how certain electoral/institutional arrangements may affect turnout in democratizing Southeast Asia. Our first institutional consideration is *rest-day* voting. Seemingly, the ability to vote on a traditional non-workday would be associated with an increase in voter turnout. However, some studies have suggested that rest-day voting does not significantly affect electoral participation.²¹ Rest-day voting occurs in Thailand and Singapore.

Second, we test the effect of *concurrent elections* or elections when a chief executive and the legislature are chosen at the same time. Concurrence is believed to enhance the level of electoral relevance of a parliamentary election²² and consequently to produce higher voter turnout. In the five

¹⁹ Chin-Huat Wong, "The Federal and State Elections in Malaysia, March 2004," *Electoral Studies* 24, no. 2 (2005): 311-319; James Chin, "The General Election in Singapore, May 2006," *Electoral Studies* 26, no. 3 (2007): 703-707; Graham K. Brown, "Federal and State Elections in Malaysia," *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 4 (2008): 740-744; and Christian Schafferer, "The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, December 2007," *Electoral Studies* 28, no. 1 (2009): 167-170.

²⁰ Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

²¹ Vernon Bogdanor and David Butler, *Democracy and Elections: Electoral Systems and Their Political Consequences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²² Kostadinova and Power, "Does Democratization Depress Participation?" and Franklin, "Electoral Participation."

Table 1. Turnout of Voting-Age Population
in Five Southeast Asian Countries, 1998-2011

Year	Country	Turnout	Average Turnout
1999	Indonesia	85.7	81.9
2004	Indonesia	87.5	
2009	Indonesia	74.0	
1999	Malaysia	49.6	51.8
2004	Malaysia	52.2	
2008	Malaysia	53.4	
1998	Philippines	69.0	65.0
2001	Philippines	64.7	
2004	Philippines	75.1	
2007	Philippines	54.9	
2010	Philippines	63.1	
2001	Singapore	21.4	36.9
2006	Singapore	32.2	
2011	Singapore	53.3	
2001	Thailand	70.1	69.7
2005	Thailand	73.5	
2006	Thailand	62.6	
2007	Thailand	76.2	
2011	Thailand	66.0	

Note: Elections are in chronological order within the alphabetical order of countries.

countries analyzed here, only the Philippines has concurrent parliamentary and presidential elections.

Third, we seek to determine how *unicameral legislatures* may affect voters' perceptions of their own efficacy and the policy prowess of the government officials whom they elect. Voters' perceptions of the decisiveness of elections for policymaking has been linked to voting turnout,²³ and it is argued that voter turnout is higher the "greater the power that is bestowed on those elected."²⁴ In other words, when one's vote is more likely to make a difference, citizens should turn out at a higher rate. In 1999, the parliamentary election in Indonesia was for a unicameral legislature, and Singapore has had a unicameral legislature throughout the time period studied.

Fourth, *mandatory voting* is expected to lead to higher voter turnout rates. What is most interesting about this variable in other regions is that it does

²³ Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies," and Andre Blais, *To Vote or Not To Vote?* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

²⁴ Blais, *To Vote or Not To Vote?*

not seem to matter whether the country actually enforces the law or provides punitive sanctions for nonvoting.²⁵ Once voting is made mandatory, people tend to follow the rule. This suggests higher voter turnout in elections where voting is compulsory, as is the cases in Singapore and Thailand.

Last, we test *automatic registration*, or its reverse, voter registration by personal initiative. When registration is not automatic, citizens wishing to vote, in effect, need to turn out twice—once to register and again to cast a vote. It is widely acknowledged that difficult voter registration requirements sap voter turnout among the voting-age population.²⁶ Building on existing literature, our expectation is that voter turnout will be lower where voter registration laws demand that voters take the initiative to register and remain registered. In this analysis, only Indonesia has an automatic voter registration process, albeit one marred by problems sufficient to warrant further discussion when we turn to qualifying our results below.

Demographic Considerations

We use *female literacy* as a proxy for the health of a nation's education system. Arguably, higher literacy is evidence of a more educated population. We use female literacy because suffrage was universal in the nation-states of Southeast Asia during the time period of this study and because it provides greater variation in this proxy for educational achievement. The average rate of women's literacy in our sample of nations is 89.3 percent and ranges from 85.4 percent in Malaysia to 92.7 percent in the Philippines. We anticipate a positive relationship between literacy and voter turnout.

Urbanization may be associated with increased poverty and low levels of political mobilization by virtue of economic deprivation.²⁷ However, it is also possible that urbanization may allow for more assessable polling stations and give voters greater access to political information, which may enable political parties to better mobilize their constituents.²⁸ Although the theoretical expectations are somewhat mixed, the urbanization and poverty argument is more relevant to developed industrial democracies and the ease of polling argument is more pertinent to nation-states still in the process of democratic and economic development. Hence, in our analysis, we expect urbanization to

²⁵ Lijphart, "Unequal Participation," and Tingsten, *Political Behavior*.

²⁶ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote: And Why Politicians Want It That Way* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1992); and Richard E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).

²⁷ Franklin D. Gilliam, "Influences on Voter Turnout for U. S. House Elections in Non-Presidential Years," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1985): 339-351, and Robert A. Jackson, "A Reassessment of Voter Mobilization," *Political Research Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1996): 331-349.

²⁸ Carolina A. Fornos, Timothy J. Power, and James C. Garand, "Explaining Voter Turnout in Latin American, 1980 to 2000," *Comparative Political Studies* 37 (2004): 909-940.

be associated with increased voter turnout. The average rate of urbanization in the five countries we are studying is a little over 51 percent and ranges from 100 percent in Singapore to 34 percent in Thailand.

The *size of the largest ethnic group* serves as an indicator of ethnic pluralism. It is widely recognized that ethnic cleavages can produce greater citizen participation in democracies.²⁹ Hence, in countries such as Singapore, where the Chinese majority constitutes 76.8 percent of the population and the largest ethnic group, ethnic tension may be reduced and there may be consequent lower voter turnout. The Philippines, on the other hand, has significant ethnic diversity. The Tagalog are the largest ethnic group, yet account for only 28.1 percent of the population. Consequently, we might expect greater ethnic-based voter mobilization efforts and higher voter turnout in the Philippines.

We also check *the size of the largest religious group* to see if religious pluralism may be causing social cleavages that would prompt voter mobilization in the same manner that ethnic cleavage is hypothesized to do.³⁰ Thailand is 94.6 percent Buddhist, therefore we might expect less religious-based mobilization and lower voter turnout. On the other hand, more significant religious-based mobilization may take place in Singapore where Buddhist are again the largest religious group but represent only 42.5 percent of the total population. The size of the largest religious group should be inversely related to voter turnout.

Democratic Development

Next, we examine how democratic development may affect voter turnout in our five nation-states. We focus on four measures of the quality of democracy. In the literature, the level of democracy is commonly associated with voter turnout.³¹ Accordingly, political repression discourages democratic participation and places restrictions on meaningful electoral competition. We hypothesize that the higher the risks of casting a vote and the more widespread the official manipulation of elections, the lower turnout will be. In our analysis, we use the widely publicized annual Freedom House rating of civil liberties and political rights to account for the level of democracy. We also combine these scores

²⁹ Serguei Kaniovski and Dennis C. Mueller, "Community Size, Heterogeneity and Voter Turnouts," *Public Choice* 129, nos. 3/4 (2006): 339-415; Bill Winders, "The Roller Coaster of Class Conflict: Class Segments, Mass Mobilization, and Voter Turnout in the U. S., 1840-1996," *Social Forces* 77, no. 3 (1999): 833-862; and Carole J. Uhlaner, Bruce E. Cain, and D. Roderick Kiewiet, "Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s," *Political Behavior* 11, no. 3 (1989): 195-231.

³⁰ M. Reza Nakhaie, "Electoral Participation in Municipal, Provincial and Federal Elections in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2006): 363-390; Gary G. Preuss, "The Effects of Density and Urban Residence on Voter Turnout," *Population and Environment* 4, no. 4 (1981): 246-265; and Theodore F. Macaluso and John Wanat, "Voting Turnout and Religiosity," *Polity* 12, no. 1 (1979): 158-169.

³¹ Blais, *To Vote or Not To Vote?* and Kostadinova and Power, "Does Democratization Depress Participation?"

to develop a third measure of democratic development and add the Polity IV Index as a fourth measure. The Polity IV Index has been used routinely in cross-national tests of democratic performance.³²

Using the *Freedom House civil liberties* and *Freedom House political rights* indicators, each country is ranked on a scale of one to seven. A score of one on either indicator represents the highest level of civil liberties or civil rights, while a score of seven indicates the lowest level. In our database, the Philippines has the best record on civil liberties and Singapore and Malaysia are tied for the worst record during the time period studied. Concerning civil rights, Indonesia has the best formal civil rights record and Singapore the worst. The *Freedom House combined scores* yield a scale that ranges from two to fourteen, with a score of “2” indicating the highest possible level of freedoms and rights. Because a higher combined Freedom House score is a well-established measure of repression, we anticipate a negative association with voter turnout. Using average values across all election years in our dataset, Indonesia has the lowest combined score (highest quality democracy) and Singapore the highest combined score (lowest quality democracy).

Polity scores have been used to place countries on a twenty-one-point scale that ranges from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy).³³ With this measure, higher scores indicate better quality democracy and the Philippines (8) has the highest score, followed closely by Indonesia (7.33). In our dataset, Singapore again ranks the lowest of the five countries in terms of democratic development.

Economic Considerations

In early analyses of Western industrial democracies, economic development and wealth are found to be positively associated with voter turnout at both the individual and aggregate levels of analysis.³⁴ However, in other contexts, scholars have found that poor economic conditions can cause citizen mobilization. In particular, a study of voter turnout in Latin American found that poor economic conditions are associated with higher voter turnout.³⁵

³² Scott Gates, Håvard Hegre, Mark P. Jones, and Håvard Strand, “Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800-2000,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 893-908, and Shawn Treier and Simon Jackman, “Democracy as a Latent Variable,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2008): 201-217.

³³ These scores can be separated into the three following categories: autocracies (-10 to 6); anocracies (-5 to +5); and democracies (+6 to +10).

³⁴ G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), and John E. Filer, Lawrence W. Kenny, and Rebecca B. Morton, “Redistribution, Income and Voting,” *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (1993): 63-87.

³⁵ Scot Schraufnagel and Barbara Sgouraki, “Voter Turnout in Central and South American,” *Latin Americanist* 49, no. 1 (2005): 39-69.

In this analysis of Southeast Asian countries, expectations regarding economic factors are mixed. On the one hand, we know severe economic deprivation can mean political mobilization is impossible. On the other hand, if the quality of democracy is sufficient enough so that the poor feel their voice will be heard in national elections, it is possible that poor economic conditions might motivate citizens to turn up at the polls to try to improve political conditions and, by extension, their economic circumstances. Because the elections in our dataset are defined by Freedom House as at least “partly free,” we believe that this second logic is the most relevant for this study.

The first economic variable we test is *Gross National Income Per Capita*, or the total income of resident producers divided by the mid-year population. We also check *growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*, which is intended to capture changing economic conditions in a country. On both economic indicators, Singapore performs best and Indonesia the worst. We also test *infant mortality* and *life expectancy* rates as surrogates for economic development. Higher infant mortality and lower life expectancy are believed to equate with less development and poorer economic conditions. In our database, Indonesia has the highest infant mortality and lowest life expectancy rates, while Singapore has the lowest infant mortality and highest life expectancy rates.

Results

An appendix provides t-tests of the difference in mean voter turnout in the nineteen elections employed in this analysis when certain electoral-institutional arrangements are present versus when they are absent. When the independent variables or alternative explanations are represented by ordinal or ratio data, we report bivariate correlations with voter turnout in the nineteen elections. The information from the appendix is then condensed in tables 2 through 5. In each of the tables, the countries are ranked by average voter turnout in the time period studied. Hence, in each table, the far left column shows the countries in the same order. Indonesia has the highest average voter turnout, Thailand is second, the Philippines third, Malaysia fourth, and Singapore last. Table 2 shows the relationship between average voter turnout and whether each

Table 2. Electoral Institutions and Turnout of Voting-Age Populations in the Democratizing Countries of Southeast Asia, 1998-2011

Country	Turnout	Rest-Day Voting	Concurrent Elections	Unicameral Legislature	Mandatory Voting	Automatic Registration
Indonesia	81.9	No	No	Part	No	Yes
Thailand	69.7	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Philippines	65.0	No	Yes	No	No	No
Malaysia	51.8	No	No	No	No	No
Singapore	36.9	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

country has certain electoral institutional arrangements that are believed to cause higher electoral participation. The table simply states “yes” or “no” if the country has rest-day voting, concurrent elections, a unicameral legislature, mandatory voting, or automatic registration. If these variables influence voter turnout, we would expect the “yes’s” to be amassed at the top of the table and the “no’s” at the bottom. Note, of the five different considerations, only automatic registration exhibits this pattern. Indonesia has automatic voter registration and the highest average voter turnout. None of the other institutional considerations lines up with expectations.

Considering table 3 and demographic considerations, there is also limited evidence of the hypothesized relationships. In this table, the columns to the right of the “Turnout” column present the countries’ relative ranks when compared to each other on the different demographic considerations that might be expected to be associated with varying levels of voter turnout. In order to affirm the hypothesized relationships about demographic considerations, smaller numbers (1 and 2) should be at the top of the table and the fourth- and fifth-ranked countries should be at the bottom of the table.

Note, first, expectations regarding urbanization are not met in large part because the most urbanized nation-state, Singapore, has the lowest voter turnout. Moreover, we expected higher female literacy to be associated with higher voter turnout, and this is not the case. Indonesia, the country with the highest voter turnout, has only the fourth highest female literacy rate. There is some evidence of possible ethnic mobilization. The most ethnically diverse populations (Indonesia and the Philippines) have the first and third highest levels of voter turnout, and the most ethnically homogeneous country (Singapore) has the lowest voter turnout rate. Our expectations about religious heterogeneity increasing voter turnout are not met.

When we consider the quality of democracy indicators in the five Southeast Asian countries, we begin to see more orderly effects (table 4). Indonesia, with the highest voter turnout, is ranked either first or second on the four different measures of democratic development. Singapore, with the lowest voter turnout, is ranked either fourth or last on each indicator. Also, Malaysia with relatively low average voter turnout, does not score high on the alternative indicators

Table 3. Demographics and Turnout of Voting-Age Populations in the Democratizing Countries of Southeast Asia, 1998-2011

Country	Turnout	Female Literacy	Urbanization	Size of Largest Ethnic Group	Size of Largest Religious Group
Indonesia	81.9	4	4	4	2
Thailand	69.7	2	5	2	1
Philippines	65.0	1	3	5	3
Malaysia	51.8	5	2	3	4
Singapore	36.9	3	1	1	5

of democratic quality, consistent with expectations. The relationship between democratic development and voter turnout, however, is not a perfect match, as the Philippines, with a relatively high-quality formal democracy, is ranked only third in terms of voter turnout. More discussion about the relationship between formal democratic quality and voter turnout is offered below.

Table 4. Quality of Democracy and Turnout of Voting-Age Populations in the Democratizing Countries of Southeast Asia, 1998-2011

Country	Turnout	Freedom House Civil Liberties	Freedom House Political Rights	Freedom House Combined Scores	Polity Scores
Indonesia	81.9	2	1	1	2
Thailand	69.7	3	4	3	4
Philippines	65.0	1	2	2	1
Malaysia	51.8	4-5	3	4	3
Singapore	36.9	4-5	5	5	5

Our last set of indicators measures the economic well-being of the five countries. In this instance, our hypotheses suggest an inverted ranking. In other words, if poor economic conditions motivate people to participate in politics, we would expect higher numbers (or lower rankings) to congregate at the top of table 5 and lower numbers to appear at the bottom of the table. Indeed, this is what we find. Singapore, with a relatively strong economic performance, is associated with lower voter mobilization, and Indonesia, which ranks lowest in all measures of economic well-being, has the highest voter turnout. Moreover, the results from Malaysia are in tune with our expectations. Malaysia has the second best economic conditions and the second lowest average voter turnout, suggesting that economic well-being may keep people home on Election Day. The Philippines and Thailand flip-flop positions to some degree, but basically each of these two countries has a lower performing economy and a higher voter turnout level, suggesting that economic hardships may be driving people to the polls as hypothesized.

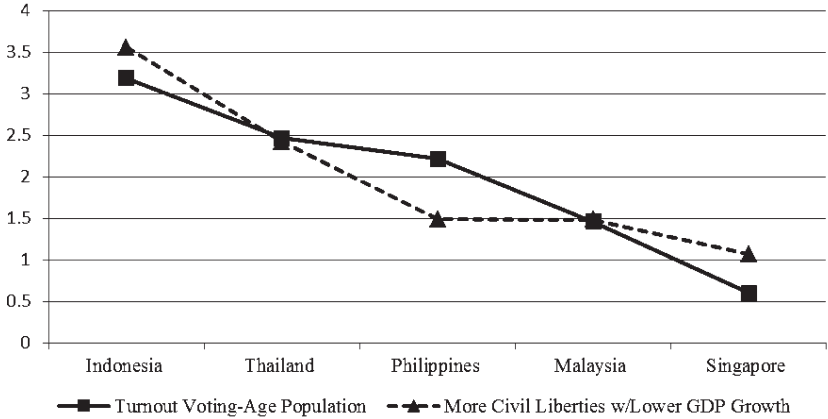
Table 5. Economic Well-Being and Turnout of Voting-Age Populations in the Democratizing Countries of Southeast Asia, 1998-2011

Country	Turnout	Gross National Income Per Capita	Growth in Gross Domestic Product	Infant Mortality	Life Expectancy
Indonesia	81.9	5	5	5	5
Thailand	69.7	3	4	4	3
Philippines	65.0	4	3	3	4
Malaysia	51.8	2	2	2	2
Singapore	36.9	1	1	1	1

We perform one last test. Given our findings regarding the quality of democracy and economic well-being indicators, we tested an interaction effect. Specifically, we imagined that it might be a combination of quality democracy and poor economic conditions that best predicts voter turnout in our five countries. Each country in the dataset is represented by a minimum of three parliamentary elections and we have unique “quality of democracy” and “economic well-being” scores for each election in each country in the study. We multiply the values for democratic well-being (using the combined Freedom House score) and GDP growth (a classic measure of economic well-being) for all nineteen observations and next create country averages. The country values are then standardized and subsequently averaged, as are the voter turnout values, so that we can display the data in the same figure.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between better democratic conditions interacting with poorer economic situations and voter turnout. Now, there is a perfect match. Previous research has pointed to this possibility. In work on the United States, it has been found that “those facing economic adversity are more likely to vote when they [can] blame the government for economic outcomes.”³⁶ Being able to “blame” the government suggests the governing system is at least minimally liable or that the country enjoys an appropriate

Figure 1. The Relationship between Voter Turnout and the Combined Freedom House Score and Lower Growth in State Gross Domestic Product



Note: For this figure, we use standardized values plus 2 or $\sum((x_i - \text{mean})/s.d. + 2)/n$. Moreover, to preserve the substantive significance of all values, we reverse the values of the Freedom House Scores and GDP Growth so that more freedom (better quality democracy) and lower GDP growth (worse economic conditions) produce positive standardized values.

³⁶ Kevin Arceneaux, “The Conditional Impact of Blame Attribution on the Relationship between Economic Adversity and Turnout,” *Political Research Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2003): 67-75.

level of democratic accountability. Other work considering consolidated democracies suggests that poor economic conditions may cause voters to *withdraw* from electoral participation.³⁷ However, when scholars turn their attention to the developing world, they find “economic downturns elevate turnout while upswings depress it.”³⁸ One can reasonably assume that findings regarding the developing world are most relevant for our purposes and even more germane when elections matter or when the quality of democracy is sufficient enough that elected officials are answerable to the voting public.

In all, our preliminary work suggests that when people are hungry (figuratively or literally perhaps) and there is higher quality formal democracy, as is the case in Indonesia, there is higher voter turnout. Conversely, when people are economically comfortable and the quality of democracy is such that people do not have much faith that their vote matters, as arguably may occur in Singapore, voter turnout is lower. Indeed, the interaction of quality democracy and poor economic conditions produces a perfectly predictable relationship with voter turnout in the five countries studied, as exhibited in figure 1.

Qualification of Results

Our base empirical analysis, although illuminating for an initial probe, leaves many questions about citizen participation in the democratizing countries of Southeast Asia unanswered. For instance, there are several possibilities as to why our research fails to confirm the hypotheses about the influence of institutional variables on voter turnout.

Considering concurrent elections, it may simply be that we do not detect an influence on voter turnout in the Philippines because it is the only country with such a system in the region. This makes a meaningful comparison with other Southeast Asian countries difficult. Yet, we can note that, although legislative and executive elections are not concurrent in Indonesia, a law adopted prior to the 2004 and 2009 elections requires a certain number of seats, or vote percentage, to be earned by a party or a coalition of parties for qualification to nominate a presidential candidate.³⁹ The legislative elections held in April 2004 and 2009, respectively, determined whether the party or the coalition of parties could run a candidate in the presidential elections, which followed in July. Hence, in some sense, legislative and executive elections were held

³⁷ Steven J. Rosenstone, “Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout,” *American Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 1 (1982): 25-46.

³⁸ Alexander Pacek and Benjamin Radcliff, “The Political Economy of Competitive Elections in the Developing World,” *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 3 (1995): 745-759; see also, Benjamin Radcliff, “The Welfare State, Turnout, and the Economy: A Comparative Analysis,” *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992): 444-456.

³⁹ Andreas Ufen, “The Legislative and Presidential Elections in Indonesia in 2009,” *Electoral Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 281-285.

“concurrently” and we cannot rule out the possibility that this may have caused higher voter turnout in Indonesia, the country with the highest level of turnout in the study.

We also could not confirm a relationship between the presence of unicameral legislatures and voter turnout. Voter turnout actually increased in Indonesia after the unicameral legislature was abolished in 2001 and the Regional Representatives Council (Upper Chamber) was established. We feel that this finding needs to be qualified. The Indonesian Regional Representatives Council does not have the revising power of a typical Upper Chamber and has only a consultative role in matters concerning center-periphery relations.⁴⁰ Moreover, candidates who want to be elected to the Council must not belong to a political party. A 2004 survey revealed that 42 percent of Indonesian voters were either unaware of the Regional Representative Council’s existence or did not know how to elect its members.⁴¹ Hence, it might be said that the bicameral elections of 2004 and 2009 continued to act as unicameral elections in voters’ minds.

Moreover, we think that unicameralism probably did not influence voter turnout in Singapore because voters in that country are acutely aware that opposition parties have no chance of winning a majority or even a plurality of the seats in the national legislature. In Singapore, the opposition never managed to occupy more than two seats in parliament between 1981 and 2011. Since 2011, opposition parties have controlled six seats but the People’s Action Party (PAP) still controls eighty-one of the eighty-seven seats. Since there is no real possibility to change the composition of the parliament, unicameralism may have a negligible effect on voter turnout in the city-state.

We also wish to qualify our results regarding mandatory voting. Singapore and Thailand have such regulations, but these countries have relatively low voter turnout. This may be explained, in part, by the type of sanction that occurs for nonvoting in Singapore. Singaporeans who fail to vote are deleted from the electoral registry. Citizens can apply to be reinstated, but have to pay a fine if they cannot present good cause for why they abstained from voting.⁴² We think that mandatory voting regulations in Singapore do not produce greater turnout of the voting-age population because the nature of the sanction complicates matters. Mandatory voting regulations may have actually caused lower voter turnout in Singapore by shrinking the number of registered voters, which lowers turnout of the voting-age population. Put differently, if the sanction prevents people from registering to vote, turnout of the “eligible” voting-age population would necessarily be lower.

⁴⁰ Roland Rich, “Designing the DPD: Indonesia’s Regional Representative Council,” *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 47, no. 2 (2011): 263-272.

⁴¹ Chanintira Thalang, “The Legislative Elections in Indonesia, April 2004,” *Electoral Studies* 24, no. 2 (2005): 326-332.

⁴² Chin, “The General Election in Singapore, May 2006.”

Regarding mandatory voting in Thailand, citizens who fail to vote without notifying the election commission lose their right to run as a candidate in local and national elections until they cast their ballot in a future election.⁴³ However, around 90 percent of citizens are unable to run as candidates anyway, because they do not meet educational and other requirements. Contrary to the research cited earlier which found that the type of sanction for not voting does not matter, others who study Southeast Asia have noted specifically that since “the penalties for abstention are minor...turnouts [in Thailand] are typically closer to those seen in non-compulsory voting systems.”⁴⁴

Our research also failed to produce a strong pattern of invariant associations between demographic variables and voter turnout. For instance, the state with the highest urbanization, Singapore, also had the lowest voter turnout. We think this has to do with the fact that urbanization in Singapore over past decades has first and foremost followed political imperatives. Concretely, “compulsory urban resettlement provided the PAP [the dominant party] with the opportunity of breaking up established and potential electoral communities by dividing up old ethnic, working-class communities for resettlement in dispersed locations.”⁴⁵ Resettlement, with the provision of public housing to around 86 percent of the population, is arguably the government’s most successful attempt at social control.⁴⁶ In short, Singapore’s urban population has been fractionalized in a manner that may depress voter mobilization, suggesting any direct effect on voter turnout is not a straightforward proposition.

Likewise, our expectations about ethnic and religious heterogeneity and voter turnout were not firmly met. Higher ethnic fragmentation was moderately associated with higher turnout, while religious fragmentation had no relationship to voter turnout. We believe the reason for the weak association between fragmentation and voter turnout is because voter mobilization along ethnic lines is rare in the five countries studied. For instance, Indonesia, the most ethnically fragmented country of the five cases, has no ethnic-based parties, which might serve as mobilizing agents. Indeed, scholars have described the country as a “weakly ethnicized polity.”⁴⁷ The same is true for politics in

⁴³ Aurel Croissant and Daniel Pojar, “The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, February 2005,” *Electoral Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006):184-191, and Christian Schafferer, “The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, December 2007,” *Electoral Studies* 28, no. 1 (2009): 167-170.

⁴⁴ In Thailand’s 2007 elections, abstention was highest in the poor northeastern provinces. Thailand’s ballots include a “no desire to vote” option. In 2007, around 3 percent of the valid votes were such votes compared to 37.9 percent in the 2006 elections, which were later annulled (Schafferer, “The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, December 2007,” 167-169).

⁴⁵ Linda Lim, *Status of Women in Asia and the Pacific Region* (New York: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1989).

⁴⁶ Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control of Singapore* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Edward Aspinall, “Democratization and Ethnic Politics in Indonesia: Nine Theses,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 289-319.

the Philippines, where parties often try to broaden their electoral appeal by deliberately nominating candidates with different ethnic origins. Malaysia is the only country examined where ethnic-based parties are significant political players. However, a cross-ethnic alliance, the Barisan Nasional, has run the country's politics in a consociationalist fashion for decades. Arguably, the complex political dynamics that arise from this arrangement have prevented ethnic fragmentation from having an influence on voter turnout in Malaysia.⁴⁸

Similar dynamics may be at play with regard to religious fragmentation. The multireligious ruling coalitions in both Malaysia and Singapore share similar political and economic interests. We speculate that the power and financial interests concentrated in the one-party system in Singapore and the dominant-party system in Malaysia trump religious fragmentation. In the Philippines, religious fragmentation is geographically confined to the south of the country as is the case in Thailand. The majority of the electorate is therefore not exposed to political dynamics related to religious diversity⁴⁹ and voter turnout does not seem to be affected. In Indonesia, parties with religious platforms that have entered politics have not fared well. Consequently, these groups have toned down their religious messages.⁵⁰ In short, we believe political realities in the five countries studied prevent religious or ethnic diversity from having the expected influence on voter turnout.

We found an overall positive relationship between formal democratic quality and voter turnout. Indonesia, the country that scored either first or second on all of the quality of democracy indicators also had the highest voter turnout. Turnout and democratic quality are also higher in the Philippines and Thailand. One could attribute these results to voters' stance vis-à-vis democracy. Voters in these countries, in other words, cherish and value their democratic freedoms and make frequent use of them to express their political preferences. Indeed, surveys conducted in recent years show that Indonesian citizens show continuously strong support for the newly established democratic institutions, despite the questionable behavior of many of their politicians.⁵¹

Last, our finding that economic well-being predicts voter turnout is supported by corollary evidence from previous studies. For instance, changes in the popularity of Indonesia's president Yudhoyono have been closely tied to

⁴⁸ Chin-Huat Wong, "The Federal and State Elections in Malaysia, March 2004," *Electoral Studies* 24, no. 2 (2005): 311-319.

⁴⁹ Vince Boudreau, "Elections, Repression and Authoritarian Survival in Post-Transition Indonesia and the Philippines," *Pacific Review* 22, no. 2 (2009): 233-253.

⁵⁰ Michael Buehler, "Revisiting the Inclusion-Moderation Thesis in the Context of Decentralized Institutions: The Behavior of Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party," *Party Politics* 19, no. 2 (2013): 210-229.

⁵¹ Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia and the Pitfalls of Low-Quality Democracy: A Case Study of the Gubernatorial Elections in North Sulawesi," in *Democratization in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. Marco Bunte and Andreas Ufen (London: Routledge Press, 2011), 124-149.

the fluctuation in domestic oil and gas prices. The massive subsidy programs established during Yudhoyono's two tenures are indicative of how politicians have started to realize their political survival may be tied to voters' economic well-being.⁵² Likewise, record turnout figures and the electoral success of Thaksin Shinawatra who was prime minister of Thailand between 2001 and 2006 before being overthrown in a military coup, are primarily due to Thaksin's pro-poor policies.⁵³ These earlier works compliment the relationship between economic conditions and voter turnout uncovered by this research. Moreover, they speak to possible democratic accountability. Poorer economic conditions increase nonelite (poorer citizens) voter turnout, which prompts politicians to take notice and respond with policies that aim at the poor. The precise causal string is, at minimum, theoretically plausible.

Conversely, citizens in Malaysia and Singapore, more affluent on average, turn out to vote at lower rates. Again, findings from previous studies compliment the results of our systematic comparison. The continuing economic growth in Singapore provides the government with a great degree of legitimacy. And, "economic development in Singapore is not accompanied by widespread calls for greater political openness and transparency."⁵⁴ It seems economic well-being forestalls public demand for decentralization of political authority in a manner consistent with higher levels of citizen participation. In Malaysia, too, consistent economic growth over past decades may be preventing some voters from recognizing a need to turn out on Election Day.⁵⁵

Avenues for Future Research

The qualitative probing of the results of our base quantitative analysis has largely corroborated our findings regarding democratic development and economic conditions. But, the investigation has also uncovered other possible explanations for varying levels of voter turnout, based on institutional and demographic considerations that our tests failed to expose. The incomplete nature of our numerical tests must be acknowledged. Cross-national comparisons of the type employed here are wrought with inference problems that result from cultural distinctiveness and nonsystematic "real-world" conditions. The net result often is, simply, avenues for future research.

⁵² Michael Buehler, *Vested Interests Impede Subsidy Reform in Indonesia* (Oxford: Oxford Analytica, 2011).

⁵³ Croissant and Pojar, "The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, February 2005," and Schafferer, "The Parliamentary Election in Thailand, December 2007."

⁵⁴ Chin, "The General Election in Singapore, May 2006."

⁵⁵ For evidence of this phenomenon in other developing countries, see Radcliff, "The Welfare State, Turnout, and the Economy."

For instance, in Singapore, we learn that it is almost certainly the case that voter turnout has fluctuated based on the number of constituencies contested. There were more constituencies contested in 2006 than in 2001, which arguably explains why voter turnout went from 21.4 percent to 32.2 percent of the voting-age population. Opposition parties contested only twenty-nine seats in the 2001 elections but forty-seven seats in the 2006 elections. In 2011, the opposition put up candidates for eighty-two of eighty-seven seats in parliament and the average voter turnout in 2011 rose to a record level (53.3 percent). In short, the possibility of political change in certain Singaporean constituencies may explain variance in voter turnout in the island nation.

Second, there may be an alternative explanation altogether for voter turnout in the formally high-quality democracies of Southeast Asia that are also poor. Paradoxically, the three countries with the highest turnout figures are also the ones most devoid of programmatic politics. Especially in Indonesia and the Philippines, politicians rarely campaign on ideas or by using policy programs.⁵⁶ Parties are almost always the personal vehicles of politicians whose main interest in politics is to protect or improve their personal economic well-being.⁵⁷ In addition to the absence of meaningful political platforms, these electoral contests are highly “elitist” affairs.⁵⁸

In the context of the nonprogrammatic and elitist character of elections in these countries, we need to know more about why a combination of low economic well-being and relatively strong formal civil and political liberties motivates voters to cast their ballot. For instance, why do voters in poor democracies turn out in high numbers when the opportunities of electing a parliament composed of alternative figures may be absent? At the same time, do voters see elections as a referendum for the performance of past parliaments? Do they give salience to sociotropic over pocketbook considerations when turning out to vote? How would voters make such decisions, anyway, given the almost complete absence of meaningful discourse prior to, during, and after elections about the economic performance and the quality of services delivered by politicians?

The fact that programmatic politics are least pronounced in the democracies of Southeast Asia that also show the highest levels of voter participation

⁵⁶ Marcus Mietzner, “Indonesia’s 2009 Elections: Populism, Dynasties and the Consolidation of the Party System,” *Lowy Institute for International Policy* 19 (May 2009): 3-22, and Mark R. Thompson, “Class, Charisma, and Clientelism,” in *Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines*, ed. Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (New York: Routledge, 2012): 62-79.

⁵⁷ For an in-depth case study from Indonesia, see Michael Buehler and Paige Tan, “Party-Candidate Relationships in Indonesian Local Politics: A Case Study of the 2005 Regional Elections in Gowa, South Sulawesi Province,” *Indonesia* 84 (2007): 41-69.

⁵⁸ In Thailand, for example, the requirements for citizens who want to participate in elections as candidates, such as the possession of a bachelor’s degree, disqualifies around 90 percent of the population from running for parliament.

suggests looking for alternative explanations for the relationship between turnout and formal democracy in combination with lower economic well-being. We think that differentiating between substantive and procedural democratic qualities may offer some insights. A small but growing body of literature has started to challenge the assumption that electoral participation can be used as a democratic proxy.⁵⁹ High electoral turnout in Russia, for instance, may not be indicative of an active electorate but, rather, of bad or corrupt record keeping.⁶⁰ Other scholars have suggested that coercive voter mobilization and outright fraud may explain high voter turnout in poor democracies.⁶¹

Most specifically, we think, the influence of political corruption needs to be taken into account as a potential explanation for variance in voter turnout rates in the countries of Southeast Asia. The three countries with the highest voter turnout, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, figure high on the quality of democracy index because formal institutions associated with democracy are in place. However, many of these institutions are dysfunctional and are ignored in favor of informal political mechanisms. Hence, higher voter turnout may simply be an effect of vote-buying and other forms of political corruption. Against this backdrop, we believe that future research needs to focus on the complex dynamics of political malfeasance and its influence on electoral participation. Let this essay be the opening salvo for a much-needed discussion about what drives voter turnout in democratizing Southeast Asia.

⁵⁹ Caroline Beer and Neil J. Mitchell, "Comparing Nations and States: Human Rights and Democracy in India," *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 8 (2006): 996-1018; Michael Coppedge, "Defining and Measuring Democracy," paper presented at the Interantional Political Science Association, Mexico City, Mexico, 2005; and Tomila Lankina and Lullit Getachew, "Mission or Empire, Word or Sword? Colonial-Era Education Legacy in India's Democratic Development," paper presented at the Second International Symposium of Comparative Research on Major Regional Powers in Eurasia, Tokyo and Osaka, Japan, 2010.

⁶⁰ Joseph Deckert and Mikhail Myagkov, "How Are Elections Fixed? An Agent-Based Model of Russia's Regional Politics," paper presented at the Annual Convention and Exhibition of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 2010.

⁶¹ Byron Moraski and William M. Reisinger, "Explaining Electoral Competition across Russia's Regions," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 2 (2003): 278-301.

Appendix

Statistical Relationships among Variables Hypothesized to Influence Voter Turnout in Democratizing Southeast Asia, 1998-2011

Variables	Expected Sign	Statistical Relationship	Sample Size
		Difference of Means Test	
<i>Electoral-Institution Considerations</i>			
Rest-Day Voting	+	t = -1.23	19
Concurrent Elections	+	t = .75	19
Unicameral Legislature	+	t = -2.10 #	19
Mandatory Voting	+	t = -1.23	19
Automatic Registration	+	t = 2.62 **	19
		Bivariate Correlations	
<i>Demographic Considerations</i>			
Female Literacy	+	r = .16	19
Urbanization	+	r = -.82 #	19
Size of Largest Ethnic Group	-	r = -.35 †	19
Size of Largest Religious Group	-	r = .81 #	19
		Bivariate Correlations	
<i>Quality of Democracy Considerations</i>			
Freedom House Civil Liberties (higher score means less free)	-	r = -.56 **	19
Freedom House Political Rights (higher score means less free)	-	r = -.43 *	19
Freedom House Combined Scores (higher score means less free)	-	r = -.50 *	19
Polity Scores (lower score means less democracy)	+	r = .55 **	19
		Bivariate Correlations	
<i>Economic Considerations</i>			
Gross National Income Per Capita	-	r = -.64 **	19
Growth in Gross Domestic Product	-	r = -.37 †	19
Infant Mortality	+	r = .84 ***	19
Life Expectancy	-	r = -.77 ***	19

Note: Results based on the following elections: Indonesia (1999, 2004, 2009); Malaysia (1999, 2004, 2008); Philippines (1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010); Singapore (2001, 2006, 2011); and Thailand (2001, 2005, 2006, 2007).

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .01$; $p < .05$; † $p < .10$ (one-tailed tests).

Statistically significant in the hypothesized wrong direction.