

Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta (eds.), *Party System Institutionalization in Asia: Democracies, Autocracies, and the Shadows of the Past*, Cambridge University Press, 2015
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Editors Allen Hicken and Erik Martinez Kuhonta have assembled an informative and coherent volume on party system institutionalization (hereafter PSI) in Asia. PSI has now become a key term in the literature on party politics, most notably since the publication of Mainwaring and Scully (1995)¹ that elaborated the concept and applied it to Latin America's new democracies. Systems with high degrees of PSI are thought of as having the following four features: (1) a stable pattern of interparty competition, (2) parties are regarded as legitimate and necessary in the policy-making process, (3) a high degree of value infusion to party organizations among voters, and (4) a high degree of organizational routinization.

The book has an introductory chapter by the editors; its final chapter is by one of the foremost proponents of this concept, Scott Mainwaring. The rest of the chapters are 'arranged roughly from the more institutionalized to the less institutionalized party systems' (p. 17), that is, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, China, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines. While each country chapter has a different emphasis with regard to the four dimensions of PSI, the book shows an overall coherence as all chapters address the same research questions, namely, the nature of PSI and the factors influencing the degree of PSI.

Another coherent feature of this edited volume is that the country chapters, albeit to a variable degree, test five hypotheses on the determinants of PSI. These five hypotheses are identified and elaborated in the introduction by Hicken and Kuhonta, through their review of the existing literature. PSI becomes greater in the following contexts: (1) with the passage of time, (2) when parties are the major vehicle pushing for the expansion of suffrage and other rights, (3) when previous electoral authoritarianism had a high degree of PSI, (4) when permissive electoral rules, such as a proportional representation system, are in place, and (5) when the party system is built on societal cleavages. Applying these theories, the country chapters find that these existing hypotheses are not relevant to Asia in most cases. Instead, they demonstrate that there are few straightforward relations between the factors suggested in previous research and the degree of PSI.

In view of this null finding, the editors offer the following conclusions. First, in the case of Asia, PSI tends to be higher among parties institutionalized at an earlier point in time relative to those that emerged later. In particular, as exemplified by Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, ruling parties born in an authoritarian setting tend to exhibit a high level of PSI over the succeeding period. Second, PSI should be analyzed 'as a separate category from democracy' (p. 17). While previous studies of PSI have mostly focused on party systems in democracies, the editors claim that the analytical scope should be extended to non-democracies and cross-cut regime types.

The second conclusion is objected in Mainwaring's chapter, which reflects on the theories of PSI with regard to the Asian context. He argues that PSI in different party systems, which in effect means different regime categories, should be analyzed separately. More specifically, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand have one type of party system, namely, a competitive party system. This differs from the hegemonic party system found

¹ Mainwaring, S. and T. Scully (eds.) (1995) *Building Democratic Party Systems in Latin America*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

in Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore. China and Vietnam have a party system that can be called the party–state system, where the ruling party and the state apparatus fuse. For Mainwaring, it is important to distinguish these types of party systems because the implications of high (or low) PSI can differ depending on the type of party system. For example, in hegemonic party systems, a high degree of PSI works against democracy, whereas in the context of a competitive party system it can mean a consolidation of democracy. Hicken and Kuhonta, on the other hand, maintain that PSI in different types of party systems as well as political regimes should be analyzed within a single analytical scope.

I support Mainwaring's claim. In this light, this book could have been arranged differently. The country chapters could be ordered according to the three different types of party systems discussed above, in order to better highlight the systematic insights into the different meanings or effects of PSI. Having various types of party system is, indeed, an advantage that Asia can offer to comparative analyses. What are the similarities and differences across the different types of party systems with regard to the factors influencing the degree of PSI? How do the consequences of PSI differ across these types? Addressing these questions would contribute not only to the literature on PSI but also to the study of institutions under authoritarianism.

Some of the country chapters suggest a new factor affecting the level of PSI that has not been explored in previous research: international influence. In Indonesia, the environment of the Cold War provided a polarizing influence over inter-party competition as China helped Indonesia's Communist party (PKI) and the United States supported non-communist parties in the 1950s. Cambodia's ruling party, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), received disproportionately much more favorable treatment from the international community than other parties in the wake of the civil war due to concern over the Khmer Rouge. These examples suggest that the international influence as a determinant of PSI deserves further systematic investigation in the future.

What will be the future of PSI research? Scholars are likely to continue to rely on the concept of institutionalization, since it is a substantively important aspect of any polity. As an analytic concept, however, its fuzzy nature may hinder the accumulation of general knowledge on this theme. This fuzziness comes mainly from the fact that it encompasses both the inter-party and intra-party aspects of party politics. This may not be troublesome if the analytical scope only covers democracies, as was the case in Mainwaring and Scully (1995). But for PSIs in an authoritarian setting, the meaning of a high degree of intra-party and inter-party institutionalization can be different. On the one hand, a high degree of organizational institutionalization across parties (including the opposition) can be interpreted as being one step closer to democratization. On the other hand, a high degree of systemic institutionalization can mean a perpetuation of authoritarian politics. In other words, the complication in interpreting what it means to have a high (or low) PSI might overwhelm the benefits of using this concept as an analytical framework when used in authoritarian setting. Thus, particularly for those who study authoritarian politics, whether future research will find this concept useful or not remains to be seen.

Despite these caveats, overall *Building Party Systems in Asia* is a major step forward in creating a scholarship to analyze Asia in a coherent comparative framework. It is also an essential read for scholars of Asian politics, political parties, and political institutions.

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