

Review of: "Institutions and Socioeconomic Development: Do Legacies and Proximity Matter? Case Studies of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This article has a worthy objective: understanding the relationship between institutions and socioeconomic development in three Southeast Asian countries. The authors have assembled the raw materials for a strong piece of analysis. In its current form, however, the paper could stand some serious rewriting and reorganizing. The weaknesses that I am pointing out can all be rectified.

The introduction (Section I) needs to be pruned, restructured, and more narrowly tailored to the research focus at hand. It is not necessary to include what amounts to a primer on institutionalist economics. Avoid repeating observations. Get to the point and to demonstrating the applicability of your variables to the case countries more quickly.

There are a lot of moving parts in this analysis, and it is important to keep them distinct and prevent them from becoming muddled together. It would help if clear hypotheses were laid out at the start of the methods section (Section II). These are necessary even with a mixed research design. The independent and dependent variables should be identified and operationalized before the data sources are described. This precision should carry over to the presentation of the correlation and regression results (Section III b.-c.). (As an aside, it is surprising that with the complex goal of explaining “the evolution of the interrelationships among political, socioeconomic, and cultural institutional development and development outcomes, including economic growth, education, health, and poverty” [line 3 of the abstract], the authors do not seem to have considered interaction effects in their quantitative analysis.)

Right now, Tables 1-4 (some of which are mis-numbered in the text) with the regression model results come out of nowhere and are thus somewhat confusing. The process that led to them needs to be included, with all of the independent and dependent variables plainly labeled (not just in the model). They should dictate the organization of the presentation of desktop study and interview results (Section III d.), which is now very lengthy and rather rambling. The same call for clarity and logical organization applies to the discussion section (Section IV) and the conclusion (Section V).

I do wonder if the time period examined (2006–2018) is long enough to establish the trends that are of interest here (Section III a.). Moreover, only domestic factors are considered in the analysis, which may be problematic, especially since that span of years was marked by the 2008 financial crisis, the Great Recession, and subsequent economic turmoil – fairly exceptional events seen in many corners as a byproduct of neoliberalism (an international factor).

Regarding the writing, there are problems with punctuation (especially commas) throughout the article, as well as occasional issues with prepositions, definite and indefinite articles, and syntax. A deep edit will be indispensable.