

## Sub-national conflict, clientelism and state formation

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Sub-national conflict and clientelist politics are widely acknowledged as significant obstacles to development and stability across South East Asia. Apart from separatist movements in southern Thailand and Myanmar, a number of sporadic, highly localised but endemic conflicts smoulder across the region, ranging from clan feuds in the Philippines, inter-village conflict in East Timor and the localised feuds in Indonesia sometimes referred to as *tawuran*. These low-level conflicts are often driven by local issues such as land or water disputes or inter-family tensions, yet may assume the appearance of broader narratives such as religion, ethnicity and political party rivalry. Dominant state centric portrayals of this conflict across the region commonly draw on reductive local/national or state presence/state absence dichotomies. Such scholarship rarely directly engages with the structure of political orders, the multiplicity of agents involved in violence and the presence of dynamic, subnational political relationships that give rise to distinct and recurring conflicts. At the same time, while it is often acknowledged that clientelist politics can lead to conflict, such as electoral violence, clientelist literature rarely directly engages with conflict. An emerging sub-national politics perspective, however, sees both conflict and clientelism as closely connected. This perspective, informed by political geography, explicitly interprets statehood and governance as a function of social relationships. Variations in informal governance and conflict intersect through competition over local power, state consolidation and political order. While a state might have low capacity or be ineffectual in terms of monopolising violence, they may nonetheless draw on a variety of sub-national alliances with non-state actors to organise communities politically or mobilise for violence. These non-state actors may in turn leverage these alliances for jobs, public goods or development assistance. Through this framework, conflict can be viewed as an integral process in state formation.

This panel convenes scholars working across the different scales and types of conflict, clientelist practices and governance in South East Asia. The aim is to compare and contrast the different ways in which sub-national conflict and actors articulate with national level formal and informal politics and actors. It seeks to answer the key questions of:

1. What are the links between clientelist politics and conflict?
2. How are local-level conflicts linked to broader national narratives?
3. What is the role of sub-national actors in these conflicts?

**Single session**