Shadows from the Past: Party System Institutionalization in Asia

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Allen Hicken¹ and Erik Martinez Kuhonta²

Abstract
This article explains variation in levels of party system institutionalization in Asia by testing available data against several major hypotheses in the literature. The authors make three contributions to the literature on party system institutionalization. First, this study finds that historical legacies are a crucial variable affecting current levels of party system institutionalization. In particular, the immediate postwar period was the crucible from which institutionalized party systems in Asia developed. Second, the authors claim that for a significant number of institutionalized party systems, historical legacies are rooted in some element of authoritarianism, either as former authoritarian parties or as semidemocratic regimes. Third, precisely because authoritarianism has played an important role in the origins of institutionalized party systems, the authors argue that the concept of institutionalization needs to be strictly separated from the concept of democracy.

Keywords
political parties, party system institutionalization, institutions, path dependence, Asia

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A voluminous literature in comparative politics has now emerged on party and party system institutionalization (Bruhn, 1997; Coppedge, 1994; Dix, 1992; Huntington, 1968; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2001; McGuire, 1997; Mainwaring, 1999; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Mainwaring & Torcal; 2006; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007; Moser, 2001; Randall & Svasand, 2002; Roberts, 1998; Stoner-Weiss, 2001). Tracing its roots to Samuel Huntington, this literature was spurred by an attempt to explain why party institutionalization was necessary for establishing political stability. Without institutionalized parties, polities in the developing world would be unable to temper and channel social demands. Institutionalized parties therefore provided the organizational structure within which to incorporate and stabilize social demands and thereby ensure effective governance. Since Huntington’s pioneering work, the study of party institutionalization has centered more on its effect on democratic consolidation. When parties are institutionalized, these later studies argue, there is more accountability, greater stability of interests, and more broadly targeted policy programs—all of which augur well for democracy. By contrast, in democracies lacking institutionalized parties, party politics is often simply an arena for charismatic or clientelistic politicians to gain power without any real advancement of the public good. Institutionalized parties therefore are a crucial pillar in the functioning and consolidation of emerging democracies.

The substantive move away from Huntington’s emphasis on party institutionalization as a basis for order also entailed an important analytical shift away from a focus on parties qua organizations to party systems. In a context in which democracies tend to be prevalent and researchers are concerned with the relationship between parties and democracies, institutionalization is necessarily analyzed through the party system since it is within the party system that democratic competition occurs. When analyzing party systems in terms of institutionalization, we are looking primarily at the stability of patterned interactions among parties, rather than at parties as organizational behemoths. Institutionalized parties, nonetheless, still play an important role in party system institutionalization, since the stability of interparty competition must necessarily depend on the presence of cohesive and ideological organizations creating a setting for patterned electoral contests. In fact, as our research shows not only are institutionalized parties crucial for explaining party system institutionalization; semidemocratic or authoritarian parties are particularly important in shaping party system institutionalization.

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

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

We focus in this article on party system institutionalization in part because it is easier to quantify and measure institutionalization across competitive party systems. In doing so, we build directly on Mainwaring and Scully’s study of party system institutionalization in Latin America. However, we diverge from their analytical framework in two important ways. More broadly, the shifts we make signal our own differences with the general trend in the literature. First, we believe that Mainwaring and Scully’s definition of party system institutionalization conflates democracy with institutionalization. In their analytic framework, Mainwaring and Scully create a separate residual category, hegemonic systems, for two of their cases, Mexico and Paraguay, that are not fully democratic. Instead of keeping Mexico and Paraguay within the general framework of institutionalization, they are culled away and evaluated based on regime type. This blurs the distinction between institutionalization and democratic
consolidation. Institutionalization is no longer a variable that can strengthen democratic consolidation; it appears instead to stand for democratic competition. When the authors write that “[Mexico and Paraguay] . . . are still evolving from authoritarian hegemonic party systems, and competitive party systems have not yet been well institutionalized” (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995, p. 20), “institutionalized” becomes equated with a democratic process—competitive party systems—rather than a distinct process in which organizations gain value and stability.3

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

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

It is important to foreground our three analytical contributions in this article. First, our analysis of factors affecting party system institutionalization shows that historical legacies are a crucial variable affecting current levels of party system institutionalization. Second, we argue that for a significant number of institutionalized party systems, historical legacies are rooted in some element of authoritarianism, either as former authoritarian parties or as semidemocratic regimes. Third, precisely because authoritarianism has played an important role in the origins of institutionalized party systems, we argue that
the concept of institutionalization needs to be strictly separated from the concept of democracy. Eliding institutionalization with democracy inherently creates “conceptual misinformation,” but it is especially analytically problematic for explaining the origins of current levels of party institutionalization, precisely because authoritarianism has historically been important in helping to create institutionalized party systems in new democracies.

What Variables Explain Party System Institutionalization?

Before examining hypotheses about Asian party system institutionalization, we begin by looking at various explanatory hypotheses for the general causes of party and party system institutionalization. These hypotheses form the basis from which to subsequently test the factors that matter in explaining party institutionalization in Asia. Scholars have proposed a variety of hypotheses for explaining the causes of party and party system institutionalization: (a) the passage of time, (b) timing or a period effect, (c) the characteristics of the prior regime, (d) political institutions, and (e) political cleavages.4 We review each of these categories in this section. However, from the outset it is important to note that despite the recent flurry of work on institutionalization in authoritarian settings, most of this work focuses on the causes of party system institutionalization in new and developing democracies. The literature we build on is therefore concentrated on democracies, but it is precisely our intention in this article to move this literature toward a greater appreciation of nondemocratic variables and settings.

The Passage of Time

A number of scholars claim that institutionalization is largely a function of time. Voters’ attachment to parties, information about the relative strength and position of various political parties, party organizational structures, and knowledge about institutional incentives all take time to develop (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Converse, 1969). Although it is plausible to believe this hypothesis applies equally to democratic and nondemocratic settings, the empirical evaluations have exclusively relied on data from democracies. The evidence for this hypothesis is thus far mixed. Tavits (2005) and Lupu and Stokes (2007) find that volatility declines and party identities strengthen the more time a country spends under democracy. Likewise, Roussias (2007) and Tavits and Annus (2006) find evidence for better strategic coordination by voters and candidates over time in new democracies.5 By contrast, Mainwaring and Torcal

**Timing or Period Effect**

The second hypothesis focuses on the timing of elections relative to expansion of suffrage and citizenship. The key distinction is between countries that transitioned to democracy in the first and second waves versus those that transitioned later. In early democracies, political parties played a lead role as mobilizing institution by, for example, incorporating new citizens into the political system and pushing for an expansion of suffrage and other rights for those citizens (Colomer, 2001; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007). This forged strong links between parties and the citizens they helped to mobilize. By contrast, in later democracies, the switch to competitive elections and new party formation was preceded by, or occurred in conjunction with, the adoption of universal suffrage. As a result, the kinds of links and networks that characterized early democratizers never developed. What is more, with the advent of mass communication, specifically television, parties and candidates had a means of mobilizing large numbers of voters without the costly investment in party organization or grassroots networks. In short, given the structural differences of late democratizers, party institutionalization is less likely to occur than in earlier periods, ceteris paribus. In support of this argument a number of scholars demonstrate that parties, voters, and party systems in third-wave democracies are qualitatively different from those in advanced industrial democracies (Coppedge, 1998; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007).

**The Nature of the Prior Regime**

A number of scholars argue that the characteristics of the pretransition authoritarian or semiauthoritarian regime help shape the party system in democratic periods. A number of authors explore the relationship among the length of authoritarian interludes, voter attachment to party labels, and the stability of the party system. Some find that the longer the authoritarian interludes the more destabilizing the effects on the party system (Lupu & Stokes, 2007; Remmer, 1985). Others argue that there is no straightforward link between the duration of authoritarian regimes and party system instability (Wittenberg, 2006). Geddes and Frantz (2007), for example, examine the effect of authoritarian interludes on the evolution of party systems in Latin America. They
find that the types of strategies employed by dictators cast a long shadow. Where authoritarian leaders simply repress or outlaw parties, voter loyalties remain intact (even over many years) and those same parties reemerge when democratic elections return. However, if, in addition to outlawing existing parties, dictators create one or more new parties, then the new parties tend to attract candidates and supporters at the expense of the traditional parties. When democratic elections return these new parties initially dominate, but the party system then tends to fragment as the artificially created new parties fall apart.

One question not explored in the existing literature is the link between institutionalization under electoral authoritarian regimes and the nature of the party system after a democratic transition. As we noted in the introduction to this article, institutionalization can occur under either authoritarian or democratic regimes. We hypothesize that party system institutionalization is more likely where there was a high degree of institutionalization under the previous electoral authoritarian or semidemocratic government.

**Political Institutions**

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

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

Some authors hypothesize that presidentialism hinders the emergence of strong, cohesive parties (Lijphart, Rogowski, & Weaver, 1993), and by extension we might expect the same for party system institutionalization. However, evidence from studies of cross-country differences on some dimensions of
institutionalization (i.e., volatility) has not revealed a significant empirical connection between presidentialism and institutionalization (Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007).

**Political Cleavages**

A number of studies trace the origins of strong party–society links to characteristics of the social structure (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Chhibber, 2001; Desai, 2002; Dix, 1989; Kalyvas, 1996; Kitschelt, 1994; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986; Sartori, 1969). Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue that Western European party systems reflect the shared preferences among subsets of voters (social cleavages). Politicized cleavages—whether based on class, religion, or urban–rural differences—gave rise to political parties that (a) had deep roots within cleavage groups and (b) had distinct, collective identities. In more recent work Birnir (2007) finds that strong parties and stable party systems are more likely to emerge in ethnically divided societies. In short, this literature suggests that where the party system is not built on societal cleavages, whether in democratic or nondemocratic settings, party system institutionalization should be slower to develop, and we should expect a lower level of institutionalization, ceteris paribus.

There are a number of reasons why party systems often may not be rooted in societal cleavages. To the extent countries are relatively homogenous there may be a lack of deep-seated cleavages around which to organize. This of course is relatively rare, particularly in the developing world. A more likely situation is one in which there are a variety of cleavages, but those cleavages are crosscutting (Selway, 2011). Crosscutting cleavages diminish the opportunity for forming viable parties rooted in particular cleavage groups. Instead, multigroup, catchall parties become a more appealing option. These crosscutting catchall parties are the goal of some party system engineers because of their potential for moderation and conflict amelioration. However, the cost of moderation is perhaps greater distance and weaker links between political parties and some voters.

Party systems may also be divorced from societal cleavages not because of any feature of the social structure but because of the political system. For example, governments may explicitly or implicitly ban certain types of cleavage-based parties. Restrictive electoral rules may make certain cleavage-based political parties unviable (Amorim-Neto & Cox, 1997; Clark & Golder, 2006). Ethnically based parties may be forced by law to enter into alliance with other parties. Such engineering attempts are common in Asia (Hicken, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Reilly, 2007).
Some Preliminary Tests of Party System Institutionalization in Asia

We now turn our attention toward measuring institutionalization in Asia and testing the extent to which these general hypotheses hold in Asian cases. As an estimate of the degree of institutionalization we use one of the most commonly used indicators—the measure of electoral volatility. Electoral volatility is a measure of the stability or volatility of the party system from election to election—the degree to which there is variation in aggregate party vote shares from one election to another. Where there is a stable pattern of interparty competition and where parties have strong links with voters, we expect to see the same sets of parties receiving consistent levels of support from election to election, reflected in a low volatility score. High levels of electoral volatility, on the other hand, can reflect both instability in voters’ party preferences from election to election and elite-driven changes to the party system such as the creation of new parties, the death of existing parties, party switching, party mergers, and party splits (Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007). Electoral volatility is not without its problems—tracing party vote shares can prove extremely complicated where there are lots of party mergers or splits. Where possible we follow Mainwaring and Zoco’s rules about how to treat such events. More fundamentally, electoral volatility does not allow us to differentiate the sources of instability—fickle voters or ephemeral parties. In future work we hope to supplement electoral volatility with other data, such as public opinion polls and information about party creation and durations.

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

It bears emphasizing that by focusing on electoral volatility we are using only one of potentially four or five indicators to measure institutionalization. We should recall that beyond electoral volatility of the party system, one could also conceivably measure other variables, such as the cohesive-ness, adaptability, complexity, social rootedness, and autonomy of political parties. We follow the literature’s convention and focus on electoral volatility because we are interested in party system institutionalization and because it is simpler to operationalize and measure quantitatively compared to other possible variables.
Table 1 compares the average electoral volatility of Asian states compared to states in other regions. We include in our calculations states in Northeast Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia that have experienced relatively free and fair elections as well as those countries where opposition parties are allowed to compete and win seats in regular elections but the electoral playing field is tilted heavily against the opposition (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia). We do not include those polities where elections are not regularly held or where autonomous opposition parties are banned outright (e.g., Vietnam, Myanmar, China). Although by Huntington’s definition the communist parties in China and Vietnam are institutionalized parties, for the purposes of measuring electoral volatility, which must include at the very least semicompetitive elections, we cannot include them. For informational purposes we also include an estimate for all of Asia excluding the semidemocratic cases (Asia II). A full list of the countries we include is displayed in Table 2.

Table 1. Electoral Volatility Across the Globe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Electoral volatility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia I</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia II (without Cambodia, Singapore, and post-1971 Malaysia)</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western democracies (including Australia and New Zealand)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe and former Soviet states</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations; Hicken (2008); Mainwaring and Zoco (2007).

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Viewed through the prism of electoral volatility, Asian party systems are on par with those in Latin America—both regions have volatility scores between 24 and 26. By contrast, Asian states appear more institutionalized than their counterparts in Eastern Europe and Africa. Not surprisingly, Western democracies exhibit the lowest level of electoral volatility.

As useful as comparing across regions may be, Asia’s regional average masks a high degree of variation among Asian states. Table 2 displays the electoral volatility scores for each of the countries in our sample. For countries that experienced an authoritarian interlude (i.e., Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand) we estimate separate volatility scores for the periods before and after such interludes. The countries with the most stable party system and highest degree of institutionalization are the dominant party regimes in the region—Malaysia post-interregnum and Singapore. If we exclude these two states,
average volatility ranges from a low of 16.2 in Taiwan to a high of 38.4 in Thailand I.\textsuperscript{14}

Although the relatively small sample size does not allow us to systematically test the hypotheses described in the last section we can examine the extent to which these data are consistent with those hypotheses. Beginning with the first, simplest hypothesis—party system institutionalization is a matter of time—we would expect level of institutionalization to increase with the number of uninterrupted elections. There is mixed support for this hypothesis. Those countries that have longer electoral histories do have lower volatility scores. The average volatility scores for countries with more than five uninterrupted elections is 18.8 (21.2 if we exclude Malaysia II and Singapore) versus 29.1 for countries with five or fewer elections under their belt.

Volatility scores also appear at first glance to decline over time within a given country. For all but two cases the volatility score of the most recent election is lower than the score from the first two elections (Table 2). However, the picture is less clear if we look more carefully at changes in volatility in each country. Figure 1 compares changes in electoral volatility over the first seven elections within each. The top portion of the figure displays the volatility scores for the countries in Southeast Asia, and the bottom portion includes those

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Electoral Volatility in Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations; Hicken (2008).
from Northeast Asia and South Asia. Once again for countries that experienced a clear authoritarian interlude (the Philippines in 1972, Malaysia in 1969, and Thailand in 1991) we have broken the series into pre- and post-authoritarian elections. No clear downward trend is evident from the figures—contrary to the time hypothesis. It is true that in nearly every case there is a sharp drop in electoral volatility between the second and third elections—perhaps suggesting greater institutionalization of the party system.  However, beyond the third election the story is more complex. In some cases volatility continues to fall (pre-martial law Philippines), in some it rises (Taiwan and Malaysia I),

Figure 1. Electoral Volatility Over Time
in some it seems to stabilize at a low level (Singapore and Malaysia II), and in others there is no discernable pattern (Japan and Thailand post-1991). At the very least the passage of more elections does not appear to be inexorably linked with greater institutionalization, consistent with the findings of Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) and Reich (2001, 2004).

Turning to our second hypothesis, the issue of timing or a period effect seems to matter. The data in Table 2 are consistent with an argument that late democratizers are systematically different from early democratizers. The average volatility score for those countries that democratized during the third wave is 27.3, compared to 19.9 for countries that transitioned to democracy during the second wave. This suggests then, as Mainwaring and Zoco point out, that different periods of democratization affect the stability of party systems. However, if we look closely at the countries during the second wave of democratization, not all of them are fully democratic. In fact, two of the most highly institutionalized party systems, Malaysia and Singapore, are only partially democratic. Thus, it is not necessarily clear that the issue at hand in terms of differences in electoral volatility is related to aspects of democratization, such as mass mobilization.

Except for Taiwan’s KMT, all of the party systems that are highly institutionalized emerged in the postwar period. This suggests strongly that there may be a period effect at work. We need to assess carefully, however, what kind of period effect may matter here. As our testing of the next hypothesis shows and as the conclusion elaborates, elements of authoritarianism may be relevant in explaining patterns of institutionalization.

We find support for our third hypothesis that institutionalization is more likely where the ruling party under the previous authoritarian regime was highly institutionalized (Table 3). Recall Huntington’s four criteria for party institutionalization under authoritarianism: adaptability, coherence, complexity, and autonomy. The ruling parties in three countries meet these criteria—the KMT in Taiwan, the CPP in Cambodia, and Golkar in Indonesia. The post-transition volatility scores for these states are indeed somewhat lower than those

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutionalized authoritarian party system?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (without Cambodia)</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations.
for the rest of the region—22.7 versus 24. (If less than democratic Cambodia is excluded the difference is even larger.) Furthermore, in two other party systems that can be classified as semidemocratic, we find the highest scores of party system institutionalization: 10.7 in post-1969 Malaysia and 14.9 in Singapore. It is especially instructive that Malaysia’s average electoral volatility score fell after 1969—from 30.6 to 10.7—precisely when it became a more closed regime.

Note, however, that longer authoritarian interludes, particularly those where the authoritarian regime tries to create a new party while repressing existing parties, seem more disruptive to the party system than shorter interventions. This is consistent with findings elsewhere in the party and transitions literature (Geddes & Frantz, 2007; Lupu & Stokes, 2007). What this suggests is that although some element of coercion may have a positive impact on party system institutionalization, it is not the case that simply establishing authoritarian parties leads in the long run to more stable party systems. Under Marcos’s 14-year rule existing political parties were repressed and a new state-backed party, the KBL, was created. Since democratic elections returned to the Philippines in 1986 we have seen a much higher rate of electoral volatility than prior to martial law. By contrast, the shorter, less severe, authoritarian interludes in Thailand and Malaysia caused less disruption to the existing party system. Thailand’s volatility rises modestly in the wake of the military’s year-long intervention, in part reflecting the rise and quick demise of the military backed party—Samakkhi Tham. Malaysia’s party system exhibits more stability after the 2-year emergency period. This reflects the fact that most of the opposition parties initially joined the Barisan Nasional (BN)—a repackaged version of the Alliance—once elections returned. It is also indicative of a political and electoral environment more heavily biased toward BN after the crisis.

Our fourth hypothesis on institutions receives little support (Table 4). Government type appears to have no bearing on volatility. Consistent with existing empirical studies the volatility scores for parliamentary and presidential/hybrid systems are not significantly different. Turning to the electoral system, the expectation was that proportional representation (PR) systems would exhibit lower volatility, unless PR produces a high level of political fragmentation. Instead, we see that systems that use proportional electoral rules exhibit higher volatility than either majoritarian or mixed-member systems. (Of the two countries that use PR Indonesia does have a high degree of fragmentation, but Cambodia does not.) Obviously, our ability to generalize from this finding is limited by the fact that only two countries in the region employ a
straightforward proportional electoral system, and both have held only a couple of elections.

Finally, we turn to the connection between political cleavages and institutionalization. The existing literature suggests that volatility should be lower where (a) there are significant politicized cleavages and (b) political parties reflect those cleavages. Table 5 displays the estimates of ethnic fractionalization (EF) scores and ethno-religious crosscuttingness alongside the volatility scores for the countries in our sample (Fearon, 2003). One possible implication of the

Table 4. Institutions and Electoral Volatility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional hypothesis: Electoral system</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majoritarian</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(without Singapore and Malaysia II)</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed member</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional hypothesis: Government type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(without Singapore, Malaysia II, Cambodia)</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential/hybrid</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ calculations.

Table 5. Ethnic Cleavages and Electoral Volatility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic fractionalization</th>
<th>Ethnic-religious crosscuttingness</th>
<th>Electoral volatility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fearon (2003); Selway (2011); authors’ calculations.
cleavage argument is that higher levels of fractionalization should be correlated with less volatility. However, this simple version of the argument is not supported by the data. Regardless of how we divide the sample EF does not appear to be systematically associated with less (or more) volatility. There is some support, however, for the argument that where cleavages crosscut each other (and where nonethnic, catchall parties are thus more likely) the attachment to party label is less strong. The three least crosscut societies—Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Singapore—have significantly lower volatility scores compared to the more crosscut societies in Asia (average volatility score of 16.4 vs. 24.2). There also is some evidence that party systems stabilize more quickly in divided societies—the decline in electoral volatility between the second and third election is greater in countries with an EF score greater than .40 compared to those with a score less than .40. However, this pattern does not hold if we compare the changes in volatility beyond the third election.

These findings should not come as a surprise to students of Asian political institutions. Asian governments exhibit a strong preference for political institutions that encourage aggregation and moderation across cleavage groups, rather than the articulation of those divisions (Hicken, 2008; Reilly, 2007). As a result, even in divided societies ethnic parties are relatively rare. Of the countries in this sample, cleavage-based parties are prevalent only in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and to a lesser extent Indonesia and India. The average volatility score for these four countries is indeed lower than the average score for the rest of the region, but only when we include semidemocratic Malaysia II.

**Conclusions**

At a theoretical level, our study has drawn the following conclusions about the causes of party system institutionalization in Asia. First, in terms of the passage of time the data do not allow us to conclude decisively that more elections necessarily lead to greater institutionalization. Second, we find no relationship between electoral institutions and government type with institutionalization. Third, we do not find a strong association between political cleavages and party institutionalization, although we do find that societies with overlapping cleavages have higher levels of institutionalization.

Our strongest finding has to do with institutional legacies. Under both democratic and authoritarian regimes, we find that parties that were institutionalized at an earlier point of time, in general, tend to maintain a high level of institutionalization relative to those parties that emerged later. These countries with the highest level of party system institutionalization are Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and Sri Lanka. Except for Taiwan, these parties...
were all born in the postwar period. The argument that a prior period of institutional development affects current levels of party system institutionalization is in line with other studies on the causes of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007). What this points to then from a theoretical perspective is the importance of path dependence in the study of party institutionalization. Historical developments during a critical juncture may have long-term effects on institutional form.

Recent research on political parties ratifies our argument concerning institutional legacies. In his work on states and regimes, as well as on single-party rule, Benjamin Smith has shown that the durability of states, regimes, and single parties can be explained in terms of earlier processes of institutional formation and coalition building. Where a party, regime, or state faced significant opposition and lack of easy access to rents prior to the initiation of economic development, the institution was more likely to become durable and institutionalized precisely because structural constraints necessitated greater institutional capacity. On the other hand, where political institutions were not faced with significant opposition and had easy access to rents, they were less likely to expend their resources on institution building and were therefore more vulnerable to collapse when a crisis struck (Smith, 2005, 2007). A sophisticated study by Dan Slater on state, regime, and party formation in Southeast Asia also gives significant emphasis to historical timing. Slater argues that the period between World War II and the onset of bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes was the critical juncture in which current patterns of state and party formation were molded (Slater, 2010). Our analysis of party system institutionalization in Southeast Asia therefore confirms what other researchers are finding: institutional capacities, whether of parties, states, regimes, or party systems, can be explained through long-term historical processes.

Our second conclusion concerns the specific character of these institutional legacies. It is here were we diverge sharply from some major studies of party system institutionalization. Although Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) emphasize that “the critical determinant of electoral competition is when democracy was born, not how old it is” (p. 171), we argue that the relationship between parties and democratization is not the key to explaining the relevance of specific time periods. The evidence from Asia indicates that the three most highly institutionalized party systems were not shaped under particularly democratic conditions. All three party systems carry with them significant authoritarian legacies. Singapore’s party system developed through sharp repression of the left even though some degree of electoral competition was still allowed. Malaysia’s party system was initially more democratic in its incipient stage in the late 1950s, but after 1969 it became decisively more closed. Both of
these party systems, although competitive, are rooted in highly illiberal structures and processes that undermine the opposition’s ability to defeat the incumbent. Taiwan, the country with the third highest level of party system institutionalization, was for much of its modern history ruled by a deeply coercive party–state apparatus, the KMT. The electoral volatility scores for two other party systems in which hegemonic parties were dominant in the past, Cambodia and Indonesia, are also relatively lower than the average for Asia. These two party systems are not highly institutionalized, but they are also not highly fragmented and volatile. What this suggests then is that party systems in Asia are institutionalized because of some constraints on competition, whether these constraints were forged in the past or continue to structure the party system. Therefore, in contrast to Mainwaring and Zoco, the Asian cases point not to mobilizing effects of parties during the early stages of democracy but to the capacity of dominant parties to assert themselves and constrain the opposition while in power. We thus argue that structural constraints at an early point in time have a long-term impact on institutional configurations and capacities.23

However, in contrast to authors who claim that the persistence of authoritarian regimes is a function of strong states and parties, we argue that it is authoritarian or semidemocratic parties that have a causal effect on the characteristics of party systems (Brownlee, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Slater, 2010). In other words, we reverse the causal argument relating institutions to authoritarianism, positing that coercive structures tend to reinforce stable party systems. At least for the three most institutionalized party systems in Asia, authoritarian or semidemocratic parties play a fundamental role in structuring and solidifying the party system. Our research then provides somewhat of a troubling conclusion: To get highly institutionalized party systems it may be necessary to have some form of an authoritarian party in power at an earlier point in time. A highly institutionalized party system—an institutional arrangement that analysts consider valuable for democratic consolidation and policy continuity—may emerge from the shell of undemocratic politics. We should emphasize that this is not the case for all five of the highly institutionalized party systems in our study, but it is the case for the three with the highest scores.

Furthermore, where some degree of competition is allowed, hegemonic institutionalized parties can push the oppositional forces to also become more institutionalized.24 Although Smith emphasizes the causal impact of a strong opposition on regime durability, it is also possible that the dominant institution may help solidify the opposition, thereby in effect creating the foundations for an institutionalized party system once party competition is permitted. To compete
effectively against hegemonic institutionalized parties, the opposition must also establish cohesive and disciplined organizations. In Taiwan and Mexico, two newly democratizing countries that have long been characterized by dominant parties, the opposition parties are strong organizations, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), and the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), respectively. The opposition parties are able to mobilize voters through cohesive organizational structures, consistent ideologies, and regular linkages between party and society. In Malaysia, the opposition to United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the BN also tends to be relatively institutionalized. For example, the Islamic party, Parti Islam-se Malaysia (PAS), competes with UMNO toe-to-toe in the state of Kelantan in terms of organizational depth. It maintains numerous branches throughout the state and controls the vast majority of mosques as mobilizing sites. Throughout the state, the party’s offices are extremely visible. In Taiwan and Malaysia, the largest opposition parties have historically had a more stable vote share from election to election than the ruling party. Voters in these countries can clearly make a choice among parties with very distinct political agendas. This is not the case in some democratic countries, such as the Philippines and Thailand, where hegemonic parties have never played a role in the polity.

Our final conclusion is that precisely because of the importance of authoritarianism in shaping the party system, either historically or in the contemporary polity, institutionalization must be analyzed as a separate category from democracy. The problem with analyzing institutionalized party systems only through democratic lenses is that we occlude the possibility that authoritarianism in some guise may contribute to institutionalization. This was, after all, the implicit claim that underlay Huntington’s work—and that made it so contentious. By shifting the geographical emphasis toward Asia and away from Western party systems, where parties largely operate under a democratic framework, it becomes evident that party systems can possess very distinct institutional characteristics and legacies.

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Notes

1. Sartori (1976) provides a useful conceptual description of a party system qua system:

A party system is precisely the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition. That is, the system in question bears on the relatedness of parties to each other, on how each party is a function (in the mathematical sense) of the other parties and reacts, competitively or otherwise, to the other parties. (p. 44, emphasis original)


3. The problem of conflating institutionalization with democratic consolidation is particularly apparent in one of the indices used to assess party system institutionalization: legitimacy. For example, in the assessment of party system institutionalization, Mexico is given a low score (1.5) on the legitimacy variable (defined as the degree to which political actors accord legitimacy to the system), thereby reducing its aggregate institutionalization score. But given the Huntingtonian definition with which the authors begin their study, it is not clear how legitimacy is related to institutionalization. Legitimacy would appear to be less a characteristic of party system institutionalization than of democratic stability.

   One should also point out that a weakly institutionalized party system within a nominal democracy is not necessarily going to be more responsive or accountable than an institutionalized party system in a less democratic regime. This point must be emphasized because of the tendency among many scholars, and in this particular case in the work of Mainwaring and Scully, to assume that, ceteris paribus, democratic systems are naturally responsive whereas less democratic systems are not.

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

5. Also see Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg (2000).

6. Ibid.

7. In a similar manner, Hutchcroft and Rocamora (2003) trace the origins of weak parties in the Philippines to initiation of early elections in a political environment in which the central government was relatively weak.
8. Notice, for example, the rebirth of the Socialist Party in Chile following Pinochet’s departure.
9. Between these two extremes is the case where the dictator allies with a preexisting party.
10. Although existing work has mostly a unidirectional focus—looking at transitions from autocracy to democracy—it may be fruitful to reverse the arrow and consider how the characteristics of the party system in democratic periods shape the party systems (and dictator strategies) in succeeding authoritarian periods. For example, where there are strong ties between parties and voters, authoritarian elites may find it necessary to suppress existing parties and promote a new party. However, where strong attachments are absent leaders may be able to secure sufficient support for a new party without resorting to direct suppression and intimidation of existing parties. The creation of Golkar in Indonesia in the wake of the 1965 coup is a good example of the former, whereas the 1991 coup and subsequent creation of a military-backed party in Thailand seems to be a case of the latter.
11. As noted above, these parties often were the key mobilizers of underrepresented cleavages.
12. For example, regional parties are effectively banned in Indonesia, and class-based political parties have been excluded in much of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Although class-based parties have emerged throughout the postwar period in Southeast Asia, they have been routinely repressed, through a combination of authoritarian repression and external support driven by the cold war. In the late 1940s in Thailand, leading members of the leftist party based in the northeast, Sahachip, were systematically eliminated, whereas in the Philippines, the six elected members of the leftist Democratic Alliance were prevented from taking their seats in Congress. The Indonesian Communist Party, the largest outside mainland China, was annihilated following the 1965 coup.
13. In Singapore’s Group Representative Constituencies, party teams must be multi-ethnic, which effectively eliminates challenges from ethnically based opposition parties.
14. Cambodia post-1997 should also be viewed as a polity with circumscribed political competition.
15. The exceptions are Thailand I, Japan, and Taiwan. The volatility scores in each country increase slightly between the second and third election.
16. If we drop Cambodia, Singapore, and Malaysia II from the analyses (on the grounds that these polities are less than fully democratic), the score is 30.4 for third-wave democracies, and 20.9 for second-wave democracies.
17. We excluded Singapore and Malaysia II from our calculations given that there has been no democratic transition in either.
18. We tried the following: dividing the sample in half (between Thailand and Singapore); dividing the sample at an ethnic fractionalization (EF) score of .33;
dividing the same at an EF score of .50; excluding Malaysia II, Singapore, and Cambodia for each division.

19. These results hold whether or not we include Cambodia, Singapore, and Malaysia II.

20. For a debate about the extent to which voting in Indonesia reflects societal cleavages, see Dwight King (2003) and Liddle and Mujani (2004).

21. One can argue, however, that the KMT was reborn during this period as it gained new direction after it fled mainland China.

22. The recent methodological advances that have been made in thinking of politics through time should be useful for theorizing about these issues. See George and Bennett (2005); Pierson (2004); Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), especially the chapters by Hall and Thelen; Thelen (1999); and Collier and Collier (1991).

23. Smith’s work is again relevant here—this time, less in terms of historical processes as much as in terms of structural constraints. As Smith notes, it is the pressures from strong oppositions and lack of resources that compels elites to build institutions.

24. Reidl (2007) has argued similarly that democratic transitions that are more constrained tend to create more institutionalized party systems by compelling the opposition to respond to the incumbent as a cohesive structure.

25. Over the five elections between 1992 and 2004, the average change in vote share from elections is actually less for the opposition DPP than for the KMT (3.3 vs. 6.5 percentage points). Between 1974 and 2004, the average change in the vote share for PAS and the DAP is 2.5 and 4.1, compared to 7.4 for Barisan Nasional.

26. There are clearly other potential explanations for the strength of opposition parties within hegemonic or former hegemonic party systems. For example, social polarization may create sharp divisions among parties while solidifying the relationship between parties and their supporters. But it is also theoretically plausible that the struggle against a powerful institutionalized force may serve as a catalyst for invigorating the opposition and its supporters.

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