Political Parties in Democratizing Asia

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What is the role of political parties in democratization? What is the role of political parties in democratizing Asia?

Liberal Party

Democrat Party

Democratic Progressive Party

Indonesian Party of Struggle

Candlelight Party

Cambodian National Rescue Party

Parti German Rakyat

Singapore Democratic Party

Civil Will Green Party

National Awakening Party
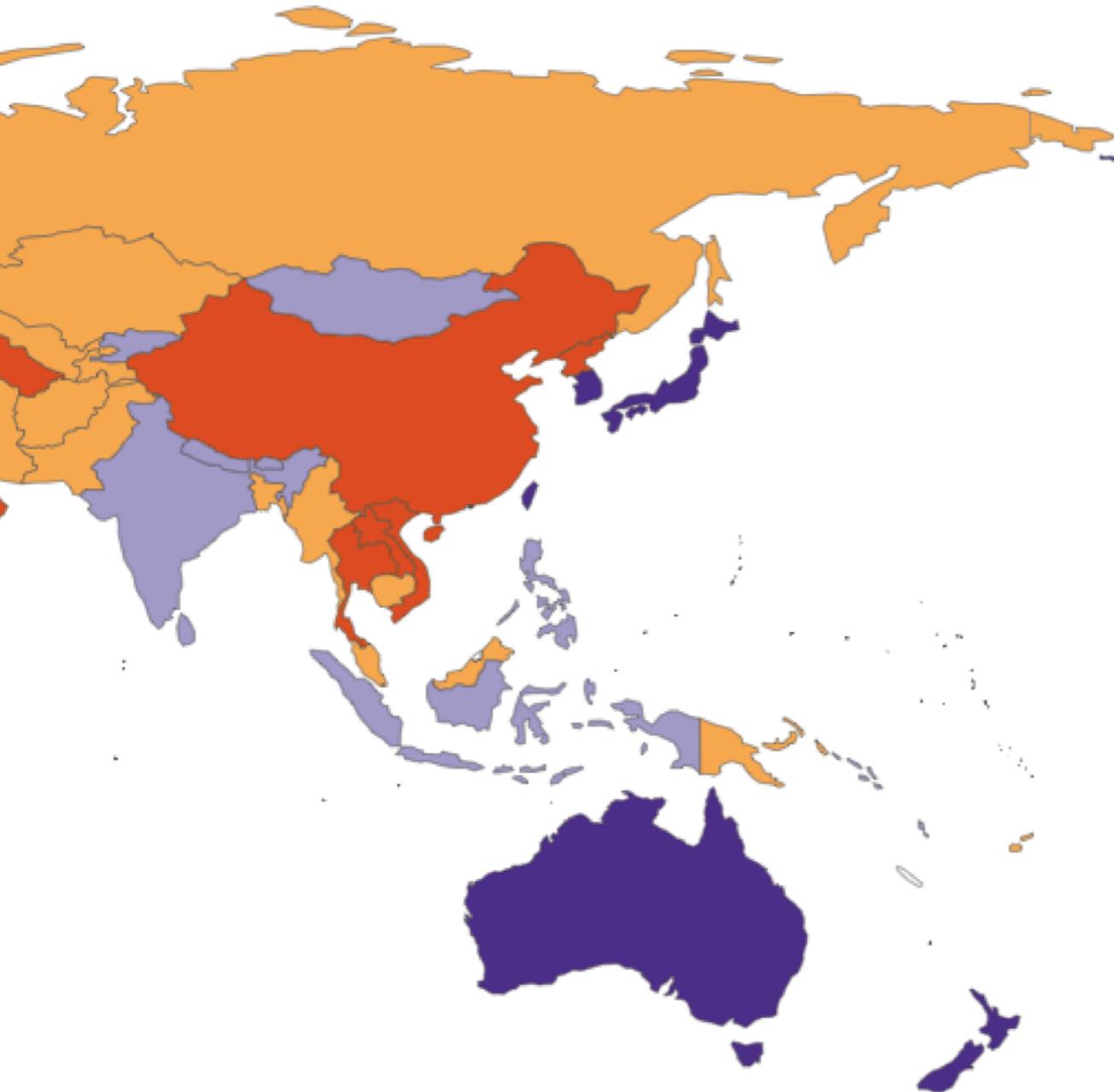
Compelling Puzzle

In the Asia-Pacific, countries at the middle range of development sometimes embraced democracy and sometimes adopted autocracy.

The resilience of "poor democracies," which are "electorally competitive regimes where many or most of the inhabitants are poor and where moderating 'middling men' are proportionally few."

These "democracies against the odds" have become or continue to be democratic despite the persistent poverty, gross inequality, and lack of economic opportunity.

Bermeo and Yashar, 2016
Parties, Movements, and Democracy in the Developing World

"Democratizing" Asia as a verb indicating process and as a noun referring to countries in the region that have endured the odds despite a myriad of historical, structural, and economic constraints in keeping democracy alive.

Additive polyarchy index
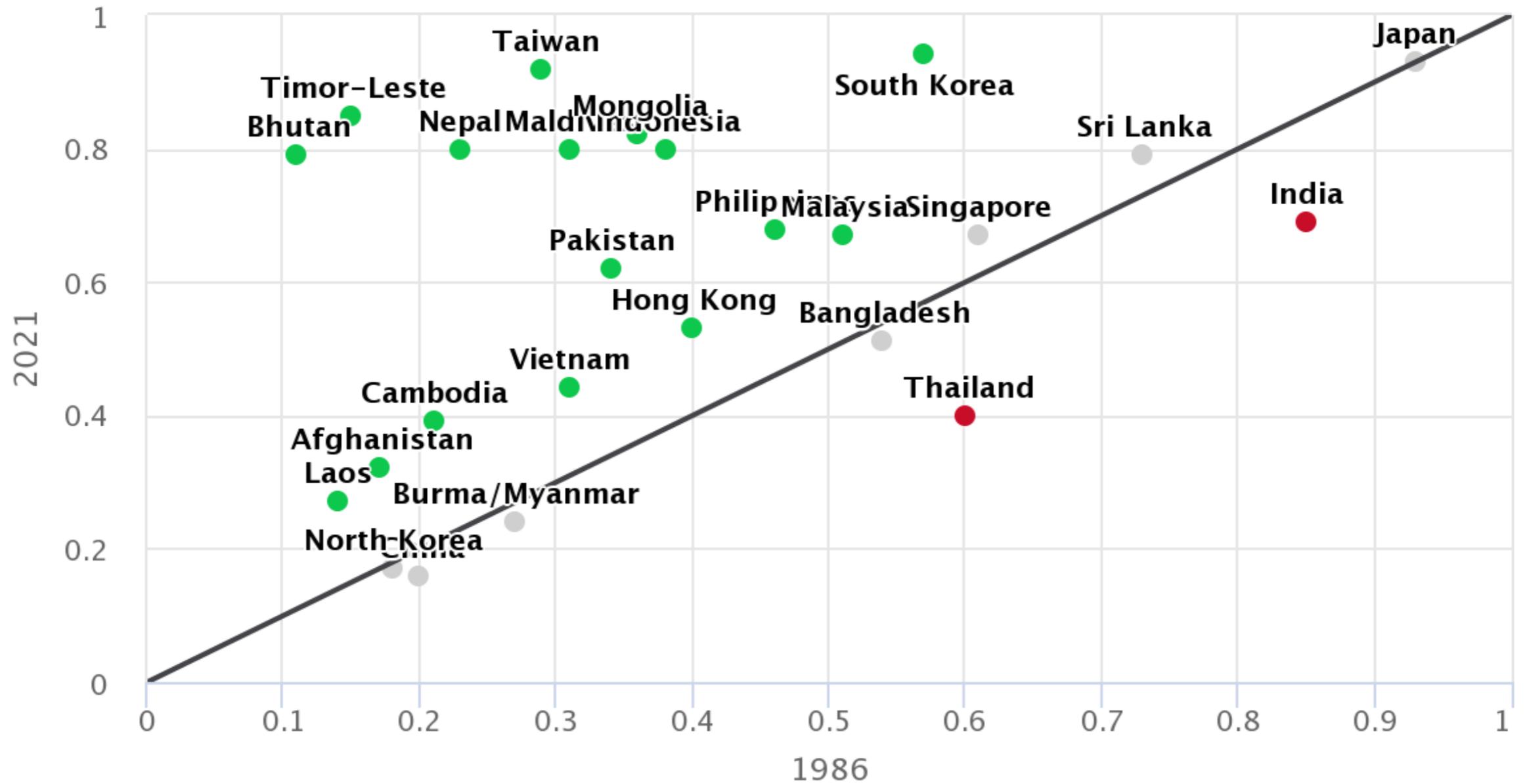
The API is derived from the average of the scores for Robert Dahl's five indices, namely: freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage.

The majority of Asian countries have made tremendous strides in their polyarchy scores since 1986.

Electoral Democracy Index

1986 People Power

1992 Black May

1998 *Reformasi*

Rating

1

0.8

0.6

0.4

0.2

0

1986 1988 1990 1992 1994 1996 1998 2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012 2014 2016
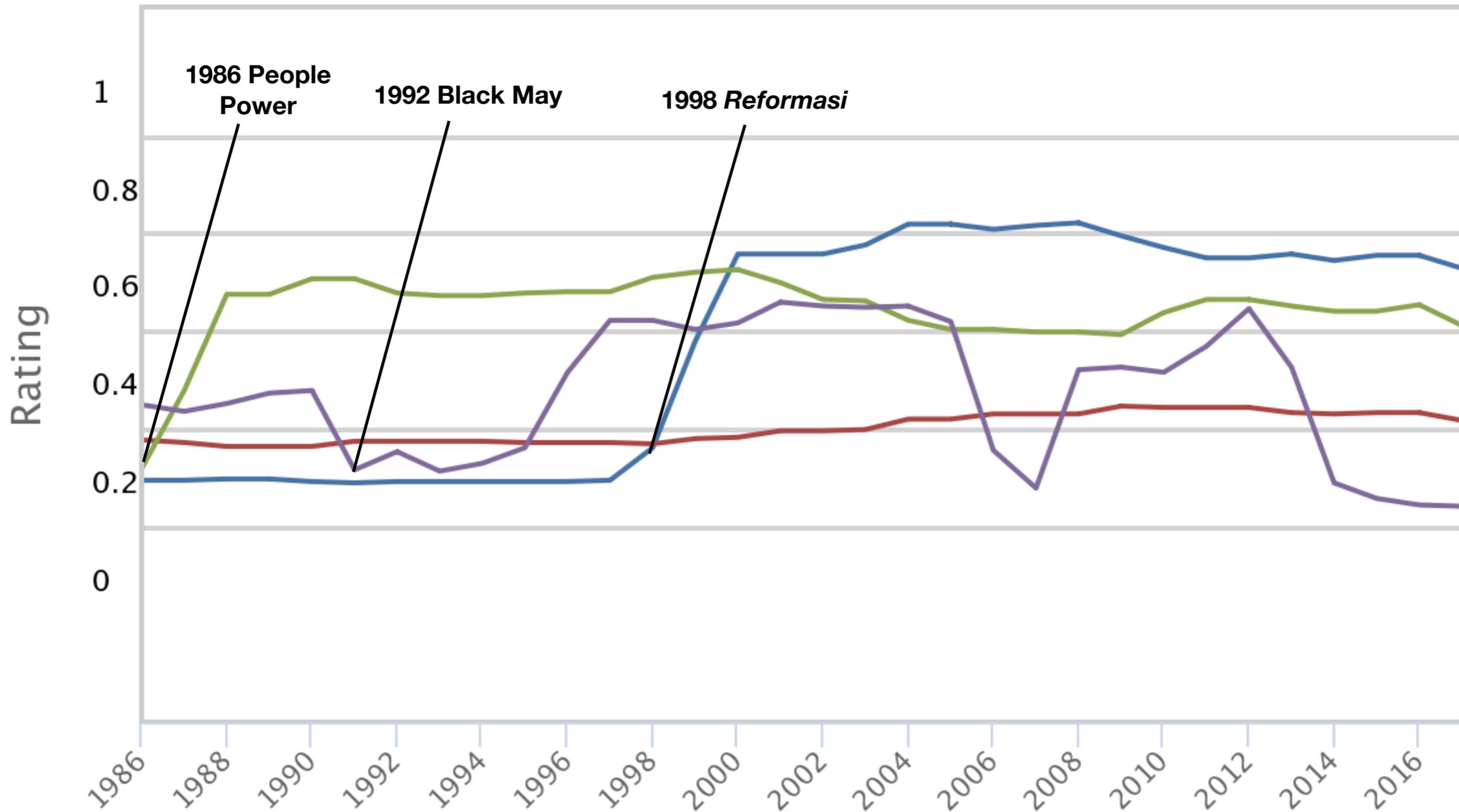
- Restoration of electoral democracy in the region during the Third Wave of democracy
- 1986 People Power Revolution that ousted Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos
- 1992 Black May demonstrations in Thailand in the aftermath of a failed coup.
- 1998 *Reformasi* movement in Indonesia in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis.

Liberal Democracy Index
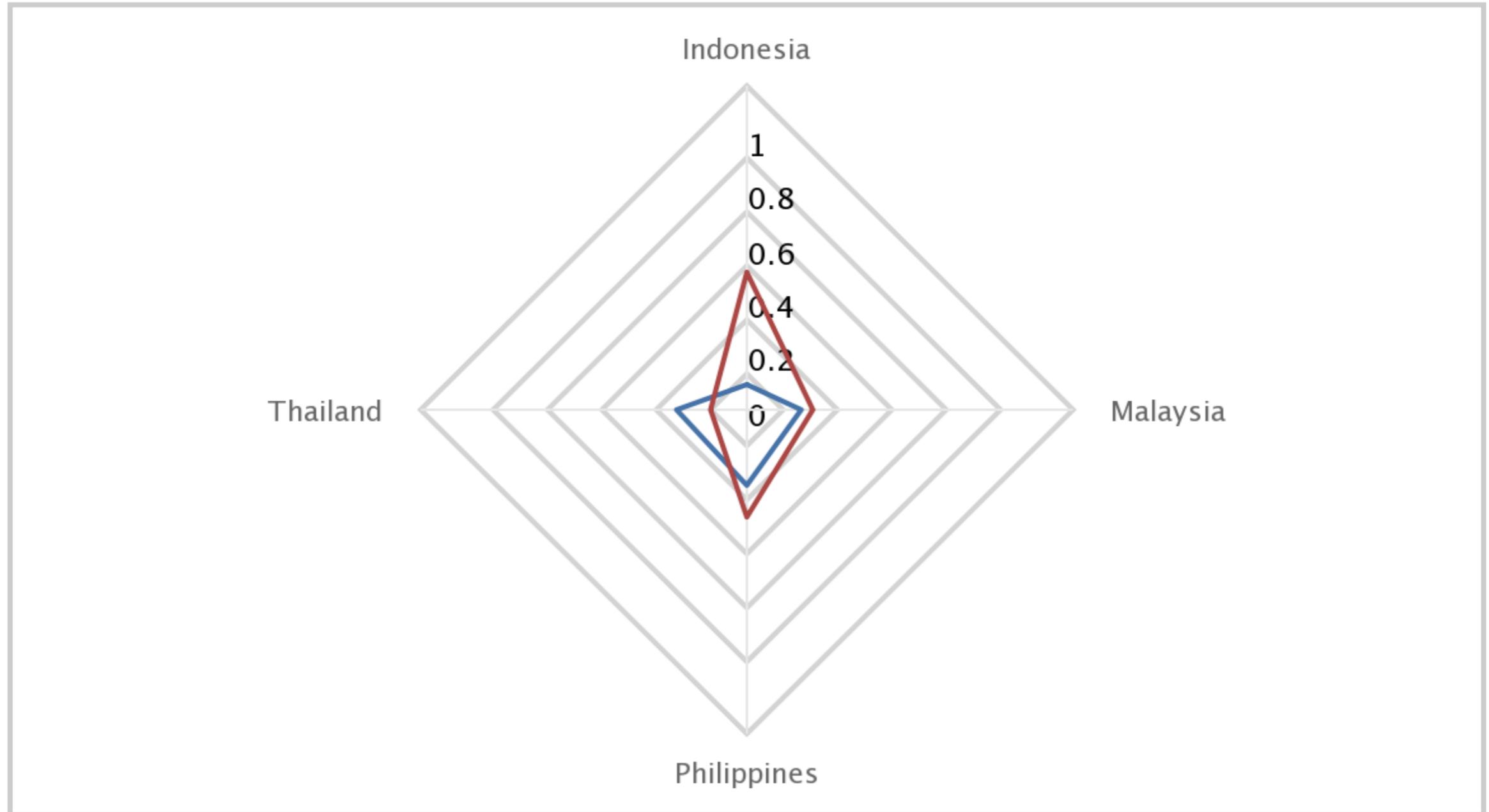
Indonesia is actually the "most improved democracy" in the region.
Historical continuity of relatively institutionalized parties.

WHY PARTIES?

	Articulation	Aggregation	Recruitment
Administration	implement policies	sustain support for government	fill government positions
Opposition	develop alternatives	gain support for change	Build pool of competent people

Source: Sachsenröder 2014, p. 23

POLITICAL PARTIES - A GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT IS ORGANIZED FOR THE PURPOSE OF WINNING GOVERNMENT POWER, BY ELECTIONS OR OTHER MEANS (HEYWOOD 2013, P. 222)

Context and Conduct in Asian Political Parties

Context	Conduct
Initial Conditions	colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, postcolonial regimes, civil war and internal conflict, authoritarianism, democratization
Cultural and Ideational Frames	national liberation, freedom, equality, social justice, religious doctrine, reforms, good governance, democracy, the people, etc.
Party Organization	party type; level of party institutionalization intra-party democracy; factions
Strategic Challenges	coordination, competition, bargain
Multilevel Domains	domestic, international

Source: Adapted from Tilly and Tarrow 2015; Bermeo and Yashar 2016.

Highlight the role of party-movement dynamics in deepening democracy in Asia

POLITICAL PARTY INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Dimensions	Indicators
Roots in society: The party has stable roots in society	1. Party age relative to beginning of multiparty period 2. Changes in electoral support in last and second last elections 3. Links to civil society organizations
Autonomy: The party is relatively independent from individuals within and societal groups outside the party	1. Number of alternations in party leadership 2. Changes in electoral support after alternation in party leadership 3. Decisional autonomy from individuals and groups 4. Popular appreciation of particular party
Organization: There is a constant organizational apparatus at all administrative levels and acts in the interest of the party	1. Membership strength 2. Regular party congresses 3. Material and personal resources 4. Nationwide organizational presence, activities beyond election campaigns
Coherence: The party acts as a unified organization; the party tolerates a certain level of intraparty dissidence	1. Coherence of parliamentary group (no defections or floor-crossing) 2. Moderate relations between intraparty groupings (no dysfunctional factionalism) 3. Tolerance vis-à-vis intraparty dissidence

Source: Sachsenröder 2014, p. 21

Party institutionalization is a process in which individual political parties that participate in elections: experience an increase in organizational stability and value (Based and Stroh 2008: 8).

Party institutionalization index

2022
Cambodia: 0.41
Indonesia: 0.74
Malaysia: 0.84
Mongolia: 0.53
Philippines: 0.21
Singapore: 0.75
Taiwan: 0.76
Thailand: 0.58

Codebook Category

— Cambodia — Indonesia — Malaysia — Mongolia — Philippines — Singapore — Taiwan — Thailand

Highcharts.com | V–Dem data version 13
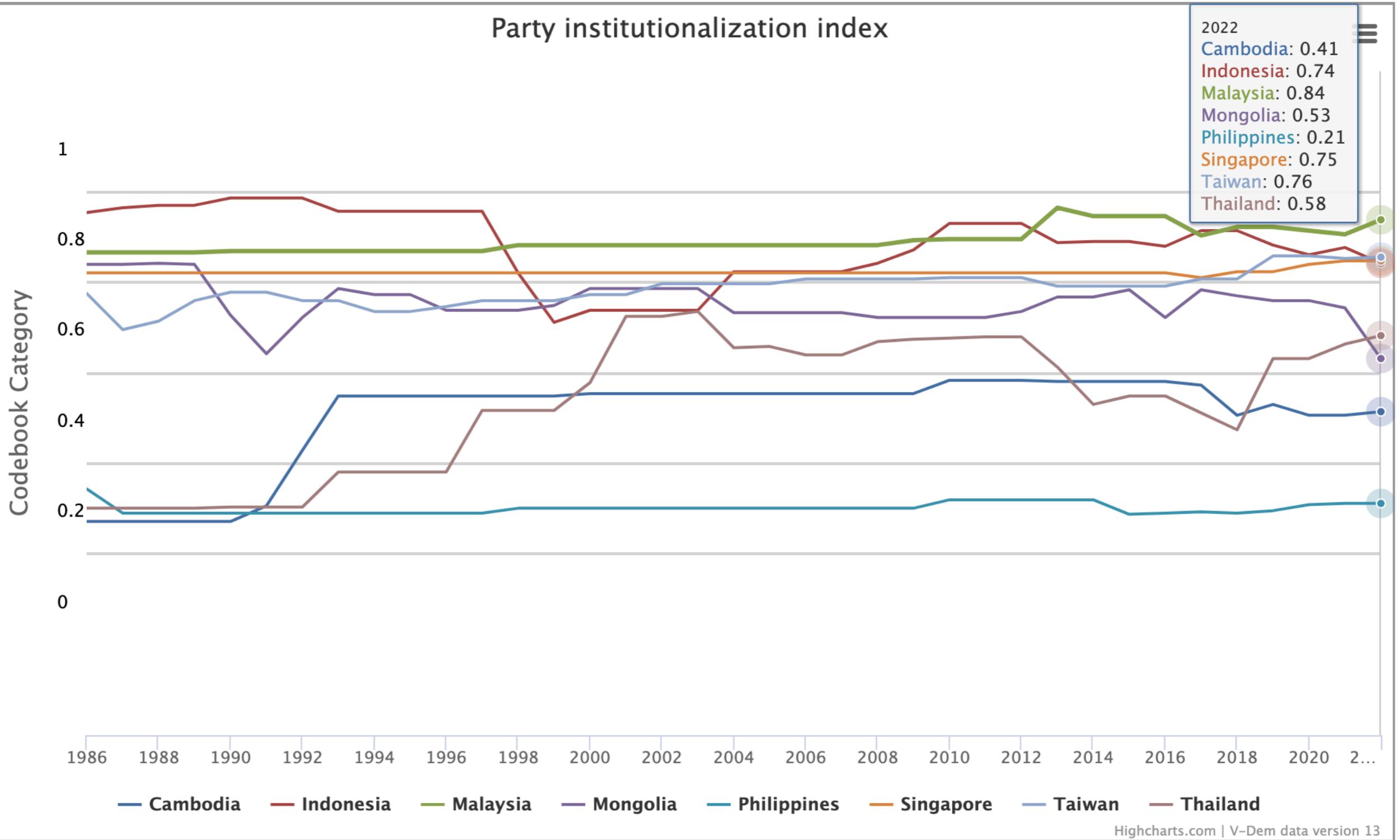
**PI Index = Organization + Branches + Platforms + Leg. Cohesion + Linkages**

TWO MODELS OF PARTY ORGANIZATION

CANDIDATE-ORIENTED

- The candidate-oriented model focuses more on the activities of legislators.
- Political parties perform an overall administrative role and surrender the responsibility of basic political activities to the legislator or candidate.
- The legislator or candidate sets the basic guidelines for party members and designs the grand strategy of election campaigns.
- They are also responsible for fundraising, policy proposals and maintenance of office, and so on.
- Due to weak party discipline and self-autonomy, cross voting in the national legislature is tolerated.

PARTY-ORIENTED

- The party-oriented model posits the centre of politics as the political party.
- The key political functions, such as interest articulation and aggregation, election campaign, fund raising or political donation, political recruitment, policy initiatives, and so on, are performed by the political party….
- A party's base usually refers to the mass public motivated by the party's cause and ideology.
- Party members actively participate in party running and decision-making processes.
- Each legislator depends on the party and finds it almost impossible to crossvote and establish his/her own voice in the parliament due to strong party discipline.

Source: Lim, 2011: 227–228
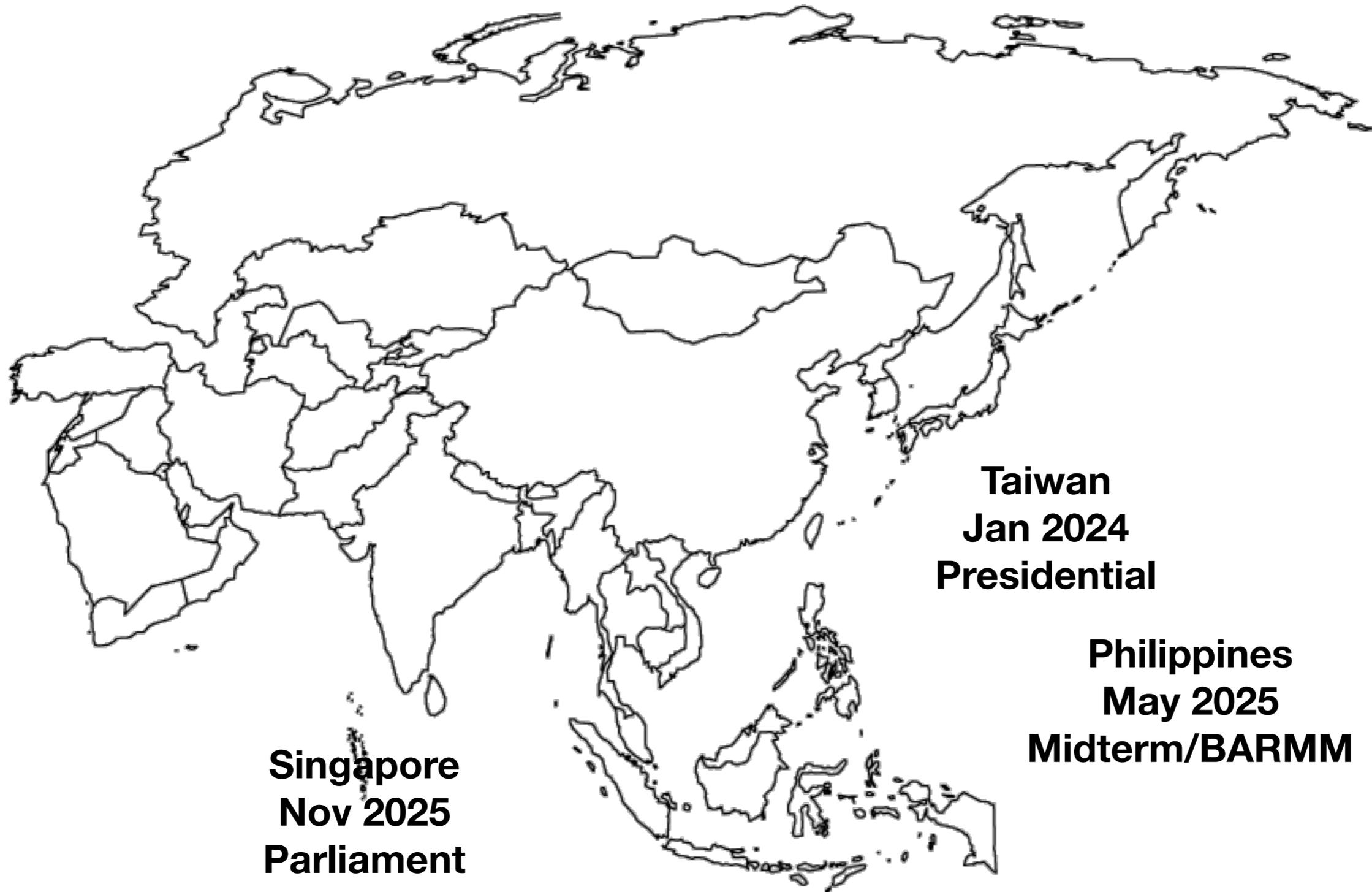
Taiwan
Jan 2024
Presidential

Philippines
May 2025
Midterm/BARMM

Singapore
Nov 2025
Parliament

Indonesia
Feb 2024
Presidential

EDITED BY
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RETHINKING PARTIES
IN DEMOCRATIZING ASIA

- "Democracies against the odds" are countries that have become or continue to be democratic despite persistent challenges.
- They face various problems, including rising socioeconomic disparities, the rise of extremist/separatist movements, economic deterioration, and geopolitical threats.
- The extent to which political parties, including opposition parties, have become institutionalized can act as stabilizers on democracy.