

Title:

Vigilante groups in Southeast Asia: new developments amid increasing political polarisation - methodological, practical and political challenges

Proposal for a panel at the 9th EuroSEAS conference at Oxford University

Conveners:

Tomáš Petru, Ph.D.

Oriental Institute

The Czech Academy of Sciences

Pod Vodárenskou věží 4

186 00 Praha 8, Czechia

tel.: +420 605 272 224

e-mail: petru.tomas@gmail.com; petru@orient.cas.cz

Wolfram Schaffar, Univ.-Prof. Dr.

Department of Development Studies

University of Vienna

Sensengasse 3, Stiege 2/2

1090 Wien, Austria

tel.: +43-1-4277-23906

e-mail: wolfram.schaffar@univie.ac.at

Gunnar Stange, Dr.

Institute of Population Geography and Demography

Universitätsstraße 7/5

1010 Wien, Austria

tel.: +43-1-4277-48 603

e-mail: gunnar.stange@univie.ac.at

Panel Description:

Increasing polarisation between antagonistic political camps, the rise of populist political leaders, and the rise of right-wing political forces are global phenomena. These tendencies are accompanied by increasing political violence - symbolic and verbal violence in political discourses, but also the use of physical violence as part of political strategies.

Southeast Asia is no exception. The establishment of an authoritarian military regime in Thailand, extra-judicial killings in the Philippines, rising communal violence in Myanmar but also the continuous rise of religious fundamentalist groups in Indonesia mirror this global tendency. Vigilante groups of different shapes, with different ideological backgrounds and various political strategies can be found all over Southeast Asia.

While the rise of vigilante groups in Southeast Asia is a dynamic and complex process that deserves academic attention, the study of such groups poses serious methodological and practical problems. Firstly, much of the social science methodology addressing political actors draws on social movement studies. Researchers focus on qualitative techniques, - participant observation,

biographical interviews - relying on personal relations with actors based on mutual respect and common perspectives. How can such methodologies be employed with activists whose discourses are often racist, extremist, or whose political strategies involve violence and are exclusive in nature? Secondly, in an atmosphere of political polarisation, social science research can have far reaching political consequences as shown in the debate concerning the documentary "The Act of Killing" and historic research of the 1965-1966 killings in Indonesia.

The panel welcomes papers addressing current research on vigilantism and vigilante groups in Southeast Asia in a situation of increasing political polarisation. Presenters are encouraged to explicitly address the methodological, practical and political challenges connected to and emerging from their research.

Panel format and participants:

The panel will be organised as a double session (2 x 90 min.) with space for 6 presenters. The convenors will present the following papers (in alphabetical order):

Tomáš Petrů:

Fatwas and regional by-laws as justification for Islamic vigilantism in Indonesia

Wolfram Schaffar:

Public mourning and witch-hunting: internet-based hyper-royalist vigilante groups in Thailand in the interregnum.

Gunnar Stange:

Vigilante, Freedom Fighter, or Intelligence Proxy? The Case of Din Minimi in Aceh, Indonesia