

Theme Ia: Establishing Political Structures and Legitimacy



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Over 100 years ago, this was a mud-flat, swamp. Today, this is a modern city. Ten years from now, this will be a metropolis. Never fear.

Lee Kuan Yew, 12th September 1965, Speech at Sree Narayana Mission

“If you can select a population and they’re educated and they’re properly brought up, then you don’t have to use too much of the stick because they would already have been trained. It’s like with dogs. You train it in a proper way from small. It will know that it’s got to leave, go outside to pee and to defecate. No, we are not that kind of society. We had to train adult dogs who **even today deliberately urinate in the lifts.**”

Lee Kuan Yew

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevehanke/2017/07/06/20th-anniversary-asian-financial-crisis-clinton-the-imf-and-wall-street-journal-toppled-suharto/>

a. Factors for establishing different forms of government

ai. Decolonisation Experience

1. Confrontational experiences resulted in a lack of political tutelage. This meant that the country could not fully adopt democracy or completely shut the doors to democracy due to constant fighting and animosity towards bearers of the ideology.
 - a. Dutch Police Actions (1947-1949) and the Battle of Surabaya (1945) evidenced and cemented Indo nationalists' resentment to Dutch authority and hence the impossibility of any Dutch tutelage. 5 Governments in 5 years + 63 parties in 1 sitting led to a deadlock dysfunctional government, paving the way for Sukarno's authoritative "Guided Democracy"
 - b. French high handedness led to Vietnamese disillusionment towards democracy. The First Indochina (1946-1954) culminated in the former's defeat and withdrawal after Dien Bien Phu in 1954 reduced French chances of building a democratic Vietnam to zero as they were forced out of Vietnamese affairs
2. Collaborative experiences resulted in ample political tutelage as colonial powers were able to set up proper political mechanisms to adopt democracies and train local politicians to uphold democracy.
 - a. Tydings-McDuffie Act (1934) granted Philippines full autonomy for internal affairs, forming the Philippine's Commonwealth and a bicameral congress. This cemented democracy in Philippines as they embraced liberal democracy and had a government structure similar to that of the US.

Probe: However, briefly from 1972-1986, Marcos established an authoritarian government and justified it on a NPA terror attack to remain in power as Benigno Aquino Junior threatened his tenure. Also, Marcos has reached his term limits.
 - b. 1953-1959, under British supervision, elections occurred with the number of contested seats and eligible voters slowly expanded (9 to 51 seats), increasing political participation. Singapore has also embodied the spirit of inclusivity and diversity as it introduced NMPs, NCMP and GRC to allow people from all disciplines and backgrounds to be heard.

Probe: Albeit boasting democratic features, Singapore still upholds the Internal Security Act (ISA), enabling individuals to be detained without trial in the name of national security. The ISA was used during Operation Coldstore and Operation Spectrum to detain socialists without trial.

aii. Role of Political Elites + Masses

1. Authoritarian governments only came into prominence only after the failure of their predecessors during which they were able to capitalise on the weakness and slip ups to force a transition in the government.
 - a. U Nu's 1961 State Religion Bill made Buddhism the state religion, incensing the pseudo-minorities in Burma. The final straw came when U Nu attempted to alleviate tensions by negotiating with the leaderships of the various groups

seeking ethnic autonomy, prompting an alarmed Ne Wim to seize power to safeguard territorial unity

- b. Sukarno played a precarious balance between the Communists and Muslims (NASAKOM Government). The military viewed Sukarno's friendship with the communists with increasing suspicion as he received up to 2 billion in aid by 1965 from USSR and close relations with the PRC. Suharto utilised the May 30 Gestapu Coup to accuse an attempted communist coup to destroy the PKI and remove Sukarno
2. Democratic governments only emerged after earlier authoritarian governments were deposed by popular protests. As the mandate of the people supported democracy, authoritarian governments were unable to stay in power with an overwhelming opposition to their rule
 - a. Thailand 1973's Day of Great Sorrow saw Thanom used tanks, helicopters, and infantrymen to support the police, killing 77 ² student demonstrators protesting against Thanom's authoritarian rule. King Bhumibol intervened to order Thanom to resign and invited Thammasak to become PM, restoring civilian democracy.
 - b. 1986 EDSA Revolution saw over a million Philippines forming a human barrier along the EDSA highway in response to the Church's call for the people to take to the streets to support Fidel Ramos and Juan Ponce Enrile's military mutiny against Marcos. Marcos forced to resign, and Aquino installed as the next president.

aiii. Cold War Developments

1. Cold War dynamics were instrumental to the emergence of authoritarian leaders as the domino theory led the US to support authoritarian governments if they presented themselves as a bulwark against communism with military and economic aid, cementing their grip on power
 - a. Although Ngo Dinh Diem's "Personalism" compromised freedom and public interest due to his pervasive control over the masses (He viewed himself as morally superior and that the public should listen to him) along with blatant nepotism and cronyism (Nhu, a Hitler admirer became leader of the Can Lao Party, commanded private armies and secret police that rule the South), he was supported by the US due to his intense anti-communist stance.
Probe: However, the Buddhist crisis (murder of 9 Buddhist protestors and a series of self-immolations) evidenced the alienation and discontent of the people which the Vietcong readily capitalised upon, leading to the US to see him as a liability and overthrow him in a US-backed military coup in 1963.
 - b. Despite being a civilian authoritarian government, Marcos blatant abuse of democracy (using martial law to arrest Aquino Junior) was overlooked by the US who continued supporting him (166 million in 1976)³ due to his anti-communist stance and fear of a supposed New People's Army (NPA).

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Thai_popular_uprising#

³ <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/marcos-declares-martial-law-philippines>

2. Cold War was instrumental to the rise of democratic governments as the promises of and calls for independence by communists served as impetus for colonial masters to accelerate the process for independence in exchange for ensuring that democracy was upheld upon it
 - a. During the Malayan Emergency, Briggs and Templer's plans managed to squash the communist's military prowess and allure. British also removed the MCP's main justification that "British were greedy imperialist" by introducing the 1951 Member System that served as an experience for power sharing and self-governance for Malay locals.
 - b. Lim Yew Hock won British support as he launched crackdowns on left-wing trade unions and other organisations, duly impressing the British who rejected self government over the basis of internal security during the Rendel Commission. They agreed to full internal self-government for Singapore in 1957, paving the way for a fully elected Legislative Assembly of 51 seats

b. Factors for Consolidation of Power

bi. Role of Government Leaders

1. Leaders were able to remain in power due to their nationalist credentials that they gained during and after the decolonisation experience in their instrumental role in kicking the colonial powers out to achieve independence. This earned them the continuous support of the people.
 - a. Sukarno's leadership during the Battle of Surabaya (1945), Dutch Police Actions (1947-1949) and Conquest of West Irian (1962) made him a prominent anti-colonialist and nationalist, bolstering his nationalist credentials albeit amidst a failing economy (1500% inflation)
Probe: However, his reputation was diminishing in the eyes of the military due to his "cozing up" with the communists such as strong relations with PRC and allowing the PKI to be the 4 largest political party in Indonesia (and second in Asia only to China!)
 - b. Ne Win's military
 - i. Accelerated Burmese independence by threatening violence against the British
 - ii. Defeated 25000 strong communist force led by Than Thun
 - iii. Defeated the minorities threatening Burmese national unity

, thus, boosting its nationalist credentials, enabling a bloodless and unopposed coup in 1962
2. Government leaders' employment of authoritarian features as part of their ideology silenced their opponents so that they were unable to pose a threat to the incumbent leader's power as well as their employment of pervasive control to prevent opposition within society.
 - a. Sukarno's 1957-1965 guided democracy ran by mutual consensus rather than a majority rule. Sukarno, as the president, would lead policy deliberation to a

“consensus” between stakeholders. He also disbanded parliament ⁴ as well as removing the balloting system, such that all other parties (opposition) had no political influence

- b. 1957-1963 Sarit’s “Benevolent Paternalism” saw the military play a strong hand in national politics and were influential as senior officials served on the boards of government and boards of directors of private businesses, ensuring that they called the shots in policy making and government administration

bii. Constitutional Processes

1. Government leaders used constitutional processes to portray themselves as fair and clean leaders through democratic functions, boosting their credibility and thus gaining themselves massive support due to their image as a public servant who acts in the public interest

- a. 1986-1992 Aquino dismantled Marcos’ civilian autocracy by re-introducing democracy, safeguarding human rights, and installing multiple checks and balances such as a 6-year presidential term which she abided by. Her return to democracy led to her gaining popular support from the people
- b. Singapore embodied the spirit of inclusivity and diversity as it introduced the NCMP, GRC, NMP to ensure political representation of people from all disciplines and of all backgrounds + elections every 5 years.

Probe: The role of Singapore’s economic success cannot be understated as its positive performance especially during times of crisis helped cement the PAP’s legitimacy as well. E.g. During the AFC, Singapore’s growth slumped only to a high 5% as compared to the severe recession in the region (Indonesia -13%)

2. Governments used constitutional processes to give their regimes an illusionary veneer of democracy to legitimise their rule while rendering the opposition ineffectual in challenging their rule as their hands are bounded by the law

- a. In 1978, Marcos New Society Movement won all seats in the national Assembly in a sham election and arrested hundreds of opposition members from Laban immediately. The only semblance of democracy during Marcos’ tenure were referendums on policies.
- b. Suharto forced his oppositions, often conflicting, into large monolithic blocs, such as the anti-west and Islamist PNI and Christian parties. This resulted in parties that formed an toothless opposition as they tried to accommodate a plethora of interest and groups⁵, effectively ensuring Golkar dominance in parliament while giving his government a phony image of democracy.

~~However, it must be noted that while Golkar reigned supreme along with 2 other toothless opposition blocs, the PKI kept growing in stature⁶,~~

⁴ Ullas Fionna, Dirk Tomsa, “Parties and Factions in Indonesia: The Effects of Historical Legacies and Institutional Engineering,” ISEAS Working Paper on “...”, No. 01, 2017, www.iseas.edu.sg

⁵ Ibid 3.

⁶ Ibid 3.

~~becoming the 4th largest political party in Indonesia and second largest communist party in Asia~~

biii. Role of Traditional Institutions

1. The monarchy was a massive aide to leader's grip to power as their popularity with the locals persuaded them to view leaders who associated themselves closely with the monarch favourably, enabling them to gain the support of the people to stay in power.
 - a. Siarnouk, although voluntarily abdicated royalty in 1955 to play a more active political role within the country, leveraged his status as a monarch alongside with his nationalism against Japanese rule to help Sangkum his party, win the 1955 elections
 - b. As the monarch was popular due to his frequent travels around the country to use his engineering skills to help in agriculture, Sarit associated by building his "Benevolent Paternalism" around Nation, Religion and King alongside with reviving monarchist and religious ceremonies, allowing him to stay in power from 1957-1963
2. Traditional institutions like religion were used to associate the government with the people and gain an additional layer of support by the masses as it seemed that the government could resonate with their social interests and beliefs.
 - a. Sarit build his 1957-1963 "Benevolent Paternalism" around Buddhism, making it a main feature of his regime. He funded many religious schools, promised development in Northern Thailand which was dominated by Buddhist monks, thus gaining their's, and the populace who looked up to them's support.
 - b. UMNO, under Tun Razak and Tun Mahathir managed to maintain a stronghold in politics from 1957-1997 by preserving ethnic Malay (Bumiputera) rights and installing Islam as the state religion. This was resonant with the Malay populace as well as undermine the PAS's selling point as an Islamic Fundamentalist.
Probe: However, the 1969 racial riots evidenced the inadequacy of merely using religion as the collapse of the social contract was brought about by discontent and fear towards the Chinese's economic dominance.

biv. Military

1. The military enabled democracy to remain in power long term by temporarily assuming leadership to address instability that threatened democratic governments before handing control back to the government.
 - a. 1958-1960 Factionalism within the Union party + Communist Uprising (25,000 led by Than Thun) + Minority Separatist movements out of control. U Nu appealed to Burmese military to assume temporary control to restore order. After 1960, Ne Win relinquished his post and brought back elections.
Probe: However, the military, having the "forbidden" taste of political power, would go on to depose U Nu on the grounds of safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial unity.
 - b. 13 May 1969 Malay Racial Riot sparked by Chinese onlooker taunting the UNMO ultra-Malays who were alarmed at the Chinese opposition gains. The

government declared a state of emergency and suspended parliamentary democracy, governing temporarily through a National Operations Council that became the supreme decision-making body in Malaysia

2. The undivided support of the military for authoritarian regimes was able to keep leaders in power as they acted as a suppressive force against opposition and a front for additional support by evoking nationalistic sentiments.
 - a. 1972-1986 Marcos's political opponents were warded off through violent means by the military such as the communists New People's Army and Islamist Moro-Islamic-Revolutionary Front insurgencies and the assassination of popular political opposition Benigno Aquino Jr. despite discontent towards his government due to rampant corruption.
 - b. Despite discontent towards Sukarno due to the consequence of his economic policies (1500% corruption), he was able to gain support and distract the populace by using the military to stoke nationalistic sentiments through his military adventures such as Conquest of West Irian and Konfrontasi.

~~Government leaders were not able to remain in power when the military becomes alarmed by policies and actions of the incumbent government, seeing them as a threat to national sovereignty and territorial integrity, leading them to depose the incumbent government~~

3. Governments could not remain in power due to the military's reputation over their own, drawing massive support to themselves that makes them a formidable threat against incumbent governments whenever they oppose government actions
 - a. The Indonesian military was popular among the masses due to its struggle for Indonesian Independence in the Battle of Surabaya (1045), Dutch Police Actions (1947-1949) and its actions against communist threats (1948 Medan Affair ⁷) This allowed Suharto to replace Sukarno without much public reprisal following the 1965 Gestapu Coup
 - b. 1957 Thai Elections saw Phibun's SMP won by a landslide victory. Sarit however, openly condemned the illegality of the elections and was backed by many college and university students who hoped for a restoration of a true democratic government. This support enabled Sarit to launch a bloodless coup and takeover
4. Government leaders were unable to remain in power as the military played a key role in successfully removing them from power in hopes of installing a more stable and legitimate power considering the erstwhile government's corruption and failed policies
 - a. The 1986 EDSA Revolution was sparked by a mutiny, led by Fidel Ramos against Marcos the Church's calls for the people to support him. This was due to Marcos' dispopularity owing to his corrupted government. The military pledged their support to Corazon Aquino, allowing democracy to govern Philippines after 14 years of civilian authority.
 - b. U Nu's 1961 State Religion Bill made Buddhism the state religion, incensing the pseudo-minorities in Burma. The final straw came when U Nu attempted to alleviate tensions by negotiating with the leaderships of the various groups

⁷ <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/2edcd957-cba3-47a2-af9c-d3da90453033/content>

seeking ethnic autonomy, prompting an alarmed Ne Wim to seize power to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial unity.

bv. Governing Performance

1. Successful authoritarian governments were able to deliver economic successes in exchange for the people's political freedom and rights due to the absence of cumbersome political opposition and ability to implement long term policies, leading to people's continued support for the authoritarian government
 - a. While Sekber Golkar had only a veneer of democracy, Suharto build up the industrial base by investing in basic industries and erected trade barriers. Oil revenues fuelled investment in development projects, enabling the GDP to grow at an annual average of 8% in the 1970s.
Probe: Indonesia's economic success belies rampant nepotism and corruption as many SOEs were owned by Suharto's circle where the government allowed for the formation of monopolies, eventually wrecking Indonesia's economy with a spectacular -13% growth during the AFC)
 - b. Although Sarit exercised dictatorial power, Thai economy flourished under Sarit. Sarit appointed highly trained technocrats to implement capitalist policies and aimed to foster a more liberalised economy. This enabled an 8.2% economic growth in the 1960s as compared to during Phibun when economic development was moribund
2. Democratic governments who performed was able to enjoy an added basis of popular support from a satisfied populace as their ability to weather crisis only cemented their ability, and this legitimacy to govern
 - a. During the AFC, Singapore was able to weather the speculative attacks due to ample reserves and collateral, a corrupt-free financial system and regulated financial institutions. This alongside with its successful contagion and recovery efforts, cemented, in the people's eyes, the ability of the government to weather even crisis that her neighbours were unable to (5.8% growth)
 - b. After the May 1969 riots, the NOC identified economic inequity as the root cause. The government then implemented the NEP, giving economic privileges like tax breaks and employment quotas to the Malays. It was successful as the Malay ownership of capital rose from 3% to 20%
3. Governments with poor governing performances due to poor political and economic decisions not only brought suffering to the masses but also often undermine political rights, garnering immense disillusionment from the people, culminating in their removal from power
 - a. By 1980s, disillusionment appeared with the New Order due to prevalent cronyism and nepotism (Ms Tien percent) while years of authoritarian government had wearied the people, despite rising standard of livings. The AFC proofed to be the final straw as Indonesia's disastrous economic performance (-17% growth) destroyed Suharto's ability to deliver economic growth-the central pillar of his regime, causing mass protests and the end of the New Order

- b. Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" wiped foreign talent and shut out trade and investment, crippling Burma's economy. This was compounded by disastrous currency reforms to crack down on black markets and drain separatists of their wherewithal, causing many people's savings to be wiped out. Culminated in the 8888 Uprising in major cities by university students. Ne Win forced to resign.

bvi. Cold War

1. Government leaders were unable to stay in power as they become associated with communist elements, stirring panic within powerful anti-communist elements to depose them from power.
 - a. To portray itself as a neutral party, Sihanouk not only permitted the Vietnam communist to use Cambodian territory as sanctuaries and supply routes (Ho Chi Minh trail) but also permitted the US to secretly bomb areas of Cambodia to hurt the North Vietnamese war efforts (Linebacker I and II). 1970, backed by US, rightist members overthrew Sihanouk.
 - b. To keep the Indonesian army in check, Sukarno leaned towards the PKI, allowing it to grow to become the 4 largest party in Indonesia (And 2nd largest communist party in Asia with 3 million members during Guided Democracy) and warming relations with the PRC. Suharto used this justification to remove Sukarno from power and crackdown on the PKI following the Gestapo Coup
2. Cold War dynamics were instrumental to the emergence of authoritarian leaders as the domino theory led the US to support authoritarian governments as long as they presented themselves as a bulwark against communism with military and economic aid, cementing their grip on power
 - a. Although Ngo Dinh Diem's "Personalism" compromised freedom and public interest due to his pervasive control over the masses (He viewed himself as morally superior and that the public should listen to him) along with blatant nepotism and cronyism (Nhu, a Hitler admirer became leader of the Can Lao Party, commanded private armies and secret police that rule the South), he was supported by the US due to his intense anti-communist stance.
Probe: However, the Buddhist crisis (murder of 9 Buddhist protestors and a series of self-immolations) evidenced the alienation and discontent of and by the people which the Vietcong readily capitalised upon, leading to the US to see him as a liability and overthrow him in a US-backed military coup in 1963.
 - b. Despite being a civilian authoritarian government, Marcos blatant abuse of democracy (using martial law to arrest Aquino Junior) was overlooked by the US whom continued supporting him with more than 3 billion in aid due to his anti-communist stance and fear of a supposed New People's Army (NPA).