

April 2025
Volume 32, Number 3

CONTENTS

Democratization in a state of democratic backsliding
 Michael W. Austin, Catherine Lewis, Pierre de Traz, and Michael
 The political role of media elites in China: strengthening democratic
 institutions and reform
 Disrupting China and creating Hong
 The internationalization of democracy: state-building
 and good governance in the case of the Caribbean region
 Peter Haller

**Why do authoritarian governments not collapse after all? A large-N
 case study analysis, 1980-2019**
 Michael F. Elfron, Ali Fard, and Eric D. Peterson
 Exclusion-politicians: Exclusion, democracy and counterpolitics
 William A. Starna

**Local power play: the post-election expansion and local governance
 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**
 The Democratic Republic of the Congo: democratic election, statehood,
 security, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo
 Kevin D. Dorman

**Comparing democratic institutions and popular, non-national
 institutions in a comparative context**
 Anna Sperber, Jonathan and Edward J. Taylor

**Using AI to help in shaping the future of the world: the
 democratic future of the world**
 Javier Padilla, Roderick J. White, and Michael W. Austin

**From democracy to democracy: a critical analysis of democracy
 in the world**

BOOK REVIEWS

Democratization

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fdem20

An authoritarian security community in mainland Southeast Asia: regional dynamics in an actor-centred theory of transnational authoritarianism

Gregory V. Raymond

To cite this article: Gregory V. Raymond (18 Mar 2025): An authoritarian security community in mainland Southeast Asia: regional dynamics in an actor-centred theory of transnational authoritarianism, *Democratization*, DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2025.2462974](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2462974)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2462974>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 18 Mar 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 524



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE



An authoritarian security community in mainland Southeast Asia: regional dynamics in an actor-centred theory of transnational authoritarianism

Gregory V. Raymond 

Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article presents a novel actor-centred theory of transnational authoritarianism that puts the nexus between security and authoritarianism at the heart of its explanation of how and why neighbouring states collude to preserve their respective authoritarian regimes. It proposes the authoritarian security community, in which regionally proximate states of similar power and status form a “no war” community, allowing their security services to actively cooperate in transnational repression. These relations are underpinned by personal networks for both regime security and kleptocratic purposes. In total, the retooled relationships between networks of security actors leverage the authoritarian dividends of an autocratic peace, providing assurance of reduced space for opponents, less prospect of future accountability and more opportunities for material gain. I demonstrate the argument based on the case of the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia. The evidence presented in this article suggests the later-joining Mekong members have extended ASEAN’s illiberal practices to a new level of subregional collusion, linking up with founding member Thailand in the process. Empirically, the case shows that attributing democratic deconsolidation or autocratic regression in mainland Southeast Asia solely or mainly to the rise of China risks overlooking important local, transnational dynamics that foster authoritarianism.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 25 September 2024; Accepted 1 February 2025

KEYWORDS Transnational authoritarianism; democracy decline; Mainland Southeast Asia; security; community; China

Introduction

In the last decade and a half, scholars have theorized the role international factors play in the spread and stabilizing of authoritarianism regimes. In 2010, Levitsky and Way posited linkage (density of ties with the West) and leverage (vulnerability to Western pressure) as powerful factors underpinning or limiting the spread of democracy in the post-Cold War era.¹ This insight gave rise to what might be called the Black Knight

CONTACT Gregory V. Raymond  greg.raymond@anu.edu.au

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

theory of transnational authoritarianism, that globally powerful authoritarian states can foster a global environment more hospitable for authoritarianism by blunting US or EU democratizing pressure. More recently, Kneuer and Demmelhuber's agent-centred model, authoritarian gravity centres (AGC), enunciated a theory of transnational authoritarianism emphasizing the importance of *regional* processes, cross-border networks and regional organizations.²

This article offers a new actor-centred explanation of transnational authoritarianism that is also regional, but which has security as its core concept. This theory, the authoritarian security community (ASC), builds on the central insight that authoritarian regimes use security policy to maximize regime interests, unlike democracies which use security policy to achieve national interests. The ASC, it is argued, is likely to emerge amongst regional clusters of states of equivalent power and status facing similar internal security challenges arising from ethnic or religious diversity, and whose security forces are primarily inwardly facing. Recognizing that each has a low capacity for conventional warfare, they constitute a "no war community". The no war community is then the foundation for the ASC, a group of states that collude in transnational repression and illicit cross-border business, mutually legitimate authoritarian rule, and share authoritarian governance techniques. In these ways, they strengthen their collective non-democratic hold on power. Like other actor-centred explanations of transnational authoritarianism, such as the Black Knight and AGC theories, the ASC can help explain the stalling of democratization and strengthening of authoritarianism globally since 2006.

The primary empirical case given in this article is mainland Southeast Asia, comprising the so-called "Mekong states" of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. It might be observed that Southeast Asia as a whole is domestically repressive and illiberal, whilst externally irenic and conciliatory. This security posture is the product of a confluence of factors that predate China's rise and which include US support for dictatorships during the Cold War³, and the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. While this is a common inheritance, the evidence presented in this article suggests the later-joining Mekong members have extended ASEAN's illiberal practices to a new level of subregional collusion, just as founding member Thailand has regressed politically. Their collective eschewal of war is striking when considering that the Siamese, Burmese, Khmer, and Vietnamese kingdoms experienced fierce rivalry and recurrent warfare in the precolonial period.

Beyond its members having little expectation of conventional state-on-state conflict with neighbours, the ASC has two additional characteristics. First, the authoritarian regimes of the ASC perceive transnational spaces as potential sanctuaries for regime adversaries and sources of democratic contagion. As such, they are prepared to cooperate to shut this space down, even to the point of tolerating encroachments on their sovereignty. Second, the ASC contains transnational networks of security and government actors who can facilitate both transnational repression and cross-border kleptocratic gain. These three fundamental elements of the ASR apply in addition to the presence of other commonly cited mechanisms for transnational autocratization, such as external legitimation, diffusion, linkage, emulation, and promotion that strengthen domestic legitimacy and provide opportunities for authoritarian learning, and the transmission of norms, structures, policies, and techniques.

This article unfolds in five parts. After this introduction, I review the evidence for global democratic decline and situate Southeast Asia within that trend, emphasizing the relatively greater deterioration in mainland Southeast Asia. In the third part, I

review the literature, and in particular two actor-centred theories for democratic decline and autocratization, the Black Knight and the authoritarian gravity centre (AGC) theories, before laying out the fundamental propositions of the ASC theory. I show how Central Asia offers an example of an ASC. In the fourth part, I trace the emergence of the Mekong ASC beginning with the “no war community” that has manifested since the end of the Cold War. I examine how reaching this stage generated kleptocratic and security networks across the subregion, providing the basis for high levels of transnational repression and illicit profit-making. I compare the ASC with the authoritarian gravity centre and Black Knight theories, showing that while each has relevance, they also have limitations in their applicability to the mainland South-east Asia case. In the fifth part, I conclude.

By offering a new regionally oriented, actor-based theory of the international politics of authoritarianism highlighting the role of security factors and forces, this article further theorizes how authoritarianism works beyond borders. By adding a temporal dimension that illuminates phased pathways towards increased cross-border authoritarian cooperation, the ASC theory builds on the important work already undertaken in identifying the distinctive processes that operate within regional settings. Finally, the article is also another step towards remedying the dearth of work examining how transnational factors can strengthen authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. Using previously unpublished empirical material from both whistle-blower testimony and foreign language sources, this article offers a needed appraisal of the specific cross-border dynamics relevant to democratic decline and autocratization in mainland Southeast Asia. By doing so it helps avoid a fixation on the role of China, often apparent in public commentary, in Southeast Asia’s authoritarian trends.

Global democratic decline and Southeast Asia

While there is variation in how to characterize the decline, and how serious the decline is in historical terms, a turn away from liberal democratic forms of governance worldwide is one of the major contemporary trends in international politics.⁴ The decline comprises both a deterioration in democratic institutions and governance in established democracies and in what limited democratic practice exists in autocracies.⁵ These parallel trends are reflected in falling scores across a range democracy rating indices such as the Freedom House Index, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.⁶ This decline is thought to have begun around 2006.⁷

Southeast Asia manifests these trends although again there is variation in appraisals. Mietzner assesses that the quality of democracy in Southeast Asia overall has declined since the mid-2000s, albeit his focus is on democratic deconsolidation, which he defines as democratic decline in states that have been rated “free” for five consecutive years by Freedom House.⁸ Pepinsky, however, argues that democracy has stagnated rather than eroded in Southeast Asia between 1980 and 2016, and that reversal is less important than the resilience of non-democracies.⁹

If mainland Southeast Asia, rather than the maritime states or in Southeast Asia as whole, is made the focus, the decline of democracy appears significantly more serious. Between 2005 and 2023, the V-DEM score for deliberative democracy averaged across the four most significant maritime Southeast Asian states (the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia) declined by 9 per cent.¹⁰ Over the same period, the deliberative democracy score averaged across the five mainland Southeast Asian states fell by

46 per cent.¹¹ A comparable maritime-mainland gap can be found in the democracy scores of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index. Between 2006 and 2022 maritime Southeast Asian states slipped by 5 per cent.¹² The analogous scores for the mainland states fell by almost double, 9 per cent.¹³

Looking more deeply into the trend data reveals that the scores for the two formal communist party-states, Laos and Vietnam, have remained relatively constant, albeit low. The states which have produced the falling scores are Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. As [Figure 1](#) shows, Thailand and Cambodia especially have evinced the greatest downward shifts, moving back towards the consistently low scores of their one-party neighbours since 2005.

What has caused this deterioration? Scholars of Asia and Southeast Asia such as Croissant and Haynes or Mietzner view domestic factors such as political parties, political, economic and ideological divisions, clientelist behaviours, praetorian militaries, the capacity of civil society to resist, political institutions such as courts, cultural factors and the positioning of middle classes as paramount in the regression.¹⁴ Comparative politics scholarship has, however, consistently overlooked the transnational dynamics of autocratization in Southeast Asia. As Fibiger points out, Slater's "Ordering Power", one of the most authoritative studies of authoritarianism and democracy in this region, omits to mention the effects of the significant volumes of United States foreign aid funnelled to authoritarian regimes during the Cold War.¹⁵

This is regrettable, not least because a range of large-n studies suggest that the international environment does exert influence. Tansey et al assessed the effect of autocratic linkage in dimensions of trade, migration, diplomatic ties and geographic proximity and found that *ceteris paribus*, autocratic linkages helped regimes survive.¹⁶ Brinks and Coppedge undertook a large n study of regime change shifts, looking at a sample of all countries between 1972 and 1996.¹⁷ They found a tendency for countries to change their regimes to correspond with the average state of democracy or autocracy present in the regimes of their close neighbours.

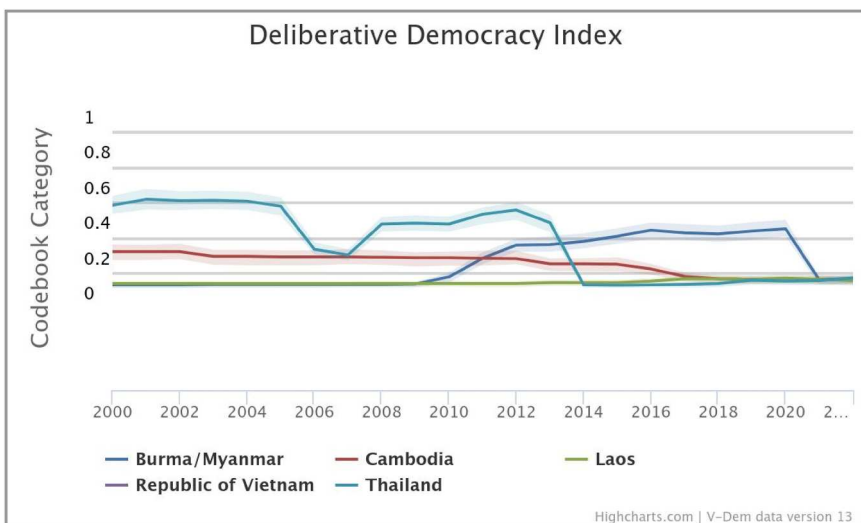


Figure 1. The decline of democracy in mainland Southeast Asia 2000–2021.

There is therefore an imperative to study the transnational dimensions of the democratic backsliding and autocratization in Southeast Asia. This article seeks to redress this scholarly lacuna, selecting the Mekong sub-region as its case, where the relatively worse democracy trends as well as the geographical proximity of the states and density of cross-border contacts suggest potential analytical benefit.

The idea of mainland Southeast Asia having historical and political dynamics separate to the maritime states is not new. Buzan cited the region as an example of a regional security complex, a cluster of geographically proximate states with highly interlinked security perceptions and problems.¹⁸ Liebermann argued that the large catchments of the mainland river systems supported larger integrated kingdoms compared with the more fragmented island geography of maritime Southeast Asia. These mainland states, because of their relative inaccessibility, were less exposed to global maritime commerce and, until the nineteenth century, less impacted by European traders.¹⁹ Wang suggests that these separate histories of the mainland and archipelagic states had made the region susceptible to division.²⁰ Such division has been evident since 2021, with mainland states significantly more prepared to deal directly with the Myanmar junta, thereby splitting ASEAN and preventing a unified Southeast Asian policy on the Myanmar crisis.²¹

There is no suggestion here that precolonial history explains the variation in democracy trends we see in contemporary mainland Southeast Asia. But taken together with the compelling statistical data showing the significantly more serious shift away from democracy, there is certainly a case for considering that the dynamics underpinning mainland Southeast Asia's dynamics of democratic deconsolidation and autocratization might be distinct to those of maritime Southeast Asia.

Actor-centred explanations of transnational authoritarianism

Below I survey two extant *actor-centred* models of transnational authoritarianism, the Black Knight and authoritarian gravity centre theories, and propose a third, the authoritarian security community. Actor-centred models spell out the *who* as well as the *how* of transnational authoritarian influence. They do this by conceptualizing the preferences and intentions of the actors involved, explaining how their interactions change the costs associated with authoritarianism, and illuminating the transmission mechanisms of authoritarian influence. Actor-centred models all implicitly or otherwise acknowledge the following dynamics. First, that effects may be achieved either with or without cooperation between states, where cooperation is assumed to involve some form of intentionality on the part of both parties.²² Without cooperation, states may emulate or learn authoritarian norms or techniques from others. With cooperation, they may collude in transnational repression or discourse. Second, that actors may mutually legitimate authoritarianism, thereby strengthening domestic legitimacy. The French and American revolutions made international legitimacy increasingly important in international affairs.²³ The post-Cold War dominance of the West made acquiring external legitimacy difficult for autocratic regimes. In the twenty-first century authoritarian governments have become adept at mutual legitimation through a range of devices including election observation bodies rubber-stamping unfair elections.²⁴ Third, that cross-border relationships offer opportunities for knowledge on tools and techniques of authoritarian governance to be transferred, whether

through simple observation and emulation of others, or through one agent actively-promoting their authoritarian methods.

The principal actors in the Black Knight theory are major powers with an interest and the means to engineer a global environment less hostile to authoritarianism. Receiver states, smaller polities who are susceptible to democratic deconsolidation or autocratization, are also actors though more passive. Levitsky and Way's original conception of a Black Knight was a state able to blunt Western, usually US or EU democratizing pressure.²⁵ China and Russia are the two most frequently cited Black Knights, although Diamond et al expand the category to a Big Five club comprising Russia, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.²⁶ Cooley and Nexon offer the term "alternative patrons" for Black Knight states who can offer lending institutions, sources of development assistance and infrastructure investment without "the imposition of liberal political and economic conditions".²⁷ This form of blunting is direct.

Black Knights may also exert transnational authoritarian influence through ideational effects, drawing on the power of norms and discourse. Ambrosio's conceptualization of authoritarian diffusion proposes two dynamics, *appropriateness*, that is, the normative legitimacy of authoritarian systems relative to democratic systems, and *effectiveness*, how the performance of different political systems might determine their attractiveness to others.²⁸ In considering how China's approach to its external environment might affect other states, Rolland for example notes China's concept of discourse power (*huayuquan*) emphasizes the capacity of a country to persuade others to accept its values, ideology and goals.²⁹ This conception of a Black Knight model of authoritarian diffusion parallels Nye's softpower concept, power that accrues "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants" and the attractiveness of a country's norms, culture and ideology generate soft power.³⁰

Black Knights may achieve both blunting and ideational/normative effects *indirectly* via their capacity to shape international order, broadly conceived as the sum of global rules, values, norms agreements, alliances and institutions.³¹ Foot, Lim and Ikenberry and Rolland argue that by drawing on its domestic practices and norms, China wants and will shape a model of global order more hospitable to authoritarianism in which liberal norms are less central.³² Here, blunting can occur by China exporting its "network or *guanxi* capitalism", which relies less on transparent laws and agreements, and more on informal business networks, to inform international interactions.³³ Similarly, Russia extends a model of "patrimonial authoritarianism" beyond its borders by using networks and patron-client relationships to conduct opaque business transactions.³⁴ Indirect ideational effects can be achieved by Black Knight reform of international institutions such as the United Nations, where China is inserting its preferred terminology, or by establishing new institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, that normalize cross-border cooperation against political dissidents in SCO states and "criminalise legitimate expressions of political and religious beliefs".³⁵

The authoritarian gravity centre theory, in contrast with the Black Knight theory, emphasizes the regional context. Since gravitational force varies with distance, Kneuer and Demmelhuber posit that an authoritarian gravity centre is "an autocratic regime that constitutes a force of attraction for countries in geopolitical proximity".³⁶ This emphasis on proximity arises from their observation that actors within a region are likely to have (i) a greater quantity of interactions, (ii) cross-border networks, and (iii) similarities of outlook potentially derived from shared language, culture or history compared with geographically distant dyadic pairs.

The AGC theory assumes asymmetric relations between AGCs and neighbours.³⁷ From this asymmetry, which may derive from political, economic, strategic, territorial and cultural factors, the AGC obtains a form of dominance. The AGC could be a regional hegemon or Great Power, such as Russia, but it does not need to be. Kneuer and Demmelhuber offer three criteria for identifying an AGC: (1) status as a moderate autocracy for at least 5 years (they suggest a BTI score below 5); (2) a clear desire for the AGC to be a dominant player in its sub-region and the capacities to achieve this; (3) a high density of ties and flows between the AGC and the proximate states.³⁸

The causal mechanisms underpinning the AGC are twofold.³⁹ Firstly, and similar to the Black Knight model, the qualities of the AGC make them a model of emulation and learning. Second, the AGC actively promotes or coerces a recipient towards authoritarian practice. This latter mechanism can be distinguished from the more passive blunting mechanism found in the Black Knight model, where the Black Knight merely provides an alternative source of economic assistance or legitimacy. Zumbargel found autocratic promotion visible in Saudi Arabia's 2011 military intervention in Bahrain's capital Manama, undertaken to protect the Bahraini monarchy against an uprising.⁴⁰

This article posits a third agent-centred theory of transnational authoritarianism. It proposes the *authoritarian security community*, a theory that puts a security-authoritarianism nexus at the heart of its explanation of how and why neighbouring states collude to preserve their respective authoritarian regimes. In the security-authoritarianism nexus, a cluster of contiguous authoritarian states deprioritize traditional external security concerns, such as border integrity and territorial sovereignty, in favour of a foreign policy that allows mutual assistance in regime survival through legitimization, learning and transnational repression. This nexus is the paramount dynamic in the authoritarian security community (ASC).

The ASC is, like the AGC, a regional theory emphasizing the importance of geographic proximity, regional processes, density of contact, mutual legitimization and opportunities for learning. But it differs from the AGC theory in three important respects. First, it presupposes relative equality between the units, rather than the asymmetric relations assumed in the AGC between a dominant centre "sending" state and weaker "receiving" states. In the ASC, relationships are broadly symmetric. Several factors may engender this relative symmetry. Differences of size and capacity may exist, but not to the extent that any state in the cluster can naturally assume leadership. Or there may be more than one aspirant to the leadership position, for example, in which case they veto the other. Alternatively, there may be multilateral institutions which shape cross-border relations by conferring *de jure* equality and establishing rules of conduct. A further possibility is that a proximate external power discourages any member from seeking an overt leadership role.

Secondly, as described above, the ASC privileges security as a driving force. This stems from three specific security-related dynamics. First, the states of the ASC will generally have problems of internal security as their largest security concern, arising from their incomplete state-building processes, the latter often a product of their ethnically heterogeneous populations. Two, in their relations with each other, they will constitute a "no war community", in which the ASC states don't fight each other and have stable expectations that war won't occur in the future.⁴¹ This expectation arises from a mutual understanding regarding the incapacity of themselves and

other community members to fight wars. In practical terms, this does not make the grouping immune from territorial disputes or border clashes, especially if political leaders choose to resort to nationalist appeals for legitimacy or popularity. But it does mean that any clash is extremely unlikely to escalate.

A third aspect of the security dynamics of the ASC is that that member states have renounced subversion and embraced transnational repression. Subversion, fostering and supporting an insurgent group within the territory of a neighbour, is a highly effective and debilitating method of weakening a neighbouring state.⁴² In the ASC members have replaced subversion with extraterritorial security practices, in which states use the territory of another state to achieve their internal security goals.⁴³ Because authoritarian regimes perceive both domestic and transnational spaces as potential sanctuaries for regime adversaries, this condition provides the basis for cross-border cooperation, since from the point of view of regime security, there is more to be gained by reciprocal collusion in repressing dissidents from neighbouring countries on home soil than by resourcing for conflict.⁴⁴

These security dynamics both arise from and catalyse cross-border networks that offer opportunities for personal financial gain, and stabilize authoritarian governance via transnational repression. There is a circular relationship between the cross-border kleptocratic networks and the authoritarian nature of the regime: on the one hand it is the weak accountability and rule of law that offers opportunities for graft and illicit trade, on the other, the criminal conduct creates incentives for the maintenance of authoritarian rule, since any move to accountability or stronger rule of law is likely to expose the culpable actors. Criminal networks may reinforce, overlap with, or emerge from the security-oriented transnational networks, who frequently act with impunity, confident in the knowledge that the higher echelons of the regime will mostly protect them in order to maintain a visage of invulnerability and a citizenry too cowed to protest or resist the depredations.

Central Asia, comprising five firmly authoritarian states, exhibits the attributes of an ASC. First, its intra-group relations are largely symmetric. While Kazakhstan's status as the largest economy has led to speculation it could become an AGC, at this point the evidence is weak.⁴⁵ Overall, neighbouring states did not emulate Kazakhstani governance, its foreign policy did not seek to influence its neighbours' domestic politics, and Kazakhstan's example was not particularly high in the thinking of other Central Asian elites. Common origins as former republics with the Soviet Union until 1993 may foster a tendency towards equivalence, whilst the continued influence of Russia as a primary external patron and role model may also dampen the emergence of an obvious leader.

Second, in the domain of security, the region fits the character of a "no war" community. The Central Asian states have reason to focus on their internal stability rather than each other, with the Soviet Union having drawn borders to ensure ethnically and religiously diverse populations.⁴⁶ Correlates of War data validates this hypothesis. It shows that the countries have never fought a war (defined as battle fatalities greater than 1000).⁴⁷

Conversely, over the last decade, all Central Asian states have used transnational repression, facilitated by significant levels of cross-border security cooperation.⁴⁸ Ratified in 2009 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as by China and Russia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Counter-terrorism Convention allows extradition from member states with no more than an accusation.

Hence the security services of each state may investigate within each other's borders.⁴⁹ Many of the security services also have relationships with organized crime groups.⁵⁰

Demonstrating *prima facie* the utility of the ASC theory, in the next section I argue that the five authoritarian states of mainland Southeast Asia also display transnational processes and dynamics consistent with the theory's main propositions. Before unpacking that argument, however, I show why the Black Knight agent-centred theory positing China as the main protagonist is important but incomplete as a theory of transnational authoritarianism for mainland Southeast Asia.

Transnational factors in Southeast Asia's democratic regression

The proximity of Southeast Asia to the world's second largest economy, China, brings with it expectations of considerable PRC influence. Blackwill and Harris, for example, call Southeast Asia a "test case for Beijing's use of geoeconomics".⁵¹ But on the question of whether China uses this power to actively promote authoritarianism as an interest, the literature is ambivalent. While one school of thought strongly argues that China wants a world in which authoritarian regimes are given greater respect and deference and is actively exporting a model to achieve this,⁵² another observes that it is pragmatic and regime-neutral in actual diplomatic practice.⁵³ The characterization of China as a "passive Black Knight" resolves this apparent dichotomy; while China will shore up old autocratic friends, make knowledge about authoritarian governance available, seek to remould international institutions and hope its example wins adherents, it will not actively promote or foster regime change.⁵⁴

This passive Black Knight role is enough in some circumstances, and especially in the case of autocratizing hybrid regimes, to make a significant difference in Southeast Asia.⁵⁵ The literature is unequivocal regarding China's critical role in facilitating Cambodia's transition from competitive to hegemonic authoritarianism from 2013 on, blunting Western democracy policy through "soft interference".⁵⁶ After a near election loss in 2013, Cambodia's autocrat Hun Sen closed down democratic space, banning independent media and ultimately in 2017, dissolved the main opposition party. To minimize delegitimizing criticism from the West, and replace withdrawn foreign aid and assistance, he significantly strengthened relations with China, who boosted military and economic assistance.

But the evidence is significantly weaker when it comes to whether China has exerted any ideational pull with regards to offering a governance model. Thailand's Prayuth junta government largely used references to Xi Jinping's "China model" to justify decisions already made.⁵⁷ That is, instrumentally, in the same way Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban cited Russia, China, Turkey and Singapore as models to legitimize decisions of indigenous origin.⁵⁸ The survey evidence for Southeast Asian nations wishing to emulate China is also weak. In the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's annual State of Southeast Asia survey between 2020 and 2024, respondents who had stated they trusted China were offered the option of selecting "my country's political culture and worldview are compatible with China's" as the reason they trusted China. Over five years only an average of 16% from mainland Southeast Asian countries selected this option.⁵⁹ Similarly, only 12% selected "I respect China and admire its civilisation and culture".⁶⁰ Indeed, the authors concluded that China's soft power in mainland Southeast Asia was "surprisingly low despite the popular belief that these countries have a closer cultural affinity with China".⁶¹

The uneven evidence for China's Black Knight role in Southeast Asia's negative political trajectories therefore suggest caution about attributing it sole agency, and that alternative frameworks of transitional authoritarianism warrant attention. In fact, in several ways the regional emphasis of the AGC offers explanatory power equal to that of the Black Knight theory, especially in the case of the entirety of Southeast Asia.

Firstly, the AGC theory predicts that regional organizations can be "transmission belts and learning rooms for autocrats".⁶² The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has indeed quietly supported authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia. Davies describes ASEAN as espousing "an illiberal vision of authoritarianism ... predicated on social stability and economic growth".⁶³ ASEAN's vaunted policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states is one means by which it has ensured a non-threatening environment for authoritarian member states.

ASEAN members never openly discuss this benefit of membership except in the most oblique terms, so the internal ruminations that Vietnam conducted prior to joining ASEAN in 1995 offer rare and compelling evidence of the degree to which authoritarian states felt sheltered within ASEAN. At the end of 1992, the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, a major organ of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) with responsibility for ensuring continued CPV rule, assigned its Institute of International Relations researchers to study ASEAN countries and their political systems. The article they produced began by noting the pro-West and anti-communist stance of the ASEAN governments. The report then, however, stressed that ASEAN governments were "determined to defend their ruling regimes, and refuse to share power with the people".⁶⁴ They noted that the nation-building formula of the ASEAN states, consisting of an "export-oriented market economy, limited democracy, and even authoritarianism in some countries" was not different in essence to Vietnam's.⁶⁵

More broadly, the personal networks between ASEAN leaders have made it a college of authoritarian governance technique. Cambodia's Hun Sen told Indonesian diplomat Benny Widyono that he had emulated the ways in which Indonesia's GOLKAR (Golongan Karya) party under Suharto, and Malaysia's United Malays National Organization (UMNO) under Mahathir, had strengthened their regimes by forming strong patron-client relationships between the ruled and the rulers.⁶⁶ Singapore, an economically successful authoritarian state, is another model for ASEAN states. Cambodia and Vietnam have all studied Singapore's management of "rule of law", which has frequently been a method of silencing critique.⁶⁷ Strikingly, so has China, establishing that the flow of authoritarian influence has not been only one way. ASEAN leaders also offer mutual legitimation via public endorsement. Asked by a Cambodian university student if a country like Cambodia should be democratized based on western standards or develop its own version of democracy, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir said Cambodia should adopt aspects of western democracy that are compatible with the Kingdom.⁶⁸

The key problem of the authoritarian gravity centre theory, however, is that especially in mainland Southeast Asia, but also in Southeast Asia overall, there is an absence of a clear leader or state dominant enough to be the AGC. In the Mekong sub-region, my concern from this point on, Thailand with the largest economy and Vietnam with the most powerful military are the two obvious candidates for the role of AGC. Indeed, both have entertained aspirations for sub-regional leadership

at various moments. Le Duan, the principal leader of Vietnam in the postwar era, advised the Soviet Union in 1975 that

“[I]n peace we want to make Vietnam into the center of socialism in Southeast Asia. That is the direction of our political and economic policy. Southeast Asia with more than a hundred million people is a large area. In this region, besides Japan, no other country is [as powerful] as Vietnam”.⁶⁹

For their part, Thai officials spoke of creating a Thailand-centred region, a Suvannabhumi (Golden Land) in which Thailand helped its neighbours develop and the Thai baht became the regional currency.⁷⁰ The rivalry between these two states, however, that means that neither would accept the other as leader. Furthermore, the histories of the two smaller powers Laos and Cambodia, that include invasion and domination by Thailand and Vietnam, have fostered fierce nationalisms that preclude them accepting Thailand or Vietnam as sub-regional leaders. Myanmar for its part has been inward facing for most of its post-colonial independence, but retains historical memories of being a powerful state in the precolonial era and so would not accept Vietnam or Thailand. Therefore, the absence of a dominant player in the Mekong sub-region mean that the conditions for the AGC are not met in the Mekong sub-region.

The Mekong sub-region as an authoritarian security community (ASC)

During the Cold War, Southeast Asia experienced devastating proxy interstate wars, sponsored by external powers such as the United States and China. This history meant that in the post-Cold War period there needed to be a significant transformation of regional relations to allow the emergence of the Mekong “no war community”. There were in fact three critical cross-border developments. First, Thailand introduced a “battlefields into marketplaces” policy in the last years of the nineteen eighties, seeking to reset its relations with former adversaries, having been a bastion of anti-communism for the United States during the Vietnam War. Second, all the Mekong states joined ASEAN, beginning with Vietnam in 1995, followed by Myanmar and Laos in 1997 and finally Cambodia in 1999. Thirdly, Thailand renounced subversion. In its so-called “buffer policy”, it had supported insurgents and ethnic armed groups on the Thai-Myanmar and Thai-Cambodia borders to oppose the state forces. By 2005, Thailand had ceased using ethnic armies, such as the Shan State Army and the Karen National Union, to constrain the Burmese government forces, after having already ceased support to the Khmer Rouge whom it used against Cambodian state forces.⁷¹

These three developments in concert with the fact that the Mekong countries also manifested, as with Southeast Asia overall, high levels of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, cemented security postures oriented towards internal security.⁷² Indeed, all of the militaries of the Mekong states are actually or virtually, “party armies”, whose first mission is regime security. The forces of Laos and Vietnam are formally party-armies, and the Thai military’s primary loyalty is to the monarchy rather than elected governments. The Cambodian armed forces are “a partisan, corporate arm of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP)”⁷³ and Myanmar’s armed forces aspire to govern, offering only fleeting and conditional support to the National League of Democracy civilian government from 2015 until the 2021 coup.

These antecedents together were important in the formation of a no war community. Conflict data confirms this. Since 1979, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, large

scale conflict has not existed in Southeast Asia.⁷⁴ There have however, as in Central Asia, been militarized interstate disputes between the five Mekong states.⁷⁵ Between 1995 and 2014, there were 38 MIDs, almost 50% of which were between the Mekong states and non-Mekong states. Many were clashes between Vietnamese and Chinese maritime forces, but incidents with Malaysia, Bangladesh, India and Indonesia also occurred.⁷⁶ Of the remaining 20 incidents, 14 were between Thailand and Myanmar on other land and maritime borders, five were between Cambodia and Thailand, and the sole remaining incident was at sea between Vietnam and Thailand.⁷⁷ No militarized disputes between Cambodia, Laos or Vietnam were recorded. The total number of fatalities is seven, certainly an underestimate since the project could not obtain reliable data for the Thai-Cambodia border dispute 2008–2011 and some of the other border clashes.⁷⁸ Overall, Jenne’s definition of a “no war community” still holds as there has been no willingness to escalate from these disputes.

Establishing the “no war community” provided firm foundations for the volume of contacts between the ASC states to increase. The introduction of sub-regional diplomatic architecture, for example, increased the density. By 2004, the Mekong states had established some eight inter-governmental structures, including the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). After that, external powers sponsored an additional five forums, including China’s Lancang-Mekong Cooperation initiative, making the region a “crowded field”.⁷⁹

The density of contacts has offered opportunities for knowledge diffusion via emulation or learning. Constitutional borrowing between the competitive and hegemonic democracies Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar is one example. In 2017, Hun Sen publicly exhorted Cambodia to examine Thai laws used in Thailand to dissolve political parties, and within a month, the Cambodian parliament passed such amendments.⁸⁰ Though similar “smoking-gun” evidence is unavailable, it can be noted that the Myanmar constitution prior to the 2021 coup had seats reserved for the military in way that has been found in many Thai parliaments. There is also considerable cooperation between the two party states, Laos and Vietnam, as well as Cambodia, a quasi party-state (the Cambodian People’s Party had its origins as a communist party). Vu emphasizes that “[C]lose ties and institutional similarities among these communist regimes allow them to share resources, cooperate against common security threats, and learn new ideas from each other to strengthen their regimes”.⁸¹ Vietnam has, for example, trained thousands of Cambodian soldiers.⁸²

Equally, examples of cross-border legitimation can also be found, such as endorsement between authoritarian leaders. Throughout the post-coup Myanmar crisis, mainland Southeast Asian states have consistently been willing to meet Myanmar junta leaders in informal consultations, breaching the ASEAN stance of not permitting the junta to attend ASEAN meetings.⁸³ The Mekong countries have also legitimated each other’s flawed elections. Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand sent observers to the 2023 Cambodian election, in which the main opposition party was prevented from running candidates.⁸⁴ Some bilateral meetings have evidenced very explicit mutual acknowledgement. In May 2019, Myanmar’s later dictator and coup maker Min Aung Hlaing lay a wreath for then-recently deceased Thai elder statesman, Prem Tinsulanond. Min Aung Hlaing spoke of his close decade-long relationship with Prem and his respect for the teachings Prem had imparted. One of these was that “democracy must be the democracy of one’s own country”.⁸⁵ As a leading exponent of “Thai-style democracy”, this was certainly an approach that Prem had

implemented. During his tenure as a never-elected prime minister of Thailand between 1980 and 1988 he relied on monarchical approval for his power; later he was a key instigator of the 2006 coup against elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

What has been distinctive about the Mekong in comparison with maritime South-east Asia is the advent of networks between the security forces. Here joint border committees have offered opportunities for personal ties to develop between security forces. The Thai Cambodia Joint Border Committee, for example, was established in 1994 to manage residual border tensions, foster tourism, and provide a shared knowledge base. This body was instrumental in preventing escalation during the Phra Viharn–Preah Vihear temple dispute.⁸⁶ The establishing of a Thai–Myanmar General Border Committee (GBC) during the government of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001–2005) had a similar stabilising effect, by allowing the development of personal relations between key Thai and Myanmar military personnel. As a senior guest of the Supreme Commander of the Thai Armed Forces, Myanmar’s coup-maker Min Aung Hlaing visited Thailand at least twice a year to attend meetings of the GBC.⁸⁷ Through these visits, Min Aung Hlaing first visited former Thai prime minister and illiberal statesman Prem Tinasulanond at his house Si Sao Thewes in 2012.⁸⁸ The changing security dynamics also set the scene for the advent of the two phenomena intrinsic to the authoritarian security community: transnational repression and cross-border kleptocratic networks.

Transnational repression

In 2018, Deputy Thai Prime Minister Pravit Wongsuwan and Cambodian Defence Minister Tea Banh hosted a Cambodian–Thai General Border Committee meeting. Banh then signed an agreement on the return of “fugitives” and to “monitor individuals who escape the law by crossing the border”.⁸⁹ After the Myanmar military’s 2021 coup, junta leader Minh Aung Hlaing agreed with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha that Thai police would arrest politicians from the former Myanmar government fleeing into Thai territory.⁹⁰ These agreements made public what was already occurring informally and tacitly: security forces cooperating in the repression of dissidents beyond their borders.

Transnational repression often occurs within the complex domain of migration policy. This means assessing the relative causal weight of regime versus national interests in influencing the treatment of asylum-seekers is challenging. Receiving states have legitimate concerns, especially in cases of large refugee flows, with regards to the social and economic impacts. Nonetheless, the growth of the fraternal cross-border relations between Mekong security forces, amidst a policy landscape in which security forces often have considerable sway (Thailand’s military and paramilitary forces still control its borders)⁹¹ and where only Cambodia amongst the Mekong states are signatories to the Refugee Convention, does allow significant scope for decisionmaking consistent with the predictions of the ASC theory; that is, with a view to reciprocal denial of transnational space for political opponents. Thus it is not surprising that human rights agencies point to an increasing frequency of transnational repression in areas such as the Myanmar–Thailand and Myanmar–Laos border, even as Thailand continues to host large numbers of Burmese refugees and even some members of opposition parties.⁹²

The increase has occurred since the 2014 military coup in Thailand and the 2014 launch of China’s Operation Foxhunt, aiming at the arrest and extradition of domestic political opponents.⁹³ Since this time, Mekong security services become noticeably

active in transnational repression, including the assassination, disappearance, rendition and detention of dissidents, opposition party members and journalists. The region now rates with sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East as one of the world's hotbeds. In 2021, Thailand was in the top 10 of origin countries globally practising transnational repression, with at least 25 cases known to have occurred on Thai territory.⁹⁴ Reciprocity has been evident. A Thai anti-monarchist was kidnapped and “disappeared” in Cambodia in 2020; conversely, multiple Cambodian dissidents seeking refuge were monitored and apprehended by Cambodian security services permitted to operate on Thai soil.⁹⁵ Five Thai anti-monarchists disappeared or were murdered in Laos between 2016 and 2018; meanwhile a Laos dissident disappeared in Thailand in 2019.⁹⁶ Cooperation between Vietnamese and Cambodian security forces may have as also occurred, with Vietnamese activists in Cambodia attacked with acid in 2017.⁹⁷ Vietnamese dissidents were handed to visiting Vietnamese officers security forces by Thais.⁹⁸

Transnational kleptocratic networks

Military and government personnel in the Mekong advance personal business interests alongside formal government policy-making, and in some instances subordinate national interests to personal profit making, establishing the transnational national kleptocratic linkages characteristic of an ASC. These kleptocratic networks may comprise a variety of actor types, ranging from uniformed security personnel, to civilian government officials, to business people and finally to militia and paramilitary groups with varying degrees of alignment to national governments. Examples below are the Thaksin Shinawatra–Khin Nyunt business deals, the Thai–Myanmar–Malaysia people-smuggling rackets, and Thai security force involvement in casinos and scam centres in eastern Myanmar.

Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's path to wealth began when as a policeman he drafted a plan for deploying computers in a police information centre, and then as a businessman won the tender to implement the plan.⁹⁹ He later extended his “interlocking of business and politics” into neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Cambodia.¹⁰⁰ Thaksin visited Myanmar one month after becoming PM in 2001, and Khin Nyunt, a powerful Tatmadaw leader, soon returned the favour. In May 2002, Thaksin's company Shin Satellite contracted with Bagan Cybertech for use of Shin satellites to broadcast within Myanmar. Bagan's managing director was Khin Nyunt's son (Dr Ye Naing We), who also attended the contract signing ceremony. Bagan Cybertech and Myanmar telecommunications staff subsequently were trained in Thailand by Shincorp. At this time the Thai military was actively working with the US Drug Enforcement Administration to suppress the drug trade, and had established a Task Force 399 for this purpose.¹⁰¹ But in order to smooth his business relationship, Thaksin shut down Thai military operations along the border aimed at countering methylamphetamine drugs entering Thai territory from Myanmar. Thaksin called the military's drug suppression operations an “over reaction” and moved Surayud Chulanond, the Thai army general overseeing the operations, to a less influential post in August 2002.

Senior Thai officials have been active in lucrative cross-border people-smuggling operations. In 2015, the discovery of mass graves of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia caused international outrage, resulting in the Thai government appointing Police Major General Paween Pongsirin to head a police investigation. Pongsirin uncovered

a vast people-smuggling network spanning Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia, trafficking mostly Rohingya people numbering in the tens of thousands annually. His investigation found 115 alleged offenders, including four officers from Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) and a navy officer.¹⁰² One of the ISOC officers arrested, Major General Manas Kongpan, was of three-star rank. The arrests of military personnel displeased key figures in the Thai junta government, including Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Deputy Prime Minister Pravit Wongsuwan, who organized for Pongsirin to be sent to Thailand's restive and violent Southern provinces where the trafficking networks were particularly strong. Fearing for his life, Pongsirin fled to Australia, with the Australian government granting asylum. In his statutory declaration, Paween wrote that the "people who are seeking to harm me are at the highest level of military, police and government in Thailand. They have shown that they do not hold themselves to the law or the rules of the country".¹⁰³

In 2024, Thai politician Rangsiman Rome presented the Thai parliament with details of Thai military and police officers involvement in casinos and scam centres operating in neighbouring Kayin state, eastern Myanmar.¹⁰⁴ Myawaddy, the Kayin state capital, was a prime location for the scam centres since they could obtain internet, electricity, and fuel from Thailand. Myawaddy also offered convenient access from Thailand across the narrow, shallow Moei River. Rome cited more than 17 casino businesses with Thai owners or Thai partners, including a significant number owned by Thai uniformed people. One of these was a police major general still serving with a close relationship to the government party. This officer had served in the Thai town of Mae Sot opposite Myawaddy. Another casino, Sky Complex, was also opened by a former Thai police officer.

Conclusion

In 2009 Indonesian political scientist and defence commentator Connie Bakrie summarized her country's security posture, saying "Outside we are dove, inside we are fox".¹⁰⁵ This observation applies equally to Southeast Asia as a whole. But it is in mainland Southeast Asia, rather than Indonesia and maritime Southeast Asia, that transnational authoritarianism has developed further and become been more potent and destructive of the rights and freedoms of its citizens

The article demonstrates that two clusters of authoritarian states, the mainland Southeast Asian states of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand and the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, manifest the dynamics of authoritarian security communities. They are "no war communities", with no dominant state, who conduct cross border kleptocratic ventures and cooperate in transnational repression. Could other additional authoritarian security communities exist? Regions that might house additional ASCs would include the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe, as well as Africa, the Middle East and South America.

In the case of the Mekong states, where China's influence is significant, the ASC theory provides a necessary but previously undocumented complement to the Black Knight view of the strengthening of authoritarianism in mainland Southeast Asia. China's role as an alternative patron, while clearly significant for authoritarian regimes in crisis such as Cambodia after 2013, is limited by both its own general

pragmatism in dealing with foreign governments and also by the fact that its model is not unambiguously desired by mainland Southeast Asian states. This article argues that the role of the international politics of Southeast Asia and ASEAN as another incubator and shield for authoritarianism is underappreciated, and at the same time, also shows the importance of considering mainland Southeast Asia as a sub-region with political and authoritarian dynamics distinct from that of maritime Southeast Asia.

Notes

1. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 40–3.
2. Kneur and Demmelhuber, “Authoritarian Gravity Centers”, 10.
3. Jackson, *Pacific Power Paradox*; Fibiger, “The Nixon Doctrine and the Making of Authoritarianism”; Fineman *A Special Relationship*; Chiozza, *Leverage and Cooperation in the US World Order*.
4. Different approaches to measurement unsurprisingly yield highly varied pictures. Measuring the share of the world’s population living in autocracies, which between 2010 and 2020 increased from 48% to 68%, suggests an alarming drift away from democracy (VDEM, 2021, 6). If, however, the decline is measured in the fall in the number of democracies globally, a drop of three from 100 in 2011 and to 97 in 2016 is less disturbing (Mechkova et al. 163).
5. The scholarly literature terms the former backsliding processes “democratic deconsolidation”, “democratic recession” or “democratic breakdown”, while the latter are variously labelled “autocratisation”, “autocratic consolidation” or “autocratic regression”. Although as Weiss (2024) points out, in electoral authoritarian systems such as Malaysia’s, there remains uncertainty as to what label to apply because there is uncertainty as to what Malaysia was to begin with, a flawed democracy or an autocracy with democratic characteristics.
6. Croissant and Diamond, “Introduction”, 8.
7. Diamond, “Democracy Demotion”, 17.
8. Mietzner, “Democratic Deconsolidation”.
9. Pepinsky, “Democracy isn’t receding in Southeast Asia”.
10. Coppedge et al., V-Dem Variable Country Graphs Dataset v14.
11. Ibid.
12. Bertelsmann Transformation Index.
13. Ibid.
14. Croissant and Haynes “Introduction”, 11, 13; Mietzner, “Democratic Deconsolidation”, 4.
15. Fibiger, “The Nixon Doctrine and the Making of Authoritarianism”, 957; Slater, “Ordering Power”.
16. Tansey et al. “Ties to the Rest”.
17. Brinks and Michael Coppedge, “Diffusion Is No Illusion”.
18. Buzan, “Regional Security Complex Theory”.
19. Liebermann, “Strange Parallels”, 768–9).
20. Gungwu, “China’s South”, 134–138.
21. Vatikiotis, “ASEAN Is Quietly Coming Apart at the Seams”.
22. Graefrath and Jahn, “Conceptualizing Interstate Cooperation”.
23. Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, 212.
24. Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 12.
25. Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 41
26. Tansey, *International Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 2; Diamond L. *Authoritarianism Goes Global*
27. Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 12
28. Ambrosio, “Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion”, 377
29. Rolland, China’s Vision for a New World Order, 10
30. Nye, “Soft Power”.
31. Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 34–37.
32. Foot, “Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State”; Lim and Ikenberry, “China and the Logic of Illiberal Hegemony”, 11; Rolland, “China’s Vision for a New World Order”

33. Lim and Ikenberry "China and the Logic of Illiberal Hegemony", 11
34. Wallander, "Russian Transimperialism and Its Implications"
35. Fung and Lam, S. "Staffing the United Nations"; Yee "Autocratic Peace and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation"
36. Kneur and Demmelhuber, "Gravity Centres of Authoritarian Rule", 781.
37. Kneur and Demmelhuber, "Authoritarian Gravity Centers", 37
38. Ibid. 37–8
39. Ibid 17–8
40. Zumbragel "Kingdom of Gravity". 59–60
41. Jenne, "The Domestic Origins of No War Communities".
42. Lee, "Crippling Leviathan"
43. Cooley and Heathershaw, Dictators Without Borders, 191.
44. Lewis, "Illiberal Spaces", 141.
45. del Sordi and Libman. "Kazakhstan" 151–2
46. Cooley, "Central Asia: A Political History"
47. Sarkees and Wayman, "Resort to War"
48. Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight Not Out of Reach" 49
49. Cooley and Heathershaw, Dictators Without Borders, 49
50. Ibid., 118
51. Blackwill and Harris, "War By Other Means, 111
52. Rolland "China's Vision For A New World Order"; McGregor "Xi Jinping's Ideological Ambitions"; Economy, "Responses before the U.S.-China Economic And Security Review";
53. Bader, "The Political Economy of External Exploitation"; Noesselt, "China's New Regional Responsiveness"; Nathan, A. "China's Challenge".
54. Noesselt, "China's New Regional Responsiveness"
55. Bader, "The Political Economy of External Exploitation"
56. Loughlin, "Chinese Linkage, Leverage, and Cambodia's Transition"; Po and Sims "The Myth of Non-interference"
57. Bukh "The Productive Power of Rising China", 13
58. Buzogany, "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary", 1307
59. Tang, "State of Southeast Asia: 2020"; Seah, "State of Southeast Asia: 2021"; Seah, S, "State of Southeast Asia: 2022"; Seah, "State of Southeast Asia: 2023"; Seah, "State of Southeast Asia: 2024"
60. Ibid.
61. Tang "State of Southeast Asia: 2020", 36
62. Kneur and Demmelhuber, "Authoritarian Gravity Centers", 30
63. Davies, "Ritual and Region", 60
64. Nguyen, "Flying Blind", 175
65. Ibid.
66. Widnyono, "Dancing in Shadows", 146–7
67. Rajah, "Authoritarian Rule of Law", 5-6, 12
68. Sokhean "Mahathir Mohamad speaks on Kingdom's Democracy"
69. Vu "In the Service of World Revolutions", 28.
70. Erlanger, "Thailand Seeks to Shape a 'Golden Peninsula', 19.
71. Pathan, "Ethnic armies could lose Buffer Role".
72. Reid, *History of Southeast Asia*"; Ordenez, "Southeast Asia's ethnic crises"
73. Chambers, "Neo-Sultanistic Tendencies", 179
74. Jenne, "Domestic origins of no-war communities " 202 -204
75. Palmer et al., "The MID5 Dataset"
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Zawacki, "Implications of a Crowded Field", 1
80. Lawrence, "Authoritarian Constitutional Borrowing and Convergence", 328
81. Vu, "Strengths and Vulnerabilities", 10–11
82. Ibid., 11
83. Tucker, Myanmar Reveals ASEAN's Weak Spot Again

84. Khmer Times, “15 International Observers from ASEAN Countries”; Brook, X post
85. Thai Rath, “Godson: General Min Aung Hlaing Pays Respects”
86. Jenne, “The Thai–Cambodian Border Dispute”
87. Manager Online “Get to Know General Min Aung Hlaing”
88. Ibid.
89. Jenne, “Thai–Cambodian fugitive deal”
90. Han, “Case Study: Thailand”
91. International Crisis Group, 22.
92. Human Rights Watch, “Thailand: Myanmar Activists Forcibly Returned”; Progressive Voice Myanmar, “Impunity across borders: Junta’s TNR stalks Burmese Communities Abroad”.
93. Safeguard Defenders, “Involuntary Returns”, 3.
94. Cordell and Medhi, “Transnational Repression”; Quinley and Robertson, “We Thought We Were Safe”.
95. Wright and Praithongyaem “Wanchalearm Satsaksit”; Quinley and Robertson “We Thought We Were Safe”.
96. Phasuk, “Thai Rights Commission Links Officials”; Finney “Lao Democracy Activist Still Missing”.
97. Schenken and Linzer, “Out Of Sight, Not Out Of Reach”, 45.
98. Quinley and Robertson, “We Thought We Were Safe”.
99. Phongpaichit and Baker, “*Thaksin: The Business of Politics*”, 41.
100. Ibid., 197–198.
101. Nanuam, “*Steel Path*”, 182–6.
102. Pongsirin, “Statutory Declaration”.
103. Ibid., 17.
104. Rome, “Fairyland for Crime”.
105. Bakrie, Defending Indonesia.0

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Marcus Mietzner, Edward Aspinall, George Lawson and the two anonymous Reviewers for their valuable comments, as well as the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at Kyoto University in Japan, where this article was written.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Gregory V. Raymond is a senior lecturer at the Australian National University (ANU) researching Southeast Asian defence, politics and foreign relations, with a focus on Thailand and the Mekong states. His work examines transnational authoritarianism, civil-military relations, strategic culture and collective memory. He is the author of *Thai Military Power: A Culture of Strategic Accommodation* (NIAS Press 2018) and the lead author of *The United States–Thai Alliance: History, Memory and Current Developments* (Routledge, 2021).

ORCID

Gregory V. Raymond  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5047-881X>

Bibliography

- Ambrosio, T. “Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion: Concepts, Dynamics, and Future Research.” *International Studies Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (2010, November): 375–392.

- Bader, J. "The Political Economy of External Exploitation. A Comparative Investigation of China's Foreign Relations." *Democratization* 22, no. 1 (2015): 1–21. DOI:[10.1080/13510347.2013.795550](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.795550).
- Bakrie, C. *Defending Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009.
- Bertelsmann Transformation Index. BTI 2006–2020 Scores (Excel). <https://bti-project.org/en/downloads>, 2024.
- Blackwill, R., and J. Harris. *War By Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.
- Brinks, Daniel, and Michael Coppedge. "Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy." *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 4 (2006): 463–489.
- Brook, J. X post 23 July @jack_brook96 https://x.com/jack_brook96/status/1682927937820196864, 2023.
- Bukh, A. "The Productive Power of Rising China and National Identities in South Korea and Thailand." *The Pacific Review* 35, no. 4 (2021): 676–704. DOI: [10.1080/09512748.2020.1868557](https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1868557).
- Bukovansky, M. *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Buzan, B. "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World." In *Theories of New Regionalism*, edited by F. Söderbaum, et al., 140–159. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Buzogány, A. "Illiberal Democracy in Hungary: Authoritarian Diffusion or Domestic Causation?" *Democratization* 24, no. 7 (2017): 1307–1325. DOI: [10.1080/13510347.2017.1328676](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1328676).
- Chambers, P. "Neo-Sultanistic Tendencies: The Trajectory of Civil-Military Relations in Cambodia." *Asian Security* 11, no. 3 (2015): 179–205. DOI: [10.1080/14799855.2015.1108965](https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2015.1108965).
- Cooley, A. *Central Asia: A Political History from the 19th Century to Present*, Asia Society, <https://asiasociety.org/central-asia-political-history-19th-century-present>, 2024.
- Cooley, A., and D. Nexon. *Exit from Hegemony: The Unravelling of American Order*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Cooley, A., and J. Heathershaw. *Dictators Without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
- Coppedge, M., J. Gerring, S. Lindberg, J. Teorell, D. Altman, F. Angiolillo, M. Bernhard, et al. "V-Dem Variable Country Graphs Dataset v14" Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. doi:[10.23696/mcwt-fr58](https://doi.org/10.23696/mcwt-fr58), 2024.
- Cordell, R., and K. Medhi. "Transnational Repression: International Cooperation in Silencing Dissent." *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2024, September): sqae108. doi:[10.1093/isq/sqae108](https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae108).
- Croissant, A., and J. Haynes. "Democratic Regression in Asia: Introduction." *Democratization* 28, no. 1 (2021): 1–21. DOI:[10.1080/13510347.2020.1851203](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1851203).
- Croissant, A., and L. Diamond. "Introduction: Reflections on Democratic Backsliding in Asia." *Global Asia* 15 (2020, March): 8–13.
- Davies, M. *Ritual and Region: The Invention of ASEAN*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- del Sordi, A., and A. Libman. "Kazakhstan: Possible Future Authoritarian Gravity Center?" In *Authoritarian Gravity Centers : A Cross-Regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*, edited by Marianne Kneuer, and Thomas Demmelhuber, 138–171. New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.
- Diamond, L. "Democracy Demotion: How the Freedom Agenda Fell Apart." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (2019): 17–25.
- Diamond, L., ed. *Authoritarianism Goes Global : The Challenge to Democracy*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Erlanger, S. "Thailand Seeks to Shape a 'Golden Peninsula'." *New York Times*, 30 April, 1989.
- Fibiger, M. "The Nixon Doctrine and the Making of Authoritarianism in Island Southeast Asia." *Diplomatic History* 45, no. 5 (2021, November): 954–982. doi:[10.1093/dh/dhab065](https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhab065).
- Finney, R. "Lao Democracy Activist Still Missing After a Year, as Thai Police Investigation 'Stalls'." *Radio Free Asia*, 25 August accessed at, 2020.
- Foot, R. Chinese Power and the Idea of a Responsible State in a Changing World Order, Centre of Gravity Series, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, February, 2018.
- Fung, C. J., and S. Lam. "Staffing the United Nations: China's Motivations and Prospects." *International Affairs (London)* 97, no. 4 (2021): 1143–1163. doi:[10.1093/ia/iab071](https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab071).

- Graefrath, M. S., and M. Jahn. "Conceptualizing Interstate Cooperation." *International Theory* 15, no. 1 (2023): 24–52. doi:[10.1017/S1752971921000208](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971921000208).
- Gungwu, W. "China's South." In *China Reconnects: Joining a Deep-Rooted Past to a New World Order*, edited by W. Gungwu, 139–161. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2019.
- Han, B. "Case Study: Thailand." In *Defending Democracy in Exile: Policy Responses to Transnational Repression*, edited by Yana Gorokhovskaia, and Isabel Linzer, 1–12. Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2022, June. <http://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/thailand>
- Human Rights Watch. "Thailand: Myanmar Activists Forcibly Returned." 12 April, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/12/thailand-myanmar-activists-forcibly-returned>, 2023.
- International Crisis Group. "Waging Peace: ASEAN and the Thai-Cambodian Border Conflict." Asia Report N°215, 6 December., 2011.
- Jenne, N. "Thai–Cambodian Fugitive Deal Won't Mend Relations." East Asia Forum, 11 May, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2018/05/11/thai-cambodian-fugitive-deal-wont-mend-relations/>, 2018.
- Jenne, N. "The Domestic Origins of no-war Communities." *J Int Relat Dev* 24 (2021): 196–225. doi:[10.1057/s41268-020-00188-7](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-020-00188-7).
- Jenne, N. "The Thai–Cambodian Border Dispute: An Agency-Centred Perspective on the Management of Interstate Conflict." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 315–347. doi:[10.1355/cs39-2c](https://doi.org/10.1355/cs39-2c).
- Khmer Times. "15 international Observers from ASEAN Countries to Observe Cambodian Election." *Khmer Times*, 14 July <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501324419/15-international-observers-from-asean-countries-to-observe-cambodian-election/>, 2023.
- Kneuer, M., and T. Demmelhuber. "Gravity Centres of Authoritarian Rule: A Conceptual Approach." *Democratization* 23, no. 5 (2016): 775–796.
- Kneur, M., and T. Demmelhuber. *Authoritarian Gravity Centers: A Cross Regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Lawrence, B. "Authoritarian Constitutional Borrowing and Convergence in Cambodia." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 43, no. 2 (2021): 321–344.
- Lee, M. M. *Crippling Leviathan : How Foreign Subversion Weakens the State*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020. doi:[10.7591/9781501748387](https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501748387)
- Levitsky, S., and L. A. Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism : Hybrid Regimes After the Cold war*. New York: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2010.
- Lewis, D. "“Illiberal Spaces.” Uzbekistan's Extraterritorial Security Practices and the Spatial Politics of Contemporary Authoritarianism." *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 140–159. doi:[10.1080/00905992.2014.980796](https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.980796).
- Liebermann, V. *Strange Parallels Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830, Vol. 2 Mainland Mirrors: Europe, Japan, China, South Asia, and the Islands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Lim, D., and G. Ikenberry. "China and the Logic of Illiberal Hegemony." *Security Studies* 32, no. 1 (2023): 1–31. DOI:[10.1080/09636412.2023.2178963](https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2023.2178963).
- Loughlin, N. "Chinese Linkage: Leverage, and Cambodia's Transition to Hegemonic Authoritarianism." *Democratization* 28, no. 4 (2021): 840–857. DOI:[10.1080/13510347.2021.1888931](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1888931).
- Manager Online. "Get to Know General Min Aung Hlaing' the New Leader of Myanmar Who Has Close Ties With Thai Military Commanders" [รู้จัก พล.อ.อาวุโส มิน อ่อง หลာข ผู้นำเมียนมาคนใหม่ ที่ผูกพันใกล้ชิดผู้นำทหารไทย] Manager Online, 2 February, accessed at <https://today.line.me/th/v2/article/7rQgGn> on 19 April 2022., 2021.
- McGregor, R. "Xi Jinping's Ideological Ambitions." *The Wall Street Journal* (2018). 2 March Eastern Edition.
- Mechkova, V., A. Lührmann, and S. I. Lindberg. "How Much Democratic Backsliding?" *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 4 (2017): 162–169. doi:[10.1353/jod.2017.0075](https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0075).
- Mietzner, M. *Democratic Deconsolidation in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Nanuum, W. *Steel Path: General Surayud Chulanond 24th Prime Minister*, [เส้นทางเหล็กพล.อ.สุรยุทธ์ จุลานนท์ นายกรัฐมนตรีคนที่ ๒๔]. Bangkok: Matichon Press, 2006.
- Nathan, A. "China's Challenge." *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 156–170.
- Nguyen, V. *Flying Blind: Vietnam's Decision to Join ASEAN*, ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021.

- Noesselt, N. "China's new Regional Responsiveness: Passive Agency and Counter-Agency in Processes of Democratic Transitions in Asia." *Democratization* 28, no. 1 (2021): 219–236. DOI:10.1080/13510347.2020.1840557.
- Nye, J. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy* Autumn, no. 80 (1990): 153–171.
- Ordoñez, J. H., and E. La Viña. Southeast Asia's ethnic crises in modernity, New Mandala, 7 Dec <https://www.newmandala.org/southeast-asias-ethnic-crises-in-modernity>, 2018.
- Palmer, G., et al. "The MID5 Dataset, 2011-2014: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 39, no. 4 (2020): 470–482. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.11770738894221995743>
- Pathan, D. "Ethnic armies could lose Buffer Role in Border Zone." *The Nation*, 6 Aug, 2008.
- Pepinsky, T. Democracy isn't receding in Southeast Asia, authoritarianism is enduring, East Asia Forum, 4 November, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/11/04/democracy-isnt-receding-in-southeast-asia-authoritarianism-is-enduring/> 4 November 2017, 2017.
- Phasuk, S. "Thai Rights Commission Links Officials to 'Disappearance' of 9 Exiles." *Human Rights Watch*, 11 June, accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/11/thai-rights-commission-links-officials-disappearance-9-exiles>, 2024.
- Phongpaichit, P., and C. Baker. *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004.
- Po, S., and K. Sims. "The Myth of Non-Interference: Chinese Foreign Policy in Cambodia." *Asian Studies Review* 46, no. 1 (2021): 36–54. DOI:10.1080/10357823.2021.1887813.
- Pongsirin, P. *Statutory Declaration Made Pursuant to Statutory Declarations Act 1959, Commonwealth of Australia*, 13 January accessed at https://www.moveforwardparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/paween_pongsirin_statutory_declaration_for_publishing.pdf, 2015.
- Progressive Voice Myanmar. "Impunity Across Borders: Junta's TNR Stalks Burmese Communities Abroad." BN 2024/2102 13 Dec accessed at https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2102-TNR-Briefer-Burma_English.pdf, 2024.
- Quinley, C., and P. Robertson. "We Thought We Were Safe" *Human Rights Watch* accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/feature/2024/05/16/we-thought-we-were-safe/repression-and-forced-return-of-refugees-in-thailand>, 2024.
- Rajah, J. *Authoritarian Rule of Law: Legislation, Discourse and Legitimacy in Singapore*. 1st ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Reid, A. *A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads*. Somerset: Wiley, 2015.
- Rolland, N. China's Vision For A New World Order, National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report No. 83, January, 2020.
- Rome, R. "Fairlyland for Crime" [ແຕ່ນສາວກັບຂອງຈຳພາກກຸມ] Facebook post, 4 April accessed at [https://www.facebook.com/rangsimanrome/posts/pfbid0SCh2DfamjQAMXH81rv7fRxpvvjv3B4K7R19fSMqb31QCmевqGUj9NF4Rw6qB89UFl?_cft__\[0\]=AZUzSWThVPAdJ_HtOPwqTNl6vRWscxCvZVvuqQ2ahgKFz_QYcZ9F5IYhV0BD72Uz4x370VU6da3NPBwAJwmFMxxQVnXaLs-boeVLxXTl6fRa3ubkuXP6c5G28PclssHWGtpyzqC0fUFqEO4V9f_wTlfoQ6i44nkYLoOzagZ54ChgLmC_Yo52MqwYfvNMBJCwUV5sGrs0Ra80rgWGBu_c4qc&_tn__=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/rangsimanrome/posts/pfbid0SCh2DfamjQAMXH81rv7fRxpvvjv3B4K7R19fSMqb31QCmевqGUj9NF4Rw6qB89UFl?_cft__[0]=AZUzSWThVPAdJ_HtOPwqTNl6vRWscxCvZVvuqQ2ahgKFz_QYcZ9F5IYhV0BD72Uz4x370VU6da3NPBwAJwmFMxxQVnXaLs-boeVLxXTl6fRa3ubkuXP6c5G28PclssHWGtpyzqC0fUFqEO4V9f_wTlfoQ6i44nkYLoOzagZ54ChgLmC_Yo52MqwYfvNMBJCwUV5sGrs0Ra80rgWGBu_c4qc&_tn__=%2CO%2CP-R), 2024.
- Safeguard Defenders. "INVOLUNTARY RETURNS: China's covert operation to force 'fugitives' overseas back home." <https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/INVOLUNTARY%20Returns.pdf>, 2022.
- Sarkees, M., and F. Wayman. *Resort to War: 1816–2007*. Washington DC: CQ Press, 2010.
- Schenkkan, N., and I. Linzer. Out Of Sight, Not Out Of Reach: The Global Scale And Scope of Transnational Repression, Freedom House, February., 2021.
- Seah, S., T. Hoang, M. Martinus, and T. Pham. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2021*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021.
- Seah, S., J. Lin, S. Suvannaphakdy, M. Martinus, T. Pham, F. Seth, and T. Hoang. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2022*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022.
- Seah, S., J. Lin, M. Martinus, S. Suvannaphakdy, and T. Pham. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2023 Survey Report*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.
- Seah, S., J. Lin, M. Martinus, K. Fong, I. Aridati, T. Pham, and D. Chee. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2024 Survey Report*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024.
- Slater, D. *Ordering Power : Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Sokhean, B. "Mahathir Mohamad Speaks on Kingdom's Democracy." *Khmer Times*, 3 September, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/639704/mahathir-mohamad-speaks-on-kingdoms-democracy/>, 2019.
- Tang, S., et al. *The State of Southeast Asia: 2020*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2020.
- Tansey, O. *International Politics of Authoritarian Rule, Oxford Studies in Democratization*. Oxford: Oxford Academic, online edn, 2016.
- Tansey, O., K. Koehler, and A. Schmotz. "Ties to the Rest: Autocratic Linkages and Regime Survival." *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 9 (2017): 1221–1254.
- Thai Rath. "Godson: General Min Aung Hlaing Pays Respects to Prem Reveals that there was warmth very time they spoke" [ลูกบุญธรรม บ. พล.อ.มิน อ่องหล่ายล่ กราบศพ"ป๋าเปรม"เผย อบอุ่นทุกครั้งที่ ที่พู่ที่ ดพพ คพพ] Thai Rath online, 31 May accessed at <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/1581206> on 15 January 2022, 2019.
- Tucker, S. "Myanmar Reveals ASEAN's Weak Spot Again." Stimson Policy memo, 25 July, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/myanmar-reveals-aseans-weak-spot-again/>, 2023.
- Vatikiotos, M. "ASEAN is Quietly Coming Apart at the Seams." *Nikkei Asia*, 28 August, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/ASEAN-is-quietly-coming-apart-at-the-seams>, 2023.
- Vu, T. "In the Service of World Revolutions: Vietnamese Communists' Radical Ambitions Through the Three Indochina Wars." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 21, no. Fall 019 (2019, Number 4): 4–30.
- Vu, T. "Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Surviving Asian Communist Regimes from a Historical, Regional, and Holistic Approach." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 55, no. 2 (2022): 1–27.
- Waller, C. "Russian Transimperialism and Its Implications." *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 107–122.
- Weiss, M. "Is Malaysian Democracy Backsliding or Merely Staying put?" *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 9, no. 1 (2024): 9–24. <https://doi-org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.117720578911221136066>
- Widiono, B. *Dancing in Shadows: Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and the United Nations in Cambodia*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.
- Wright, G., and I. Praithongyaem. "Wanchalearm Satsaksit: The Thai Satirist Abducted in Broad Daylight." BBC News, 2 July accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53212932>, 2020.
- Yee. "Autocratic peace and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." East Asia Forum, 11 May, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/05/11/autocratic-peace-and-the-shanghai-cooperation-organisation/>, 2011.
- Zawacki, B. *Implications of a Crowded Field: Sub-Regional Architecture in ACMECS Countries – Policy Brief*. United States of America: The Asia Foundation, 2019. Retrieved from <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/rk3x5t> on 16 Sep 2024. COI: 20.500.12592/rk3x5t.
- Zumbragel, T. "Kingdom of Gravity: Autocratic Promotion and Diffusion in Saudi Arabia." In *Authoritarian Gravity Centers : A Cross-Regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*, edited by Marianne Kneuer, and Thomas Demmelhuber. Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.