

# **Revolutions, Crackdowns, and Quiescence: Communal Elites and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia<sup>1</sup>**

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Urban mass mobilization often stimulates the collapse of authoritarian regimes, but the literature on social forces in democratization has not dealt adequately with these episodes of popular protest. Nor has it systematically compared democratic revolutions with cases of authoritarian crackdown and chronic quiescence, despite the prevalence of these alternative outcomes. This article critiques the democratization literature's excessive focus on class actors and economic factors by highlighting the importance of emotive appeals to nationalist and religious sentiments and solidarities in sparking, sustaining, and sanctifying high-risk protest against authoritarian governments. A comparative historical analysis of seven Southeast Asian countries reveals that democratic uprisings are more likely both to emerge and to succeed when communal elites—a society's primary possessors of nationalist and religious authority—assume an oppositional posture. Explaining variation in mobilization outcomes thus requires examining whether communal elites have gained political salience and retained political autonomy through long-term processes of political development.

## WHO MOBILIZES AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISM . . . AND WHY?

Whether or not the age of social revolutions has ended, the age of democratic revolutions plainly has not. Echoing Eastern Europe's epic rev-

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olutions of 1989, recent popular uprisings in Georgia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Nepal, Serbia, and Ukraine have served as powerful reminders that authoritarian regimes can be toppled by the mobilization of thousands of protestors in capital cities.<sup>2</sup> Such uprisings do not always end in victory for the protestors, however—as authoritarian crackdowns in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Burma, China (both Tiananmen and Tibet), Ethiopia, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe attest. Dramatic though these revolutions and crackdowns may be, they should not distract us from the numerous cases in which the public's reaction to dictatorship is not recurrent rebellion but chronic quiescence.<sup>3</sup> From Belarus to Brunei, from Saudi Arabia to Singapore, and from Cameroon to Cuba, despotisms of every imaginable stripe manage not only to persevere but to do so in the absence of any significant organized public challenge.

Such a dramatic global range of empirical variation raises fundamental questions for our theories of contentious politics and democratization. Why do huge urban groundswells of opposition arise in some authoritarian settings but not in others? Which groups are the key social forces in such high-risk political confrontations? Why do some episodes of urban democratic protest succeed in overthrowing dictatorial regimes while others fail?

This article addresses these questions through a comparative-historical analysis of seven countries in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia presents especially fertile territory for comparative inquiry for three main reasons. First, the region exhibits multiple examples of all three possible mobilization outcomes: (1) successful democratic mobilization in the Philippines in 1986, Thailand in 1973 and 1992, and Indonesia in 1998; (2) unsuc-

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<sup>2</sup> See Foran (2005, chap. 6) on the potential for future social revolutions. Democratic revolutions are political revolutions, not social revolutions. Their defining feature is mass involvement in changing a country's regime type from authoritarian to democratic, not changing its social structure. See Goldstone (2003, pp. 54–55) for a similar working definition of revolutions. For analytic rather than normative reasons, I adopt a proceduralist definition of democracy in which competitive elections and active state protection of civil liberties and collective political participation are the essential traits (e.g., Schumpeter [1942] 1976, p. 269; Dahl 1971). Even this expansive definition suffices to exclude “competitive authoritarian” regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002) such as Malaysia, which exploit incumbency and abuse challengers in ways incommensurate with even a minimally democratic polity. For more on the concept of democratic revolutions, see the introductory chapter in Thompson (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Everyday forms of noncompliance are commonplace in all political systems, including the Southeast Asian cases analyzed here (e.g., Scott 1985; Kerkvliet 2005); they are not the focus of this article. Similarly, the kind of large-scale crackdowns analyzed here are “only the proverbial tip of the iceberg” in terms of state repression in authoritarian settings, where more covert and unobservable forms of coercion and channeling are ubiquitous (Earl 2003, p. 44).

successful democratic mobilization in Burma in 1988 and 2007, Malaysia in 1998, and Indonesia in 1978; and (3) the chronic absence of democratic mobilization in Singapore and Vietnam. These cases permit the construction of a regional sample whose range of variation mirrors that of the global population of cases. Second, and just as important, similar mobilization outcomes coincide with considerable diversity in socioeconomic conditions, facilitating comparative control over important alternative explanations. Third, an added benefit is that democratic mobilization did not sweep across Southeast Asia in a wavelike manner, as it did in the Soviet bloc and sub-Saharan Africa during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Beissinger 2002). This provides a golden opportunity to control for the causal impact of international revolutionary diffusion and to pinpoint domestic factors shaping prospects for the emergence and success of democratic protest.

As a theory-building exercise, this comparative-historical analysis seeks to highlight and help correct three shortcomings in the democratization literature. First, while political scientists and sociologists have paid considerable attention to the importance of social forces in laying the structural groundwork for democracy, we have placed less stress on the causal mechanisms through which social forces actually turn nondemocracies into democracies.<sup>4</sup> Mass urban mobilization is not the only such mechanism, but it is one of the most important. Second, the literature on social forces in democratization has also neglected the importance of collective identities while overemphasizing the role of socioeconomic classes—typically conceived as bearers of shared material interests rather than as identity groups in any collectively experienced sense—as the primary drivers of regime change.<sup>5</sup> A third shortcoming is closely related to the second: our leading theories are too narrowly instrumentalist in their conception of why societal actors do or do not come together to oppose authoritarian rule. In part because it has not paid enough attention to the contentious manner in which dictatorships so often collapse, the democratization lit-

<sup>4</sup> Tilly (2005, e.g.) is the major exception, but his focus is on medium-term mechanisms that influence the substantive quality of democracy, such as the expansion of trust networks and declines in categorical inequality. My inquiry into the more immediate role of urban democratic protest in producing regime change in a procedural sense neither duplicates nor supersedes Tilly's considerable efforts.

<sup>5</sup> While class obviously can be treated as a concept connoting a shared felt identity as well as shared material interests, the emphasis in nearly all studies of democratization is simply and squarely on interests alone. See Eley (2002), Tsai (2005), and Yang (2007) for recent works on democratization that admirably treat class formation as a process of subjective identity formation and provide the best starting points for scholars wishing to rethink rather than reject the class paradigm. Many thanks to an *AJS* reviewer for pressing me on my treatment of the identity-interest distinction.

erature has remained practically untouched by the “cultural turn” that has reshaped our understanding of collective protest more generally.

Unlike analyses that stress the significance of economic grievances and demands for liberal political reforms, this article highlights the power of emotive appeals to nationalist and religious sentiments and solidarities in sparking and sustaining popular collective action against dictatorship. Its intellectual debt to the sociological literature on contentious politics, particularly those strands emphasizing “political cultures of opposition” (Foran 2005, p. 14), is thus considerable. Yet in pressing the case that revolutionaries can make their own revolutions, even in unpropitious circumstances, this literature has largely lost sight of the powerful ways in which historical and structural forces not only channel mass mobilization but constrain it.<sup>6</sup> Spontaneity and creativity may be quintessential traits of contentious politics, but this does not mean that collective protests are equally likely to erupt or to prevail in all times and places. Unless we do the historical work to uncover where oppositional political cultures come from, it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain why so many societies have produced neither democratic revolutions nor large-scale authoritarian crackdowns but persistent quiescence.

This article introduces a new conceptual and causal framework to facilitate comparative analysis of this political variation. It proposes a new category of political actor—communal elites, or a society’s primary possessors of nationalist and religious authority—as the pivotal players in democratic (non)mobilization. While communal elites are the primary agents in this causal narrative, their political role is historically and systematically structured. They can act as democratizing agents only in settings in which they have gained political salience and retained political autonomy through long-term processes of political development. Where communal elites lack autonomous positioning, they cannot readily assume an oppositional posture. Since communal elites’ long-term positioning is logically prior to their short-term posture and since many societies do not possess politically autonomous communal elites at all, one cannot explain the full range of variation in mobilization outcomes with reference to short-term factors alone. My first goal in this article is thus to develop a new comparative-historical framework to capture variation in the political positioning of communal elites. This framework is then deployed to detail and defend my central causal argument: democratic mobilization is more

<sup>6</sup> “Repertoires” (e.g., Traugott 1995) are an exceedingly helpful tool for thinking about how resistance unfolds but not about how likely it is to occur in the first place.

likely both to occur and to succeed in societies with politically autonomous communal elites.<sup>7</sup>

Several caveats are necessary before fleshing out this argument. First, what follows is a new theory of democratic mobilization, not democratic transition writ large. The distinction is subtle but vital. Even when they manage to topple a dictatorship, democratic protests do not necessarily culminate in the installation of a viable democratic regime. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes may implode at the elite level and give rise to democratic politics in the absence of any mass mobilization whatsoever, or they may democratize via electoral defeat instead of contentious overthrow. Since countries democratize in diverse ways and successful democratic protests produce diverse regime outcomes, any theory of democratic mobilization can only complement and complicate our leading theories of democratic transition (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Huntington 1991; Boix 2003), not replace them wholesale.

A second vital caveat is that this is primarily a theory of challengers, not incumbents. The strength or weakness of an authoritarian regime depends on much more than its support among communal elites, as I explore elsewhere (Slater, *in press*). Plenty of authoritarian regimes have prevailed over their opponents when they lacked or lost nationalist or religious authority—but precious few democratic movements can say the same. As with general theories of democratic transition, this analysis does not seek to overturn our leading theories of durable authoritarianism (e.g., Geddes 1999; Bellin 2002; Brownlee 2007). Nor does it challenge the view that “top-down” state practices and regime forms shape patterns and outcomes of contention (e.g., Skocpol 1979; Goodwin 2001; on Southeast Asia, see Boudreau [2004]). What it does aim to provide is a new opposition-oriented theory for the emergence and success of massive collective protest against authoritarian regimes. It also aims to reinvigorate the study of collective identities and emotions in political science and the analysis of democratization in sociology while pushing both disciplines to make our culturalist analyses more comparative, and vice versa.

This goal of bridging culturalist with comparative and causal analysis requires a final clarification. The argument here depends on a conceptual disentangling of material interests and identity politics that might seem outdated and untenable. It does not deny that class formation is a subjective process of identity formation (e.g., Thompson 1963; Sewell 1980; Katznelson and Zolberg 1986), nor does it reject the view that group

<sup>7</sup> This is a probabilistic, not deterministic, argument. When I say that communal elites are the pivotal players at all stages of democratic mobilization, I mean that they are the most important actors, not that their support is necessary and/or sufficient for mobilization emergence and success.

identification can further self-interests (e.g., Hardin 1995; Laitin 1998). What it does deny is that treating material interests and collective identities as mutually constitutive and analytically inseparable is a costless move. Such an approach prevents us from assessing the relative importance of material interests and felt identities in motivating and mobilizing democratic protest.<sup>8</sup> To loosen the stranglehold of class analysis in the literature on social forces in democratization and to explain variation in mobilization outcomes, it is essential to do some conceptual disentangling of what are obviously empirically intertwined social phenomena.

The next two sections elaborate my central arguments and bring the culturalist literature on contentious politics to bear in my critiques of the democratization literature. The subsequent section compares historical trajectories in Southeast Asia, showing how variation in the political positioning of communal elites explains variation in mobilization outcomes better than more proximate and socioeconomic theories of democratization. The conclusion considers some broader theoretical and empirical implications for the study of democratic mobilization.

#### COMMUNAL ELITES, COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES, AND SYMBOLIC POWER

Public struggles between authoritarian incumbents and democratic challengers fundamentally entail a confrontation over the material perquisites of political power. Yet they typically take on the look and feel of a “symbolic war” (Kubik 1994, p. 17). To understand why, it is useful to recall Etzioni’s (1961) typology of power: coercive, remunerative, and symbolic. Authoritarian regimes tend to hold huge advantages over their opponents in coercive and remunerative power because they command the state apparatus, with its army, police, and treasury. If oppositionists are to hold any advantage, it is most likely to be in symbolic power. Most democratic opposition groups are neither armed to the teeth nor bankrolled to the hilt. They must try to gain political leverage from whatever symbolic advantages they might enjoy.

How can democratic protestors generate symbolic power? One answer is that opposition activists produce the desired effect through their own creativity. They can “frame” the struggle for regime change in ways that resonate with a broad cross-section of the population (e.g., Snow et al. 1986). Another possibility is charisma. Leaders might emerge who possess

<sup>8</sup> Following Polletta and Jasper (2001, p. 285), I consider the question, “Is identity or interest the bedrock of individual choice?” to be “a sociological chicken and egg question.” Yet they add, “An alternative tack asks whether interest or identity is more salient in different contexts.” This is precisely the approach taken here.

an uncanny capacity to “evok[e] a particular emotional state in people, namely a state of motivation and commitment, often identification, with the leader or with a movement or goal” (Aminzade, Goldstone, and Perry 2001, p. 130).

Major uprisings are not always merely a creative or charismatic leader away, however. This article acknowledges the contingencies of individual leaders’ charisma and creativity in Southeast Asia’s democratic revolutions. Yet the critical factor is not so much leaders’ creativity or charisma as their credentials. In Southeast Asia, as I attempt to show below, the most broadly resonant frames for collective protest have been those of nationalism and religion. Democratic activists cannot credibly tap into these sources of symbolic power at will or through creativity or charisma alone. Divergent trajectories of political development have yielded systematic differences in the political salience of nationalism and religion across national settings. They have also differentially credentialed individuals and groups to appropriate these sources of symbolic power within national settings.<sup>9</sup>

At any moment in time, a society’s leading possessors of nationalist and religious authority—what I call communal elites—are largely if not completely a historical given. Nationalist and religious credentials are usually cultivated over time or inherited from the past, not readily secured in a single creative act. Such credentials can also be the property of formal organizations (e.g., nationalist parties and postrevolutionary militaries) and more loosely structured collective actors (e.g., university students and religious communities). This adds to their tendency to inhere in particular hands in path-dependent ways rather than to be constantly reinvented and reallocated. When regime oppositionists contemplate whether and how to appropriate nationalist and religious symbols to motivate mass protest, they do so under clear historical constraints. They face an even greater structural hurdle in that they are forced to confront “the primary repository of symbolic power in the modern world” (Loveman 2005, p.

<sup>9</sup> Sewell (1996, p. 842) has usefully attempted to blend considerations of power, culture, and structure with his claim that structures are “composed simultaneously of cultural schemas, distributions of resources, and modes of power.” Although Sewell rightly acknowledges that resources and power are unevenly distributed within societies, which can explain quiescence, his portrayal of cultural schemas as “provid[ing] actors with meanings, motivations, and recipes for social action” is more exclusively liberating. I hope to build on Sewell’s work by inquiring into how historical patterns of identity formation have forged very different cultural schemas in different countries, such that not all societies possess “recipes for social action” that are readily appropriable by opposition actors. For an argument that our theories of contentious politics pay insufficient attention to the ways that culture constrains as well as empowers movement actors, see Polletta (2003). On blending structural-historical with more constructivist views of identity formation, see Tilly (2002, chap. 4).

1659); the modern state. The puzzle of successful democratic revolutions is thus not simply how oppositionists might generate symbolic power. It is how they might achieve a symbolic advantage over the authoritarian regimes they face.

Fortunately for democratic activists in some countries (but not others), what Loveman calls the “balance of symbolic power” does not always tilt in the state’s favor (2005, p. 1663). Which way the scales tip depends on more than the outcome of a creative competition between regimes and opponents during moments of political crisis. It depends on the long-term political positioning of communal elites. While “there is no way to measure with satisfactory precision the ‘strength’ of the hegemony achieved by the rulers over the ruled” (Kubik 1994, p. 12), I suggest that the political positioning of communal elites provides a useful way of operationalizing the balance of symbolic power between state elites and their societal challengers.

How communal elites are politically positioned is not determined overnight. Their authority and autonomy are forged historically amid a series of political conjunctures quite common among postcolonial states (see fig. 1). Specifically, high colonialism (circa the half century preceding World War II) and national decolonization (circa the two decades following World War II) determine the political salience of various types of communal elites within a polity as it gains independence. A third historical process, the onset of open-ended authoritarian rule (circa 1955–70), determines whether communal elites will be politically autonomous from the emergent regime. Only if they enjoy political autonomy will communal elites be structurally available to an emergent democratic opposition during a fourth historical epoch: the age of the “Third Wave” of democratization (circa 1975–present).

In some cases, communal elites have either become completely identified with ruling authoritarian regimes or been completely eliminated (or simply failed to emerge) through processes of political development. This presents opposition groups with tremendous difficulty in mustering the emotive appeals that can help bring swarms of unarmed civilians into direct confrontation with the coercive arms of the state. Where communal elites retain some measure of political autonomy, they can provide democratic oppositionists with significant mobilizational thrust as well as symbolic sanction for their transgressive actions. This greatly improves the odds that the opposition might manage to paralyze the capital city with sheer numbers and makes it more politically difficult for an authoritarian regime to repress a challenge with brute force. Even when communal elites provide a belated imprimatur instead of a proactive inspiration for protests, their support can help tilt the scales toward the opposition during times of regime crisis.



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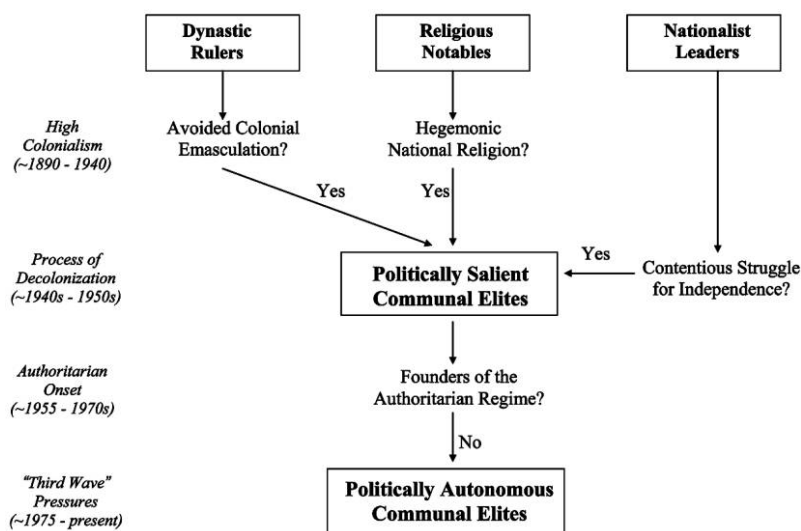


FIG. 1.—Political positioning of communal elites over time

How are the political salience and autonomy of communal elites shaped by historical patterns of colonialism, decolonization, and authoritarian onset? During colonialism, the critical factor is whether dynastic rulers are eliminated, emasculated, or protected by Western powers. This is closely linked to whether imperialists practiced indirect or direct forms of colonial rule. Under extreme forms of direct rule, such as the British imperium in Ministerial Burma, these monarchical elites were completely and permanently erased from the political stage.<sup>10</sup> Where colonialism was more indirect (as in most of British Malaya) or even absent in a formal sense (as in Thailand), dynastic rulers survived to play important roles in postcolonial politics.

The second critical factor, of central importance in the long-term political positioning of religious notables, is whether colonial policies and practices fostered the emergence of a “hegemonic religion” (Friedland 2001, p. 138) at the national level: for example, Catholicism in the Philippines or Buddhism in Burma and Thailand. Where no single religious community has gained national predominance, as in Singapore and Vietnam, even the most creative activists will face insuperable difficulties in mobilizing democratic opposition on the basis of religious appeals. Such

<sup>10</sup> The so-called native states and excluded areas in British Burma were ruled more indirectly.

appeals are more likely to divide than to unify democratic oppositionists in the absence of a hegemonic national religion.<sup>11</sup>

Today's postcolonial states not only endured very different types of colonialism. They also escaped the imperial yoke in very different ways. Where the struggle for independence was especially contentious, nationalist leaders such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, Burma's Aung San, and Indonesia's Sukarno emerged to claim their newly independent societies' most potent source of symbolic power. Intense nationalist struggles tended to leave thick organizational residues, producing and fortifying political groups that would play central roles during the democratization denouements of decades to follow: most notably, the fervently nationalist student groups, political parties, and religious associations of Indonesia and Burma.

On the regime side as well, military organizations vary considerably in their revolutionary experiences and nationalist credentials. While all militaries proclaim a nationalist purpose, not all militaries have historic grounds for credibly portraying their institutional mission in heroic, self-sacrificing terms. Where the military was irrelevant to the process of securing national sovereignty—as in the Philippines and Thailand—its invocations of a nationalist mission typically ring hollow.<sup>12</sup> Where Western powers yielded sovereignty voluntarily—as in Malaysia and Singapore—nationalism provides neither a resonant frame nor a familiar framework for collective action, hamstringing democratic oppositionists.<sup>13</sup> Yet the absence of an anticolonial struggle also made nationalism a less salient source of authoritarian legitimacy in these countries than in Burma, Indonesia, and Vietnam, where ruling regimes have been routinely accused of brutality and ineptitude but rarely accused of lacking nationalist righteousness or commitment.

It is thus not an overstatement to say that history had “ended” for certain types of communal elites by the time national independence was secured. Burma no longer possessed dynastic rulers who might help tilt the scales in later conflicts over democratization (as did Thailand); Singapore could no longer produce religious notables with majority appeal

<sup>11</sup> Although a religious community's demographic power by no means assures its political power, long-term demographic trends clearly favor some communities more than others. For a similar disentangling of demographic and mobilization questions, see Bartolini (2000, p. 184).

<sup>12</sup> The link from nationalist struggle to later political involvement was recognized in one of the classic early works on postcolonial militaries: “Clearly, military formations born in the struggle for national liberation have maintained wide political involvements” (Janowitz 1977, p. 91).

<sup>13</sup> The most resonant form of “nationalism” in Malaysia is ethnic and hence not very “national” at all.

(as could the Philippines); and the Philippines could never spawn any Vietnamese- or Indonesian-style nationalist organization rivaling the authority of its main religious organization. Southeast Asian societies thus differed dramatically by the dawn of decolonization, not only in the type of communal elites who were most salient but in the degree to which they contained politically salient communal elites at all. In the most extreme case, there were effectively no communal elites possessing widely recognized religious or nationalist authority in Singapore by the time the British voluntarily ceded self-rule in 1959.

Would the politically salient communal elites of the 1940s and 1950s become the politically autonomous communal elites that democratic oppositionists would need on their side for later antiauthoritarian struggles? This depended on whether these elites and the organizations they commanded would become the founders of the authoritarian regimes that became entrenched throughout the region between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s. Again to illustrate with an extreme case, the Vietnamese Communist Party seized political power in the process of leading a protracted and bloody national revolution. In a society without surviving dynastic rulers or a hegemonic national religion, the establishment of open-ended authoritarian rule by Vietnam's lone organized repository of nationalist authority has been a recipe for the chronic absence of democratic mobilization.

By subtle but significant contrast, communal elites such as the king of Thailand, the leaders of the Philippine Roman Catholic Church, and top figures in Indonesia's mass Islamic organizations lent a degree of support to authoritarian rule but were never coterminous with the regime itself. So long as an authoritarian regime is not communal elites' personal pride and property, they maintain a measure of autonomy that allows them to assist democratic protesters during a political crisis. To be sure, communal elites have been emasculated by authoritarian regimes or have become identified with them to different degrees in different cases. It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a systematic comparative explanation for variation in the political allegiance of communal elites, although I aim to do so elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> For present purposes, what matters is that political autonomy is logically prior to political opposition, even if the former by no means always yields the latter.

The literature on democratization has not paid adequate theoretical attention to the role of nationalism and religion in sustaining and un-

<sup>14</sup> See Slater (in press). My central argument is that subtle variation in patterns of contentious politics before the onset of open-ended authoritarian rule shapes long-term support for an authoritarian regime among a wide range of elites, not just communal elites.

dermining authoritarian regimes. The next section details some problems that have arisen from this literature's excessive focus on the materialist demands of class actors in driving democratic change, as well as its relative inattention to the contentious manner in which authoritarian regimes so often collapse.

#### SOCIAL FORCES IN DEMOCRATIZATION: RETHINKING THE HOW, WHO, AND WHY

The shortcomings I seek to address in the democratization literature are threefold. There has been insufficient attention to how social forces bring authoritarian regimes down, as well as an overly narrow focus on who tends to mobilize for democracy and why. The culturalist literature on contentious politics proves enormously useful in correcting the democratization literature's economistic biases and relative inattention to democratic mobilization—even as it generally proves too ahistorical and inattentive to “negative cases” (i.e., cases of failed mobilization and nonmobilization) for the comparative, explanatory purposes at hand.

#### How?

Over the past two decades, a division of labor has emerged in the study of democratization. Scholars emphasizing “structure” explore the long-term societal and coalitional shifts that pave the way for democratic transitions. Others stress “contingency,” examining the short-term dynamics through which authoritarian regimes split at the elite level and collapse from within. What is missing is an analysis of the long-term social and political processes that influence the “end game” dynamics whenever authoritarian regimes find themselves in trouble. In this theoretical breach, democratic protest—a major causal mechanism in authoritarian collapse—has been treated by default as a highly contingent phenomenon.

One of the most influential recent theoretical works on democracy is also the most strikingly silent on the question of causal mechanisms. In arguing that economic development is only correlated with democracy because rich democracies are unlikely to collapse, Przeworski and Limongi (1997, p. 159) conclude that “democracy appears exogenously as a *deus ex machina*.” Even the chief critic of this argument shares Przeworski and Limongi's conviction that severe political and economic crises can be a sufficient explanation for democratization. While insisting that economic development indeed makes dictatorships more likely to break down, Boix (2003, p. 29) accepts that military and economic disasters in

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Germany in 1918, Argentina in 1983, and Indonesia in 1998 “made democracy inevitable for each country.”

Contingent events such as a leader’s death or an economic meltdown can clearly weaken an authoritarian regime’s grip on power. Yet they leave much to be explained. On the regime side, the “crisis hypothesis” ignores the various kinds of political legitimacy that a nondemocratic regime might enjoy, even during hard times. Might an authoritarian regime possess other types of legitimacy to fall back on when it loses the charismatic legitimacy of a long-time ruler or squanders its performance legitimacy from a record of economic growth?<sup>15</sup> On the opposition side, crises neither solve collective-action problems nor provide a mechanism to channel public anger into politically oriented claims making (e.g., protests, demonstrations) as opposed to economically oriented violence (e.g., looting, shop burning). Since the fate of dictatorships rests on a struggle between regimes and their opponents, we must consider how history has endowed each side with the power resources it brings to the political battlefield.

This requires the sort of deep social-historical analysis for which the structural side of the democratization literature is renowned. Yet even structuralist scholars have spent little time theorizing the causal mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes break down. Their main tasks have been to determine which classes in society are most strongly supportive of democratic procedures and to trace whether long-term shifts in the balance of class power favored or disfavored democracy’s champions in particular cases.<sup>16</sup> Yet even if we know which groups are most likely to support democracy once it is established, this does not mean that they will be able to overcome the enormous collective-action problems that hinder opposition in highly repressive settings.<sup>17</sup> The societal pillar that upholds the house of democracy is not necessarily the societal battering ram that levels the house of dictatorship.

Developing better theory on democratic mobilization is thus essential to the development of better theory on democratization more generally.

<sup>15</sup> Although no one could deny the importance of performance legitimacy in sustaining authoritarianism, it is too often treated as the only viable source of authoritarian legitimacy.

<sup>16</sup> This may well be because democracy was more often secured in Europe through a gradual extension of the franchise to the working classes than through all groups securing democratic rights at once. In our contemporary age of universal suffrage, democratization is more of an all-or-nothing affair in class terms.

<sup>17</sup> As Waldner (2008, p. 31) depicts the uphill battle confronting opponents of authoritarian regimes: “Supporters of the status quo are embedded in institutions facilitating their collective action; opponents of the regime have no such luxury.” Also see Loveman (1998).

Unfortunately, those scholars who perceive “battering rams” as essential for democratization have not yet offered a convincing causal framework for the variation in mobilization outcomes—from full-blown revolutions to chronic quiescence—that we see. Contingency rather than structure is taken to be the defining feature of democratic uprisings, when an “exultant feeling” among protesters creates an atmosphere of “hope, opportunity, choice, incorporation of new actors, shaping and renewal of political identities, inventiveness” and hence a “high degree of structural indeterminacy” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p. 19). An unabashed ahistoricism also characterizes a recent study of democratic revolutions by a historically astute sociologist, Kurzman (2008), who argues that “in moments of revolutionary confusion, people replace their old routines with new paths” (p. 23) and that “rapid shifts in these self-understandings suggest that long-term causes may not be so important as short-term expectations” (p. 21). This leaves us, as Kurzman frankly and admirably admits, with a “circular” argument in which “cause and effect are one and the same” (pp. 54–55).

One need not deny the eventful and relentlessly creative nature of revolutionary mass behavior to be dissatisfied with this explanatory cul-de-sac. While no reasonable scholar could fail to acknowledge the manifold contingencies of revolutionary processes, such an analytic perspective cannot shed much light on why so many revolutions fail and why so many more fail to occur. Do Singaporean, Malaysian, and Vietnamese democracy activists lack the “inventiveness” of their Indonesian, Philippine, and Thai counterparts? Or might there be underlying features of these states and societies as they have politically developed over time that make some of them more prone and primed for mass urban protest than others?

The need for better theorizing of the causal links from long-term political development to short-term democratic mobilization rings through most clearly in the recent work of Acemoglu and Robinson (2006). On the one hand, “an effective threat of revolution is the spark that ignites the democratization process” (p. 36). Yet “a real threat from the citizens requires the juxtaposition of many unlikely factors: the masses need to solve the collective-action problem necessary to organize themselves, they need to find the momentum to turn their organization into an effective force against the regime, and the elites—who are controlling the state apparatus—should be unable to use the military to effectively suppress the uprising” (p. 25). In sum, the essential causal mechanism in Acemoglu and Robinson’s framework appears inexplicable with reference to short-term dynamics alone:

Our framework implies that a relatively effective threat of revolution from the citizens is important for democratization. When the citizens are not well

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organized, the system will not be challenged and transition to democracy will be delayed indefinitely. . . . Therefore, some degree of development of civil society is also necessary for democratization. We take such development as given in this book and *it plausibly represents the outcomes of long-run historical processes*.<sup>18</sup> (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, p. 31; emphasis added)

Acemoglu and Robinson thus rightly suggest that mass mobilization can be a powerful accelerant of democratization and that social scientists need to do a better job of theorizing where it comes from historically.<sup>19</sup> This requires some rethinking on who the key actors in democratic mobilization are and why some rise up while others consistently acquiesce.

### Who?

If democratic mobilization is so important, it is essential to ask who mobilizes. Although structuralist theorists have not paid enough attention to mass urban protest per se, they have valuably studied the democratic and antidemocratic proclivities of various social forces in tremendous depth and breadth. These theorists disagree on who represents the “carrying class” for democratization, but they overwhelmingly agree that it is indeed classes that carry countries in democratic (or undemocratic) directions.

Moore (1966) famously focused on the role of the bourgeoisie in preventing the triumph of authoritarian coalitions dominated by reactionary landed elites.<sup>20</sup> Most subsequent theorists have paid greater attention to either the working class or the middle class as the ultimate shaper of political regimes. The case for popular sectors has been most forcefully made by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992), who saw workers and peasants playing the key democratizing role in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean.<sup>21</sup> Collier maintained a focus on labor in both her individual and collaborative work (Collier and Mahoney 1997; Collier

<sup>18</sup> Mass protest is similarly essential—and exogenous—in Boix (2003, pp. 3–4): “If the lower classes are demobilized or the ruling elite has strong repressive capabilities, there is a peaceful and durable authoritarian regime. However, if the organizational capacity of the poor rises, the likelihood of revolutionary explosions and civil wars escalates.” No explanation for this critical change in the organizational capacity of ordinary people—nor for variation in authoritarian regimes’ repressive capabilities—is offered.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent argument that mass urban mobilization has played this accelerant role in Northeast and Southeast Asia, see Wang (2008, pp. 109–15).

<sup>20</sup> In a new application of Moore’s core argument to Southeast Asia, Sidel (2008, pp. 128–29) argues that the region’s diverse regime outcomes “can in no small measure be understood in terms of the degree of vigor and independence enjoyed by a given country’s bourgeoisie.” Yet Sidel does not argue that capitalists were the leading actors in Southeast Asia’s democratic revolutions.

<sup>21</sup> For a similar argument focused more squarely on Europe, see Eley (2002).

1999). Wood (2000) has deployed the tools of class analysis to illuminate labor- and peasant-led transitions in South Africa and El Salvador. Bermeo (1997) has similarly stressed the role of militant labor unions in breaking elite resistance to democratization in cases ranging from South Korea to Spain.

These studies all portray organized labor as a leading actor in public challenges to authoritarian rule. This focus on labor has been challenged yet also reinforced by Bellin (2002). She begins by questioning the universality of labor's democratic character, arguing that workers exhibit a diffident attitude toward democratization whenever they benefit from state sponsorship. When democratization takes place despite labor's diffidence, the initiative comes from "other forces in society (e.g., church activists and students in Korea, a new generation of party activists in Mexico)" (p. 4). Having hinted at a parallel world of social forces capable of driving democratization, Bellin returns her attention to the role of organized labor and another prime protagonist of class analysis, the bourgeoisie.

Bellin's conflation of social forces with social classes is endemic among democratization theorists. In his sweeping comparative analysis of democratic experiments in the early 20th century, Kurzman convincingly shows that the "usual suspects" of class analysis—for example, landlords and laborers—fail to explain empirical variation (2008, p. 11). Rather than eschewing the class lens, he tries to salvage it by emphasizing the causal role played by the "class of modern intellectuals" (p. 12). Game theoretic models derived by Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) and Boix (2003) portray regimes as the outcome of purely material struggles among stylized upper, lower, and middle classes. More sociologically oriented scholars have fallen into the same trap. In recent review essays, Ziblatt (2006, p. 323) asks, "Who actually pushes for democracy?" and answers in strictly class terms, while Mahoney (2003, p. 147) praises comparative-historical work for "tell[ing] us much about the class-based origins of democracy and dictatorship."

But what of those "other forces in society" to whom Bellin (2002) referred before returning her attention to workers and capitalists? How well does class fare in apprehending such social forces? When scholars examine democratic activists beyond the working class, they generally lump them into an amorphous middle class or eschew any categorization whatsoever. Huntington has most famously emphasized middle strata qua middle strata: "Third wave movements for democratization were not led by landlords, peasants, or (apart from Poland) industrial workers. In virtually every country the most active supporters of democratization came from the urban middle class" (1991, p. 67). In their analysis of popular protest in sub-Saharan Africa, Bratton and van de Walle (1997, pp. 101–3) place



civil servants and students alongside labor unions as key democratic forces.

These works usefully direct our attention toward groups besides labor unions likely to be found in mass urban protests. Yet the “middle class” label encompasses a ragtag assemblage of social forces. The tremendous diversity of groups involved in democratic protest is nicely expressed, if not explained, by Bermeo (1997, p. 306): “In some cases, the most threatening pressures will come from students and other well-educated urban groups,” she argues. “In other cases, the primary threat will come from armed opposition with a rural base, subnationalist groups, or organized labor. . . . Who these actors are sociologically needs to be contextually defined.”

Perhaps what links these diverse democratic protesters is not their class standing but something else entirely. Without assuming that the same social forces should be expected to mobilize against authoritarianism in all cases, I submit that collective identities provide a powerful and underutilized lens through which to examine democratic protest. The promise of such an approach is suggested by what appears to be a basic inconsistency in the literature on class and democratization: How can class itself explain the emergence of the kind of cross-class coalition that seems so important in sparking democratic change? As Polanyi ([1944] 2001, p. 160) once put it: “There is no magic in class interest which would secure to members of one class the support of members of other classes. Yet such support is an everyday occurrence.”

Even if democratic activists do predominantly come from the middle class, this might have little to do with class per se. “Religious nationalism draws overwhelmingly from the middle class,” Friedland writes (2001, p. 145), “precisely that class to which political sociologists have always looked as a bastion of support for democracy.” Perhaps it is “the communal solidarities” (Friedland 2001, p. 142) produced by shared religious and nationalist identifications, more than shared material interests, that bring diverse middle-class actors together in public opposition to authoritarian rule.

This argument jibes with broader trends in the study of contentious politics. Scholars have countered methodologically individualist treatments of collective action with the commonsensical notion that “individuals share prior bonds with others that make solidaristic behavior a reasonable expectation” (Polletta and Jasper 2001, p. 289). To explain democratic protest in authoritarian settings, however, we must explain not only solidarity but solidarity behind high-risk collective action. Who can inspire thousands of people from diverse walks of life to take such risks? And whose support can help deflect and delegitimize the use of violence against democratic protests? The historical record suggests that

the fate of democratization struggles in Southeast Asia has hinged on the political positioning of communal elites. Wherever a country's primary possessors of nationalist and religious authority have sided with authoritarian incumbents, democratic protest has failed to emerge or has been suppressed with relative ease.

Why?

Understanding the power of collective identities in motivating democratic protest requires that we at least partially escape the rationalist assumptions that dominate the democratization literature. We have already seen how the literature on social forces in democratization remains wedded to a paradigm in which different classes have different material interests, and this affords the best explanation for variation in democratization outcomes. When scholars look more explicitly at mobilization outcomes, the grip of the class paradigm loosens—but scholars of democratic mobilization are yet to grasp the power of emotive collective identifications in motivating high-risk protest aimed at overthrowing authoritarian regimes.

Four main hypotheses have been offered to explain how democratic protesters overcome collective-action problems to mobilize against a dictatorship. First, and most consistent with the class analyses just discussed, some scholars see economic development as the key transformation providing ordinary citizens with both the capacity and the incentive to confront authoritarian repression (e.g., Huntington 1991, p. 69; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).<sup>22</sup> A second socioeconomic explanation focuses on economic crisis as the most likely trigger for collective democratic protest, as aggrieved citizens look to “secure a larger share of the economic benefits of the system” through democratic change (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, p. 29). A more political third explanation posits stolen elections as the strongest impetus for democratic uprisings, as “electoral fraud can be a remarkably useful tool for solving the collective action problems faced by citizens” (Tucker 2007, p. 536; also Thompson and Kuntz 2005; Schedler 2006, p. 13).<sup>23</sup> Finally, the wavelike spread of democratic revolutions

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Eley (2002, p. 20) ties democratic ideology to Europe's industrial development: “The new ideas didn't follow inevitably from socioeconomic change. But in the most general way, changes in the democratic idea clearly had this material source.”

<sup>23</sup> Case (2006, p. 97) combines elements of all three of these logics in his explanation for variation in Southeast Asia: “Under [crisis] conditions, the new classes wrought by industrialization have finally been activated . . . and they have begun to look upon elections, however much competitiveness may be calibrated, as the aperture through which change might be brought about.” Yet Case ultimately acknowledges that the Philippines is the only Southeast Asian case that even approximates such “democratization by election” (p. 110).

through the postcommunist world has inspired multiple scholars to invoke international diffusion as the best explanation for the puzzlingly common phenomena of democratic revolutions against brutal dictatorships (e.g., Beissinger 2007).

None of these hypotheses is devoid of explanatory power, and each may provide more analytic purchase in some cases than in others. In the empirical section on Southeast Asia, I hope to show that none of them outperform my own explanation for mobilization outcomes, centering on the political positioning of communal elites. For now, the key point is that none of these rival explanations sheds much light on the core deductive puzzle of democratic mobilization: Why would individuals assume the personal risk of injury and death intrinsic in any collective act of protest against an authoritarian regime? Economic and political shifts may raise the perceived costs of inaction or the potential for movement success, but how do they prevent “free riding” from remaining the dominant rational strategy for individuals considering whether to risk their lives by joining the uprising?

The short answer is that classic rationalist perspectives provide little insight on high-risk collective action. As Loveman (1998, p. 480) argues, “Rational choice models are particularly *unhelpful* for explaining participation in collective action in situations involving high levels of risk or contexts of extreme instability and unpredictability.” This is why the cultural or emotional turn has become so mainstream in sociological research on contentious politics, even as it has exhibited virtually no impact on the study of democratization. Olson’s (1965) famed “logic of collective action” has illuminated innumerable political processes during undangerous times. Yet the dangers of collective protest against authoritarianism suggest the need for a heightening of collective emotions and identifications as much as a honing of individual logic.

One of my central claims is that nationalism and religion provide especially potent sources for such collective emotions and solidarities. But why is this so? How does symbolic power, the main currency in communal elites’ hands, actually work? Why are oppositionists who have it more likely to prevail during democratization struggles than those who do not? Why are authoritarian regimes that have it more able to crush protest, and even prevent it from arising altogether, than those that do not?

There are multiple ways in which nationalist and religious authority might bolster either an authoritarian regime or a democratic opposition. The simplest way is by inducing deeply held convictions and commitments at the individual level. “An analysis that ignores the emotional dimensions of attachments and commitments is incapable of explaining activists’ determination in the face of high risk and their willingness to endure suffering and self-sacrifice, including torture and death,” Aminzade and

McAdam write (2001, p. 31). This helps explain recent findings that nationalism tends to trump democratic sentiment as a revolutionary force. In his study of the waves of mass mobilization that heralded the downfall of the Soviet Union, Beissinger concludes that “demonstrations that championed regime liberalization but did not raise ethnonationalist demands for the most part gained relatively minor resonance within society” and that this underscored “*the significant role played by nationalism in providing regime transition with a social base*” (2002, p. 76; emphasis added).<sup>24</sup> If individual protesters feel emotionally invested in democratic protest because they see it as linked to a higher nationalist or religious purpose, Olson’s (1965) “free rider problem” becomes less problematic. What Durkheim ([1912] 1995, p. xli) called “collective effervescence” might make individuals behave less like what Bourdieu (2005, p. 83) called the “anthropological monster” of the purely materialist, maximizing actor.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of individual members of the dictatorship, true belief that the regime is a legitimate historical expression of nationalist or religious righteousness might make them more willing to accept personal sacrifices or to impose heavy costs on opponents for the perceived good of the whole.

It would, of course, be sociologically naive to posit uniform beliefs or emotional states to crowds that can number in the millions. Recent work by Varshney (2003) elaborates a more subtle logic by which nationalist and religious identities can generate collective action. Drawing on Weber, Varshney asserts that nationalist identifications are “value rational” rather than “instrumentally rational,” insofar as nationalists see the good of the nation as an absolute rather than relative good. This makes them relatively insensitive to the costs and risks of public mobilization. By using this framework to explain patterns of collective violence in defense of the status quo as well as collective protest on behalf of political change, Varshney suggests a logic whereby shared nationalist and religious identifications might bolster authoritarian regimes every bit as much as their democratic challengers.

In aiming “to pluralize the concept of rationality” rather than portray communal identities as nonrational, Varshney (2003, p. 95) provides insight into how nationalism and religion might motivate collective action among individuals who do not feel deep commitments to their identity groups. Massive protest necessarily mobilizes diverse social forces, so in-

<sup>24</sup> Relatedly, Pape (2003) sees demands for national self-determination as the most important motivation for suicide terrorism—as “high-risk” a form of protest as can be imagined.

<sup>25</sup> For an application of the concept of collective effervescence to democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe, see Tiryakian (1995).

dividuals will join the same movement for different reasons and at different times. Even if the first wave of protesters is motivated by emotional or value-rational stimuli, “many would join such mobilization, when it has acquired some momentum and chance of success, for entirely selfish reasons. The *origins* of ethnic mobilization are thus value-rational, and its *evolution* may contain a lot of strategic behavior” (p. 86). By contrast, Wood argues that initial outbreaks of mobilization are best explained by political exclusion and economic marginalization but that “once mobilization begins . . . the experience of rebellion may provide affective rewards that further fuel rebellion” (2000, p. 11 n. 10). In sum, one need not reject rationalist ontology in toto to recognize the power of nationalism and religion in democratic protest. One must simply be willing to complement instrumentalist logic with notions of value rationality and emotional commitments that are critical at the onset of contention and that may also prove critical during later stages of mobilization.

There are ultimately numerous ways to reconcile an analytic focus on nationalism and religion with instrumental views of individual action. Besides activating collective passions, shared identities facilitate the emergence of group leaders as “focal points” for collective protest (Petersen 2001, p. 14). Religious organizations provide a “free space” in which regime opponents not only “can develop counterhegemonic ideas and oppositional identities” (Polletta and Jasper 2001, p. 288) but can simply gather in relative safety, even if they are atheists in their heart of hearts. The support of communal elites can help inoculate activists against charges that they are cynically seeking personal power with no real concern for the national interest.<sup>26</sup> Communal elites’ presence in a crowd or expressed support for protesters might make soldiers less likely to use deadly force; when force is used against widely revered individuals or widely respected groups, it is more likely to spark the kind of “moral shock” that can galvanize wider protests (Jasper 1999, p. 106). Furthermore, soldiers might stay loyal so long as they perceive that their superiors are resolved to protecting the regime out of genuine and shared nationalist commitments. Fears of reprisal could suffice to make a soldier open fire on unarmed demonstrators, regardless of his own emotional commitments or communal identifications.

It is beyond the scope of this article to unravel these possibilities. The key point is that their logics are complementary, not competing. What matters for the discussion to follow is that authoritarian regimes and

<sup>26</sup> As O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 22) depict the king of Spain’s role in that country’s democratization: “The person of the king and the institution of the crown were essential in providing a central focus which consistently supported the transition and was accepted by almost all as being above party, faction, and particular interests.” The king of Thailand has similar if not greater symbolic power, although the consistency of his support for democracy has certainly been questioned (e.g., Handley 2006).

democratic oppositionists are each bolstered by an advantage in symbolic power; the political positioning of communal elites is the key to this balance; and this political positioning is shaped in systematic ways over a long period of time, not merely determined by short-term calculations and creative maneuvers during moments of political crisis.

#### REVOLUTIONS, CRACKDOWNS, AND QUIESCENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

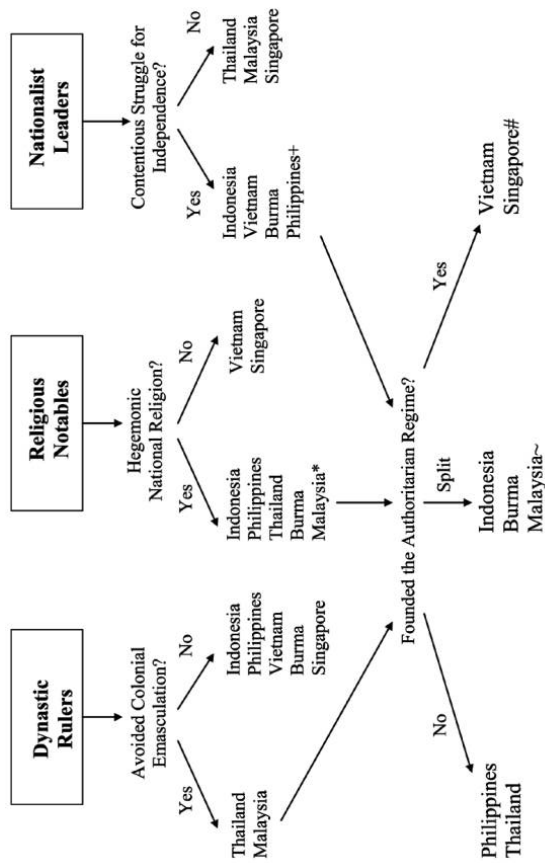
With its focus on class actors and economic factors, the theoretical literature fails to capture the power of communal identities in shaping the fate of democratization movements. We still lack the necessary vocabulary for systematically examining the role of nationalism and religion in democratic protest. To facilitate comparative analysis, I propose a new concept—communal elites—to capture the wide range of leading figures who have organized, inspired, and bolstered antiregime mobilization in Southeast Asia. Sometimes these elites have commanded mass organizations, and sometimes not. Sometimes they have helped spark protests, sometimes they have helped sustain them, and other times they have simply sanctified them. But in all instances, their primary weapon as agents of political opposition has been symbolic rather than coercive or remunerative power (Etzioni 1961).

Three types of figures could emerge as communal elites in postcolonial politics. Dynastic rulers are the descendants of precolonial monarchs and other royalty, where these indigenous institutions emerged relatively unscathed from the colonial onslaught. Religious notables are leading figures within a society's institutions of faith. They could become politically salient communal elites on a national scale only if colonialism gave rise to a hegemonic national religion. Nationalist leaders are the individuals who can most credibly claim to have led the struggle to secure independence. Who inherits nationalist authority after such individuals pass from the scene is often (but not always) a matter of fierce political contestation, as we shall soon see.

If these communal elites did not gain salience and retain autonomy through long-term processes of political development, they would not be structurally available as allies to postcolonial democratic oppositionists. Figure 2 applies the historical framework introduced in figure 1 to the seven Southeast Asian countries under examination here.<sup>27</sup>

The starkest contrast is between Thailand and the Philippines—cases

<sup>27</sup> More provisionally, I would submit that communal elites appear to have been pivotal actors for regime dynamics in Southeast Asia's other four countries (Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, and Laos) as well.



\* Muslims are a growing demographic majority enjoying increasing political domination, but urban areas remain deeply divided.  
 ~ Some religious and aristocratic actors retain a measure of autonomy, yet the regime's advantage among communal elites is significant.  
 + Although the United States voluntarily surrendered sovereignty, the earlier anti-Spanish struggle left nationalism somewhat salient.  
 # Nationalism has relatively low salience, but provides a minor source of advantage to the authoritarian regime.

FIG. 2.—Political positioning of communal elites in Southeast Asia

in which communal elites enjoyed substantial autonomy from authoritarian regimes and democratic protesters benefited from a clear symbolic advantage during regime crises—and Singapore and Vietnam, where no politically autonomous communal elites exist and democratic activists have been chronically hamstrung by their symbolic disadvantage. Alternative political pathways have arrayed communal elites across the regime-opposition divide in Burma and Indonesia, facilitating large-scale protest as well as massive crackdowns in both cases. Successful mobilization became possible in Indonesia only after a wide array of communal elites either assumed oppositional postures (e.g., some Islamic leaders and Sukarno's daughter) or simply withdrew their active support for the authoritarian Suharto regime (i.e., the nationalist military and other Islamic leaders). Malaysia presents something of an intermediate case between the crackdown and quiescence outcomes, in which Islam has gained political if not demographic hegemony and has retained at least a limited degree of institutional autonomy while nationalism lacks resonant non-regimist manifestations. This has provided more raw material for identity-driven protest in Malaysia than in Singapore and Vietnam, if less than in Burma and Indonesia—as witnessed in the moderate-sized urban protests of Malaysia's *reformasi* movement in 1998, which were dwarfed by Burma's and Indonesia's highly nationalistic democratic uprisings and were easily crushed just months after Indonesia's own *reformasi* movement helped bring the Suharto regime crashing down.

Politically autonomous communal elites are, of course, not the only plausible explanation for Southeast Asia's divergent mobilization outcomes. Table 1 pits my argument centering on communal elites against all four alternative explanations for democratic mobilization discussed in the previous section: economic development, economic downturn, stolen elections, and international diffusion.<sup>28</sup> If any of these rival arguments were consistently correct, we would see a clear pattern of "high/yes" to "low/no" codings from left to right in the table, as cases of revolution give way to crackdowns and then to quiescence, but we do not. Only the long-term positioning and short-term posture of communal elites appear clearly and consistently correlated with their hypothesized mobilization outcomes.

The cross-class analysis conducted in table 1 is only a first step in assessing the explanatory power of these alternative hypotheses. Of equal

<sup>28</sup> Although international diffusion pressures are difficult to verify, I consider them relevant when regime crises correspond either to major global waves of democratic revolutions (i.e., postcommunist "velvet" revolutions and recent "colored" revolutions) or to a major democratic uprising in a neighboring country (i.e., Malaysia's *reformasi* movement following Indonesia's in 1998).



TABLE 1  
COMMUNAL ELITES VERSUS RIVAL EXPLANATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC MOBILIZATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

	Philippines (1986)	Thailand (1973)	Thailand (1992)	Indonesia (1998)	Indonesia (1978)	Malaysia (1998)	Burma (1988-90)	Burma (2007)	Singapore	Vietnam
Economic development .....	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium-high	Medium	Low-medium	Medium-high	Low	Low	High	Low-medium
Economic downturn .....	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Stolen election .....	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
International diffusion .....	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Politically autonomous communal elites .....	Yes	Yes	Yes	Split	Split	Split	Split	Split	No	No
Communal elites' predominant posture .....	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	Regime	Regime	Deadlock	Deadlock	Regime	Regime
Mobilization outcome .....	Revolution	Revolution	Revolution	Revolution	Crackdown	Crackdown	Crackdown	Crackdown	Quiescence	Quiescence

interest is how well my explanation captures the historical processes and not just the final outcomes of political development and democratic mobilization. Given the difficulties of doing justice to so much political history in seven diverse cases in a single article, I focus my attention on a subset of especially informative cases: the successful democratic revolution in the Philippines in 1986, the chronic absence of democratic mobilization in Vietnam, and the unsuccessful democratic mobilization and authoritarian crackdown in Burma from 1988 to 1990, with brief reference to the more recent crackdown in that country in 2007.<sup>29</sup>

Taken together, these cases capture all three mobilization outcomes and shed informative light on every stage of my causal argument—from the shaping of communal elites' salience during colonialism and decolonization, to the forging of their autonomy after independence, to their posture during moments of authoritarian crisis. Of the two quiescence cases, Vietnam is especially methodologically useful because it permits a detailed analysis of how political development shapes the autonomy as well as the salience of communal elites, and it allows us to assess how an authoritarian regime's symbolic advantage over oppositionists can sustain it during a time of economic crisis and international revolutionary diffusion. As for the mobilization cases, the Philippines and Burma are methodologically useful insofar as they should be relatively easy cases for alternative hypotheses to explain. The Philippines is purportedly a paradigmatic case of democratic revolution in response to a stolen election against a backdrop of precipitous economic decline. In Burma as well, the dictatorship flagrantly disregarded its landslide electoral defeat in 1990 and mismanaged the economy so egregiously for decades that purely economic factors should suffice to explain democratic mobilization. Yet in both cases, the historical narrative will show that these conventional explanations shed surprisingly little light on the dynamics of antiauthoritarian contention.

In short, rather than choosing cases where only my posited cause is clearly correlated with the eventual outcome (e.g., Thailand, where the ultimate prodemocratic posture of the king as a politically autonomous communal elite can plausibly explain the success of that country's democratic revolution in 1992, whereas economic crisis and stolen elections—there was neither—clearly cannot), I have selected cases where multiple

<sup>29</sup> Readers interested in evidence for this article's arguments on Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are encouraged to contact the author and to refer to some of the main works that have helped shape these conclusions. On Indonesia, see Anderson (1972), Suryadinata (1989), Ramage (1997), Sidel (1998), Madrid (1999), Hefner (2000), Aspinall (2005), Barton (2006). On Malaysia, see Chandra (1979), Khoo (1995), Hamayotsu (2002), Weiss (2006). On Singapore, see Chua (1995), Rodan (1996), Huxley (2002). On Thailand, see Anderson ([1977] 1998), Reynolds (1978), Tambiah (1978), Thak (1979), McCargo (1997), Ockey (2004), Handley (2006).

plausible explanations are correlated with their expected outcome. It is only through careful process analysis that we can determine which of these explanations proves most useful in explaining not only the outcome but how the outcome came about. Within-case analysis is essential to substantiate what cross-case analysis alone cannot. As we will see, democratic mobilization more closely followed the rhythms of highly emotive “moral shocks” than those of economic shocks or electoral shocks (Jasper 1999). Protest emergence and success have depended not on any particular “carrying class” but on the availability of communal elites—and the religious and nationalist sentiments and solidarities they mobilize—to carry many classes at once.

#### Symbolic Advantage and Democratic Revolution: The Philippine Case

With the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in the People Power movement of February 1986, the Philippines became a paradigmatic example of democratization via the causal mechanism of mass urban mobilization. Of dozens of democratic transitions occurring during the Third Wave, “the role of mass protest in authoritarian withdrawal was perhaps most dramatic in the Philippines” (Haggard and Kaufman 1995, p. 64). Of added interest for the explanatory purposes at hand, the Philippines is also taken to be a paradigmatic case of successful democratic revolution in direct response to stolen elections (Thompson and Kuntz 2005), and the Marcos regime was a consummate example of national economic decline resulting from mind-boggling mismanagement and autocratic corruption.

Economic and electoral grievances were undoubtedly ubiquitous in the People Power movement. Yet neither materialist demands nor liberal-reformist appeals were the emotive force driving hundreds of thousands of Filipinos to risk life and limb by directly and collectively confronting the Marcos military. Nor does one gain much analytic purchase by viewing this groundbreaking contentious event as the product of the “usual suspects” of class analysis such as labor unions, business leaders, or overly stylized “middle classes.” The puzzle of the People Power movement—like that of successful democratic revolutions in Indonesia and Thailand as well as unsuccessful democratic uprisings in Burma and Malaysia—is why citizens from all social classes took such profound personal risks for no obvious or immediate personal benefit. It was ultimately the opposition’s capacity to mobilize religious and nationalist sentiment and solidarities transcending class divides that allowed it to paralyze Manila and topple Marcos.

The People Power movement exhibited the religious atmospherics of a citywide Sunday Mass. The deep religiosity of the movement and the

moment had deep historical roots in colonialism and decolonization, which paved the way for the Roman Catholic Church to become the preeminent social organization in the Philippines at the nation's birth in 1946. Direct Spanish rule (1565–1898) wiped out dynastic forms of rule throughout the archipelago and depended on Catholic friars to govern the population. The friars' conversion of over 90% of the population made Catholicism a hegemonic national religion, especially considering the geographic marginalization of the Muslim minority in the far south. The widespread assimilation of Chinese immigrants only reinforced Catholicism's hegemony. Philippine politicians casually refer to theirs as a "Catholic country," with little regard for the sensitivities of religious minorities.<sup>30</sup>

The development of nationalism in the Philippines presents a more nuanced tale. A violent anti-Spanish uprising was triggered in 1896 with the execution by firing squad of Jose Rizal, an erudite literary figure whose martyrdom transformed him posthumously into the Philippines' paramount nationalist icon. Religion and nationalism became tightly intertwined in Rizal's enduring legend as "a Tagalog Christ" whose "Christ-like death" has long tugged simultaneously at nationalist and religious heartstrings (Ileto 1979, pp. 256, 312). Revolutionary nationalist organizations were thoroughly crushed by American military intervention (1898–1901), however, destroying any institutional residues from the anticolonial struggle. The United States' early moves to negotiate a handover of formal sovereignty further prevented the emergence of any nationalist figures or organizations rivaling the heroic credentials of Rizal or the organized national reach of the church.<sup>31</sup>

Unrivaled in its political salience as a communal organization at independence, the Catholic Church preserved its political autonomy throughout the Marcos years. From the declaration of martial law in 1972, the church's stance toward Marcos was one of "critical collaboration" (Youngblood 1990, p. 73). Utterly lacking any historic nationalist basis for rule, Marcos worked to develop a personality cult based on a fabricated war record (McCoy 1999, chap. 5). He also tried to survive his lack of legitimacy through a combination of unbridled corruption and state terror. Marcos's dependence on violence for regime survival culminated in August 1983 when he had exiled opposition leader Benigno Aquino gunned down "in a blatant fashion: he was shot by a Philippine military escort as he descended from a plane full of international journalists" (Thompson 1995, p. 115).

This was the most important event precipitating cross-class mobiliza-

<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Paul Hutchcroft for this insight.

<sup>31</sup> Philippine schoolchildren typically take a class devoted solely to Rizal's personal history. Thanks to Gladstone Cuarteros for this observation.

tion against Marcos. Why did Aquino's assassination serve as "the catalyst that forced hitherto reluctant groups among the middle class into more direct action" (Barry 2006, p. 166), when the economic downturn dating back to the 1970s had long given ample grounds for mass frustration? The event dramatically delegitimized the Marcos regime in a way that its economic failings—more a constant than a variable feature of Philippine presidencies—could not. Both religion and nationalism fueled the cross-class upsurge in protest. Aquino's martyrdom at the hands of state violence vividly recalled Rizal's execution by firing squad and, by extension, the blood sacrifice of Christ himself. Aquino had assiduously burished his religious credentials during his six years in prison under martial law, even conducting a hunger strike for a Christlike 40 days and 40 nights (Thompson 1995, p. 77). An estimated 2 million mourners took to the streets to see Aquino's traveling funeral procession (Franco 2000, p. 234) as the fallen oppositionist "joined the pantheon of national martyrs" (Owen et al. 2005, p. 459).

In an essay tellingly entitled "The Past in the Present Crisis," Ileo (1985) masterfully captured the historical and emotional content of the postassassination outpouring of public opposition, foreshadowing the People Power movement still to come. Ileo argued "that a familiar drama involving familiar themes is being re-enacted." The martyr Aquino had become "the body to which all of those subversive meanings which used to float aimlessly around or were displaced in the religious realm have now adhered, thus making it a potent center to challenge the old, which is precisely what Rizal became." The assassination replayed a religious script as well as a nationalist one: "When Marcos on television repeatedly tried to dissociate the palace from the affair, the almost universal outcry was: 'Pontius Pilate!'" In terms of public emotion, Ileo insisted that "the function of grief at present is unmistakable." No less a communal elite than Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin expressed as much in his funeral homily for Aquino, tearfully proclaiming that "our people . . . wait, no longer as timid and scattered sheep, but as *men and women purified and strengthened by a profound communal grief that has made them one*" (Ileo 1985, pp. 12–13; emphasis added).

Aquino's assassination thus definitively shifted the balance of symbolic power toward the opposition. Whereas "Marcos has never aspired to Rizal's status," Ileo concluded, "Aquino has succeeded on this point" (1985, p. 11). From this disadvantaged symbolic position, Marcos calculated that his advantages in coercive and remunerative power might permit him to stabilize his regime through national elections, which could be bought or rigged as needed. His electoral gamble also stemmed from confidence that his opponents—mostly a factionalized assortment of business oligarchs—would never agree on a single candidate to challenge him.

What Marcos failed to appreciate was the awesome political potential of the mass religious and nationalist upheaval that had followed the moral shock of Aquino's 1983 assassination. Thompson and Kuntz (2005, pp. 21–22) have noted that “there were more than 250 major demonstrations” during the six months following Aquino's assassination alone, and “weekly demonstrations [drawing] tens of thousands of participants continued until late 1985.” The religious tenor of mass protest was only amplified by its intersection with what was, from Marcos's perspective, a most inopportunistically timed Catholic holiday:

The country's political and economic decline added special significance to the “Marian celebration,” commemorating the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of the Virgin Mary. In a homily that he gave at the start of the celebration in September 1985, Jaime Cardinal Sin warned against demoralization and a “dying of hope” during these “dark days” facing the country. Hundreds of thousands of people throughout the Philippines had enthusiastically greeted Sin as he traveled around the archipelago with a small statue of the so-called Weeping Madonna. An estimated 1.5 million Filipinos gathered at the final mass in this tribute to the Virgin in early December, constituting probably the largest religious gathering in Philippine history. (Thompson 1995, pp. 144–45)

It was against this emotive backdrop that Aquino's bereaved widow, Corazon, assumed leadership of the anti-Marcos forces. “The opposition's seemingly miraculous unification behind Aquino must be placed in this context,” Thompson writes (1995, p. 145). “Crowds that had mobbed Sin and the Weeping Madonna were soon out again to see the ‘Filipina Mary,’ Corazon Aquino.” Far more through her inheritance of symbolic power through the Christlike martyrdom of Rizal and the Rizal-like martyrdom of her husband than through her own charisma or political skills, Aquino became a powerful new focal point to unify the opposition for the February 1986 elections. This mass appeal was long on symbolism and short on economic substance. “Her conservative economic policy differed little from Marcos',” as Aquino “made only vague references to land reform” and no substantive “class-based promises of social reform” whatsoever.

Given the complete bankruptcy of the Marcos regime on all imaginable fronts—including the eleventh-hour public debunking of his only plausible nationalist credential, his fabricated war record—it is no surprise that the president could not prevail over his symbolically appealing opponent in a free and fair vote. This forced Marcos to try to hold on to power through fraud, which was promptly and convincingly exposed—by election observers fortified and ennobled by pamphlets glorifying their task in starkly

nationalist and religious terms (Hedman 2006, pp. 144–45).<sup>32</sup> It was thus the emergence of an emotive oppositional focal point that led to stolen elections, not the other way around.

With both Marcos and Aquino claiming the presidency, the self-styled Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) tried to break the political deadlock by seizing power for itself in a lightning coup. A tactical debacle, the putsch left the RAM rebels as sitting ducks in the face of the “crushing superiority” of Marcos’s military forces (McCoy 1999, p. 247). Yet it would be symbolic power more than coercive power that would shift the regime-opposition balance to Marcos’s disadvantage. “In the end, it was not the feint and thrust of rival military factions that decided the outcome,” McCoy writes (1999, p. 256), as the “game of generals” was essentially “stale-mated.” In a society in which the Catholic Church is the only institution with widely recognized moral authority, Archbishop Cardinal Sin served as the only communal elite with the symbolic power and political autonomy to tilt the scales. In a dramatic call for action on church-run Radio Veritas, Sin “intervened to call out the masses to protect the rebels. By responding in such vast numbers, the people transformed an aborted coup into a mass uprising” (p. 256).

The church’s role in Marcos’s removal was both inspirational and organizational.<sup>33</sup> In his ethnography of Manila slum dwellers who participated in the People Power movement, Pinches (1991, p. 172) reports: “Some said they responded directly to the call of Cardinal Sin, and a great many said they would not have gone had it not been for this directive and the large presence of nuns and priests.” When Radio Veritas briefly went off the air, the protestors became like a “fleet of taxicabs without any central dispatcher” (Thompson 1995, p. 159). Priests and nuns passed out crucifixes and statues of the Virgin Mary to as many in the crowd of “over five hundred thousand” protestors as possible because, in the words of one nun, “people will need symbols to rally around” (McCoy 1999, pp. 248, 160). For some protesters, these symbols took quite tangible form: “Some felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Others, of a more literal faith, reported sightings of an angelic ‘blue lady’ who hovered protectively over the massed humanity” (McCoy 1999, p. 257). In more sociological terms, the church’s intervention had helped produce cross-class mobilization, as

<sup>32</sup> Besides the central role of the church in its self-proclaimed “effort of bringing Christ to the polls,” consider the illustrated pamphlet urging voter registration and sanctifying election monitoring with “the unmistakable image of Rizal before a Spanish firing squad next to the following lines. ‘My right to vote had a price. It did not come cheaply. It was paid for with the blood of my forefathers’” (Hedman 2006, p. 145).

<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy that in his bourgeoisie-focused explanation for the success of the People Power movement, Sidel (2008, p. 136) refers to the Philippine opposition as “business-backed,” not business led.

it “galvanized the participation of people from all walks of life, rich and poor alike” (Rivera 2001, p. 239). As Cardinal Sin himself would humbly summarize the dynamics of the People Power movement: “God was the scriptwriter. And all of us played our own roles” (quoted in McCoy 1999, p. 257).

Yet Marcos never agreed to follow God’s script rather than his own. Undeterred by the ocean of church-led humanity standing between his own troops and rebel soldiers, Marcos ordered Marine General Artemio Tadiar to take the lead in dispersing the crowd with force. “But in front of Tadiar were thousands kneeling in the path of his tanks, nuns in white habits reciting the rosary, children in the firing line,” McCoy writes. “His uncle’s voice pleaded with him over the radio to turn back. *His bishop’s voice came next, saying ‘We’re all Filipinos’*” (1999, p. 249; emphasis added). Like his fellow officers in a military apparatus that had never secured historical credit for saving the Philippine nation from anything, Tadiar could not bring himself to slaughter fellow Catholic Filipinos to save a brutal leader with no credible claim to nationalist authority of his own. As we will see in the following case studies, however, not all militaries are so lacking in historical righteousness regarding their use of repression; not all authoritarian regimes are so symbolically bankrupt; and not all societies possess the shared religious and nationalist resources, almost uniquely appropriable by politically autonomous communal elites, that make high-risk democratic protest more likely both to occur and to prevail.

#### Symbolic Disadvantage and Chronic Quiescence: The Vietnamese Case

In explaining why only about half of all Soviet republics erupted in nationalist protest between 1987 and 1991, Beissinger (2002, p. 208) argues that “pre-existing structural conditions shape the nonevent in nationalism.” The same is true of the “nonevent” of democratic protest in Vietnam throughout the Third Wave era. Whereas historical processes permitted the rise of politically autonomous communal elites in the Philippines, they forestalled the emergence of such critical social forces in Vietnam. This has made it difficult for large-scale urban democratic mobilization to emerge, let alone succeed.

The remarkable placidity of contemporary politics in Vietnam is largely the product of the symbolic dominance of the long-ruling Vietnamese Communist Party, a dominance that ironically derives from extraordinarily tumultuous patterns of political development. One of Asia’s most centralized kingdoms at the turn of the 19th century, Vietnam would see both its territorial integrity and its ruling monarchy shattered at the hands of French imperialists by the century’s end. Carved into three artificial provinces by successive French military operations and forced treaties,



Vietnam would be ruled directly in the south (Cochinchina) and indirectly in the center (Annam) and north (Tonkin). The monarchy was formally preserved in the ancient royal capital of Hue—but it did not readily accept the classic colonial bargain of subservience for survival. Emperor Ham-Nghi led a violent anti-French revolt in 1885–86 that culminated in the ruthless repression of the royalist rebellion, the youthful emperor's exile to Algeria, and the political emasculation of the Nguyen dynasty. French rule in the northern parts of Vietnam henceforth rested on a flagrant facsimile of monarchical continuity, while the south saw dynastic power not merely emasculated but eliminated. Military might definitively displaced royal right as the hard currency of political power in colonial Vietnam.

Religion would not provide much more of a basis for salient postcolonial communal elites than would royalty. Although Vietnam is over 80% Mahayana Buddhist in demographic terms, Confucianism has long predominated in political and ethical terms. As the core legitimating philosophy of the Nguyen court and its predecessors, Confucianism provided an ideological basis for centralized state control over all matters religious: “No Buddhist temple could be built in Vietnam without the permission of the Nguyen court,” and as the French imperial onslaught began, “there were no societywide Buddhist religious organizations to compete with the Confucian bureaucracy” (Owen et al. 2005, p. 42). Centuries of precolonial rivalry with neighboring China also elevated Confucianism into the seemingly natural religious element in Vietnamese religious nationalism. “Since North Vietnam was the cradle of premodern Vietnam's resistance against invasion from the North,” Thaveeporn writes (1995, p. 265), “its villages worshiped local deities, some of which were symbols of heroic and patriotic engagements in the defense of the fatherland.” Buddhism would remain politically and institutionally enfeebled while Catholicism would blossom among a vocal and powerful minority of collaborationists under French rule, depriving Vietnam of the kind of unifying national religion that would facilitate large-scale collective protest in the Philippines and, as we shall soon see, in Burma.

It was in this historical context of discredited dynastic rulers and fragmented religious institutions and identities that Vietnam's nationalist movement would emerge.<sup>34</sup> Thanks in part to the French use of over-

<sup>34</sup> McHale's (2004) informative archival unearthing of Buddhist and Confucian influences on print culture in interwar Vietnam only underscores the revolutionary superseding of these themes by the grand narratives of nationalism and communism. Vietnamese communists also importantly parted company with their Chinese counterparts in embracing Confucianism as a revolutionary ideology that had “consolidated Vietnam's national spirit and facilitated resistance to foreign invaders” (Woodside 1999, pp. 26–27). This would limit the political space for oppositional religion in Vietnam even further.

whelming force against Vietnam's first, Kuomintang-style nationalist movement, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) became Vietnam's nationalist vanguard under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh in the 1930s. Having traveled to Versailles in 1919 to plead for Vietnamese self-rule, Ho had already burnished his nationalist image. He would need to wait decades for the kind of political success that could make him a revered nationalist icon, however. Stifled by the coercive power of the French colonial police state, the ICP remained a small, clandestine organization throughout the 1930s while Ho tried to drum up support for Vietnam's independence in exile. It was only with Japan's de facto occupation of Vietnam during World War II that the iron French grip was loosened, paving the way for the explosive growth of a powerful nationalist resistance movement led by the ICP: the Viet Minh.

Japan's military brutality and France's political obstinacy would unwittingly deepen the Viet Minh's revolutionary radicalism and broaden its mass support (Goodwin 2001, chap. 4). When the Japanese enlisted the aid of French and Vietnamese collaborators in commandeering local rice stocks in late 1944, the subsequent famine claimed perhaps a million lives, mostly in the northern provinces where indigenous Vietnamese rulers ostensibly still held limited sway. Symbolically spent, collaborationist Emperor Bao Dai simply handed the northern political capital of Hanoi over to Viet Minh forces as World War II wound to a close in August 1945.

With this "August Revolution," Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence and at last secured a monumental symbolic success for himself and his political party. Tragically, it would take Western leaders three bloody decades to learn that the Viet Minh juggernaut (reborn as the Vietnamese Communist Party, or VCP) had too much mass support to be stopped. In the meantime, Vietnam's wars for independence strengthened the VCP's nationalist credentials for reunifying the nation and ending its seemingly interminable experience with foreign occupation. Ho Chi Minh himself would pass from the scene in 1969, enjoying the kind of unrivaled nationalist credentials in Vietnam that Jose Rizal carried to his grave in the Philippines. Yet unlike Rizal, Ho had spent his critical political years consistently and unambiguously positioned within a specific nationalist organization that would secure independence after his death. Symbolic power deriving from nationalist authority would thus accrue to the post-colonial VCP, not just the anticolonial Ho. These credentials have endured, as "the Vietnamese Party's more recent victory in 1975 affords it more ongoing prestige than the Chinese [Communist] Party's victory in 1949. Moreover, the Vietnamese victory over foreign forces is readily portrayed in terms more nationalist than socialist" (McCormick 1999, p. 175).

The absence of both a hegemonic national religion and any nonregimist

expression of nationalism has made it difficult for the VCP's opponents to mobilize a collective challenge to single-party rule—even when the Soviet bloc collapsed and the Vietnamese economy went into a tailspin in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As foreign aid dried up and state revenues plummeted, the VCP pursued “the desperate policy option of inflationary state finance,” giving rise to a period of “hyperinflation” and “stagnation”; by “1990–91 fundamental questions of regime survival therefore came to the fore” (Fforde 1999, p. 58), at precisely the moment when the forces of international diffusion should have made an anticommunist democratic revolution most likely.

Economic reforms and recovery would come in time, but the VCP would not need to wait for the slow-ripening fruits of *doi moi* (renovation) to preempt calls for political pluralism by defending its monopoly as historically appropriate and nationalistically nonnegotiable. While a wave of democratic revolutions marked European communism's death throes, the VCP's general secretary argued that “prior noncommunist Vietnamese political parties had been chaotic and often dysfunctional in conflicts with colonialism while the Communist Party alone had experienced victory” (Joiner 1990, p. 1056). The VCP also quickly stepped up its “use of Ho Chi Minh as a national symbol. The party endorsed the building of a Ho Chi Minh mausoleum and a Ho Chi Minh museum to commemorate his hundredth birthday in 1990” (Thaveeporn 1995, p. 392 n. 95). Such political maneuvers, along with the elevation of Ho Chi Minh thought to the status of official ideology, “restored the credibility of the party's leadership among the rank-and-file,” as even the party's “critics recognized the leadership role of the party as rooted in history” (Thaveeporn 1995, p. 278). Helpful as economic reforms may have been for the VCP's performance legitimacy since the early to mid-1990s, whatever success these reforms have had has rested on a foundation of political stability during the uncertain economic times of the late 1980s and early 1990s—a foundation that the VCP's preponderance of symbolic power helped provide.

Neither economic downturn nor economic development has dislodged or even disrupted the VCP's political monopoly in the decades since. From a socioeconomic perspective, Vietnam seems like relatively fertile ground for democratic coalitions to sprout; socialist politics produced high literacy rates while weakening landed elites, and postsocialist economic growth has expanded Vietnam's urban middle and working classes (Gainsborough 2003). The rising inequality and endemic corruption accompanying market reforms have predictably sparked recurrent protests, but these economically oriented episodes of contention show no signs of accumulating into any coherent political opposition. Emergent entrepreneurs have proven surprisingly easy to incorporate into the ostensibly socialist VCP's legitimacy formula, with Prime Minister Phan Van Khai praising local

capitalists for “creating a glorious victory for the country and the nation” (Abrami 2003, p. 96). While rapid capitalist development has undoubtedly produced a mix of winners and losers in Vietnamese society, the VCP regime has seen its nationalist image and credentials only bolstered by economic growth.<sup>35</sup> Beyond (unevenly) raising standards of living, McCormick (1999, p. 175) argues, “economic growth does create the potential for a new politics based on nationalism and developmentalism.”

To the very limited extent that contemporary Vietnam exhibits political opposition, its roots lie not in emergent economic classes but in long-standing communal solidarities. Religion would seem at first blush to be a political nonstarter, since Vietnam’s majority Buddhist community exhibits “startlingly different levels of formal religious mobilization” from its Thai and Burmese counterparts (Woodside 1999, pp. 23–24) and “the church is divided between the state-controlled religious establishment and the underground and besieged Buddhist and Catholic churches” (Abuza 2001, p. 14).<sup>36</sup> Vietnam’s Catholic population may be the second largest in Asia behind the Philippines, but a religion claiming the fealty of less than 10% of the population cannot reasonably serve as a basis for large-scale democratic mobilization. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church remains an important site for dissidence: “Despite all attempts by the Communist Party to kill it, the Catholic Church has proven remarkably resilient” (Abuza 2001, p. 199).

Organized Buddhism is more potentially potent as a mobilizing force. It holds an institutional advantage to complement its demographic advantage, as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) secured limited political autonomy under the repressive South Vietnamese regime and survived Vietnam’s reunification in 1976. Yet conflicts quickly erupted, including “massive street protests by church supporters in Ho Chi Minh City” in March 1977 in the wake of the new communist regime’s expropriation of a UBCV orphanage (Abuza 2001, p. 192). By 1981 the VCP had abolished the UBCV and replaced it with a state-sponsored Buddhist umbrella organization, the Vietnamese Buddhist Council (VBC). This has not entirely solved the problem, however, as “there have been protests and demonstrations by leaders of the party-controlled VBC as well. The primary reason is that most of the 28,000 VBC monks are sympathetic to or tacitly support the underground UBCV leadership, and

<sup>35</sup> Not all observers have been impressed by the VCP’s recent economic record. “The Vietnamese economy, by all measures, has been in dismal shape since 1997. . . . The Asian economic crisis hit Vietnam hard” (Abuza 2001, p. 30).

<sup>36</sup> As of the late 1990s, Thailand had approximately 10 times as many monks and 8 times as many Buddhist temples as Vietnam (Woodside 1999, pp. 23–24), even though Vietnam’s population is about 30% larger than Thailand’s.

they only cooperate with the VBC out of fear of persecution” (pp. 196–97). To call such figures a viable force of politically autonomous communal elites would be a stretch, but the persistence of religious dissidence in Vietnam exemplifies the oppositionist potential of religious solidarities in authoritarian settings.

It is ultimately in nationalism, not religion, where political salience lies and VCP legitimacy rests. The absence of rival institutions or collective actors possessing nationalist credentials ensures that the greatest threat to VCP hegemony emanates from within the VCP itself. Although Abuza located “supporters of the old Saigon regimes; Buddhist monks and Catholic clergy; and artists, writers, and poets simply wanting freedom of expression” (2001, p. 29) among Vietnam’s fragmented and bedraggled dissident community, most Vietnamese dissidents are “lifelong party members with irreproachable revolutionary credentials” (pp. 23–24). In the absence of a nonregimist nationalist narrative, à la the Rizal narrative in the Philippines, these patriotic dissidents overwhelmingly aim to influence and not to overturn the VCP. In short, “these critics are not out to undermine the system or to overthrow the communist party, quite the opposite. They seek to broaden the political spectrum, scope of political debate, and political participation—all in order to strengthen the party and restore its legitimacy” (p. 35; emphasis added). Even a relatively optimistic chronicler of Vietnamese civil society such as Abuza acknowledges that “few dissidents actually call for a multiparty system” (p. 103). Without a collectively shared, nationalistically emotive anti-VCP narrative to draw on, these dissidents have shown a consistent “inability to gain a wider following and to convince others, who are not in the elite, to sacrifice themselves” (p. 28).

In sum, the VCP regime’s advantage in symbolic power, grounded in the absence of politically autonomous communal elites, seems to be the best explanation for why Vietnam has lacked not only a democratic transition but an organized democratic opposition of any kind. Although emergent elite divisions could certainly help spark democratization from above in Vietnam, legacies of political development have made it highly unlikely that the VCP will ever be brought down through the causal mechanism of democratic protest from below.

#### Symbolic Deadlock and Authoritarian Crackdown: The Burmese Case

We have just seen how the absence of politically autonomous communal elites has helped prevent the rise of democratic protest in Vietnam, while the availability and active support of such elites helped carry oppositionists to victory in the Philippines. Such revolutions and quiescence do not exhaust the empirical possibilities—crackdowns in response to mas-

sive cross-class protests represent a third common mobilization outcome. This section considers the case of Burma, where the democratization struggle that began in the late 1980s and revived in 2007 is yet to be definitively resolved. Regime opponents have included figures with impressive, historically grounded nationalist and religious credentials: university students, Buddhist monks, and the daughter of a deified national icon. But authoritarian rule is grounded in an institution that has remained remarkably unified at least in part because of its historically rooted perception of its own nationalist purpose: the military, or *tatmadaw* (Callahan 2004). With symbolic power in a deadlock, it has been the military's preponderance of coercive power that has kept Burmese authoritarianism from collapsing.

The British destruction of the Konbaung dynasty in the wake of the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1885 permanently removed dynastic rulers from Burma's national stage. At almost the same historical moment that Vietnam's Emperor Ham-nghi was being exiled to Algeria, Burma's last Konbaung dynast, King Thebaw, was being forcibly and permanently relocated to the Indian subcontinent. Unlike their French counterparts in Vietnam, the British would not even make a pretense of ruling Ministerial Burma through dynastic collaborators. The majority Burman ethnic group would be ruled directly by a handful of British officers and thousands of Indian sepoy. Nothing would remain of the precolonial monarchy but the collective memory of the Konbaungs' "dancing peacock" flag as a shared symbol of resistance to British incursions.

The British could annihilate the Burmese monarchy, but powerful alternative sources of collective rebellion would remain in the hegemonic national religion that they confronted and in the powerful nationalist movement that repressive colonial practice helped radicalize. In terms of religion, the British drew a sizable Hindu minority from neighboring India into Burmese territory and fostered the conversion of non-Burman minority populations to Christianity. Yet this pursuit of *divide et impera* could not shake the hegemonic position of Buddhism in national religious life.<sup>37</sup> To the contrary, resentment among the ethnic Burman majority toward non-Buddhist collaborators only deepened Buddhism's political salience: "Buddhism is the religion of the majority of the Burmese and the leading cultural institution in the country—what one Western observer over a century ago called 'the soul of a people'" (Matthews 1993, p. 408). When the nationalist movement emerged in the 1910s and 1920s, monks

<sup>37</sup> Besides the much greater social mobilization of the Burmese monkhood than that of the Vietnamese during precolonial times, colonial practice also left Vietnam's Catholic minority enjoying a larger urban presence and greater political influence than Burma's Christian minorities.

were at the forefront. By the 1930s, their nationalist fervor was surpassed by that of university students, who stepped up public agitation against colonial rule. Invoking and updating the historic symbol of Burmese sovereignty, students converted the dancing peacock of the Konbaung flag to the “fighting peacock” flag of the surging nationalist movement.

The most prominent student leader was Aung San. His inability to foster change from within led him to collaborate with Japanese agents to build the Burma Independence Army (BIA), which mounted a successful invasion of British Burma from Thailand in 1942. The student leader was thus reborn as a military commander. Aung San would later turn against his Japanese patrons, founding a broad-based resistance movement. His Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) unleashed massive urban protests against the return of British rule after Japan’s defeat in 1945. Having taken the lead both in originally overthrowing British rule and in ultimately preventing its restoration, Aung San’s nationalist status swelled. When gunmen assassinated him, with widely suspected British connivance, on the eve of Burma’s formal independence, Aung San came to combine the heroism of a Ho Chi Minh with the martyrdom of a Jose Rizal. “For half a century,” Callahan writes (2000, p. 28), “*the* unquestioned national hero of Burma has been Aung San.”

Politics in postcolonial Burma has largely been shaped by a contest to inherit this unrivaled nationalist authority. The structural foundation for this irresolvable conflict is that whereas Ho Chi Minh was a product of one nationalist grouping and Jose Rizal was a product of none, Aung San was a product of two. Students and the military—both of which can credibly claim Aung San as their own—are thus the key combatants in Burma’s ongoing “symbolic war.” First blood was drawn in 1962, after the military seized political power. The coup was led by General Ne Win, one of Aung San’s original cohorts in the BIA. It was justified in nationalist terms, as military leaders condemned civilians for failing to preserve national integrity amid numerous regional rebellions. For military officers, that “the Tatmadaw, and the Tatmadaw alone, has the right to rule . . . is inherent in its historic responsibility as the protector and defender of national sovereignty” (Yawnghwe 1995, p. 189).

Far from being cofounders of the new regime, university students vigorously and righteously rejected it. This prompted the Tatmadaw to bomb Rangoon University’s student union building with hundreds of protesting students inside. By destroying what Burmese students and their societal sympathizers consider “a nationalist shrine” (Boudreau 2002, p. 539), the Ne Win regime crystallized the division between student- and military-style nationalism. This division took stark symbolic form: the Tatmadaw preserved the national flag boasting white stars symbolic of Burma’s anti-Japanese wartime resistance, while the student movement adopted the

fighting peacock of precolonial and anticolonial struggles as its own defining symbol.

If the institutional continuity of the Vietnamese Communist Party has helped Ho Chi Minh's successors inherit his nationalist bona fides, Burma's military commanders can neither entirely appropriate nor eliminate the long nationalist shadow of Aung San. Student self-perceptions as the true inheritors of Aung San's nationalist authority have repeatedly emboldened student protesters to take the lead in confronting the military regime en masse. Such student-led protests have often gained substantial societal support, with broad resentments "periodically bursting out in the open in the form of urban uprisings (1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1974, 1975, 1976, and so on)" (Yawngwe 1995, p. 188). A major source of such support has been Burmese students' primary historical partner in the decolonization struggle: Buddhist monks. "The *sangha* (i.e., the Buddhist clergy), has played a central role in organizing opposition to the regime," despite the Tatmadaw's resolve to control and crush religious activism. "Immediately after seizing power, the Revolutionary Council asked all monks to register with the government, which they refused to do," Alamgir writes (1997, pp. 343–44). "The Buddha Sasana Council, a large religious organization, was dissolved in 1962. On numerous occasions soldiers have fired upon demonstrations by monks." Although Burma's dictators look more like their Vietnamese than their Philippine counterparts in their commitment to containing religious dissent, the hegemonic quality and historical centrality of Buddhism in Burma more closely resembles that of Philippine Catholicism than that of any Vietnamese religion. In other words, Buddhist monks can clearly be considered politically autonomous communal elites in Burma but not in Vietnam.

The consistent centrality of students and monks rather than class-based organizations such as labor unions in Burmese protest suggests that nationalist and religious sentiments and solidarities have been at the heart of high-risk collective action. Further evidence for this claim comes from process analysis of particular contentious events. In what would eventually become the largest protests in Burma before the massive crackdown of 1988, spontaneous strikes erupted in early 1974 among "oil field and railroad workers" and at "textile, ink and paper factories" as "food grew scarce and prices rose" (Boudreau 2004, p. 92). Yet "workers remained inside their factories" and "carefully avoided explicitly anti-government actions they thought might provoke authorities" (p. 93). It would take a major moral shock later that year to bring university students to the forefront and trigger a significant cross-class movement:

Six months later, the occasion presented itself when respected statesman



## Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia

and former UN Secretary-General U Thant died overseas, and was returned home for burial without honors in an isolated Rangoon cemetery, in conformity to regime orders. Outraged by the apparent snub of U Thant, thousands of students and monks at the funeral seized his body, and marched it through downtown Rangoon. Eventually, they buried U Thant in a makeshift tomb near where the student union once stood. . . . On December 11, three days after the burial, military tanks crashed through the university gate, and soldiers dug up the Secretary-General's body for burial at a more suitable site than originally intended. In the commotion, soldiers shot students who jumped across the coffin to resist the move, and protests and riots flared across Rangoon. . . . Workers who had been reluctant to leave their factories in May and June marched with students, as did many monks. (Boudreau 2004, pp. 94–95)

Considering that the Burmese military's autarkic development strategy made the country the basket case of Southeast Asia from the early 1960s onward, economic development and class transformation clearly do not provide a viable explanation for democratic mobilization. More plausible is the argument that such intense mobilization has arisen in response to economic downturns. Yet in 1988 as in 1974, process analysis shows that it was primarily public outrage over the renewal of historic student-military violent conflict, not economic factors, that sparked a massive cross-class uprising. When the Ne Win regime undertook a sudden demonetization in September 1987, "many people's savings were wiped out in an instant," but "no protests coalesced on the street" (Fink 2001, p. 50). Student moves to organize renewed protests were incited as much by nationalist outrage as by economic suffering and gained momentum after "Burma was designated a 'least developed country' by the United Nations" in December 1987 (Schock 2005, p. 94).

The tinderbox was lit in March when a university student was killed in a brawl whose instigator—the son of a government official—escaped punishment. Student outrage erupted when "the regime's spokesmen blamed the students for inciting unrest" (Fink 2001, p. 51). In the months that followed, student-military conflict escalated in ever-worsening bloodshed, and the students gradually gained increasing active support from the wider urban population. Religious allies were critical in these early stages of contention, as "Buddhist monasteries became clandestine shelters where placards and flags were made and plans were laid for coordinated protest" (Mydans 1988). Scattered but swelling protests exploded into a full-blown cross-class uprising with the student-led general strike of August 8, 1988 (8/8/88), a date chosen for its astrological auspiciousness in Buddhist cosmology. "The anger was palpable among the students when the protests came to a head on Aug. 8. . . . Wherever they went, crowds applauded, tossing bunches of bananas and handfuls of cheroots in what had become a ritual of support for the students" (Mydans 1988, p. 3).

The notorious military crackdown on that day “left an estimated one thousand to three thousand unarmed citizens dead” (Schock 2005, p. 95). Yet it failed to cow a revolt led by the same two social forces that had withstood British crackdowns in the 1920s and 1930s: students and monks. Both acted as if history was on their side, even if the balance of coercive power palpably was not. “In every demonstration students carried fighting-peacock student union flags, banned since 1962, and portraits of General Aung San. In doing so, they sought to convey that they, not General Ne Win and the ruling government, represented General Aung San’s true legacy” (Fink 2001, p. 56). History similarly echoed in the renewed activism of the Buddhist sangha, as the 1988 protests “drew widespread monastic support” (Matthews 1993, p. 417). A newly formed All Burma Young Monks Union “claim[ed] that Buddhist monks ha[d] an ‘historical duty’ to participate in resistance,” complementing the leadership of the Yahanpyo (Young Monks’ Association, or YMA), whose activist role dates back to the 1930s (p. 421). “The YMA played a major role in organizing protests” in 1988, thanks in part to historic roots that contemporary repression could not fully destroy. The Tatmadaw “moved to abolish the Yahanpyo, but even a formal order from political or religious authorities is not likely to succeed in destroying or neutralizing the Yahanpyo legacy” (Matthews 1993, p. 413).

Such legacies helped sustain the Burmese democratic uprising in the face of horrific repression. “The killings, far from ending the uprising, appeared only to have stoked the anger of the students, and that of the Burmese people now once again following their lead,” Mydans wrote (1988). A second national strike was subsequently called, and “on August 24 an estimated one million people participated in protest demonstrations in Rangoon alone, while other cities drew crowds of hundreds of thousands” (Schock 2005, p. 96). The student-led movement then received an enormous symbolic lift from the return to Burma of Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San’s daughter: “Like Corazon Aquino, Aung San Suu Kyi was a political figure linked by bloodline to a national martyr-hero, lending her an aura of great legitimacy” (Yawnghwe 1995, p. 171). Her first public address was delivered before a rain-soaked throng estimated at “at least five hundred thousand” (Schock 2005, p. 96) at the most sacred site in Burmese Buddhism: the Shwe Dagon Temple in central Rangoon. She added nationalist rhetoric to the religious atmospherics. “I could not as my father’s daughter remain indifferent to all that was going on,” she announced. “*This national crisis could in fact be called the second struggle for independence*” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1995, p. 193; emphasis added).

Unfortunately for Burma’s democratic opposition, the Tatmadaw has consistently seen itself as the rightful heir to that shared historical struggle. This may help explain why the military once again not only used over-

whelming violence but remained unified while unleashing overwhelming violence against peaceful protesters in September 1988. This consistent lack of hesitation among Burmese officers and soldiers to use lethal collective violence helps explain, in turn, why no massive democratic uprising took place in the wake of Burma's stolen election in May 1990. Even after Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy secured over 80% of the parliamentary seats in a vote marred by widespread coercion and intimidation, only minimal protests arose when the Tatmadaw simply refused to honor the people's will. Having amply shown that marching against it means marching into a certain crackdown, the Burmese military managed to steal the 1990 elections without sparking major new mobilization efforts.

Yet Burmese students and monks had marched headlong into certain repression in the wake of moral shocks before and would do so again. There is regrettably not space here to treat the renewal of anti-Tatmadaw protests in 2007 in depth, but the consistency of these events with earlier outbreaks of contention is worthy of note. Most obviously, the protests of 2007 were emphatically led by Buddhist monks—hence their “Saffron Revolution” moniker. Less well recognized is that while the removal of fuel subsidies helped spark the initial protests, the movement only gathered massive strength on a national scale after the military attacked peacefully protesting monks in the provincial religious center of Pakokku. As Human Rights Watch (2007, p. 29) reported, “The army's abuse of revered monks in their initial appearance at protests caused revulsion and anger throughout the country.” If this use of violence against widely revered communal elites was the first “turning point” in the protests, the second came two weeks later when “a group of some 500 monks was allowed to pass through the barricades surrounding Aung San Suu Kyi's home . . . and briefly pray with her. This unexpected and unprecedented meeting invigorated the protests. A day later, September 24, the Rangoon protests exploded in size, to an estimated 150,000 people, including 30,000 to 50,000 monks” (Human Rights Watch 2007, pp. 7–8). In Burma in 2007—no less than in earlier years and in neighboring countries—politically autonomous communal elites proved to be the most pivotal players in the high-risk collective confrontation that is antiauthoritarian protest.

#### COMMUNAL ELITES AND DEMOCRATIC MOBILIZATION BEYOND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Democratization theorists have paid insufficient attention to the contentious manner in which authoritarian regimes so often collapse. Meanwhile, theorists of contentious politics have given relatively short shrift to dem-

ocratic revolutions. Applying the insights of the latter literature to the former allows us to consider other motivations for democratic mobilization besides instrumental, individual-level impulses, as well as other actors besides the “usual suspects” of class analytics. Bringing the tools of comparative-historical analysis to bear on culturalist analyses of contentious politics helps us more fully appreciate cross-national variation in the structural constraints weighing on democratic activists in authoritarian settings while permitting a more systematic understanding of the prevalence of chronic quiescence—hardly a favorite topic of contention theorists—throughout so much of the postcolonial world.<sup>38</sup>

The empirical evidence detailed here has been geographically bounded, but the causal logic presented is potentially more portable. How might the arguments on nationalist and religious identities and the role of communal elites in mobilizing these forms of solidarity in democratic protest fare outside of Southeast Asia? Might they rival or surpass the explanatory power of existing explanations for democratic mobilization in other regions as well?

Culturally oriented social scientists have produced an array of theoretically informed single-country and comparative studies highlighting the role of collective identities in democratic mobilization. Such studies are yet to be aggregated into a sustained challenge to the class-analytic paradigm in democratization theory. Intriguingly, the epicenter for these monographs has been the former Communist bloc rather than the kind of developing capitalist economies that characterize most of Southeast Asia. For instance, Kubik (1994) noted the combustible oppositional cocktail of religion and nationalism in communist Poland. As in the Philippines, Catholicism was at the core of opposition, as “the bishops’ support encouraged people to action, [and] its lack killed many independent oppositional initiatives” (p. 119). And Polish religion and nationalism were tightly intertwined: “Among the nonreligious values constituting the core of the Church’s discourse, national identity was by far the most conspicuous. The Church retained its crucial role as a repository of national heritage” (p. 123). This echoes the conclusions of Beissinger (2002) on the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well those of Way (2005, pp. 238–39), who sees identity politics at work in the contrast between successful democratic mobilization in Ukraine and the absence of protest in Belarus: “Emotive appeals to nationalism have arguably made it easier to stimulate the sustained personal sacrifice and cross-class coalitions necessary to carry out successful mobilization.”

<sup>38</sup> To my knowledge, the work by Gaventa (1980) remains unrivaled as a study of quiescence in the literature on contentious politics, nearly three decades after its publication.

These analyses provide added ballast for this article's contention that it can be fruitful to compare the resonance and effectiveness of nationalist and religious appeals as opposed to materialist grievances in democratic mobilization. The causal and conceptual framework developed here provides a tool with which to assess the likely resonance of such appeals given particular patterns of long-term political development. For instance, in the case of the Tiananmen Square protests in China, Calhoun (1994, p. 192) has stressed the coexistence and compatibility of the movement's nationalist and liberal streams: "In 1989 students and intellectuals thought about national salvation in ways that stressed the unity of the entire nation, but they also thought about enlightenment in ways that reflected their desire for more individual freedom." By contrast, Zhao (2001) sees liberalism trumping nationalism at Tiananmen. Unlike the nationalist upsurges of 1919 and 1935, the 1989 "movement was much more pro-Western in appearance" (p. 272) with its most visible symbol "a Statue of Liberty turned 'Goddess of Democracy' in Tiananmen Square" (p. 273). By 1989, "colonialism was seen as part of the distant past; intellectuals and students were no longer so concerned with saving China" (p. 273). More than nationalist symbolism, Chinese students drew on traditionalist tropes, especially the Confucian-style prostration of protestors before sites of power, to generate support and deflect, if not overcome, the state's coercive power.

This article underscores the significance of such cultural considerations while entreating us to think more comparatively and historically about how symbolic power works. Like Vietnam, China presented a context in which dynastic rulers had been eliminated and a communist party had defeated external colonizers en route to seizing power. Students at Tiananmen were relegated to mobilizing support through dynastic symbols in a setting in which dynastic rulers had been vanquished for nearly a century. Such appeals were structured acts of desperation as much as creative acts of framing. Unlike Burmese students, Chinese students had not been perceived or remembered as the sociological core of the national revolution of the 1940s. Yet like their Burmese counterparts, China's students confronted a political apparatus with a powerful sense of nationalist mission—thanks to the kind of "homegrown revolution" that Eastern European communist parties lacked (Karklins and Petersen 1993, p. 611)—and a related willingness to use overwhelming force to see its historical centrality preserved.

Historical experience with war and revolution seems to have shaped the coercive practices of states far beyond Burma and China. It is almost axiomatic that an authoritarian regime's willingness and capacity to use crushing force against its opponents is a major determinant of its dura-

bility. But why are some regimes more able than others to remain unified behind a strategy of total repression and denial of basic political pluralism?

Nationalism is certainly not the whole story (e.g., Brownlee 2002; Slater 2003), but from Cuba to North Korea to Zimbabwe, regimes that rose to power through national revolutions appear especially inclined to use whatever coercive means necessary to preserve their political monopolies.<sup>39</sup> As in Burma and Vietnam, precipitous economic declines in such cases seem irrelevant to these ruling regimes' underlying legitimacy formulas. Perhaps such regimes' initial "accumulation of symbolic power" (Loveman 2005) makes them more capable of deploying coercive power down the road without splitting into "hard-liner" and "soft-liner" factions. In cases such as Vietnam, nationalist hegemony can prevent organized challengers from even arising to be coerced. Our studies of authoritarian durability need to complement their attention to coercive power with more sustained and systematic attention to symbolic power (Wedeen 1999).

Rather than making a *sui generis* argument about Southeast Asia, this article seeks to inform empirical studies on other world regions as well as the theoretical literatures on contentious politics and democratization. It makes a natural opposition-oriented accompaniment to the state-centric literature on revolutions, particularly works that stress the role of indiscriminate state violence in sparking revolutionary action and outcomes (Goodwin 2001). State violence in Southeast Asia seems to have had explosive consequences when it was aimed at communal elites but more of a dampening effect on mobilization when the targets lacked clear, pre-existing nationalist or religious credentials. The analysis here also invites more ethnographic digging into how communal elites generate their mobilizational effect, as well as more disaggregation of the role of nationalist versus religious solidarities in democratic protest.<sup>40</sup> Given the long-standing, stifling conflation of social forces with social classes in the democratization literature, there is much work to be done in theorizing the causal role of cultural forces generally, and nationalism and religion specifically, in shaping democratic mobilization outcomes.

<sup>39</sup> Linking communist regimes' more general will to power with nationalism, Chirot (1994, p. 260) has argued that "communist regimes that never gained nationalist credentials turned into flabby, illegitimate, and ineffective forms of government."

<sup>40</sup> Aggregating various types of elites into the "communal elite" category clearly comes at some conceptual cost. Only wider comparative research can determine whether more is lost or gained by treating nationalism and religion—distinct phenomena to be sure—as fundamentally similar because of their common capacity to instill emotive collective identifications and to inspire high-risk, cross-class activism.

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