

Electoralism, ritual process, and voter rationalities in Southeast Asia

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Abstrak

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Southeast Asians participate in elections eagerly, a fact indexed by the high electoral participation rates across a range of political conditions in the region. What gives elections in Southeast Asia such high legitimacy. Using data from Indonesia and the Philippines, this article emphasizes the need to understand peoples rationalities, which are informed by meanings generated by prevailing cultural practices. From this perspective, electoralism can be understood as a cultural phenomenon that conforms to the structure of a ritual. Despite the democratic deficit in many electoral exercises, elections share the attractiveness and fun of traditional community festivities. Voters participate in elections as a testament to membership in a community. Although they do not always transform the existing social arrangements, elections embed contradictory impulses in the same way that cockfights do. A procedure of formal democracy authored elsewhere, electoralism has been localized in Southeast Asia and invested with indigenous significance.