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CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Power Struggles and Political
Regimes*

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Civil Society in Southeast Asia

Power Struggles and Political Regimes

Elements in Politics and Society in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: Contrary to popular claims, civil society is not generally shrinking in Southeast Asia. It is transforming, resulting in important shifts in the influences that can be exerted through it. Political and ideological differences in Southeast Asia have sharpened as anti-democratic and anti-liberal social forces compete with democratic and liberal elements in civil society. These are neither contests between civil society and uncivil society nor a tussle between civil society and state power. They are power struggles over relationships between civil society and the state. Explaining these struggles, the approach in this Element emphasises the historical and political economy foundations shaping conflicts, interests, and coalitions that mobilise through civil society. Different ways that capitalism is organised, controlled, and developed are shown to matter for when, how, and in what direction conflicts in civil society emerge and coalitions form. This argument is demonstrated through comparisons of Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Keywords: civil society, capitalism, ideology, democratisation, authoritarianism

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