

Book review

CROISSANT, A. & BÜNTE, M. (2011). THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. NEW YORK: PALGRAVE MACMILLIAN.

Erick J. Clayson

For political scientists, Southeast Asia has become an extensive experiment for democratic governance, especially within the past 20-40 years. Western minds and other pro-democratic thinkers proselytize the benefits and successes of democracy. But the authors and contributors of this book make it clear that in Southeast Asia, being democratic doesn't necessarily equate to prosperity and success. To support the overall thesis, the contributors have provided a comparative analysis of the politics in Southeast Asia. They explain why autocratic nations like Singapore and Cambodia are faring better than democratic states such as Thailand or the Philippines. Through utilizing various tools and methodologies, the contributors conclude that despite successes in Indonesian democratization, the four Southeast Asian democracies are missing the vital requisites for sustainable democracy (p. 265).

The book is divided into three parts: 1) an examination of political culture, civil society and democracy; 2) an analysis of institutions and political systems to explain their impact on democratic governance; and 3) effect of conflict management, security and human rights in Southeast Asia. In the introduction, the author's intent is for the reader to understand the definition of democracy and with said definition; they then assign all the Southeast Asian countries into different groups (democracy, autocracy, and anocracy). This sets up an environment in which each contributor provides a comparative analysis. The organization of the book allows the reader to easily find the main arguments and findings in the introductory chapter and then refer to the contributor's research in their respective chapter. The conclusion restates the thesis and the authors' findings, and additionally provides prospects for the future on the effects of "lackluster" democratic governance in Southeast Asia.

Findings from the Asian Barometer Survey suggest that most people in Southeast Asia prefer democracy, but the Survey also concludes that they have been misinformed or not adequately educated on what makes a government democratic. In fact, in the case of non-democratic regimes like Vietnam, people "equate communist one-party dictatorship

Copyright: © 2014 Erick J. Clayson. Copyright for this article is retained by the authors, with first publication rights granted to the International Public Management Review (IPMR). All journal content, except where otherwise noted, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. By virtue of their appearance in this open-access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

Corresponding Author: erick.clayson@us.af.mil

with democracy (p. 25).” A lot of focus is given to the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, especially in a discussion on civil societies and social networks. These elements have threatened the democracies in Thailand and the Philippines, but in Indonesia, “there has been no major extra-constitutional threat to the government (p. 69).” Indonesia seems to have developed a non-traditional “Burkean” civil society that is dominated by a sense of nationalism, headed by Muslim elites that have pursued conservative goals. The concept of political Islam and the role it plays in Indonesia and Malaysia highlights stark differences between the two countries. Democratization in Indonesia alongside the concept of “Pancasila” has been supported by major Islamic organizations. In Malaysia, Islam has become a part of the party system, and in many ways this politicization has had an effect on the electoral system. Although government sponsored conservative Islam has helped to stabilize electoral authoritarianism, research concludes that there is “no clear-cut relationship between ‘Islam’ and democracy (p. 89).”

A comparative analysis of the four democratic countries in Southeast Asia does not provide ample support to make any conclusions on the relationship between the types of democratic institutions and their overall performance (p. 110). The only exception may be with Indonesia, which has achieved stability in its political system due mainly to the presidential system of governance (p. 108). In regards to democratic governance, research shows that democratic reforms in Southeast Asia are moving away from the consociationalism (power-sharing through ethnic balancing and coalition government building) in favor of more centripetal/majoritarian models, to pull the political parties towards moderate, compromising policies (p. 119). This could lead to problems down the road with political integration in multi-ethnic societies. In particular with ethnic minorities, indigenous populations and other politically and economically marginalized groups, democratic decentralization in Southeast Asia has “created space for democratic change (p. 146). However, this research also shows that decentralization does not always guarantee a stronger democracy.

The book concludes that Southeast Asian countries have been very receptive to the theory of protecting human rights, each country having signed two of the six United Nations human rights treaties. That being said, human rights issues remain prevalent in Southeast Asia, and the authors have concluded that the human rights culture has still not taken root (p. 187). Some of these human rights issues stem from poor civilian control over the military, and this in turn has affected democratic governance. When militaries are deeply entrenched in the political process, civilian control is usually weak. Indonesia seems to be the only country that is improving this framework, yet research concludes that the level of civilian control is still not adequate. Civilian control over the military directly ties into the issue of internal conflict and conflict management. The authors conclude that cultural conflicts are more of a domestic phenomenon, and democracies are more affected by political conflict than autocratic or anocratic regimes (p. 226). The research then looks at the democratic peace hypothesis, which states that de-

Erick J. Clayson studied Southeast Asian Studies at Naval Postgraduate School, and currently works as a Regional Affairs Strategist for Southeast Asia at the Headquarters for Pacific Air Forces. Email: erick.clayson@us.af.mil

mocracies will not fight or go to war with each other. In the case of Southeast Asia, democracies are not found to be more peaceful than non-democracies (p. 247).

The contributors to this book do a commendable job of supporting Marco Bünthe and Aurel Croissant's main thesis, which speculates the endurance of democracy in Southeast Asia. Through various case studies, comparative analyses and other methodologies, the contributors paint a bleak picture for almost all the Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Indonesia. Corruption seems to be the downfall and disease for these democratic governments. There should be more focus and research on the concept of "transparency," especially with corruption at the national government level. It would have been interesting to see how the governments portray transparency and view themselves in their own operations. These results can then be compared to an outside perspective, like Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.

Various autocratic and anocratic regimes (excluding Myanmar) seem to be faring better at the present time than a majority of the democratic regimes in Southeast Asia. It goes back to one of the last sections in the book that questions, "Does regime type matter?" Although a majority of the contributors in this book state that information is too limited to reach any solid conclusions, it can be seen through the evidence provided that something needs to change. It is possible that if changes aren't instituted and internalized throughout the different governments in Southeast Asia, the crisis of democratic governance in the region (regardless of regime type) will only get worse.

About IPMR

IPMR The International Public Management Review (IPMR) is the electronic journal of the International Public Management Network (IPMN). All work published in IPMR is double blind reviewed according to standard academic journal procedures.

The purpose of the International Public Management Review is to publish manuscripts reporting original, creative research in the field of public management. Theoretical, empirical and applied work including case studies of individual nations and governments, and comparative studies are given equal weight for publication consideration.

IPMN The mission of the International Public Management Network is to provide a forum for sharing ideas, concepts and results of research and practice in the field of public management, and to stimulate critical thinking about alternative approaches to problem solving and decision making in the public sector.

IPMN includes over 1300 members representing about one hundred different countries, both practitioners and scholars, working in all aspects of public management. IPMN is a voluntary non-profit network and membership is free.

ISSN 1662-1387