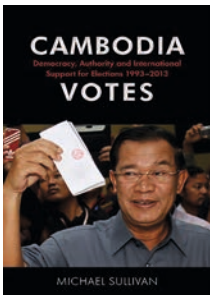


Cambodia Votes

After two decades of strife, opposing Cambodian factions in October 1991 concluded several agreements, collectively known as the Paris Peace Accords. One of the agreements called for the United Nations to create a special authority, which became the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), to serve as an interim force to run government ministries, verify disarmament, and organize elections for a national assembly. Another agreement called on the international community to provide economic assistance for the reconstruction of Cambodia.

Reviewer: Ronald Bruce St John, Independent Scholar



Reviewed title:
Michael Sullivan. 2016.
Cambodia Votes: Democracy, Authority and International Support for Elections 1993-2013
NIAS Press
ISBN 9788776941871

IN INTERNATIONAL DONOR CIRCLES, it was widely accepted at the time that competitive multi-party elections were the optimum mechanism to put countries with little or no experience with democracy on the path to peace, prosperity, and democratization. An opposing school of thought held that elections should not be held until the rule of law and democratic institutions had been firmly established and consolidated in a country like Cambodia.

In *Cambodia Votes*, Michael Sullivan, a long-time resident of Cambodia and an advisor to the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Phnom Penh, analyzes the impact the 1993 UNTAC-supported elections had on the subsequent development of electoral politics in the country up to and including 2013. In this period, Cambodia held four sets of parliamentary or national elections and three sets of commune or local elections. With the exception of the

2012 local and the 2013 national elections, all of these polls were conducted with significant international financial and technical support. With the end of the Cold War, the number of states embracing some form of democratic government dramatically increased, and in this milieu, the UNTAC-supported elections conducted in Cambodia in 1993 were celebrated as a unique achievement. Unfortunately, the less-than-democratic outcome of those elections in which Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) ran second in the balloting but remained in power began a two-decade period in which internationally assisted elections were manipulated and controlled by Hun Sen and the CPP. Instead of sparking lasting change in the traditional political culture in areas like power-sharing and loyal opposition, the political elite after the 1993 elections largely drew on long familiar aspects of Cambodian political culture to promote modernization within an authoritarian political model.

Over the ensuing two decades, powerful political forces within the Cambodian government and the dominant CPP regularly manipulated the electoral process to ensure the outcomes they desired. This manipulation took a variety of forms with intimidation, coercion, exclusion, violence, and fraud commonplace. Democratic procedures, respect for human rights, and concern for social justice were concepts bandied about but seldom implemented. Instead, the ruling parties returned to the client system prevalent in earlier eras, a system in which access to power and wealth was sought

and achieved through place and position with connections most often determining the level of justice obtained.

As Sullivan emphasizes, the Hun Sen government, even as it subverted the political process, strove to keep the political system credible enough to satisfy the wishes and interests of its international partners and donors. In turn, the international community found itself in the ambivalent position of promoting democracy on the one hand while welcoming the order and stability that a flawed political process contributed to on the other. 'At the same time, as there was a need for political stability – even if that meant glossing over human rights abuses and the rule of law – there was also a need for the international community in Cambodia to at least be seen to be "promoting liberal democratic values"' (p. 110). The result was a situation known as electoral authoritarianism in which opposition parties competed in elections, supported and observed by international bodies, which appeared to be competitive but in which the opposition could win votes and seats but never an outright victory because of authoritarian meddling and manipulation.

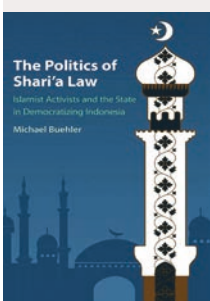
The author concludes on an optimistic note, arguing 'the 2013 election results demonstrated the power of Cambodian elections to challenge the entrenched power of the CPP' (p. 290). Whether or not his optimism is justified remains to be seen, but it certainly will be tested in the upcoming 2017 local and 2018 national elections. In this regard, the abrupt resignation in the face of increasing government pressure of Sam Rainsy, the embattled leader of Cambodia's main opposition party, just four months before the June 2017 local elections is not reassuring. Regardless of the outcome of future elections, the Cambodian experience after 1993 remains a sobering example of the interrelated challenges which must be addressed to nurture democracy in less developed political economies. In *Cambodia Votes*, Sullivan makes a major contribution to the ongoing debate over whether multi-party elections are a path to democratization or whether direct elections should be delayed until the rule of law and democratic institutions are established. In addition to academics and other specialists in Cambodia and Southeast Asia, this book should be read by diplomats and policy-makers faced with similar problems in other countries around the world.

Democracy, State Elites, and Islamist Activists in Indonesia

In this important book, Michael Buehler attempts to explain the cause of Islamization of politics in Indonesia after the fall of Soeharto's New Order military regime in 1998. Between 1998 and 2013, the country witnessed no less than 443 sharia regulations adopted by provincial and district/city governments across the country.

This figure is remarkably high given the marginal status of Islam under Soeharto's New Order. Against this background, Buehler asks what factor drives the proliferation of such regulations and how this factor works under Indonesia's new democratic system.

Reviewer: Sirojuddin Arif, Northern Illinois University



Reviewed title:
Michael Buehler. 2016.
The Politics of Shari'a Law: Islamist Activists and the State in Democratizing Indonesia
Cambridge University Press
ISBN 9781107130227

DRAWING ON A COMPARATIVE historical analysis of sharia policy making in West Java and South Sulawesi, Buehler shows how pressures from Islamist social movements have led many sub-national governments to adopt sharia regulations. He disagrees with the claim that the emergence of Islamist parties was the main force behind the adoption of sharia's regulations. The poor performance of these parties in the Indonesia's electoral system does not support such a claim. Rather than influences of Islamist parties, it is the collaboration between state elites and Islamist activists that drives the proliferation

of sharia regulations in many different parts of the country. While Islamist parties and Islamist social movements share the same agenda of 'Islamizing' the state, differences in the political origins of their development determine the different ways they work under Indonesia's new democratic system. Unlike Islamist parties, which faced fierce political competition from nationalist and religious-nationalist parties, Islamist social movements had a relatively large political space to articulate their demands for Islamization of politics.

One of the main strength of the book lays on its novel theoretical approach to the study of political Islam in contemporary Indonesia. Unlike many previous works on this subject, which mostly focused on the activities of Islamic and Islamist groups and/or institutions,¹ Buehler draws on a state-society relations approach to explain the rise of sharia regulations. According to him, the key to explain the politics of sharia policymaking across different regions in Indonesia is to understand how changes in power dynamics within the state define not only the nature of competition among different political actors but also state – Islam relations.

As laid out in Chapter 2, the relationship between Islam and the state was mostly antagonistic throughout the New Order. Some engagements that Soeharto showed since the early 1990s did not eradicate the prevailing tensions between Islam and the state. At local level, the rise of the New Order implied a couple of things: (1) the creation of new elites consisting of military personnel and state bureaucrats; and (2) maintaining of the old tension between old aristocracy and a new class of social elites consisting of rich Muslim farmers and traders, who often casted their opposition against the old aristocrats as well as the New Order in Islamist terms. Yet the collapse of Soeharto's military regime in 1998 has changed the future trajectory of political relations between these different groups. Rather than being antagonistic, state elites and Islamist activists now often engaged in mutual collaborations, albeit with different purposes, in 'Islamizing' politics at local level.

It is true that the collapse of Soeharto's regime did not necessarily eliminate the influence of the old elites nurtured by the New Order. But unlike in the previous era, in which political appointments were determined by the centralized power of the central government, aspiring leaders now have to gain popular support from voters to be elected as governors, district heads or city mayors. This allowed Islamist activists to capitalize their social capital and networks in the new political terrain created by democracy. Unlike Islamist parties, which struggled hard to expand their influence

among voters, Islamist social movements provided the prospective leaders with large political resources to support their bid for local leadership. The fierce competition created by Indonesia's direct election system for governors, district heads and mayors makes it possible for Islamist activists to use their social capital and vast networks in both rural and urban areas as bargaining power to support aspiring leaders in exchange of sharia regulations.

By tracing the development of sharia policy making since beginning of the New Order, *The Politics of Shari'a Law* offers a fresh look at the evolution of state-Islam relations in Indonesia especially at the local level. Nevertheless, despite its rich data and detailed historical analysis, the book leaves some questions unanswered. First, it is widely known that Islam in Indonesia is not a homogenous entity. Yet it seems to me that the book covers areas dominated by modernist Muslims. In fact, a substantial part of Indonesian Muslims adheres to the traditionalist version of Islamic teaching. It is interesting to know how the collapse of the New Order affects state-Islam relations in areas dominated by traditionalist Muslims. Besides, it is also interesting to know how traditionalist Muslims respond to the demand of Islamization of politics by Islamist activists.

Second, it is also known that nationalism has deeply affected not only the development of state ideology but also political contestation in Indonesia. At the national level, the failure of Islamist parties to promote Islamist causes in the constitution amendment in the early 2000s resulted from the strong resistance of the nationalists in the parliament. It is unfortunate that Buehler's work does not say much about the nationalists' stance on sharia regulations at the local level.

Nevertheless, regardless of the above questions about the respond of the nationalists and traditionalist Muslims to sharia regulations, Buehler has made a significant contribution to the study of Indonesian political Islam. His work clearly shows how social science and comparative method can be applied to enhance our theoretical understanding of democracy and political Islam. Buehler's hypothesis about the effect of power dynamics within the state on the development of political Islam deserves further attention not only from students of comparative politics but also Islamic and Indonesian studies.

Reference

- 1 Iqra Anugrah. 2015. 'Recent studies on Indonesian Islam: A sign of Intellectual exhaustion?', *Indonesia* 100:105-16.