

**SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

Course	PhD
Course Number	To be assigned
Course Title	<b>Government and Politics in Southeast Asia- II</b>
Course Type	Optional
Semester	Winter Semester
Course Teacher & Contact Details	Name: Dr Rahul Mishra Associate Professor, Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies (CIPS), SIS, JNU Room No: 208, SIS-I Email: <a href="mailto:rmishra@mail.jnu.ac.in">rmishra@mail.jnu.ac.in</a> Tel No: Mobile: 9871014440 Landline:
Credits	2 or 3
Contact	4 hours per week
Class Schedule and Room Number	To be decided
Tutorials (for difficulties & discussion)	To be decided

**Course Statement**

Southeast Asia is arguably the most diverse region in the world when it comes to the type of government structures. The region, which comprises eleven countries, has one absolute constitutional monarchy (Brunei), two socialist countries (Laos and Vietnam), a military dictatorship (Myanmar), a constitutional monarchy with a predominant military (Thailand),

an elected constitutional monarchy with unitary features (Cambodia), a multicultural democratic republic dominated by a single political party (Singapore), an Islamic democratic state (Malaysia) and three democracies (Indonesia, The Philippines, and Timor Leste).

Each of the eleven Southeast Asian countries have their own peculiar political and constitutional histories, making the region unique in terms of politics and government features.

This course offers insights into different government and political structures of countries of the Southeast Asian region. This is the second part of a two-semester course on Government and Politics in Southeast Asia, running across two semesters. This course aims to take a deep dive into the history and evolution of forms of government in mainland Southeast Asia viz., Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei, which is a part of maritime Southeast Asia. Each module of this course focusses on a particular country, how its political system evolved over a period of time, the role of political institutions and actors, as well as the role of the civil society and citizens of the country.

It also focuses on the current state of politics in these countries and to what extent democracy plays a role in shaping the politics and governance structures in these countries.

### **Course Objectives**

Key objectives of this course are:

1. To understand the nature of governments in the Southeast Asia.
2. To examine theoretical frameworks that help explain political cultures in Southeast Asia;
3. To analyse and assess the contemporary politics in eleven Southeast Asian countries and the role political institutions and actors play in shaping the government and politics of their respective countries.
4. To assess the role of democracy in Southeast Asia and understand why it has not taken firm roots in the region.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Explain the role of history and political culture in shaping the government and politics of countries of the Southeast Asian region.
2. To analyse the role political institutions play in contemporary politics in Southeast Asian countries;
3. Analyse the role of civil society in Southeast Asia;
4. Critically analyse and theorize the role of democracy, authoritarianism, and monarchy in Southeast Asia;
5. Assess ASEAN's approach to democracy and human rights in the region;
6. Appraise ASEAN's role in dealing with the challenges it faces.

## Evaluation Methods

1. Mid Semester evaluation (50%)
  - Term paper & Presentation: 20%
  - Book Review: 10%
  - Examination: 20%
2. End-Semester Examination (50%)
3. SIS Research Manual should be used as a guide to write assignments. Available at [https://www.jnu.ac.in/sites/default/files/SIS\\_Research\\_Manual\\_0.pdf](https://www.jnu.ac.in/sites/default/files/SIS_Research_Manual_0.pdf)

Students should maintain high degree of academic integrity, which includes abstaining from copying and plagiarism. For details on plagiarism and research ethics refer to the SIS Research Manual.

## Course Outline:

This course provides an in-depth exploration of government and politics in the Southeast Asian region, focusing on the history, structure, and evolving role of various forms of political systems in the region. Through lectures, readings, and discussions, students will

gain a comprehensive understanding of political dynamics and forms of government in the region, and its impact on domestic and intra-regional politics. The course will also examine the role of democracy and authoritarianism in Southeast Asia.

## Modules

### Module I: Myanmar, Vietnam

- **Myanmar's** political journey has been a complex one, marked by a brief stint with democracy followed by decades of military rule. Myanmar has a long history of kingdoms and empires, but the concept of a unified nation is relatively recent.
- Despite the shift towards democracy, Myanmar still faces significant hurdles. Ethnic conflicts, military influence in politics, and human rights abuses continue to be major concerns. The recent military coup in 2021 has raised serious doubts about the country's democratic progress.
- **Vietnam** is a textbook example of a Marxist-Leninist single-party state. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), established in 1930, reigns supreme. This dominance is solidified by the fact that the current General Secretary of the CPV, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, who used to also hold the presidency. The current President is Tô Lâm. While the constitution acknowledges a separation of powers, the CPV exerts significant influence over all branches of government.
- Despite its socialist foundations, Vietnam has undergone a remarkable economic transformation. The "Doi Moi" reforms initiated in 1986 embraced market principles, leading to impressive economic growth and integration with the global market. This pragmatic approach has undeniably lifted millions out of poverty, but it also raises questions about the long-term role of socialist ideology in Vietnam's development.
- While Vietnam enjoys economic prosperity, its political system raises concerns about human rights. The dominance of the CPV restricts political dissent and freedom of expression. Human rights organizations continue to report on limitations on these freedoms. Addressing these concerns will be crucial as Vietnam seeks to solidify its position on the global stage.

## **Module II: Thailand**

- **Thailand** functions as a constitutional monarchy, with King Maha Vajiralongkorn as the head of state. However, the King's political power is limited by the constitution.
- Thailand's political history is marked by instability, with numerous military coups throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and hampered democratic development.
- Despite the constitutional framework, the military maintains significant power in Thailand. The 2014 coup led by Prayut Chan-o-cha exemplifies this influence.
- Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, who came to power through the 2014 coup, currently leads the government. This highlights the ongoing tension between democratic ideals and military intervention.
- Recent years have seen a rise in pro-democracy movements advocating for a more transparent and accountable government. These movements challenge the status quo and the military's grip on power.
- Thailand faces the challenge of balancing the monarchy's traditional role with democratic aspirations. The military's role in politics and the ongoing pro-democracy movement will likely continue to shape Thailand's political trajectory in the coming years.

## **Module III: Cambodia, Lao PDR and Brunei**

- **Cambodia's** political landscape presents a complex situation with a facade of democracy and a one-party dominance in reality. Cambodia operates under a constitutional monarchy, with King Norodom Sihamoni as the head of state. However, the King's role is largely symbolic, and real power lies elsewhere.
- Prime Minister Hun Sen, of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), has been in power since 1985. This extended rule has raised concerns about a lack of political competition and democratic stagnation. The CPP's dominance over Cambodian politics weakens any opposition and stifles political pluralism.
- **The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)** operates as a Marxist-Leninist single-party state. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), established in 1954, has held onto complete power since the communist revolution in 1975. The LPRP dictates all aspects of government policy and social life, leaving little room for political diversity.

- Despite its authoritarian nature, the Lao PDR government faces challenges. Economic development has led to growing social and economic inequalities, and corruption remains a significant problem. The government has undertaken some anti-corruption measures, but their effectiveness is debatable. While genuine political reform seems unlikely in the immediate future, these challenges could prompt the LPRP to adopt a more nuanced approach to governance in the long run.
- **Brunei** stands out in Southeast Asia as the last remaining absolute monarchy. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, ruling since 1967, concentrates immense power in his hands. He acts as head of state, head of government, and Prime Minister. There are no national elections to challenge his authority.
- Political parties exist in Brunei, but they hold little sway. Their activities are restricted, and they cannot meaningfully participate in the political process. This lack of political competition stifles dissent and alternative viewpoints.

#### **Module IV: Democracy and Governance in Southeast Asia**

- This module assess the current state of play and future of democracy and governance in Southeast Asia
- A critical assessment of linkages between good governance and various forms of governments will also be made in this module.

#### **Modules V: Student Evaluations (Dates to be decided)**

Mid-semester examination (1)

Term paper and presentations (2)

Book reviews (Nil)

End-semester examination (1)

#### **Readings**

##### **Essential Readings**

- Damien Kingsbury (2016), *Politics in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Authority, Democracy and Political Change*, London: Routledge
- John Funston (2001), *Government & Politics in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
- Beeson, Mark (ed.) 2004. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics, National Differences*. London: Palgrave.

### Module specific readings

- Adam Simpson, Nicholas Farrelly (2024), *Myanmar Politics, Economy and Society*, Routledge
  - Uddin, Md. K. (2021). Democracy and Human Rights of Rohingya in Myanmar. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 41(3), 463–472.
  - William Case (2015), *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization*, Routledge
  - Kipgen, N. (2021). The 2020 Myanmar Election And The 2021 Coup: Deepening Democracy Or Widening Division? *Asian Affairs*, 52(1), 1–17.
  - Chen, K. (2022). Narrating democracy in Myanmar: by Tamas Wells, Amsterdam University Press, 2021, 212 pp., US\$115.62 (hardback). *Asian Studies Review*, 47(4), 856–858.
- Jonathan D. London (2023), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Vietnam*, Routledge
  - Casey Lucius (2009), *Vietnam's Political Process: How education shapes political decision making*, Routledge
- Hewison, K. (2010). Thaksin Shinawatra and the reshaping of Thai politics. *Contemporary Politics*, 16(2), 119–133.
  - Kanchoochat, V., & Hewison, K. (2016). Introduction: Understanding Thailand's Politics. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 46(3), 371–387.
  - Ockey, J. (2004). State, bureaucracy and polity in modern Thai politics. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 34(2), 143–162.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Katherine Brickell, Simon Springer (2016), <i>The Handbook of Contemporary Cambodia</i>, Routledge</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ooi Keat Gin, Victor T. King (2023), <i>Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Brunei</i>, Routledge</li> <li>• Simon Creak &amp; Keith Barney (2018) Conceptualising Party-State Governance and Rule in Laos, <i>Journal of Contemporary Asia</i>, 48:5, 693-716</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William Case (2015), <i>Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization</i>, Routledge</li> <li>• Loh, F. K. W. (2008). Procedural democracy, participatory democracy and regional networking: the multi-terrain struggle for democracy in Southeast Asia. <i>Inter-Asia Cultural Studies</i>, 9(1), 127–141.</li> <li>• Jacques Bertrand (2021), <i>Democracy and Nationalism in Southeast Asia: From Secessionist Mobilization to Conflict Resolution</i> (Cambridge University Press, 2021)</li> </ul>