

How to Rule with an Iron Fist: Legitimizing Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Authoritarianism has been a political feature of many governments in Southeast Asia. After World War II the region undertook decolonization and these countries, one after the other, gained independence. 'Strongman rule' reigned in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore while brutal military dictatorships ruled in Burma and Thailand. In former Indochina, communist regimes swayed in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In recent years, authoritarian longing and lure have pervaded the atmosphere in some Southeast Asian countries even in countries that transitioned to democracy. In order to legitimate their authoritarian rule, state elites have used a variety of ways to justify their regimes.

This panel seeks to understand and examine the ideologies, mechanisms, means and processes – or the Althusserian ideological state apparatuses – that state actors in Southeast Asia deploy to rationalize and perpetuate their either one-man or one-party rule.

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