Blind Spots in the Study of Political Representation: Actors and Political Dimensions in Southeast Asia and Beyond

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Abstract:
Mass-elite policy preference congruence lies at the heart of the study of democratic representation. Substantiated by a meta-analysis result grounded in all related empirical works between 1960 and 2020, we demonstrate that the literature on mass-elite congruence has three blind spots. First, the literature has exclusively focused on political parties to the neglect of presidents including in (semi-) presidential democracies. Second, despite the increasing dealignment trend across the globe, the literature has not so far distinguished between partisan and independent voters and between voters and non-voters. Third, the literature has overlooked the study of mass-elite congruence in several new democracies across Africa, Asia and Latin America based on the false premise that political dimensions are antithetical to clientelism. For instance, although often characterized by its weakly institutionalized, cartelistic, and oligarchic politics, Southeast Asian cases point that the party-voter representation linkages reflect socio-cultural concerns such as ethno-religious identities. In the presentation, we will share our findings on how these three blind spots affect the measurement of democratic representation.

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