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Edited by Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta

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I

Introduction: Rethinking Party System Institutionalization in Asia

Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta

Political parties are often the weakest link in democracies, both young and old. This is the conclusion of a large number of scholars, policy consultants, and political practitioners. From Peru to the Philippines, these lynchpins of modern democracy are struggling to carry out the fundamental tasks of representing citizen interests and enabling voters to hold government officials accountable.¹ In some parts of the world, the traditional connections between parties and their constituents are eroding (see the extensive literature on dealignment); in other parts of the world, meaningful links between parties and voters have yet to develop. Some systems present voters with a dizzying number of political parties, distinguishable more by the personalities at their helm than the policies in their platforms. In others, a single party so dominates elections that one can justifiably call into question the credibility of competition.

For scholars trying to make sense of the role parties play in supporting (or undermining) effective and robust democracies, *party system institutionalization* has emerged as an important concept. The literature on party system institutionalization suggests that a democracy with a more institutionalized party system is more likely to survive than one without. Institutionalized parties, defined as coherent, adaptable, and complex institutions, provide a stable means for channeling the interests of social groups and a mechanism for citizens to hold government accountable. Without parties acting as a bridge between state and society, demands from society will overwhelm government institutions and may lead to the weakening of democracy. Institutionalized parties thus serve as a crucial bulwark for sustaining democracy and maintaining its representative quality.

But institutionalization does not only matter for democratic stability. The literature on institutionalization suggests that party system institutionalization

¹ Powell 2000.

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can affect the longevity and stability of *nondemocratic* regimes as well. Precisely because institutionalized parties are more stable, complex, and adaptable, they may help nondemocratic regimes withstand opposition, understand and adapt to changes in citizen preferences, and successfully manage factional conflicts from within the ranks of the ruling party.

Institutionalized parties, regardless of regime-type, are furthermore often better equipped to advance public goods, such as social reforms or economic growth, in part because they tend to be more programmatic and thus have stronger incentives to provide public goods and in part because they tend to have greater levels of party discipline and cohesion.² The study of party systems thus helps us clarify why democratic regimes – and certain authoritarian regimes – may persist, and how effective they are at translating citizen demands into needed public policies.

The literature on party system institutionalization has to date focused primarily on Latin America, and more recently on Western and Eastern Europe, with Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully's edited book, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford University Press, 1995) as a seminal example. The rich cases in Asia have generally, and regrettably in our view, been ignored.³ One implication of this neglect is that the literature has been heavily focused on understanding party system institutionalization only in the context of democratization.

This project shifts the lenses of party institutionalization toward Asia. This geographical shift leads to distinct analytical questions and enables us to make at least three distinct contributions to the literature, as laid out in this introductory chapter. First, we find that historical legacies are a crucial variable affecting current levels of party system institutionalization across Asia. In particular, the immediate postwar period was the crucible from which institutionalized party systems in Asia developed. Second, we claim that for a significant number of institutionalized party systems, historical legacies are rooted in some element of authoritarianism, either as former authoritarian parties or as semi-democratic regimes. Third, precisely because authoritarianism has played an important role in the origins of institutionalized party systems, we argue that the concept of institutionalization needs to be decoupled from the concept of democracy.

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss the concept of institutionalization and the various ways in which it has been defined and measured in the literature, after which we identify some of the primary hypotheses about the causes of institutionalization. We then turn our attention to Asian politics and provide a simple overview of party system institutionalization vis-à-vis the rest of the world and across Asia. Drawing on the chapters in this volume, we note that many of the conventional explanations for why institutionalization emerges in some contexts but not others do not find much

² Kohli 1987; Kuhonta 2011.

³ See Croissant and Völkel's (2012) review for a notable exception.

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empirical support in Asia. Instead, we highlight the role that institutional legacies have played, particularly the shadow of authoritarianism, on the development of Asian party systems. The final section of the chapter presents an overview of the rest of the volume.

PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION AS A CONCEPT

A voluminous literature in comparative politics has now emerged on party and party system institutionalization.⁴ Tracing its roots to Samuel Huntington, this literature was spurred by an attempt to explain why party institutionalization was necessary for establishing political stability. Without institutionalized parties, polities in the developing world would be unable to temper and channel social demands. Institutionalized parties therefore provided the organizational structure within which to incorporate and stabilize social demands and thereby ensure effective governance. Since Huntington's pioneering work, the study of party institutionalization has centered more on its effect on democratic consolidation. When parties are institutionalized, these later studies argue, there is more accountability, greater stability of interests, and more broadly targeted policy programs – all of which augur well for democracy. By contrast, in democracies lacking institutionalized parties, party politics is often simply an arena for charismatic or clientelistic politicians to gain power without any real advancement of the public good. Institutionalized parties therefore are a crucial pillar in the functioning and consolidation of emerging democracies.

The substantive move away from Huntington's emphasis on party institutionalization as a basis for order also entailed an important analytical shift away from a focus on parties qua organizations to party *systems*. In a context in which democracies tend to be prevalent and researchers are concerned with the relationship between parties and democracies, institutionalization is necessarily analyzed through the party system, as it is within the party system that democratic competition occurs.⁵ When analyzing party systems in terms of institutionalization, we are looking in particular at the stability of patterned interactions among parties, rather than primarily at parties as organizational behemoths. Institutionalized parties nonetheless still play an important role in party system institutionalization, as the stability of interparty competition must necessarily depend on the presence of cohesive and ideological organizations

⁴ Huntington 1968; Welfling 1973; Panebianco 1988; Dix 1992a, 1992b; Coppedge 1994; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Bruhn 1997; McGuire 1997; Levitsky 1998; Roberts 1998; Mainwaring 1999; Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Moser 2001; Stoner-Weiss 2001; Randall and Svasand 2002; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007; Riedl 2014.

⁵ Sartori (1976: 44) provides a useful conceptual description of a party system qua system: "a party system is precisely the *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition. That is, the system in question bears on the relatedness of parties to each other, on how each party is a function (in the mathematical sense) of the other parties and reacts, competitively or otherwise, to the other parties" (emphasis in original).

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creating a setting for patterned electoral contests. In fact, as our research will show, not only are institutionalized parties crucial for explaining party system institutionalization; semi-democratic or authoritarian parties are particularly important in shaping party system institutionalization.

Most of the early literature on institutionalization has concentrated on explaining the characteristics of political parties, party systems, democracies, political stability, and general patterns of political development. More recently, a vibrant debate has also emerged to explain the factors that *cause* party system institutionalization. Although this literature has made some valuable contributions, it has largely been focused on materials from Western regions. Our goal in this volume is to reexamine the causes of party system institutionalization through Asian empirics. We believe that this is an important analytical exercise not only because of our interest in testing theory but also because the Asian political landscape presents a notably contrasting picture to Western polities. Not only has the Third Wave of democracy come just partly ashore in Asia; institutions in Asia have also developed in distinct ways. Therefore, an exercise in testing some general hypotheses of party system institutionalization will be of broad analytical use precisely because Asia provides a sharp contrast.

It is important to first lay out our concepts clearly. In defining *institutionalization*, we return to Huntington's (1968: 12) concise statement: "the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability."⁶ Huntington argued that four factors were particularly important for explaining the level of institutionalization: adaptability, coherence, complexity, and autonomy. In their groundbreaking work on Latin America, Mainwaring and Scully build on Huntington's definition, although their focus is on party systems. For them, the four factors that define an institutionalized party system include stability in the rules and nature of interparty competition; parties having stable roots in society; legitimacy of the electoral process and parties; and cohesive, disciplined, and autonomous parties (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 5–6). The difference between Huntington's and Mainwaring and Scully's definitions hinges on the latter's focus on the party system. In effect, Mainwaring and Scully have subsumed Huntington's factors, which were all concerned with party institutionalization within their fourth variable: cohesive, disciplined, and autonomous parties.

We focus in this volume on party system institutionalization in part because it is easier to quantify and measure institutionalization across competitive and semi-competitive party systems. In doing so, we build directly on Mainwaring and Scully's study of party system institutionalization in Latin America. However, we diverge from their analytical framework in two important ways. More broadly, the shifts we make signal our own differences with the general trend in the literature. First, we analyze institutionalization in the context not

⁶ For other conceptual definitions, see Welfling 1973; Panebianco 1988; Levitsky 1998; Randall and Svasand 2002.

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just of democratic regimes, but nondemocratic regimes as well. Mainwaring and Scully's focus was squarely on the relationship between party system institutionalization and democracy, precisely because they were assessing the extent to which party system institutionalization strengthened democratic consolidation.

When we look at party systems in Asia, it becomes strikingly apparent why party system institutionalization should be assessed in the context of both democratic and nondemocratic regimes. Many Asian party systems, such as those in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as until recently, Taiwan, are not fully democratic, although they are *competitive* – and increasingly so. These party systems, as we will see, are also the most institutionalized in the region. It is therefore of paramount importance to be able to identify the institutional characteristics of the party system separate from a normative concern for, or an analytical interest in, democratic consolidation. Furthermore, it also bears emphasizing that we should not assume that the process of institutionalization necessarily leads to democratic consolidation. Institutionalized party systems may or may not be consolidated democracies.

A second and related point that differentiates work in this volume from Mainwaring and Scully's analytical framework is our argument (to be detailed later) that traces current highly institutionalized party systems in Asia to the presence, historically, of authoritarian institutionalized parties. It is these authoritarian, institutionalized parties that are now democratic or maintain some aspects of democracy, that often serve as the anchor for emerging democratic, institutionalized party systems or semi-democratic systems. Therefore, whereas our analysis focuses on the party system, in contrast to Mainwaring and Scully, we give much greater weight to the role of authoritarian (or semi-authoritarian) parties. In this sense, although our study concerns competitive parties in a party system, we still take seriously Huntington's claim that dominant, institutionalized parties are critical for establishing institutionalized polities.

PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION AS A CONSEQUENT

Scholars have proposed a variety of hypotheses for explaining the causes of party system institutionalization: (1) passage of time, (2) timing or a period effect, (3) characteristics of the prior regime, (4) political institutions, and (5) political cleavages.⁷ We review each of these categories in this section. However, from the outset it is important to note that despite the recent flurry of work on institutionalization in authoritarian settings, most of this work focuses on the causes of party system institutionalization in new and developing democracies. The literature we build on is therefore concentrated on democracies, but it is

⁷ An additional factor discussed in much of the literature is the state of the economy. Economic downturns are associated with higher levels of volatility (lower levels of institutionalization).

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precisely our intention in this volume to move this literature toward a greater appreciation of nondemocratic variables and settings.

The Passage of Time

A number of scholars claim that institutionalization is largely a function of time. Voters' attachment to parties, information about the relative strength and position of various political parties, party organizational structures, and knowledge about institutional incentives all take time to develop.⁸ Although it is plausible to believe that this hypothesis applies equally to democratic and non-democratic settings, the empirical evaluations have exclusively relied on data from democracies. The evidence for this hypothesis is thus far mixed. Tavits (2005) and Lupu and Stokes (2007) find that volatility declines and party identities strengthen the more time a country spends under democracy. Likewise, Roussias (2007) and Tavits and Annus (2006) find evidence for better strategic coordination by voters and candidates over time in new democracies.⁹ By contrast, Mainwaring and Torcal (2006), Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), Reich (2001, 2004), and Roberts and Wibbels (1999) find no evidence of a decline in volatility and the number of parties over time.

Timing or Period Effect

The second hypothesis focuses on the timing of elections relative to expansion of suffrage and citizenship. The key distinction is between countries that transitioned to democracy in the First and Second Waves versus those that transitioned later. In early democracies, political parties played a lead role as a mobilizing institution by for example incorporating new citizens into the political system and pushing for an expansion of suffrage and other rights for those citizens.¹⁰ This forged strong links between parties and the citizens they helped mobilize. By contrast, in later democracies, the switch to competitive elections and new party formation was preceded by or occurred in conjunction with the adoption of universal suffrage. As a result, the kinds of links and networks that characterized early democratizers never developed. What is more, with the advent of mass communication, specifically television, parties and candidates had a means of mobilizing large numbers of voters without the costly investment in party organization or grassroots networks.¹¹ In short, given the structural differences of late democratizers, party institutionalization is less likely to occur than in earlier periods, *ceteris paribus*.¹²

⁸ Converse 1969; Bartolini and Mair 1990.

⁹ See also Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2000.

¹⁰ Colomer 2001; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007.

¹¹ Mainwaring and Zoco 2007.

¹² In a similar manner, Hutchcroft and Rocamora (2003) trace the origins of weak parties in the Philippines to initiation of early elections in a political environment in which the central government was relatively weak.

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In support of this argument, a number of scholars demonstrate that parties, voters, and party systems in Third Wave democracies are qualitatively different from those in advanced industrial democracies.¹³

The Nature of the Prior Regime

A number of scholars argue that the characteristics of the pre-transition authoritarian/semi-authoritarian regime help shape the party system in democratic periods. Some authors explore the relationship between the length of authoritarian interludes, voter attachment to party labels, and the stability of the party system. Some find that the longer the authoritarian interludes the more destabilizing the effects on the party system.¹⁴ Others argue that there is no straightforward link between the duration of authoritarian regimes and party system instability.¹⁵ Geddes and Franz (2007), for example, examine the effect of authoritarian interludes on the evolution of party systems in Latin America. They find that the types of strategies employed by dictators cast a long shadow. Where authoritarian leaders simply repress or outlaw parties, voter loyalties remain intact (even over many years), and those same parties reemerge when democratic elections return.¹⁶ However, if, in addition to outlawing existing parties, dictators create one or more new parties, then the new parties tend to attract candidates and supporters at the expense of the traditional parties.¹⁷ When democratic elections return, these new parties initially dominate, but the party system then tends to fragment as the artificially created new parties fall apart.¹⁸

One question not explored in the existing literature is the link between institutionalization under electoral authoritarian regimes and the nature of the party system after a democratic transition. As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, institutionalization can occur under either authoritarian or democratic regimes. We hypothesize that party system institutionalization is more

¹³ Coppedge 1998; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007.

¹⁴ Remmer 1985; Lupu and Stokes 2007.

¹⁵ Wittenberg 2006.

¹⁶ Notice for example the rebirth of the Socialist Party in Chile following Pinochet's departure.

¹⁷ Between these two extremes is the case where the dictator allies with a preexisting party.

¹⁸ Whereas existing work has mostly a unidirectional focus – looking at transitions from autocracy to democracy – it may be fruitful to reverse the arrow and consider how the characteristics of the party system in democratic periods shape the party systems (and dictator strategies) in succeeding authoritarian periods. For example, where there are strong ties between parties and voters, authoritarian elites may find it necessary to suppress existing parties and promote a new party. However, where strong attachments are absent, leaders may be able to secure sufficient support for a new party without resorting to direct suppression and intimidation of existing parties. The creation of Golkar in Indonesia in the wake of the 1965 coup is a good example of the former, whereas the 1991 coup and subsequent creation of a military-backed party in Thailand seems to be a case of the latter.

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likely where there was a high degree of institutionalization under the previous electoral authoritarian or semi-democratic government.

Political Institutions

The electoral system has a substantial impact on the nature of the party system. Permissive rules, such as proportional representation with large district magnitude, tend to produce more parties and hence a greater correspondence between party positions and voter preferences than restrictive electoral rules. If we assume that voters' attachment to a particular party is some function of the distance between the voter's ideal point and what he or she perceives as a party's position, permissive rules should be more likely to produce party systems with strong voter-party links. On the other hand, if electoral rules are too permissive, they will produce party fragmentation, which itself is associated with higher electoral volatility.

Other features of the electoral system may also hinder or encourage party institutionalization. For example, branch and membership requirements may encourage parties to develop stronger roots. Electoral rules that place a premium on party-based electoral strategies (as opposed to a personal vote) may help promote the development of party label differentiation. Likewise, restrictions on party switching can increase the incentives for politicians to invest in the party label.

Some authors hypothesize that presidentialism hinders the emergence of strong, cohesive parties,¹⁹ and by extension we might expect the same for party system institutionalization. However, evidence from studies of cross-country differences on some dimensions of institutionalization (i.e., volatility) has not revealed a significant empirical connection between presidentialism and institutionalization.²⁰

Political Cleavages

A number of studies trace the origins of strong party-society links to characteristics of the social structure.²¹ Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that Western European party systems reflect the shared preferences among subsets of voters (social cleavages). Politicized cleavages – whether based on class, religion, or urban/rural differences – gave rise to political parties that (1) had deep roots within cleavage groups and (2) had distinct, collective identities.²² In more recent work, Birnir (2007) finds that strong parties and stable party systems are more

¹⁹ Lijphart et al. 1993.

²⁰ For example, Mainwaring and Zoco 2007.

²¹ Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Sartori 1969; Prezowski and Sprague 1986; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Dix 1992a, 1992b; Kitschelt 1994; Kalyvas 1996; Chhibber 2001, 2002; Ufen 2012.

²² As noted earlier, these parties often were the key mobilizers of underrepresented cleavages.

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likely to emerge in ethnically divided societies. In short, this literature suggests that where the party system is not built on societal cleavages, whether in democratic or nondemocratic settings, party system institutionalization should be slower to develop, and we should expect a lower level of institutionalization, *ceteris paribus*.

Party systems often may not be rooted in societal cleavages for a number of reasons. To the extent countries are relatively homogenous, there may be a lack of deep-seated cleavages around which to organize. This of course is relatively rare, particularly in the developing world. A more likely situation is one in which there are a variety of cleavages, but those cleavages are crosscutting.²³ Crosscutting cleavages diminish the opportunity for forming viable parties rooted in particular cleavage groups. Instead, multi-group, catchall parties become a more appealing option. These crosscutting catchall parties are the goal of some party system engineers because of their potential for moderation and conflict amelioration. However, the cost of moderation is perhaps greater distance and weaker links between political parties and some voters.

Party systems may also be divorced from societal cleavages not because of any feature of the social structure but because of the political system. For example, governments may explicitly or implicitly ban certain types of cleavage-based parties.²⁴ Restrictive electoral rules may make certain cleavage-based political parties unviable.²⁵ Ethnically based parties may be forced by law to enter into alliance with other parties.²⁶ Such engineering attempts are common in Asia.²⁷

PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN ASIA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Turning our attention toward Asia, what can we learn about the factors that shaped party system institutionalization in this region of the world? As an estimate of the degree of institutionalization, we use one of the most commonly used indicators – electoral volatility. Electoral volatility is a measure of the stability or volatility of the party system from election to election – the degree

²³ Selway 2010.

²⁴ For example, regional parties are effectively banned in Indonesia, and class-based political parties have been excluded in much of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Although class-based parties have emerged throughout the postwar period in Southeast Asia, they have been routinely repressed through a combination of authoritarian repression and external support driven by the Cold War. In the late 1940s in Thailand, leading members of the leftist party based in the northeast, Sahachip, were systematically eliminated; in the Philippines, the six elected members of the leftist Democratic Alliance were prevented from taking their seats in Congress. The Indonesian Communist Party, the largest outside mainland China, was annihilated following the 1965 coup.

²⁵ Amorim-Neto and Cox 1997; Clark and Golder 2006.

²⁶ In Singapore's Group Representative Constituencies, party teams must be multiethnic, which effectively eliminates challenges from ethnically based opposition parties.

²⁷ Hicken 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Reilly 2007; Kuhonta 2008.

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to which there is variation in aggregate party vote shares from one election to another. Where there is a stable pattern of interparty competition and where parties have strong links with voters, we expect to see the same sets of parties receiving consistent levels of support from election to election, reflected in a low volatility score. High levels of electoral volatility, on the other hand, can reflect both instability in voters' party preferences from election to election and elite-driven changes to the party system such as the creation of new parties, the death of existing parties, party switching, party mergers, and party splits.²⁸ Electoral volatility is not without its problems – tracing party vote shares can prove extremely complicated where there are lots of party mergers or splits. Where possible, we follow Mainwaring and Zoco's (2007) rules about how to treat such events. More fundamentally, electoral volatility does not allow us to differentiate the sources of instability – fickle voters or ephemeral parties.

Electoral volatility is calculated by taking the sum of the net change in the percentage of votes gained or lost by each party from one election to the next, divided by two ($(\sum |v_{it} - v_{it+1}|) / 2$). A score of 100 signifies that the set of parties winning votes is completely different from one election to the next. A score of 0 means the same parties receive exactly the same percentage of votes across two elections. The higher the volatility score, the less institutionalized the party system is.

It bears emphasizing that by focusing on electoral volatility, we are using only one of potentially four or five indicators to measure institutionalization. We should recall that beyond electoral volatility of the party system, we could also conceivably measure other variables, such as the cohesiveness, adaptability, complexity, social rootedness, and autonomy of political parties. In this chapter, we follow the literature's convention and focus on electoral volatility because we are interested in party *system* institutionalization and because it is simpler to operationalize and measure quantitatively compared to other possible variables. We note that the authors of the chapters in this volume employ a variety of empirical strategies to estimate and trace the degree of institutionalization within their country of focus. This includes electoral volatility, but also historical analyses, use of public opinion polls, and information about party creation and durations. We should note that because of the solidly authoritarian character of the Vietnamese and Chinese regimes, these two chapters focus specifically on historical analyses of the party, rather than volatility within the party system.

Table 1.1 compares the average electoral volatility of Asian states compared to states in other regions. We include in our calculations states in Northeast Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia that have experienced relatively free and fair elections as well as those countries where opposition parties are allowed to compete and win seats in regular elections, but the electoral playing field is tilted heavily against the opposition (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia). We do not include those polities where elections are not regularly held or where

²⁸ Mainwaring and Zoco 2007.