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Jacques Bertrand

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Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

Amy H. Liu and Joel Sawat Selway, eds. *State Institutions, Civic Associations, and Identity Demands: Regional Movements in Greater Southeast Asia*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024.

Reviewed by Jacques Bertrand*

In *State Institutions, Civic Associations, and Identity Demands*, Amy Liu and Joel Selway aim to cast a new perspective on the sources of ethnic and secessionist mobilization in Southeast Asia. The volume contains a collection of 12 essays by country specialists, bookended by the editors' tightly designed analytical framework in the introduction and conclusion. The last chapter, by Henry Hale, engages with the broad conceptual themes of the book and reflects on some of its empirical findings while offering insights on their generalizability to other similar regions.

Regions, rather than ethnic groups, are the main unit of analysis used to compare political mobilization. In their introduction, Liu and Selway argue that focusing on regions helps to better understand what causes mobilization. This approach allows a comparison of explanatory factors across cases where little mobilization occurs and cases where there are strong identity-based movements or other political actions. This makes it possible to overcome some of the selection bias that plagues the ethnic conflict literature, such as selecting groups on the basis of spurious assumptions regarding their political identity or selecting cases exclusively on the basis of their mobilization.

Two conditions, according to the editors, appear to be necessary for mobilization—particularly secessionism—to arise along regional lines: exclusion from state institutions is a strong driver for mobilization when combined with the presence of civic associations that unify a group along ethnic lines. The empirical chapters are organized according to these two main factors, while in the conclusion the editors weigh their relative effect and, when combined, how they help to understand various forms of mobilization.

The editors are to be commended for their highly organized, well-defined framework that guides the empirical chapters. All the chapters aim to engage with the shared conceptual

* Department of Political Science, University of Toronto

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5008-9440>

framework, exploring how identity is both defined and politicized across different regions. They employ process tracing to examine the ways in which exclusion or inclusion in state institutions, along with the role of various civic associations, influenced (or failed to influence) the politicization of identities and the resulting mobilization (or lack thereof). The key insight is that in regions where groups face multiple cross-cutting cleavages, the structure of civic associations can hinder the consolidation of a single ethnic identity. This, in turn, affects regional mobilization, potentially influencing outcomes such as the rise of secessionist movements.

The chapters cover several countries and regions, with Taiwan as the sole East Asian case and more extensive coverage of Indonesia, Malaysia/Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and to a lesser extent Myanmar. While these cases provide valuable geographic diversity and insight, they fall short of the editors' goal of systematically covering all Southeast Asian regions in a rigorous comparative analysis of regions with and without mobilization. Although this approach is mentioned multiple times, the case selection and regional coverage lack the systematic and controlled comparison implied. Nonetheless, the study successfully incorporates enough regional variation to avoid the limitations of focusing solely on politically mobilized ethnic groups.

Six chapters examine the role of state institutions. Two of these focus on Malaysia and Singapore, with Elvin Ong primarily addressing Singapore, where the successful mobilization of the ethnic Chinese majority in South Malaysia led to secession. Ong highlights the significance of the underrepresentation of Chinese in Singapore as a crucial factor that complements other explanations of the island's expulsion from Malaysia—explanations that often emphasize the ideological differences between Lee Kuan Yew and Tunku Abdul Rahman. However, the analysis presents a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem: the formation of Malaysia itself already reflected ethnic tensions and the rise of Malay nationalism, which contributed to the limited representation of the Chinese community, particularly in Singapore.

Mohamed Salihin Subhan and Kai Ostwald compare Northeast and East Malaysia to analyze the absence of secessionism. They offer insights such as the potential for a unified identity in the three Northeast provinces historically linked to Siam, and how the United Malays National Organisation's cooptation of the Islamist agenda prevented secessionist movements. However, this argument is built on the somewhat forced premise that centralization in Malaysia would have sparked sufficient grievances to drive secessionism, all else being equal. A similar logic applies to East Malaysia, where cooptation also played a key role in staving off strong mobilization, showing how the region's diversity complicated the creation of a unified identity for secession. Overall, while these cases provide useful reminders of the prerequisites for secessionist mobilization, the idea of a shared identity against which centralization should have triggered a response seems less crucial than other, more context-specific, factors.

Jacob Ricks argues that despite a strong Isan/Lao identity, there was no mobilization among the Isan/Lao people for secessionism. His survey shows a strong attachment to Isan

culture alongside a Thai identity. He attributes this to the Thai state's assimilationist policies, raising the question of why high assimilation leads to less mobilization, whereas the broader comparative premise suggests that state exclusion triggers politicization and mobilization. Risa Toha also offers an intriguing finding among "North Sumatrans," though the PRRI (Piagam Revolusioner Rakyat Indonesia) rebellion is framed mainly as driven by group and regional identity. However, the link to Permesta in Sulawesi and the role of military commanders suggest broader issues, including military centralization, corruption, and a larger contestation of the Indonesian state itself rather than a regionalist agenda. The inclusion of more Bataks in the cabinet, military, and other influential roles during the New Order highlights how inclusion can alleviate regional grievances. However, the Bataks' relatively low mobilization raises questions as to whether similar patterns occur in other provinces and regions in Indonesia, particularly islands with equally strong identities but less political inclusion.

Chun-Ying Wu and Amy Liu's chapter most clearly demonstrates the link between regional and demographic differences and how these differences shape identity-based mobilization. The authors highlight the contrast between northern and southern Taiwan, showing that the predominance of Hokkien speakers in the South spurred demands for distinct recognition and language rights, while the same group in the North joined others in pushing the KMT toward abandoning monolingualism. They also emphasize how democratization, assumed to promote greater inclusion, gave rise to such claims and successful state responses. Mary Anne Mendoza-Davé, in contrast, focuses less on state inclusion and more on identity formation through education. She argues that Muslims were less able to develop a strong identity than Christians due to colonial powers' less intensive education in the South compared to the North; in the North, more intensive colonial education and Catholic influence played a key role. While education did contribute to nationalism during colonial expansion in Southeast Asia, this argument seems secondary to the role of the Catholic Church and the high conversion rates. Additionally, the chapter overlooks the more complex ways in which identities and mobilization for rebellion were shaped, particularly the differences between the *ilustrados*' failed revolution and the Katipunan, which were grounded in distinct identities and cross-cutting cleavages.

The six chapters on civic associations highlight how societal organization shapes a group's ability to unify along ethnic lines and mobilize regionally. In regions where civic associations divide groups by factors like religion or class, the unity needed for secessionist or large-scale mobilization is often undermined. While I take issue with S.P. Harish's claim that the Timorese formed four social movements in 1975, I agree with his argument that the Catholic Church was key in solidifying Timorese ethnic unity and enabling resistance to Indonesian occupation.

Jessica Soedirgo and Alexandre Pelletier both show how cross-cutting cleavages hindered the regional ethnic unity necessary for secession. Soedirgo explains that the RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan) independence movement failed due to strong religious ties, which prevented

the Christian Ambonese from broadening their support to include Ambonese Muslims. However, her chapter downplays the internal divisions among Ambonese Christians, as the RMS involved mainly former KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger) colonial soldiers and failed to gain broader Christian support.

Pelletier illustrates how the Kachin ethnic identity, while reinforced by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), faces challenges from subgroups like the Lisu and Rawang, who have stronger local organizations disconnected from the broader Kachin nationalist movement. While these divisions are a valuable corrective to simplistic views of ethnic unity, the KIO's continued mobilization demonstrates that cleavages can be layered rather than entirely undermining broader unity. With this chapter being the only one on Myanmar, it certainly begs the question of how best to understand such umbrella identities and whether in other cases, such as the Chin in the Northwest, we might see similar associations between degrees of organization and varied patterns of mobilization.

Ryan Tans's chapter on Bali makes an interesting argument regarding the ability to appeal to Balinese ethnic culture as a minimal winning coalition that could transcend diverse interests and create resistance to a reclamation project. However, it falls short of fully engaging with how the region of Bali coincides with the island as the site of the reproduction of Balinese Hindu identity over centuries.

Jeremy Menchik's chapter shows how the Minahasans, similar to the Bataks in Toha's chapter, adhered to Indonesian nationalism and benefited to some extent during colonial times as well as under the New Order regime. Their organization along religious lines, particularly with the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, consolidated their identity and prevented alliances with Muslims from Gorontalo, for instance, also located in North Sulawesi. Their brief alliance with the Permesta movement, which opposed Indonesian centralization, did not provide a basis for sustained mobilization, as their efforts were quickly truncated by various other forms of mobilization—whether international, local, or national.

As with other Indonesian cases, it is not clear what unit should be taken as a "region." All the chapters on Indonesia (Chapters 3, 7, 8, and 11) quickly defer to common ethnic group identities, focusing in the end on whether these groups have been included or co-opted within central state institutions, and whether their identities are compatible or even enthusiastically complementary to Indonesian nationalism. This is true also for the Lanna people in Selway's chapter, who have shown little nationalist mobilization despite a relatively strong identity—an identity that has been revived through tourism and capitalist interests. As with the Balinese, culturally based expressions of identity complement their broader attachment to Thai identity. While some cultural associations helped strengthen their regional identity, this did not translate into secessionist tendencies.

Overall, the analysis of regionally based identities—their politicization or interaction with

other cross-cutting cleavages, their relationship to state inclusion or exclusion, and the civic associations around which they organize—adds great value to our understanding of the mobilization of ethnic identity, territorially based secessionist movements, and the conditions that explain why some potential movements are never realized. At times, the regionally based analysis seems a bit forced, and there is some conceptual stretching around notions of state exclusion/inclusion as well as civic associations. Nevertheless, the book offers a solid contribution to the comparative effort to understand regionally based forms of identity mobilization and the numerous cases of dogs that do not bark. While methodologically prescribed, including such cases and applying them successfully to cases of mobilization is often difficult to achieve. The book provides an original way of rethinking how we can broaden our analytical lens to better reach these goals.