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Behind the Facade: Elections under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Lee Morgenbesser

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Explores why authoritarian regimes bother to hold elections.

Behind the Façade examines the question of why authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia bother holding elections. Using comprehensive case studies of Cambodia, Myanmar, and Singapore, Lee Morgenbesser argues that elections allow authoritarian regimes to collect information, pursue legitimacy, manage political elites, and sustain neopatrimonial domination. He demonstrates how these functions are employed to manage the complex strategic interaction that occurs between dictators, political elites, and citizens. Far from being mere window dressing or even a precursor to democracy, flawed elections, Morgenbesser concludes, are paramount to the maintenance of authoritarian rule.

Lee Morgenbesser is Research Fellow at the Centre for Governance and Public Policy and Griffith Asia Institute at Griffith University in Australia.

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