

Department of Political Science Department Seminar

Assistant Prof. Paul Schuler
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"Shadows on the Wall: Legislative Politics in Post-Reform Vietnam and China"

Moderator: A/P Sooyeon Kim
Thursday, 15th Nov 2018
2.00pm to 3.30pm
PS Staff Meeting Room, AS1, #04-01
National University of Singapore
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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship suggests that under authoritarian rule, quasi-democratic institutions such as elections and legislatures—the velvet gloves of autocratic rule—facilitate political stability and economic growth. On this count, China and Vietnam are remarkably stable and dynamic, and compared with China's ostensibly democratic institutions, Vietnam's legislature is open and raucous. That makes Vietnam a likely place to find election and legislatures performing their hypothetically salutary functions. But do they?

Prof. Schuler, in a new book project, challenges this burgeoning conventional wisdom, arguing that the legislature's main function is to convey regime strength and cow possible opposition. Using evidence drawn from more than ten years of fieldwork, survey research, and close readings of legislative debates and the debaters' lives, he finds that electoral and legislative activity reflect intra-party debates rather than genuine citizen opinion. His results should temper expectations that such institutions can serve either as safety valves for public discontent or as enablers of tangibly better governance. Single-party legislatures are more accurately seen as propaganda tools that reduce dissent while increasing disaffection. This project will contribute to our understanding of Vietnamese politics and representative institutions under single-party rule.

BIO

Paul Schuler is an assistant professor at the University of Arizona, where he studies Southeast Asian politics, Vietnamese politics, and authoritarian institutions. He guest-lectures and publishes widely. His latest article is "*Position Taking or Position Ducking? A Theory of Public Debate in Single-Party Legislatures*," *Comparative Political Studies* (March 2018). Earlier scholarship has appeared in the *American Political Science Review* and *Comparative Politics*, among other outlets. He is fluent in Vietnamese and has served as a UNDP consultant in Vietnam. His political science doctorate was earned with distinction at the University of California, San Diego.

