

Panel Organizers: Marco Bünthe, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg
Meredith Weiss, University at Albany, SUNY.

Topic: Civil Society and Democratic Decline in Southeast Asia

Although the number of formal democracies has gradually increased in Southeast Asia since the 1980s, scholars simultaneously note a disconcerting trend of democratic regression or failure to consolidate. Both Indonesia and the Philippines have experienced serious democratic backsliding, for instance, democracy in Myanmar has broken down completely, Thailand remains on a rollercoaster of democratization and autocratization, Malaysia seems unable to complete a democratic transition, and Cambodia's feeble democracy has collapsed into hardening autocracy. Academic analyses of these regimes and their status tend to highlight structural features such as elections, as well as leadership – particularly with the crowd-propelled ascent of populist leaders such as the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte. Such focal points home in on forces that might exert horizontal or vertical accountability: institutional and electoral checks on anti-democratic tendencies. Equally important, yet less commonly addressed, are sources of diagonal accountability, or how specifically such extra-institutional domains as civil society and media might help to interdict, or fail to take action against, democratic decline.

This double panel looks at how civil society in Southeast Asia has reacted to episodes of democratic backsliding and autocratization. Panelists will address specifically how civil societal organizations and actors – from NGOs, to trade unions, to student associations, to independent media – have reacted to executive aggrandizement, the hollowing out of electoral and judicial platforms, and shrinking safe space for autonomous political participation in those states in the region that have completed or attempted transitions to democracy: Panelists will explore the extent to which civil society acts as a firewall against democratic decline or autocratization in one Southeast Asian state, framing their investigation in theoretically engaged terms – including when other civil society organisations exert countervailing, *anti*-democratic pressure. In their papers, they will identify agents and mechanisms of diagonal accountability: how, and under what conditions, can civil societal actors succeed in halting or slowing processes of democratic erosion, and when do these efforts fail? And to what extent, and in what ways, can this sort of accountability supplement or stand in for debilitated institutional and electoral accountability mechanisms?

Chosen format: Double Panel

The double panel will include 2 chairs (the organizers), 6 papers and 1 discussant. So far, the following academics have agreed to present their papers:

Cambodia: Sokphea Young (University College, London)

Indonesia: William Hurst (Cambridge University, UK)

Malaysia: Azmil Tayeb (University Sains Malaysia) and Ilaiya Barathi Panneerselvam (Han Chiang University College Penang).

Myanmar: Nyi Nyi Kyaw (Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen)

Thailand: Janjira Sombatpoonsiri (GIGA Hamburg/Chulalongkorn University)

Philippines: Jasmin Lorch (University of Erfurt)

Discussant: Eva Hansson (Stockholm University)