

Panel proposal

Clientelism across Southeast Asia: towards a comparative analysis

Long considered a pre-modern artifact destined to be swept away by modernization, political clientelism – the practice of exchanging political support for personal benefits – has proven resistant to economic development and democratization. A new wave of research from across Southeast Asia is highlighting the continued predominance of clientelistic practices as a means to garner votes, build party organizations and control the state apparatus. Such practices can now be arguably viewed as the norm rather than the exception across this region.

Nonetheless, while the comparative study of the formal dimensions of politics are major sub-fields within political science, the comparative study of clientelistic politics has hardly begun. Yet we know from available studies that clientelistic politics vary considerably across Southeast Asia. For example, clientelistic strategies differ in terms of the nature or types of brokers and networks that mediate the exchange between politicians and voters; some may be clan-based, while others may have an ethnic or religious dimension. These strategies also differ in terms of resources; some politicians engage mainly in vote buying using private resources, while others engage in a clientelistic distribution of public services or jobs. And they differ in terms of control over these resources – this control can be highly centralized or dispersed among competing political patrons.

This panel aims to bring together researchers working on clientelistic politics in different countries across Southeast Asia to foster the comparative study of patronage democracies. What is the character of clientelistic politics in different countries across Southeast Asia, and what similarities and differences can be observed? How can we explain these variations? Do these varied forms of clientelistic politics evolve over time? And what is the impact of the specific character of informal politics on the nature of elections, governance or democracy? Are some types of clientelist strategies or networks more stable, durable and successful than others? To address these questions, this panel invites both contributions that use close-up observations on clientelistic politics in specific contexts, as well as broad comparative studies. The aim of the panel is generate publications that further the comparative study of informal politics across Southeast Asia.

Proposed format: Double Panel

Conveners:

Ward Berenschot (KITLV Leiden)

James Scambary (Australian National University)

Confirmed Paper presenters:

Ward Berenschot (KITLV Leiden) on comparing patronage democracies

James Scambary (Australian National University) on East Timor

Edward Aspinall (Australian National University) on Indonesia
Nanking Choi (Leiden University) on Indonesia
Andreas Ufen (Giga, Hamburg) on Malaysia
Astrid Noren-Nillson (Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund
University) on Cambodia
Shihlun Allen Chen (Sun Yat-Sen University) on Cambodia
Rosanne Rutten (University of Amsterdam) on the Philippines