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Can Leviathan be Democratic? Competitive Elections, Robust Mass Politics, and State Infrastructural Power

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Abstract Reconciling effective government with accountable government remains an enormous political challenge, especially in the postcolonial world. Can postcolonial states only gain infrastructural power when their rulers enjoy unencumbered despotic power? With their contradictory findings about the influence of democratic parliaments on state autonomy and capacity, the literatures on constitutional states in Western Europe and developmental states in Northeast Asia provide limited guidance on this normatively critical question. As an alternative approach, this essay proposes three causal mechanisms through which competitive national elections can incite the territorial extension of state institutions: (1) catalyzing the construction of mass ruling parties; (2) energizing state registration of marginal populations; and (3) fostering centralized intervention in local authoritarian enclaves. Evidence from Southeast Asia suggests that competitive elections will only have these infrastructural effects when accompanied by robust mass political mobilization. This has intriguing implications for how scholars understand historical patterns of state-building in the West, as well as how policymakers try to build more effective states in the most ungoverned corners of the contemporary world.

Keywords State-building · Competitive elections · Infrastructural power · Mass politics · Southeast Asia

> In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself (James Madison, *Federalist No. 51*).

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> We are driven by a common desire to understand what makes for good governments and how to build them. Good governments are those that are (1) representative and accountable to the population they are meant to serve, and (2) effective—that is, capable of protecting the population from violence…and supplying other public goods that the populace needs and desires (Margaret Levi 2006).
>
> [H]e who looks for large-scale social change must be possessed, with Kierkegaard, by 'the passion for what is possible' rather than rely on what has been certified as probable by factor analysis (Albert Hirschman 1970).

Transcending Stateless Democracies and Authoritarian Leviathans[1]

The challenge of reconciling effective government with accountable government has bedeviled politicians and political thinkers for centuries—from one of the first American presidents to one of the most recent presidents of the American Political Science Association (APSA). Few political problems are both so timeless and so timely. One needs look no further than Iraq, where the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the introduction of electoral politics have coincided, not with state *making*, but state *breaking*. As Iraq spirals downward into the nastiest and most brutish forms of Hobbesian disorder, it is painfully evident that America's current leaders are far from resolving the core political dilemma that plagued its founding fathers.

An apparent correspondence between collapsing tyranny and emergent anarchy is unfortunately not particular to Iraq. As Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder (2007: 5) have recently argued, "turbulent democratization" is "now widely recognized" as a major concern in both academic and policy circles. A growing chorus of scholars and policymakers has been led by the force of events to the conclusion—as democracy promotion advocate Thomas Carothers worries aloud—that "certain preconditions, above all, the rule of law and a well-functioning state, should be in place *before* a society democratizes" (Carothers 2007: 13, emphasis in original).

State weakness is not simply a short-term malady accompanying democratic transitions. Wherever one looks in the postcolonial world, it is difficult to locate governments that combine the virtues of effective and accountable government. Few states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East have experienced the kind of concurrent decline in "despotic power" and rise in "infrastructural power" that Michael Mann (1988) saw occurring over the *longue durée* in Western Europe. Democratic postcolonial governments are too often infrastructurally weak, and infrastructurally strong postcolonial states are too often governed undemocratically. Many comparativists might see the past three decades as "an age of democratization" (Brownlee 2007), but no one would call it an age of democratic Leviathans.

As in other postcolonial regions, the problem of infrastructurally weak democracies has been chronic in Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia have had the longest stretches of democratic rule in the region. Yet they

[1] "Statelessness" is conceived here as a continuum, not a dichotomy. Political systems can thus be relatively "stateless" without being "failed states."

have all broadly failed to build infrastructural power—"the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm" (Mann 1988: 5)—during democratic times. Most scholars see the apex of state infrastructural power in all three of these countries coinciding with authoritarian rather than democratic politics. Meanwhile, Singapore and Malaysia stand alone in Southeast Asia, if not the entire postcolonial world, for both the infrastructural power of their Leviathans and the durability of their nondemocratic regimes (Slater 2008).

In sum, Southeast Asia has produced authoritarian Leviathans and stateless democracies, as well as some notorious stateless dictatorships, such as Burma. But it has produced no democratic Leviathans whatsoever. Nowhere in Southeast Asia can the general citizenry feel simultaneously confident that their state has the infrastructural capacity to provide them with a wide range of valued public goods, and that they have a credible shot at replacing their political leadership should it fail to do so.

Are state infrastructural power and democratic accountability incompatible goals in postcolonial politics? Can the problem of stateless democracies and authoritarian Leviathans be transcended? By examining these questions in Southeast Asia, this article aims to provide some new thinking and new evidence on this new manifestation of Madison's classic dilemma in political theory and comparative politics. It shows how competitive elections have at times helped spark state-building efforts in a region where democratic accountability and state capacity have generally *not* gone hand in hand.

Historical evidence from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines suggests different causal mechanisms through which regime type can shape state power than those emphasized in the literatures on constitutional states in Western Europe and developmental states in Northeast Asia. Whereas leading scholars of these regions have emphasized the role of democratic parliaments in strengthening or weakening the state, this article stresses the significance of *competitive elections amid robust mass mobilization* as a spur for state-building efforts.[2] And whereas these analyses tend to focus on the bureaucratization and autonomy of the state, my focus is squarely on the empirically related but analytically distinct question of *state infrastructural power*.[3]

To the extent that democratic practices have sparked state-building efforts in Southeast Asia, they have not done so through the kind of parliamentary mechanisms stressed in the European literature. Instead, competitive national elections have enhanced state infrastructural power through three institutional mechanisms that have nothing to do with parliaments: (1) stimulating the emergence of mass political parties, which can increase the state's willingness and capacity to deliver broad public goods; (2) pressing the state to improve the "legibility" (Scott

[2] My use of "robust" draws from John McCormick's depiction of "Machiavellian democracy," which combines "electoral mechanisms for elite control" with "more direct and robust modes of popular engagement with politics" (McCormick 2001: 297). While McCormick stresses the benefits of this combination for democratic accountability, I highlight its potentially potent impact on infrastructural power.

[3] See Hillel Soifer's contribution to this issue.

1998) of the general population through mass voter registration, with potential spillover effects in other areas of governance; and (3) compelling central state authorities to expand their coercive monopoly into areas previously lorded over by parochial strongmen or armed militias. Our existing literature seems to have missed these causal mechanisms through which the two distinct dimensions of "good government" might jointly come about.

As the Albert Hirschman epigraph should have made obvious at the outset, this is a normative exercise as well as an analytical one. My goal is to uncover new ways in which democracy and state capacity might coincide, not to determine whether they generally coincide in a probabilistic manner. When Margaret Levi (2006) uses the occasion of her APSA presidential address to insist that we *need* a new theory of government, her tone rightly conveys the urgency of the problem at hand. As political analysts, we might be content to uncover dismally low correlations between democratic government and effective government. As politically engaged citizens, we need to think creatively about how state infrastructural power might be expanded without raising a ruling regime's despotic power in the process. Political scientists are rightly concerned with uncovering causal probabilities in political life. Yet in some instances, causal relationships might only become *probable* once political decisionmakers have begun to perceive a causal connection as *possible*.

The next section briefly reviews the existing literature on regime type and state capacity, exploring the tensions between Europeanist and Asianist scholarship on the subject. I then discuss why competitive national elections might be expected to catalyze mass party building, energize state registration practices, and foster centralized intervention into local authoritarian enclaves—but only when held in the shadow of vigorous mass political mobilization. The article's empirical section then provides examples of such electoral–infrastructural linkages in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Clearly, none of these cases supports the existence of a positive relationship between democratization and stateness as dichotomous variables. Only if we go beyond the examination of nominal variation to consider ordinal variation (Mahoney 2000) can we uncover the surprising harmonies between electoral processes and state-building processes in Southeast Asia. The article concludes by suggesting that competitive elections amid robust mass politics may also shed light on the original expansion of state infrastructural power in the West itself, and might induce new state-building efforts in the postcolonial world beyond Southeast Asia as well.

Democratic Politics and State Power: Never the Twain Shall Meet?

It is hard to imagine a topic on which Europeanists and East Asianists disagree more sharply than the influence of democratic politics on state power. To most students of Europe, and to most leading theorists in political science more generally, effective parliamentary checks on executive authority are essential to curb predatory state behavior. For most East Asianists, the elite societal figures who gain access to the state via parliamentary elections have been seen more often, not as a necessary check against state predation, but as predators themselves.

The view that strong parliaments enhance state infrastructural power derives from a combination of European (especially British) historical experience, and a highly

contractual vision of state–society relations. To scholars such as Margaret Levi (1988), Douglass North and Barry Weingast (1989), and Philip Hoffman and Kathryn Norberg (1994), states will be hobbled in their efforts to collect taxes unless they can make credible commitments to use the revenues in ways that accord with taxpayers' interests. It was presumably through iterated consultation with a parliament of social notables that rulers made those commitments credible.[4] Thus Levi concludes: "The existence of strong parliaments in England ultimately made it easier to extract revenues there than in France" (Levi 1988: 117). Hoffman and Norberg concur in their volume on European fiscal history that "representative institutions, not absolute monarchy, proved superior in revenue extraction." Wherever "forceful representative institutions were absent, though, fiscal paralysis was almost inevitably the result" (Hoffman and Norberg 1994: 306). Since revenue is a primary pillar of state infrastructural power, these conclusions speak volumes about the relationship between parliamentary strength and state strength in general.

The sensibility of such analyses could not be much more different from that of the Weberian scholars who dominate the study of East Asian states. For scholars such as Stephan Haggard (1988), Robert Wade (1990), and Atul Kohli (1994), it must seem bizarrely counterintuitive to conclude, as North and Weingast do, that parliamentary supremacy enhances state power because it "increase[s] dramatically the control of wealth holders over the government" (1989: 817). These Asianist scholars see an autonomous "developmental state" as essential in countering the depredations of economic elites, who tend to use their dominance of democratic parliaments to devour public resources with the rapacity of a pack of vultures.

To the limited extent that Southeast Asianists have engaged this theoretical debate, they have unsurprisingly sided with the East Asianists. This is especially visible in the influential studies of the Philippine state by Paul Hutchcroft (2000), John Sidel (1999), and Benedict Anderson (1998 [1988]). If their complex analyses for the perpetual weakness and capture of the Philippine state could be expressed as a shared diagnosis, it would be "precocious electoralism." By introducing national elections at the turn of the twentieth century, American colonial authorities ensured that bureaucratic officials in Manila would be "lorded over" by provincial politicos (Hutchcroft 2000). These studies draw on the theoretical work of Martin Shefter (1994), who posits that bureaucratization will be stymied unless it is pursued before the introduction of electoral politics at the national level. Sidel extends Shefter's logic from the Philippines to Thailand, blaming electoral politics for the emergence of localized "bossism" and the debilitation of bureaucratic agents in both countries.[5]

There are two main difficulties in applying this argument to the question of democratic Leviathans. First, Shefter never argued that precocious electoralism produced *irreversible* damage to the state apparatus. Bureaucratization could follow democratization, as it did in Britain and the United States, if a "progressive coalition" arose to serve as the necessary "constituency for bureaucratic autonomy" (Shefter 1994:

[4] A dissenting view can be seen in Downing (1992), who argues that monarchs in early modern Europe maximized their revenue haul by dismantling parliaments, not consulting them.

[5] National elections did not precede bureaucratization in Thailand, so Sidel cannot rely on Shefter to explain Thai state weakness. He concludes that the common problem in the Philippines and Thailand was that both experienced democratization under conditions of "primitive capital accumulation" (Sidel 1999).

31, 29). In the long run, Shefter saw state-building as complicated, but not precluded, by preexisting democratic politics. The puzzle of Philippine and Thai state weakness requires better understanding of why progressive coalitions opposed to clientilism and corruption have failed to make much headway under democratic conditions.

The second critical point is that Shefter and those who apply his arguments to the Philippines have been centrally concerned with barriers to *bureaucratic autonomy*, not *infrastructural power*. As Hillel Soifer argues in this issue, these two dimensions of state power should not be analytically conflated. Whether low levels of state autonomy automatically yield state infrastructural weakness is uncertain. I have already suggested that the electoral victory of a progressive constituency might have ultimately helped (and might still help) improve bureaucratic autonomy in the Philippines. There is no reason to foreclose the possibility that changing social and political dynamics could also have induced (and could still induce) the extension of infrastructural power from Manila into the Philippines' oligarchic periphery, thereby overcoming the pernicious legacies of precocious electoralism.

Shefter's portrayal of the long-term causal relationship between democracy and state-building is inconclusive, not simply negative. This inconclusive tone is echoed in other analyses as well. Thomas Ertman insists that there exists an "independent influence of strong representative assemblies on administrative and financial institutions" (Ertman 1997: 6), but his case studies show that this influence can cut both ways. Britain and Sweden lend support to the Levi-North-Weingast perspective on parliaments as a political force pressing for bureaucratic rather than patrimonial rule; but Hungary and Poland perfectly reflect the East Asianists' nightmare of a state held captive by rapacious and narrowly self-interested parliamentary elites. Among cases where state-building was not encumbered by strong preexisting parliaments, outcomes ranged from the bureaucratic absolutism of Germany to the rampant patrimonialism of Italy and Spain. In sum, parliaments have an independent effect on state-building in Ertman's analysis, but not a unidirectional one.

Jose Antonio Cheibub's recent study of state performance in democratic and authoritarian settings speaks more directly than Ertman's to a defining feature of state infrastructural power: the power to tax. Yet it similarly recognizes that existing theory on democracy and the state has led us into an analytical cul-de-sac: "Theoretical analyses have produced conflicting but plausible hypotheses about the effects of regimes on performance" (Cheibub 1998: 349). Since Cheibub's study ultimately lends only conditional support to the Levi-North-Weingast perspective, it is fair to say that the intellectual stalemate of "conflicting but plausible hypotheses" remains.

Beyond Parliaments and State Autonomy: Alternative Causal Mechanisms

For purposes of the present analysis, there is no harm in accepting the indeterminate effect of democratic parliaments on state power. Parliaments have apparently acted as catalysts for state-building in some instances and obstacles in others. Yet existing studies of democracy and the state might not be barking up the most fruitful institutional tree—especially considering the uncertain causal influence of bureau-

cratic autonomy on state infrastructural power to begin with. Rather than spurring (or hindering) state-building by producing powerful parliaments, competitive elections might enhance state infrastructural power through three very different institutional mechanisms.

First, competitive elections not only produce parliaments at the elite level; they can also ignite the mobilization of new *political parties* at the mass level. Such mass parties can serve as an invaluable institutional adjunct to the state apparatus, particularly in aiding and inciting the effective delivery of public services to marginal and underserved populations. Fascinating lessons in this regard come from India, where subnational variation in welfare outcomes has been attributed to variation in ruling party ideology and organization at the state level. Kohli (1983) found West Bengal's democratically elected communist party registering more than a million rural tenants in just 3 years, after Congress-led governments had registered only 60,000 in three decades. Not only did communist-run West Bengal outperform Indian states run by less coherent and more elitist parties in its poverty alleviation efforts; the party itself was key to this outcome, as the registration of sharecroppers in particular "had the greatest success in those parts of Bengal where the party is the strongest" (Kohli 1983: 655–656).

Subsequent studies have established an even stronger relationship linking robust mass mobilization and leftist-party rule to the development of an infrastructurally capable welfare state in the Indian state of Kerala. According to Patrick Heller:

> [T]he coordinating role of the Communist Party, organizationally cemented in the tight integration of its union and party leadership, has made it possible to continuously scale up industry and sector-level struggles into a broader political program of expanding social and economic rights….As a disciplined and ideologically coherent political formation, the CPM has given the often spontaneous actions of the working class a degree of cohesion and continuity. Local struggles, be they on the shop floor or in the paddy fields, have been translated into statewide demands for state protection and regulation (Heller 1999: 15).

To be sure, mass demands for state intervention in social policy often overwhelm the capacities of infrastructurally weak states. Yet in some cases, such demands provide a necessary impetus for the expansion of the state's infrastructural power in the first place. According to Manali Desai (2003), robust mass politics combined with repeated competitive elections not only put pressure on Kerala's governing communists, but also on competing parties to improve service delivery, starting with the initial push for land reform and improved primary education in the late 1950s:

> Since then successive governments, both Communist and noncommunist, have extended the public food distribution system to cover 97% of the population, set up Fair Price Shops, provided comprehensive free meal programs in schools, and distributed food supplements through health centers to expectant and nursing mothers. The Communist-led governments also established special nutritional and educational programs for tribal and slum children (Desai 2003: 172–173).

If competitive elections can help spark the expansion of state infrastructural power, then, it might be most likely to do so by delivering power to a grassroots party with a programmatic commitment to providing broad-based public goods in

urban and rural areas alike[6]—or by forcing more conservative parties to improve their grassroots infrastructure in response to leftist competition. While narrowly targeted "constituency clientilism" can typically be accomplished by even the feeblest of states (Waldner 1999), concerted pressure from broadly mobilized mass publics to expand public provision can "call forth" the improved institutional capacity necessary to deliver administratively challenging government services on a more universalistic scale: e.g., land reform, public housing, and high-quality education (Doner et al. 2005).[7] Elections amid mass mobilization may not be conducive to the kind of rarefied state autonomy most East Asianists perceive as critical to state performance; but they can deliver power to mass parties with a self-interest in extending the state's reach for the benefit of the bulk of the population, not just raiding state resources for the benefit of narrow clientilist networks.

As Kohli's discussion of West Bengal's sharecroppers implies, mass parties with a base in marginalized populations also have an especially strong incentive to pursue *citizen registration*. The registration of a population throughout a territorial domain is a basic foundation of state infrastructural power. As Neil Diamant puts it, "for most citizens, the state looms large not so much as a coercive organization but as a registering one" (Diamant 2001: 447). Yet as Diamant's study of marriage licensing in Mao-era China shows, even the most rudimentary forms of registration can thwart state-builders when confronting a noncooperative population: a point echoed in Mara Loveman's (2005) study of the Brazilian state's failed effort to extend even basic civil registration practices during the nineteenth century "war of the wasps."

The critical point here is that state infrastructural power fundamentally rests on citizen registration, but registration often provokes societal resistance. States can presumably lubricate the process by providing inducements for citizens to register. In many studies of postcolonial states, the initial act of citizen registration is presumed to coincide with centralized efforts to collect taxes. Where states need not tax, thanks to foreign aid or natural resource revenue, they need not thoroughly register the population, and state infrastructural power is debilitated across a wide range of administrative domains (e.g., Vandewalle 1998; Chaudhry 1997; Shafer 1994).

While taxation may not inspire ordinary people to make themselves seen and stand in line, *representation* is a different matter. The opportunity to vote in relatively competitive national elections might make citizens much more compliant with the state registration process. Once wide-ranging voter registration has taken place, what James Scott (1998) calls the "legibility" of the population to state intervention will have been increased, with the same sort of potential spillover effects for the quality of national governance that political scientists have long seen arising from the centralized registration of taxpayers.

This potential harmony between elections and state-building is nicely captured in a familiar phrase: *electoral administration*. Wherever the administration of a public

[6] Why some (perhaps most) mass parties such as Argentina's Peronists have pursued clientilist rather than programmatic policies and undermined rather than enhanced state capacity is an important question for further research. Thanks to Miguel Centeno for this stark and significant counter-example.

[7] As Daniel Ziblatt argues in this issue, the provision of public goods might be *encouraged* by preexisting infrastructural power, not just *indicated* by it. Yet states might also develop the capacity to provide public goods through the process of doing so.

good is required, so is state infrastructure. Yet for the elite "strongmen" who tend to dominate local politics in the "weblike societies" that characterize of most of the postcolonial world (Migdal 1988), elections are private, not public goods; they are tools for amassing power, not sharing it. This helps explain why democratic postcolonial elections more often project provincial power toward the national center than vice versa. Vigorous centralized intervention in the process of electoral administration typically goes against the interests of parochial strongmen wishing to use elections to convert their local power monopolies into national political office.

Robust mass politics of various types can alter this equation. When elections take place as part of a peace agreement in the wake of civil war, for instance, elites on both sides may accept or even demand centralized control over the electoral process to prevent their opponents from violently defecting. Under conditions of ongoing mass insurgency, similarly, local strongmen may tolerate or even welcome unusually energetic state intervention in their bailiwicks to make elections possible in the first place. Once Leviathan has used electoral administration to gain a foothold in a peripheral locale in response to mass unrest, it may prove unwilling or unable to retreat.

Occupying forces' experiences with administering national elections in Iraq exemplify such an electoral–infrastructural dynamic. Only where military forces could establish an effective monopoly over the use of violence could elections be effectively implemented. This required at least the temporary extension of state power into hostile territory, as well as heightened policing of Iraq's normally porous borders. The point is not that such efforts were uniformly successful, or necessarily sustained; it is that competitive elections amid endemic political unrest provided an impetus for occupying forces to expand state infrastructural power with more energy and urgency than had characterized the Iraqi occupation more generally. Even when central authorities' efforts to counter mobilized mass opposition by holding national elections meets stubborn resistance from provincial powerholders, this might spark the sort of "state–society confrontations" through which central authorities often first assert their authority in remote regions (Barkey 1994: 20).

Having hopefully established the plausibility of these three causal mechanisms linking competitive elections to state infrastructural power, I now provide examples of how they have played out in specific Southeast Asian cases. My focus will be on mass party-building in Malaysia, voter registration in Indonesia, and the projection of state power for purposes of electoral administration in the Philippines.

Competitive Elections and State Infrastructural Power in Southeast Asia

Elections, Mass Parties, and State Power: Malaysia in Comparative Perspective

Thailand and the Philippines not only have two of the weaker states in Southeast Asia—they also have had some of the region's weaker political parties, lacking grassroots membership and "programmatic thrust" (Heller 1999: 15). This raises the possibility that these countries might not have weak states because democratic periods have produced dominant elite parliaments, but because they have failed to spawn dominant mass parties. Without a grassroots party linking state and society in a territorially encompassing manner, public goods provision in Thailand and the

Philippines has been just the passing fancy of occasional populist leaders, not an ongoing commitment from mass-oriented political organizations.

Comparative support for this hypothesis comes from Malaysia, where extremely strong political parties emerged during the decolonization process. Echoing Kohli, Erik Kuhonta has argued that party formation was critical to the Malaysian state's relative success vis-à-vis Thailand and the Philippines in pursuing "equitable development," as "the emergence of a mass-based party…has enabled the demands of the poor Malays to be addressed through institutionalized channels" (Kuhonta 2003: 21). Infrastructural power is not always a function of state administrative institutions working autonomously, but a result of state and ruling party institutions working to extend centralized rule in tandem.

Why did stronger parties emerge in Malaysia than in Thailand and the Philippines? As I argue elsewhere (Slater 2005), the primary reason for this dramatic divergence in the immediate post-1945 period was the subtle divergence in the types of contentious politics that erupted in the wake of the Japanese occupation. In brief, my overarching argument is that urban and ethnicized class conflicts in Malaysia provided a powerful impetus for elite collective action, which has served as the coalitional basis for strong parties ever since. Specifically, the explosion of communal riots and the national mobilization of a Chinese-dominated communist party sparked *counter*mobilization and cross-ethnic coalescence of elites in both the majority Malay and minority Chinese communities. The resulting party configuration involved the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and an alliance between them that has dominated Malaysian politics from the 1950s until the present.[8]

Yet the puzzle of Malaysian party strength is not fully resolved in reference to the cohesion of elites alone. In terms of party-state infrastructural power, the puzzle is why and how this elite coalition built a powerful institutional presence at the grassroots level, in both urban and rural areas. It is precisely this infrastructural variance that explains the dramatic variation in rural public initiatives in education, health services, and poverty alleviation between Malaysia and Thailand:

> UMNO was necessary to drive the state towards a forceful, politicized campaign of redistribution. UMNO's political force and organizational strength dictated the state's goals to the bureaucracy. Without UMNO's presence, the mobilization of the Malays, the penetration of the countryside, and the sustained politicization of the 'Malay dilemma'[9] would not have been achieved. Therefore, UMNO provided the institutional bridge to embed the state with societal concerns over equity (Kuhonta 2003: 63).

Competitive national elections interacted with contentious mass politics to strengthen UMNO's grassroots machine, as well as the MCA's. Before elections were introduced in 1951, "the MCA was a group of leaders in search of followers" (Stubbs 1989: 203). Although UMNO had certainly proven its capacity to mobilize mass protests when the Malay position appeared to be threatened in 1946, its

[8] The third longstanding member of this coalition, the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), is a sideshow compared to these two main players.

[9] This refers to the chronic relative poverty of majority Malays vis-à-vis minority Chinese.

"success in utilizing the social ferment unleashed by the [Malayan] Union was not matched by an ability to attract supporters into the party" (Funston 1980: 79).

While *contentious* politics provides the best explanation for the birth of both UMNO and the MCA as elitist political associations in the late 1940s, it was *electoral* politics that pressed both groups to undergo the hard organizational work of transforming themselves into more territorially encompassing grassroots parties in the 1950s. It was only "with the introduction of elections" that "UMNO was concerned to consolidate its position as a mass political organization with a substantive rural support base" (Manderson 1980: 201). As one leading figure in UMNO's highly active women's wing described her grassroots activism between late 1953 and the 1955 national election:

> I made a program then to go to every state, in the whole of Malaya, to arrange group meetings and to organize more branches for women in the kampongs…. Sometimes I went by train, sometimes by car; when there was no road, we went by bicycle or on foot. I worked very hard because I wanted to bring up the Party, and in one month's time I was not more than 3 or 4 days at home (ibid., 96).

Electoral pressures similarly helped galvanize "a distinct improvement in the organizational capacity and efficiency of the MCA" starting in early 1952. The party's reach was expressed in part through increased mass services, as "nearly $4 million was spent by the MCA on subsidizing the building of houses, the erection and maintenance of school buildings, the provision of such amenities as piped water, dispensaries and recreational facilities, the payment of the salaries of teachers and health teams, and the formation of Home Guard units" (Stubbs 1989: 211–212). The impressive grassroots presence of the Malaysian state largely originated with the impressive local interventions of Malaysia's government-linked political parties.

In 1969, the renewed confluence of competitive elections and contentious politics incited the construction of even stronger party-state infrastructure. This was most noteworthy within the MCA. Its loss of a sizable share of seats in the 1969 election had called its longstanding political hegemony within the Chinese community into question. Even worse, a post-electoral outbreak of Malay–Chinese violence threatened to return Malaysia to the kind of endemic ethnic conflict it had suffered in the 1940s and 1950s.

The MCA responded with an energetic effort to rebuild its tattered mass base, and thereby restore its position as a moderate alternative to increasingly popular radical Chinese opposition parties. Loh Kok Wah has chronicled the MCA's post-riot grassroots initiatives, in which "labor seminars were organized; public service bureaux to help the illiterate apply for land, citizenship and passport were initiated; even a Hawkers' Committee and an Urban Development Committee to monitor the Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory Development plans so as to ensure that it would be fair to all sectors of the community were set up" (Loh 1982: 21). The institutional parallels between this outreach effort and that of Kerala and West Bengal's communist parties—despite the enormous ideological gap between those parties and the fervently anticommunist MCA—suggest that electoral competition amid robust mass politics can trump leftist ideology as an impetus to improve ruling parties' grassroots infrastructure, and to increase state provision of broad-based public goods.

Malaysia has been a more authoritarian polity since 1969 than it was before. Yet elections remain relatively competitive, in spite of the dictatorial curbs on political association that prevent the UMNO-dominated government from meeting the procedural minimum definition of electoral democracy. This has presented at least a modicum of pressure on the parties in the ruling coalition to maintain their grassroots ties, and to make the state apparatus produce tangible benefits for the voting public. In explaining "the breadth and depth of the *institutional infrastructure* that has been created in order to implement policy at the grassroots level," Kuhonta points to the ruling party's "clear political aim: the forging of state authority at the rural level and the concomitant attempt by UMNO to build its political legitimacy and electoral dominance" (Kuhonta 2003: 239, emphasis in original). It is precisely where elections have been eliminated altogether since 1969—at the local and municipal level—where state institutions in Malaysia appear to perform at their very worst (Faruqi 1995). Pressures on UMNO and the MCA to sustain national electoral dominance amount to pressures on the Malaysian state to govern the grassroots with vigor and conviction.

The Malaysian experience thus implies that it is the combination of electoral mobilization and wider social mobilization that is vital in producing the kind of strong mass parties that make states more willing and able to provide public goods. The relative *absence of social mobilization* better explains party–state weakness in Thailand and the Philippines than the *presence of electoral politics*.

Communist Threat, Competitive Elections, and Voter Registration in Indonesia

Indonesia experts generally agree that the country's most impressive bout of state-building occurred at the onset of Suharto's New Order (1966–1998). Given this regime's well-deserved reputation as a highly authoritarian system of rule, how could Indonesia possibly lend empirical support to my contention that democratic practices and state power might be surprisingly compatible? As in Malaysia, we must go beyond the nominal coding of regimes and recognize that, in an ordinal sense, the Suharto regime exhibited a combination of coercive *and* competitive practices—at least initially. Much as Malaysia's powerful parties were born during relatively competitive times and endured to dominate politics in a more authoritarian era,[10] the Indonesian state reached its apex of power against a backdrop of significant elite competition and considerable societal uncertainty.

For all the undeniable brutality of the New Order, its emergence did not coincide with the abolishment of electoral politics. Rather than replacing an electoral democracy, the Suharto regime arose in the wake of Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" (1959–1965), under which no elections were held. Indonesians had not enjoyed the opportunity to vote since 1955, and many elites supported Suharto's seizure of power in the expectation that democracy would be restored. To say that their hopes were dashed would be an understatement. Yet this should not prevent us from recognizing that Indonesia's post-1965 period witnessed both a dramatic deepening of coercive practices and the *reintroduction* of national elections.

[10] The same can be said of Singapore, Southeast Asia's consummate authoritarian Leviathan.

New Order elections were far from free and fair, and are typically portrayed as a complete joke. But to Suharto and his inner circle, the national elections in November 1971 were no laughing matter. With no preexisting electoral vehicle in place to compete with established political parties, the military regime faced an uphill struggle to translate its social support into electoral backing (Smith 2007). Suharto's supporters justifiably worried that anything less than a resounding victory at the polls would once again destabilize national politics, as the explosive growth of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the subsequent massacre of hundreds of thousands of its suspected followers in 1965–1966 were still fresh memories. Stability was of the essence. This was widely thought to require a military-led government with hegemonic power, not a weaker government divided along factional and ideological lines.

Unable to countenance anything short of a landslide at the polls, the Suharto regime deployed the entire state apparatus for the task of "successing" (*menyukseskan*) the elections. While political scientists frequently presume that state-building begins with revenue collection, and that subsequent state capacities arise on the heels of that core administrative accomplishment, national electioneering presented an initial major administrative test for the New Order state. State success at electioneering may well have laid the groundwork for success in other areas of governance, much as taxation has been presumed to have done in other settings.

The Suharto regime registered voters more obsessively than it ever registered taxpayers. Even this seemingly basic act of governance presented the state with a monumental administrative task in conducting the 1971 vote. "All technical preparations would have to be made from scratch; for example, the previous registration of voters, used sixteen years before, and the last census in 1961 would be of no use" (Nishihara 1972: 5). Given the political stakes involved, the Suharto regime was not about to entrust the administrative process to any institution it could not tightly control:

> The General Elections Institute (LPU), an autonomous body placed administratively within the Ministry of Home Affairs, was to be directly responsible for the whole electoral administration….The vertical lines of Indonesia's local government organization under the Home Affairs Department were thus utilized in setting up the administrative organization for the elections. While it ensured administrative efficiency, this structure no less certainly guaranteed effective governmental intervention and control….In effect, the General Elections Institute assumed the character of a military command with local chief executives as local commanders and election committees as their staffs (ibid., 12–13).

In registering voters, the emphasis was on political control rather than administrative efficiency. To be more precise, the latter consideration was made the servant of the former. Considering Indonesia's enormous, diverse, and sprawling population, it was no mean feat for the state to administer elections in a manner that avoided giving voters any liberating sensation of anonymity and secrecy. State functionaries established 235,983 polling stations across the vast archipelago; 3,268 of these were directly installed in professional offices, to enhance vertical control; and only 664 of these office polling stations (around 20% of the total) were located

in the capital city of Jakarta, underscoring the impressive geographic sweep of the operation. The state thereby made the bulk of the Indonesian population effectively "legible" in unprecedented ways:

> Each polling place, whether in offices or in residential areas, was to handle only 200 to 300 eligible voters….Since voters were grouped as voting units according to residential districts or offices, it was feared that the outcome of polling done in such small units would easily enable the members of each polling unit to tell generally who voted for which party. There was even talk that non-Golkar voters, if later identified, might lose their jobs and that all ballot papers would be secretly numbered for later identification. Whether or not such rumors were well founded is beside the point. What mattered was the fear itself (ibid., 38).

A total of 54,699,509 valid votes were ultimately cast in the 1971 election: an average of fewer than 232 people per polling station. Of course, the regime's goal was not simply to achieve a high turnout, but to channel support to the regime itself. This involved the refashioning of Golkar, a state-dominated association of corporatist "functional groups," into the government's new electoral vehicle. It also entailed reworking of the state's intelligence agencies, which, having helped successfully crush the communists, turned their attention to organizing support for Golkar. (Indeed, Golkar was such a creature of the state that it was more of a "Ministry of Electoral Victories" than a political party.) The regime's hard political and administrative work paid big dividends, as Golkar trounced its nearest competitor by a 63% to 19% margin. And the state electoral machine continued to work wonders in all subsequent New Order elections, delivering Golkar the lion's share of the national vote with "thermostatic sophistication" (Anderson 1983: 490).

The burgeoning local knowledge and interventionism of the central state was by no means limited to the electoral sphere. In his study of local government in New Order Indonesia, Jim Schiller captures both the dramatic upswing in state intervention as well as its intimate connection with electoral administration:

> By the early 1970s the *kabupaten* [local district government] was involved in a host of activities. Economic and social programs in which the district government had a significant role included various plans to increase rice production, public works projects, employment generation programs, nutrition, public health, family planning, the expansion of schools, the provision of credit to small businesses, and the disbursement of aid to villages for village development projects. District government's political assignments included various tasks of surveillance, especially in relation to people who had previously had links with the communist movement, and the implementation of national elections (in a way which ensured a high vote for the government political party, Golkar) (Schiller 1996: 36).

Electoral administration and these other manifestations of state infrastructural power may not simply have been *closely* related, but *causally* related. With the population so effectively registered for electoral purposes by the end of 1971, it must have been far easier for the state to intervene in each of these other domains of governance. For instance, Indonesia's family planning program, long "considered a

model of government-sponsored fertility control in a developing country," saw its participation skyrocket from 2.8% of eligible couples in 1971 to 62.6% by 1984. This required "a formidable contingent of local implementers," 88% of whom were "deployed in the villages, subdistricts, and regencies." Spillover effects among state institutions were very much in evidence, as "cross-agency participation" was considered vital in the program's success (Warwick 1986: 453, 458, 483). It seems no more far-fetched to suggest that this impressive extension of infrastructural power had its roots in *electoral* registration than commonplace assumptions that state-building originates with *tax* registration. Citizens made legible for a relatively unobjectionable practice such as voting remain legible for more intrusive and controversial interventions such as family planning.

Elections, Rebellion, and the (Temporary) Taming of Rural Oligarchs in the Philippines

Average citizens frequently see registering to vote in competitive elections as an opportunity to be welcomed, but provincial strongmen often consider such elections a threat to be obstructed. For those who derive parochial power from local coercive and socioeconomic monopolies, electoral politics is not a major threat so long as central state authorities permit them to leverage those monopolies for electoral advantage. Yet at times—particularly under conditions of worsening rural insurgency—central authorities' interest in curbing provincial abuse can clash with local elites' interest in abusing their power advantages for electoral purposes. Confrontations between state leaders and societal elites over the conduct and competitiveness of national elections thus represent a third causal mechanism through which democratic practice might stimulate rather than stifle the extension of state infrastructural power.

On this front, Philippine state-building has generally failed spectacularly. Rather than providing an institutional vehicle for the replacement of unresponsive political elites, Philippine elections have mostly served to reproduce the country's dizzyingly steep socioeconomic hierarchies. Even worse, elections have often compounded such stratification by acting as matchmaker in the dirty marriage of political and economic power. So long as provincial politicos retain either their own private armies or the clout to convert local police forces into their own personal "muchachos," elections serve more often to project provincial power toward the center than vice versa (Hutchcroft 2000).[11]

Yet even in the Philippines, the tables have been turned at times, but only when competitive national elections took place against a backdrop of intensifying mass unrest. During the rural Huk rebellion of the early 1950s, national elections provided an impetus for central officials to bring provincial elites to heel in ways that efforts to increase income taxes and impose land reform—more typical barometers of state power projection—never have. As the Huk rebellion worsened, government officials (and their American backers) increasingly pinned the blame for the strengthening insurrection on the fraudulent and violent national elections of 1949. Making the

[11] See Matthew Lange and Hrag Balian's article in this issue for more discussion of the debilitating effects of "decentralized despotism" on state infrastructural power.

midterm elections of November 1951 a cleaner affair became a top priority for officials in Manila and their American allies.

Foremost among these highly placed friends of Washington was Ramon Magsaysay, whose appointment as defense minister in September 1950 had been pushed, if not preordained, by American advisers. As rural rebellion neared its apex, Magsaysay imposed new hierarchical order on the Philippines' military apparatus. "Magsaysay merged the twenty-two-thousand-man Philippine Constabulary with the army, which included another thirty-three thousand troops, thereby creating a single chain of command" (Goodwin 2001: 118). This provided Magsaysay with unprecedented muscle to implement the central government's directives in the provinces.

The intensification of rural rebellion shifted the balance of power from rural oligarchs toward the center. The Defense Minister's growing clout was manifested in several ways. Of most significance, "the 'civilian guards'—essentially the private armies of large landowners who were notorious for their mistreatment of villagers—were disbanded" (ibid., 119). This move represented a stark about-face in government policy, as President Elpidio Quirino had been actively *encouraging* the formation of anti-Huk "citizen armies," invariably under oligarchical leadership, just before Magsaysay's appointment. During Magsaysay's first tour of rural Luzon, he had found that "the villagers are armed with a substantial number of licensed firearms which even the gawky teen-ager of the barrio could fire with a certain degree of skill" (*Manila Times*, September 4, 1950).

Magsaysay's relative success in demobilizing provincial politicos' private armies represented a significant bite out of the oligarchs' power. Not only did this limit their capacity to control their own agricultural workforce; it threatened to weaken their stranglehold on local voters as well. While Edward Lansdale, Magsaysay's American sponsor, was lukewarm toward suggestions that combating the Huks would require land redistribution, he shared Magsaysay's view that the Huks had gained political mileage from electoral fraud and violence. Fearing a China-style communist takeover, Lansdale threatened to withhold American aid if electoral abuses were repeated in 1951.

Magsaysay's collaboration with the national Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and citizen observers ultimately produced "an unusual demonstration of how state power and social mobilization combined could be used successfully to intervene in the electoral process and make it more democratic by counteracting elite efforts at electoral manipulation" (Franco 2000: 121). The coercive institutions of the Philippine state left heavy footprints in this effort, as "[t]he armed forces were ordered to police the election, aided by 4,500 ROTC members called up for the purpose" (Hart 1953: 68). In short, Magsaysay's interest in a clean vote as a weapon in counter-insurgency won the day over provincial politicos' interest in winning reelection through any means necessary.

An especially intense "state–society confrontation" occurred between Magsaysay and Rafael Lacson, the sugar magnate and governor from the state of Negros Occidental. The defense minister's announcement that he would deploy troops to Lacson's bailiwick "to guard against political terrorism" elicited "vigorous objections" from the governor, who was clearly the main "terrorist" Magsaysay had in mind (*Daily Mirror* 10/4/51). In response, "President Quirino, following assurances from Governor Rafael Lacson that the Negros elections did not require the presence of Magsaysay's armed forces, ordered the redeployment of troops to

scattered areas." Yet Magsaysay outflanked the president, as "despite Quirino's orders, election day found armed units in the very towns specifically ordered by the President to be vacated." The clean vote produced a resounding victory for the opposition, and leaders of Quirino's party demanded that Magsaysay "be fired for facilitating the repudiation of the party at the polls" (*Manila Times*, November 16, 1951).

Magsaysay managed to retain his post, and to win the presidency in 1953. Similar state intervention into local electoral administration assured another relatively free and fair national election in 1953, simultaneously striking blows for both accountable and effective governance at the national level. Magsaysay's successful disbanding of provincial civilian guards and sweeping reorganization of the Philippine military proved to be his most notable accomplishments as a state-builder:

> The successful campaign by President Magsaysay against the Huk insurgency had the effect of establishing the authority of the central government over the civilian guards of provincial governors. In this sense, the armed forces' engagement in the insurgency campaign, as well as in other domestic peacekeeping functions, transformed it into an instrument that promoted the consolidation of central authority (Doronilla 1992: 139).

In the final analysis, "the administration of Pres. Ramon Magsaysay fell short of reshaping the state into an autonomous, efficient, and coherent apparatus that could move the country away from oligarchic control" (Abinales 2000: 117). Low levels of autonomy and infrastructural power have been mutually reinforcing, as the oligarchs who have captured the state are the same figures opposing more vigorous central intervention in local, rural politics. State resolve to command the countryside faded as the Huk threat fizzled. "With the collapse of the Huk rebellion by 1954, the only incentive for central authorities to mobilize state resources against regional authoritarian elites was removed" (Franco 2000: 123). Yet the examples of harmonious convergence between state-building and democratization processes during the 1951 and 1953 elections suggest that the two goals can be pursued simultaneously, especially when robust mass politics gives national elites strong incentive to overcome parochial elites' resistance to the imposition of competitive elections.

Competitive Elections and Infrastructural Power beyond Southeast Asia

The electoral process and the state-building process have not been as incompatible in Southeast Asia as one might think from the nominal covariation of state power and regime type in the region. Competitive elections have facilitated state-building in the region when they have stimulated either (1) the formation of stronger mass political parties, or a more vigorous state commitment to (2) citizen registration, or (3) the imposition of centralized authority over societal strongmen.

Whether elections actually catalyzed such institutional responses depended on how *competitive*, not necessarily how *democratic* those elections were. The two are related, but not coterminous. "Competitive authoritarian" regimes hold relatively competitive elections, even as they systematically suppress the effective social organization of political opposition (Levitsky and Way 2002). This was what happened in Indonesia's national elections of 1971, and in Malaysia's elections ever

since 1969. More encouraging is that elections seem to have spurred state-building efforts in more legitimately democratic elections in the Philippines in the early 1950s, and in Malaysia before its authoritarian turn. In all of these instances, it was essential that electoral competition was accompanied by significant mass mobilization in the wider polity. This suggests that it would be unfair to conclude that mass democracy has undermined state-building in Thailand and the Philippines. The fairer conclusion would be that mass democracy has yet to be tried.

How generalizable are these mechanisms linking competitive elections, robust mass politics, and state infrastructural power? While this is obviously a question for deeper research, I am prepared to argue tentatively that the arguments presented here can be extended both backward and forward in time. Looking historically, Elizabeth Sanders (1999) has traced American state development from 1877–1917 to robust agrarian mass politics. The move to progressive income taxes that revolutionized the American fiscal system occurred because "the agrarians united to extract their pound of flesh from the industrial elite" (Sanders 1999: 228). More broadly, Sanders argues that the initial building of "administrative capability" in the United States in the late nineteenth century was "in response to the demands of politically mobilized farmers" (ibid., 1). Walter Korpi similarly traces the origins of Western Europe's highly developed welfare states in this period to conservative elites' efforts at "counteracting working-class based collective mobilization," as seen in the threatening rise of new socialist parties and labor confederations (Korpi 2004: 7). Consistent with the analysis above, Sanders and Korpi suggest that state capacity to provide broad-based public goods in the West could emerge through Malaysia-style *defeats* of the radical left, not just Kerala-style leftist *victories* (e.g., Huber and Stephens 2001).[12]

Looking at the postcolonial world, prospects for state-building through competitive national elections seem mixed. In an age of televised election campaigning, it seems highly unlikely that elections of *any* sort can still spark the kind of territorially encompassing party-building witnessed in Malaysia in the 1950s. Yet recent research on Eastern Europe suggests that democratization can enhance state-building when accompanied by "robust party competition" (Grzymala-Busse 2007: 3; O'Dwyer 2004: 521), which discourages elected leaders from using the state as a feeding trough for allies instead of an apparatus for effective governance. Whether democratic governments in this region go beyond sealing off the state from predatory interests and actually extend the state's infrastructural writ seems to depend not simply on robust *party competition*, but robust *mass politics*. As Gerald Easter (2002) has shown, it was the continued mass mobilization of workers, farmers, and state employees in postcommunist Poland that pressed elected governments to replace regressive wage taxes with a progressive, direct income tax. This put the Polish state on relatively firm fiscal footing for the governance challenges of simultaneous regime and market transition.

There is also room for optimism that competitive elections amid robust mass politics might induce state infrastructural expansion through citizen registration and electoral administration. In his recent study of "warlord democratization" in contemporary post-

[12] Quantitative confirmation of the continuing importance of robust mass politics in contemporary democracies can be found in tests by Lee (2007), who finds that labor-led civic mobilization is strongly correlated with effective and transparent governance across high- and middle-income countries.

civil war settings, Leonard Wantchekon has shown how "a situation of anarchy can generate political order and democracy simultaneously" (Wantchekon 2004: 31). Merely holding elections in post-conflict settings can require the disarmament or at least the defanging of scattered militias: hence "a key component of the democratization process in a war-torn country such as El Salvador has been the demilitarization of the warring factions and the reconstruction of the state," Wantchekon argues. "The electoral process was a tool for the creation of political order" (ibid., 18).

El Salvador does not seem to be an isolated example of this. In cases as diverse as Cambodia (1993), Mozambique (1994), Ghana (1996), Somaliland (2002), Afghanistan (2004), Iraq (2004), Liberia (2005), and Congo (2006), competitive national elections have provided an impetus for revitalized citizen registration practices and the suppression of armed non state actors. Founding elections yielded Mozambique's "first truly comprehensive data base on a host of vital statistics on the population" (Alden 1995: 121). New forms of accountability and governance have also co-emerged in Somaliland: "The formation of elected district councils that recognize the authority of the government in Hargeisa, and pay taxes to it, reinforced the internal legitimacy of Somaliland's political institutions and leaders and helped to consolidate the boundaries of Somaliland" (Abokor and Kibble 2006: 8). Reports from Afghanistan, Congo, and Liberia suggest that voter registration provided many citizens in those stateless lands with personal identification cards for the first time in their lives.

None of this should minimize the monumental challenges of meshing state-building with democracy in the most ungoverned corners of the world. The ubiquity of foreign intervention in post-civil war elections seems liable to short-circuit endogenous processes of state formation, much as foreign aid and oil revenues can forestall the extension of state infrastructural power for purposes of taxation. If a UN field officer can ensure a fair election by putting temporary inkblots on voters' fingers, why train local bureaucrats to do the hard political and administrative work of creating permanent records of citizens in remote stretches of impoverished lands? Speaking more abstractly, Madison's dilemma is simply a permanent feature of political life. Rather than just establishing correlations that limit the range of factors probabilistically covarying with state infrastructural power, we need to think creatively about mechanisms through which democratic politics might strengthen rather than debilitate Leviathan.

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