

Democratization and Political Reform in the Asia-Pacific: Is There an 'Asian Model' of Institutional Design?

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ABSTRACT: One of the little-noticed consequences of the democratization of the Asia-Pacific has been reforms to key political institutions such as electoral systems, political parties, and parliaments. I argue that, across the region, these reforms have been motivated by common aims of increasing government stability, reducing political fragmentation, and limiting the potential for ethnic politics. As a result, similar strategies of institutional design are evident in areas such as the increasing prevalence of 'mixed-member majoritarian' electoral systems, attempts to develop aggregative political party systems, and constraints upon the formation of small, ethnic or regional parties. I argue that these political reforms have increasingly converged on an identifiable "Asian model" of institutional design.

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The past decade has been a period of major political reform in the Asia-Pacific region. More governments are elected in competitive, freely contested elections today than ever before. Thailand and the Philippines now appear to have joined Japan, South Korea and Taiwan as genuine competitive democracies. In addition, both Indonesia and East Timor have navigated the initial challenges of democratization by holding successful transitional elections. All of this represents a dramatic change in the nature of Asian regimes: from what a decade ago was a region dominated by authoritarian governments, there is now a clear trend towards democracy being the accepted means for choosing and changing a country's political leadership.¹

One consequence of this movement towards democracy has been the reform of democratic institutions such as electoral systems. Electoral systems represent a particularly important democratic institution because they determine how votes won in an election are translated into seats won in parliament, and are the central 'rule of the game' affecting who governs. The formative role of elections in shaping broader norms of political behaviour means that they are also "the most specific manipulable instrument of

¹ See John Fuh-Sheng Hsieh and David Newman (eds) 2002, *How Asia Votes*, Chatham House Publishers, New York.

politics”², and can be designed to achieve specific objectives and outcomes. Thus Lijphart writes that “if one wants to change the nature of a particular democracy, the electoral system is likely to be the most suitable and effective instrument for doing so”.³

This paper argues that many of the electoral system changes in the Asia-Pacific region in recent years have attempted exactly this kind of political manipulation, via the common aim of reducing instability by promoting cohesive political parties and limiting party fragmentation. These have been driven by several distinctive patterns of political reform across the region, including the increasing prevalence of mixed-member electoral systems, the distinctively majoritarian nature of these systems, and attempts to engineer political party systems. The nature and similarities of these reforms are such that they constitute an emerging ‘Asian model’ of institutional design.

Democratization in the Asia-Pacific

The democratization of East Asia deserves to be seen as a historic shift in the region’s affairs.⁴ Major transitions from authoritarian rule towards democracy began with the “people power” uprising in the Philippines in 1986 and the negotiated transitions to democracy in South Korea and Taiwan in 1987, before moving on to Thailand in 1992, Cambodia in 1993, Indonesia in 1998,

² Sartori, G. 1968, ‘Political Development and Political Engineering’, *Public Policy*, 17, p. 273.

³ Lijphart, A. 1995, ‘Electoral Systems’, in S.M. Lipset (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington DC., p. 412.

and East Timor (following international intervention) in 2001. Of course, not all of these transitions to democracy are assured, and the democratization wave is far from universal: politics in China, for one, remains firmly under the control of the Communist Party, despite an economic transformation. Likewise, Vietnam, Burma, Laos and North Korea have shown little sign of adopting democracy.

There are significant regional variations in the extent and timing of democratization across the region. In North Asia, the democratic triumvirate of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are some of the longest-established democracies in East Asia -- and Japan deserves to be seen as being in a class of its own given that it has been a stable (if remarkably non-competitive) democracy for almost 50 years. If "democratic consolidation" is a measure of the staying-power of democratic rule, then this group could be considered to be consolidated democracies: it is unlikely that democracy could be overturned in any of these countries. For example, it is notable that South Korea, despite the severe economic difficulties it suffered as a result of the Asian economic downturn, has shown no signs of flirting with a return to authoritarianism -- and in fact elected the region's foremost democracy activist, Kim Dae Jung, as its President in 1997.

⁴ See Lee, J. 2002. 'Primary Causes of Asian Democratization', *Asian Survey* 42(6):821-837.

Turning to South-East Asia, the Philippines and Thailand are now clearly the two best-established democracies amongst the ASEAN member states. Both, for example, have experienced successive elections and, importantly, peaceful turnovers of government as a result of the electoral process. Depending on how the ongoing process of democracy unfolds, Indonesia may join this club at some stage in the next decade. It will hold its second consecutive free election in 2004. There is also the case of East Timor – a new democracy born out of the crucible of a liberation struggle and international intervention, but which appears to be moving quite quickly to becoming one of the region's firmly democratic states. However, while the democratization of all of these countries is proceeding rapidly, none could yet be said to be truly consolidated in the sense of democracy being considered the “only game in town” and any reversion from it unthinkable.⁵

Then there are the semi-democratic or ‘soft’ authoritarian regimes, principally Malaysia and Singapore – neither of which have experienced a turnover of power since independence, but both of which maintain regular and fraud-free electoral processes. In these cases, the fairness of the electoral process is biased not through outright manipulation as much as via restrictions on opposition parties’ right to campaign openly, a compliant judiciary and a pro-government press. Cambodia should probably be seen as a borderline

⁵ This is the definition suggested by Adam Przeworski 1991, *Democracy and the Market*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

member of this group, due to the violence and intimidation that accompanied the flawed 1998 and (to a lesser extent) 2003 elections there.

Finally, there are the ongoing outright authoritarian regimes in the region – North Korea, China, Vietnam, Brunei, Laos and Burma/Myanmar – in which elections are either not held at all, or do not involve a contest for actual political power. Although some democratic reforms and innovations are taking place amongst this group (opposition candidates have been allowed to contest elections in Laos, for example, while competitive village-level elections have been held in China), in general elections in these countries are empty and stage-managed exercises. I will therefore not be dealing with the electoral systems of these countries in this paper.

Probably the best-known measure of democracy is the annual rankings of civil and political rights produced by the US private foundation Freedom House. The Freedom House rankings for the Asia-Pacific in the 30 years from 1972 to 2002 are shown at Table One, and tend to support the other judgements. Using the Freedom House criteria, five countries – Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand – are ranked as “free”. East Timor, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are all adjudged as “partly free”, although their trajectories run in different directions, with Indonesia and East Timor having improved their rankings while Malaysia and Singapore have regressed. The others – Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, China, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam -- are all adduced as being “not free”, although again there is enormous variation within this group, with some countries having held at least partly free

elections in the 1990s (eg Cambodia) while others remain completely dominated by authoritarian rule (eg North Korea).

Table One: Freedom House Rankings of Political Rights and Civil Liberties in the Asia-Pacific, 1972-2002

Year	Brunei	Burma	Cambodia	China	E. Timor	Indonesia	Japan	Korea, N.	Korea, S.	Laos	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Taiwan	Thailand	Vietnam
1972-73	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	6,5,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,NF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	4,6,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	-
1973-74	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	6,5,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	4,6,PF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,3,PF	-
1974-75	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,PF	5,5,PF	3,3,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	5,3,PF	-
1975-76	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,5,PF	6,6,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	2,3,F	-
1976-77	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,NF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF
1977-78	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,4,PF	6,5,NF	7,7,NF
1978-79	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	5,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,3,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,4,PF	6,4,PF	7,7,NF
1979-80	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,5,NF	-	5,5,PF	2,1,F	7,7,NF	4,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	4,3,PF	7,7,NF
1980-81	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,6,PF	3,4,PF	7,7,NF
1981-82	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,4,PF	7,7,NF
1982-83	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,4,PF	7,6,NF
1983-84	6,5,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	5,6,PF	7,7,NF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,4,PF	7,6,NF
1984-85	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,6,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	5,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,5,PF	4,4,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,4,PF	7,6,NF
1985-86	6,5,PF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,6,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	4,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,5,PF	4,3,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,4,PF	7,7,NF
1986-87	6,5,PF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,6,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	4,5,PF	7,7,NF	3,5,PF	4,2,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	3,3,PF	7,7,NF
1987-88	6,5,PF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,6,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	4,4,PF	7,7,NF	3,5,PF	2,2,F	4,5,PF	5,4,PF	3,3,PF	6,7,NF
1988-89	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	2,3,F	6,6,NF	4,5,PF	2,3,F	4,5,PF	5,3,PF	3,3,PF	6,7,NF
1989-90	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	-	5,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	2,3,F	6,7,NF	5,4,PF	2,3,F	4,4,PF	4,3,PF	2,3,F	7,7,NF
1990-91	6,5,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	-	6,5,PF	1,1,F	7,7,NF	2,3,F	6,7,NF	5,4,PF	3,3,PF	4,4,PF	3,3,PF	2,3,F	7,7,NF
1991-92	6,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	6,5,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,3,F	6,7,NF	5,4,PF	3,3,PF	4,4,PF	5,5,PF	6,4,PF	7,7,NF
1992-93	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	6,5,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,3,F	7,6,NF	5,4,PF	3,3,PF	4,5,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	7,7,NF
1993-94	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	4,5,PF	7,7,NF	-	7,6,NF	2,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	4,4,PF	3,5,PF	7,7,NF
1994-95	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	4,5,PF	7,7,NF	-	7,6,NF	2,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	3,4,PF	5,5,PF	3,3,PF	3,5,PF	7,7,NF
1995-96	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	7,6,NF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	2,4,PF	5,5,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	7,7,NF
1996-97	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	7,5,NF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	2,3,F	4,5,PF	2,2,F	3,3,PF	7,7,NF
1997-98	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	-	7,5,NF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	2,2,F	3,3,PF	7,7,NF
1998-99	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	-	6,4,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	2,2,F	2,3,F	7,7,NF
1999-00	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	6,4,PF	4,4,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	2,2,F	2,3,F	7,7,NF
2000-01	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	6,3,PF	3,4,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,6,NF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	1,2,F	2,3,F	7,6,NF
2001-02	7,5,NF	7,7,NF	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	5,3,PF	3,4,PF	1,2,F	7,7,NF	2,2,F	7,7,NF	5,5,PF	2,3,F	5,5,PF	1,2,F	2,3,F	7,6,NF

Note: The characters representing scores for each year are, from left to right, political rights, civil liberties, and freedom status. Each of the first two is measured on a one-to-seven scale, with one representing the highest degree of freedom and seven the lowest. "F," "PF," and "NF" respectively stand for "free," "partly free," and "not free." Countries whose combined averages for political rights and for civil liberties fall between 1.0 and 2.5 are designated "free"; between 3.0 and 5.5 "partly free"; and between 5.5 and 7.0 "not free."

Source: Freedom House (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/FHSCORES.xls>.)

Despite their marked differences in levels of democracy and democratic consolidation, there has been a convergence in patterns of political reform in the Asia-Pacific's electoral democracies -- Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and East Timor -- over the past decade.⁶ The remainder of this paper examines this convergence in the field of electoral reform, looking both at the institutional characteristics of systems chosen as well as their intended outcomes.

Electoral Systems

The most striking movement in terms of electoral systems in the Asia-Pacific has been the increasing enthusiasm for "mixed-member" systems – that is, where part of the parliament is elected by proportional representation (PR), part by some type of plurality or majority method. As in other world regions, such systems have become increasingly popular in Asia in recent years, perhaps because they appear to combine the benefits of proportional election outcomes with district-level representation.

Mixed systems can be divided into two broad systemic categories, parallel and compensatory (also known as 'unlinked' and 'linked') systems. *Parallel* mixed-member systems run district-level and elections and a national party

⁶ For an excellent recent survey of Asian electoral systems, see Allen Hicken and Yuko Kasuya. 2003. 'A guide to the constitutional structures and electoral systems of east, south and southeast Asia', *Electoral Studies* 22:121-151.

list vote concurrently (hence the term 'parallel'). Because of this, parallel systems are generally classified as semi-proportional, producing outcomes that fall somewhere between the strict proportionality of PR systems and the distorted results of plurality-majority forms. By contrast, *compensatory* systems link the two electoral systems so that the allocation of list seats is dependent at some level of the results from the district elections. In most cases, such as New Zealand, this results in broadly proportional outcomes. While parallel systems have been chosen by many Asia-Pacific states, none currently use compensatory systems.⁷

The adoption of mixed systems in the Asia-Pacific has occurred in two different contexts. In North Asia, mixed systems have been introduced mostly as a replacement for the single non-transferable vote (SNTV). In South-East Asia, by contrast, mixed systems have been introduced as a replacement for the block vote (BV). Both SNTV and BV are variations on a standard plurality electoral system, and were once widespread for elections throughout Asia. Under SNTV, each elector has one vote but there are several seats in the district to be filled, and the candidates with the highest number of votes fill these positions. This system was formerly used in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, and is still used to elect the district seats in Taiwan's mixed-member system.

⁷ See Andrew Reynolds and Ben Reilly 1997, *The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design*, International IDEA, Stockholm.

Across Asia, the rejection of SNTV and BV systems as part of political reforms through the 1990s resulted in the introduction of parallel mixed-member systems to combine two divergent system types, such as PR and plurality in Thailand, or PR with SNTV in Taiwan. South Korea should be seen as the instigator of this movement, as it first adopted a parallel mixed-member system in 1963.⁸ Taiwan was the next to introduce the party list option, moving to a SNTV/PR combination in 1992, followed by Japan in 1994 and, in 1996, a revision of Korea's system to make the allocation of list seats truly proportional. Since then, the Philippines, Thailand and East Timor have all followed suit.

Japan is probably the best-known case of the change to a mixed system in Asia. Japan's choice of a mixed system was in large part a reaction to the strategic impacts of the SNTV system, which it had used for many decades. Because SNTV enables parties to put forward multiple candidates in each district, and hence for members of the same party to run in competition with one another, it encourages intra-party competition. As the region's only long-term "established" democracy, Japan's electoral reforms were stimulated not just by a decline in public confidence in SNTV, which was widely seen as having encouraged intra-party factionalism and hence corruption, but also by a deliberate attempt to change the way the political system operated by

⁸ South Korea thus has some claims to having invented this model of elections, *contra* the common misconception that non-compensatory mixed systems were invented in Eastern Europe before being

manipulating of the electoral system, an approach that has been followed by other Asian countries more recently.

Since 1994, Japan has thus utilized a parallel mixed-member system, with 300 seats elected by plurality rules in single-member constituencies, and a PR list (using the d'Hondt method) for the remaining 180 seats. The allocation of these proportional seats is based on the parties' share of the national vote in 11 large multi-member districts. However, candidates are allowed to transfer between the party lists and the single-member districts, creating an unusual "dual-candidate" system which appears to have undermined some of the goals of electoral reform, such as the creation of less personalistic and more programmatic political parties.⁹

Predating the Japanese reforms, Taiwan first adopted a mixed system for its Legislative Yuan elections in 1992, but has continued to use SNTV for the district-based component of elections, which comprises 80 percent of the 225 seats in the Yuan. The other 20 percent of legislative seats are for national representatives (including eight overseas Chinese representatives) elected by PR in two nationwide constituencies. Unlike the Japanese version, however, electors are not given a separate vote for these national constituencies. Rather,

taken up by other states like Japan and Taiwan. See S. Birch 2003, *Electoral Systems and Political Transformation in Post-Communist Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire and New York, p. 32.

⁹ See McKean, Margaret and Scheiner, Ethan. 2000. 'Japan's new electoral system: la plus ca change ...', *Electoral Studies* 19:447-477.

national seats are allocated to parties who poll more than 5% of the vote in the SNTV seats in proportion to their vote share at the district level.

The South Korean experience of mixed systems has, until recently, represented a third approach to electoral reform. Over the years, Korea has experimented with several different combinations of mixed system in which local districts and national PR lists have been combined in a variety of ways. At the time of writing, of the Korean National Assembly's 273 seats (reduced from 299 prior to the April 2000 elections as a means of cost saving), 227 are elected from single-member constituencies by a plurality formula, while the remaining 46 are chosen from a national constituency by proportional representation. These seats are divided proportionately among the political parties based upon their votes obtained in the districts, on condition that they have obtained at least 5% of the total valid votes cast. Prior to 1996, however, the national list seats were given to parties on the bases of their *seat* share at district elections, meaning that the national seats usually exacerbated any disproportionality at the local level.

These North-East Asian cases can collectively be seen as a 'democratic club' in which divergent approaches to reform have resulted in a surprisingly high degree of similarity in electoral models. A similar conclusion applies to the two best-established democracies in South-East Asia, the Philippines and Thailand, which have also undergone major electoral reforms in recent years.

In both cases they replaced the block vote (BV) described earlier, and today only Laos continues to use the BV for its elections.

Under its 1987 Constitution, the Philippines adopted a mixed system in which 80% of the 250 House of Representatives seats are elected from single-member districts via a plurality formula, and the remaining 20% are chosen from a national list. These list seats, however, are not open to established parties but are designed to represent “sectoral interests” and marginalized groups such as youth, labour, the urban poor, farmers, fishermen and women. Each group can put up a maximum of three candidates, and any group securing 2% of the party-list vote gets a seat, up to a maximum of three seats. However, the list seats have been dogged by problems. In 1998, only 14 of the 52 list seats were filled, as electoral authorities struggled to verify the credentials of elected groups. In 2001, ten parties and organizations surpassed the 2% threshold, although again less than one-third of all available seats were filled. Following the 2001 elections, the Supreme Court found that most of the groups elected did not in fact represent minorities, and that some indeed had links to the major parties. Less than half of the elected party-list members have so far taken up their seats.¹⁰ To further complicate matters, up to 20 or more positions are filled at each election – and candidate names do not appear on

¹⁰ R. J. May, 2002, ‘Elections in the Philippines, May 2001’, *Electoral Studies*, Volume 21(4):673-680.

the ballot papers, but have to be written in by voters, creating practical difficulties in a country where literacy remains a problem.¹¹

Like the Philippines, Thailand has also moved away from the block vote to a mixed system in which 80% of the parliament's 500 seats are elected from local constituencies, and the remaining 20% of the seats are elected from a national party list. This exercise in institutional engineering has created two classes of politicians with radically divergent career incentives for election. The district MPs must represent local areas and bring development opportunities to them; while the national MPs are explicitly charged with playing a role in issues of national, not local, importance. Parties competing for party-list seats must attain at least 5 percent of the vote, a provision which discriminates against splinter parties. This has resulted in a sharp drop in party system fractionalization, with the 'effective' number of parliamentary parties falling by half between 1995 and 2001.¹²

The three other cases of democratization in South-East Asia – Indonesia, Cambodia and East Timor – have also experimented with mixed-member systems, but with significant variations. Each of these cases also demonstrate

¹¹ See Montinola, Gabriella R. 1999. 'Parties and accountability in the Philippines', *Journal of Democracy* 10(1):126-140.

¹² See Hicken, Allen. 2003. "From Province to Parliament: Party Aggregation in Developing Democracies." Paper presented to the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 28-31 August.

some of the underlying issues driving the adoption of mixed systems in the region.

The electoral system used for Indonesia's transitional 1999 elections was an unusual and possibly unique combination of party list PR with 'personal vote' characteristics. In an attempt to reward individually popular candidates without moving all the way to a district-based system, Indonesia's political engineers effectively tried to graft an element of local representation onto a party-list PR system. They did this by specifying that the vote totals parties gained in each local government area (*kapupatem*) would determine which candidates from the party list would be elected. In theory, a locally-popular representative who attracted an above-average proportional of votes to the party in a particular district would thus have an increased chance of gaining a parliamentary seat. In practice, this procedure was almost impossible to administer, and the successful candidates ended up being chosen by the parties internally.

For the 2004 elections, a more conventional form of 'open list' proportional representation was adopted. Unlike mixed-member systems, where some parliamentarians are elected from districts and some from national lists, all candidates were chosen from party lists, but voters were able to influence the composition of these lists by voting directly for a chosen candidate. However, this 'open list' provision had little influence on the final election outcomes, as

an exceptionally large number of personal votes were needed to alter a candidate's position on the party list. Nonetheless, demands in Indonesia for some kind of district-based system remain strong, fuelled in part by the expectation that democratic prospects would be enhanced if the power of party elites was reduced and politics brought closer to the masses.¹³ In part in response to this, Indonesia's 2004 elections were conducted under a PR system, but used much smaller electoral districts than previously, with a maximum of 12 members per district. This raised the threshold for election and made it difficult for smaller parties to win seats compared to the 1999 elections, when districts were based around entire provinces.¹⁴ The effect of this – in keeping with the reforms in Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines – was to make outcomes in Indonesia's 2004 election more majoritarian than previously, with the elimination of a number of very small parties from the 1999 parliament and a reduction in the number of parties overall.

In Cambodia also, there has also been pressure for the introduction of some kind of district-based or mixed system due to concerns about the lack of accountability in the proportional system inherited from the United Nation Transitional Authority in Cambodia mission in 2003. Like Indonesia, Cambodia uses a list PR system in 23 constituencies based around the country's provinces, which results in broadly proportional outcomes.

¹³ See Andrew Ellis 2000. 'The politics of electoral systems in transition: the 1999 elections in Indonesia and beyond', *Representation* 37:241-248.

However, in response to the calls for greater local linkages and accountability between voting populations and their representatives, over one-third of these constituencies are actually single-member districts.¹⁵ Predictably, this has led the elimination of some small parties, and more majoritarian outcomes overall.

The final case of electoral reform in process in the region, East Timor, also used a mixed-member model for its foundation elections in 2001. As in Cambodia, the majority of voters in East Timor are elected from the party lists, not from districts. For the August 2001 elections to the Constituent Assembly, the body charged with drawing up the new nation's constitution, 75 seats were elected on a nationwide basis by proportional representation, and only 13 seats (one for each district) by first-past-the-post. The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) captured a majority of 55 seats in the 88-member Assembly, winning 43 of the 75 national seats and all of the available district seats. The Assembly has since transformed itself into a legislature and passed a new constitution which specifies that elections must be held under proportional representation for a much smaller parliament, so it is likely that future elections will be held under a straight PR system with no district level representation.

¹⁴ Stephen Sherlock 2004, 'Consolidation and Change: The Indonesian Parliament after the 2004 Elections'. Canberra: Centre for Democratic Institutions., p. 4.

Table Two sets out the changes in electoral system across the democratic states of the region since 1990.

¹⁵ At the time of writing there were eight single-member constituencies in Cambodia, up from six in 1993.

Table Two: Electoral Systems Changes in Asia Since 1990

Country	Former Electoral System	New Electoral System
Japan	SNTV	Mixed FPTP-PR (1994)
Taiwan	SNTV	Mixed SNTV-PR (1992)
Thailand	Block Vote	Mixed FPTP-PR (1997)
Philippines	Block Vote	Mixed FPTP-PR (1998)
South Korea*	Mixed SNTV-PR	Mixed FPTP-PR (1996)
Indonesia	Closed List PR	Open List PR (2004)
Cambodia	Closed List PR	List PR with SMDs (2003)
East Timor	-	Mixed FPTP-PR (2003)

* The system adopted in South Korea 1988 delivered compensatory list seats to the party that won the most seats in the district contest, ensuring it an overall majority in the assembly. In 1996, the list seats were de-linked from the district results, in order to make the overall result more proportional.

The two remaining cases, the 'soft-authoritarian' states of Malaysia and Singapore, can be covered quickly. Malaysia, alone amongst the region, uses a standard Westminster system with first-past-the-post elections. Constituency boundaries are gerrymandered to favour the Malay community, and the electoral commission is a compliant servant of the government. Singapore's system is similar, except that there are a range of single-member and multi-member districts. While MPs for the single-member seats are elected by FPTP, most MPs are elected from multi-member districts known as Group Representation Constituencies, each returning between four and six members from a single list of party candidates. Voters choose between competing party lists rather than candidates, and the highest-polling party wins all seats in the

district. This has benefited Singapore's ruling party, the PAP, which regularly wins over 90 percent of seats in parliament on a plurality of the vote. In the most recent elections in 2001, for example, the PAP won 82 out of 84 seats in Parliament on 73.6% of the vote.

Political Parties

In addition to the new electoral systems, reformers in a number of Asia states have also featured an attempt to 'engineer' the development of their nascent party systems by introducing new rules governing the formation, registration and campaigning of political parties.¹⁶ In Thailand, for example, the electoral reforms were just one of a number of measures designed to produce a more consolidated and stable political system, which included measures to combat vote-buying, the establishment of an elected but non-partisan Senate, the introduction of compulsory voting, and restrictions on 'party hopping'.¹⁷ The "self-restraining" nature of the Thai state's new institutional apparatus makes it a particularly interesting and possibly influential example of constitutional reform in the region.¹⁸

Indonesia's attempts to regulate its emerging party system have gone even further. Prior to Indonesia's transitional 1999 election, over 200 new parties

¹⁶ For more on this, see Benjamin Reilly 2003. 'Political Parties and Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific Region', *Asia Pacific Issues: Analysis from the East-West Center*, 71:1-8.

¹⁷ See Murray, David. 1998. 'Thailand's Recent Electoral Reforms', *Electoral Studies* 17:525-535.

¹⁸ See Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds) 1999. *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

mushroomed, many with extremely limited support bases. In an attempt to combat the potentially disastrous consequences of party fragmentation, Indonesia's political engineers introduced a complex series of incentives and constraints on party development. As a precondition to compete in the elections, all new party had to demonstrate that they had an established branch structure in more than half of Indonesia's (then) 27 provinces, and within each of these provinces have established branches within over half of all regions and municipalities, before they could stand candidates. In addition, in order to combat the centripetal forces of party fragmentation, there were also strong systemic pressures for party amalgamation: parties which failed to gain more than 2% of all seats in the lower house of parliament, or at least 3% of all seats in both houses combined, had to merge with other parties to surmount these thresholds and contest future elections. These rules whittled down the field considerably: of 141 parties screened by the KPU, only 48 were approved to contest the 1999 elections, and only five gained significant representation: PDIP (led by President Megawati), Golkar (the party machine created by former President Soeharto), and the three Islamist parties, PAN, PPP and PKB.¹⁹

These rules were further strengthened prior to the 2004 elections: new parties had to establish branches in two-thirds of Indonesia's provinces and in two-thirds of the regencies within those provinces. Each local-level party unit also

¹⁹ Suryadinata, Leo. 2002. *Elections and Politics in Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 90-92.

had to demonstrate that it had at least 1,000 members (or at least one-thousandth of the population in smaller regencies). This led to a further drop in party numbers, with only 24 parties qualifying to contest the 2004 elections. However, unlike 1999, most of these parties proved to be electorally viable, and were also able to attract a spread of votes across the three main regions of Indonesia. Whereas the 1999 DPR was dominated by the “big five”, the 2004 parliament features the “big seven”: the five main parties from 1999, plus the two new entrants in the Justice and Welfare Party (PKS) and the Democrat Party (PD) created by presidential aspirant Susilo Bambang Yudhonyo.²⁰ As a result, while the number of parties in parliament declined, the effective number of parties actually rose from 5.4 in 1999 to 8.3 in 2004.

Patterns of Reform

Three clear trends in electoral system choice thus stand out when surveying the East Asian region as a whole.

The first is the predominance of mixed electoral systems, structured to give electors both a vote for political parties from a party list (usually at a national level), and a vote at a district-level election for candidates. While mixed systems have been a popular innovation around the world over the past decade, the Asian version has been distinctive for several reasons.

²⁰ See Sherlock, Stephen 2004, *Consolidation and Change: The Indonesian Parliament after the 2004 Elections*. Canberra: Centre for Democratic Institutions.

First, in all cases bar East Timor, mixed systems in the region are heavily weighted in favour of the majoritarian, single-member districts rather than the PR list. In Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines, only 20 percent of seats are elected from the national list. In Japan, the figure is 40 percent. In all cases, the majority of seats in the legislature are elected from single-member seats. This stands in contrast to the international norm, where most mixed systems have an almost equal split between tiers. Only East Timor, which allocated 80% of all seats to the party list for its 2001 elections, went against this trend (see Table Three). This bias towards districts over lists may retard the development of more nationally-focussed and programmatic political parties in the region, as district-based systems are generally thought to provide lesser incentives towards national party formation than PR.

A second way in which the adoption of mixed systems have been unusual is in the rejection of compensatory mechanisms in the allocation of list seats to balance for disproportionality arising out of the district-level competition. In contrast to countries like Germany, New Zealand, and Mexico, none of the Asian cases use list seats to adjust overall electoral outcomes in this manner (indeed, in one case – South Korea from 1963-96 – the list seats were awarded to the party which did *best* in the district seats, thus compounding rather than compensating for such imbalances). Rather, in each case the PR list runs in

parallel with the district contest, but with no interchange between the two.²¹

This means that while smaller parties can legitimately hope to gain some representation from the lists seats, overall levels of proportionality will, in many cases, not be greatly improved unless parties have strong regional support and can thus win a fair share of the district-based seats. The effect of this is to reinforce the bias away from proportionality created by the structural breakdown between list and district seats.

Most of the mixed-member electoral systems used in Asian countries are thus examples of what Shugart and Wattenberg call 'mixed-member majoritarian' (MMM) systems – that is, mixed member systems in which most seats are elected from districts, creating predominantly majoritarian electoral outcomes.²² This is not an accident. In cases like Thailand and the Philippines, for example, an overriding goal of constitutional and electoral reforms has been to strengthen executive government, combat parliamentary instability, and encourage the development of cohesive political parties. Proportional representation has been seen as inimical to all three goals. As Table Three

²¹ Although some scholars have incorrectly classified the Philippines as a compensatory system. See Louis Massicote and Andre Blais 1999. 'Mixed electoral systems: a conceptual and empirical survey', *Electoral Studies* 18, p. 353.

²² Matthew S. Shugart and Martin P. Wattenburg (eds) 2001. *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: the Best of Both Worlds?* New York: Oxford University Press. Although they do not focus on Asian cases beyond Japan, Shugart and Wattenberg's discussion of MMM systems from other regions may have relevance for the Asia-Pacific. Specifically they find that in most cases the adoption of MMM systems was the result of a compromise between incumbent and newly emerging political parties with strongly divergent preferences (Hungary, Italy, Japan and Mexico are all examples of this).

shows, all the East Asian mixed systems are clearly majoritarian in their structure.

Table Three: Mixed-Member Electoral Systems in the Asia-Pacific

Country	District seats	District system	List seats	List System	Total seats
Japan	300	FPTP	180	List PR	480
Korea	227	FPTP	46	List PR	273
Taiwan	188	SNTV	38	List PR	225
Thailand	400	FPTP	100	List PR	500
Philippines	209	FPTP	up to 53	List PR, with 3 seat limit	262
East Timor	13	FPTP	75	List PR	88

The outcomes of the application of mixed systems in the Asia-Pacific region tend to support the findings of the broader scholarly literature. In Russia, for example, the introduction of a parallel mixed-member system in 1995 was designed to achieve the same goals as most Asia-Pacific reforms: that is, to refashion the party system by stimulating the development of national parties, consolidate smaller parties into large ones, and produce a more stable

legislature.²³ More generally, the most comprehensive evaluation of mixed-member systems to date has concluded that they are more likely than most other electoral systems to generate “two-block” party systems, and are more likely than any other electoral system to simultaneously generate local accountability and a nationally-oriented party system.²⁴ These were precisely the goals which most Asian reformers had high on their list of priorities as part of their broader quest for political stability. The Asian experience of mixed systems thus supports the findings from other regions.

Reinforcing this conclusion is the fact that other countries in the region which have *not* adopted mixed-member systems – such as Cambodia and Indonesia -- have also adopted more majoritarian and disproportional electoral models in recent years. In keeping with the logic of the political party reforms, these have had the effect of penalizing smaller parties, restricting political fragmentation, and hence – not incidentally -- promoting the interests of the established parties. In Cambodia, for example, successive electoral reforms adopted since the restoration of democracy in 1993 have each resulted in small steps away from proportionality. Similarly, Indonesia’s 2004 electoral system was markedly less proportional than that used at the 1999 elections, with most of the smaller parties that gained representation in 1999 failing to be re-elected.

²³ Robert G. Moser 2003. *Unexpected Outcomes: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Representation in Russia*. Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

This rejection of proportionality in favour of majoritarian outcomes has, in most cases, been quite deliberate. Many years of comparative research has clearly identified PR systems as being the foremost institutional variable encouraging party multiplicity.²⁵ The increasing use of single-member districts in many Asia-Pacific states, the penalties on smaller or regional parties, and the increasingly majoritarian nature of electoral system choices, reflects a desire to limit political fragmentation and government instability, promote more meaningful and programmatic political parties, and encourage a greater degree of identification between electors and their elected representatives.²⁶

To illustrate this swing towards majoritarianism, Table Four shows the level of disproportionality for pre-reform and post-reform elections in Japan, Cambodia, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, using Lijphart's measure of the average seat-vote deviation of the two largest

²⁴ Matthew S. Shugart and Martin P. Wattenburg (eds) 2001. *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: the Best of Both Worlds?* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 591.

²⁵ See, for example, Rae, D.W. 1967, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*, Yale University Press, New Haven; Taagepera, R. and Shugart, M.S. 1989, *Seats and Votes: the Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London; Lijphart, A. 1994, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990*, Oxford University Press, New York.

²⁶ This course of action is supported by research which has found that small district magnitude helps to block the rise of 'fringe' or extremist parties in established democracies. See Joseph Willey 1998, 'Institutional Arrangements and the Success of New Parties in Old Democracies' in Richard Hofferbert (ed), *Parties and Democracy*. Blackwell: Oxford.

parties at each election.²⁷ As the Table shows, in almost all cases, disproportionality levels following the reforms were considerably higher than the average levels experienced in previous years. In Thailand and Japan, for example, the first elections held under the new mixed-member systems resulted in rates of disproportionality almost twice that of previous elections. As Crossant notes, “The change in vote-seat deviation in the wake of electoral reforms is remarkable ... [in Thailand] disproportionality rose significantly *after* components of the proportional representation system were introduced. The same is true for the Philippines’s party-list system, used for the first-time ever in 1998 and again in 2001.”²⁸ Cambodia also saw an increase in disproportionality, due in part to the increase in the number of single-member districts. Only Indonesia, where proportionality actually increased between 1999 to 2004, bucks this trend, somewhat surprisingly given the marked reduction in average district magnitude there.

Table Four: Electoral Disproportionality in Pre- and Post-Reform Elections

Country	Disproportionality average all elections	Disproportionality Post-reform
Cambodia	5.42 (1993-1998)	7.30 (1998)
Japan	4.80 (1947-2000)	7.60 (2000)

²⁷ Arend Lijphart 1994. *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-1990*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸ Auriel Croissant 2002. ‘Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia: A Comparative Perspective’ in Aurel Croissant, Gabriele Bruns and Marei John (eds), *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Singapore, p. 329.

Korea	7.00 (1988-2000)	7.95 (2000)
Taiwan	4.20 (1992-2001)	4.3 (2001)
Thailand	2.70 (1992-2001)	6.04 (2001)
Philippines	4.46 (1987-1998)	2.60 (1998)
Indonesia	1.87 (1999-2004)	1.5 (2004)

Source: Auriel Croissant 2002. 'Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia: A Comparative Perspective' in Aurel Croissant, Gabriele Bruns and Marei John (eds), *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Singapore, p. 329; author's calculations.

Complementing this widespread rejection of proportionality, a third distinctive element of electoral system design in the Asia-Pacific has been the attempt to forge cross-regional and cross-ethnic politics via interventions in the development of political party systems. In general, the recognition of minorities through the electoral system in the many Asia countries has been achieved through methods other than proportional representation.²⁹ In Malaysia, for example, informal ethnic balancing has been achieved through 'vote pooling' arrangements between the Malay (UMNO), Chinese (MCA) and Indian (MIC) parties which make up the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) coalition.³⁰

²⁹ Indeed, one of the interesting aspects of electoral system design in East Asia is the way that some of the most ethnically-divided countries of the region – such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma – have maintained plurality electoral laws. This represents a reversal of the choice of electoral systems in Europe, where the earliest moves towards proportional representation came in the ethnically most heterogeneous countries. See Rokkan, S. 1970, *Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, p. 157.

³⁰ See Horowitz, Donald L. 1991, 'Making Moderation Pay: the Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management' in J.V. Montville (ed), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*, Lexington Books,

Despite being dominated by UMNO, the fact that every Malaysian government to date has been comprised of parties representing the country's three major ethnic groups has provided a form of credible commitment that future governments will similarly follow this prescription. While the institutionalisation of such practices in Malaysia has come at a considerable cost to democracy, via increasingly flagrant gerrymandering of constituencies and intimidation of opponents, it has nonetheless helped preserve ethnic peace in Malaysia.

In Singapore, this kind of ethnic balancing takes place within the main party, the PAP, via the use of so-called 'Group Representation Constituencies'. These are multi-member electoral districts of between four and six members, which parties contest by presenting a closed list of candidates for the whole electorate, at least one of whom must be a Malay or Indian representative. As well as ensuring the ongoing dominance of the PAP, such arrangements help to ensure a degree of ethnic balancing within both the party and the parliament, as it effectively requires all parties to put forward a multi-ethnic candidate list as a pre-condition for competing in the election. Singapore also uses "best loser" seats for opposition candidates in some circumstances.

Thailand and Indonesia have taken this process a step further by actively discriminating in favour of broad-based parties that can command national

New York, p. 466; Brown, D. 1994, *The State and Ethnic Politics in South-East Asia*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 235.

(rather than regional) support. The outcomes in both cases have been striking. In Thailand, the effective number of parties declined from an average of 7.2 in the ten-year period from 1986-96 to 3.8 at the first post-reform elections in April 2001. In Indonesia, the raw numbers dropped from 48 parties contesting the 1999 election to 24 parties at the 2004 poll – again, a fifty percent decline – and a similar but less extreme decline in the number of parties represented in parliament, from 21 in 1999 to 17 in 2004. Considering that political reforms in both countries were aimed at countering party fragmentation, these are striking outcomes by any measure.

Of course, retarding political fragmentation has costs as well as benefits. In Indonesia, the new laws have helped to reduce excessive candidature and fragmentation in what is an extremely heterogeneous society. However, they have also benefited incumbent parties by restricting the level of political competition, and place real barriers on new entrants into the political marketplace.³¹ Moreover, given that there are now 32 provinces and some 430 regencies in Indonesia, the laws requiring a minimum number of party members in each are truly onerous requirements -- as one commentator noted, if the laws are enforced “parties may, instead of collecting dues from members, be paying them to sign up in future”.³²

³¹ Benjamin Reilly 2003, 'Political Parties and Political Engineering in the Asia-Pacific Region', *Asia Pacific Issues: Analysis from the East-West Center*, 71, December 2003, pp. 1-8.

Another application of cross-voting rules will take place at the forthcoming presidential elections in Indonesia in October 2004. In contrast to the other presidential systems in the region (Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines), all of which use a plurality method, Indonesia will make use of a two-round system, with candidates for the presidency and vice presidency running as a team. In order to avoid a second round of voting, first-round winners must gain over 50% of all votes as well as a minimum of 20% in half of all provinces.³³ This latter provision – known in the scholarly literature as a “distribution requirement” – was borrowed from Nigeria, another large and ethnically diverse country. Again, the aim is to ensure that the winning candidate not only has majority support overall, but also is able to attract support across most parts of the country as well. In this respect, the presidential electoral law is consistent with the centripetal logic of the laws on party formation, aiming to promote parties with a cross-regional support base.³⁴

Conclusion

To return to the question posed in the title of this paper – “Is there an Asian Model of institutional design?” – the answer appears to be ‘yes’.

Overwhelmingly, Asian democracies in recent years have chosen mixed-

³² Paige Johnson Tan 2002, ‘Anti-Party Reaction in Indonesia: Causes and Implications’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 24(3): 484-508.

³³ The second round of voting, if required, will be a straight runoff between the two leading candidate teams, with no distribution requirements.

member systems when reforming their electoral arrangements, and have also attempted to shape the nature of their emerging party systems. In almost all cases, strategies of reform have been strongly majoritarian in both design and outcome.

Structurally, this preference for majoritarianism is apparent in four ways.

First, all mixed-member systems adopted have been 'parallel' in nature, meaning that there is no compensation of any seats-votes disparities from the district seats with seats from a party list. Second, the balance of seats in these systems is, in all cases bar East Timor, strongly weighted in favour of the district component, so that systems perform more like straight plurality contests than like mixed systems in other regions. Third, countries have placed restrictions on the proportionality of the PR component of mixed systems by the use of explicit thresholds (in the case of Taiwan, Thailand, and Korea), manipulation of district size (Indonesia, Cambodia) or restrictions on which parties can compete for party list seats (the Philippines). Fourth, complementing these electoral reforms, some countries (Thailand, Indonesia) have tried to shape the development of their political party systems by rewarding national parties and restricting smaller ethnic or regional ones.

It is important to emphasise just how distinctive the Asia-Pacific's adoption of majoritarianism and centripetalism is in comparison to other world regions.

³⁴ For more on the concept of 'centripetalism', see Benjamin Reilly. 2001. *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In Africa, for example, there has been a strong trend in the other direction – towards the increasing use of list PR electoral systems – and an equally strong tendency towards one-party dominant regimes.³⁵ Similarly, in Latin America, democratizing states have, without exception, maintained list PR systems – despite the combination of presidentialism and PR being widely blamed for political fragmentation and legislative deadlock in many cases.³⁶ Similarly, in the new democracies of Eastern Europe, the tendency has been to follow the example of Western Europe and introduce highly proportional electoral systems with ethnic parties and strong guarantees for minority rights. Indeed, the guidelines of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) make this explicit, affirming the right of ethnic minorities to form their own parties and compete for office on an ethnic basis.³⁷

By contrast, in Asia, the focus has been on creating more majoritarian political systems, reducing overall levels of proportionality, promoting the electoral prospects of larger political parties, and restricting the ability of minority groups to form parties in the first place. The divergence between the Asia and other world regions in this regard is itself the strongest affirmation of a

³⁵ See Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, eds. 1998, *The Awkward Embrace: Democracy and Dominant-Party Rule in Semi-Developed Countries* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers; Andrew Reynolds 1999, *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ See Mainwaring, S. 1993, 'Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination', *Comparative Political Studies*, 26(2):198-228.

³⁷ See, for example, the OSCE's 1990 Copenhagen declaration at www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/hd/cope90e.htm.

distinctively Asian approach to the issue of democratization and institutional design.

This is not to suggest that such reforms are necessarily coherent. Indeed, mixed incentives appear to be a common problem across the region. For example, by limiting the development of regional parties, the Indonesians may have improved the prospects for a nationally-consolidated party system, but they have also undercut the ability of all but a few established parties to form and mobilize support. Ethnic groups that are unable to mobilize and compete for political power by democratic means will likely find other ways to achieve their ends. If restrictions on regional parties end up encouraging extra-constitutional action by aggrieved minorities, they will have exacerbated the very problems they are designed to prevent.

Similarly, the Thai reforms, while reducing fragmentation, have excessively centralized government power and fostered single-party domination. Measures to promote political stability may thus have many unintended consequences, including the delegitimizing of the political order and multiple unforeseen or even mutually contradictory outcomes.³⁸ The heavy-handed nature of these reforms is likely to produce some unusual side-effects. The danger of overkill – placing so many incentives in favour of party aggregation and against regional or ethnic parties that they form a pattern of systemic

³⁸ Duncan McCargo 2002, 'Democracy Under Stress in Thaksin's Thailand', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4):112-126.

discrimination and disempowerment – is clearly present. A balance needs to be struck between encouraging national parties, which is in general a positive thing, and restricting regional ones, which can have clear downsides.

The final distinctive aspect of East Asian electoral systems is simply how much inter-regional borrowing and imitation there has been, and how much innovation has taken place over the past decade. This is not simply a consequence of democratization or political bargaining, important though these have been. Rather, there also appears to be a real willingness in a number of transitional Asian democracies to experiment with new forms of representation and revised political institutions, a process that may have reached its zenith in the extensive constitutional reforms that have taken been enacted in Thailand and are now taking place in Indonesia. This willingness to experiment is, in part, a response to the troubled democratic history of such countries, and particularly the failure of previous attempts at democratization due to a combination of weak institutions, fragmented party systems, and unstable governments. As such, they represent a distinctively Asian contribution to the field of institutional design.

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