Regional party networks and the limits of democratic norm diffusion in Southeast Asia

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Abstract
Regional party networks are an important instrument for democracy promotion organizations intent on helping build democratic party structures. The main goals of these networks are usually capacity-building and the provision of communication channels, but the affiliation with international donors also turns these networks into contested forums for the diffusion of global norms and values. This article will illustrate that these norm diffusion processes are subject to significant constraints as transnational party networks are shaped by the pre-existing norms and electoral self-interests of their constituent members. The article uses a case study of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats to argue that the diffusion of Western democratic norms through regional party networks is a multidimensional process that can be successful in building small fraternities of committed norm recipients, but faces severe limitations when it comes to transmitting these norms further on into local party organizations.

Introduction

Just a few years ago, Southeast Asia seemed to be on the cusp of a small democratic wave. Opposition parties and movements were making strides in autocracies, such as Burma, Malaysia and Singapore, while the region's young democracies, such as Indonesia, East Timor and the Philippines, showed some remarkable resilience (Diamond, 2012). Today, however, hopes for democratization in Malaysia and Singapore have largely evaporated and Thailand, in the 1990s still the poster boy of democracy in Southeast Asia, has once again regressed to military rule. The reasons for 'Southeast Asia's democracy downer' (Caryl, 2015) are of course manifold, but the lack of political parties with a genuine commitment to defending democratic values has arguably played an important role in the region's democratic stagnation.

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Broadly speaking, most political parties in Southeast Asia possess neither the organizational capacity nor the ideological or programmatic values that could turn them into powerful agents of democratization (Tomsa and Ufen, 2013). And yet some parties with at least notionally democratic platforms have existed for decades, most prominently the Democrat Party (DP) in Thailand and the Liberal Party (LP) in the Philippines. Since 1993 these and other like-minded parties from other parts of Asia have been loosely aligned through the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), an organization largely funded by Western donors that seeks to mediate the diffusion of liberal democratic norms and values into an Asian political context.

The role of political parties and transnational party networks in processes of norm diffusion remains surprisingly understudied, despite the immense potential for parties to act as transmitters of global norms into local contexts. This article seeks to fill this gap by analyzing to what extent CALD and its main financial and ideological sponsor, the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), have succeeded in aiding the diffusion of liberal democratic values among its member parties. Based on an analysis of CALD documents, media coverage and secondary literature on parties and norm diffusion, as well as interviews with current and former CALD and FNF executives and representatives of member parties from selected countries, this article puts forward two main arguments.

First, the establishment and organizational development of CALD has resulted in different types of norm diffusion which vary in nature and impact. To elucidate this point, this article distinguishes between three closely related yet analytically distinct arenas of norm diffusion: first, from the FNF directly to CALD as an organization and its executive leaders; second, among and between the delegates of member parties who attend CALD workshops, seminars and conferences; and third, from these delegates to the parties' domestic environments. The extent to which liberal democratic norms are diffused on these three levels differs significantly, with the most serious limitations to be found on the third level.

The second main argument follows from the first, but shifts the focus to the differences in norm absorption and diffusion between individual member parties. By comparing the impact of CALD activities on three of its member parties – the LP in the Philippines, Thailand's DP and the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*, PDI-P) – the article reveals some major differences but also remarkable similarities in how individual parties respond to their exposure to liberal democratic norms. The most important findings here are that the parties' pre-existing norms and belief systems have been practically impossible to change, and that domestic political considerations have often prevented meaningful engagement with, not to mention adoption of, the externally propagated norms.

In developing these arguments, this article recognizes that 'liberalism' and 'liberal democracy' are essentially contested concepts (Abbey, 2005; Katz, 1997: 46-66), not only within academic discourse but also among development practitioners and policy-makers. Moreover, liberalism in particular carries certain, predominantly negative, connotations in many parts of the world, including Southeast Asia (Zakaria, 1994). In fact, back in 1993 these negative connotations strongly influenced the founding fathers of CALD when they dropped the network's initial working title *Caucus of Asian Liberals* in favour of the ostensibly less confrontational *Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats*. Against this background, it is important to note at the outset that in order to assess the work of CALD and the FNF against some of their own normative benchmarks, this article defines liberal democratic norms and values as those that are advocated as key principles by the FNF. These include freedom of the individual, responsibility, civil and political rights, the rule of law, equality of opportunity, pluralism, competition, free trade and a market economy in which the state does not compete through its own institutions with private enterprises (FNF, 2015).

Structurally, the article is divided into four main sections. Following this introduction, the first main section reviews the scholarly literature on norm diffusion, parties and party networks. In the second section, the article analyzes the reasons behind the formation of CALD. The third section then examines the network's main activities and their relevance for the diffusion of liberal democratic norms. After demonstrating briefly how norm diffusion has occurred on the first two analytical levels, the fourth and last main section illustrates how individual member parties have responded to CALD activities and to what extent, if any, they have integrated liberal democratic values into their organizational and programmatic profiles. The article concludes by highlighting the broader implications of the CALD case for party institutionalization in Southeast Asia.

Norm diffusion and political parties

Broadly defined as 'a complex process that involves information flows, networks of communication, hierarchies of influence, and receptivity to change' (Kopstein and Reilly, 2000: 12), diffusion is a widely used concept in political science and its related sub-disciplines. Although it can be mediated and shaped by so-called norm entrepreneurs, diffusion is generally a fluid process in which norm recipients are not coerced or forced into submission by a dominant external actor. The academic study of diffusion processes is primarily concerned with the transnational spread of information, ideas, norms and values through networks, social movements, institutions and policies. Its prominence grew exponentially after the end of the Cold War when scholars began to frame new approaches to explain the global spread of democracy (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), human rights norms and institutions (Risse et al., 1999) and the rise of regionalism in international relations (Acharya, 2009). More recently, as the global spread of democracy came to a halt (Diamond, 2008), the latest generation of norm theorists has turned their attention to the limits of norm diffusion (Chandler, 2013) and, increasingly, the diffusion of authoritarian rather than democratic norms and values (Tansey, 2016).

This new research focus was borne out of the acknowledgement that in practice the intended recipients of democratic norms only very rarely adopt the externally propagated norms through a one-dimensional process of 'political learning' (Bermeo, 1992). Instead, a more widespread reaction by norm recipients is to seek enhanced legitimacy by adopting external norms mainly rhetorically but without actually altering the pre-existing normative orthodoxy (Acharya, 2009). In constructivist International Relations literature this kind of largely ceremonial organizational behaviour is known as 'isomorphic adaptation' or 'isomorphism' (Rüland, 2014: 239), a concept derived from organizational theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

At the most basic level, isomorphism simply denotes a process by which an organization emulates the structures of another. This article, however, utilizes Rüland's (2014) extended conceptualization of the term, which emphasizes that isomorphic processes of convergence often result in significant rhetoric-action gaps in a given organization. In particular, organizations that display isomorphic behaviour tend to be reluctant to make meaningful normative adjustments, even if they publicly pledge to do so and even if they have adopted formal organizational structures and procedures that resemble those of another organization. Thus understood, isomorphism can be 'either a calculated low-cost response to external paradigmatic pressure, ceremonial adaptation to an organizational model widely considered "appropriate", a move to generate external assistance or – most likely – a combination of all three options' (Rüland, 2014: 240). Beyond isomorphism, another strategy often used by norm recipients is to partially adopt new norms and values, but to modify them during the adoption process in accordance with local socio-political contexts. This widespread phenomenon has been theorized extensively in both the human rights literature, where it is

known as 'vernacularization' (Merry, 2006), and in the field of International Relations, where Acharya (2009) has popularized the notion of 'norm localization'.

Regardless of how norm recipients actually behave, diffusion theorists tend to conceptualize them predominantly as state actors, whereas norm entrepreneurs comprise a more diverse range of actors including, for example, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or transnational activist networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Missing in most accounts of norm diffusion are, somewhat surprisingly, political parties, despite the potentially significant role they can play in the diffusion of norms and values. Theoretically, parties seem to be ideally positioned to be involved in norm diffusion as they operate at the intermediary level between society and the state. Here they can, for instance, act as norm recipients if they adopt programmatic norms and values derived from global ideologies such as liberalism, socialism or Islamism. At the same time, they can also act as 'translators', the kind of norm transmitters identified by Merry (2006) as crucial to the process of 'vernacularization', that is the adaptation of global values to specific local contexts. Parties that are connected to transnational party networks appear to be especially predestined to fulfil this role as they have, just like internationally connected NGOs and activist groups, 'one foot in the transnational community and one at home' (Merry, 2006: 229).

So far, however, diffusion theorists have largely disregarded political parties. At the same time, party and party network scholars, for their part, have paid equally scant attention to the diffusion of norms, values and ideas. The available literature on transnational party politics, for example, focuses almost exclusively on organizational and functional aspects of Europe's transnational party federations and their impact on EU politics (Hix, 1996: 308–31; Ladrech, 2006), while ideational developments are largely neglected. Meanwhile, studies about transnational party networks outside Europe are practically non-existent. At the same time, scholars who work more generally on political parties have examined values and ideas more systematically, but they tend to do so without reference to diffusion processes and rarely consider the role of transnational party networks. Good examples here include Randall and Svåsand's (2002) discussion of 'value infusion' as a dimension of party institutionalization or Forestiere and Allen's (2011) analysis of the relationship between ideas, cognitive locks and single party dominant regimes. Thus, given the shortage of works that combine the study of norm diffusion, party networks and individual parties, this article makes an important and innovative contribution to the study of party politics by examining to what extent transnational party networks can in fact act as transmitters of political norms and values.

One potential reason for the existing gap in the literature is that, in contrast to the mass parties of the first half of the twentieth century, contemporary parties are far less clearly defined by their ideological or programmatic orientation. In Europe, for example, catch-allism, cartelization, dealignment and populism have all taken their toll on the programmatic identities of political parties (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Katz and Mair, 1995; Taggart, 1995). In many regions outside Europe, meanwhile, especially in the developing world, parties are often little more than electoral vehicles centred on charismatic leaders, clientelistic networks or ethnic affiliations (Gunther and Diamond, 2001). The more shallow the organizational infrastructure and the more glaring the lack of value infusion in a political party, the weaker its overall institutionalization (Randall and Svåsand, 2002). But that is not to say that no well-institutionalized parties exist in these parts of the world. Especially in non-democratic and semi-democratic regimes some reasonably well-institutionalized parties have in fact evolved, as exemplified in Southeast Asia by Singapore's People's Action Party and Malaysia's United Malays National Organization (Hicken and Kuhonta, 2011).

Indeed, even in new democracies not all parties lack organizational capacity and value infusion. Nor are they all immune to norm diffusion processes. In one of the few works that analyze the role of political parties in this context, Dakowska (2002: 272) describes what she calls 'the Europeanisation of Polish political parties during their association with European party federations in the 1990s.' She

demonstrates how EU enlargement and the prospect of joining party federations such as the European People's Party provided strong incentives for Polish parties to adopt Western European norms. The process of norm diffusion was facilitated to a large degree by German political foundations who acted as effective norm entrepreneurs. Johansson (2010) reports similar findings about the Estonian Social Democratic Party, whose quest to emulate Western European Social Democratic parties was fuelled by frequent interactions with parties from Germany, the UK and the Nordic countries, as well as political foundations and transnational party networks such as the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (Johansson, 2010: 151–155). The pattern of norm adoption in these cases largely followed Bermeo's (1992) concept of 'diffusion by interaction' (as opposed to 'diffusion by comparison'). It should be noted, however, that the broader structural conditions of imminent EU enlargement created significant pressure for the Polish and Estonian parties to conform to EU norms and values. European party federations, for example, applied rigorous compliance mechanisms for Polish parties intent on joining (Dakowska, 2002: 282), pre-empting the possibility of isomorphic behaviour. Diffusion was therefore only a small part of the process of norm adoption, complemented or perhaps even trumped by quasi-coercive conditionality.

The peculiar conditions surrounding the EU enlargement process, and the fact that Polish and Baltic party systems feature party spectrums that reflect fairly similar kinds of social cleavages as those in Western Europe, make it unlikely that the trajectories of norm diffusion experienced by these Central European parties are emulated by parties in other parts of the world. Yet, the political foundations that were so instrumental in the Polish case are also active as norm entrepreneurs in other parts of the world. The FNF, for example, has sought to facilitate the diffusion of liberal democratic norms and values through the sponsoring of various regional liberal party networks, including CALD (founded in 1993), the Liberal Network for Latin America (founded in 2004) and the Arab Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (founded in 2008 under the name Network of Arab Liberals). In Africa, it is a partner organization for the Africa Liberal Network (founded in 2003). The following analysis will use the oldest of these networks as a case study to examine how and to what extent democratic norms can be transmitted from Western donors via regional party networks into non-Western political parties.

The formation of CALD: Bottles of beer and other strategic interests

CALD was formed in 1993 as 'the only regional alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia which offers a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation' (CALD, 2015a). Founding members were Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, Thailand's DP, the Philippines' LP, Parti Gerakan Rakyat of Malaysia and two now defunct parties, the Democratic Party of Korea and the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party of Cambodia. Over the years, several new member parties were admitted to the organization including the Singapore Democratic Party, Sri Lanka's Liberal Party, the Indonesian PDI-P, the Civil Will Green Party of Mongolia, the Cambodia National Rescue Party and the now defunct National Council of the Union of Burma. By 2015, CALD had nine full fee-paying member parties plus one associate member party and three observer parties (CALD, 2015a).

The CALD website provides a somewhat romanticized account of the network's initial formation, describing it as the result of 'an evening of serious musings' that took place 'over bottles of beer' on the sidelines of a conference of liberals in Portugal (CALD, 2015a). But beyond the picturesque setting of the Portuguese surroundings, there were very rational considerations at play. For both the FNF, which was hosting the Portugal conference, as well as the Asian party leaders who attended the conference, the formation of CALD was not just a 'meeting of minds' but rather

a strategic initiative that reflected strong organizational interests on both sides. On the one hand, the FNF was in the midst of shifting the focus of its activities from socio-economic development assistance to political education and democracy promotion.[1] In Asia, however, where authoritarian rulers such as Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad were propagating the supremacy of Asian values, hostility to the term liberalism was widespread. As a result, the foundation began to advocate regionalization as a strategy that would strengthen a transnational democratic identity and give Asian pro-democracy parties a sense of ownership over the local discourse on democracy.

On the other hand, the formation of CALD also represented a response by Asian parties to the new normative challenges brought about by the spread of democratization in the region. By 1993, the political transformations that had begun in the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1987/88), Taiwan (1987/88), Thailand (1992) and Cambodia (1993) were creating a tantalizing mix of challenges and opportunities for pro-democracy forces in the region, including the possibility of open and uncertain electoral competition. A few years later, Indonesia would join the democratic bandwagon, but regime clampdowns on democratic movements in China (1989), Burma (1990) and Malaysia (1998) also showed that democracy still encountered fierce resistance from entrenched authoritarian interests in the region. On a multilateral level, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also rejected pressure for democratization (Rüland *2014: 249–50*). In this political climate, the prospect of a new organization that would foster capacity-building and networking among like-minded parties was an attractive proposition for many parties as it was seen as an opportunity for learning and mutual moral support at a time of profound political upheaval.[2]

The first parties to respond positively to the FNF's overtures were the Philippines' LP and Thailand's DP, followed soon by the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party and the now defunct party of South Korea's democracy icon Kim Dae Jung. Arguably, none of these parties had sound liberal credentials, but they did have relatively clearly defined political identities based on their opposition to authoritarianism. Building on this reputation, they joined CALD in the hope of enhancing their international legitimacy and forging new links that could be beneficial in their new domestic political struggles.[3] The formation of CALD therefore carried traces of both isomorphism as well as localization. It was isomorphic because the parties' decisions to join CALD were aimed primarily, though not exclusively, at an international audience and linked to the hope of securing another form of external assistance. Moreover, the formation of CALD was initially a largely ceremonial step, complemented by many aspirational statements but few concrete activities.

But there were also elements of localization. While pleasing an international audience was an important motivation, domestic concerns also mattered. For parties engaged in the early stages of a democratization process, CALD represented an opportunity to acquire technocratic know-how that could be used to strengthen party programs and infrastructures. Organizational and normative adaptation, in other words, was not only possible but perhaps even desired at this early stage. Besides, despite the strong involvement of the FNF, CALD perceived itself as an organization that was not simply emulating Western models, but was run 'by Asians for Asians' and therefore more cognizant of local concerns than global groupings such as the Liberal International.

What CALD does and what it aspires to do: Norm diffusion on three different levels

According to the CALD charter, the group's main objectives are to foster the growth of society based on liberal democratic values, to facilitate communication and networking among and between members as well as to discuss and analyze political, social and economic developments in Asia (CALD, 2015b). These goals are to be achieved by means of capacity-building projects and programs such as leadership training, conferences and exchanges, seminars, workshops, visits as

well as exchange of information through publication and research. Through these objectives and activities, three layers of norm diffusion are woven into CALD's organizational fabric: first, from the sponsoring FNF to the Asian members of CALD; second, among and between the individual party elites who participate in CALD activities; third, from these party elites to local party branches, members and supporters in the countries where the individual member parties hail from.

On the first level, the diffusion of liberal norms and values has been the most effective, for two main reasons. First, most CALD activities originate in the Manila-based secretariat whose staff have undergone extensive training in the FNF's International Academy for Leadership in Germany. As a result, the CALD secretariat is now run by people who have a sound understanding of what liberalism is. By fostering a close relationship with the CALD secretariat, the FNF has ensured that the overwhelming majority of CALD projects really do reflect the liberal democratic values of the Western norm entrepreneur. Second, norm compliance is further facilitated by the fact that the FNF still funds a significant percentage of the CALD budget and has to approve the expenses for the projects and programs it supports.[4] The transmission of norms on the first analytical level, in other words, is shaped strongly by the hierarchical relation between CALD and its main financial sponsor.

Nevertheless, CALD is not merely a passive recipient of Western liberal norms. Localization also occurs, especially when it comes to economic policy. Whereas the FNF always advocates liberal economic policies with as little state intervention as possible, CALD has at times openly endorsed the need for state interventionism. A good example is a project on climate change, initiated in 2011, which has involved a number of seminars, workshops and conferences over the years (CALD, 2014). Although climate change may hardly seem like a core topic for liberals, the FNF nevertheless agreed to support the project with the understanding that it would focus primarily on the potential for new entrepreneurial opportunities arising from climate change. CALD leaders, however, have called for a substantial role for the state in handling the effects of climate change, framed around liberal catchphrases such as freedom, rights and the rule of law (Acosta, 2014).

On the second level, norm diffusion occurs as a more complex mixture between genuine absorption, localization and isomorphism. When CALD organizes an event, member parties are invited to send delegates in accordance with expertise and experience. Many parties, however, send the same delegates over and over again, regardless of the specific focus of an event. Former CALD secretary general Neric Acosta describes these regular participants as a 'fraternity', a small core group of party elites from various member parties who relish the international networking opportunities provided by CALD.[5] Many of these regulars, it seems, have embraced the norms and values represented by CALD and are known within their respective domestic environments as proponents of democratic reform. These regulars come closest to what might be termed the 'model CALD citizen' as they genuinely appreciate the opportunities for communication and political learning and have at times directly adopted strategies and ideas practised by other members of the network.

Beyond the committed core, however, there are also those who like to, as one LP official put it, 'learn from Europe, but modify it to suit local conditions'.[6] This category of delegates comprises especially those who embrace the chance to learn new technical skills (for example, campaign strategies or communication skills), but are reluctant to engage more deeply with the actual norms and values that CALD stands for. Other delegates view the workshops and conferences organized by CALD primarily as a travel opportunity, while in yet other cases the choice of delegates by the individual parties is driven by pragmatic considerations, for example the availability of party members with good English language skills. Some of these less than committed delegates keep returning to events many times without ever moving beyond liberal democratic rhetoric. Nevertheless, despite these limitations liberal norms have travelled fairly well on the first two levels of analysis. To determine whether these norms are also being transferred further into national party organizations, the

following section will analyze the relationship between CALD and three of its member parties, the Philippines' LP, Thailand's DP and the Indonesian PDI-P.

These three parties were selected because they have some important characteristics in common. First, all three parties were, before they became members of CALD, potent symbols of opposition to authoritarian rule and they all joined CALD shortly after democratization began in their respective countries. Second, compared to other member parties of CALD, these three are fairly old and can justifiably claim to have some relatively well-established roots in society. Third, all three parties have a reasonable territorial reach and especially the PDI-P and the DP have set up comprehensive networks of local branches (Mietzner, 2012: 523; Sirivunnabood, 2013: 164), even if many of these branches are dominated by clientelistic networks rather than well-functioning party machineries. In short, all three parties possess at least some institutional characteristics that could enable them to continue the process of norm diffusion from the second to the third analytical level.

The impact on individual member parties

The Liberal Party (Philippines)

Of all the parties that joined CALD, the LP had what might be regarded as the 'purest' liberal heritage. Owing to the Philippines' past as an American colony, liberal values such as individual freedom, pluralism and participatory democracy have been prevalent among Filipino elites since the early days of the Republic. Founded just before the Philippines achieved independence in 1946, the LP became one of two parties representing these liberal values and ideas in what essentially became a carbon copy of the American two-party system (Ufen, 2008). But as in the US, the parties in the Philippines never developed into European-style mass parties based on ideological commitment. Instead, they were simply electoral vehicles for powerful family clans striving for political office and the associated patronage opportunities (Teehankee, 2013). Liberalism was a political label that resonated vaguely with large parts of these elites, but it was not a reflection of a programmatic orientation that would guide policy development.

Nevertheless, the LP became somewhat associated with liberal democratic values when the Philippines plunged into martial law during the Marcos years (1972–1986). However, the party's nascent reputation as a pro-democracy party was more the result of opposition by individual politicians such as Benigno Aquino Jr. rather than the party as an organization. How feeble this reputation was became clear after the end of the martial law period, when the LP was unable to benefit from the democratic spirit of the People's Power movement that ousted Ferdinand Marcos. Rather than becoming the organizational home for pro-democratic forces, the LP disappeared in electoral no man's land as elites who supported the democratization process split into numerous small and often ephemeral parties.

In search of a moral boost, the LP joined CALD in 1993 as one of the network's founding members. Since then, it has been one of the most active members of CALD, boasting its liberal credentials in glossy publications, hosting high profile CALD events and frequently sending prominent party leaders to CALD activities. LP officials maintain that the party has benefitted enormously from CALD's capacity-building and the opportunities for exchange and networking with like-minded parties.[7] However, very little of this capacity-building has filtered down into the party. Regular LP participants at CALD events acknowledge that only a small number of party members have even heard of CALD. Invitations to workshops and conferences usually end up on the desks of the same people rather than party members who are still unfamiliar with CALD. In the rare instances that new party delegates do join CALD events, they tend to be uninterested and unprepared. Liberal

norms and values thus get recycled among the same small group of elites rather than disseminated deeper among the rank and file.

Once a CALD event is over, there is usually no follow-up through internal party mechanisms. Participants at the events have virtually no opportunity to share their experiences in a systematic way, transfer their new skills or shape a new normative orthodoxy that could be based on the norms and values of CALD and find expression in programmatic development or policy initiatives. For some regular CALD participants, the main problem here is a lack of support from the top party leadership, which is largely indifferent to CALD and primarily focused on domestic policy matters. Perhaps more important, though, is the fact that the LP is not immune from one of the main pathologies of Philippine party politics, namely the dominant role of political clans. According to Teehankee (2013: 197), more than half of the LP's congressmen in the 15th Philippine Congress (2010–2016) were members of political dynasties and, more often than not, securing patronage for the family trumps commitment to abstract political values. Ironically, for CALD the problems associated with clan politics became more serious when the LP finally returned to power in 2010. Once appointed to high-ranking government positions, even some of the ostensibly committed liberal democrats who appeared to have internalized the norms and values propagated by CALD began to reveal some significant rhetoric-action gaps when it came to defending the interests of their own family clans. Thus, while CALD understandably took pride in the LP's success in the 2010 elections, the party's victory was actually somewhat counterproductive for CALD's aims to translate liberal norms and values into tangible LP policies.

The Democrat Party (Thailand)

Like the LP, Thailand's DP was founded in 1946. It became known for its opposition to militarism between the 1950s and the 1970s, when Thailand was dominated by a powerful alliance of monarchists, the military and the bureaucracy. In the 1980s, the DP consolidated this reputation and in 1992 it won the famous September elections that pitched pro-democratic 'angel' parties against pro-military 'devil' parties (Askew, 2008: 43–45). But Thailand's subsequent democratization process was marred by continuing political instability that included the rise and fall of controversial Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the 'good coup' of 2006, a brief spell in government for the DP and eventually, after months of violent street protests, a return to military rule in 2014. Significantly, the DP did not oppose the military interventions in 2006 and 2014, at least not publicly. On the contrary, with its open hostility towards Thaksin and its refusal to accept electoral defeat, the DP directly contributed to the escalating political polarization in Thailand that resulted in the latest coup (Connors, 2014). In view of the DP's shifting political allegiances from anti- to pro-military, Campbell (2013) maintains that the DP is 'hilariously misnamed'.

The DP itself, of course, would disagree. Despite its tacit support for violent street protests and military coups, the Democrats claim to defend democracy. Their vision of democracy, however, is not based on key pillars of Western liberal democracy, such as electoral competition and accountability. Instead, it is embedded in what Connors (2008: 144) has called 'royal liberalism […], a liberalism shaped by fear of an uneducated citizenry unschooled in appropriately restrained democratic practice and manipulated by demagogues, otherwise known as the "tyranny of the majority"' Royal liberalism is embodied by many groups in Thailand, but as 'liberalism's establishment protagonists' (Connors, 2008: 148), the DP is key to its political representation. DP leaders are aware of this and like to highlight the party's commitment to good governance and a free market economy.

The enduring legacy of royal liberalism puts the DP in a unique position among CALD's member parties. In contrast to the Philippine LP, for example, which possessed a Western-style but

poorly elaborated liberal tradition, the DP's existing normative orthodoxy was shaped by liberal ideas and values that had been vernacularized long before the formation of CALD. Combining Western values with ancient Buddhist notions of monarchical power, the DP's ideological foundation is based on a politically liberal but socially and morally conservative worldview. The Western norm entrepreneurs behind the formation of CALD probably hoped that this normative orthodoxy could be reshaped in favour of a 'purer' Western-style liberalism. But instead, the opposite occurred. If in the early 2000s the DP's alternative vision to Thaksin's pluto-populism was still based on the good governance paradigm that had inspired the 1997 constitution, the overwhelming force of the Thaksin juggernaut then made the DP increasingly resistant to liberal democratic norms. Unable to defeat their archenemy at the ballot box, the former anti-military party bolstered its ties with the armed forces and became more and more dogmatic in its defence of royalist and elite privileges. In short, domestic political conditions prompted DP leaders to discard rather than strengthen the party's liberal traditions.

For CALD, the DP's about-face is a double dilemma. First, it is proof that in Thailand CALD has, for the time being, failed to achieve its charter goal of fostering the growth of society based on liberal democratic values. More specifically, it has failed to transmit its liberal democratic norms to the DP and also failed to build the kind of democratic capacity that would have been necessary to counteract the organizational development taken by the DP since the early 2000s. Second, the DP's support for military rule has exposed CALD's inability to sanction its own members, even if they blatantly violate key democratic principles. Although discontent about the DP is now rife within CALD, there are no mechanisms in the network's rules and regulations that could lead to the expulsion of a member party or at least a formal warning. DP representatives have been asked to justify the party's political decisions at CALD Executive Committee meetings, but as all executive decisions are taken by consensus between the member parties rather than voting, the DP has never allowed for criticism of its actions to be expressed through formal CALD statements.

The Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle

Indonesia's PDI-P became a full CALD member in 2010 after several years of observer status. Officially formed in 1999 as the successor to the Indonesian Democratic Party, which had operated as one of only two recognized opposition parties during the authoritarian New Order regime, the PDI-P entered Indonesia's reform era as one of the key symbols of the struggle for democracy. Thanks to the appeal of this symbolism and the popularity of party leader Megawati Sukarnoputri, the PDI-P won the first post-New Order election in 1999, but over the years the party forfeited most of its reformist credentials and its electoral results deteriorated (Mietzner, 2012: 515). It was not until 2014 that the party re-emerged as winner of a parliamentary election. As in 1999, one of the reasons for its victory was that voters, once again, associated the party and its presidential candidate (this time Joko Widodo) with hope for democratic reforms.

The PDI-P's commitment to the basic pillars of democratic rule is certainly undisputed. Over the years, it has demonstrated this commitment by, for example, defending the rights of religious minorities, accepting electoral defeat and acting as opposition party in a patronage-driven political system in which very few parties are willing to go into opposition. But the PDI-P was never a *liberal* democratic party, and it did not even pretend to be one. At a party congress in 2010, for instance, party leader Megawati Sukarnoputri reportedly declared that liberal democracy 'could never be a "red carpet" that would bring social justice' (Aspinall, 2010). More recently, at the 2015 national party congress, she insisted that all decisions at the congress be taken by consensus because 'voting is not our culture, but Western culture, which has been imported and brought to our place' (*Kompas*, 2015).

These statements by Megawati are worth noting here because they highlight important differences between the PDI-P and its counterparts from the Philippines and Thailand. First, in contrast to the LP and DP, Indonesia's PDI-P is a highly leader-centric organization. Megawati has been in charge since 1993 and still makes all the important decisions alone, appoints the party board single-handedly and 'considers her word final and binding' (Mietzner, 2012: 520). Second, Megawati and the party she controls differ from the LP and the DP in their attitude towards the norms and values propagated by CALD. The PDI-P is neither just indifferent towards CALD and what it stands for (like many LP officials) nor does it at least rhetorically profess to be committed to liberal democracy (like many DP officials). Instead, it appears to be inherently hostile towards some of CALD's key norms. In place of liberal democracy, the party's main ideological tenet is nationalism derived from the party's spiritual inspiration, Indonesia's first president Sukarno. Beyond this populist nationalism, PDI-P also advocates collectivism, concern for the 'wong cilik' (the little people) and a protectionist people's economy that is critical of key pillars of economic liberalism.

Given the absence of intra-party democracy within PDI-P and its reluctance to be associated with liberalism, the party's membership in CALD seems rather curious. One may argue that in the beginning it joined the network for the same reasons as the other parties that had set up the network earlier on, namely as a reaction to the uncertainty surrounding Indonesia's transition to democracy. During the early 2000s, the political situation in Indonesia was indeed fluid with extensive communal violence, a presidential impeachment process in 2001, a volatile party system and widespread nostalgia for the New Order (Crouch, 2010). At the same time, the international community poured massive resources into helping Indonesia consolidate its young democracy as the country was seen as a crucial test case for the viability of a Muslim democracy. In this political context, PDI-P deemed it beneficial to be open to external support, hopeful that this would shore up its own legitimacy, provide assistance for party development and open up new channels for international networking.[8]

The decision to join CALD, however, was a purely isomorphic strategy. That the party was not intent on engaging genuinely with liberal democratic values became clear very quickly as Megawati hesitated for several years to upgrade the PDI-P's initial observer status to full membership. Only in 2010 did the small group of committed regular CALD participants from the PDI-P convince her to sign off on a full membership. But even after that symbolic step was taken, the PDI-P still tried to keep its CALD profile as low as possible, for example by declining to take over the rotating chairmanship when it was scheduled to do so. During the 2014 elections, CALD election monitors disguised their organizational affiliation in order not to fuel allegations raised during the election campaign that PDI-P's presidential candidate Joko Widodo was too liberal. Party officials who have attended CALD events in the past readily acknowledge that the party as a whole has little interest in CALD as there are few tangible benefits to be gained from membership.[9] All in all, it is clear that a transmission of liberal democratic norms and values from CALD to the PDI-P never occurred as the party has neither altered nor adjusted its preconceived normative orthodoxy.

Conclusion

When CALD was created in 1993, it served a clear purpose for both the FNF as the main financial and ideological backer as well as the parties that joined the network. Faced with the political and economic uncertainty brought about by the third wave of democratization, both sides embraced the new transnational party network as an unprecedented opportunity for communication, capacity-building and political learning. More than 20 years on, it is noteworthy that CALD has not only expanded its membership and increased the number of dedicated office staff, but also established youth and women's groups and broadened the scope of its regular activities. In view of these

developments, it is understandable that many of those involved with CALD see the network as a success story.

The analysis provided in this article, however, sounds a more cautious note. While it is true that the CALD secretariat has established itself as a source of liberal democratic activism in Asia, its impact on the various member parties remains confined to individual party officials rather than the parties as organizations. In all three cases that were examined in more detail here, CALD has been unable to shape the parties' programmatic outlook to the extent that they became thoroughly infused with liberal democratic values. Arguably, the LP of the Philippines has been most receptive of CALD's norms and values because its own pre-existing normative orthodoxy was already derived from liberal ideas. However, the party has yet to pursue a clear policy agenda based on liberal democratic norms and values as Philippine politics remains dominated by clans and charismatic populists rather than competition between programmatic parties. In Thailand and Indonesia, the limits of CALD's norm diffusion efforts are even more striking. Although both Thailand's DP and the Indonesian PDI-P joined the network as symbols against authoritarian repression, they subsequently refused to incorporate even some of the most fundamental of CALD's principles into their programmatic identities.

But the growing gap between the rhetoric of CALD as an organization and the actions of some of its member parties is not only a reflection of the enduring strength of the parties' pre-existing norms and values. It can also be attributed to changes in the incentive structures faced by CALD's member parties, both internationally and domestically. Internationally, the global spread of democracy had stalled by the early 2000s (Diamond, 2008), thereby lessening the need for parties to appear democratic for legitimacy purposes. Domestically, meanwhile, many CALD member parties had found their place in the newly evolving political systems at home and no longer saw the need for programmatic development through a transnational party network. Generally, domestic political considerations usually trumped transnational loyalties as was evident in particular in the Thai and Indonesian cases.

All in all then, CALD's impact on party institutionalization and, more generally, democratization in the region has been limited. Worse still, one of its member parties, Thailand's DP, directly contributed to Southeast Asia's recent 'democracy downer'. At an individual level, the workshops and conferences may have turned selected delegates into committed democrats, but overall these model CALD citizens have had little influence on internal party matters at home. The CALD case therefore shows that norm diffusion through transnational party networks has significant limitations. In contrast to transnational civil society networks, party networks are subject to constraints that are directly linked to electoral competition and thus, sometimes, the political survival of the members of the network. Many parties in the developing world do not see norms and values as organizational assets that could help maximize votes. Transnational party networks like CALD are therefore primarily sites for communication between elites, not for the diffusion of international norms.

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Notes

1. Interview with Wolfgang Sachsenroeder, former FNF regional director for Southeast and East Asia, Singapore, 1 June 2015.
2. Ibid.
3. Interviews with CALD delegates in Manila and Jakarta, June 2015.
4. The remainder of the budget is covered by annual membership dues from each member party and additional funds from the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. Interview with Celito Arlegue, CALD Executive Director, Manila, 22 June 2015.
5. Interview with Neric Acosta, CALD Secretary General 2005–2014, Manila, 23 June 2015.
6. Interview with Mel Sarmiento, Secretary General of the LP, 24 June 2015.
7. Interviews with LP officials, Manila, 22–24 June 2015.
8. Interviews with members of PDI-P leadership board, Jakarta, 17 June 2015.
9. Ibid.

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