

How far do you agree that political legitimacy in post-independent Southeast Asian states was obtained mainly through violent measures?

Role of military violence in quelling insurgencies and unrest compared to inability of PD governments to handle security threats

[BURMA] U Nu's weak PD govt was insensitive to the desires of the ethnic minorities. As a result of the broken promise of the creation of separate states for the Arakanese and Mons, minority insurgents that controlled 10% of Burma broke out in 1961. This undermined the credibility of the PD govt as they were unable to deal with the security threat. On the other hand, Ne Win's military government arrested the minority leaders, such as those from the Shan tribe, hence crushing the insurgencies.

[INDONESIA] Under Sukarno's rule, the Indonesian army played a key role in crushing the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) separatist movements in Sumatra and South Sulawesi in 1958 that had declared counter-government to Sukarno's rule in West Sumatra with their own Prime Minister.

In situations where the incumbent governments proved unable to secure political consensus and garner mass support to bring about political legitimacy, the military would step in and use force to directly take control and pave the way for strong political leadership for the masses.

[BURMA] Under U Nu's rule, factionalism plagued the AFPFL as he was unable to manage the increasing internal disputes. Furthermore, even after elections were enabled by the military in 1960, U Nu's New Union Party still failed to hold the country. In 1962, Ne Win led the army in a coup to take over the government and consolidate his control over Burma through the Revolutionary Council.

[INDONESIA] Sukarno's Guided Democracy had failed to bring about political stability with competing rival factions of the PKI and the military. This culminated in the PKI abortive coup against Sukarno led by the Revolutionary Council on 30th September 1965. This necessitated General Suharto to take over and tighten political control by purging political opponents in the Gestapu Affair. After the abortive coup, PKI was outlawed and the military was purged of its communist elements. PKI supporters were also massacred in central and East Java and Bali.

[Counter] However, while the use of violent measures was necessary to bring about a favourable context for political legitimacy with the quelling of insurgencies and separatist movements and displacement along with the displacement of ineffective incumbent governments, this only proved effective in the short run. In fact, in the long run, the use of military force only served to oppress the masses and fan the flames of discontent where they continued to play a destabilising role to the military government and undermine their political legitimacy. (limited success)

[INDONESIA] Attempts by Suharto to suppress the rise of radical Islam in the 1970s were only met by similar use of force where in 1984, a violent demonstration was held by conservative Muslims against Pancasila in Tanjong Priok. This had to be forcefully suppressed by the army.

Nonetheless, this did not completely eradicate radical Islamic forces and there were still underlying Islamic dissent against Suharto with the founding of Jemaah Islamiah (JI) in 1993.

[THAILAND]As a result of many years of political repression when martial law was declared, and party politics were banned under Sarit's rule since 1955, student protests erupted in 1984. With the killing of student protestors, popular sympathy from the ground was evoked. As a result, the military government's legitimacy was threatened when even the King took the side of the students by allowing first-aid stations to be set up on palace grounds.

There were more effective ways to establish political legitimacy other than the overt use of force. Even governments that were willing to use force to maintain political control, still sought to use democratic processes to engineer a façade of accommodation to garner political legitimacy and mass support in the long run.

[MALAYSIA]Though less oppressive than military governments like Suharto, the Alliance Party proved itself willing to use force in the racial riots of 1969 where a State of Emergency was declared and the constitution was suspended. Even so, the use of force was coupled with efforts to bring about constitutional change to control the political opposition. In 1971, the constitution was amended with the Sedition Act that banned any public and parliamentary discussion on the Special Position of the Malays, muting the non-Malay opposition to Malay domination of politics. There were also efforts to strengthen the Alliance Party and expand its support base by co-opting other political parties through the formation of the coalition Barisan Nasional (BN). This allowed UMNO to forge partnerships with Chinese leadership groups outside the MCA like Gerakan and People's Progressive Party (PPP).

[SINGAPORE] Singapore, which had retained the Parliamentary Democracy structure of government, was also willing to use force to maintain their political dominance. In February 1963, the People's Action Party (PAP) carried out Operation Coldstore, an anti-communist security operation. It led to the arrest of 113 people, who were detained without trial who included key members of the Barisan Socialis, a large opposition party at the time. Later, the Internal Security Act was invoked by the PAP in 1966 to arrest 23 leaders of the Barisan Socialis. The PAP's authoritarian inclination manifested through gerrymandering and the GRC system to ensure their political dominance. Despite this, Singapore's government remained under the parliamentary democracy structure, ensuring the legitimacy of the government as PAP was seen as a credible and dominant political party that led a stable government