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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE REFLECTION OF "FREEDOM IN THE WORLD" INDEX BY FREEDOM HOUSE ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

This research aims to understand and compare the significance of political development in Southeast Asia countries through democratic index, "Freedom in the World", by Freedom House Organization. The study started with a consideration of "Freedom in the World" survey data from years cover 1972-2014 in 11 Southeast Asia countries. Then, explicated the substantial political phenomenon from the trends of data. The findings suggested that there are three clusters of political development in Southeast Asia. The First cluster is the countries which are designated to the one and only status every year of the Freedom House surveys: Burma, Vietnam, East Timor and Singapore. The Second cluster is the countries which are designated to two statuses in the periods of the Freedom House surveys: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Third cluster is the countries which are designated to three statuses in the periods of the Freedom House surveys: Indonesia and Thailand.

Keywords

Political Development, Southeast Asia, Democracy, Freedom House Organization, Freedom in the World

1. Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, a trend of democratization speedily spread to all parts of the world. Currently, democracy is the universal benchmark in the political society, as we can say we are now in the democratic age. However, we could not explicating democracy and democratization by evading the revision of political development.

To explain the political development patterns of South east Asia countries is probably an incredible task. Generally, we explain political development by concentrating on the history of political, culture, economic and social. (Croissant & Bünthe, 2011). However, the question which the researcher ruminates on the political development study is “Can we explain the political development in other ways?” Consequently, the democracy surveys are the answer of my choices.

There are several institutions and organizations which survey and measure the democracy of the countries. For examples, the Economist Intelligence Unit’s index of democracy, World Bank, Freedom House Organization; etc.

However, the reliability in longtime of survey from 1972 to present-day is a reason which the researchers designate to study of the Freedom House Organization survey, especially, ‘Freedom in the World’ annual surveys.

In studies on democracy, democratization and political development, the Freedom in the world index by Freedom House Organization is frequently used to measure the concept of democracy. Especially, the evaluating in the narrow concept of democracy, that of ‘electoral democracy’

The Freedom House Organization is the American organization that was founded in 1941. The annual “Freedom in the World” survey, launched by the Freedom House Organization in 1973 edition which is covered the world situations in 1972. The purpose of the “Freedom in the World” survey is to designate the democracy status in the countries all parts of the world, like

a democracy watchdog.

The survey started to considerate two parts of measurement; political rights and civil liberties. The political rights (PR) are measured on 1-7 scale similarly to the civil liberties (CL). The highest degree of freedom is one while seven the lowest.

The combined average score for political rights and civil liberties is designated to the democracy status of the countries. The status represented the freedom status in each country. There are three statuses; Free, Partly free and Not free. “Free” (F) is the status that the countries whose combined average scores for political rights and civil liberties fell in range 1.0 to 2.5

“Partly free” (PF) is the status that the countries whose combined average scores for political rights and civil liberties fell in range 3.0 to 5.5. This scores was used until 2003 then from year 2003 survey is changed to 3.0 -5.0 until present.

“Not free” (NF) is the status that the countries whose combined average scores for political rights and civil liberties fell in range 5.5 to 7.0 (Freedom House Organization, 2015).

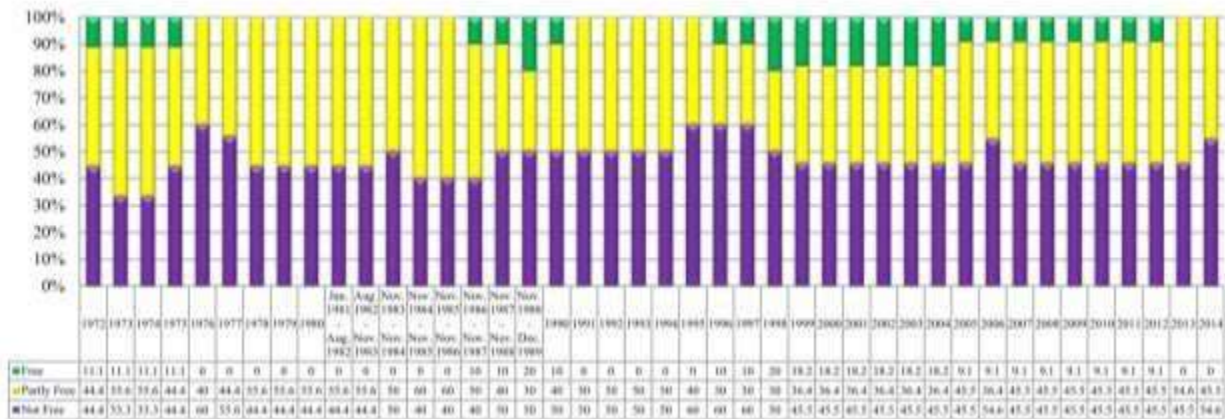


Figure 1: Percentages of Free, Partly Free, and Not Free status in Southeast Asia Countries (1972 – 2014)

In the Most noticeably of all, it can be seen that the Figure 1 shows the graph of percentages of the freedom in the world status in Southeast Asia countries, years covered from 1972 to 2014. There are significant trends of the “Free” status. In 1976-1986, 1991-1995 and 2013-2014 periods, there are not Free Southeast Asia countries. These notable trends bring the researcher back to focusing on the details of annual index and survey data to understanding the significant of political development.

2. Objectives

This research purposes to compare and understand the significance of political development in Southeast Asia countries through annual democratic survey, “Freedom in the World”, by Freedom House Organization. Then, to arrange the clusters of political development of Southeast Asia countries that reflected from the “Freedom in the world” index by Freedom House Organization.

3. Method

In the effort to understand the political development in Southeast Asia countries, this research uses comparative approach to arrange data and explain the significant phenomenon. This research conducted by the analysis of “Freedom in the World”, by Freedom House Organization survey data. By focusing the “Freedom in the World” data in 1973 to 2015 editions which designated the phenomenon in years cover 1972 to 2014.

4. Results

4.1 OverReviewof Southeast Asia

By focusing and comparing of overall “Freedom in the World” survey data in years cover 1972 to 2014, the trends of Southeast Asia countries’ political development are exposed.

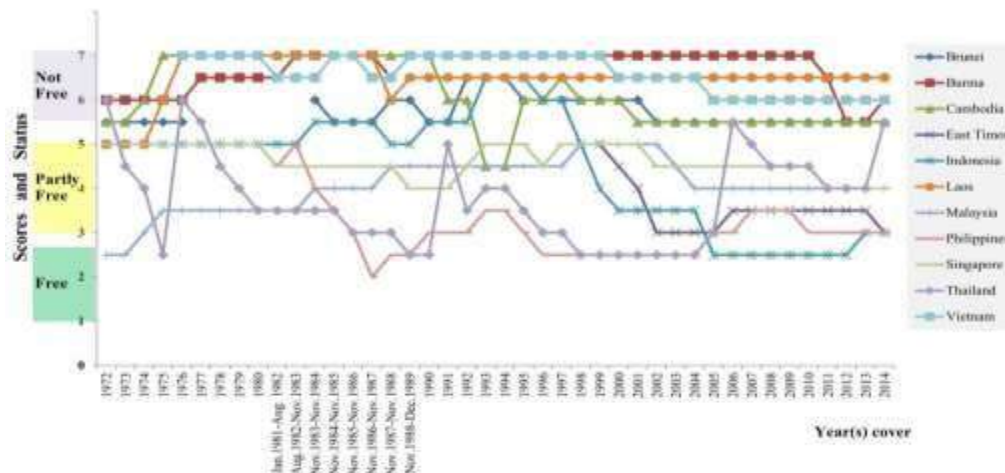


Figure 2: “Freedom in the World” Scores and Status in Southeast Asia Countries (1972 – 2014)

Source: Modified from the data by Freedom House Organization. (2015). Individual country ratings and status: Freedom in the World 1973-2015.

The Figure 2 shows the Southeast Asia countries’ scores and status of “Freedom in the World” index 1972 to 2014 which demonstrates the overview of democracy trends and political development. There are several summaries of Southeast Asia countries’ political developments of from the Figure 2. The first of all, the most of Southeast Asia countries are in the “Not Free” status. These trends display that the most of democratization is hardly effect in the region. On the other hand, the Southeast Asia countries are rarely designated as “Free” statuses. For examples, Thailand in 1975 is designated to “Free” status after the October 14, 1973 Student Uprising; the Philippines’ phenomenon in 1986 after The People Power Revolution, PPP Revolution, or the EDSA Revolution.

4.2 The political development clusters in Southeast Asia.

By comparing and focusing country by country on the detail of “Freedom in the World” index 1972 to 2014. The findings suggested that there are three clusters of political development in Southeast Asia countries.

4.2.1 The First Cluster Is The Countries Which Are Designated To The One And Only Status Every Year Of The Freedom House Surveys.

This cluster could be divided to two sub-clusters;

- The First sub-cluster is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Not Free” status of the Freedom House surveys; Burma and Vietnam.
- The second sub-cluster is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Partly Free” status of the Freedom House surveys; East Timor and Singapore.

Table 1: *The Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Not Free” Status of the Freedom House surveys*

Country	Status	Total	Percentages	Year(s) cover
Burma	Not Free	All of 42	100 %	1972-2014
	Partly Free	0 of 42	0%	
	Free	0 of 42	0%	
Vietnam	Not Free	All of 38	100%	1976-2014
	Partly Free	0 of 38	0%	
	Free	0 of 38	0%	
	No survey data: 1972-1975			

As shown in Table 1, the data of Burma and Vietnam which are The First sub-cluster is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Not Free” status of the Freedom House surveys. The overall of the political development of Burma is not democracy because of the rule by military government all the period of political situation. Similarly, the political regime in Vietnam is a socialist state and strongly roles by communist party.

Table 2: *The Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Partly Free” Status of the Freedom House surveys*

Country	Status	Total	Percentages	Year(s) cover
East Timor	Not Free	0 of 16	0%	
	Partly Free	16 of 16	100 %	1999-2014
	Free	0 of 16	0%	
	No Data: 1972-1998			
Singapore	Not Free	0 of 42	0%	
	Partly Free	All of 42	100%	1972-2014
	Free	0 of 42	0%	

As shown in Table 2, the *second sub-cluster* is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Partly Free” status of the Freedom House surveys; East Timor and Singapore. East Timor is the newly country in the region. The first survey of East Timor is 2000 edition of ‘Freedom in the world’ which is covered in 1999 political situation. Because of the period of nation building and the problem of the governmental stability, East Timor is designated to the “Partly Free” status.

By contrast, Singapore is the most strongly governmental and political stability in Southeast Asia but with the problems of the governing by the dominant and one single party, the People’s Action Party-PAP, and the freedom of expression problems. Some scholar named Singapore as “Compulsive Authoritarianism” regime. (Margoles, 2005; 95).As the reason of scarcely democratization in East Timor and Singapore, They are designated to the similar “Partly Free” status along the surveys although there is dissimilar political development.

4.2.2 The second cluster is the countries which are designated to two statuses in the periods of the Freedom House surveys:

Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Table 3: The Southeast Asia countries which are designated to two statuses of the Freedom House surveys

Country	Status	Total	Percentages	Year(s) cover				
Brunei	Not Free	33 of 36	91.67%	1972 - Nov.1984				Nov1988 - 2014
	Partly Free	3 of 36	8.33%		Nov.1984-Nov.1987			
	Free	0 of 36	0%					
	No Data: 1977-Nov 1983							
Cambodia	Not Free	40 of 42	95.24%	1972-1992				1995-2014
	Partly Free	2 of 42	4.76%		1993-1994			
	Free	0 of 42	0%					
Laos	Not Free	39 of 42	92.86%					1975-2014
	Partly Free	3 of 42	7.14%	1972-1974				
	Free	0 of 42	0%					
Malaysia	Not Free	0 of 42	0%					
	Partly Free	40 of 42	95.24%					1974-2014
	Free	2 of 42	4.76%	1972-1973				
Philippines	Not Free	0 of 42	0%					
	Partly Free	30 of 42	71.43%	1972- Nov.1986		1990-1995		2005-2014
	Free	12 of 42	28.57%		Nov.1986- Dec.1989		1996-2004	

As shown in Table 3, the generally Southeast Asia countries are designated to two statuses of the Freedom House surveys.

Brunei is the country which designated to “Not Free” status in 1972 to 1984 with the political situation of governs by British protectorate. However, in the early 1984, because of the gaining of its independent from United Kingdom and the development of economics and society in Brunei, the status is raised to “Partly Free”. Conversely, with a strongly constitutional sultanate and the powerful of Islamic state and laws, Brunei is declined to “Not Free” status since 1988 to present.

The political development of Cambodia, beginning with the unstable politics with the conflicts between the government and military and the periods of “Khmer rouge regime” are the significant political situation conduct to the “Not Free” status for 20 years, since 1972 to 1992. However, the restoration of Cambodia’s monarchy by former King Norodom Sihanouk and the election in 1994 contributes to “Partly Free” status. Unfortunately, since 1995 until present is the period of “Not Free”. Especially, after the 1997 coup d’état by Hun Sen led to the dominated government which is no democracy.

Laos is designated to “Partly Free” status in 1972 to 1974. After that, since the socialist state proclaims in 1995 to the 2014 survey, Laos is designated to “Not Free”.

Malaysia’s political development is declined from “Free”, in 1972-1973, “Partly Free” since 1974. There are several situations which contributed to “Partly free” status of Freedom in the World survey: the national cultural policy in 1970s, as “Bumiputra”, is the significant matter urges to the national conflicts; the political conflicts which related to national policy between Malay and Chinese; the political unstable; etc. These phenomenon leads to the political development’s reflection from the surveys.

The data from the “Freedom in the World” survey’s reflection, the Philippines is the most designated to “Free” status in Southeast Asia, 12 of 42 times of the surveys. The political development of the Philippines is started with “Partly Free” status with the postcolonial period, after the independence from America. The significant changing to “Free” status is related to the people uprising in 1986 and 2001.

4.2.3 The Third Cluster Is The Countries Which Are Designated To Three Statuses In The Periods Of The Freedom House Surveys:

Indonesia and Thailand.

Table 4: *The Southeast Asia countries which are designated to three statuses of the Freedom House surveys*

Country	Status	Total	Percentages	Year(s) cover									
Indonesia a	Not Free	5 of 42	11.90%			1993-1997							
	Partly Free	29 of 42	69.05%	1972-1992			1998-2004			2013-2014			
	Free	8 of 42	19.05%					2005-2012					
Thailand d	Not Free	5 of 42	11.90%	1972						2006		2014	
	Partly Free	27 of 42	64.28%		1973-1974		1978-Nov 1988		1991-1997		2005		2007-2013
	Free	10 of 42	23.81%			1975			Nov 1988-1990		1998-2004		

As shown in Table 4, the data revealed that there are two significant countries which are designated to all status of Freedom in the World index. Indonesia is the unstable politics and government, similarly to Thailand.

Indonesia is started with “Partly Free” status for 20 years, since 1972 until 1992. The noteworthy situation of the 1967-1998 is the Suharto era. From the survey, Indonesia is designated to “Not Free” in 1993-1997 which the lately Suharto era. In this period, there are several situations: the corruption; the suppression of political opposition; the authoritarian order; etc. After that there are the people uprising in 1997 and the economical context, Tom Yam Kung Crisis, led Suharto resigned of the position in 1998. After the “Not Free” periods, it seems that Indonesia develops to the grater position to “Partly Free” in 1998-2004 and jumped to “Free” status in 2005 -2012. Although the position slightly declined to “Partly Free” status in 2013 until

present, the new government is expected by the several democratic leaders and scholars to be the new role model of democracy in Southeast Asia. (Cochrane, 2014;the Economist, 2009)

Thailand is started with the “Not Free” status in 1972 as the result of the military regime. Then, the status of Thailand changed to “Partly Free” because of the 14 October 1973 Student uprising and jumped to “Free” status in 1975 after the used of 1974 democratic constitution. Unfortunately, the political development of Thailand dropped significantly with the 6 October 1976 massacred in Thammasat University. After that, Thailand rose gradually to “Partly Free” in 1978 -1988 and “Free” status in 1998-1990 for the reason of re-democratization. However, it seems like the political development of Thailand is unstable in long periods. There was hardly any change in long term. While the status in 1991-2005 are changed from “Partly Free” to “Free” and declined back to “Partly Free”, the political situation which depressed the democratic people in Thailand are the 2006 and 2014 coup d'états led Thailand to “Not Free” status of the Freedom in the World. These dramatic changings of democracy status reflect the unstable of democracy and Political development in Thailand.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings proposed that there are three clusters of political development in Southeast Asia which is reflected and explained through the Freedom in the World index by Freedom House Organization.

The First cluster is the countries which are designated to the one and only status every year of the Freedom House surveys. This cluster could be divided to two sub-clusters; The First sub-cluster is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Not Free” status of the Freedom House surveys; Burma and Vietnam; The second sub-cluster is the Southeast Asia countries which are designated to the one and only “Partly Free” status of the Freedom House surveys; East Timor and Singapore.

The second cluster is the countries which are designated to two statuses in the periods of the Freedom House surveys: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and the Philippines.

The Third cluster is the countries which are designated to three statuses in the periods of the Freedom House surveys: Indonesia and Thailand.

There are the limitation and recommendation of this research. Firstly, this research is explained in comparative approach with the generally and principally political development in Southeast Asia countries, thus the limitation is hardly explain by focusing on specifically detail of countries' contexts. Secondly, this research is especially focus on "Freedom in the World" index by Freedom House Organization. There are other democracy indicators, such as the Economist Intelligence Unit, which proper in the studies on democratization and political development.

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