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Introduction: Rethinking Stateness and Democracy in East Asia

Aurel Croissant and Olli Hellmann

The relationship between stateness and democracy has attracted a great deal of attention in comparative politics. This is related not only to the "historical turn in democratization studies" (Cappocia and Ziblatt, 2010) but also to the improved availability and quality of data with regard to the measurement of democracy and stateness. A similar trend has taken place in the political economy and development economics literature, where, in the late 1980s, the call to "bring the state back in" (Evans et al., 1985) heralded the development of a variety of new research agendas. While political economists have been intensively researching the role of the state in Asia's industrialization and development processes since the 1980s, democratization research on East Asia has so far largely ignored the "state-democracy nexus" (Møller and Skaaning, 2014). In contrast to the prevalence of economic, cultural, and class-based approaches, stateness-related explanations for democracy in the region are exceedingly rare.[1]

This volume examines the relationship of stateness and democracy in East and Southeast Asian nations. Specifically, we focus on polities that introduced democratic structures during the so-called third wave of democratization, which swept much of the world between the mid-1970s and the mid-2000s. The seven case studies represent the full universe of *third wave* democracies in the region. While the first wave of democratization before and after World War I barely touched the shores of Pacific Asia, the second wave that followed World War II and decolonization resulted in only one case of consolidated democracy: Japan. Democracy has thus long been an exception in Asia; instead, the political landscape has historically been dominated by authoritarian systems of government – especially military dictatorships

[1] Notable exceptions are Hutchcroft (2000) and Seeberg (2014).

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TABLE 1.1. *Three waves of democratization in East and Southeast Asia*

	First Wave	Second Wave	Third Wave
Brunei	–	–	–
Burma/Myanmar		1953–1961	–
Cambodia			1993–1997
China	–	–	–
East Timor			2002–
Indonesia			1999–
Japan	1912–1932 ("Taisho Democracy")	1947–	
Laos	–	–	–
Malaysia	–	–	–
North Korea	–	–	–
Philippines		1946–1972	1986–
Singapore	–	–	–
South Korea	–	–	1988–
Taiwan	–	–	1996–
Thailand	–	1946–1947	1975–1976, 1988–1991, 1992–2006, 2008–2014
Vietnam	–	–	–

Source: Woodall (2018) and the chapters in this volume. Classification as democracy based on the Electoral Democracy Index of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. Only political regimes with an EDI score of 0.45 or higher for at least three consecutive years have been classified as "democratic" in one of the three waves.

and one-party regimes. It was only with the third wave of democratization that a number of authoritarian regimes were replaced with democracies: the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1988), Thailand (1992), Cambodia (1993), and Taiwan (1996). Moreover, in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Indonesia (1999) and East Timor (2002) were also swept up by the region's most recent wave of democratization (see Table 1.1).

Nevertheless, while the third wave of democratization was remarkable in its impact and reach, the ensuing reform processes resulted in great variation in terms of political regime outcomes across East Asia. While South Korea and Taiwan are often celebrated as resounding success stories of the third wave of democratization (Diamond, 2016; Hellmann and Templeman in this volume), other democracies such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and East Timor continue to face debilitating challenges – including political polarization, the rapid political mobilization of diverse groups, a deinstitutionalizing role of political leaders, and the failure of democratic structures to respond to growing social demands. In addition, a large number of studies and data from

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TABLE 1.2. *Electoral and liberal democracy in East Asia*

	Electoral Democracy Index			Liberal Democracy Index		
	2017	2007	Change	2017	2007	Change
Burma/Myanmar	0.39	0.1	0.29	0.26	0.02	0.24
Cambodia	0.24	0.35	−0.11	0.08	0.15	−0.07
China	0.09	0.1	−0.01	0.06	0.06	0
East Timor	0.72	0.64	0.08	0.51	0.49	0.02
Indonesia	0.63	0.72	−0.09	0.48	0.53	−0.05
Japan	0.83	0.85	−0.02	0.76	0.79	−0.03
Laos	0.09	0.09	0	0.09	0.09	0
Malaysia	0.32	0.33	−0.01	0.21	0.21	0
North Korea	0.09	0.09	0	0.01	0.01	0
Philippines	0.51	0.5	−0.01	0.36	0.38	0.02
Singapore	0.45	0.4	−0.05	0.36	0.32	0.04
South Korea	0.79	0.85	−0.06	0.71	0.77	−0.06
Taiwan	0.8	0.77	−0.03	0.69	0.69	0
Thailand	0.14	0.18	−0.04	0.1	0.19	−0.09
Vietnam	0.26	0.18	0.06	0.19	0.11	0.08

Source: Coppedge et al. (2018). *V-Dem Dataset v8*. V-Dem Project. https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemcy18.

various democracy barometers[2] show that, in most new democracies in East Asia, a persistent gap exists between the electoral components of democracy – or what Robert A. Dahl (1971) terms *polyarchy* – on the one hand, and the enforcement of civil liberties, judicial independence, and horizontal accountability, which represents the *liberal* aspect in the concept of liberal democracy, on the other hand (Shin and Tusalem, 2009; Croissant and Bünte, 2011). Moreover, with the exception of Taiwan, the quality of (liberal) democracy seems to be eroding (see Table 1.2).

The extent of erosion varies from country to county, but overall, the data suggests that East Asia has joined the global wave of democratic backsliding (Lührmann et al., 2018). The clearest examples of this alarming trend are the cases of Cambodia and Thailand. In both countries, already-defective democracies were subjected to full autocratic reversal and replaced by authoritarian regimes (see Chapter 5 by Chambers and Chapter 6 by Un in this volume).

This trend of democratic erosion still has momentum in Asia, despite the fact that, more recently, a number of autocratic regimes in the region appear to have embarked on processes of political liberalization. In Malaysia, an alliance

[2] Such as Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org), the Economist Intelligence Unit (www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy0814), the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (www.bti-project.org/en/home/), and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-8/).

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of opposition parties won a historic election victory in the general elections of May 2018 and toppled the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) coalition, which had been in power since 1957. In Myanmar, the military (*Tatmadaw*) initiated a process of gradual disengagement from day-to-day politics that led to the election of a civilian government in 2015. This process of military-controlled reform "should not be understood simply as an exit strategy by the military to retreat from national politics" (Hung, 2012: 2); instead, the ratification of a new constitution, together with the disbanding of the military junta and the organization of reasonably free elections in November 2015, constitute remarkable achievements in a long process of transition from direct military rule toward "something else" (Croissant, 2015). Still, at the time of preparing this volume, it was too early to assess the direction and magnitude of political reforms in Malaysia and Myanmar and judge whether the end of autocratic rule would give way to democratic regimes, thereby balancing the trend of democratic decline.

In short, the third wave of democratization produced three different types of regime outcomes in East and Southeast Asia: consolidated democracies, defective democracies, and autocratic backsliders. Moreover, and of crucial importance for a systematic analysis of the state-democracy nexus, the seven cases with which the contributions in this volume are concerned exhibit a remarkable variation in the degree of stateness. To begin with, Cambodia and East Timor experienced simultaneous state-building and democratization as part of post-conflict reconstruction under the authority of United Nations (UN) interim administrations. Nonetheless, they are often considered *weak* states that display very little capacity to regulate social and economic relations. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Taiwan and South Korea: both represent *strong* and high-capacity states and seem to add credence to the *stateness first* argument (Wilson, 2018), which maintains that positive political development is more likely when effective state institutions had been put in place prior to democratization.

However, for reasons that we elaborate in this volume, the Asian experience challenges some of the key tenets of the prominent *sequencing* approach to the state-democracy nexus and *stateness first* arguments more specifically. As the cases studies in this volume demonstrate, there is no linear or clear-cut relationship between levels of stateness, on the one hand, and the robustness or *quality* of democracy, on the other. Certainly, South Korea and Taiwan rank high in terms of both the strength of their states and the qualities of their democracies, while Cambodia combines a weak state with weak democratic structures. However, as the respective contributions in this volume show, existing state-democracy theories struggle to account for specific mechanisms beyond this broad comparative pattern: Why do democracies in South Korea and Taiwan continue to suffer from path-dependent impairments? Why did autocratic reversal in Cambodia unfold in the time and the way that it did? Even more damningly, the "stronger states facilitate democratization" argument collapses completely when the focus is widened beyond these three cases. For example, despite the fact that both Indonesia and Thailand

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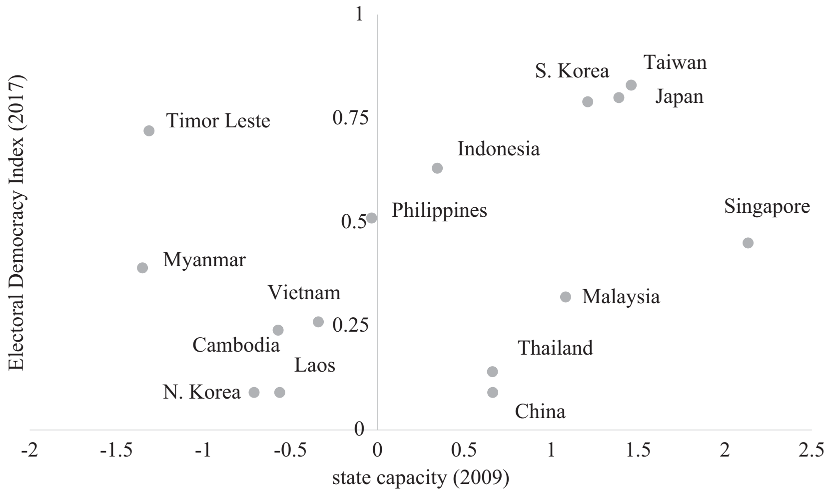

FIGURE 1.1. Electoral democracy and state capacity in East and Southeast Asia. *Source:* Electoral Democracy Index of the V-Dem Project and State Capacity Index (Hanson and Sigman, 2013). Higher scores indicate higher levels of electoral democracy/state capacity.

exhibit medium-level state capacity, the two political systems differ markedly in terms of their institutional features: whereas democratic structures have endured in Indonesia, they have collapsed in Thailand. Similarly, while both the Philippines and East Timor struggle with anemic state capacity, the quality of democracy diverges significantly: the Philippines have, under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte (elected in 2016), witnessed a dismantling of key democratic institutions and a trend toward regime hybridization; East Timor, in contrast, is regularly ranked as the top Southeast Asian country in most democracy barometers (see also Figure 1.1).

THE AIM OF THIS VOLUME

This variation calls for explanations and makes Asia an excellent region for studying the complex relationship of stateness and democracy. Specifically, we will approach the state-democracy nexus in East Asia from two complementary perspectives: while the first one is focused on the impact of state-building on the development of post-authoritarian democracies, the second considers the effect of democratic reforms on the state's infrastructural power and state-society relations. As explained in more detail in the remainder of this chapter, the resulting dual focus allows us to make at least four distinct contributions to the literature.

First, through a set of qualitative case studies, our volume addresses three weaknesses in existing research on the state-democracy nexus: (1) Up until

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now, the relevant academic literature has dealt mostly with the question of how stateness and state capacity affect the likelihood that the breakdown of autocratic rule will result in consolidated democracy; we know much less about how the installment of democratic structures affects the subsequent development of stateness. (2) Existing work on the state-democracy nexus, especially the *stateness first* strand of the literature, makes the mistake of applying the mechanism drawn from the historical experience of first wave democracies in Europe and North America to third wave democracies in non-Western regions. (3) Attempts to test arguments about the state-democracy nexus through quantitative means are fraught with problems of measurement.

Second, by disaggregating the multidimensional concepts of stateness and democracy into a number of different components or *partial regimes* (Schmitter, 1995), the case studies in this volume are able to make more nuanced arguments about how different elements of stateness affect different facets of democracy.

Third, our own argument on the relationship between stateness and the quality of democracy places particular focus on the relationship between the state and particularistic networks and the distribution of power between particularistic networks. We broadly agree with the sequentialist approach that the chances of democratic consolidation are greatest in new democracies where the state – because of its infrastructural properties – has a strong ability to fend off particularistic demands. However, we go beyond the sequentialist approach to show that political systems characterized by lower levels of state autonomy can develop into electoral democracies, depending on the systemic properties of particularistic networks.

Fourth, taken together, our case studies show that stateness does not exert a linear effect on the quality of democracy. The reasons include not only the properties of particularistic networks – as an intervening factor – but also path-dependent effects and mechanisms of circular causality. The case study approach chosen in this volume is particularly appropriate because it allows the researcher to accommodate bidirectional and reverse causalities.

The rest of this chapter proceeds with two sections that discuss the meaning and content of the key theoretical concepts of this study: stateness, state capacity, and democracy. Next, we identify the primary strands in the literature on the stateness-democracy nexus before we lay out our own argument. The final section presents an overview of the rest of the volume.

STATENESS AND STATE CAPACITY

There is well-established, rich literature in social science on how to define the state. Other core concepts in the state-building literature, such as state capacity and stateness, are of more recent origin. In *Politics as Vocation*, Max Weber famously defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 1992: 158–59). While the empirical realities to which the terms *state* and

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political regime refer to are tightly interwoven, they constitute conceptually distinct concepts: whereas a political regime concerns the access to and exercise of political power, the state provides political power holders with an instrument to implement policies and other interventions. The state "is a (normally) more permanent structure of domination and coordination including a coercive apparatus and the means to administer a society and extract resources from it" (Fishman, 1990: 428), whereas a political regime "designates the institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules identifying the political power holders [and] regulates the appointments to the main political posts […] as well as the […] limitations on the exercise of political power" (Skaaning, 2006: 15).

While fundamentally shaped by this Weberian understanding of the state, empirical studies differ in what exactly constitutes stateness. Without fully entering the theoretical debate, we can establish that the literature on the stateness-democracy nexus typically highlights three key components or dimensions of stateness (cf. Linz and Stepan, 1996; Andersen et al., 2014; Carbone and Memoli, 2015; Andersen, 2017): (1) political order and the monopoly on violence; (2) basic administration and administrative effectiveness; and (3) the dimension of citizenship agreement – that is, the attachment of citizens to the state. The first component refers to the core of the Weberian definition of the state as the source of legitimate physical force and the monopoly over the means of violence within a given territory. The second constitutive dimension concerns the presence of a basic infrastructure for the exercise of state power, or a "usable bureaucracy" (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 11). The third dimension refers to the extent to which the members of a political community are attached to the state as the legitimate public authority and agree about citizenship.

The concepts of stateness and state capacity overlap to some extent; however, the latter concept is more specific and concerns the ability of state institutions to implement official goals and policies (Skocpol, 1985: 8). It is related, in particular, to the projection of state authority over the national territory and the administrative dimension of stateness. But since many scholars assume state capacity "to require a degree of legitimacy and trust in state institutions" (Carbone and Memoli, 2015: 7), state capacity is also connected to the third constitutive dimension of stateness.

In order to operationalize a state's capacity to implement official policy goals, scholars propose a broad range of criteria and indicators. Based on the existing literature and inspired by Michael Mann's typology of state powers (Mann, 1984), we distinguish three forms of state capacity: coercive, administrative (the quality of the bureaucracy), and the state's social embedding.[3]

[3] A fourth capacity is a state's ability to raise revenues (extractive capacity). While extractive capacity is essential for funding state activities of all types, it is highly dependent on the ability of the state to enforce its monopoly on the use of force over a population/territory and the capacity to gather and maintain information, which depends on the presence of administrative agents to carry out these functions ably (Hanson, 2018).

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The three capacities overlap but are not identical to Michael Mann's typology of state power.[4]

Coercive capacity refers to the state's ability to maintain the monopoly over the legitimate use of force, including both the ability to maintain order within the borders of the state and to defend the territory against external threats. Of course, coercive capacity is not a "binary, on-off condition" (Fukuyama, 2014: 1329). Instead, the extent to which a state is able to provide security to its population can be measured as a continuous variable that ranges from near-absolute security to the complete breakdown of state authority. In authoritarian regimes, in particular, the state's coercive capacity is frequently used to suppress civil and political opposition and can be an important tool to compensate for lacking administrative capacities and weak social embedding (Seeberg, 2014; White, 2018).

Administrative capacity is broadly defined as "the ability to develop policy, […] to produce and deliver public goods and services and […] to regulate commercial activity" (Hanson and Sigman, 2013: 4). Similar to coercive capacity is the scalar concept, indicating the degree to which public state organizations are governed by meritocratic recruitment and formally institutionalized rules, rather than by forms of particularism, such as corruption, clientelism, nepotism, cronyism, or patronage (Hanson, 2018). It indicates whether a state sits closer toward the legal-rational type or the patrimonial type in Weber's framework of legitimate authority. As Andersen et al. (2014: 1208) note, coercive and administrative capacities are closely related, as states seldom exhibit strong administrative capacity without also having the capacity to exercise a monopoly on violence (see also Fortin-Rittberger, 2014: 1245).

The capacity of the state is not just a function of the state's institutional properties. The ability of the state to implement official policies also depends on the degree of citizenship agreement, or put differently, the extent to which citizens accept the state's exercise of political power as legitimate. The state can derive legitimacy from a number of sources, including economic performance, social factors (such as ethnic homogeneity) and the design of participatory processes (see Gilley, 2009). What matters more for the discussion here, however, is that – once the state has achieved a certain level of legitimacy, citizens will support the state's action on a quasi-voluntary basis, thus boosting public organizations' capacity to implement policy goals (Uslaner and Rothstein, 2016: 240). In contrast, when the state lacks legitimacy, citizens will be incentivized to evade the control of the state – for example, by refusing to pay taxes (Bräutigam, 2008) or by participating in the informal rather than the formal economy (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008: 165–66). In short, low levels of citizen agreement undermine the state's capacity to enforce official laws and regulations.

[4] According to Mann, *despotic* power refers to the "range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups," whereas infrastructural power highlights the state's capacity to "penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm" (Mann, 1984: 88).

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While this three-component framework doubtlessly covers key aspects of stateness, we believe that the existing literature on the state-democracy nexus has neglected *the role of informal institutions and networks in shaping state capacity*. To a large extent, this has to do with the fact that informal political structures are difficult to measure quantitatively, thus making them unavailable for statistical inquiry. As will be discussed in more detail in the following section, it is precisely large-N research designs that have dominated existing work on the state-democracy nexus.

To begin with, states that score high on quantitative capacity measures can get hijacked by informal, particularistic networks. For example, if we apply the most common indicator of coercive capacity (armed forces personnel per capita), Myanmar ranks very high in global comparison. However, what this obscures is that military units have often been *privatized* by high-ranking military officers, who employ this supposedly public organization to further their own private goals (e.g. Holliday, 2012: 68). Similarly, South Korea's high-capacity *developmental state*, was – during military rule (1963–1988) – under firm control of informal networks between political and business elites, which were employed to organize the distribution of public loans in exchange for kickbacks and bribes (e.g. Kang, 2002; also see Chapter 3 by Hellmann in this volume). In other words, as in the case of Myanmar, infrastructurally strong state organizations were misused to facilitate self-interested predatory practices.

Conversely, just because a state is infrastructurally weak does not mean that political elites do not possess the ability to deliver public goods. As a growing body of literature shows, informal networks, depending on their organization and resources, may possess the capability to perform functions that we usually associate with the state. For instance, academic work on neopatrimonialism shows that centralized patron-client networks can help to *buy* peace and thus provide security to the population (Le Billon, 2003). Meanwhile, the so-called "Asian puzzle" literature demonstrates that many autocratic regimes in Southeast Asia successfully coordinated industrial development without a high-capacity *developmental state* at their disposal. Instead, scholars highlight how specific configurations of particularistic networks not only incentivized political elites to pursue developmental goals but also boosted their ability to implement growth-enhancing policies (e.g. MacIntyre, 2000; Rock and Bonnett, 2004). Likewise, there is evidence that particularistic networks can be used to secure the agreement of social groups regarding the question of citizenship – for example, by co-opting community leaders into distributive arrangements (e.g. Kimenyi, 2006).

As will be explained in more detail in this chapter, we argue that these informal aspects of state-society relations matter to explain why there is no linear relationship between stateness and the quality of democracy: not only do states differ in their ability to fend off hijacking attempts by particularistic networks, which is largely a function of their infrastructural power, but particularistic networks also display differences in their organizational and relational properties.

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DEMOCRACY AND ITS PARTIAL REGIMES

The age-old political science debate on what democracy is or should mean fills more than one library. For the purpose of this volume, it is sufficient to acknowledge that, despite the nature of democracy as an "essentially contested concept" (Collier et al., 2006), actual empirical research on democratization and the quality of democracy relies on a procedural understanding of democracy (Diamond and Morlino, 2006; Munck, 2016). Still, the debate is whether a minimal and essentially electoral understanding of democracy (*polyarchy*; cf. Dahl, 1971) is sufficient or whether democracy should also include the presence of more substantial elements such as the rule of law and constitutionalism (Diamond, 1999, 2008; Diamond and Morlino, 2006; Merkel, 2004).

Our approach rests on the assumption that a minimal, electoral conception of democracy will not suffice for the study of the relationship between state-building and democracy. What do we really *know* when we *know* that Taiwan and the Philippines or Indonesia and South Korea are all democracies despite evident differences in the integrity of elections, effectiveness of civil liberties or levels of political participation, not to mention the strength (or weakness) of the rule of law in these countries? Furthermore, the global spread of democracy in the last quarter of the twentieth century has not been a triumph of democratic liberalism but of an often quite *illiberal* electoralism (Zakaria, 1997). Even before the recent debate about the backsliding of democracies (Lührmann et al., 2018), it had become clear that many transitions from authoritarian rule in the third wave were stuck in a gray zone between (minimal) democracy and (open) autocracy (Carothers, 2002).

The case studies in this volume adopt the model of "embedded democracy" developed by Wolfgang Merkel and his coauthors (Merkel and Croissant, 2000; Merkel, 2004; Croissant and Merkel, 2019). It systematizes the relationship between the different partial regimes of liberal democracy in order to distinguish it from the various types of less-than-liberal forms of democracy and autocratic rule. Embedded democracy, as a root concept of democracy, thereby includes the necessary components of a liberal democracy. Defective democracies, on the other hand, are political regimes that fulfil some, but not all, of the criteria of this root concept (Croissant and Merkel, 2019). According to the concept of embedded democracy, a contemporary democracy is akin to an institutional superstructure, being composed of highly complex yet additive *partial regimes* (Schmitter, 1995). The partial regimes themselves are as follows (see Figure 1.2).

A. The *electoral regime* is the central piece among the five partial regimes, and it operates by filling the principal state power positions through regular, free, general, equal, and fair elections. Such a regime fulfils the minimal requirements for electoral democracy.
B. The *political rights* regime facilitates the democratic right to political communication and organization by entitling people to free speech/opinion as well as free association, demonstration, and petition. It also

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