

Title: The liberal state and its discontents in Southeast Asia

(Panel of the CRISEA network)

Double session

Convener: Tomas Larsson, University of Cambridge, UK

Presenters: Lisandro Claudio, De La Salle University, Philippines
Andreas Ufen, GIGA, Germany
Iza Hussin, University of Cambridge, UK
Rémy Madinier, CASE-CNRS, France
Kristian Stokke, University of Oslo, Norway
Eugénie Mérieau, University of Göttingen, Germany

Discussant: Rachel Leow, University of Cambridge, UK

Brief description of the panel

It has been argued that Southeast Asia is in the vanguard of a worldwide move towards illiberal and authoritarian forms of politics. In recent years the region has notably witnessed a return to forms of strongman politics reminiscent of those that were common throughout the region in the 1960s. Yet Southeast Asian states frequently combine liberal and illiberal elements in unexpected and incongruous ways. With these developments in mind and using the liberal state as a conceptual focal point, this panel seeks to answer questions about how Southeast Asian political actors struggle to shape political institutions, policies, and practices in ways that have implications for the character of the state on dimensions of relevance to liberal concerns broadly conceived. How are popular and populist movements and leaders contesting rival conceptions of “the people” and its “others,” and with what consequences? How are political actors managing religious demands and challenges to the state’s authority and legitimacy? How far are civil society activists advocating universal values, often articulated in the liberal language of individual rights and freedoms, able to establish and defend islands of liberalism within otherwise undemocratic and illiberal regimes? To what extent are formal institutional arrangements that are (ostensibly) designed to safeguard the rights and freedoms of citizens, such as constitutional courts, able to fulfil such roles?

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