Like the postcolonial world more generally, Southeast Asia exhibits tremendous variation in state capacity and authoritarian durability. Ordering Power draws on theoretical insights dating back to Thomas Hobbes to develop a unified framework for explaining both of these political outcomes. States are especially strong and dictatorships especially durable when they have their origins in “protection pacts”: broad, elite coalitions unified by shared support for heightened state power and tightened authoritarian controls as bulwarks against especially threatening and challenging types of contentious politics. These coalitions provide the elite collective action underpinning strong states, robust ruling parties, cohesive militaries, and durable authoritarian regimes – all at the same time. Comparative-historical analysis of seven Southeast Asian countries (Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Vietnam, and Thailand) reveals that subtly divergent patterns of contentious politics after World War II provide the best explanation for the dramatic divergence in Southeast Asia’s contemporary states and regimes.

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Ordering Power

CONTENTIOUS POLITICS
AND AUTHORITARIAN
LEVIATHANS IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA

DAN SLATER
University of Chicago
ORDER, v. To arrange methodically or suitably; . . . to regulate, direct, conduct, rule, govern, manage; . . . To bring into order or submission to lawful authority; . . . To give orders to or command; to direct authoritatively; . . . to domineer over, treat as a subordinate; . . . to give a . . . request that (something) be made, supplied, or served.

*Oxford English Dictionary*

An organizer combines disparate elements into an integrated whole. He may do this *ex tempore* if his aim is simple or passing. He must make more elaborate preparations if he is confronted with a permanent and difficult task.

*Karl Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism*

The opening up of channels for the expression of manifest or latent conflicts between the established and the underprivileged classes may have brought many systems out of equilibrium in the earlier phase but tended to strengthen the body politic over time.

*Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, Party Systems and Voter Alignments*

The cause in general which moveth a man to become subject to another, is (as I have said already) the fear of not otherwise preserving himself. . . . [M]en may join amongst themselves to subject themselves to such as they shall agree upon for fear of others.

*Thomas Hobbes, The Element of Laws*

[O]nce the common mind has received the impress of an acute danger, fear remains latent, as long as its ultimate cause is not removed.

*Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation*
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This book examines how states and regimes in Southeast Asia have historically tried to extract and organize political and economic resources from the societies they rule. In the process of researching and writing it, I myself have accrued a rather long history of “extracting” support and encouragement from numerous sources, both personal and professional. Whether I have managed to organize all this generous support and encouragement into a coherent and convincing manuscript is a matter for the reader’s judgment. If I have failed to bring it all together, it can only be because of my own incapacity to organize, not any lack of generosity among those from whom I have extracted so much for so long.

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Map of Contemporary Southeast Asia