Throughout Southeast Asia, in a range of phenomena sometimes collectively labelled “money politics,” candidates for elected office distribute patronage—particularistic benefits, including cash, goods, appointments, or other rewards—via clientelist networks. Sometimes illegal or illicit, other times above-ground and at least tacitly condoned, such practices span the electoral cycle and deeply inflect the quality and character of governance structures, democracy, and national integration. This seminar will introduce a cross-national, multi-method, multi-year study on money politics in Southeast Asia, tracing the flows and implications of patronage for electoral gain in four middle-income, developing democracies: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Surprisingly few cross-country studies have compared the forms, determinants, actors and outcomes of money politics, particularly in Southeast Asia. Our investigation situates patronage and clientelism in the nexus of politicians, parties, brokers, and voters. Through richly textured analysis of our cases, including careful attention to both cross-national and sub-national differences, we interrogate causes and motivations found across three overarching and overlapping categories: institutional, structural, and normative. Within these broad categories, we seek to capture the effects of such factors as inter- and intra-state variations in state administrative capacity, territorial structures, party and party system institutionalization, electoral systems, economic development, distribution of coercive resources, norms of reciprocity and hierarchy, and religious dictates. We hypothesize that the nature and extent of clientelism and patronage have specific, significant effects on the quality and character of governance; democratic representation and accountability; and political stability as well as national and social integration.
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