Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia: Towards an Alternative Framework for the Study of 'Local Strongmen'

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Introduction

Over the course of the past several years, increasing academic, journalistic, governmental, and NGO attention has been devoted to the problems of local 'money politics' (politik uang) and 'gangsterism' (premanisme) in regencies, municipalities, and provinces around the Indonesian archipelago. The election of regents (bupati), mayors (walikota), and governors (gubernur) during this period is said to have been heavily swayed by monetary inducements on the one hand, and threats of violence, on the other, with local businessmen and leaders of criminal rackets playing a prominent role on or off stage. Newly assertive local assemblies (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah or DPRD) are said to be dominated by businessmen, gangsters, and their minions, or machine politicians susceptible to their influence. The enactment and implementation of new laws and regulations by these DPRD, moreover, are likewise described as decisively shaped by the interplay of competing interests of rival business and criminal cliques, rather than by the broader interests of the local population. Meanwhile, accounts of communal violence in provinces as varied as Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, and Maluku have stressed the leadership role of 'local elites' in mobilising local communities – or armed gangs within local communities – for inter-religious or inter-ethnic violence. After half a decade of democratisation and decentralisation in Indonesia, a consensus has emerged among observers that 'local elites' constitute a major obstacle to the economic, political, and social advancement of the country.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that scholars and activists working on local politics in Indonesia have begun to turn to writings on manifestations of this new phenomenon in Indonesia as long found in other parts of Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world, most notably the work of Joel Migdal on so-called 'local strongmen'. Indeed, although the academic literature on local brokers, patrons, and clients was rich and varied in the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, over the past decade the point of departure for the study of 'local strongmen' in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has narrowed down considerably to Joel Migdal's (1988, 2001) writings on this topic. Migdal's work is included in the reading lists of countless undergraduate and graduate courses and provides an analytical framework that numerous scholars have – knowingly or otherwise – relied upon and/or reproduced in their study of sub-national politics in many parts of the world.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this brief paper is both to criticise Migdal in a systematic fashion, and to offer an alternative framework for understanding patterns of 'local strongmen', using Southeast Asian examples – the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia – to suggest the explanatory power of this framework. First, a brief sketch of Migdal's arguments. Migdal seeks to explain why 'local strongmen' have, through their success at 'social control', often effectively 'captured' parts of Third World states: 'They have succeeded in having themselves or their family members placed in critical state posts to ensure allocation of resources according to their own rules, rather than the

rules propounded in the official rhetoric, policy statements, and legislation generated in the capital city or those put forth by a strong implementor' (Migdal 1988:256).

His explanation for this observed phenomenon consists of three inter-related arguments. First of all, Migdal argues, local strongmen have flourished in what are described as 'weblike' societies, which 'host a mélange of fairly autonomous social organisations,' and in which 'social control' is effectively 'fragmented.' This supposedly distinctive pattern of fragmented social control, it is claimed, often crystallised in the course of colonial rule and integration into the world capitalist economy, most notably in the entrenchment of large landowning classes. In short, due to the weblike structure of society, local strongmen enjoy significant influence and leverage over state leaders and local bureaucrats in what Migdal describes as a 'triangle of accommodation' (Migdal 1988:238-258). Secondly, local strongmen come to exercise social control by delivering key components for the so-called 'strategies of survival' of the local population. By this account, the strongmen not only enjoy legitimacy and support among the local populace but also exist essentially to satisfy this constituency's needs and demands for their services. Thus authors inspired by Migdal tend to frame their discussions in terms of 'personalism,' 'clientelism,' and 'patron-client relations' and to portray local strongmen as occupying roles as patrons who provide personal benefits to needy clients and followers in their bailiwicks. Thirdly and finally, Migdal argues that local strongmen's success in 'capturing' state agencies and resources impedes or compromises the efforts of state leaders to implement various policies. Local strongmen, overall, limit state autonomy and capacity, causing state weakness 'in effecting goal-oriented social changes' (Migdal 1988:9) and contributing to 'ungovernability' and 'disorder.' Insofar as successful industrialisation and growth strategies depend heavily on coherent, effective state policy formation and implementation, local strongmen thus constitute obstacles to economic development in the Third World.

This paper offers an account of 'local strongmen' in Southeast Asia which is strikingly at odds with Migdal's arguments. As illustrated in the pages below, the contexts in which local strongmen thrive are shaped at least as much by the nature of *the state* as by that of society. Local elites, it is argued, may be less 'traditional' – and oligarchies less enduring – than is often assumed; in fact, they typically emerge as much from within the state as from 'society'. For all the supposed 'weakness' of the state, it is in fact the very – in Migdal's terms, 'weblike' - structure of *the state* which creates the conditions for the emergence, survival, and success of local strongmen.

Equally, this essay takes issue with the stress on 'clientelism' and 'personalism' and the suggestion that the political culture, predispositions, and particularistic demands of local populations essentially cause, legitimate, and bear responsibility for local forms of despotism. As the cases cited below suggest, the *supply* of local strongmen does not necessarily reflect popular *demand*; people do not, in other words, simply 'get the government they ask for' (and thus deserve). Finally, this essay argues against the notion that local strongmen impede capitalist development, revealing instead their capacity to facilitate and benefit from the expansion of market relations and the process of industrial growth in their bailiwicks.

In sum, the discussion of local bosses in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia below offers a counterpoint to the dominant account of local strongmen in the Third World as provided by Migdal and other authors who have drawn upon his work. The alternative

framework suggested by the analysis below is one which is not only more descriptively accurate with regard to the nature of local strongman rule in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, but also more illuminating with regard to explaining the pattern of variation observed across the three cases. Thus the paper does not simply include Indonesia among a growing number of instances of 'bossism' – in addition, it provides an explanation for the subtle but crucial differences between the 'bossism' found in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. These differences should be of considerable interest to scholars, policy-makers, and activists working to promote democratisation – as well as decentralisation – in Southeast Asia and other regions of the world.

The Philippines: Clientelism, Oligarchy and a 'Weak' State?

Of all the countries of Southeast Asia, the Philippines offers the most obvious case of local strongmen through which to re-examine the scholarly literature sketched above. Scholars and other commentators have long emphasised both the predominance of patron-client relations and the persistence of a landowning élite in the archipelago. Elections – local, congressional, and national – in the Philippines have long been dominated by local politicians and 'political clans' known to enjoy not only political longevity but also economic pre-eminence – if not a monopolistic position – within their respective municipal, congressional, or provincial bailiwicks, through landownership, commercial networks, logging or mining concessions, transportation companies, and/or control over illegal economic activities.

Yet this pattern of local strongman rule can not be said to reflect the strength and endurance of 'patron-client relations' and a 'landowning élite' in Philippine politics.³ Widespread electoral fraud, vote-buying and violence have long played a decisive role in elections, and high re-election rates for incumbent legislators and local officials belie the fiction that bi-factional competition between rival patron-client networks has allowed constituents to exercise effective influence over politicians. In addition, the size and importance of large private landholdings have been much exaggerated, as has the extent to which landownership ever provided a truly independent economic base for the exercise of political power. Moreover, many of the entrenched politicians and magnates in the country have derived their power and wealth not from private landownership but from state resources and commercial capital, and many of those entrenched politicians and 'landed élites' who have accumulated large landholdings did so after - rather than before – assuming elected office. Finally, concentrations of landownership have *not* in fact corresponded with the political longevity of elected officials: some of the most enduring politicians and political clans are found in rural bailiwicks notable for an absence of large landholdings or in urban areas.

In fact, the entrenchment of local bosses in the Philippines reflects neither the strength of patron-client relations nor the rule and resilience of a landed oligarchy, but rather the peculiar institutional structures of the state. In particular, the subordination of a poorly insulated state apparatus to *elected* municipal, provincial, and national officials in the American colonial era (1900-1941) contrasted sharply with the bureaucratisation and insulation of colonial states elsewhere in the region and combined with the onset of what might loosely be termed 'primitive accumulation' to facilitate the emergence of bossism in the Philippines in the early twentieth century. While the Spanish colonial regime had delegated certain local powers to native officials elected according to highly

restricted suffrage requirements and closely supervised by Spanish parish priests, American colonial rule in the Philippines from 1901 until the outbreak of World War II essentially expanded the structure of private control over the local coercive and extractive agencies of the state 'upwards' through the subordination of a national state apparatus to provincial- and national-level elected officials. Elections to municipal office, based on highly restricted suffrage and freed from the intervention of ecclesiastical authorities, were first held in 1901, followed by those for provincial governors (1902), representatives to the national Philippine Assembly (1907), an American-style bicameral legislature (1916), and a Commonwealth presidency (1935). Elected municipal mayors retained their Spanish-era discretionary powers over local law-enforcement, public works, and taxation, winning complete independence from parish priests and full authority to appoint municipal police forces. While elected governors enjoyed somewhat similar law-enforcement and taxation powers at the provincial level, representatives to legislature gained control over a hastily constructed and rapidly Filipinized national state apparatus. Within their own districts, legislators exercised effective discretion over the disbursement of pork barrel funds for public works and the appointment of Constabulary commanders, district engineers and superintendents of schools, provincial fiscals, treasurers, and assessors, judges of the court of first instance, and local agents of the Bureau of Lands. In Manila, meanwhile, these legislators likewise exerted influence over the awarding of contracts, concessions, and monopoly franchises, the appointment of ranking officials in national government agencies, and the allocation of loans by the Philippine National Bank. Finally, with the election of a Commonwealth president in 1935, these local executives and national legislators were subordinated to a directly elected national executive. This distinctly American form of late colonial administration contrasted sharply with the processes of state expansion, bureaucratisation, and centralisation ongoing in this period elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The subordination of municipal, provincial, and national agencies of the state apparatus to elected officials combined with the onset of primitive capital accumulation and the expanding role of the colonial state in the economy to facilitate the emergence and entrenchment of *bosses* in a variety of localities and at different levels of state power in the colonial era. The term 'bosses' here refers to local brokers who enjoy an enduring monopolistic position over coercive and economic resources within their respective bailiwicks: long-term mayors who ran their municipalities as their private fiefdoms, congressmen and governors who built up political machines and business empires that spanned entire districts or provinces.

As the independent Republic inaugurated in 1946 essentially reconstructed the institutional legacies of American colonial rule, bosses have continued to thrive in the Philippines to the present day. While close electoral competition and frequent turnover have endured in some localities, bosses have emerged and entrenched themselves in countless municipalities, cities, congressional districts, and provinces. Throughout the Philippines, one can find localities where one politician – or one family – has held office and built up a monopolistic position in the local economy over the course of many years.

Research on local bosses in different parts of the Philippines reveals the following patterns of local variation. First of all, local bosses have succeeded in entrenching themselves when and where the 'commanding heights' of the local political economy

have lent themselves to monopolistic control, most notably illegal activities, nodal commercial/transportation chokepoints, public lands, heavily regulated crops and industries. Secondly, where such monopolistic control over the local economy has hinged on state-based derivative and discretionary powers, single-generation gangsterstyle bosses have relied heavily upon superordinate power brokers, whose backing has underpinned their emergence, entrenchment, and survival, and whose hostility has spelled their downfall or death. Thirdly, where, by contrast, monopolistic control over the local economy has rested upon the construction of a solid base in proprietary wealth outside the realm of state intervention, bosses have withstood the hostile machinations of superordinate power brokers and successfully passed on their bailiwicks to successive generations in classic *dynasty* form.

Today, local bosses thrive in a wide variety of settings, and without relying upon large landholdings or patron-client relations as the essential underpinnings of their rule. Control over elected office provides access to a broad array of state resources and prerogatives, from control over public land to discretion over law-enforcement to authority over construction contracts and monopoly franchises. Violence and intimidation, vote-buying and electoral fraud work in tandem with the mobilisation of local machines for self-perpetuation in office. Thus fishing magnates and bus company owners in the Visayas, smugglers in Sulu, and rulers of urban slum squatter settlements in Metro Manila have entrenched themselves in their bailiwicks for decades at a time. Even in provinces like Cavite and Cebu, suburban growth zones filled with industrial estates, golf courses, residential subdivisions, and tourist resorts, local bosses have used their considerable discretionary powers — over zoning ordinances, construction contracts, and police forces used for busting unions and clearing land of 'squatters' — to oil their political machines by serving as gate-keepers and facilitators to Manila-based and foreign investors.

In sum, the example of bossism in the Philippines does not in fact confirm the arguments of Migdal and others concerning local strongmen. Neither the strength of patron-client relations nor the endurance of a landed oligarchy offer compelling societybased explanations as to why local bosses have emerged and entrenched themselves in various localities around the archipelago. Instead, the analysis above suggests that it was the distinctive pattern of (colonial-era) state formation which prefigured the prevalence of local bosses in the Philippines. As for the conventional wisdom that landed élites and local strongmen have obstructed economic growth in the Philippines, the evidence in fact suggests otherwise. It was under an authoritarian regime far more centralised and autonomous from societal influences than its predecessors that the Philippine economy experienced dramatic decline in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it has been in large measure through the efforts of local bosses that growth zones in provinces like Cavite and Cebu have attracted Manila-based and foreign investors since the restoration of competitive electoral democracy after 1986. Overall, local bosses in the Philippines have been described above as far less paternalistic, rooted in society, and detrimental to capitalist development than previously argued or assumed. Instead, they have emerged and entrenched themselves in large part through violence and guile, thanks to enabling state structures and institutions, and as active promoters of capital accumulation and industrial growth.

Bossism in Comparative Perspective: Thailand

Overall, the Philippine case suggests that bossism reflects a fairly common conjuncture in state formation and capitalist development: the subordination of the state apparatus to *elected* officials against the backdrop of what might loosely be termed 'primitive accumulation'. 'Primitive accumulation' here refers to a phase of capitalist development in which a significant section of the population has lost direct control over the means of production and direct access to means of subsistence, and been reduced to a state of economic security and dependence on scarce wage labour; and in which considerable economic resources and prerogatives remain in the 'public' domain. Taken together, these last two conditions signal both the susceptibility of many voters to clientelistic, coercive, and monetary pressures and the centrality of state offices and state resources for capital accumulation and control over the 'commanding heights' of local economies.

This argument linking bossism to democracy and 'primitive accumulation' finds considerable support in a comparative analysis of bossism's manifestations throughout Southeast Asia. Broadly speaking, the only other country in the region where local bosses have achieved power and prominence analogous to what has been observed in the Philippines is, curiously, Thailand. What is it about Thailand that has made it so hospitable to local bossism in recent years?

Under military rule and 'the bureaucratic polity' in Thailand until the 1970s, the institutional constraints upon embryonic manifestations of local bossism were significant. The steady growth of rice cultivation since the mid-19th century did provide ample opportunities for capital accumulation through control over the expanding circuitries of production and distribution, and a provincial economic élite accordingly did emerge, based in landownership, moneylending, milling, marketing, and transportation as well as such illegal activities as gambling and smuggling. A pattern of what James C. Scott has identified as 'market corruption' thrived, with pliable or predatory local agents of various central government ministries open to the 'purchase' of their discretionary and regulatory powers over the local economy. Yet these local government officials were only available, as it were, for temporary rent rather than permanent sale, and at prices open to competitive bidding, as decisions with regard to appointment, promotion, removal, and transfer were made by Bangkok-based bureaucrats rather than up-country bosses.

By the 1970s, however, the social forces generated by the Vietnam War boom in Thailand began to combine with the internal contradictions of army rule to shift the locus of national-level power away from the military establishment and towards previously ceremonial and impotent parliamentary institutions. While an initial period of unprecedented openness in 1973-1976 led to a brutal right-wing backlash against the most vocal proponents of democratisation, the intensity of factional rivalries at the highest echelons of the army derailed efforts to reconstruct a military-dominated 'bureaucratic polity' and delivered increasing political leverage and legislative authority into the hands of parliament in the 1980s. Thus, although an appointed Senate and threats of a *coup d'état* left considerable power in military hands well into the 1980s and 1990s, Bangkok's agro-business, banking, commercial, and industrial magnates began to view parliament as an essential avenue of influence and re-channelled their resources accordingly. While Bangkok-based magnates commanded tremendous financial resources, only province-based businessmen enjoyed links to large blocs of voters in the

country's overwhelmingly rural constituencies, and parliamentary seats promised influence over (or inclusion among) cabinet ministers, central ministries, and local agents of the Thai state. With the vast majority of parliamentary (multiple-seat) constituencies located in *rural* areas, it is thus no surprise that by 1990, nearly half of all Cabinet members were provincial businessmen.

Against this backdrop, by the mid-1980s, observers of Thai politics had begun to comment on the growing manifestations of local bossism, most prominently with reference to what have come to be known as chao pho (or jao poh), Thai 'godfathers' of a distinctly mafioso variety. These chao pho are identifiable through the multiplicity and monopolistic quality of their economic activities within loosely defined territorial bailiwicks, in terms of accumulation of proprietary wealth (agricultural land, real-estate properties, mills, processing centres, factories; shares in banks and industrial firms), acquisition of state-derived concessions, contracts, and franchises (e.g. logging, mining, public works, transport), and involvement in illegal rackets (e.g. drug trade, gambling, smuggling). These chao pho have achieved great prominence and power through their successful service as - or provision of - vote brokers (hua khanaen) in elections, delivering parliamentary constituencies, or regional clusters of constituencies, to Bangkok-based patrons, local clients, or themselves on election day, through a combination of coercion, vote-buying, and electoral fraud. These chao pho have also become notorious for their control over the local tentacles of the state, most notably its coercive apparatuses, and their ability to achieve effective local monopolies over the organisation of (state and extra-state) violence within their bailiwicks, for use in capital accumulation, electoral manipulation, and enforcement of illegal rackets.

Compared to manifestations of local bossism observed in the Philippines, the contemporary Thai variant is distinctive in two key respects. Firstly, the transfer of effective control over the state apparatus to *elected* officials came *relatively late* vis-àvis the process of capitalist development, with enormous Bangkok-based financial, agro-business, and industrial conglomerates and up-country magnates with province- or region-wide empires already entrenched and equipped with ample resources for electoral competition. Thus prominent Bangkok bankers and industrialists have themselves assumed political party leadership posts or otherwise engineered alliances with regional clusters of *chao pho*, and provincial businessmen have in some cases exercised *chao pho*-like influence over multiple constituencies or even provinces.

Secondly, the subordination of the state apparatus to a parliament drawn from multiple-seat constituencies and without proportional representation has facilitated the emergence of a highly fluid system of political parties held together largely by patronage networks (regional and national) and personal ties and coalition governments stitched together through multi-party Cabinets. Under such a system, it has been difficult to build a truly nation-wide political party greater than the sum of its – local – parts. Thus *chao pho* exercising control over several constituencies have found it relatively easy to install themselves or their stooges in the Cabinet and thereby to wield considerable influence over the internal affairs of key central ministries and their local line agencies. The distinctiveness of this configuration in contemporary Thailand is apparent when compared to the highly decentralised state and presidential system in the Philippines, with its multi-tiered pattern of municipal, congressional, and provincial bosses.

In short, in contemporary Southeast Asia, bossism has begun to take root beyond the Philippines over the past ten years. In Thailand, bosses – known as 'godfathers' or *chao pho* – have emerged with the entrenchment of electoral democracy since the 1980s, yet, unlike the Philippines, in the context of a more industrialised economy, a more centralised bureaucracy, and a European-style parliamentary system, with local executive powers remaining in civilian bureaucrats' hands and military generals retaining a measure of national influence through an appointed Senate and other forms of political and economic intervention. At the same time, the case of Thailand confirms the broader argument that it is the subordination of the state to elected officials, rather than the strength of 'traditional élites' and clientelistic demands in society, that constitutes the crucial pre-condition for local bossism.

Indonesia: Local Mafias, Networks, and Clans

In contrast with the pattern of bossism observed in the Philippines and Thailand, a distinctively different form of local power has begun to crystallise, expand, and entrench itself in Indonesia in recent years. During the three decades of the Soeharto era (1966-1998), the Indonesian state was tightly centralised and insulated from centrifugal and societal constraints on the internal circulation and machinations of its officials. Although pseudo-parliamentary bodies at the district, provincial, and national levels were regularly elected on a five-year cycle, their effective powers and prerogatives were severely limited. Electoral competition was confined to three parties, Golkar, the United Development Party (PPP), and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), with Golkar enjoying tremendous advantages - and persistent majorities - as the government's political machine, and PPP and PDI restricted to minor supporting roles. At the district and provincial levels, local executives were essentially imposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and vested with powers that dwarfed those of the elected assemblies, while at the national level a supra-parliamentary body stacked with carefully selected appointees convened on a quinquennial basis to 're-elect' Soeharto and his anointed vice-president. A multi-tiered hierarchy of military commands mirrored the structure of local government, and active and retired officers were appointed not only to reserved seats in the regional assemblies and the national parliament but also to nearly half the governorships and regencies in the country. Active and retired military officers staffed countless other local and national government positions and, at least until the 1990s, dominated the leadership of Golkar, which operated as a centralised and 'closed-list' dominant party throughout the New Order.⁵

The implications of this organisation of state power were obvious: the possibilities for the emergence of 'local strongmen' were highly restricted. Officials at all levels of the state hierarchy were highly responsive to demands and directives from 'above', as their assignments and promotions depended entirely on appointments determined in Jakarta. As one study of the Soeharto government's family planning program noted:

When a governor is approaching the end of his five-year term of office and wants a second term, his achievements are evaluated by a national team, who scrutinize family planning in particular. If the province has a poor record in family planning, the doors are generally closed to a new appointment for the governor. Periodic evaluations of the performance of provincial officials therefore serve as an inbuilt incentive to ensure that the

program has produced demonstrable results. (Selo Soemardjan and Kennon Breazeale 1993:65)

Regular rotations of governors, as well as district-level and provincial Army commanders, in and out of localities, prevented these middle-ranking civilian and military officials from building up local fiefdoms independent of the centre. Conversely, small-town businessmen and other local powerbrokers were impeded from exerting direct discretion over state personnel, resources, and regulatory powers. Local government officials offering special favours and facilities to private parties 'for a price' did so essentially as 'retail outlet' distributors and collectors for the national ('wholesale') centre in Jakarta, with promotions and assignments contingent on delivery of regular 'franchise renewal' fees (Malley 1999a:300-301). As provinces and districts enjoyed only minimal powers of legislation and taxation and depended heavily on Jakarta for revenues, centrally appointed governors and regents essentially exercised discretion over the enforcement of national laws and regulations and the distribution of state revenues and resources (contracts, jobs, subsidies) on behalf of the centre.⁶

Against these relentlessly centripetal forces of the New Order's strong centralised state, at least two mitigating circumstances exerted residual centrifugal influence and created state-based niches for 'local elites'. First of all, clusters of entrenched local interests emerged within the Indonesian state itself. For example, the very organisation of presidential – and, more generally, civilian – control over the Armed Forces depended heavily on a strictly enforced policy of retirement for all military officers at 55 years of age and their reincorporation into the state in civilian positions of local and national authority. While the highest-ranking retiring Army officers were awarded cabinet posts, governorships, and seats in the national parliament as their 'retirement packages', lowand mid-level retiring officers were allotted posts in district-level and provincial assemblies and Golkar branches, and other available sinecures in their home provinces, and often in the very localities where they had served as active officers. Thus even as the regular rotation of regents and governors, and district and regional military commanders, worked to maintain control over key local posts in the hands of Jakarta, some observers noted the emergence in the 1980s of 'local mafias' from among lowerand middle-ranking military personnel serving -- and then retiring -- in various provinces of the archipelago:

[T]hey have the opportunity to build powerful long-term local bases in the regions, first as representatives of the Center, later as real-estate speculators, fixers, commission-agents, local monopolists, and racketeers. These long-term prospects, meaning retirement in the regions, are helped by local alliances, including marriage connections (themselves or their children), business partnerships with local elites, and personnel manipulations through former subordinates within the active military. As 'old hands,' such military men are in a strong position to inveigle or obstruct 'new broom' officers sent in from the Center. Essentially, we are speaking of the formation of *local mafias*, which often have their eye on such 'civilian' political positions as bupati, provincial secretary, and even governor. ('Current Data' 1992:98, emphasis added)

Such state-based provincial- and regency-level 'mafias' were by no means confined to military officers alone. In the 1970s, for example, the generous flow of development funds from the central government during the oil boom allowed local aristocrats who

held key government posts – *bupati* (regent), *sekwilda* (regional secretary) and *ketua* DPRD (head of the regional assembly) - to emerge as owners of plantations, fishponds, logging concessions, cement factories, private banks, construction companies, hotels and tourist resorts. As one observer of South Sulawesi during this period concluded:

It was hard to find any *bupati* or high-ranking official in the governor's office who did not own profitable clove plantations or salt-water fishponds or both.... Officials owning large areas of productive land represented the continuation of a long established pattern in which aristocratic families owned land and invested some of the money they received from landowning in trade. But it also reflected the new economic climate of the New Order which enabled nobles who were also government officials to commercialize their landholdings. (Ichlasul Amal 1992:179)

Meanwhile, in the 1980s and 1990s the processes of economic growth, industrialisation, and social-political mobilisation in Jakarta and in major provincial cities facilitated the emergence of *preman* (gangsters) belonging to the para-statal group *Pemuda Pancasila* (Pancasila Youth) or otherwise linked to the regime. These gangsters enjoyed control over various criminal rackets and provided much-needed muscle for strike-breaking, repression of opposition protests, and election-related services in the late Soeharto years.⁷

Thus even as Jakarta regularly rotated regents, governors, regency-level (dandim) and regional (pangdam) military commanders in and out of localities throughout the Indonesian archipelago, these centrally appointed officials often found it convenient to reach accommodations with entrenched provincial, regency-level, and municipal 'mafias' nestled in local government offices, regional assemblies, and Golkar and Pemuda Pancasila branches. Given their role in the everyday affairs of local government and in the delivery of votes for Golkar in the 5-year election cycle, they were well positioned to partake in the distribution of government resource flows (subsidies, contracts, jobs) and to influence the enforcement of government regulations to their own advantage. Thus the central government's 'Inpres' programs for the financing of primary schools, health clinics, markets, and other public facilities in localities around the country created countless opportunities for petty pilfering, padding of payrolls, and fixing of contracts, even as the diversification of trade patterns, business operations, and industrial activities in the provinces facilitated the proliferation of 'wild taxes' (pungutan liar) for the facilitation of business operations by local officials. 8 Not all the proceeds were simply 'kicked upstairs' to higher officials: entrenched provincial- and regency-level 'mafias' benefited as well.

Meanwhile, below the sub-district level of the centralised New Order bureaucracy, state power at the lowest administrative level – the village or desa – rested in the hands of elected officials with local roots and local interests. Under Dutch colonial rule and in the early post-independence period, village headmen were elected for life, and this arrangement was retained by the Soeharto regime until 1979, at which point new legislation was introduced which limited the village headman ($kepala\ desa$) to an eight-year term in office and to a total of two terms. While village elections (pilkades) and the management of village affairs were overseen by appointed civilian sub-district officers (camat), and military presence and surveillance reached down into the village as well, a local elite firmly rooted in the village economy flourished over the course of the New Order. The $kepala\ desa$, after all, presided over two consultative bodies – the Lembaga

Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa (Village Social Defense Council) and the Lembaga Musyawarah Desa (Village Consultative Council) – whose members he appointed with the approval of the camat, and oversaw the staffing and machinations of a bewildering variety of village-level state and para-statal organisations. Indeed, the density of the state at the village level was remarkable. As the author of one village study noted in the mid-1990s: 'It is not unusual for a village to have two hundred official posts in a village bureaucracy of twenty organisations, each with a sign in front of the village office' (Antlöv 1995:7).

Control over the office of kepala desa guaranteed privileged access to state resources and discretion over state regulatory powers in the economy. From the Dutch colonial era onwards, village headmen in many villages in Java and elsewhere were awarded control over communal or salary lands (tanah bengkok) for the duration of their tenure, and in some cases these tracts of land were more sizeable than the private land owned by the wealthiest local landowners. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the office of headman in many villages was often held by a single family or group of families over several generations, whose control over large tracts of communal or salary land helped to finance the purchase of private land and diversification into other economic activities as well. Under the Soeharto regime, these large landowners benefited greatly from the government's efforts to raise agricultural productivity, as their control over the office of kepala desa gave them discretion over the flow of government subsidies for agricultural inputs (e.g. HYV seeds, fertilisers, pesticides), credit facilities, and infrastructure. Thus the New Order era saw village headmen and their families pioneering local investment in agricultural machinery (e.g. tractors, combine harvesters), processing facilities (e.g. rice mills), transport (e.g. buses and trucks), and a variety of capital-intensive agricultural (e.g. prawn farms, fishponds, sugar plantations) and mercantile activities as well as construction and real estate speculation. By investing in education for their children, moreover, these village-level elite families developed supra-local networks, through marriage, school affiliation, and opportunities for government employment. Small wonder that observers noted the increase in vote-buying in village elections during this period: much was at stake in the contest for the office of kepala desa (Maurer 1994, Husken 1994).

Thus the imposition of centralised authoritarian rule and the implementation of New Order government programmes were mediated by the interests of local elites who controlled the lowest rung of the administrative hierarchy and commanded considerable economic resources at the village level. The kepala desa and the cluster of personal and familial interests they represented used their positions as intermediaries – enforcers of local order, dispensers of state resources, vote brokers for Golkar - to enhance their strategies of political entrenchment and private capital accumulation. Studies of government programmes ranging from rural electrification to intensification of agricultural productivity to family planning consistently revealed that these village elites played a decisive role in the allocation of government resources and the enforcement of government regulations at the local level. Kepala desa were responsible for brokering the maintenance of village cooperatives (KUD or Koperasi Unit Desa), the leasing of village land to agro-business concerns, and the re-zoning of the village for real-estate 'development'. Together with regents (bupati) and sub-district officers (camat), the kepala desa enjoyed such discretion over the flow of state resources that some studies estimated a 'loss' of twenty percent of village development funds in transit from the regency to the village itself (Antlöv 1994:91).

In short, the highly centralised and authoritarian nature of the Soeharto-era state made it impossible for 'local bosses' to emerge, survive, and flourish in Indonesia up through the turn of the century. Local aristocracies in Java and the Outer Islands, Muslim scholars operating vast networks of Islamic schools in the archipelago, and customary (*adat*) institutions in a number of provinces impressed some observers with regard to the strength and density of Indonesian society, yet no 'local strongmen' surfaced from among these clusters of social forces. Instead, at the lower rungs of the Indonesian state, loose networks, 'mafias', and clans emerged, growing from within the state rather than emerging organically from Indonesian society. As Michael Meeker has noted in a different context:

Each governor, sub-governor, and subordinate officers was after all always more than a singular, isolated individual. He was a father of children, a master of a household, a relative among relatives, a friend among friends, a partner among partners, and a patron among clients. That is to say, each took his place in a world of nonofficial as well as official associations. So each was the representative of a discipline of interpersonal association as father, master, relative, friend, partner, and patron. And given that each was the subject of a discipline of interpersonal association, insofar as they were members of the official class, would it not also follow that adherence to such a discipline would also shape the ethics of families, households, patronage, kinship, partnership, and patronage? (Meeker 2002:145-146)

In short, if even a centralised, authoritarian state was inevitably 'penetrated' and 'captured' in some way by local elites, the very form and extent of local elite power was defined by the nature of the state, in both its overarching national structures – centralised, authoritarian – and its micro-institutional foundations (e.g. early retirement of Army officers, provincial and regency-level assemblies, village-level elections and state land allocations). It was thus the organisation of state power – rather than society – in Indonesia which made it so difficult for full-blown 'local strongmen' to emerge during the Soeharto era.

With the transition to regular competitive elections in 1999, however, conditions approximating those found in the Philippines and Thailand have come into force in Indonesia, greatly widening the possibilities for the accumulation of power by mafias, networks, and clans in localities around the archipelago. With competitive elections in 1999 came the transfer of state power to those capable of mobilising and capturing votes and thus elected offices. With the decentralisation legislation of the same year came the simultaneous devolution of control over the dispensation of state resources and the enactment and implementation of state regulations. Overall, power was shifted 'downwards' and 'outwards', from within a centralised bureaucracy firmly rooted in Jakarta to elected members of assemblies in regencies, municipalities, and provinces around the archipelago.

Scholars of Indonesian politics were quick to pick up on the rapid rise to prominence of local powerbrokers previously limited in access to and control over state power. In North Sumatra, for example, one scholar concluded:

the newly salient political actors have tended to be small and medium-level entrepreneurs who are at least partly dependent on state projects and contracts; professional politicians with links to the old New Order parties; or activists who have latched onto organizations such as the Association of Muslim Students (HMI), the National Council of Indonesian Youth (KNPI), the Indonesian Nationalist Student Movement (GMNI) and the Indonesian Christian Students Movement (GMKI), from which the New Order regularly recruited new apparatchiks and fixers. No less important are those who acted as the regime's local henchmen through organizations such as Pancasila Youth (Pemuda Pancasila). (Hadiz 2003a:124-125)

Of 22 *bupatis* and mayors elected in North Sumatra, six were local business moguls, many active in construction, 'demonstrating the growing attractiveness for local business people of wielding direct control over the state apparatus. The majority of the remainder have bureaucratic backgrounds, indicating continuity with the New Order' (Hadiz 2003a:125).

With democratisation and decentralisation, such local powerbrokers were given unprecedented opportunities to 'capture' state offices and agencies. Careful research on local politics in one regency in the neighbouring province of Aceh, for example, has revealed the entrenchment of a 'timber mafia', which enjoys considerable influence in the local assembly and in the various local offices of the bureaucracy. Through their influence, this network of logging interests ensures that 'district politicians dependent on local support do not threaten their business operations. In many cases local business elites influential in local legislative bodies work to ensure that decentralised district administrations create new formal decisions regarding the management of local resources that favour their interests and those of their business partners from outside the region' (McCarthy 2002b:882):

At the apex of the network are four key business figures, predominantly from a particular Alas clan (*marga*). These figures dominated Southeast Aceh politics, and even the *Bupati* was enmeshed in this network. Those who upset this group would be excluded from the webs of patron-client relations running Southeast Aceh....

Key figures there, allegedly including the *Bupati*, are enmeshed in a social order that extends to forestry staff working for the National Park, police (*Polres*) and army personnel (*Kodim*), local government officials, the judiciary and local religious leaders (*imam*). Irrespective of the precise formal position within the state of those playing various roles, the links among businessmen, intermediaries, brokers and villagers lie outside the formal structure of the state (McCarthy 2002a:93-94).

The emergence and entrenchment of such 'local mafias' has also been evident in much less remote and rural settings. In the city of Medan, for example, the municipal assembly is said to be dominated by rival *preman* (gangster) groupings, some of which enjoy close links to cliques of retired Army and police officers. The mayor is a local businessman who won office in large part through vote-buying and violence, and in condominium with these 'local mafias' in the city (Ryter 2000).

In some parts of the country, moreover, local 'mafias' and 'networks' have also emerged under the leadership of local aristocracies and of the avowed representatives of religious and ethnic communities, who have played prominent roles in the mobilisation of violence in communal conflicts around the archipelago. The role of traditional

Islamic teachers (ulama or kyai) in mobilising votes – and since 1999 winning seats in local assemblies – is one obvious example, most notably in the East Java and pasisir (north coastal) strongholds of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Since 1999, numerous incidents of violence and intimidation - election-related and otherwise - have been attributed to the youth wing (Ansor) and civilian militia (Banser) associated with NU, whose members are drawn from NU pesantren ('traditional' Islamic boarding schools) and help to enforce the authority of local religious leaders (Endang Turmudi 2004). A recent study of local politics in eastern Indonesia has revealed a broader pattern: pam swakarsa (civilian militias) linked to rival groupings of tuan guru (Islamic teachers) are described as holding sway over many parts of Lombok, even as community patrols originally assigned to police local customary law (adat) on Bali have evolved into thuggish enforcers of the PDI-P, which dominates politics on the island. 10 Rival Christian and Muslim 'mafias' of politicians, businessmen, clerics, and gangsters have clearly been at the heart of the inter-religious violence in Ambon and elsewhere in Maluku (Klinken 2001), as have their counterparts in the Central Sulawesi regency of Poso (Aragon 2001). The rival sultanates of Ternate and Tidore are likewise reported to have emerged as alternative poles in local factional politics - and inter-religious violence – in North Maluku (Smith Alhadar 2000, Tamrin Amal Tomagola 2000), even as the leaders of new organisations claiming to represent 'the Dayaks' of Central Kalimantan have evolved into major powerbrokers in the electoral arena, and in the 'ethnic cleansing' of Madurese immigrants from the province (Klinken 2002).

Overall, it is clear that the past several years have witnessed the rise to power and prominence of local 'mafias', 'networks', and 'clans' around the country in tandem with the shift to competitive elections and the devolution of considerable state powers to elected regency-level, municipal, and provincial assemblies. It is also abundantly clear that something rather different from the pattern of local 'bosses' in the Philippines and Thailand has crystallised in Indonesia: local power does not seem to be monopolised by individual 'strongmen' or 'dynasties'. Instead, economic and political power at the regency-, municipal, and provincial levels in Indonesia appears to be associated with loosely defined, somewhat shadowy, and rather fluid clusters and cliques of businessmen, politicians, and officials. As the author of one particularly rich study of local politics in a Central Java regency concluded:

After three years in office, a new *modus vivendi* based on negotiation and deal-making appears to be evolving between the bureaucracy and the legislature. The system serves as an avenue for political players to maximise their access to resources and enhance their political standing. Each tries to outdo the others, because they all realize that victory in the fight for strategic positions depends on being able to mobilise financial resources and build a popular support base (Amrih Widodo 2003:190).

Even where such power is associated with forces deeply rooted in society – local aristocracies, customary institutions, religious school networks – there seems to be a pronounced tendency towards the diffusion of power within a set of families rather than concentration within a single leader or lineage. Only at the village level is there some evidence of cases of enduring monopoly over state office (*kepala desa*) and economic resources (*tanah bengkok*, brokerage services, construction contracts) in some localities, and even here power-sharing arrangements, contestation between rival families and factions, and high turnover appear to be the rule (Antlöv 2004).

How then can we explain the decidedly looser, more nebulous and less monolithic pattern of local networks, 'mafias', and 'clans' in Indonesia, as contrasted with the more narrowly concentrated and sharply defined entrenchment of 'bosses' and *chaopho* in the Philippines in Thailand? Migdal's work would suggest that the answer must lie in a weaker and more fissiparous Indonesian society, in which power is diffused and fragmented rather than concentrated in individual 'strongmen'. Yet an alternative response more in line with the analysis of the Philippines and Thailand above is suggested by close analysis of the micro-foundational structures of the – now more fully electoralised and decentralised – Indonesian state. That is, in sharp contrast with the direct elections – and unrestricted powers – of mayors, governors, and congressmen in the Philippines, and parliamentarians (MPs) in Thailand, the system of elected offices found in Indonesia is much less hospitable to the concentration of power in the hands of a single 'boss' or 'dynasty'. To date, governors (gubernur), mayors (walikota), and regents (bupati) have been elected not directly by the residents within their localities, but instead by the elected members of their local assemblies (DPRD), who also enjoy broad legislative powers thanks to decentralisation. Would-be provincial, municipal, or regency-level 'bosses' and 'dynasties' are thus kept in check by the institutional obstacles to the concentration of local powers in single hands, which alongside the strength of local assemblies include a highly centralised political party system and lawenforcement apparatus.

Even at the village level, where kepala desa are directly elected, the 1999 legislation has imposed important checks: tenure is restricted to a maximum of two (10-year) terms, and Village Representative Bodies (Badan Perwakilan Desa or BPD) based on direct election by village residents. These village councils now play a central role in the determination of village-level regulations, the allocation of village budgetary funds, and the monitoring of the performance of the *kepala desa*. The BPD is even empowered to initiate proceedings for the dismissal of the kepala desa, although the decision itself rests in the hands of the regent (*bupati*). ¹¹ The emergence of 'local bosses' in Indonesia is thus severely constrained by the very organisation of state power at the local level, with neither strong local executive positions nor locally powerful national parliamentary seats, as available sites for the accumulation – and monopolisation – of power (as in the Philippines and Thailand). In this context, the planned shift to directly elected regents (bupati) and governors (gubernur) in Indonesia over the next few years might well be expected to facilitate the emergence of Philippine- or Thai-style 'bosses' in some localities, albeit ones still hampered by the remaining institutional obstacles cited above.

Conclusion: 'Local Strongmen' in Southeast Asia Revisited

In contrast to Migdal, the Southeast Asian cases outlined above provide ample support for much more careful analysis of state structures in addressing the question of 'local strongmen' in the Third World. As seen in the Philippines and Thailand, a pattern of local bossism has emerged and prevailed when and where the state apparatus is subordinated to elected officials at a relatively early stage of capitalist development which we can gloss as 'primitive accumulation', with the differences between the two cases corresponding to the constellation of elected offices and the timing of 'democratisation'.

Against the backdrop of these variegated configurations of state structures and diverging patterns of local 'strongman' rule, sub-national variation in local bosses and 'mafias' does in fact reflect the landscape of what Migdal and others refer to as 'society'. Yet here again the notion of 'strong societies' does not conform to the available evidence: enduring local bosses in the Philippines and Thailand and local mafias in Indonesia are found not so much in bailiwicks where private wealth is concentrated in very few hands (e.g. plantation belts) but more often in localities notable for diffused private economic power and distinguished by the central role of the state in the economy. The above-noted case of the 'timber mafia' in Southeast Aceh is paradigmatic: the forests in question lie on state lands. As scholars of local politics in the United States and Southern Europe have noted, local state 'strength' rather than 'weakness' may in fact underpin boss rule. Thus one study of the Christian Democrat (Democrazia Cristiana or DC) party machine's endurance in Palermo concluded: 'The monopolisation of economic resources in the hands of the DC is possible because of the absence of an autonomous resource base at the local level and the consequent dependence of the local economy on the resources of the state' (Chubb 1982:215). Conversely, the strength of the dominant social class may in fact constrain boss rule: thus in the Philippines, mayors in most major provincial cities serve as brokers for a cluster of local business interests, rather than as entrenched bosses in their own right.

In terms of the linkages between these 'local strongmen' and the people who reside in their bailiwicks, the preceding pages have suggested a more 'supply-side' response than the 'demand'-driven conventional wisdom exemplified by Migdal. To be sure, the broad mass of the population in much of Southeast Asia lives in conditions of economic deprivation and insecurity, and local bosses and mafias have served as patrons to countless needy – and grateful – clients over the years, amassing personal followings whose loyalty may help to under-gird the local foundations of their rule. Yet, as noted above, national-level state structure and local political economy, rather than popular 'demand' for patronage, appear decisive in determining the 'supply' of local strongmen in a given setting. Moreover, as suggested by their use of violence, vote-buying, and fraud in elections, reliance on state agencies and powers (including those of the police) in accumulating wealth, and involvement in criminal activities, local bosses and mafias - as these evocative terms themselves suggest - are far more predatory than paternalistic, more coercive than clientelistic in the treatment of their putative constituencies. Overall, these 'local strongmen' work to achieve positions of local monopoly, in which the terms of exchange between 'patron' and 'client' lean heavily in their favour, and in which control over economic and coercive resources facilitates the preservation and manipulation of the scarcities and insecurities experienced by the local populace.

Finally, the pages above have cast considerable doubt on the commonly held notion that 'local strongmen' stand as both hallmarks of backwardness and obstacles to capitalist development. As noted in passing with reference to the case of suburban industrial zones in the Philippines, local bosses have in fact served as the hand-maidens of economic growth, facilitating land conversion and labour repression and reaping huge profits as real-estate brokers and construction moguls. As suggested above, 'local mafias' in Indonesia have likewise overseen industrial growth in cities like Medan and natural resource extraction in forested and mineral-rich localities around the archipelago. The 'local strongmen' so often disparaged as the enemies of development appear instead above as the unacknowledged front-line agents of capitalist development.

Against the arguments of Joel Migdal outlined and criticised above, this paper has suggested an alternative framework for the analysis of 'local strongmen', one which pays much closer attention to the opportunities and constraints for the accumulation and monopolisation of local economic and political power which are provided by the macroand micro-structures of the state. As the preceding pages have shown, this framework helps to explain not only when and where 'local strongmen' emerge and entrench themselves, but also the diverging forms which 'local strongman' rule assumes in different institutional contexts. In this analysis, the paper has been ruthlessly, polemically, and perhaps excessively, 'state-centred'.

Indeed, both the strengths and the limitations of this alternative framework for the analysis of 'local strongmen' are evident in the case of emerging forms of local 'mafias', 'networks', and 'clans' in Indonesia since the onset of competitive electoral politics in the country in 1999. While this pattern of local machine politics closely corresponds to the distinctive structures of the Indonesian *state*, it also reflects certain – non-Migdalian - features of what should be acknowledged as a genuinely 'strong' society. That is, if, unlike Migdal, this paper has suggested that 'local strongmen' of various stripes should be understood essentially as extensions of states rather than representatives of societies, then it might be hoped that constraints - and forms of resistance - to strongman rule should also be expected from within the societies in which they are found. Thus the virtually 'pure' cases of bossism observed in the Philippines and Thailand are ones in which, for the most part, only other would-be bosses - and, as noted in passing above, city-based bankers and businessmen constrain local bosses' entrenchment and exercise of power. This configuration is understandable against the backdrop of societies in which the 'vertical' pattern of boss rule is not mitigated by countervailing 'horizontal' solidarities and forms of 'social capital'. Neither in the Philippines nor in Thailand do we find evidence of the strong community, class, ethnic, and religious identities found in Indonesia (or, for example, India). In neither case do we find much in the way of pre-electoral social mobilisation along the lines of the Indonesian (or Indian) struggle for independence. In neither case do we find 'nationalist' impediments to the direct exercise of class power by businessmen (especially those of 'Chinese' ancestry) as seen in more statist economies like Indonesia (or India).

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that the various obstacles and objections to local boss rule in the Philippines and Thailand observed in recent years pale in comparison to the myriad forms of local popular mobilisation against local 'mafias', 'networks', and 'clans' seen in Indonesia since 1999, and the much more complex, collective, and contentious pattern of local electoral mobilisation in the country. ¹² Thus if we adopt 'bossism' as an alternative framework for understanding patterns of variation in 'local strongman' rule, we must also look beyond the bosses and the states in which they are embedded, and examine much more closely the societies from which challenges and constraints to their rule are imposed. For the fruits of democratisation and decentralisation to be more fully enjoyed and more widely shared in countries like the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, a different kind of 'strong society' than that described by Migdal – or that lionised by many avowed supporters of democratisation – should be applauded, assisted, empowered, and mobilised.

¹ In the later book, Migdal's assumptions and arguments with regard to 'local strongmen', while slightly qualified, remain essentially unchanged.

² On this point, see Michael E. Meeker (2002), especially pp. 28-31, 144-147 and 185-226.

³ These arguments are defended and elaborated in John T. Sidel (1999).

⁴ See James Soren Ockey (1992), Ruth McVey (2000) and Daniel Arghiros (2001).

⁵ See John MacDougall (1982) and Michael S. Malley (1999).

⁶ On this point, see for example, R.A. Richards (1978).

⁷ On this phenomenon, see, for example, Loren Ryter (1968).

⁸ See, for example, Sudarno Sumarto, Sulton Mawardi, Syaikhu Usman, Nina Toyamah, Jacqueline Pomeroy, and Roger Montgomery (1998).

⁹ In the village in West Java where Antlöv conducted his fieldwork, for example, there were 178 state offices in a *desa* of 1,600 households (Antlöv 1995:144).

¹⁰ The Perils of Private Security in Indonesia: Guards and Militias on Bali and Lombok (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 7 November 2003).

¹¹ Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 22 Tahun 1999 Tentang Pemerintahan Daerah, Pasal 11.

¹² See, for example, Anton Lucas (1999), Douglas Kammen (2003) and Anton Lucas and Carol Warren (2003).