

**States, Neopatrimonialism, and Elections: Democratization in Southeast Asia**

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## *Abstract*

The theory of democratization by elections (Lindberg 2009) holds that elections—even when flawed—can have an independent causal effect on democratic transitions. Despite the recent growth of this literature, questions remain about the global scope of the argument and its structural preconditions. We argue that both strong states and effective neopatrimonial practices can undermine the democratizing power of elections. We use Southeast Asia to probe the applicability of this theoretical argument to an important but critically understudied world region, and to illustrate the mechanisms through which state strength and patronage limit the ability of elections to bring democratic change. Our argument has implications both for Southeast Asian democratization and for existing scholarship from other world regions.

## **Introduction**

The theory of democratization by elections has quickly become a prominent explanation for how even flawed elections can advance democratic change in authoritarian regimes. A burgeoning body of research has identified a robust causal relationship between repeated multiparty elections and democratization, both globally and regionally (Donno, 2013b; Edgell, Mechkova, Altman, Bernhard, & Lindberg, 2015; Howard & Roessler, 2006; Lindberg, 2006, 2009a, 2009c). This relationship is especially prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe, but has also been studied in Latin America and the Middle East/North Africa. Despite the willingness of scholars of electoral democratization to examine regional patterns in democratization, Southeast Asia has remained almost entirely absent from this research agenda. Between 1945 and 2015, authoritarian regimes in this region oversaw 84 competitive elections, but today only Indonesia and the Philippines are electoral democracies. What explains the persistence of authoritarianism in a region of competitive elections?

In this paper, we bring Southeast Asia into conversation with the larger theoretical and empirical scholarship on democratization by elections. In doing so, we both explain the resilience of electoral authoritarianism within the region and provide a novel perspective on elections and democratization in the post-colonial era. Two features of Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes—strong states and neopatrimonial practices—prevent even competitive elections from leading to political liberalization or democratization within the region. It is only when neopatrimonial practices become unsustainable in weak (or weakening) states that elections may produce democratization; even then, the causal role of elections as agents of democratic change warrants close scrutiny, for elections may simply signal the completion of the democratization process.

Our argument draws naturally from two mature bodies of scholarship in comparative politics on the antecedents of democratization. One is the literature on neopatrimonialism, a hybrid mode of domination combining the informality of patrimonial relationships with the formality of legal-rational institutions (Bratton & Van De Walle, 1994; Brownlee, 2002; Snyder, 1992). We show that in Southeast Asia, the nature of political authority and its embodiment in political institutions in regimes such as Cambodia and Indonesia has reduced—and did reduce—the capacity of competitive elections to serve as mechanisms for democratization. The second literature is on state strength, which denotes how existing power structures can be autonomously and preferentially wielded to constrain and shape outcomes (Kuhonta, 2008; Slater, 2010; Slater & Fenner, 2011). Here the heightened capacity of regimes such as Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore to coerce rivals, extract revenues, register citizens and cultivate dependence dilutes the ability of competitive elections to augur democratic change. State strength and neopatrimonialism may operate independently or in tandem as explanations for authoritarian durability. But within Southeast Asia, elections have

only brought democratization when weak or weakening states proved unable to continue neopatrimonial strategies of rule.

This argument has critical implications for existing research on the relationship between democratization and elections in authoritarian regimes. Theoretically, our attention on state strength and neopatrimonialism offers a cautionary note for citizens, civil society organizations, opposition parties, international organizations and foreign powers that conceive of elections as avenues for democracy. It suggests a return to preexisting findings about democratization by elections elsewhere in the world to identify the background conditions that enable elections to have democratizing effects. Conceptually, we emphasize the need to distinguish between elections as causes of democracy and elections as features of democracy. This potential for tautology is particularly pronounced in the case of Indonesia, which we identify as a case where elections represent the culmination rather than the cause of democratization. Empirically, the paper capitalizes on the opportunities Southeast Asia provides to scholars as a region “relatively neglected” in comparative politics (Kuhonta, Slater, & Vu, 2008: 2). This means it profits from a long history of flawed elections in an extraordinarily diverse region, providing us with a range of insights into the conditions under which elections do or do not produce democratization. It likewise responds directly to Edgell et al. (2015), who urge scholars working in this literature to delve more deeply into cases from Asia. Methodologically, the paper employs both within-case historical analyses and cross-national statistical techniques to examine the relationship between flawed multi-party and multi-candidate elections and democratization. Instead of relying solely on cross-national statistics, which has so far been the dominant approach to this question, an integrative multi-method approach provides a stronger basis for inferring the causal effect of elections on democratization. Taken together, our contribution offers an answer to why Southeast Asia *still* remains “recalcitrant” to democratization (Emmerson, 1995) and, in particular, why the

link between elections and regime change identified in other world regions finds little support in Southeast Asia.

To make this argument, this paper begins by describing the theory of democratization by elections, with particular focus on its specific prescriptions for achieving regime change via flawed elections. After identifying two major weaknesses with this model, the next section provides a theoretical overview of how state strength and neopatrimonial domination may counteract the power of repetitive elections to act as an independent mode of transition in authoritarian regimes. The third section brings the theory of democratization by elections into conversation with Southeast Asian cases for the first time. Using seven case studies and a cross-national statistical test, we find elections that competitive elections in authoritarian regimes do not increase the subsequent likelihood of democratization in the region, even though we do find such effects in a global sample. The conclusion addresses the implications of our argument for current research on democratization by elections, emphasizing how the countervailing forces of state strength and neopatrimonial domination may explain cross-regional patterns in electoral democratization previously identified.

### **Democratization by Elections**

The central claim of democratization by elections is that elections are causally important to regime change. In the simplest terms, elections help structure political interaction and, in turn, influence political outcomes (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Snyder & Mahoney, 1999). The most explicit expression of the idea that even flawed elections can bring about democratization in authoritarian regimes is offered by Lindberg (2009c), whose edited volume provides a wealth of original theoretical and empirical insights. Despite some reservations, contributors identified partial support for this theory in Latin America and the Middle East/North Africa, but especially in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. The underlying premise is that de jure competitive elections convoke a struggle between

authoritarian regimes and their opponents. This metagame involves not only a competition for votes, but a broader competition over electoral reform that unfolds simultaneously and interactively (Schedler, 2002; Tsebelis, 1990). In light of the different demands held by each actor, this tug-of-war imbues even flawed elections with ambiguity. Ruling parties and dictators must make a trade-off between maintaining electoral control and winning electoral legitimacy, whereas opposition parties and candidates may make tangible gains without conferring credibility to the regime. Since neither side is capable of reconciling these goals, they face a strategic dilemma. The critical point here is that, regardless of the choices ruling parties and dictators make, elections have the intrinsic capacity to pull regimes away from authoritarianism and towards democracy. This is based on a simple formula with roots in classic work by Dahl (1971): the lower the costs of toleration, the greater the security of the incumbent regime; the higher the costs of repression, the greater the security of its opponents. Over time, the repetition of flawed elections increases the costs of authoritarian rule in ways conducive to democratization.

The aura of inevitability attached to authoritarian elections has made it an alluring field of enquiry. A prominent focus has been on what type of regime is sufficient for electoral democratization to take hold. Under competitive authoritarianism, ruling parties and dictators dilute the capacity of opposition parties to win office, intentionally infringe upon civil liberties and regularly abuse state resources to create an uneven playing field. Under hegemonic authoritarianism, ruling parties and dictators legally bar opposition parties from existing, violate basic civil liberties through the use of overt repression and monopolize access to resources, media and the law (on both subtypes, see Levitsky & Way, 2010). Using this distinction, Howard and Roessler (2006), Brownlee (2009) and Donno (2013b) have demonstrated that electoral democratization is more likely to occur in competitive authoritarian regimes. This outcome is itself dependent upon the relative weakness of the

ruling party when faced with international conditionality and opposition coordination. The last condition, however, has elsewhere been found to only have an alternating and short-lived effect on democratization (Van de Walle, 2006; Wahman, 2013). Yet another focus has been on the role international organizations, regional intergovernmental organizations, and foreign states have played in fostering democratization via flawed elections (Donno, 2013a; Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2012). This includes how the promotion of institutional reform contributes to an environment that favors clean elections because it renders the misconduct of ruling parties and dictators more politically costly. Indeed, international actors such as the European Union, United States and United Nations can empower opposition actors by providing them with external validation, which lends credibility to claims of electoral fraud. A final focus has been on the relationship between the mass protests triggered by stolen elections and democratization (Beaulieu, 2014; Bunce & Wolchik, 2010, 2011). Some important caveats are whether opposition actors decide to protest before or after the poll, what kind of support the protest receives and the innovative types of strategies employed to defeat ruling parties.

Together, this body of research finds that even patently flawed elections in authoritarian regimes “matter” for democratization. Indeed, this proposition has become a central theoretical framework in the broader contemporary literature on democratization. Nevertheless, this literature contains two important weaknesses that motivate our contribution.

The first weakness that we identify is empirical. Despite the many contributions in the literature on democratization by elections and the important place that region-specific analyses of Africa, Latin America and the Middle East/North Africa occupy in this literature, Southeast Asian cases has played very little role, either theoretically or empirically. This is surprising given that, first, most Southeast Asian countries have held multiple elections since the Second World War; second, that most Southeast Asian regimes are not democracies; and

third, that a few Southeast Asian countries have experienced democratic transitions or periods of political liberalization under authoritarian rule. Often missed by non-specialists is the fact that Southeast Asia is also a large world region. With a population of approximately 620 million people in 2015, Southeast Asia is roughly equal in size to Latin America and larger than the European Union or the Arab League. As an empirical matter, then, Southeast Asia holds great promise as a field site for testing and refining our understanding of the role of elections in democratization. Much as several of the regional chapters in Lindberg (2009c) have shown, as has related literature on African politics in particular (see Moehler & Lindberg, 2009), a regional focus can prove especially illuminating for testing and refining general theoretical propositions.

Southeast Asia as a region of analysis also has some particular benefits for comparative analysis (see Kuhonta et al., 2008). The region is internally diverse according to ethnicity, language, religion, geography, colonial experience, conflict, level of income, state strength and capacity, and other factors. This enables cross-national comparative analysis across key factors that might explain regime trajectories. The postcolonial political experiences of Southeast Asian countries also vary considerably over time in some instances, with countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar transitioning between authoritarian regime types. At the same time, countries such as Malaysia and Singapore have featured institutional continuity for most of their independent history. For all of these reasons, within-region, cross-country comparative analyses drawing primarily and even exclusively on Southeast Asian cases occupy a central place in the recent literature on authoritarianism, democratization, and elections (Hicken, 2009; Jayasuriya & Rodan, 2007; Kuhonta, 2011; Morgenbesser, 2016b; Pepinsky, 2009; Rodan, 2004; Sidel, 2008; Slater, 2010, 2013; Taylor, 1996b; Vu, 2010; Weiss, 2007).

We refer to these important works in order to establish that any general literature on elections or democratization must consider Southeast Asian cases if it is to be truly general and comparative in scope (for a related argument, see Bunce, 2003). And yet, thus far, Southeast Asian cases only appear in this literature as data points in several global regression analyses (e.g. Donno, 2013b; Edgell et al., 2015). By focusing closely on the Southeast Asian cases, we contribute new empirical evidence on the incidence of democratization by elections in an important world region. We can focus on important cases—such as the Philippines in 1986, Indonesia in 1999, Cambodia in 2013, and most recently Myanmar in 2015—that have heretofore escaped attention in the existing literature to examine the explanatory capacity of democratization by elections as currently conceptualized. Perhaps most importantly, we can leverage the internal diversity of Southeast Asia as a region in order to contribute new conceptual and theoretical insights.

The second weakness is conceptual, in seeing elections as causes versus features of democracy. Most definitions of democracy consider elections to be the single defining feature of democratic rule. This means that the presence of a competitive election is an indicator that captures the existence of democracy, and the outcome of a ruler stepping down after a multiparty election is an indicator of democratization haven taken place. This is the position taken in work as varied as Huntington (1991) to Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, and Przeworski (1996). By contrast, democratization by elections holds that elections cause democracy: the existence of elections—perhaps only competitive elections, or perhaps even highly restricted elections—increases the likelihood of a democratic transition. This proposition induces a potential tautology. In the framework of democratization by elections, elections are the causes of the outcomes that elections themselves measure. Elections are both the independent and the dependent variable.

The foundational work on democratization by elections recognized this tension (Lindberg, 2009c: 316-319), as has subsequent work in related areas (see Bunce & Wolchik, 2011: 15-16; Donno, 2013b: 708; Edgell et al., 2015: 5-6). We agree with these and other authors that it is logically consistent to hold that elections increase the likelihood that a democratic transition occurs—that elections may cause democratization. Nevertheless, in order to be a testable empirical claim, it must be the case that elections *may not* cause democratization. Even if elections may logically cause democracy, any empirical investigation of this relationship must be able to distinguish between causal and non-causal relationships between elections and democratization.

What would a non-causal link between elections and democratization comprise? Alvarez et al. (1996) offer a useful conceptual template. In their conceptualization of regimes, a regime “type” (democracy or something else) is fundamentally unobservable, the joint product of the strategic choices of actors within and outside of a ruling government about how to allocate power within a state. When incumbent governments hold elections, lose, and step down, then we have observed *an implication of* a regime being a democracy. The regime may nevertheless have been democratic prior to the holding of the election, meaning that incumbent governments were subject to electoral constraint even if an election had not allowed us to observe them doing so. In this way, changes in the constraints, opportunities, and resources available to political actors may lead to a change from non-democratic to democratic rule that only appears as democratic upon the subsequent holding of an election. As we will argue below, prominent cases of elections and democratization such as Indonesia (1999) are examples of democratization prior to elections.

To outline the empirical scope of our analysis, in Table 1 we list elections under authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia between 1945 and 2015, using data on regime type from Boix, Miller, and Rosato (2012) and elections from Hyde and Marinov (2012). We categorize

elections across two dimensions—type (legislative or presidential) and competitiveness, based on whether or not an opposition party participated in the election.

*Table 1: Elections under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Non-Competitive</i>
<i>Legislative</i>	Cambodia: 1955, 1958, 1962, 1966, 1972, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013  Indonesia: 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997  Laos: 1960, 1965, 1967, 1972  Malaysia: 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2008, 2013  Myanmar: 1990, 2010, 2015  Philippines: 1965, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1978, 1981, 1984  Singapore: 1963, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015  Thailand: 1946, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1952, 1957, 1957, 1969, 1979, 2007  Vietnam: 1968, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1992, 1997, 2002	Cambodia: 1976, 1981  Laos: 1989, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2011  Myanmar: 1974, 1978, 1981, 1985  Vietnam: 1959, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1981, 1987, 2007, 2011
<i>Executive</i>	Cambodia: 1972  Philippines: 1965, 1967, 1969, 1973, 1981, 1986  Singapore: 1993, 2011  Vietnam: 1955, 1961, 1967, 1971	Philippines: 1977

Several observations immediately stand out about authoritarian elections in Southeast Asia. First, elections under authoritarianism are quite common in Southeast Asia, with a total of 110 elections held throughout the region over the past seventy years. Second, most countries

in Southeast Asia have some experience with authoritarian elections, with only Brunei Darussalam (a sultanate) and Timor Leste (which was never coded as an authoritarian regime) not appearing on this list. Third and more interestingly, most authoritarian elections in Southeast Asia are competitive elections, which count for 84 out of the 110 elections (76%) in Table 1. This finding runs counter to any impression of elections in Southeast Asia as wholly managed affairs with no choice whatsoever. Even though Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes have usually strictly controlled party formation, campaigning, and electoral freedom, the majority of elections in Southeast Asia feature at least two political parties or two candidates competing for office. Indeed, most of Southeast Asia's elections are not merely "elections without choice" (Hermet, Rose, & Rouquié, 1978), they are more complicated events involving multiple parties or multiple candidates participating in a managed election, even if the ruling party and dictator have no intention of allowing their opponents to unseat them.

Our final conclusion emerges when considering Table 1 in light of the region's experience with democracy. The frequency of elections in Southeast Asia provides a sharp contrast to the relative scarcity of democratic transitions in the region. We can thus update Taylor's two-decades old finding that "with the partial exception of the Philippines prior to Marcos's declaration of martial law in 1972, and the 1975 and 1995 parliamentary elections in Thailand, elections for presidents and legislatures have never directly caused a change in government" (Taylor, 1996a: 3). Looking across the region, and at seventy years of data, elections under authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia have almost never been followed by a change in government.

### **States, Neopatrimonialism, and Democratization**

The case analyses below suggest how the scholarship behind the democratization by elections theory might profitably borrow insights from the classic literatures on neopatrimonialism and

state strength in order to understand the conditions under which authoritarian elections lead to regime transition. Before proceeding, however, we consider these two literatures in more depth to identify theoretical reasons why the democratizing power of elections might depend on states and the strategies that dictators and ruling parties use to rule.

The scholarship on states and democratization has recently begun to consider the ways in which the historical development of state structures conditions regime trajectories over the long term. In an important contribution, Slater (2010) argues that state strength is the foundation for regime durability in Southeast Asia. For Slater, strong states—and in particular regimes in states with extensive infrastructural power (see Mann, 1984; Soifer & vom Hau, 2008)—provide ruling parties with the tools that they need “to extract and to organize.” Weak states can do neither of these things, which is why regimes such as the Philippines tend to be less durable.

How might elections figure into a state-based account of democratization? States with extensive infrastructural power have bureaucracies that can identify potential sources of electoral opposition and deploy resources in their direction. They have police and security forces that can manage protests and forestall opposition mobilization with credible threats of force. They have electoral institutions that can fine-tune the process of electoral fraud. And they are more likely to have economies that can deliver economic performance around election time. Against this backdrop, the elections overseen by strong-state authoritarian regimes ought to be more manageable relative to those overseen by their weaker counterparts. In Dahl’s (1971) terminology, these are elections where the costs of repression ought to be lower, which in turn should make authoritarian rule easier to maintain during election time. A regime with a strong state may have little to fear even from competitive elections, which in turn may make elections more common and at the same time less likely to presage

democratization. Strong state authoritarianism would therefore break the causal link between elections and democratization.

Neopatrimonialism is different from state strength in that the latter is an institutional or structural variable while the former is more akin to a logic or strategy of rule. This means that the two may occur together or separately: an incumbent dictator or ruling party may pursue a strategy of neopatrimonial rule with the benefit of a strong state or without one, and a strong state may be ruled through neopatrimonial or other means. Bratton and Van De Walle (1994) characterize neopatrimonial regimes as those where “the chief executive maintained authority with personal patronage...the essence of neopatrimonialism is the award by public officials of personal favors, both within the state (notably public sector jobs) and in society (for instances, licenses, contracts, and projects). In return for material rewards, clients mobilize political support and refer all decision upward as a mark of deference to patrons.” Neopatrimonialism is structurally vulnerable to disruptions in patronage, which is quite literally the glue that binds clients to the ruler.

How might elections unfold in authoritarian regimes ruled through neopatrimonial means? On one hand, elections ought to be moments when patronage is particularly valuable—buying off potential opponents, promising licenses and contracts, and so forth. On the other hand, elections heighten the salience of these promises for clients who must mobilize political support for the regime. Taken together, this means that elections should heighten the dependence of neopatrimonial regimes on patronage; a dictator or ruling party able to limp along when patronage resources are scarce or mechanisms of patronage distribution are disrupted ought to be even more vulnerable to overthrow when elections increase the importance of patronage in the short term. At the same time, successful patronage should eliminate the threat that elections face, with elections instead serving as

illustrations of how dictators and ruling parties have the power to direct patronage and ensure compliance.

The literatures on states, neopatrimonialism, and democratization suggest that although elections may increase the likelihood of democratization in the aggregate, the specific institutions, structures, and logics of rule pursued by authoritarian regimes will matter for understanding specific cases. In strong states where neopatrimonial-based dictators effectively channel patronage to their supporters, ruling parties that hold elections should be relatively immune to pressure for democratization. (Strong states that rely on formal institutions rather than neopatrimonial ties ought to be immune to democratizing via elections as well.) Weak states led by dictators who have relied on patronage but can no longer pursue it effectively will be uniquely vulnerable to democratization when they hold elections. The relationship between elections and democratization is therefore conditional, one that is most likely to be observed in the context of state weakness and/or the disruption of the mechanisms neopatrimonial rule.

### **Authoritarian Elections in Southeast Asia**

Armed with these theoretical insights, we now turn to case histories of authoritarian elections in the region to examine the relationship between elections and democratization in Southeast Asia in more depth. We adopt two case selection strategies for this qualitative historical approach. The first is to examine all cases of democratization in the region, and then to trace the causal role of elections on transitions. As is well known, selecting on the dependent variable in this way does not allow us to characterize the average relationship between elections and democratization, and risks selection bias (Geddes, 1990). However, if the causal mechanisms and/or causal sequencing attributed to elections do not fit these cases where democratic transitions have actually occurred, then this is especially problematic for the hypothesis that elections play a causal role in democratization. By selecting every case of

democratization, we can examine those cases that ought to be predicted well by existing theory to see if, in fact, these predictions hold up to empirical scrutiny.

Our second strategy is to study those authoritarian elections that ought to be particularly propitious for democratic political change based on the existing literature on democratization by elections. By selecting “on the line” cases (Lieberman, 2005), we can investigate how those hypothesized mechanisms work in practice while avoiding selection bias. Finding that elections that are most likely to lead to democratic transitions—following existing theory but based on different regional evidence—do not in fact democratize would be evidence either that a different set of initial conditions make elections causes of democratization, or alternatively, that elections only have weak explanatory power as determinants of democratic transitions within Southeast Asia.

#### *Successful Cases: Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand*

Our first case studies focus on instances of democratization within the region. The purpose of these case studies is to examine the role of elections in cases where we know democratization to have occurred. Since 1945, three Southeast Asian countries have experienced democratic transitions: the Philippines (1986), Indonesia (1999), and Thailand (on four separate occasions). To preview our conclusions below, we find that of these six democratic transitions, only the Philippines fits well within the framework of elections as a cause of democratization.

The Philippines in 1986 is perhaps a paradigmatic instance of democratization by elections (see e.g. Schedler, 2009: 303). After declaring martial law in 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos presided over a period with no elections, ruling through personalist means (see Thompson, 1998), but subsequently attempted to build a new mass based political organization known as the New Society Movement from 1978 onwards. At the same time, pressures against his regime began to build. Some of these were external in nature, most

notably a declining foreign revenues through trade, aid, and remittances that corresponded with the worldwide economic slowdown of the 1980s. Economic hardship was compounded by increasing pressure from the United States, a critical source of foreign and military aid to the Marcos regime, in response to the excesses of corrupt and personalist rule and especially in the wake of the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983.

Marcos thus entered the elections of 1986 in relatively weak position, but still nominally in control of the instruments of state power and with the security forces behind him. Rather than a signal of strength, the decision to call snap elections in 1986 represented an attempt by a weakened Marcos to use elections to bolster his flagging regime. The outcome, officially, was victory for Marcos, a result roundly condemned by Filipino and foreign observers alike as fraudulent. What emerged in the response was the so-called EDSA revolution (so named after a major thoroughfare in Manila), in which millions of citizens protested against Marcos and his corrupt and authoritarian rule. Mass mobilization, combined with increased diplomatic pressure from the United States, public opposition from the Catholic Church, and continued economic crisis, ultimately turned Marcos's remaining allies against him. In the end, the formerly compliant Filipino security forces, led by police chief Fidel Ramos and defense secretary Juan Ponce Enrile, turned against Marcos, forcing him into exile and marking the end of the Marcos dictatorship. What followed was the reestablishment of Philippine democracy.

The case of the Philippines illustrates nicely the role that elections can play in democratization. Although Marcos's regime faced several challenges prior to the events of 1986, the contested election proved critical for mobilizing opposition forces. But what of the causal role of the 1986 election itself? Note that Marcos entered the election from a position of weakness; in the words of one observer, "The underlying reality...was that the Marcos regime had already destroyed itself....Nonetheless, the regime stole the election and declared

itself the winner. What followed was a classic demonstration of a hollow regime's inability to deploy force against an adversary” (Overholt, 1986: 1161-1162). Subsequent analyses have downplayed the importance of protest and mobilization in the transition (Fukuoka, 2015), but even critics recognize the importance of elections in the transition process—as Thompson (1995) argues, elections combined with the Philippines’ legacy of democracy help to explain why the collapse of Marcos yielded democratization rather than some other form of military, personalist, or communist rule. Counterfactually, without 1986 election as a focal point for mobilization and a clear signal to domestic and international forces of Marcos’s absence of electoral support, perhaps the Philippines would have not have undergone a democratic transition in 1986. But Marcos’s regime was certainly fragile. Perhaps the safest conclusion is that without the 1986 elections, had a democratic transition taken place in the Philippines in 1986 or after, it probably would have taken a different form.

The case of Indonesia in 1999 shares several important features with the Philippines, including a highly corrupt dictator who ruled through personalistic means, and deteriorating economic conditions prior to democratization. Unlike the Philippines, however, Indonesia’s New Order regime under Soeharto had presided over six elections, held first in 1971 and then at regular five-year intervals beginning in 1977. Whereas Marcos’s New Society Movement was but an embryonic attempt to institutionalize support for his regime, Indonesia’s Golkar was a highly institutionalized, corporatist mass organization closely affiliated with the Indonesian bureaucracy and with institutional reach throughout the archipelago, from the national to local level. The Indonesian state was by any measure stronger and more capacious under the New Order than the Philippine state under Marcos (Slater, 2010: 8). Still other important differences include the severity of the economic crisis—Indonesia’s economy contracted by a stunning 13% in 1998 as a consequence of the Asian economic crisis and the

attended political and economic dislocation—and the presence of mass violence, which erupted during May 1998 in Indonesia and again later that year.

Indonesia's 1999 elections, however, are usually considered the endpoint rather than a cause of Indonesian democratization. This is because the decision to permit competitive elections preceded the elections themselves. Between 1977 and 1997, the New Order only allowed three political organizations to contest elections: Golkar (not formally a political party, but rather a “mass organization”), the Indonesian Democratic Party, and the United Development Party. Golkar always won around 70% of the popular vote and occupied the majority of seats in the People's Representative Council. In 1999, no less than forty-eight political parties contested in Indonesia's legislative elections, and Golkar came in second with only 22% of the vote (on its elections, see Ruland, 2001). Although it is impossible to identify the exact moment at which Indonesian politics became competitive, after Soeharto's resignation in May 1998 Indonesia saw the flourishing of new independent political parties. Soeharto's successor, B.J. Habibie, oversaw the drafting of new electoral laws (on this period, see Horowitz, 2012: 60-70). Although Indonesia would continue to tinker with its electoral institutions for more than a decade, the legal and regulatory foundations for democratic elections were in place prior to the onset of campaigns in May 1999.

Thus, authors writing from many different perspectives implicitly mark the 1999 elections as the culmination of Indonesia's democratic transition, and locate the dynamics of democratization itself in the decisions made by economic elites (Pepinsky, 2009), mass mobilization (Aspinall, 2005), regime elites and political parties (Horowitz, 2012), and other social and political forces prior to the 1999 elections. There was some uncertainty prior to May 1999 about whether or not the conduct of elections would meet minimum standards of orderliness, but no doubt whatsoever about whether or not they would be competitive democratic elections.

The final cases of democratic transitions come from Thailand, which by the Boix et al. (2012) data experienced democratic transitions in 1975, 1983, and 1992. (We will consider more recent events in Thailand below in our discussion of on-going cases.) Thailand is distinctive among Southeast Asian countries in its political volatility, having experienced successive periods of military rule coupled with brief periods of democratic rule. Elections demarcate Thailand's 1975 transition to democracy, but the terms of these elections were spelled out previous in the 1974 constitution that followed on the 1973 uprising that ended military rule. The Thammasat massacre of 1976 spelled the end of this brief democratic experiment. Elections also demarcated Thailand's 1983 transition, but this time emerged as a consequence of constitutional maneuvering by the military and political parties. After a brief period of military rule in 1991-92, subsequent protests, and a royal intervention, elections marked the return to democracy in 1992. From these three transition experiences, we see little evidence of elections as causes of Thai democratization. In each case, the choices of the military together with party elites and (in 1975 and 1992) mass mobilization prove instrumental in pushing for democratic reforms that culminated in elections. In fact, these cases illustrate that for Thai military and political parties, elections are what constitute democracy itself, they are not a procedure that causes democratization.

Taken together, the record on democratic transitions in Southeast Asia shows that in only one out of six transition experiences can we attribute any causal role to elections themselves. In the remaining five, elections signify the outcome of democratic transitions, and serve as observable manifestations of changes in political order that predate their being held.

#### *Failed Cases: Cambodia, Singapore and Malaysia*

Our second research strategy is to focus not on instances of democratization, but on instances of authoritarian durability during elections. Despite representing a most-likely case for

democratization by elections, Cambodia has failed to move towards democracy in any tangible way. Since 1953, when it gained its independence from France, nine multi-party legislative elections and one multi-candidate presidential election have been held across four different regimes. During this same period, of course, Cambodia has suffered no less than four coups, three foreign invasions, one civil war and a cataclysmic genocide (for a history, see Chandler, 2008). Amongst other contributing factors, these events have proved to be antithetical to democratic rule. Since 1979, however, the incumbent Cambodian People's Party—formally the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party—has sanctioned five multiparty legislative elections characterized by varying degrees of manipulation and misconduct. A particularly salient election occurred in 1993, and was administered by the international community under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The overarching goal here was to not only separate the state from society so that legal-rational institutions could develop, but educate citizens and political parties on the relationship between elections, democracy and human rights through a nationwide education program (Frieson, 1996). This proved to be immediately problematic. Held within an atmosphere of intimidation, mistrust and violence, the 1993 election resulted in a win for the National United Front for an Independent, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) over the ruling Cambodia People's Party (CPP). This led some political elites to threaten succession from the kingdom, which was a serious concern given that the ruling party controlled the administrative apparatus of government and retained the loyalty of sizeable military and police factions. In an atmosphere of growing instability, a coalition government was eventually formed that allowed the prime ministership to be shared between FUNCINPEC's Norodom Ranariddh and the CPP's Hun Sen. Given Cambodia's turbulent political history, it was hardly surprising that this arrangement did not last. In July 1997, Hun Sen initiated a swift coup against Norodom Ranariddh. This event marked both

the failure of UNTAC's liberal peacebuilding mission and the onset of unfettered authoritarian rule.

The resulting elections have been competitive, but more importantly for the theory of democratization by elections, contain many of the mechanisms that should have enabled regime change in Cambodia (Lindberg, 2009b: 329). The first is the clumsy manipulation that has characterized all stages of the electoral cycle, both historically and contemporarily (Hartmann, 2001). During the 1993 election, which is easily the freest and fairest of modern Cambodia, CPP-led violence led to approximately 176 deaths, 316 injuries and 67 abductions (Plunkett, 1994: 71). While such blatant misconduct has since decreased, it has been replaced by an increase in manipulation. The Electoral Integrity Project (2014), for example, found that Cambodia's 2013 election was the fifth worst of the 73 parliamentary and presidential elections held worldwide that year. Another mechanism that should have worked in favor of democratization is the increasingly competitive nature of elections. Besides the 1993 election, which it actually lost, the CPP has faced an increasingly more sophisticated opposition movement. At the 2013 election, for instance, a unified effort from the Sam Rainsy Party and the Human Rights Party—who allied together as the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP)—produced a 10.6 percent swing against the ruling party (IFES, 2013). This represented the first time two opposition parties had coalesced to challenge the CPP's dominance; meaning the most robust predictor for electoral democratization was present. A supplementary mechanism here is the way opposition parties have increasingly utilized electoral tactics that have helped topple authoritarian regimes elsewhere. This has included ambitious campaigns; voter registration and turnout drives; pressures on election commissions; collaboration between civil society and youth movements; exit polls; and parallel voter tabulation (see Bunce & Wolchik, 2009: 242). During the 2013 election, the application of this “electoral model” was evident in the way the CNRP held marches, led

citizen meetings, conducted door-to-door canvassing, organized concerts and then supervised the vote count. Such exemplary activities projected a positive image aimed at persuading citizens to take a chance on them. The final mechanism that ought to enable democratization in Cambodian elections is popular protests; which were found to be causally relevant in the Philippines and Indonesia cases. In 1998, for example, demonstrations took place over a three week period after the National Election Commission dismissed opposition complaints about the election result. This led Hun Sen to declare that “If the opposition thinks I’m going to step down they’re dreaming ... and if they try to dissolve the present government by other means they will face military action” (in Grainger & Chameau, 1998: 1). A similar pattern occurred following the 2013 election. When the National Election Commission again dismissed opposition complaints, the CNRP boycotted the National Assembly and demanded an investigation into electoral irregularities by an independent commission with international support. Over the next few months, it coordinated scores of multi-day protests involving upwards of 40,000 supporters in Phnom Penh alone (Quinlan, Ponniah, & Boyle, 2013). In the same way as the above mechanisms, such protests are a constant feature of Cambodian elections.

The distinct failure of democratization by elections in this case raises important questions about the countervailing forces at work. The first obstruction is the actual nature of the political regime, which leading cross-sectional time-series datasets have previously classified as a party-based type (see Geddes, Wright, & Frantz, 2014; Wahman, Teorell, & Hadenius, 2013). Such a classification belies the personalism of Hun Sen and its implications for democratization (see Morgenbesser, 2016c). Such personalism is of course not by itself causally significant, especially in light of the personal control exhibited by Marcos in the Philippines and Suharto in Indonesia. The more exceptional obstruction in Cambodia is instead the presence of both neopatrimonial domination and a strong state. Since France

established a protectorate over Cambodia in 1863, anthropologists, historians and political scientists have documented the pervasive influence of neopatrimonialism on its development (Mabbett & Chandler, 1995; Ovesen, Trankell, & Ojendal, 1996; Peang-Meth, 1991; Thion, 1986). Today, Hun Sen and the CPP sit atop a sprawling system of domination that combines informal personal relationships of loyalty and dependence with formal state institutions of authority and officialdom. In a political system that has no clear purpose beyond its own perpetuation, Strangio (2014: 129) richly details how “political stability [has] rested not on any deep social or political consensus, but on a tenuous pact between the country’s elites, whose loyalties had to be constantly renewed through fresh distributions of profits and patronage.” In fact, the features of neopatrimonialism and a strong state are most pronounced during elections, which inhibit the coalescing of citizens, elites and institutions demanding of democracy (for details, see Hughes, 2003, 2006; Un, 2005, 2006). The ruling party-state routinely coerces its rivals (by exiling Norodom Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy from organizing), extracts revenues (by using its off-budget “donation” system amongst the *oknha* tycoons), registers citizens (by using group leaders at the household level) and cultivates dependence (by distributing development projects, material goods and specialized services to citizens in exchange for votes). In this sense, neopatrimonialism and strong stateness work as a form of co-optation, which means they encapsulate sectors of the populace into the party-state apparatus by inducing them to behave in ways that they otherwise might not. This speaks to how some ruling parties (and the dictators that lead them) can utilize both structures to withstand democratic change via elections. Moving forward, it is a similar story in the cases of Malaysia and Singapore.

Singapore’s People’s Action Party (PAP) has overseen more competitive elections under authoritarianism than any of its regional counterparts. Since 1959, when it came to power, no less than fourteen parliamentary elections and two presidential elections have been

held without any noticeable movement towards democracy (for an opposing view, see Ortmann, 2011). After obliterating the opposition Barisan Sosialis ahead the 1963 election, allegedly on the grounds its members were communist sympathisers, the PAP was able to implement an array of administrative and legal reforms that aided its subsequent domination of Singaporean politics. Beginning under Lee Kuan Yew, it curtailed civil liberties and political rights, reduced judicial independence, censored the media, undermined prospective opposition parties and captured control of the Elections Department (see Lydgate, 2003; Rajah, 2012; Rodan, 2005). Later, under Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong, minor artificial changes were made to this system to make it more consultative and inclusive.

Singapore's lack of democratization has also persisted despite the presence of many factors theorized to be causally relevant in the context of elections. This includes the legalization of opposition and political associations, use of electoral manipulation (via gerrymandering), international criticism and pressure, increased voter awareness and mobilization, organizations and institutions vested in pro-democratic action, increased size and complexity of opposition challengers, spread of democratic ideals and expectations and reliance on winner-take-all institutions (Lindberg, 2009b: 329). Such mechanisms have proven to be highly ineffective in the case of Singapore, where the PAP has succeeded by fusing flawed elections to a developmental state and a communitarian ethos (Barr, 2012; Chua, 1995). A critical component of this model is the peculiar nature of Singapore's electoral system among authoritarian regimes, in which voting and vote-counting systems are free from manipulation and misconduct, but opposition parties are inhibited by unfair rules and regulations. In the end, elections are apparently free enough to confer legitimacy on the PAP (Morgenbesser, 2016a), but unfair enough to ensure its survival. Since the fate of ruling party has always been intricately linked to the fate of Singapore, this arrangement has never been conducive to democratization by any means.

The case of Malaysia ought to be even more propitious for democratization by elections. After Singapore, no other Southeast Asian country has held more competitive authoritarian elections, a total of thirteen since independence. Malaysia's elections have also been much more competitive than Singapore's. Since 1959, the first election after independence, opposition parties have held no less than 10% and as much as 40% of the seats in the Dewan Rakyat, Malaysia's lower house of parliament. Nearly all of the mechanisms outlined in Lindberg (2009b) may be found in Malaysia: legal opposition parties, electoral manipulation (also via gerrymandering and malapportionment, see Ostwald, 2013), international criticism and pressure, increased voter awareness and mobilization, organizations and institutions vested in pro-democratic action, increased size and complexity of opposition challengers, and the spread of democratic ideals. In recent decades, moreover, trends have increasingly favored the opposition, with an increasingly sophisticated electorate, a vibrant and relatively uncontrolled online media that covers the opposition even-handedly (unlike the regime-compliant broadcast and print media), and the country's three main opposition parties formed a formal opposition coalition between 2008 and 2015.

Perhaps even more than any other country in the region, Malaysia is where elections would not just signal but actually cause a democratic transition. In the critical elections of 1969, 1990, 1999, and 2013, incumbent and opposition figures have seen elections as the sites of political contestation rather than what follows after a breakdown of the incumbent regime. The so-called "electoral tsunami" of 2008, in which non-regime parties gained 37% of parliamentary seats, was so termed because it was so surprising; had the results been even stronger for the opposition, then either a transition would have ensued or parliament would have been suspended (as it was following the elections of 1969).

Why, then, have elections not (yet) led to democratization in Malaysia? In terms of its distribution of patronage, the Barisan Nasional regime shares much with Cambodia,

Indonesia, and Philippines. Moreover, during the 1980s and 1990s, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad effectively moved Malaysian politics in a more personalist direction (Hwang, 2003; Slater, 2003). But despite the personalization of politics and the prominence of patronage, Malaysia is not accurately described as a neopatrimonial regime. Instead, we draw attention to Malaysia's strong state as a fundamental determinant of its ability both to manage elections effectively and to maintain effectively the networks of patronage that bind elites together (Slater, 2010). When faced with acute economic shocks, the regime has proven adept at maintaining those flows of resources (Pepinsky, 2009). As a result, although elections are exactly the focal point for anti-incumbent mobilization that the literature on democratization by elections predicts, they are also opportunities for the regime to demonstrate its strength and capaciousness.

#### *Ongoing Cases: Myanmar and Thailand*

Our final case studies focus on ongoing cases of elections in Myanmar and Thailand. Because Thailand is currently led by a military junta and has weathered several coups in the past decade, it is difficult to determine whether 2008 (coded by Cheibub, Gandhi, & Vreeland, 2010 as a democratic transition) represents an instance of meaningful democratization. Elections of 2007, which presaged this transition, marked the decision of the Council for National Security, which had ousted Thaksin Shinawatra in a 2006 coup, to return to civilian rule. The coup of 2014 brought this most recent period of democratic rule to a close. Throughout the past decade, and in keeping with Thailand's earlier political history, elections have emerged as a consequence of elites' decision to return to civilian rule. They are not a cause of democratization.

Myanmar's 2015 election warrants deeper scrutiny. Myanmar offers promising, but we believe ultimately illusory, support for the theory of democratization by elections. After four non-competitive elections under the Burma Socialist Programme Party in the 1970s and

1980s, Myanmar has since experienced three competitive elections sanctioned by the military or its civilian-front party (see Taylor, 1987). The 1990 election famously resulted in a landslide victory for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), which was prevented from ever forming a government. This led to an unforeseeable political impasse that persisted for two decades. The 2010 election, by contrast, produced a highly flawed victory for the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Thereafter, however, the new government embarked on a liberalization program focused on instituting substantive, but targeted, administrative, socioeconomic and political changes (Cheesman, Skidmore, & Wilson, 2012; Pedersen, 2014). The eventual endpoint of this reform process was the 2015 election, which the USDP under Thein Sein lost in yet another stunning rout to the NLD under Aung San Suu Kyi (for an overview, see Thawnghmung, 2016). This series of events seemingly lends weight to the capacity of even flawed elections to foment democratization.

However, such a view ignores the continued role of the military in Burmese politics. Learning from the Indonesian case, Myanmar's military has established "reserve domains" that carve out specific areas in which the military retains control (see Sundhaussen, 1995). The execution of this strategy actually parallels the extrusion experiences of other military regimes, which generally withdraw from politics once three rules of abdication have been met (Finer, 1985). In addition to having all significant elements of the armed forces concur with the decision and ensuring the individual and corporate interests of the military are protected (on their fulfilment here, see Morgenbesser, 2016b), the remaining precondition is to have a politically viable civilian organization for the transfer of authority. This is where the 2015 election becomes a mechanism to safeguard military rule, rather than an institution in the service of democratization. Between 2008 and 2015, the military had been able to put in place all the legal and institutional guarantees it felt it required for a partial hand-back of

executive authority. In political terms, the new strategic priority was to safeguard the very constitution that safeguards the military. The circular utility of this duty meant that the commander-in-chief of the defense services, General Min Aung Hlaing, could hand back authority and “not be concerned” about whether the NLD took over the reins of government (in Igarashi, 2015). This was evidence of a military at the height of its authority.

In sum, the most recent election thus constituted the centerpiece of a wider transactional relationship designed to preserve existing domains of military interest. While the 1990 election result threatened the military with the prospect of sudden and unprotected adaptation, the 2015 election result offers it incremental and protected adaptation (on this transition, see Farrelly, 2015; Maung Aung Myoe, 2014; Taylor, 2015). This means the notion of democratization by elections transpiring in Myanmar should be viewed cautiously, if not pessimistically.

### **Democratization by Elections: Regional versus Global Patterns**

Our analysis so far has provided little evidence that within Southeast Asia, elections are a vehicle for democratization. To review our findings, when looking at all instances of democratization, only the Philippines in 1986 is consistent with an argument that elections can cause democracy. When looking at those authoritarian elections that ought to be most propitious for democratic transitions, we find authoritarian regimes to have fared well in resisting pressures for regime change. However, even our two complementary research designs may fail to capture aggregate patterns across the region. So, in this section we adopt a quantitative approach, and test the relationship between elections and democratization using cross-national statistical methods.

Our task is to estimate whether elections under authoritarian regimes increase the subsequent likelihood of democratization. We do so by taking all authoritarian country years in Southeast Asia (as coded by Boix et al., 2012), and estimating whether an election in year  $t$

(as measured by the presence of any election in Hyde & Marinov, 2012) is correlated with a democratic transition in year  $t + 1$ . In every model that we estimate, we will include fixed effects by country and year in order to capture unobserved country-specific heterogeneity and unobserved common shocks across years, and we will use OLS as our baseline estimator. Our preferred specification is therefore

$$DemTrans_{it+1} = \alpha_{it} + \beta Elections_{it} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{it} + \delta_i + \theta_t + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where  $\beta$  is our main parameter of interest and  $\mathbf{X}$  is a vector of time-varying controls that will appear in some models. Although we will not interpret these findings as estimates of the causal effect of elections on democratic transitions, they are nevertheless useful for illustrating whether or not there is even a predictive relationship between elections and democratization within Southeast Asia.

Before proceeding, we highlight two additional issues. One is that the relationship between elections and democratic transitions may take time to appear. If so, the one-year lead of our democratic transitions variable may not reflect the medium-term effects of elections. So, we also estimate a series of models where the dependent variable is  $DemTrans_{it+5}$ . Note, however, that although these models will capture more post-election democratic transitions if these transitions tend to be durable, they will tend to miss democratic transitions if the subsequent regimes tend to be fragile (as in Thailand).

A second issue reflects once again the problem of distinguishing empirically between elections as causes and definitions of democracy. Boix et al. (2012), like many other regime codings, use elections to measure democratization. However, this means that if we select all authoritarian country-years as the analysis sample, we will exclude those elections that may plausibly cause democracy in that same year, because the election in year  $t$  that codes the regime as a democracy  $t$  appears as an election under democratic rule in the analysis sample. Therefore, we also estimate models that investigate the relationship between elections in year

$t$  on democratic transitions in years  $t + 1$  (and  $t + 5$ ) in countries that were authoritarian in year  $t - 1$ . Doing so, though returns to the problem that we first identified in our analysis of Indonesia’s 1999 election, wherein an election in 1999 is an indicator rather than a cause of democratization in 1999. Using authoritarian in year  $t - 1$  to define the sample means that Indonesia in 1999 will appear to support the existence of a predictive relationship between elections and democratization. We must be careful, then, to consider the evidence from all of the models, cognizant of how statistical correlations may be misleading.

We present our baseline results with no covariates in Table . We find no statistically significant relationship between elections and democratization in Southeast Asia, either in the short or in the long term, either using either the sample of country-years that are authoritarian in  $t$  or those authoritarian in  $t - 1$ .

*Table 2: Elections and Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia*

Dependent Variable	(1) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+1</sub></i>	(2) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+5</sub></i>	(3) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+1</sub></i>	(4) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+5</sub></i>
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t - 1$	Auth. in $t - 1$
N	452	411	441	402

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

These quantitative results are thus consistent with our qualitative analysis. Net of unobservable country and year effects, authoritarian elections do not predict democratic transitions in Southeast Asia.

There are a number of ways to extend this analysis. In the appendix, we estimate different statistical models using the same data, include models with common control variables, fixed effects logistic models, and models that distinguish between competitive and uncompetitive elections, which we code by whether or not the Database of Political

Institutions (Beck, Clarke, Groff, Keefer, & Walsh, 2001) records an opposition holding at least one seat in parliament. Our results do not change under any of these additional models.

We also investigate different dependent variables using the same models, which appear in Table 3. We first consider the (Cheibub et al., 2010) dichotomous regime coding. Then we turn to the standard Polity and Freedom House data—in these models we continue to use Boix et al. (2012) to define the analysis sample, and then control for the baseline Polity or Freedom House score at the year of the election. Finally, we use the Freedom House coding of electoral democracies, exploiting the fact that uniquely among our dichotomous measures of democracy, they do not include political turnover as an indicator of democracy (see also Donno, 2013b: 708).

*Table 3: Alternative Dependent Variables*

Panel A: Cheibub et al. (2010) Regime Coding				
Dependent Variable	(1) <i>DemTrans</i> <sub><i>t</i>+1</sub>	(2) <i>DemTrans</i> <sub><i>t</i>+5</sub>	(3) <i>DemTrans</i> <sub><i>t</i>+1</sub>	(4) <i>DemTrans</i> <sub><i>t</i>+5</sub>
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	452	411	441	402
Panel B: Polity2 Combined Score				
Dependent Variable	(1) <i>Polity</i> <sub><i>t</i>+1</sub>	(2) <i>Polity</i> <sub><i>t</i>+5</sub>	(3) <i>Polity</i> <sub><i>t</i>+1</sub>	(4) <i>Polity</i> <sub><i>t</i>+5</sub>
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.15 (0.14)	0.02 (0.42)	-0.22 (0.17)	0.04 (0.29)
Polity <sub><i>t</i></sub>	0.88*** (0.03)	0.48** (0.13)	0.89*** (0.04)	0.51** (0.12)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	416	394	413	385

Panel C: Freedom House, Political Rights

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$PolRights_{t+1}$	$PolRights_{t+5}$	$PolRights_{t+1}$	$PolRights_{t+5}$
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.09)
PolRights <sub><i>t</i></sub>	0.77*** (0.03)	0.13 (0.13)	0.70*** (0.08)	0.22 (0.12)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	300	286	308	287

Panel D: Freedom House, Civil Liberties

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$CivLib_{t+1}$	$CivLib_{t+5}$	$CivLib_{t+1}$	$CivLib_{t+5}$
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.00 (0.05)	0.02 (0.08)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.07)
CivLib <sub><i>t</i></sub>	0.80*** (0.06)	0.35** (0.09)	0.78*** (0.07)	0.34** (0.09)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	300	286	308	287

Panel E: Freedom House Electoral Democracies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$DemTrans_{t+}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.07 (0.05)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	187	173	181	166

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Our results do not change using these alternative indicators of political regime. Once again, authoritarian elections do not predict democratic transitions or political liberalization in Southeast Asia.

How should we reconcile these within-region findings with the global statistical findings on democratization by elections in Donno (2013b), Edgell et al. (2015), and related

research? One possibility is that within region findings suffer from small sample size, which increases the likelihood of Type 2 error. We confirm in Table that when we expand our analysis by re-estimating the equation in Table for all authoritarian regimes around the world, we do recover a statistically significant relationship between elections and democratization.

*Table 4: Elections and Democratization around the World*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$
Election <sub>t</sub>	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t - 1$	Auth. in $t - 1$
N	5168	4821	5081	4732

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

However, even these results only obtain for the sample of authoritarian regimes the year prior to the holding an election, which as we have argued, risks confusing elections as definitions of, rather than causes of, democracy.

A second possibility is that factors specific to the Southeast Asian region, or common among Southeast Asian countries, explain this regional anomaly. We therefore return to our qualitative findings to identify two distinct channels that allow the region's authoritarian regimes to hold authoritarian elections repeatedly while only rarely succumbing to democratic transitions: state strength and effective neopatrimonialism.

The cases of Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore illustrate the strong state path to authoritarian durability in the face of elections. As reviewed in the case studies above, each of these countries maintain an effective bureaucracy capable of identifying sources of electoral opposition, security forces that manage protests and opposition mobilization, and electoral institutions that fine-tune electoral fraud. Malaysia and Singapore have relied much more on economic performance than has Myanmar, in which the military plays a far greater

role in enforcing order both during elections and more generally. What they share, however, is a strong state capable of overseeing repeated elections without democratizing, and in the case of Myanmar since 2015, loosening grip on the regime's own terms.

The cases of Cambodia and the Philippines under Marcos represent effective neopatrimonialism in action. In both, personal connections to an individual leader are paramount, and clients support incumbent regimes in exchange for political favors, lucrative business opportunities, and other blandishments. Neither country has a strong state. In the case of the Philippines, the economic upheaval of the early 1980s eventually culminated in the collapse of patronage mechanism upon which Marcos had relied to preserve power; elections, in turn, led to democratization. Our argument implies that were Cambodia to experience such a disruption in the mechanisms of patronage, elections would for the first time threaten the CPP. Indonesia under Soeharto's New Order regime represents a mixed case, a regime in a state of intermediate strength ruling through increasingly patrimonial means (for an early analysis, see Crouch, 1979). The fall of the New Order followed the collapse of the Indonesian economy, but even here, elections followed democratization rather than causing it.

Taken together, these case analyses give texture and nuance to the study of authoritarian elections, illuminating how and when they may lead to democratization but more importantly why they normally do not. By way of conclusion, we consider the broader theoretical and empirical implications of these Southeast Asian findings.

## **Conclusion**

This paper brought cases of Southeast Asia into conversation with the new literature on democratization by elections. Despite a long history of competitive multi-party and multi-candidate elections under authoritarian rule, the vast majority do not augur democratization. By combining case studies of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines,

Singapore and Thailand with a statistical analysis of the relationship between elections and democratization, we have illustrated the limits of democratization by elections as an explanatory framework across this important world region. Instead, we have underscored state strength and effective neopatrimonialism as explanations for authoritarian durability in Southeast Asia, and proposed that elections cause democratization only when weak or weakening states are unable to continue neopatrimonial practices.

Our analysis highlights the importance of Southeast Asia to the study of comparative politics. Despite sometimes being the subject of neglect by the wider field, the region has always been known by Southeast Asianists to offer fertile ground for developing and testing concepts and theories. This is because its extraordinary cultural, historical and political variation provides a means to challenge, reformulate and build theoretical propositions (Kuhonta et al., 2008). Many of the traditional theories of democratization, for example, have fared poorly in Southeast Asia (Bertrand, 2013; Emmerson, 1995). Beyond Indonesia and the Philippines, authoritarian regimes in the region have long defied the hypothesis posited by the elite bargaining, institutional, structural, and historical sociological models. Updating these concerns, we have shown that democratization by elections does not adequately capture the distinct experience of Southeast Asia. This is especially concerning given the enduring abundance of authoritarian regimes and the frequency by which dictators and ruling parties have sanctioned competitive, but flawed, elections.

Despite the fact that Southeast Asia is not representative of experiences in other world regions, the findings presented here do not impugn the theory of democratization by elections. However, our argument does draw attention to need for scholars researching transitions to democracy to further utilize Southeast Asia to ground theoretical development in empirical experiences. Two particular theoretical implications emerge from the Southeast Asian experience that have broader relevance to this and related literatures.

First, even flawed elections may not threaten neopatrimonial regimes. Outside of Southeast Asia—and especially in sub-Saharan Africa—neopatrimonialism remains the foundation of political institutions and political interaction. Instead of elections advancing democracy, it is clear that elections can be used by dictators and dominant parties as a means of reconstituting patronage distribution. This speaks to the need to conceptualize the forces working for both authoritarian durability and democratic change. Not only do affective bonds of personal loyalty lower the costs (and risks) of multi-party electoral competition, but they give a large cross-section of citizens, business tycoons, military officials and political elites a stake in the maintenance of authoritarian rule. In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa, where Bratton and Van De Walle (1994) found that “personal rulers cannot point to a record of stability and prosperity to legitimate their rule,” Hun Sen’s CPP persists by providing greater relative security, increased economic opportunities and inclusive patterns of reward.

The lesson to be drawn from Southeast Asia, then, is that the democratizing power of flawed elections in may be limited even in neopatrimonial regimes. Comparatively, it suggests that the literature on the democratizing power of elections in sub-Saharan Africa might profitably examine how the patronage resources that undergirded authoritarian rule in the region were eroded, and how this in turn interacts with elections.

A second theoretical implication is on mechanisms for democratic change in elections sanctioned by strong states. Despite recognizing the possibility that dictators and dominant parties can use elections for regime reproduction, the democratization by elections theory simultaneously predicts the costs of doing so intrinsically pulls authoritarian regimes towards democracy (Schedler, 2002: 111). Notably absent is concern for the role of infrastructural power in both reducing the start-up costs of multi-party electoral competition and safely managing the ongoing risks it entails. This includes how authoritarian regimes can implement logistically political decisions to prevent the emergence of opposition coalitions; skillfully

manipulate election outcomes; subtly suppress political protests; reduce defections from the bureaucracy, government and ruling party; utilize effective media and information control; establish alternative avenues for contestation; regulate petitionary politics; and, of course, distribute patronage. In the cases of Malaysia and Singapore, for example, UMNO and the PAP have been able to achieve regime durability despite sanctioning thirteen and sixteen competitive elections, respectively. This speaks to the capacity of both regimes to wield the state for the purpose of coercing their rivals, extracting revenues, registering citizens and cultivating dependence (see Slater, 2012). In much the same way as patronage resources much be disrupted for elections to act as mechanisms for democratization under neopatrimonial rule, strong states must be weakened to produce the same effect.

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## SUPPLEMENTAL APPENDIX

### States, Neopatrimonialism, and Elections: Democratization in Southeast Asia

In Table A1 we repeat our main analysis using fixed effects logistic regression instead of OLS. The data and sample are otherwise identical to Table 2 in the main text.

**Table A1: Logistic Regression Results**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-21.38 (48448.54)	-0.09 (1.21)	2.52* (1.16)	0.16 (1.39)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> – 1
N	452	411	441	402

Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Estimates via fixed effects logistic regression.

In Table A2 we measure include a measure of electoral competitiveness—a binary variable coded as one if the Database of Political Institutions (Beck, Clarke, Groff, Keefer, & Walsh, 2001) records an opposition holding at least one seat in parliament—and interact it with our indicator of elections to isolate the effects of competitive versus uncompetitive elections.

**Table A2: Competitive Elections**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$
Election <sub><i>t</i></sub>	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)
Competitive <sub><i>t</i></sub>	0.06	0.07	0.01	0.06

	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.10)
Election * Competitive	-0.05	0.05	0.05	0.12
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.07)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t - 1$	Auth. in $t - 1$
N	273	241	274	243

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Estimates via OLS.

In Table A3 we control for three important demographic variables: gross domestic product per capita (in log terms), yearly growth rate, and percent urban population, all taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2015).

**Table A3: Economic and Demographic Controls**

Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$	$DemTrans_{t+1}$	$DemTrans_{t+5}$
Election $_t$	-0.03	-0.00	0.03	0.04
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDP Per Capita	-0.08	-0.14	-0.18	-0.24
	(0.08)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.38)
Growth	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Urbanization	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t$	Auth. in $t - 1$	Auth. in $t - 1$
N	265	236	262	235

Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Estimates via OLS.

In Table A4 we control for three important demographic variables: gross domestic product per capita (in log terms), yearly growth rate, and percent urban population. We

measure the two economic variable using the Penn World Tables (Feenstra, Inklaar, & Timmer, 2015).

**Table A4: Economic and Demographic Controls, Alternative Measures**

Dependent Variable	(1) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+1</sub></i>	(2) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+5</sub></i>	(3) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+1</sub></i>	(4) <i>DemTrans<sub>t+5</sub></i>
Election <sub>t</sub>	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
GDP Per Capita	-0.05 (0.05)	0.03 (0.20)	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.22)
Growth	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)
Urbanization	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i>	Auth. in <i>t</i> - 1	Auth. in <i>t</i> - 1
N	307	279	307	280

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