

# Leaders and Citizens of Democracy



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PANORAMA  
INSIGHTS INTO ASIAN  
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

# Leaders and Citizens of Democracy

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# CONTENTS

Preface .....	7
The Ambiguous Story of Democracy ..... <b>Wilhelm Hofmeister</b>	9
Globalisation of Risks and the Crisis of Democracy in Asia ..... <b>Maiko Ichihara</b>	21
Managing Democratic Leadership in Undemocratic Times: Challenges in Southeast Asia ..... <b>Bridget Welsh</b>	33
The COVID-19 Pandemic, the “War on Drugs,” and Duterte’s Brute Force Governance in the Philippines ..... <b>Mark R. Thompson</b>	45
Capacity development in International Party Assistance – The Case of KASYP ..... <b>Isabel Urrutia</b>	55
Bridging leadership: A Framework for Democratic Leadership Capacity-Building ..... <b>Ryan Camado Guinaran</b>	69
Working Democracy Amidst Continued Inequality: Does South Asia Represent a Paradox? ..... <b>Sandeep Shastri</b>	81
Reframing Inequality to Promote Inclusive Democracy ..... <b>Segundo Joaquin E. Romero, Jr</b>	93



# Preface

Exactly a decade ago, in 2011, *Panorama* investigated pressing concerns affecting democratisation around the world in an issue with the title “A Future for Democracy”. The journal presented findings which pointed to a perceived trend towards a democratic crisis. Among these findings were: lack of effective checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches of government, low levels of representativeness in parliaments, weak political parties, declines in judicial independence from political actors, and endemic corruption, which undermines the rule of law.<sup>1</sup>

Ten years later, these issues continue to linger, as shown by the evidence of more than 200 million hits from an internet search on the topic “future of democracy”. This may signify increasing attention being paid to searching for the right explanations, answers, and predictions on the direction of democratic development. This growing concern might have stemmed from the fact that political development, in this case democratisation, has plateaued in the past decade. According to the Varieties for Democracy Project, there were 100 democracies worldwide in 2009, an increase from the 87 democracies in 2000. In its more recent report, the organisation counted 99 democracies, showing a slight decline within the last ten years.

The 2011 *Panorama* issue’s focus on the institutional level is tantamount to looking at one side of the democratic crisis issue. Thus, to contribute to the effort in understanding this phenomenon, the first issue of *Panorama* in 2020 will explore the other side of this issue. Focusing on “Leaders and Citizens of Democracy”, this volume aims to shed light on the role of individuals as main actors who could contribute to either the advancement or backsliding of democracy. Leaders, individuals maybe, are not just influential but, most of all, responsible for steering the direction of democracies. This can be observed with the election of President-elect Joe Biden, who plans to gather democracies to counter the “rising authoritarianism” in the world. On the other hand, mass movements, a group of individuals coming together to achieve certain collective goals, are sprouting across the globe as can be seen in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, and other countries where people are demanding civil liberties and respect for democratic values and principles.

This issue starts with a paper that emphasises that for democracy to survive and progress, there is a need for political leaders who not only believe in but also

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<sup>1</sup> Hofmeister, Wilhelm, et al., eds. *A future for democracy*. *Panorama: An Insight into Asian and European Affairs*. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 2011.



embody the basic tenets of a democratic system. In contrast, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte exemplifies “brute force governance” – leadership based on political will at the expense of liberal rights. Another factor that often contributes to the reversal of democratic backsliding is citizens who do not easily surrender in their fight for democracy when deprived of freedom and dignity. As one paper argues, there is a need to put in place conditions that will empower citizens and protect the minorities in our societies.

Furthermore, this issue presents some interesting findings from the KASYP<sup>2</sup> impact evaluation study, where evidence of learning gains from the programme was found, particularly on the topics of electoral campaigning, project design, management skills, and current affairs. Arising from this evaluation is the question of how to train leaders to become more democratic. One paper discusses “bridging leadership” and its potential as a framework for capacity-building initiatives for enabling democratic politicians.

Finally, this issue of Panorama ends with a discussion on how people are not willing to abandon their aspirations for democracy in spite of the democratic process not living up to their expectations. They believe that democracy could do better in addressing inequality because this political system allows participation in decision-making, resource allocation, and community-problem solving.

For democracy to function for the people, it will always have to start with the people, and reading this issue could be a good start to achieve this goal.



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<sup>2</sup> KASYP stands for Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians, a training programme for young Asian political leaders on political parties, democratic leadership, election campaigning, local governance and development, and European and German politics.

# The Ambiguous Story of Democracy

*Wilhelm Hofmeister*

Democracy today is an ambiguous story. There is broad concern among analysts about democratic recession and the decline of democracy, which more recently has been complemented by a narrative about ill winds that blow in the face of democracy and explanations on why and how democracy dies.<sup>1</sup> Some years ago, the main concern was that the “third wave of democracy”<sup>2</sup> had reached a peak and that the processes of transition to democracy had come to a standstill. Lately, the main concern is about democratic backsliding, which refers to the eroding quality of the world’s democracies. The backsliding is evidenced by both the gradual and intentional weakening of checks and balances, as well as the decline of civil liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and civil society participation; in sum, a shrinking of civic space, which is essential for democracy. Such a sceptical view is supported, not least, in reaction to the election of Donald Trump as US president and his populist style of government, where he apparently does not care very much about respecting the democratic rules of the game in the US and even less about the state of democracy abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> For the arguments and debate about the recession and decline of democracy in different parts of the world cf. Larry Diamond 2008. “The Democratic Rollback. The Resurgence of the Predatory State”, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 87 (2), pp. 36-48; Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.) 2015: *Democracy in decline?* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. For the newer debate cf. Larry Diamond. 2019. *Ill winds, Saving democracy from Russian rage, Chinese ambition, and American complacency*. New York: Penguin Press; Roland Rich. 2017. *Democracy in crisis. Why, where, how to respond*. Boulder-London: Lynne Rienner Pubs; Steven Levitzky and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How democracies die. What history reveals about our future*. New York, Penguin Press; David Runciman. 2018. *How democracy ends*. London: Profile books.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Samuel P. Huntington. 1991. *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press.

However, the prospects for democracy are not completely bad. In its very recent analysis about the global state of democracy, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) discovered some reasons for optimism: more than half (62%) of the countries on earth, with more than half (57%) of the world's population, can be considered as democracies; between 2008 and 2018, there was even an increase in the number of democracies, from 90 to 97 (in contrast to the previous trends, which substantiated the "democratic recession"), and democratic transitions occurred in political regimes that had seemed staunchly undemocratic, or were stuck in the hybrid grey zone between democratic and non-democratic, countries like Armenia, Malaysia and Sudan, although in these countries, democracy still has to be consolidated.<sup>3</sup>

Some very recent events and surveys seem to support this more optimistic view. The local elections in Hong Kong in 2019 were a strong signal of the persistent appeal of democracy. Some more recent developments, in several countries of the Middle East and the South Mediterranean, indicate that the middle- and long-term effects of the so-called "Arab Spring" of 2011 should not be underestimated. Although the expectations of rapid and sustained political change in most of those countries were frustrated, the more recent developments in this area indicate some hope. Some surveys among the youth indicate that young people from these countries aspire to a different form of society, one that embraces global values and an open, tolerant culture, independent sources of news, and a change of the backward-looking concepts of religion – which together points very strongly towards more open and democratically organised societies.<sup>4</sup> Even in Russia, around the local elections of 2019, people stood up in favour of a more open and transparent, if not to say more democratic, election; despite the arrests and intimidation of opposition candidates, many Pro-Kremlin candidates suffered losses.<sup>5</sup> So the prospects of democracy are not so bad at all.

Writing a story about democracy, one has to mention these different and sometimes ambiguous facts and developments. At the very beginning of this story, it is important to point out that democracy is still a very young form of government for many countries like Malaysia and Sudan. One can also say that the appeal of democracy stems from the fact that it shows several advantages over other systems.

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<sup>3</sup> International IDEA. 2019. *The global state of democracy 2019, Addressing the ills, reviving the promise*. Stockholm: IDEA, p. 2, also available at: [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ASDA'A BCW. 2019. *11th annual ASDA'A BCW ARAB YOUTH SURVEY 2019, A call for reform*. Dubai 2019, <http://arabyouthsurvey.com/experts/sunil.html> (accessed 26 November 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. "Pro-Putin candidates suffer losses in Moscow elections", *The Guardian* 9 September 2019.

In addition, however, one also must admit that democracy is challenged by certain developments of different forms and kinds in nearly all regions on earth. To complete the story, we cannot simply note its current state, but must also ask what has to be done to safeguard and stabilise democratic regimes in the future, and, not least, who are the main actors who will have to contribute to that endeavour.

## WHY IS DEMOCRACY SO ATTRACTIVE?

Why do so many people aspire to be part of a democratic system? What are its advantages in comparison to other forms of government?

Modern societies are marked by a high number of educated and well-informed people who demand respect for their human rights, and among these, the right to participate in political decisions which directly affect them. Regardless of the dominant local culture or religion or the level of socio-economic development of their country, people share the idea that their own dignity as a human being should be respected by others and, not least, by their government. This does not just mean physical integrity and basic food and housing or healthcare. It also includes the idea that every single person has the right to pursue his or her own wishes, ideas and dreams and also the right to freely and peacefully stand for the realisation of these ideas and dreams, to express them, to share them and also to inspire other people. This desire has recently been expressed by the above-mentioned democracy movement in Hong Kong, the activists in Russia, and the survey of Arab youth and can be found in many other countries around the world. All these pro-democracy activists know that democracy is the political regime that offers the most comprehensive guarantee for individual freedom and the respect of human dignity and human rights of each individual. And it also offers the most comprehensive guarantee for peace and understanding and a peaceful settlement of conflicts in international relations. Democracies do not carry out their conflicts with weapons and do not go to war against each other.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, any regression of democratic development is a regression for human development and a reason for concern about peaceful international relations.

There are also some other hard facts which speak in favour of democracy, although we have to admit that a number of democracies are facing serious challenges to prove their superiority over hybrid or authoritarian regimes in certain

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dan Reiter and Allan C Stam. 2002. *Democracies at war*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

areas. This refers to the areas of sustainable social, human and economic development like basic welfare, access to justice, gender equality, social group equality and the absence of corruption. Democracies perform better in terms of generating and distributing welfare among the people, and they also have lower levels of corruption, on average, than non-democracies and hybrid regimes.

However, some authoritarian regimes which in the past have been very inefficient and corrupt, nowadays have also attained achievements, in some cases even memorable ones, especially in terms of economic development and eradication of poverty, if we look at China or Vietnam for instance. Also, with respect to corruption, we must note that non-democracies and hybrid regimes on average perform definitively worse. Nevertheless, we have to admit that several democracies occupy top positions in the international index of the most corrupt countries.<sup>7</sup> Take Brazil, for example, where a corruption case not only put the once-world-famous President Lula behind bars, but also many government officials and company directors of that country, as well as presidents and government officials in other countries in Latin America, all bribed by the same Brazilian construction company whose illicit practices apparently were supported by the democratic government of that country.<sup>8</sup> In Spain, which is considered a positive example for democratic transition and consolidation processes, serious cases of corruption have been discovered and former politicians from different political parties went to prison. In South Korea, a former president is also behind bars. Not to mention Africa, where, in many countries, departure towards democracy have been stopped repeatedly because of corruption and kleptocracy of the democratically elected leaders. It is obvious that corruption and its consequences can seriously damage not only the performance of a democratic regime but also the overall image of democracy as a system of government.

Nevertheless, democracies, in principle, offer better schemes of checks and balances, transparency and accountability. Even most authoritarian leaders undertake desperate efforts to present themselves as democrats and organise (fake) elections so as to present their regime as being based on the people's support. This is another notable indicator of the strength of the democratic idea that any govern-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2018, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018> (accessed 27 December 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Marcus André Melo 2016. "Latin America's New Turbulence: Crisis and Integrity in Brazil", *Journal of Democracy* 27 (2), p 50 – 67.

ment should be legitimised by the people and that the exercise of power should be limited and controlled by checks and balances.

Democracies, in principle, also offer better settlement and control of the rules for appropriate competition among market forces and general respect for the rules of the game in the economic area. These advantages can be observed in the past and present in many democracies around the world that are able to produce wealth and prosperity. And of course, democracies also offer, in principle, better mechanisms for redistribution because decisions on tax and social systems are taken with a view on the popular will and are legitimised by elections.

After examining several alternative forms of government, David Runciman from Cambridge University concluded: "For all its manifest and manifold imperfections, democracy has a better record than any rival form of government".<sup>9</sup>

## THE CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACY

Despite its advantages in general, many democracies face challenges and problems that present a specific risk for the whole democratic order because several of its key elements are being gradually undermined. Of course we have to mention here again the poor delivery of outcomes in some democracies in terms of economic development and social achievements as well as corruption. However, there are even more serious threats which go beyond malversation and corruption that foster backsliding of democracy and new authoritarian temptations.

Among those factors that reinforce anti-democratic developments, one first has to examine the extent to which these factors are linked to each other. These are the "populist peril"<sup>10</sup> and the unthoughtful and careless handling of democratic principles and rules caused by the complacency of the democrats themselves.

### Populism

Populism evolved in recent years in many democracies to become the dominant political style of political leaders and parties. It can be characterised as an anti-elitist, anti-institutional, plebiscitary and ultramajoritarian attitude.<sup>11</sup> Populists claim to represent "the people" against the powerful and the privileged. They deny the legitimacy of democratic institutions and procedures. They mobilise people behind

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<sup>9</sup> Runciman, *How democracies end*, p. 165ss.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Larry Diamond: *Ill winds*, p. 64s.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jan-Werner Müller. 2016. *What is populism?* Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press.

a populist leader and they are opposed to the checks and balances and the limitation of power of a democratic regime. Populism is hostile to pluralism, is illiberal and is often also xenophobic against foreigners and immigrants. Populist regimes typically try to undermine the independence of courts, attack the independence of the media and strive to gain control of public broadcasting. They impose stricter controls over civil society and the internet, gerrymander districts and rig electoral rules and try to gain control over the body that runs elections. Hence, inevitably, populism leads to the destruction of democracy and to authoritarianism.

The appearance and strengthening of populist movements is not limited to young and presumably weak democracies. It also happens in the oldest modern democracy, the United States, where President Donald Trump is challenging, with his populist style of governance, the traditional processes and rules of the democratic game. Europe is also strongly affected by this trend. In Poland, the governing party is aiming to subjugate the judiciary under the government, with serious restrictions on the independence of the courts. The prime minister of Hungary publicly announced his intention to establish an “illiberal democracy” in his country. In many European countries, populist parties have won considerable shares in national and European elections over the last 15 years. In some countries like France, Germany and Italy, those parties use nationalist propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, in other countries, populism is more in line with a leftist programme. For the European Union, it is a new experience to see that the crisis of democracy has reached its own shores. Although the European Commission initiated infringement proceedings to bring Poland and Hungary back on the democratic track, it seems to be difficult to force the governments of those countries to fully respect the democratic principles of the Union as laid down in Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty.

## **Disregard of democratic principles and rules**

Such developments are linked to and supported by the other above-mentioned factor, the unthoughtful and careless handling of democratic principles and rules. Democracy always has been and still is a fragile and vulnerable system of government, open to manipulation from inside and intimidation from outside. This was the case in ancient Greece, as it is in many countries of our day. The problem with democracy nowadays is that there are countries where these institutional arrangements of democracy work relatively well, in some cases even for many years and

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Hofmeister. 2020. “Simple Explanations. Why Nationalists in Europe Grow Stronger”, *KAS-International Reports 2/2020*, p. 6 – 16.

decades. Nevertheless, simultaneously there is a tendency to undermine these institutions, like in Poland or Hungary, which also means a weakening of democracy that can lead to its destruction. In the cases of Venezuela and Turkey, this is quite obvious already. The governments of these countries restricted the liberty of expression and free media, subjected the judiciary under the government and imprisoned dissidents.

Two developments are closely linked to such tendencies. Many countries in different parts of the world introduced new rules for the registration of civil society organisations that resulted in the limitation of their activities. Such rules are often justified through apolitical, administrative arguments, but they imply a restriction of democratic freedoms and a limitation of the control of a government by the citizens. The second tendency is that in some countries the government or its cronies take over control of the most relevant media, which in fact is an attack on the freedom of opinion and expression.

Furthermore, it does not take a military coup d'état to destroy a democracy, like in the sixties or seventies in Latin America or some years ago in Thailand. On the contrary, today, we must perceive that democratic breakdowns have been caused by elected governments themselves. Constitutions and other nominally democratic institutions remain in place. People still vote. But elected autocrats only maintain the facade of democracy while eviscerating its substance. Although many actions of governments to subvert democracy are "legal" in the sense that they are approved by the legislature or accepted by the courts, in several cases this has led to a decline of democracy. Where government policies are aimed at diminishing the checks and balances and at reducing the space for civil society organisations and opposition parties, there are real dangers for democracy.

## **Influence of undemocratic regimes**

Additionally, there are other confounding factors which contribute to the complications of modern democracies. The first factor is the almost blatant support of populist, antidemocratic movements by Russia and China. These two powers actively take and support actions which are aimed at undermining liberal democracies abroad through new means and technologies. Their authoritarian rulers feel threatened by the demands for liberty and democracy not only in Hong Kong and Moscow, but also in other countries far away. Both countries and their allies cause serious damage to democracy that can be felt in all continents. In Cambodia, for example, the long-time ruler Hun Sen and his People's Party closed the space



for pluralism and democracy, which was only opened very slowly, and they quite obviously falsified the results of elections and banned the main opposition party.

## Misuse of technology

Moreover, modern information technology (IT), which means primarily the internet and social media but also, in an increasing way, new forms of surveillance and artificial intelligence, do not necessarily contribute to safeguarding or even expanding our individual liberty and our ability to communicate, interact with others and participate in social and political processes.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, we have to realise that modern IT has also led to new and subtle forms of manipulation and, in the end, a restriction of our democratic liberties. Thus, we have to be careful and must protect our democratic liberties, if not by controlling the use of IT then by an appropriate handling of it.

## Military intervention

Lastly, besides those new subtle forms of undermining democracy, the old and more obvious brutal methods have not disappeared at all. Military intervention did not only happen in African countries and in Arab states, but also in Thailand, in 2014. Currently, one can observe that in Latin America the military is suddenly very present on the political stage again. Also, the authoritarian regime in Venezuela is backed by the armed forces. Meanwhile, in Bolivia, the military “suggested” that President Evo Morales step down after he apparently falsified the results of the presidential elections. In Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Chile the democratic governments summoned the military to help defend the public order against riots that were provoked, not least, by frustrations about the poor performance and corruption of the governments. Once again, these are threatening developments that endanger the young democracies in the region.

## THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The weakness of democracy is also linked to the ability or, more correctly, the inability of political parties to react appropriately to its challenges. Although the specific roles and functions of political parties in democracy continue to be

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Runciman, *How democracy ends*, p. 120ss; José Maria Lasalle. 2019. *Ciberleviatán*, Barcelona: Arpa 2019.

valid – the aggregation of societal interests into policy agendas, the mobilisation of citizens around those platforms, the selection of candidates for elections, the recruiting of leaders to advance the party’s agenda and the formation of governments to implement them – the way political parties exercise these functions nowadays is different because of social and technological changes. This has direct consequences on individual parties and the party system as well. As many traditional political parties were and are not able to adapt to the challenges of modern times and to integrate new issues into their party programmes, such as the fight against climate change and other topics, new types of parties and new models of party organisations have emerged, like “internet parties” (such as the “5-star Movement” in Italy), but also new populist parties, some with a more nationalist agenda and others with a more leftist touch. Most of these new parties arose because of frustrations with the traditional parties. A good number of comedians have founded political parties and successfully participated in elections in recent years, like Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine, Marjan Sarek in Slovenia, Jimmy Morales in Guatemala, and Beppe Grillo, the founder of the 5 Star Movement, in Italy.<sup>14</sup> Although one may not deny the right of these actors to engage in politics, it can also be considered a warning signal that in many places the political professionals of the traditional parties are not able to articulate appropriately the concerns of their citizens. The weakening of traditionally strong political parties leads to a fragmentation of party systems, which in parliamentary systems results in increasing difficulties to form strong and stable coalition governments, as can be observed in Spain, Belgium and some Nordic countries.

As long as civil society organisations or other forms of political associations cannot substitute for political parties in their core functions, the future of democracy in most countries depends on the capacity of parties to adapt in terms of organisation, programme and ideology, and, not least, communication in regard to new social and technological developments and their impact on policy making. It is also important that political parties stand for a clean and transparent form of doing politics. The above-mentioned threats to democracy exist because of corruption and money politics is often closely linked to political parties and in many cases there is not much difference between the behaviour of traditional or new parties.

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<sup>14</sup> Tej Parikh, “Comedians Will Soon Rule the World”, in: *Foreign Policy*, February 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/13/the-age-of-comedy-populism> (accessed 27 December 2019).

## DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY – THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CITIZENS

When traditional institutions fail or are too weak to protect threatened democracies, one has to look for alternative actors and forms. In this context, many authors set high hopes on the empowerment of civil society. Indeed, no democracy can survive without the active participation of its citizens. Today, there are different experiments with permanent processes for citizens' engagement in public decision-making worldwide.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly an important contribution to strengthening democratic structures and processes. However, such citizens' engagement works above all at the local level and only for certain issues, which also shows the limits of such engagement and the role of civil society. Even if topics taken up by civil society actors are important, this does not mean that they represent the majority – just as in the political arena, where the political parties only represent a part of the society. The political process in a democracy, however, consists of bringing together the different opinions within a society and, at best, in finding compromises that, on the whole, represent the opinions and concerns of a majority of society. Democracy does not know absolute truths. That is why no one in the democratic process can refer to absolute truths, even if they are scientifically well founded, as in the climate debate. As long as a majority of citizens do not stand for certain solutions, they cannot be enforced.

This indicates that democratic processes are more complex than they may appear to be at first glance. It is simply not enough to stand for the “right” issue. It is also important to organise majorities, to convince fellow citizens, to consider many different aspects and interests in the process of political opinion and decision-making and, last but not least, to participate in general elections, because these are the decisive basis for the exercise of political power. Therefore, democracy is first and foremost a method of deciding on the legitimacy, exercise and control of political power.

For democracy to work, it needs the commitment of citizens, stronger democratic institutions such as political parties, respect for democratic procedures, social pluralism and all the other attributes of civil and political rights. What is also needed can only be provided by real people, acting people. Democracy requires politicians and political leaders, who, first and foremost, have to respect the real

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Claudia Chwalisz (ed), “A New Wave of Deliberative Democracy, Reshaping European Democracy”, Carnegie Europe, <https://bit.ly/2H0gYOb> (accessed 27 December 2019).

spirit of the system, who are ethically and morally committed to its underlying principles and values and practise them in their everyday policy-making. They are also expected to act with mutual respect and tolerance, which means to accept competing parties as legitimate rivals (as long as they are committed to the values of democracy), with a certain restraint in deploying the institutional prerogatives related to certain functions or offices, and, not least, also with the appreciation that politics is the art of compromise, where democratic forces must have the capacity for coalition building when they do not gain a majority themselves. In short, every democracy needs politicians who respect the virtues of political leadership, which are “basic honesty, reliability, sound judgment, devotion to public interest, and an underlying moral compass”, as the political scientist Francis Fukuyama indicated in his latest book.<sup>16</sup>

The final argument that is neglected in many analyses about the development of democracy is the necessary civic education of citizens and the political training of future political leaders. Civic education is not about indoctrination in favour of particular political positions or ideologies, but is about conveying knowledge about the functioning of political and state institutions and the learning of behaviours that are important for the functioning of a democracy, for example, tolerance, the critical examination of opposing opinions and, today especially, the critical handling of the internet and social media. Democracy must be learned anew from generation to generation and civic education contributes to this. However, especially in democratic countries, efforts should be increased so that citizens are offered additional civic education in schools and by independent institutions, which helps them to develop to become self-determined and to critically participate in political activities. Where democracies are threatened today, there is clearly a lack of this basic equipment for citizens.

The imperative of sustained efforts in political education applies also to the political parties themselves. They need not only committed, but also informed members and representatives, and they need them wherever they are politically present and active: in the municipalities, the regions and, of course, at the national level. Today, in view of complex issues and complex systems of decision-making, every professional politician is required not only to have a high level of knowledge, but also a normative attitude that does justice to high ethical and moral principles, as many societies now demand. Not all politicians meet these expectations.

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<sup>16</sup> Francis Fukuyama. 2018. *Identity. Contemporary identity politics and the struggle for recognition*. London: Profile Books, p. X.

However, in view of the new demands on a politician's level of information and knowledge, they are all called upon to undergo continuous training. This applies not only to officials and parliamentarians at the upper levels of a political and governmental system, but also to the many representatives of a party who work voluntarily and are involved in their communities or associations at the local level. They must broaden their knowledge through regular training in order to represent the positions of their party competently and to participate in public debates and political decisions in a qualified manner in the interests of their party. Last but not least, local politicians and members of city or municipal councils – who often only work on a voluntary basis – are required to have a high level of technical and specialist knowledge, which can only be acquired through continuous further training.

The parties themselves must be concerned about giving their members the chance to obtain continuous qualifications and additional training. Certainly, politics itself offers the most important form of political education through the concrete, current political processes, its continuous attentive monitoring through the media and participation in factual debates and decisions. Education provided by political parties or other institutions cannot compete with this. However, the deepening of factual issues, and above all their evaluation from the point of view of the principles and programme of a party, can only be achieved through internal party training.

Democracy is the best type of government invented until today. It will only survive with the continued commitment of its main beneficiaries, the citizens.

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# Globalisation of Risks and the Crisis of Democracy in Asia<sup>1</sup>

*Maiko Ichihara*

Books and articles discussing the crisis of democracy have been published one after another in recent years. Larry Diamond argues that democracy has been in recession since 2006.<sup>2</sup> Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt warn that democracy is under attack without even violating laws, which makes democratic recession indiscernible, and urge political actors to take action before it is too late.<sup>3</sup> James Traub presents an even gloomier picture and argues that the state of democracy not only resembles the situation before World War I, but states are also more susceptible to totalitarianism now.<sup>4</sup>

Discussions on the crisis of democracy often raise the cases of Latin American countries such as Venezuela, East European countries such as Hungary and Poland, West European countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Austria, and the United States. The crisis of democracy in the United States generates attention because it is a major step back from the country's indispensable roles as a symbol and supporter of the liberal international order since the end of World War II. Equally, the rise of clearly authoritarian leaders like Hugo Chávez and Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, of anti-liberal leaders like Viktor Orbán of Hungary, of authoritative political parties like Law and Justice in Poland, and of anti-EU political parties in Europe has high news value. However, the crisis of democracy is just as serious in Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was supported by JSPS Kakenhi Grant Number 18KK0338 and submitted in January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015), 141-155.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How democracies die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> James Traub, "Democracy Is Dying by Natural Causes," *Foreign Policy*, 1 March 2018.

Governments in Asia have interfered in the judicial sector and violated its independence. They have weakened or forced the demise of opposition parties, and have attacked and sometimes even closed down independent media outlets. They have shrunk the space available for the activities of domestic NGOs, have banned international funding for them, and have pushed international NGOs out of their countries. They have exacerbated religion-based and ethnically based discriminations. They create laws for such controls, shifting from the “rule of law,” which is one of the core tenets of democratic governance, to “rule by law” based on their political leaders’ arbitrary decisions.

Across Asia and beyond, there are three common issues behind the crisis of democracy: domestic populism, external actors’ interference with sharp power, and advances in information technology (IT). Most problematic is that all these issues expand, spread, and impact across borders. States emulate each other’s populist tactics, thereby significantly weakening democratic norms across borders. In addition, not only do external actors interfere to damage democracy in country after country, but the number of countries that use sharp power for influence is increasing. And as IT evolves, one impact is the facilitation of transborder emulation of harms to democracy both domestically and internationally. Threats to democracy are thus likely to continue to expand across borders. In this context, this article examines the challenges to democracy in Asia.

## POPULISM

Populism is a political tool used to appeal to the majority to win elections, and by and large is a product of globalisation and excessive neoliberal economic policies. While the extent of economically vulnerable populations has expanded, wealth has concentrated to a fraction of economic elites, expanding economic polarisation and raising the relative poverty line. Cultural factors also have a great impact on populism. Francis Fukuyama argues that while the notion of human rights has expanded from a limited few elites to the general public over several centuries, those who face the influx of immigrants have sought ways to avoid the loss of their identity. Emulating the rights-based approach used by leftist actors, they began using identity politics to protect their rights from immigrants, Fukuyama argues.<sup>5</sup> This process naturally led them to support authoritarian leaders who use xenophobic

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

rhetoric and promise to protect the majority despite resistance from traditional elites and democratic institutions.

India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) uses Hindu nationalism to mobilise support in this Hindu-majority country, and its populist tactics have been further escalating since BJP became the sole ruling party in the 2019 general elections. The Indian government deprived Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India, of autonomy in September 2019, and has been preventing human rights activists and opposition party politicians from entering the region.<sup>6</sup> In December 2019, the Indian government enacted the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which grants Indian citizenship only to non-Muslim illegal immigrants, accelerating the exclusion of Muslims.<sup>7</sup> In Japan, the governing Liberal Democratic Party does not try to control members of its Net Supporters Club, which is estimated to have nearly 20,000 members, from spreading xenophobic narratives on the Internet.

Xenophobia is not the only tool used. Populist political leaders appeal to the weak, claiming to be the only ones who can handle problems and stressing that establishments and democratic institutions are not suitable for creating and implementing effective policies. President Duterte of the Philippines appeals to the public by asserting that drugs are the source of poverty in the country, and that he is the only one who can fight against drug dealers. The Philippine government has thus engaged in extra-judicial killings of alleged drug dealers, in numbers estimated at between 6,600 and more than 27,000 since Duterte came to the presidency in 2016.<sup>8</sup> Opposition party members and human rights defenders, who criticise the drug war as being illegitimate and illegal, have been arrested. Journalists critical of the drug war are constantly threatened; a prime example is the threat to close down Rappler and the arrest of the news site's founder and editor Maria Ressa.<sup>9</sup> In the 2000s, Prime Minister Thaksin of Thailand asserted that he was the only one able to fight poverty in the country, and implemented a number of policies designed to appeal to the poor, including healthcare reform and the establishment of a foundation for low-interest financing. In this effort, Thaksin curtailed criticism of his policies by using his own company, Shin Corporations, to acquire the independent iTV, and by

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, Suhasini Raj, Kai Schultz and Hari Kumar, "India Revokes Kashmir's Special Status, Raising Fears of Unrest," *The New York Times*, 5 August 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "Secularism Is Dying in India," *Foreign Policy*, 11 December 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce, "U.N. Rights Council to Investigate Killings in Philippine Drug War," *The New York Times*, 11 July 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Regine Cabato, "Philippine Journalist Maria Ressa, One of Time Magazine's 2018 People of the Year, Arrested Again," *The Washington Post*, 29 March 2019.



pressuring the business sector not to place advertisements in media that criticise the government.

Populist tactics are emulated across countries. Duterte's drug war since 2016 seems to follow Thaksin's drug war in 2003-2004, which engaged in extra-judicial killings of more than 2,000 people.<sup>10</sup> In applying pressure against a *Tokyo Shimbun* journalist who is critical of the government, the Japanese government seems to emulate Donald Trump's obstruction of CNN journalists. The spread of populist tactics creates a new normal, seriously damaging democratic norms across borders. Facing the use of populism and the ever-exacerbating polarisation in society, people wonder if democracy itself is the problem.<sup>11</sup> When combined with the institutional hurdles impeding swift decisions in pluralistic democracies, the result is a vicious cycle leading people to support authoritarian political leaders.

## SHARP POWER

While populist political elites have weakened democracy domestically, some external powers have also weakened democracy from outside. In Asia, this actor is mainly China. Different from "hard power" coercion using the military or "soft power" attraction using culture, China has been using "sharp power", the manipulation of information and impressions with deception, intimidation, and division.<sup>12</sup>

A typical sharp power tool is the spread of disinformation. China has been spreading disinformation in Taiwan at nearly every election as well as on other occasions, especially since the Sunflower Movement of 2014, and more so since the beginning of the Tsai Ing-wen administration in 2016.<sup>13</sup> China's state-run media, government-linked Weibo accounts, the 311 Base of the People's Liberation Army, and the 61716 Unit in Fujian Province are suspected to have been conducting dis-

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Not Enough Graves: The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and Violations of Human Rights," 7 July 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Carothers, "Is Democracy the Problem?" *American Interest*, 16 January 2019.

<sup>12</sup> For the argument on sharp power, see, for example, National Endowment for Democracy and the International Forum for Democratic Studies, "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence," December 2017; Christopher Walker, "What Is 'Sharp Power'?" *Journal of Democracy* 29, issue 3 (July 2018), 9-23.

<sup>13</sup> Mitsutoyo Matsumoto, "China's Sharp Power and Taiwan" [in Japanese], *Koryu* 934 (January 2019), 20-30.

information campaigns in Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> The scale of China's election meddling was so huge in the lead up to the presidential election in 2020 that the Taiwanese parliament passed an Anti-Infiltration Law to ban China's interference right before the presidential election.

Social media outlets are frequently used for disinformation. China has been, until recently, using domestic platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and QQ to spread disinformation. But in Hong Kong during the 2019 pro-democracy demonstration, the government began using Facebook and Twitter, which are banned in China, for disinformation. It used these channels to spread video clips and pictures to make it appear that pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong are employing violence for money, using real and American guns in demonstrations, and, in short, are uncontrollable terrorists.<sup>15</sup> Twitter suspended 936 accounts that were disseminating such disinformation in August 2019 alone, and found that these accounts received organisational support from the Chinese government. Another 200,000 related accounts were also identified at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Social media has become a major news source in many Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand; a phenomenon that makes people even more susceptible to disinformation. In addition, people in the region use the Internet for long hours, which exposes them to disinformation at a high frequency. According to research conducted by We Are Social and Hootsuite in 2019, while the average daily Internet use in Japan was 3 hours and 45 minutes, it was 7 hours in Taiwan and India, 9 hours in Thailand, and 10 hours in the Philippines.<sup>17</sup>

Traditional media is also increasingly becoming a sharp power tool in many countries. Major media outlets in Hong Kong have been purchased by Chinese companies with links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), subsequently changing the tone of their respective news content to pro-China. The majority stakeholder of TVB, a major television station in Hong Kong, is a member of the CCP, Li Ruigang. *South China Morning Post* was purchased in 2015 by the Alibaba Group, whose co-founder and former executive chairman, Jack Ma, is also a member of the CCP.

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<sup>14</sup> Ketty W. Chen, "China's Sharp Power and Taiwan's 9-in-1 Elections Subverting Democracy with Democratic Means," *Prospect Journal*, no. 1 (March 2019), 10-12.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Paul Mozur, "China Is Waging a Disinformation War Against Hong Kong Protesters," *New York Times*, 13 August 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Kate Conger, "Facebook and Twitter Say China Is Spreading Disinformation in Hong Kong," *New York Times*, 19 August 2019.

<sup>17</sup> We are Social and Hootsuite, "Digital 2019."

In 2017, i-Cable was purchased by a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>18</sup> Tsai Eng-meng, chairman of Taiwanese snack company Want Want China, in 2008, acquired one of the major media groups of Taiwan, China Times Group, which owns newspapers such as *China Times*, *Business Times*, and *Times Weekly*, in addition to CTiTV and China Broadcasting Corporation. Tsai is reported to have been in liaison with the Chinese government, and Want Want China was reported to have received 71 million US dollars in subsidies from the Chinese government between 2017 and 2018 alone.<sup>19</sup> In July 2019, *Apple Daily* of Taiwan reported that 23 Internet media outlets in Taiwan are functioning as propaganda stations of the Chinese government.<sup>20</sup>

The Chinese government has also attempted to divide pro-democracy actors. The unrest that occurred in Mong Kok in 2016 is seen to have been fuelled by Chinese agents.<sup>21</sup> In Hong Kong's District Council election in 2015, a person who tried to bribe localists to run for election to divert votes from other pro-democracy candidates was sentenced to imprisonment. A pro-China organisation, through an election campaigner of former Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying as a middleman,<sup>22</sup> and also the CCP's United Front Work Department were found to be behind the case.<sup>23</sup>

China has been illegally providing financial support to pro-China organisations. Pro-China candidates are noted to provide food, entertainment, and gifts regularly in their districts, with financial support from the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Hong Kong.<sup>24</sup> One of the leaders of the Patriot Alliance Association of Taiwan, which advocates integration with China and occasionally uses dirty tricks such as pressuring the police to share the list of pro-independence actors, admitted that the Association received financial support from China. China

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Ping-kuen Lui, "Hong Kong's Media under China's Sharp Power," in *China's sharp power in Hong Kong*, ed. Benny Yiu-ting Tai (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Civil Hub, 2018), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Wade, "Thousands Protest Chinese Media Influence in Taipei," *China Digital Times*, 25 June 2019.

<sup>20</sup> "Red Infiltration: Taiwan's 23 Network Media copy Chinese Official Media in Simplified Characters, All Criticizing Tsai Ing-wen, Methods of Figures behind the Scene" [in Chinese], *Apple Daily* (Taiwan), 12 July 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Sang Pu, "Crippled Electoral System of Hong Kong," in *China's sharp power in Hong Kong*, ed. Benny Yiu-ting Tai (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Civil Hub, 2018), 40-41.

<sup>22</sup> Ellie Ng, "Man Jailed for Four Years for Bribing Localists to Rig District Elections," *Hong Kong Free Press*, 26 October 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Pu, op. cit., 42.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 47.

uses the Straits Exchange Foundation of Taiwan to provide local politicians with trips to China to co-opt them. The Chinese proxies in Taiwan have been investing in local infrastructure to support Kuomintang politicians in their districts.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to its actions in Hong Kong and Taiwan, China has been spreading narratives throughout Asia that are favourable not only to China itself but also to authoritarianism in general, and that are damaging to democratic norms, through various channels such as Confucius Institute and China Central Television.<sup>26</sup> And, as well as this expansion in the group of target countries subject to the use of sharp power detrimental to democracy, the ranks of sharp power actors are also on the increase, which further poses a grave danger to democracy. While in their seminal report in 2017 the National Endowment for Democracy and International Forum for Democratic Studies found China and Russia to be the actors using sharp power,<sup>27</sup> by 2019 the list had expanded to include India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.<sup>28</sup>

## EVOLUTION OF IT

The evolution of IT has helped promote democracy. IT has supported the dissemination of information necessary to check governments, the communication and networking among pro-democracy actors, and the mobilisation of people for democratisation movements. The Arab Spring was considered as a showcase, where people were mobilised through SMS.

On the other hand, IT has also made the manipulation of the public and the suppression of unwanted voices much easier, both domestically and internationally. State surveillance using facial recognition is a powerful tool. The Hong Kong government enacted the anti-mask law in October 2019 because masks prevent facial recognition through artificial intelligence (AI), although demonstrators continued wearing masks in protest and the High Court struck down the law. Each government

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<sup>25</sup> Matsumoto, op. cit., 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Motoko Shuto, "Patterns and Views of China's Public Diplomacy in ASEAN Countries: Focusing on Confucius Institutes," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 7, no. 2 (2018), 124-148.

<sup>27</sup> National Endowment for Democracy and International Forum for Democratic Studies, "Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence," December 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, "The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation," The Computational Propaganda Project, Oxford Internet Institute and the University of Oxford, 27 September 2019.

tends to learn from other governments' methods of repression, and according to Amnesty International, this tendency is the clearest in state surveillance.<sup>29</sup> Thus, other Asian countries are also moving towards the introduction of facial recognition. Singapore introduced the technology in 2018, and the Indian government is preparing for its introduction across the country. The state of Penang in Malaysia also introduced a facial recognition system in 2019. Individual locations and events such as airports, banks, police stations, convenience stores, sporting events, and concert halls are increasingly using facial recognition. Targeted surveillance has been on the increase as well, and the Bangladeshi and Thai governments passed cyber security laws that allow the governments to access data on the Internet in November 2018 and February 2019, respectively, which could be used to silence critical voices to the government and restrict the freedom of expression.

Domestic actors also engage in online influence campaigns to mobilise support and smear opponents. According to Samantha Bradshaw and Philip Howard, various types of domestic actors, including government agencies, politicians and political parties, private contractors, civil society organisations and individual influencers, engage in manipulation campaigns online.<sup>30</sup> In India, both the governing party BJP and a major opposition party, the Indian National Congress party, are said to possess IT cells that use bots and trolls for the spread of disinformation.<sup>31</sup> In the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia, a massive volume of disinformation was spread from both the Joko Widodo and the Prabowo Subianto camps. Civil society actors also supported the Indonesian election campaigns with the use of IT, and groups such as Rumah Bersama Pelayan Rakyat voluntarily analysed big data on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram with AI, on behalf of Joko Widodo.<sup>32</sup> There are said to be hundreds of troll farms in the Philippines, and the country serves as one of the hubs of the global trolling industry for political campaigns.<sup>33</sup> Among Asian countries, Myanmar and Vietnam, in addition to China, are said to possess high cyber troop capacity, with significant staff and funding, and Cambodia, India,

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<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International, "Ending the Targeted Digital Surveillance of Those Who Defend Our Rights," ACT 30/1385/2019 (2019), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Bradshaw and Howard, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ualan Campbell-Smith and Samantha Bradshaw, "Global Cyber Troops Country Profile: India," Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford (November 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Masaaki Okamoto, "Beginning of Politics in the Post-Truth Era: Big Data and AI" [in Japanese], *IDE Square*, July 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Shibani Mahtani and Regine Cabato, "Why Crafty Internet Trolls in the Philippines May Be Coming to a Website near You," *The Washington Post*, 25 July 2019.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, and Uzbekistan are said to possess medium cyber troop capacity.<sup>34</sup>

The evolution of information technology increases the likelihood of external actors' intrusion with sharp power as well. At the time of the unofficial e-referendum on the desirability of direct ballot for the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in June 2014, *Apple Daily* and *PopVote*, two newspapers which co-hosted the e-referendum together with the University of Hong Kong, became the subject of massive and advanced cyber attacks.<sup>35</sup> In the 2019 demonstrations, the messaging app Telegram, which was used by the demonstrators, and the Internet platform "LIHKG", which was used for mobilisation of demonstrators, were subjected to massive DDoS attacks. According to Telegram CEO Pavel Durov, the attacks were mainly from IP addresses within China.<sup>36</sup> AT&T Cybersecurity points out that China's cyber-attack system, Great Cannon, which sends malicious JavaScript files to transmit massive garbage requests to target websites in order to hijack communications, was used.<sup>37</sup> China is also said to have conducted massive cyber attacks on governmental organisations such as the National Election Commission, opposition politicians, and activists at the time of the general election in Cambodia in 2018.<sup>38</sup>

Both domestic and international actors attack opponents online with the use of IT, distorting reality and causing chaos in democratic societies. Such methods are utilised to legitimise domestic authoritarian leaders, lower the hurdle for bypassing democratic institutions, and manipulate the international perception in favour of China. Chaos in democratic societies weakens public trust in democracy as well, thereby further damaging democratic norms.

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<sup>34</sup> Bradshaw and Howard, op. cit., 18-20.

<sup>35</sup> Joyu Wang, "Cyber Attacks Hit Pro-Democracy Websites in Hong Kong," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2014; Paul Mozur and Chester Yung, "Hong Kong Democracy Poll Hit by Cyberattack," *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Siegel, "Telegram Hit by Massive Chinese Cyberattack During Hong Kong Protests," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2019; Shelly Banjo, "Hong Kong Cyber Attack Briefly Disrupts Key Protester Forum," *Bloomberg*, 30 August 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Chris Doman, "The "Great Cannon" Has Been Deployed Again," *AT&T Cybersecurity*, 4 December 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Scott Henderson, Steve Miller, Dan Perez, Marcin Siedlarz, Ben Wilson, and Ben Read, "Chinese Espionage Group TEMP.Periscope Targets Cambodia Ahead of July 2018 Elections and Reveals Broad Operations Globally," *FireEye*, 11 July 2018.

## CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the spread of challenges to democracy across borders, will democracies die out? Pro-democracy protests show that democracy supporters do not easily surrender when deprived of freedom and dignity. Hongkongers have repeatedly taken to the streets to call for freedom, human rights, and democracy since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Even in the face of police arrests and court sentencing, they have never given up. The year 2019 alone showed that the same can be said of other places as well. Sharing the sense of danger with Hongkongers, people in Taiwan have become vocal about their opposition to Chinese intervention, organising rally after rally against Chinese influence. Students in Indonesia took to the streets, protesting the significant weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission. Indians have mobilised large crowds, protesting the anti-Muslim citizenship law, in a number of cities.

Hopes and voices for freedom and dignity can be powerful enough to lead to democratic transition from authoritarian rule. The Malaysian people brought about the historical change in administration in 2018, in a manifestation of their hopes to terminate corruption and to have the country governed democratically. People in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia fought against authoritarian regimes in the 1980s and 1990s, never relinquishing the fight for democracy. Pro-democracy movements continue until goals are attained, because the actors know that they are the ones on the side of justice.

Claiming that democratisation must occur spontaneously, Asian governments have upheld the principle of non-interference and shied away from criticising other governments' attempts to weaken democratic values domestically and internationally. They have to be aware, however, that such silence helps weaken democratic values and suppress citizens calling for democracy. Furthermore, due to the interconnectedness of the challenges to democracy, both among themselves and across borders, democratic recession in a country will impact other countries seriously.

Governments that face pro-democracy movements domestically should engage in constructive talks with pro-democracy actors and make concessions. Other Asian governments should not rely on the principle of non-interference and should issue statements and take appropriate measures for the support of dignity and lives of the people in Asian societies. They must realise that the existence of citizens calling for democracy is a manifestation of the spontaneous voice for it. Without supporting such citizens, there is no way to bring stability, peace, and dignity to Asia.

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# Managing Democratic Leadership in Undemocratic Times: Challenges in Southeast Asia

*Bridget Welsh*

Over the last decade, Southeast Asia has witnessed an erosion of democracy. This has occurred in three forms – democratic deconsolidation in the region’s democracies of the Philippines and Indonesia, democratic decay/reversals in Cambodia, Singapore and Thailand and a hardening of authoritarianism in Brunei, Vietnam and Laos. In the two countries where there have been democratic openings – Myanmar in 2015 and Malaysia in 2018 – reforms to open up the system have slowed and concerns about human rights violations have persisted, notably in the treatment of minorities. The only overall positive democratic story of the region is its smallest country – Timor Leste, which celebrated its twentieth year of independence in 2019 and has witnessed a strengthening of democratic practices and norms.<sup>1</sup>

Southeast Asia’s democratic contraction echoes global trends, as scholars have shown that democracy is under increasing threat, both in democracies and other more authoritarian regimes.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there are unique features of the region that help us understand the threats facing Southeast Asian democracy. This article outlines these features, detailing four threats, and fleshes out possible responses for leaders to strengthen democracy in the next decade.

## THE ENEMY WITHIN: MINORITY MARGINALISATION

In the West, populist pressures undermining democracy have primarily centred on immigrants as societies have pitted “local” or “native” against “foreigner”. In

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the trajectories of democracy in the region, see *Freedom of the world*, Freedom House (FH), <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>. As a matter of disclosure, the author is a senior advisor for FH for Asia.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond, “Breaking Out of the Democratic Slump,” *Journal of Democracy*, 31, no. 1 (2020): 36-50.

Southeast Asia, the focus has been on ethnic minorities, locals who were in these countries before their independence. Nowhere is this clearer than in the horrific treatment of the Rohingya in Myanmar.<sup>3</sup> With 745,000 Rohingya forced out by military operations in 2017, and charges of genocide filed in the International Court of Justice in 2019, this minority has not only had its livelihoods and rights stripped, it has become stateless. This internal orientation of populist pressures extends across the region – the Chinese Malaysians and Chinese Indonesians, the indigenous communities of Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, and the Muslims in Thailand and Myanmar. The erosion of rights involves a wide range of developments, from removing citizenship and exclusion from political life to increasingly making these groups targets of violence and harassment.

An important element of this marginalisation has been religion. Traditionally, race is the main underlying issue in corrosive populist pressures in the West, but in Southeast Asia a prime cause is differences over religion. This is because one of the most important developments has been the emergence of the majority religion “protection” movement – a phenomenon where there has been a strengthening of the relationship between the state and the dominant religion – be it Buddhism or Islam.<sup>4</sup> Part of the cause of the treatment of the Rohingya has been the mobilisation by the conservative Buddhist clergy in Myanmar; a similar dynamic underscored the attacks on former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or “Ahok”, in 2017, when he was imprisoned for blasphemy in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> Accompanying “protection” is a continued religious revival across faiths, as we have seen broadening evangelism and a rise of “born again” Muslims (*hijrah movement*).<sup>6</sup> Much of this revivalism brings with it a conservative and exclusionary view of the faith that has cut into the social fabric and fuelled antagonisms toward “the other” religions. Conservative religious mobilisation, for example, has contributed to attacks on the LGBT commu-

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Rohingya crisis, see: <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew J. Walton and Susan Hayward, *Contesting Buddhist narratives: Democratization, nationalism, and communal violence in Myanmar*. Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Setijadi, “Ahok’s Downfall and the Rise of Islamist Populism in Indonesia,” *ISEAS Perspective* 38, no. 8 (2017).

<sup>6</sup> See Terence Chong (ed.), *Pentecostal megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating class, consumption, and the nation*. Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018. See also Terence Chong and Evelyn Tan, “Christian Expansionism in Southeast Asia,” *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 96 (2019).

nity in Indonesia and Malaysia and constrained the expansion of rights for sexual minorities elsewhere in the region.<sup>7</sup>

This focus on internal enemies has fostered intolerance and fractured societies, undercutting democratic protections of rights and the rule of law. In the Philippines, the pattern of populist attacks deviates from ethnicity, as the focus has been on targeting lower-class men in the Duterte-endorsed “drug war” since 2016.<sup>8</sup> This has resulted in thousands killed by vigilantes. It echoes the “drug war” launched by Thailand’s Thaksin Shinawatra – another populist leader – when he first won power in 2003.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, thousands of extrajudicial killings occurred. This common “enemy within” is a prominent feature undercutting democratic practices, one in which Southeast Asian societies are pitted against themselves – a serious challenge for leaders and citizens alike.

## SOCIAL MEDIA DISTORTIONS

Closely associated with the region’s marginalisation has been the rise of social media. What is not fully appreciated about Southeast Asia is that it is one of the most “connected” regions in the world – on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and more. A study in 2019 found that of the 659 million people living in Southeast Asia, 415 million (63%) use the internet, the third highest region in the world.<sup>10</sup> Also illustrative is that Indonesia is the 4th largest Facebook user in the world. Myanmar has seen connectivity rise from essentially nothing to over a third of the population in less than five years. These developments have occurred rapidly and intensively, with

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Neela Goshal and Thilaga Sulathireh, “The Deceased Can’t Speak for Herself: Violence against LGBT people in Malaysia,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 25 July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/25/deceased-cant-speak-herself-violence-against-lgbt-people-malaysia> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Philippines: No Letup in ‘Drug War’ Killings,” 14 January 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/14/philippines-no-letup-drug-war-killings> (accessed 16 January 2020). See also, Bjoern Dressel and Cristina Regina Bonoan, “Southeast Asia’s Troubling Elections: Duterte Versus the Rule of Law,” *Journal of Democracy*, 30, no. 4 (2019): 134-148; and Nicole Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 35, no. 3 (2016): 91-109.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Thailand’s War on Drugs,” Briefing Paper, 12 March 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/03/12/thailands-war-drugs> (accessed 16 January 2020); and Marcus Roberts, Mike Trace, and Axel Klein. “Thailand’s ‘war on drugs’,” *Beckley Foundation Drug Policy Programme, Briefing Paper* 5 (2004).

<sup>10</sup> We are Social, *Global Digital Reports 2019*, <https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019> (accessed 16 January 2020).

higher internet and social media access driven primarily by advances in telecommunications, comparatively lower access costs and the proliferation of smartphones. Unlike in China, the region's most-closed authoritarian regimes of Vietnam and Laos do not heavily regulate social media use. While the wider access to information has dislodged more centralised and authoritarian control of the mainstream media and levelled the playing field for opposition parties and alternative voices, this dynamic has not necessarily strengthened democracy.

Foremost, incumbents with greater access to resources have been able to reverse the equalising trends – hiring organisations that have access to data and target voters, using spy software and, importantly, introducing and applying laws that curb the access of political challengers to different social media outlets.<sup>11</sup> From *lèse-majesté* charges and the banning of Twitter in election campaigns in Thailand to the introduction of the 2019 Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) in Singapore, the space for political criticism on social media has narrowed, limiting free speech and mobilisation. Even when there is access, this has not necessarily guaranteed free speech. Vietnam has allowed social media use but hammered bloggers and critics with legal charges. As of the end of 2019, over 50 bloggers were jailed, with long sentences for criticising the governance in Vietnam.<sup>12</sup>

Another facet undermining democracy has been the rise of “fake news,” hoaxes and unchecked hate speech on social media – the misuse of this medium. Attacks on the Rohingya in Myanmar, stories about foreigners being given citizenship in Indonesia and Malaysia and carefully crafted defamations of political figures are sadly common.<sup>13</sup> This abuse of social media has been used to justify the more intrusive government controls, but has also contributed to another impact on democracy: an erosion of trust in information, even among close personal networks. This has come when social media is already serving as “echo chambers”, reinforcing political polarisation as users follow reaffirming news sources and participate in communities that reinforce their own views.

Greater use of social media has not necessarily contributed to a more informed citizenry. The use of targeting in political advertising and provocation of emotions

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of curbs on internet freedom, see the Freedom of the Net reports published by Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-net> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>12</sup> For weekly reports on arrests and overviews of arrests of bloggers see: Vietnam Human Rights Defenders, <https://www.vietnamhumanrightsdefenders.net/> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>13</sup> See Ibnu Nadzir, Sari Seftiani and Yogi Setya Permana, “Hoax and Misinformation in Indonesia: Insights from a Nationwide Survey,” *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 92 (2019).

have deepened the polarisation and fissures in societies. Citizens are increasingly more vulnerable to manipulation, “loyalty group think” and nudging, as opposed to more reflective engagements. It is this lack of substantive dialogues and the superficiality of discussions on social media – what has been coined as P-ADHD (attention disorder tied to social media) – that has been seen to be having detrimental effects on democracy.<sup>14</sup> The need for active and informed citizens is not being filled. Southeast Asia is not alone in these phenomena, but the high level of social media use and internet penetration accentuates these trends.

## RISE OF NON-DEMOCRATIC VALUES

This in part helps us understand another worrying regional trend: more widespread non-democratic values and a lack of understanding of what democracy actually is. Both of these phenomena point to a serious problem: democracy in the region lacks a strong social foundation. Southeast Asia is again not unique in this trend, but here, it has taken on a character that reinforces the internal fissures noted above and corrodes democracy from within.

Survey data, drawing from the last two waves of the Asian Barometer Surveys (ABS) (4th Wave 2014-2016, 5th Wave 2017-2020) conducted in eight Southeast Asian countries,<sup>15</sup> point to three important developments. First is a lack of political literacy and comprehension of what democracy entails.<sup>16</sup> There is a common equation of democracy with non-democratic practices. It is no wonder this is occurring, as autocrats such as Thailand’s General Prayut Chan-o-cha are labelling practices democratic when they are not. The democratic deconsolidation in existing democracies further contributes to this conceptual confusion, as non-democratic practices such as “drug war” killings are legitimised for some as part of a democratic system. For those that do have understandings of democracy, the focus is on the substantive dimensions of democracy, namely equality, rather than processes such as elections or rights. Southeast Asians differ in their comprehension of what

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<sup>14</sup> Jamie Bartlett, *The people vs. tech: How the internet is killing democracy (and how we save it)*. Random House, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> The countries include Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. For more information on the ABS, see: <http://www.asianbarometer.org/survey>.

<sup>16</sup> Doh Chull Shull, “Popular understanding of Democracy.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017.

democracy means when compared to those in the West.<sup>17</sup> There is greater attention to the outcomes of policy, as governments are seen to have more dominant roles in providing solutions to problems.

This Southeast Asian focus on democracy as “equality” helps us understand why faith in democracy is eroding. Regimes are unable to stem the contraction of social mobility and widening of inequality the region has experienced since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Regimes are grappling with the negative effects of globalisation as many are being left behind. Politically the impact is growing frustration with democracy, as these regimes allow for more open protest against growing economic exclusion.

At the same time, there is increased support for non-democratic alternatives. With a long history of “strong men”, from the likes of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines to Indonesia’s Suharto, there is a tradition of embracing autocratic leadership, one that has been rejuvenated as democracy have delivered mixed results. Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte remains highly popular not in spite of the drug war, but arguably because of it.<sup>18</sup> His language and tough image are integral parts of his persona and have wide appeal. Indonesia’s Prabowo Subianto continued to win over 40% of support for the presidency in 2014 and 2019, alluding to his close relationship with, as the son-in-law of, former dictator Suharto. It is not a coincidence that Duterte also has close ties with the Marcos family as well. During Duterte’s tenure he has worked to rehabilitate the Marcos family, including allowing a hero’s burial for the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 2016. Even in Malaysia, which has opened up after the ouster of Najib Tun Razak in 2018, the reelection of Mahathir Mohamad, known for his erosion of political space in his twenty-two-year first tenure, taps into more autocratic sentiments among some of his supporters. It is not a coincidence that the longest serving dictator – Hun Sen of Cambodia, in power for nearly thirty-five years since 1985 – governs in Southeast Asia.

Along with support for autocratic leaders, there is a resurgence of support for the military. With the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi formally removing the military from power in the 2015 election, it appeared that the military’s power in Southeast Asia was waning. This is not the case, as militaries

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<sup>17</sup> Min-Hua Huang, Yun-han Chu, and Yu-tzung Chang, “Popular Understandings of Democracy and Regime Legitimacy in East Asia,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>18</sup> See Social Weather Station for regular polls on Duterte, <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/home/> (accessed 16 January 2020).

took power in a coup in Thailand in 2014 and has managed to stay in power through a configured election in 2019, gained greater footholds in the corridors of power of Indonesia and the Philippines and held on to key decision-making powers in Myanmar, especially in ethnic minority areas.<sup>19</sup> By the turn of this decade, militaries are seen as resurging in power in Southeast Asia. Public support for this non-democratic alternative has also gained traction, both at the 2019 polls in Thailand and through support for Prabowo in Indonesia as well as in the ABS survey data.

Higher support for authoritarian alternatives parallels trends globally, but a third facet of shifts toward non-democratic norms is more unique to the region and feeds into other non-democratic practices. This is the declining support for secularism. Across Southeast Asia (with the exception of Singapore), majorities support non-secular government – a consultative role for religious leaders in government and in some countries, support for greater use of religious laws. This ties into the strengthening of religious protection movements and the negative treatment of minorities, noted earlier. While it is not clear which of these factors came first, the shifts in values or practices, the reinforcing effect on each other help corrode democracy's foundation.

## THE NON-DEMOCRATIC HEGEMON OF CHINA

The region's environment does not help either. Over the last decade, Southeast Asia has witnessed a tectonic shift in the power of China. Not only has China emphatically become the region's hegemon, it has emerged as the leading global power as the United States has declined in influence. The rise of China has also shaped democracy in the region, tilting the balance away from rights and representation.<sup>20</sup>

Within Southeast Asia, the most prominent role that China has played has been in shoring up non-democratic leaders. China's relationship with Cambodia's Hun Sen has been long honed, reinforced by investment and international support. China has also allied with regional autocrats. When Malaysia's Najib Tun Razak became embroiled in the world's largest kleptocracy scandal to date, the 1MDB case,

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<sup>19</sup> Duncan McCargo, "Southeast Asia's Troubling Elections: Democratic Demolition in Thailand," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 4 (2019): 119-33; and Aaron Connelly and Evan Laksmana, "Jokowi Offers Prabowo a Piece of the Pie," *Foreign Policy*, (2019), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/31/indonesia-democracy-general-jokowi-offers-prabowo-a-piece-of-the-pie/> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Larry Diamond, *Ill winds: Saving democracy from Russian rage, Chinese ambition and American complacency*. New York: Penguin, (2019).



he turned to China for loans to assist in the bailout of debts caused by the abuse of power. Both the current leaders in Thailand (Prayut) and the Philippines (Duterte) have become closer to China as they have become more autocratic, relying on Chinese investment and international support. Nowhere is the pattern clearer than in Myanmar, where after Aung San Suu Kyi was lauded by the West when she was elected into power, she moved her government closer to China after international criticism poured in from the Rohingya crisis from 2017 onwards. Ironically, she reversed her country's foreign policy from growing connections to the West, under her predecessor, Thein Sein, to one in which the Myanmar is now reliant on China's support internationally – as had been the case during the height of the military Tatmadaw government.

New alliances coincide with growing perceptions of the positive role that China is playing among many Southeast Asians. Traditionally, the United States was seen to reinforce stability in the region, even during the divisive Vietnam/IndoChina wars where the United States was shoring up non-communist leaders. This is no longer the case. The Trump administration's pull-out from the Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership (TPP) – after years of negotiation to put the treaty in place – and adoption of “transactional politics” in bilateral relations have solidified the view that the United States is unreliable and erratic. While there are deep suspicions of China, among elites and the general publics in Southeast Asia, it is seen as a steadier player in the region. This has been boosted by the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has brought US\$11 billion in infrastructure investments into the region in 2019.<sup>21</sup> China has replaced the United States as the region's stabiliser for many in the region and perpetuated the view that the region's economic security and future lies with China rather than the United States. This has affected democracy negatively, as it ties the region with the most powerful global autocratic regime. To many, democracy is no longer intertwined with the region's future to the same degree as it used to be.

In fact, China's model of governance – economic development without democracy – holds sway among large swathes of Southeast Asian publics and leaders. With its economic growth and reduction of poverty, China is now seen as a viable model to follow. The resonance of the “China model” is particularly strong among older Southeast Asians, who have watched the country's transformation, and

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<sup>21</sup> Chong Koh Ping, “Belt and Road Investment in Southeast Asia Jumps,” *Caixin Global*, 14 August 2019. <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2019-08-14/belt-and-road-investment-in-southeast-asia-jumps-report-101450854.html> (accessed 16 January 2020).

among those are citizens of Chinese descent who look to their “mother” country with pride. While there is considerable variation in the attraction to China’s model of governance, the fact is, China is now a model to reckon with, and it challenges the support for democracy for future governance.<sup>22</sup>

China has worked to strengthen its support for its model of governance with active interventions in Southeast Asia. This goes beyond the alliances noted above, supporting pro-China leaders. It extends into actively supporting different domestic actors vis-à-vis each other. In the 2018 Malaysian election, the China ambassador participated in the hustings, calling on Malaysians to vote for the then incumbent government.<sup>23</sup> As environmental and nationalist concerns over China’s investments in Southeast Asia have mounted, China has actively worked to strengthen those who have favoured their growing role and model of governance through social media operations and financing. This has included attempts to reduce criticism of China’s violation of human rights in Xinjiang and in Hong Kong, as well as involvement in local political contests in Southeast Asia. In some cases, China has shared technology to support its political allies in their efforts to weaken opponents.<sup>24</sup> China has become a domestic political issue in Southeast Asia, raised in elections and by civil society. The interventions and pressure to dampen criticism on human rights issues have negatively affected democracy. More broadly, Southeast Asian governments that do become more democratic – notably Myanmar and Malaysia – are now operating in a regional and global environment that does not work in democracy’s favour.

## MODEST MEASURES MOVING FORWARD

Given that the challenging underlying forces impacting democracy are multi-faceted – creation of internal enemies, distortions by social media, greater adoption of non-democratic values and non-favourable regional contexts – what can leaders in Southeast Asia do to ameliorate and reverse these trends? The answer begins by recognising how serious the long-term erosion of democracy will be on Southeast Asia; a contraction of democratic space will further underlying conflicts, negatively

<sup>22</sup> Bridget Welsh and Alex Chang, “Choosing China: public perceptions of ‘China as a model,’” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015): 442-456.

<sup>23</sup> Teck Chi Wong, “Playing the China Card is Unlikely to Save the MCA,” *New Mandala*, 8 May 2018, <https://www.newmandala.org/mca-china-card/> (accessed 16 January 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Walker, Shanthi Kalathil, Jessica Ludwig, “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power,” *Journal of Democracy*, 31, no. 1, (2020): 124-137.

affect rights and inclusion and undercut the region's future potential stability and prosperity. The issues are pressing and measures need to be targeted at the specific factors that are undermining democracy. Below are four initiatives that can strengthen democracy associated with the different dimensions identified above. These measures are modest, important first steps, and should be part of a broader programme to rebuild democracy globally.

To address the attacks on minorities in Southeast Asia – religious or otherwise – there needs to be more efforts to promote minority defenders. This can come in different forms, such as funding for civil society groups, fora to discuss minority concerns, or appointments of minority representatives within government bodies. Currently, those that speak up for minority rights face considerable pressure and, in some cases, are “pariahs” within their own community. The aim should be to normalise inclusion, to reduce the demonisation of minority communities. For this to occur, there needs to be greater legitimisation of the narratives and protection of rights of minority communities. If domestic environments are not viable for discussions, then measures can extend to the international stage and transnationally, giving minority representatives legitimacy, experience and, as appropriate, platforms to reduce the attacks on minority communities within countries in Southeast Asia.

To support greater inclusion, there also needs to be more active interventions to strengthen democracy on social media. If you cannot reverse the trend, then it is better to join the medium, to introduce emotion-tied campaigns that promote the value of democracy. A critical part of this should be campaigns to foster inclusion, reduce hate speech and address fake news. Governments can create independent bodies to address fake news, to discredit the distortions of information. At the same time, one aim should be to foster more substantive dialogues on governance and democracy; thus the idea of nurturing democratic social media networks and facilitating dialogues on policy issues. This would involve funding initiatives to reorient social media toward democracy strengthening. Technology needs to be an integral part of any democracy-building strategy.

The shift in norms and values calls out for greater civic education in schools and in society in general through public education campaigns. There needs to be more clarity in the understanding of what democracy is (and isn't) as well as more attention given to why rights and elections are important within Southeast Asian societies. Political literacy needs to be developed, especially among younger generations who believe they are informed due to social media, but in fact lack adequate knowledge of democratic practices. Two important dimensions of the civic education curriculum should be its secularity and digital platforms.

Finally, Southeast Asian countries need to introduce laws that limit interference in elections by foreign countries and laws that foster greater transparency about foreign involvement in business ventures involving public spending. China's power and role in regional affairs is increasing, and while it will continue to woo and win allies within Southeast Asia, the ability to shift publics and directly participate in Southeast Asian campaigns and political processes needs to be curbed. Simultaneously, as much of the foreign involvement in the political realm is out of public purview, introducing laws that require greater transparency and provide protections for local companies/actors would improve conditions for a fairer and more open political terrain.

Each of these initiatives – strengthening minority defenders, democracy-oriented social media ventures, civic education and legal protections against foreign political interference – offers Southeast Asian leaders and civil society activists steps to put in place conditions where their citizens can embrace a different political future. The history of the region shows that democracy comes in waves, and after periods of authoritarian rule, there are pressures to open up political life. The past decade was one of democratic contraction, but the next decade does not necessarily have to be one of a continuation of this trend. Working to strengthen the social conditions for democratic narratives and practices can plant the seed for democracy to rejuvenate and, in the process, offer Southeast Asians a more inclusive and empowered future.

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# The COVID-19 Pandemic, the “War on Drugs,” and Duterte’s Brute Force Governance in the Philippines

*Mark R. Thompson*

## INTRODUCTION

Philippine President Rodrigo R. Duterte’s response to the COVID-19 virus has been in line with his “macho populism,” similar to Donald Trump’s in the US and Jair Bolsonaro’s in Brazil. Like these illiberal leaders, a lockdown of Metro Manila and most of the rest of the Philippines since mid-March was implemented only after Duterte’s initial “denialism,” “bravado” and “masculinity contests” in the face of the growing threat from the rapidly spreading virus.<sup>1</sup> Once Duterte did finally act, it was in a haphazard and highly militarised fashion due to the lack of planning and heavy reliance on the military and police. After the shutdown, many health workers had no way to get to work. When one enterprising mayor, Vico Sotto of Pasig, organised transportation for them to hospitals, he received a summon from the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation for violating the lockdown for his efforts.

Often lacking adequate protective gear and sufficient test kits, by mid-May 2020, 35 healthcare workers had died and over two thousand sickened during the crisis, amounting to nearly 20% of the total cases at the time. Philippine hospitals’ efforts to deal with the virus outbreak under such difficult circumstances

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<sup>1</sup> A. Santos, “The Price of ‘Machismo Populism’ in the Philippines,” *The Atlantic*, 7 June 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/duterte-kiss-philippines/562265/>; P. Piccato and F. Finchelstein, “Trump’s Macho Populism,” *Open Democracy*, 3 October 2016. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/trump-s-macho-populism/>; S. Parmanand, “The Dangers of Masculinity Contests in a Time of Pandemic,” *Oxford Political Review*, 18 April 2020. <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2020/04/18/the-dangers-of-masculinity-contests-in-a-time-of-pandemic/>. Duterte began lifting the lockdown on 1 June 2020 despite a lack of “discernable” fall in the number of new cases: R. Dancel, “Coronavirus: Sweeping, Strict Manila Lockdown Ends on June 1, After Three Months,” *Straits Times*, 28 May 2020. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/coronavirus-president-rodrigo-duterte-set-to-lift-manila-lockdown-after-3-months>.

have been nothing short of heroic, such as the new blood plasma treatment strategy being developed by the University of the Philippines' (UP) Philippine General Hospital and a new test kit being developed by researchers at the same university and the Philippine Genome Center. A "hero doctor" led a UP team that developed ReliefVent, a locally made and inexpensive but high-quality ventilator that has been used to help those who have fallen severely ill from COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

Under the lockdown, the social conditions of the poor have worsened dramatically, which culminated in Duterte threatening to shoot demonstrators demanding food. "Shoot-them-dead," Duterte said of those slum dwellers defying the lockdown to protest. "I am not used to being challenged," he said. "Not me. Let this be a warning to all."

But social distancing and working at home are luxuries for elites and the small middle class in a developing country like the Philippines. Being kept locked down in overcrowded slums provides little protection (and may make matters worse as Singapore has discovered with the virus spreading rapidly in dormitories housing migrant workers). The poor have also lost daily earnings they were dependent on for survival. In a Metro Manila slum, a resident was quoted recently as saying, "People are more likely to die of hunger than the coronavirus." Erratic delivery of crucial government food support and subsidies to the poor has led to hunger and growing desperation. Local leaders, the barangay captains, had to be warned not to play politics with food distribution.

It is thus not surprising that a recent opinion survey shows hunger levels have doubled in Metro Manila and most other parts of the countries during the pandemic. Many of the country's richest tycoons, several of them recently the subject of Duterte's wrath, stepped in to provide assistance to fill the void of an inadequate government reaction, forcing the Philippine president to apologise for his recent

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Gotinga, "PH Healthcare Workers with Coronavirus now 2,315," *Rappler*, 19 May 2020. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/261384-health-workers-coronavirus-cases-philippines-may-19-2020>; R. San Juan, "COVID-19 Plasma Treatment: Everything You Need to Know," *Philippine Star*, 25 April 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/health-and-family/2020/04/24/2009556/covid-19-plasma-treatment-everything-you-need-know>; E. Deyro, "How a Team of Filipino Scientists Developed a COVID-19 Test Kit," *CNN Philippines*, 13 March 2020. <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2020/3/13/covid-test-kit-scientists.html>; P. Caña, "Meet the Hero Doctor Helping Fight COVID-19 By Developing a Filipino-Made Ventilator," *Esquire Magazine*, 20 April 2020. [https://www.esquiremag.ph/life/health-and-fitness/hero-doctor-leads-development-filipino-made-ventilator-covid-19-a00289-20200420?ref=feed\\_8](https://www.esquiremag.ph/life/health-and-fitness/hero-doctor-leads-development-filipino-made-ventilator-covid-19-a00289-20200420?ref=feed_8).

outbursts. A Manila-based UN official warned that the current health situation remains a looming “humanitarian crisis.”<sup>3</sup>

Whether it is the extremely bloody war on drugs or now the pandemic lockdown, Duterte has instrumentalised them with his narrow “repertoire” of the “iron fist” as a “vigilante president” in order to demonstrate decisiveness, distracting from the larger picture of his failure to help significantly the poor majority in the country. This article briefly explores what is termed Duterte’s “brute force governance” using the example of the COVID-19 crisis and his “signature” programme, the war on drugs. When institutions are too weak to produce favourable governance outcomes, particularly when issues have become “securitised”, leading to demands for immediate solutions, and a lack of accountability allows the massive violation of human rights, brute force governance is the result, as the case of Duterte in the Philippines has sadly demonstrated.<sup>4</sup> It is argued that, at least until the COVID-19 outbreak (there are some indications that the pandemic has dented his seeming political invulnerability), the success of this strategy has allowed Duterte to distract effectively from the country’s failure of economic development and the lack of adequate social welfare programmes to reduce poverty significantly in the country, leaving the majority of the population poor. The broader significance of Duterte’s

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<sup>3</sup> “‘Shoot them dead,’ Philippine’s Duterte Warns Coronavirus Lockdown Violators,” *France24*, 2 April 2020. <https://www.france24.com/en/20200402-shoot-them-dead-philippine-s-duterte-warns-coronavirus-lockdown-violators>; D. Sim and K. Xinghui “How did Migrant Worker Dormitories Become Singapore’s Biggest Coronavirus Cluster?” *South China Morning Post*, 17 April 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/explained/article/3080466/how-did-migrant-worker-dormitories-become-singapores-biggest>; J. Gutierrez, “In a Manila Slum, Coronavirus Lockdown Hits Hard,” *New York Times*, 15 April 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/world/asia/manila-coronavirus-lockdown-slum.html>; M. Mangahas, “Hunger, Fear, Caution, Dependency,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 30 May 2020. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/130306/hunger-fear-caution-dependency#ixzz6NzZFPYTp>; C. Venzon, “Duterte Apologizes to Philippine Tycoons He Threatened to Jail,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 5 May 2020. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Companies/Duterte-apologizes-to-Philippine-tycoons-he-threatened-to-jail>; R. Holmes and P. Hutchcroft, “A Failure of Execution,” *InsideStory*, 4 April 2020. <https://insidestory.org.au/A-FAILURE-OF-EXECUTION/>.

<sup>4</sup> This term is inspired by the concept of “blunt force regulation”: D. Van der Kamp, “Blunt Force Regulation and Bureaucratic Control: Understanding China’s War on Pollution,” *Governance*, published online 4 March 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12485>. Van der Kamp argues that China resorts to such regulation because “institutions are too weak to hold bureaucrats accountable”, which results in leaders using blunt force measures (e.g., closing all factories in a particular industry, not just those which have violated pollution limits). Duterte goes a step further, bypassing bureaucratic procedures and laws to impose deadly “solutions.”



rule is that when there is a populist breakthrough in a weak state with a poor record of human development it can even lead to mass murder.

## THE “WAR ON DRUGS” AS BRUTE FORCE GOVERNANCE

Duterte has become the most popular president in the post-Marcos Philippines, with about 80% of Filipinos polled consistently expressing their support. This is not despite his brutal war on drugs but *because* of it.<sup>5</sup> The war on drugs has involved police vigilantes killing (usually unarmed) suspected drug criminals based on lists compiled at the local level and according to a template in which those killed have guns planted on them by police to claim they “fought back.” It is difficult, if not impossible, to provide an exact figure on deaths in the “war on drugs” given that after a brief “acclamatory” phase when police bragged about those killed to the press, officials began deliberately to obfuscate data to foil accurate counts after domestic criticism and international pushback. During the first six months of the drug war, estimates by police, media, and human rights groups were between 7,000 and 10,000 killed. By late 2018, the chair of the Philippine Human Rights Commission, Chito Gascon, estimated the number killed in the drug war at up to 27,000.<sup>6</sup>

Duterte excoriated his liberal predecessors over the supposed breakdown of law and order, which has resonated with a public angry about a dysfunctional ju-

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<sup>5</sup> “Third Quarter 2019 Social Weather Survey: Pres. Duterte’s Net Satisfaction rating at ‘Very Good’ +65,” *Social Weather Stations*, October 9 (2019): Accessed 20 October 2019. <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artclidisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20191009121030>; R. Cabato “Thousands Dead. Police Accused of Criminal Acts. Yet Duterte’s Drug War is Wildly Popular,” *Washington Post*, 23 October 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/thousands-dead-police-accused-of-criminal-acts-yet-dutertes-drug-war-is-wildly-popular/2019/10/23/4fdb542a-f494-11e9-b2d2-1f37c9d82dbb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/thousands-dead-police-accused-of-criminal-acts-yet-dutertes-drug-war-is-wildly-popular/2019/10/23/4fdb542a-f494-11e9-b2d2-1f37c9d82dbb_story.html); M. Thompson, “Why Duterte Remains so Popular: The Failures of the Philippine’s Liberal Reformism,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 9 (2018): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/philippines/2018-10-09/why-duterte-remains-so-popular>.

<sup>6</sup> S. Coronel, “The Vigilante President,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2019. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/philippines/2019-08-12/vigilante-president>; “Initial ‘Tokhang’ Files Show ‘Template Nanlaban’ Cases,” *ABS-CBN*, 4 April 2019. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/04/19/initial-tokhang-files-show-template-nanlaban-cases-lawyers-group>; D. Johnson and J. Fernquest, “Governing through Killing: The War on Drugs in the Philippines,” *Asian Journal of Law and Society* 5, no. 2 (2018): 359-390; D. Maru, “CHR chief: Drug War Deaths Could be as High as 27,000,” *ABS-CBN News*, 5 December 2018. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/12/0518/chr-chief-drug-war-deaths-could-be-as-high-as-27000>; Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, the University of the Philippines-Diliman, and Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism formed the Drug Archive in 2019 in a major effort to make a reliable count, with regular updates on their website: <https://drugarchive.ph/>.

dicial system. Duterte practises what has been termed “penal populism” but goes much further than the excesses of such policies in “developed countries” where the rule of law usually constrains politicians promising to “get tough” on criminals. He politicises latent anxieties about crime and social disorder, pointing to his supposed ability to clean up Davao, a major city in the southern island of Mindanao where he was mayor, and which has been ruled by either him or his surrogates, most recently his daughter, for over thirty years. He campaigned saying only he could bring “true change” to the Philippines and was the country’s “last card” in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. By “securitising drugs”, he created a dichotomisation of “good citizens” versus “evil” drug criminals and instrumentalised it to legitimate mass killings.<sup>7</sup>

Even though the drug war has targeted a wide range of people (primarily young urban poor males), it is not widely *perceived* as targeting the impoverished. As a recent study of an urban poor neighbourhood in Metro Manila has shown, residents “largely accept” that the drug war aims “to mould the poor into a ‘moral citizenry’” while excluding those who do not adhere to civic morality and thus become “undeserving of rescue.” It is thus believed that “good citizens” would be saved while victims were “immoral others.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the handful of opposition leaders targeted have either themselves been accused of drug dealing (such as opposition senator Leila de Lima, jailed after leading a Senate investigation into the drug war) or have been accused of betraying the country for criticising the drug war (such as Vice President Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo, who condemned the drug war killings at the United Nations).

Duterte himself admitted that the drug war has failed as the supply of illegal drugs has “worsened” and police were close to giving up in the fight against it. In

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<sup>7</sup> N. Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope: Penal Populism and Duterte’s Rise to Power,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 3 (2016): 91-109; M. Thompson, “Duterte’s Violent Populism: Mass Murder, Political Legitimacy and the ‘Death of Development’ in the Philippines,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (forthcoming 2020); N. Quimpo, “Duterte’s ‘War on Drugs’: The Securitization of Illegal Drugs and the Return of National Boss Rule.” In *A Duterte reader: Critical essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s early presidency*, Nicole Curato, ed. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017: 145-166.

<sup>8</sup> M. Thompson, “Poor Filipinos’ Lives Don’t Seem to Matter,” *New Mandala*, 12 August 2016. <http://www.newmandala.org/poor-filipinos-lives-dont-seem-matter/>; “Philippines: The Police’s Murderous War on the Poor,” *Amnesty International*, 31 January 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/philippines-the-police-murderous-war-on-the-poor/>; Kusaka, W. “Bandit Grabbed the State: Duterte’s Moral Politics,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 65 (2017): 40-75.

October 2019, the country's top policeman resigned when it was revealed he had links to officers involved in selling drugs. Duterte then dared his vice president Leni Robredo, who is from the political opposition, to take over the direction of the "drug war" after she had continued to criticise it, an obviously insincere offer which she surprisingly accepted, putting him further on the defensive. When Robredo began questioning the need for drawing up lists of purported drug abusers, criticised the drug-war killings again and spoke to a wide range of stakeholders, she was unceremoniously fired by Duterte after less than three weeks.

Despite these obvious failings, Duterte's brute force governance has won him legitimacy, reinforced by effective political messaging backed by trolling on social media. While Duterte browbeats his enemies in his mainstream media appearances, pro-government trolls continue the attack on social media, reinforcing his messaging. This allowed Duterte to use repression more selectively (although brutally) and more easily hide his administration's creeping illiberalisation through legalistic measures designed to undermine checks on his power (through the courts, media, and civil society in particular) than many other illiberal regimes. In the Philippines, a rump opposition party, the Liberals, has little support and middle class activists have been unable to sustain anti-regime protests. Opposition "yellow" forces have struggled to get their voices heard, particularly on social media dominated by pro-Duterte trolls.<sup>9</sup>

## DUTERTE'S FAILURE TO REDUCE WIDESPREAD POVERTY

Although Duterte called himself a "socialist" several times during his 2016 presidential campaign, it soon became clear that Duterte was "swinging to right-wing populism, in terms of discourse, governance style and his political support base." He also more openly revealed "his predisposition to authoritarianism," repeatedly expressing his "fascination with Marcos-era martial law" while resorting "to state

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<sup>9</sup> J. Cabañes and J. Cornelio. 2017. "The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (And What We Can Do About It)." In *A Duterte reader: Critical essays on Rodrigo Duterte's early presidency*, Nicole Curato, ed. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2017: 231-250; P. Combinido, "When Illiberal Social Media takes over Democratic Philippines," *New Mandala*, February 6 (2019): <https://www.newmandala.org/when-illiberal-social-media-takes-over-democratic-philippines/>; J. Dreisbach, "Social Media and Blogging: The Changing Philippine Media Landscape under the Duterte Regime," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 23 (2018). <https://kyotoreview.org/yav/social-media-blogging-under-duterte-regime/>; M. Thompson, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy in the Philippines: Duterte's Early Presidency." In *From Aquino II to Duterte (2010-18): Change, continuity – and rupture*, Imelda Deinla and Bjoern Dressel, eds, Singapore: ISEAS, 2019: 39-61.

violence as the solution to the problems of criminality and illegal drugs, leaving aside any thoroughgoing socio-economic reforms.” In July 2020, Duterte signed a sweeping “anti-terror” bill which a broad array of groups, from civil society activists, to the Catholic Church, Muslim representatives, and a number of business groups, condemned as a means to target peaceful opponents and stifle free speech.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that Duterte’s social policy initiatives have either been directed toward the middle class (free higher tuition in state higher education institutions to which few poor students have access because of the competitive advantage of expensive private schools in preparing students for the university admissions process) or are underfunded and largely unimplemented (universal healthcare).<sup>11</sup> Instead, Duterte has poured money into an ambitious infrastructure programme despite doubts about government agencies’ capacity and competence to undertake such projects as well as the lack of qualified construction workers, concerns which delays in the start of the construction of all but nine of the 75 projects underline. As money was “pumped into infrastructure projects, the health budget was haemorrhaging with big cuts.” Similar to Trump, Duterte cut funding for pandemic disease control, with funds for disease surveillance cut from P263 million in 2019 to P115 million in 2020. In the same period, the Department of Health’s budget of P172 billion was substantially under the World Health Organisation’s suggested 5% of GDP.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> B. Juego, “The Philippines 2017: Duterte-led Authoritarian Populism and its Liberal Democratic Roots,” *Asia Maior*, XXVIII, 129-163, K. Lema and M. Petty, “Opponents Dismayed as Philippines’ Duterte Approves ‘Monstrous’ Anti-terror Bill,” *Reuters*, July 3, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-security/opponents-dismayed-as-philippines-duterte-approves-monstrous-anti-terror-bill-idUSKBN24419T>

<sup>11</sup> Only 12% of students in now tuition-free state universities come from the poorest fifth of the population: J. C. Punongbayan, “Why the Free Tuition Law is not Pro-Poor Enough,” *Rappler*, 8 February 2019. <https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/222981-analysis-reasons-free-tuition-law-not-pro-poor-enough>. On the advantage private schools have in preparing students for the highly competitive admissions process to state universities and colleges see: J. C. Punongbayan, “Free Tuition Alone won’t Make College any more Accessible,” *Rappler*, 9 March 2017. <https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/163691-free-tuition-not-enough-college-access>. On the lack of funding for universal healthcare see: *Business Mirror*. 2019. “Lack of Funding Won’t Stop UHC Law Rollout,” 24 October 2019.

<sup>12</sup> “Duterte’s ‘Build Build Build’ under Fire,” *ASEAN Post*, 1 November 2019. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/dutertes-build-build-build-under-fire>; B. Tuazon, “Jolted by the Coronavirus,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 4 April 2020. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/128597/jolted-by-the-coronavirus>.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines had been a laggard in Southeast Asia in combating poverty, with among the highest incidence in ASEAN and more than double Indonesia's. Several economic initiatives of the Duterte administration have deepened poverty, such as VAT tax increases which hit the poor hardest, and the 2019 rice tariffication law, which opened the country to cheaper rice imports without adequate safety nets, hurting millions of already marginalised family-based farmers due to an abrupt decline in farmgate prices. While government data shows poverty at about 20%, opinion polls of self-rated poverty show it is much higher. According to data from the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey for the fourth quarter of 2019 – before the current pandemic, which has likely led to a huge increase in poverty – 54% of Filipino families rated themselves as poor, the highest since 2014.<sup>13</sup> Duterte's murderous drug war has conveniently diverted attention from the continued failure of two decades of nearly uninterrupted high economic growth to improve the condition of the poor.

## CONCLUSION

With the drug war and now his "tough" reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, Duterte has attempted to demonstrate "political will" in a series of poorly planned, arbitrary acts which are termed here "brute force" governance. Emphasising the voluntarism of his leadership and its primacy over the law and bureaucratic restraints, Duterte attempts to demonstrate his ability to "solve" festering problems even if his solution involves mass murder. Prioritising "order over law," the price of his brute force governance is liberal rights.<sup>14</sup>

But Duterte risks, like previous Philippine presidents, falling into a "narrative trap": i.e., having his projected image too obviously contradicted by events. Like Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, his immediate predecessor, Duterte scored a major victory in the midterm elections last year. But also, like Aquino, whose second half of

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<sup>13</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Key Figures 2019*. Jakarta: The ASEAN Secretariat, 2019; M. Raquiza, 2019. "SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] 8 and 10: Growth, Labor Productivity and Decent Work: What Needs to Happen to Reduce Poverty and Inequality in the Philippines." In *Social Watch Philippines, The PH SDG agenda: Closing gaps, overcoming policy incoherence*, 10-45. Quezon City: Social Watch Philippines, University of the Philippines; "Fourth Quarter 2019 Social Weather Survey: Self-Rated Poverty Rises by 12 Points to 5-year-high 54%," Social Weather Stations, 23 January 2020. <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artclisppage/?artcsyscode=A-RT-20200123140450>.

<sup>14</sup> T. Pepinsky, "Southeast Asia: Voting Against Disorder," *Journal of Democracy*, 28, no. 2 (2017): 120-131.

his presidency was marred by a pork barrel scandal, a botched rehabilitation effort after a devastating typhoon, and the killing of 44 Special Action Force soldiers in an ambush by Muslim rebels, Duterte is at a turning point in his six-year presidential term (no re-election is allowed in the Philippines) that threatens his legacy. A recent global ranking shows the Philippines to have had the poorest response to the pandemic in the Asia-Pacific (in terms of case numbers, mortality rates, effectiveness of government response, and emergency readiness). At the same time, his allies have undertaken unpopular measures like closing the country’s most popular TV station after Duterte openly criticised its owners, with the president’s social media defenders claiming, “the law is the law.” But the lockdown has revealed double standards among high-ranking Duterte officials, such as revelations of a birthday celebration by the Manila police chief, flouting a ban on social gatherings, or other Duterte officials getting a slap on the wrist for violating quarantine at a time when a man was shot to death for violating the COVID-19 lockdown and relatives cannot even visit a seriously ill relative or attend wakes of those who have died.<sup>15</sup>

Duterte’s response to the pandemic, particularly his “shoot-them-dead” comment, have triggered considerable pushback on social media. Duterte’s social media dominance is for the first time being seriously challenged as stay-at-home netizens now have more time to fight back electronically. The pandemic is a crisis that affects all Filipinos, unlike the drug war which has largely targeted young poor males in urban slum areas. During the COVID-19 outbreak, online outrage appears to have proved a match for the Philippine president’s propaganda apparatus.<sup>16</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unexpected political challenge for him and his illiberal populist counterparts around the world. An “us” versus “them” narrative is difficult to sustain in the face of an existential health emergency. It has been suggested that women leaders have performed better during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Germany’s Angela Merkel, New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern, and

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<sup>15</sup> J. Teehankee, “Duterte’s COVID-19 Powers and the Paradox of the Philippine Presidency,” *Center for Southeast Asian Studies Kyoto University*, 28 April 2020. [https://covid-19chronicles.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/post-007.html?fbclid=IwAR2-swiSil-aeHgJzStHlJ5Tng0mmwhv35T0qi6HeoEt\\_4zDRRXKH2cYLZ8;](https://covid-19chronicles.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/post-007.html?fbclid=IwAR2-swiSil-aeHgJzStHlJ5Tng0mmwhv35T0qi6HeoEt_4zDRRXKH2cYLZ8;) “‘Law is Law Unless Friends Kayo.’ Netizens Slam Gov’t Double Standards,” *Rappler*, 13 May 2020. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260771-netizens-reaction-law-is-law-double-standards-government-ecq-guidelines>.

<sup>16</sup> “Online Outrage Drowns Out Duterte Propaganda Machine,” *Rappler*, 24 April 2020. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/258827-coronavirus-response-online-outrage-drowns-duterte-propaganda-machine>.

Scotland's Nicola Sturgeon). But perhaps the better explanation is "not that women leaders are doing better. It's just strongmen are doing worse."<sup>17</sup>

Promises of upholding "discipline" ring hollow when the poor go hungry. Duterte, who has maintained his pro-China stance, was slow to implement a travel ban against China and has not joined the international community in demanding accountability of China's slowness to report and deal with the virus outbreak in Wuhan. Duterte is hoping his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (now the second deadliest in Southeast Asia with the country being considered the least safe during the pandemic of all countries in the Asia-Pacific), will vindicate his "brute force" approach to governance.<sup>18</sup> But for the first time in his presidency, he faces a situation in which his efforts to deflect from his failure to help the majority of Filipinos who remain poor may no longer work.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Wittenberg-Cox, "What Do Countries with The Best Coronavirus Responses Have In Common? Women Leaders," *Forbes*, 13 April 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbeXrgcox/2020/04/13/what-do-countries-with-the-best-coronavirus-reponses-have-in-common-women-leaders/#7f0461b63dec>; H. Lewis, "The Pandemic has Revealed the Weakness of Strongmen," *The Atlantic*, 6 May 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/05/new-zealand-germany-women-leadership-strongmen-coronavirus/611161/>.

<sup>18</sup> P. Caña, "Philippines Dead Last in List of Safest Countries in Asia Pacific To Be In During the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Esquire Magazine*, 15 April 2020. <https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/philippines-dead-last-in-list-of-safest-countries-to-be-in-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/ar-BB12ErDm>; G. Baizas,

# Capacity Development in International Party Assistance – The Case of KASYP

*Isabel Urrutia*

## INTRODUCTION

Political parties are the building blocks of democracy. They perform four elementary and interrelated functions for modern, representative democracy: they aggregate the population's interests and channel their demands and proposals from the grassroots to governments and parliaments; they train, select and propose leaders for elections and government roles; through parliaments and elections they supervise government; they develop and evaluate policy alternatives.<sup>1</sup> However, in young democracies, parties' performance of these functions is often weak. Parties fail to link citizens with the state because they lack internal party democracy, they have an electoral instead of programmatic party orientation, and their institutionalisation is marred by patronage and personalistic structures built around strong leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Asian political parties are no strangers to these challenges. The record electoral year of 2019, with five massive and vibrant national elections in the region, masks a worrying trend: the consolidation process of Asian democracies is floundering. A bouquet of formal requirements such as constitutions that prescribe separation of powers, institutional checks and balances, multi-party systems and legal recognition of civil liberties are largely in place throughout the region. But underneath the

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<sup>1</sup> Catón, Matthias. 2007. *Effective party assistance: Stronger parties for better democracies. Policy paper*. Stockholm: IDEA International. [http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/effective\\_party\\_pol\\_paper\\_final\\_lowres.pdf](http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/effective_party_pol_paper_final_lowres.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> i) Wild, Leni, Marta Foresti, and Pilar Domingo. 2011. *International assistance to political party and party system development*. London: Overseas Development Institute. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6869.pdf>. ii) Svåsand, Lars. 2014. *International party assistance – What do we know about the effects?* Stockholm: EBA Expert Group for Aid Studies. Accessed 25 July 2019. <https://eba.se/en/rapporter/international-party-assistance-what-do-we-know-about-the-effects/1830/>. iii) Catón 2007.



formalities, structures of power co-optation, clientelism, corruption, exclusion and sectarianism persist; illiberal and authoritarian forces remain strong.<sup>3</sup>

International development cooperation has long engaged in strengthening young democracies and their party systems through international party assistance (IPA). It can be defined as:

“The organisational effort [by international development cooperation] to support democratic political parties, to promote a peaceful interaction between parties, and to strengthen the democratic political and legal environment for political parties.”<sup>4</sup>

IPA efforts date back to the 1960s and underwent little change until the mid-2010s when diversified modes of interventions, strategies and donor stakeholders arose.<sup>5</sup> The most common IPA intervention mode remains capacity development (CD) in the shape of training, academic and non-academic courses and exchange visits for party members.<sup>6</sup> These programmes increasingly seek to involve civil society organisations to enable the development of political leadership from outside the established elites, and they aim to strengthen the participation of underrepresented groups such as youth and women.<sup>7</sup>

Developing the democratic capacities of young party members is a focal point of IPA. The expectation behind it is that trained members will assume party

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<sup>3</sup> Pepinsky, Thomas. 2017. *Democracy isn't receding in Southeast Asia, authoritarianism is enduring*. 4 November. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/11/04/democracy-isnt-receding-in-southeast-asia-authoritarianism-is-enduring/>.

<sup>4</sup> Burnell and Gerrits 2010 in Svåsand 2014.

<sup>5</sup> The first phase was dominated by German political foundations and US American political institutes affiliated with both countries' leading parties. The most relevant German foundations providing IPA are the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. See Carothers, Thomas. 2014. "Principles for political party assistance." In *Accountability and democratic governance: Orientations and principles for development*, by OECD, 85-96. Paris: OECD. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-en>.

<sup>6</sup> Direct IPA also includes other modes such as providing advisory, consultants, political polls (see Carothers 2014) and financial or in-kind grants (see Catón 2007). Indirect support involves indirect or pooled funding to multi-party or multi-stakeholder dialogues and brokering or negotiation (see Wild, Foresti and Domingo 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Carothers 2014.

leadership positions after the generational change and that they will exert a more democratic leadership, thereby bringing about change in their parties.<sup>8</sup>

Despite its long history, IPA continues to face important challenges. As with all interventions for consolidating democracy, the effectiveness of IPA is limited in the face of local structural and circumstantial factors and dynamics which lie beyond its influence.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the field of IPA lacks a systematic methodological framework of what it can achieve and how to do so.<sup>10</sup> There is scarce empirical evidence on IPA's transformative effects on political parties; little progress in party development has been found, and even when there is, the causal attribution across existing evaluations is weak.<sup>11</sup> IPA evaluations also display inconsistencies in what outcomes they assess and the availability of project data, and results measurement is often restricted to output level, e.g., number of events held, number of trained politicians, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Even less attention has been paid to empirically gauging the transformative effects of CD. IPA's theorised impacts often hinge on the success of CD programmes in achieving outcomes on the individual level, that is, enhancing party members' knowledge and skills. These are then expected to expand from individuals to their organisations through procedures and knowledge management.<sup>13</sup> But there is little empirical evidence confirming the first link in this results chain – the effectiveness

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<sup>8</sup> Svåsand 2014. Youth-oriented CD programmes are now implemented by numerous donors, prominent examples are the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)'s regional Fora of Young Politicians, the Programme for Young Politicians in Africa (PYPA), implemented jointly by four Swedish party-affiliated organisations and local partners, and the Young Leaders Programme in South Africa, implemented by the South African Democratic Alliance affiliated with the British Liberal Democratic Party and supported by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. In Asia, the largest multi-party programme is the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) followed by the Political Management Training for Young Progressives, implemented jointly by German, Swedish and Asian member parties of the Progressive Alliance.

<sup>9</sup> Stern, Elliot, Nicoletta Stame, John Mayne, Kim Forss, Rick Davies, and Barbara Befani. 2012. Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations. Working Paper 38, London: DFID. <https://www.oecd.org/derec/50399683.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Catón 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Carothers 2014.

<sup>12</sup> i) Svåsand 2014. ii) Wild, Foresti and Domingo 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Vallejo, Bertha, and Uta Wehn. 2016. "Capacity Development Evaluation: The Challenge of the Results Agenda and Measuring Return on Investment in the Global South." *World Development* 79: 1–13. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.10.044>.

of CD in enhancing knowledge and skills for democracy and party consolidation. Without evaluating these learning outcomes, CD will remain a black box in IPA.

This article, therefore, aims to contribute to building an empirical basis for understanding how CD delivers results for IPA. It seeks to provide answers to the questions: to what extent do CD programmes enhance knowledge and skills for democratic party performance among individuals and what are the contributing factors? To this end, it proposes an analytic framework for understanding and assessing the effectiveness of CD. It then reports findings obtained from evaluating the KASYP programme with this framework.

## UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR IPA

CD for IPA aims to enhance parties' and members' knowledge and skills for democratic performance and successful party operations (programme development, recruiting, campaigning, etc.).<sup>14</sup> But there are multiple challenges in evaluating the achievement of this objective. First, evaluations of CD face the same difficulties regarding causal attribution as with all IPA interventions. There is growing acknowledgement that in IPA, a given cause is not exclusively responsible for a given impact but only contributes to it.<sup>15</sup> This is even more so for CD because of the intangible nature of capacities and the complex processes by which individuals and organisations develop them.<sup>16</sup> Completing a CD programme does not guarantee that individuals have enhanced their capacities because CD is not simply the delivery of information. Rather, it is a

“process through which individuals, groups, organisations, institutions, and societies increase their abilities to: (i) perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and (ii) understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner.”<sup>17</sup>

In sum, the outcomes of CD on individuals comprise changes in how they think and act.<sup>18</sup> This article thus conceptualises results from CD programmes not as output but as outcomes on the level of individuals. It further disaggregates them into

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<sup>14</sup> Wild, Foresti and Domingo 2011.

<sup>15</sup> i) Carothers 2014. ii) Stern, et al. 2012.

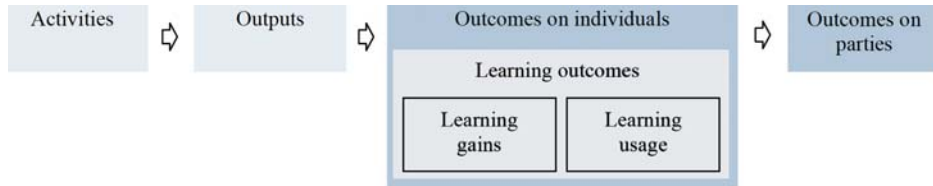
<sup>16</sup> Vallejo and Wehn 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Vallejo and Wehn 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Vallejo and Wehn 2016.

gains in knowledge and skills (learning gains) and the behavioural change which consists of applying this learning (learning usage).

**Figure 1. Simplified results chain of capacity development for IPA.**



Source: Author's own.

Even when a CD programme has in-built learning assessments (which few programmes seem to have<sup>19</sup>), this data should not stand for outputs but should be analysed towards understanding what changes occurred in individuals' learning and how these changes came about. Otherwise, CD evaluations fail to address the black box of how trained individuals learn, and without that, they cannot provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CD.

There are multiple approaches for evaluating the outcomes of CD programmes. In the context of the results agenda in development cooperation, much preference has been placed on experimental or semi-experimental designs based on a counterfactual comparison. However, these are often unfeasible for CD in IPA because of the political sensitivity of the interventions.<sup>20</sup> Instead, approaches such as Contribution Analysis (CA) are more apt as they shine a light on the causal mechanisms, the combination of causal and contextual factors, and underlying

<sup>19</sup> NIMD's evaluations do not specify if and how learning from its CD programmes is assessed on the individual level, see for example Schakel, Lydeke, and Lars Svåsand. 2014. *An evaluation of NIMD's application of direct party assistance*. The Hague: NIMD. <https://nimd.org/evaluation/evaluation-report-nimds-direct-party-assistance-2/>. PYPAs have yearly learning evaluations conducted by external evaluators. Learning assessment is based on survey data and interviews, with analysis of change conducted against a baseline generated at the start of the programme, see Karlsson, Ann, Elin Ekström, and Monica Johansson. 2016. *Annual evaluation report PYPAs 2015*. Stockholm: KIC. <http://kicsweden.org/en/our-projects/pypa-program-for-young-politicians-in-africa/>.

<sup>20</sup> For KASYP, no counterfactual could be constructed due to the political sensitivities of applicants' nominations. Participation in KASYP cannot be randomised because it is programmed to be competitive and applicants are usually nominated by the Foundation's country offices, by parties with which KASYP collaborated, or by alumni. Applications must be formally endorsed by the applicant's political party through a nomination letter from a higher-ranking party official to ensure the party's engagement.

assumptions.<sup>21</sup> Yet CA does not reflect by itself the specificities of developing the capacities of individuals.

I propose that combining CA with well-established models for evaluating adult learning in fields such as education and health can draw a more complete picture of what learning outcomes for IPA can be delivered by CD programmes, how and for whom. One such model is Kirkpatrick's four-level Training Effectiveness Model (TEM). It was developed in 1959 for evaluating organisational training, mainly in businesses, and today is often adapted and used to evaluate CD programmes for development.<sup>22</sup> The model conceptualises effectiveness as a four-level hierarchy, in which one level builds on another and increases effectiveness towards the achievement of organisational goals:

- 1) Reaction: The degree to which participants perceive the training to be favourable, engaging and relevant to their jobs.
- 2) Learning: The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, confidence and commitment from the training.
- 3) Behaviour: The degree to which participants apply what they learnt from training when they are back on the job.
- 4) Results: The degree to which targeted outcomes, usually on the organisational level, occur as a result of the training and follow-up package.<sup>23</sup>

As levels rise, they are more consecutive: while participants can still learn even if their reaction is negative, they cannot change their behaviour if they have not gained knowledge to do so. Combining this model with the analytical approach of

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<sup>21</sup> i) Stern, et al. 2012. ii) Westhorp, Gill. 2014. *Realist impact evaluation. An introduction*. Working and Discussion Papers, London: ODI. <https://www.odi.org/publications/8716-realist-impact-evaluation-introduction>.

<sup>22</sup> Carroll-Scott, Amy, Peggy Toy, Roberta Wyn, Jazmin Zane, and Steven Wallace. 2012. "Results From the Data & Democracy Initiative to Enhance Community-Based Organization Data and Research Capacity." *American Journal of Public Health* 102 (7): 1384-1391. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3478024/>. Another frequently used approach is Brinkerhoff's Success Case Method, which informed the interviewee selection of this evaluation. Evaluations with this method were conducted, for example by Olson, Curtis, Marianna Shershneva, and Michelle Horowitz. 2011. "Peering Inside the Clock: Using Success Case Method to Determine How and Why Practice-Based Educational Interventions Succeed." *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions* 50-59.

<sup>23</sup> Kirkpatrick Partners. 2019. *The Kirkpatrick Model*. 26 June. <https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Mode>.

CA allows researchers to observe learning gains and usage, as well as contributing and hindering factors.

## **EVIDENCE ON LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM THE KASYP EVALUATION**

KASYP is a CD programme established in 2010 within the scope of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's IPA mission to "consolidate democracy" by fostering representative and accountable democratic parties in Asia through strengthening young politicians' capacities. By 2019, the programme had trained more than 200 young politicians from 15 Asian countries and 43 political parties. Through four one-week training sessions in four different countries, it delivers modules on party building and electoral campaigning in democratic systems, local governance and German politics, while also training practical skills such as project management.

A preliminary phase of the evaluation reconstructed KASYP's Theory of Change (ToC) in collaboration with programme staff. Based on the outcomes and assumptions specified in the ToC, the evaluation objective was recalibrated into providing empirical evidence on what observable learning outcomes were achieved and what context factors mediate these results. This information would serve the Foundation in improving the effectiveness of its programme and adapting it to young politicians' learning needs. The evaluation applied a combined analytical framework of CA and TEM but limited the research to the first three effectiveness levels because KASYP had neither specified nor monitored targets on the level of political parties. Research proceeded in three steps: 1. Descriptive analysis of KASYP outputs; 2. Identification analysis of KASYP learning outcomes; and 3. Exploratory analysis of contribution mechanisms. To complete step 2, indicators were developed for identifying and qualifying change in alumni's capacities (outcome 1: alumni learnt) and in their behaviour (outcome 2: alumni used learning).

Primary data was collected to complete all three steps. No method for assessing learning is ideal; quizzes, reports, interviews or observations all have advantages and limitations. Thus, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to observe alumni's ability to recall learning contents and their reported usage of these contents. An online survey targeted all KASYP alumni and provided a sample of 73 respondents which reflected the population's diversity. The survey was rolled out in anonymous and non-anonymous forms, the latter because it allowed increasing response rates at a KASYP event. Positive bias from these personal responses, and from non-respondents, was partially addressed by considering incomplete responses and comparing responses from both survey

rollouts. As the indicators for gauging changes in alumni's knowledge and skills were recall-abilities, negative bias could have been introduced by respondents who completed the programme many years ago and whose recall abilities were naturally weakened by time. This was partially addressed by analysing data from seven semi-structured interviews with successful alumni and from focus group discussions using the World Café methodology with 100 participants divided into two clusters.<sup>24</sup> Additional information was drawn from document reviews and programme staff provided insights for the early stage of the evaluation.

Because of the high diversity of alumni's backgrounds and the multiple contexts in which KASYP was conducted, the findings and conclusions from the evaluation cannot be generalised to other CD programmes for IPA. However, they provide clues for further studying and understanding the potential and challenges of IPA youth CD programmes in Asian democracies.

## Learning gains – What alumni learnt

On the first effectiveness level, Reaction, KASYP was found to be effective as its alumni were satisfied with the programme and considered it relevant. On the second level, Learning, the research interest lay in finding evidence of learning gains related to the following targeted capacities, which were anchored in the KASYP curriculum:

- Democratic knowledge: role and functioning of political parties in democracies, good governance, local governance, local sustainable development, electoral campaigning and (new) media, the political system of Germany.
- Political hard and soft skills: project design and management, campaigning, communication, intercultural competency.

Findings were mixed. On the one hand, recall among surveyed and interviewed alumni was found to be common and detailed on the topic of electoral campaigning. Responses not only highlighted specific issues such as campaign strategy and messaging, but also reflected on tools, cases and specific lessons such as “know the pulse of voters and hit them right there”. Less frequent but likewise detailed recall was found on project design and management skills. The logical framework (logframe) was mentioned most prominently in the survey answers and in the interviews while other tools, such as SWOT analysis, were also recalled. Multiple

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<sup>24</sup> Special thanks to the KASPDA team for shouldering the main workload of the interviews and group discussions in Penang.

responses highlighted lessons about using and adapting planning and management tools to personal contexts. Additionally, the interviews also suggest that alumni developed unintended learning gains: awareness and information on Asian current affairs.

On the other hand, only weak evidence was found of alumni gaining knowledge on the role of political parties and the liberal democratic system. The quantitative and qualitative data contained high amounts of namedropping – recall by name only. Most frequently mentioned were the words “party functions” and the fact that parties are important to democracy, without further specifying the functions nor why parties matter. Only one interviewee engaged with the topic by describing his country’s democratic transition scenario. Beyond this case, interviews added no further evidence of learning beyond names. Notably, two interviews and the group discussions included remarks on these topics, which raises the question of whether values of democracy were left open for interpretation. For example, one interviewee used the diversity of country-specific contexts to relativise democratic principles such as non-discrimination and human rights.

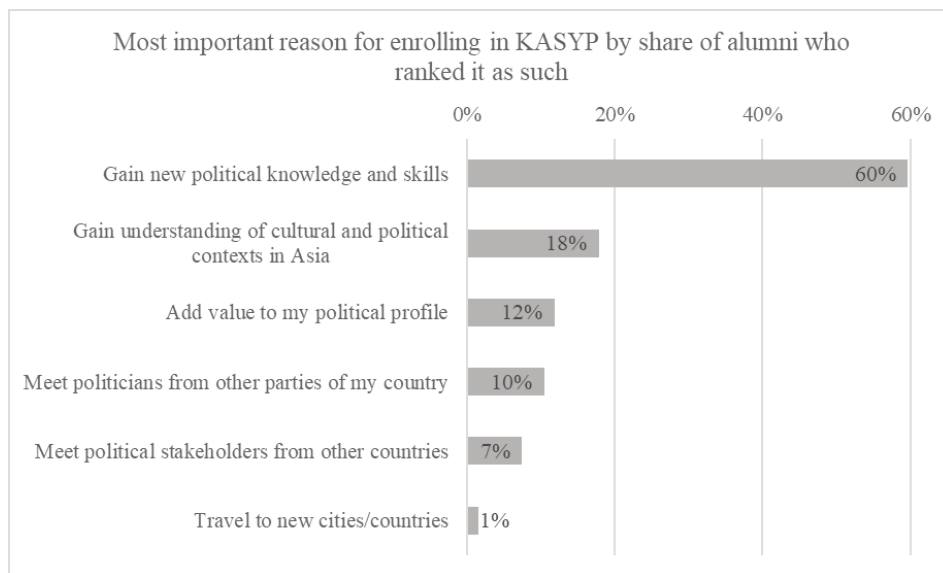
It is noteworthy that despite the limited learning gains on democracy and party functions, alumni expressed a strong demand for knowledge and skills to address new challenges to democracy. In the group discussions, the most frequently mentioned topics were issues of press freedom and interest in learning how to address digital misinformation and fake news.

Regarding soft skills, recall is not an adequate indicator and behavioural observation was not possible. Instead, survey responses and personal reflections were analysed. These suggest that most alumni increased their self-confidence and their appreciation for diversity; 62 per cent of survey respondents also fully agreed with the statement that through KASYP they had grown more tolerant of worldviews different from their own.

Contextual factors on the demand and supply side of training were then explored to find possible explanations for the variations in learning outcomes. On the demand side, a key assumption in the KASYP ToC is that participants have the willingness to learn. This was confirmed through a proxy, as 60 per cent of respondents ranked the gaining of new political knowledge and skills as their most important reason for enrolling in the programme.



**Figure 2. Alumni primary reason for enrolment.**



Source: Author's own, data from online survey, both rollouts.

Yet, the difference in learning gains by topics suggests that alumni had preferences on what they were willing to learn. Among survey respondents who were members of political parties, 84 per cent participated in electoral campaigns, more than in any other party activity. These experiences are likely to have enabled learning gains in campaigning skills. Knowledge and skill interests were also contingent on alumni's party positions – while most alumni were involved in party work, some had responsibilities in government when they participated in the programme, either as members of the executive or the legislative branch. Interviewees with government positions displayed high appreciation for project management skills and lessons from local governance experiences in Germany and Asia.

On the supply side, learning was driven by an environment perceived to be conducive and effective, with much learning occurring through peer-to-peer exchange among cohort members during and after the programme. KASYP features a hands-on component, the political project, intended to serve as an opportunity for participants to practise. Indeed, 86 per cent of survey respondents found it “much” and “very much” useful for practising project management skills. The experiential dimension of learning matters and it may be one of the factors limiting learning gains on the topics of political parties and democracy. As these largely comprise theoretical knowledge, building and retaining it is difficult. More so if contents are difficult to relate to alumni's country realities, as multiple respondents noted.

## Learning usage – What alumni used

The third training effectiveness level refers to whether alumni used what they learnt in KASYP, what learnings specifically they applied in their political parties, and in which situations. The empirical evidence to assess this effectiveness level is limited to alumni declaring such usage in the survey and the interviews. Alumni's reports could have been biased towards projecting a proactive image of themselves; thus, responses were read carefully and probed when possible. KASYP's training effectiveness on this level was low.

Among respondents to the anonymous and personal survey rollouts, 76 per cent and 88 per cent respectively declared that they used the gained knowledge and skills, mostly campaigning and project management skills. Concrete and detailed examples of such usage would have served as strong indicators of effectiveness on this level, but only one verifiable example was found in the interviews – one alumnus described how he used his KASYP learning for opinion polling and manifesto drafting. The survey responses contained 11 brief examples, but because no probing was possible, they counted as weak evidence.

**Table 1. Selected examples of KASYP learning usage.**

Topics/skills	Anonymous rollout	Personal rollout
Campaigning	I am a Member of [...]. Currently we are doing research for the 2020 Election in Myanmar. In our research, I am using the things learnt from KASYP, especially from Electoral Campaign Lecture. [...] Our findings and recommendations are reported to [...] to support its decision-making for preparation of the 2020 Election.	I am currently working on a campaign plan for the next year's election, and the campaign planning sessions have been a great resource.

Source: Author's own, data from online survey, both rollouts.

Nevertheless, 85 per cent of survey respondents and all interviewees reported that they used their learning indirectly by passing it on to other beneficiaries in their parties, often through self-organised training events.

The key contextual factor influencing alumni's usage was their party environment. Survey responses and interviews indicate that alumni with close links to the party elite, and in parties where KASYP had a good reputation, enjoyed more resources and opportunities to use their KASYP learning during and after the programme. Alumni in opposite environments struggled to apply and share their KASYP learning in their parties, i.e., due to party bureaucracy. Additionally, interviewees reported that party support was more easily given to their projects and

initiatives in the context of elections and when these initiatives served election purposes.

Lastly, alumni cannot carry their learning into the parties if they are not party members. Among survey respondents, party membership after graduation declined from 92 per cent to 77 per cent, while none of the alumni from academia and civil society joined a party after completing the programme. This constitutes a risk to the sustainability of KASYP's training effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of CD in developing knowledge and skills for democracy and party consolidation is the initial but understudied link in the results chains of IPA. It is still a black box in our understanding of how CD delivers results for IPA. The KASYP evaluation peered into this black box by providing empirical evidence on the programme's learning outcomes in young Asian politicians and on the factors that enabled or hindered these.

Applying a combined analytical framework of Contribution Analysis and Kirkpatrick's Training Effectiveness Model, the evaluation found that KASYP was effective in driving learning gains on electoral campaigning, project design and management skills and current affairs. These gains were enabled by alumni's learning preferences, which in turn were shaped by their party work experience and their responsibilities tied to their party positions. CD programming for IPA should hence be tailored to young politician's learning needs related to their actual party work. By harmonising targeted capacities, curriculum contents and the participant selection process, CD programmes can build on a participant's existing knowledge and interest to increase its effectiveness on learning gains.

The evaluation found only weak evidence of learning gains in the core topic of CD for IPA: knowledge on the role of political parties and the liberal democratic system. If young politicians cannot relate them to their country realities, they struggle to comprehend their meaning and how to implement them. To embed democratic learning contents into participants' contexts, they can be delivered around democratic challenges of concern to participants, such as press freedom and fake news. In doing so, programmes can allow for critical reflection and simultaneously build understanding about the quality of democracy. If CD is to have effectiveness for IPA, trained young politicians need to gain a solid analytical and value-based foundation on party functions and democracy.

Furthermore, the experiential dimension of learning matters. Given the theoretical nature of these topics, CD programmes can focus their didactical approaches

on practical and creative methodologies. As the evaluation showed, peer-to-peer exchange is also an important vehicle for learning gains and can be levered not only to increase them but also to sustain them over time.

KASYP's effectiveness regarding alumni's usage of their new learning was found to be low. An influential factor on this is alumni's political capital and their party environment, which can enable or hinder usage. CD programmes can address this by engaging closer with parties and strengthening programme reputation. Furthermore, strong evidence was found for indirect usage, where alumni pass their knowledge and skills on to other youths and party members. CD programmes can steer and harness young politicians' potential as democratic multipliers by including Train-the-Trainer approaches in their designs.

Lastly, peering into the black box of CD effectiveness is not enough. Evaluation research and IPA practitioners must lift the lid and assess a CD programme's contributions at the level of political parties. More data from within parties, as well as complementary research methods such as participatory observation, are needed. While party research is sensitive and laborious, it can provide necessary evidence on expected CD outcomes for party consolidation and democracy.

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# Bridging Leadership: A Framework for Democratic Leadership Capacity-Building

*Ryan Camado Guinaran*

## INTRODUCTION

In his book *Democracy: All that Matters*, Steven Beller cautioned readers that “If we just scratch the surface a little in the established democracies, the complacency that prevails there soon appears unwarranted.”<sup>1</sup> Asia, as in other parts of the world, is seeing creeping autocratisation. This reveals how fragile our democracies are and how our democratic labels may just be a disguise. Everyone, especially the young political leaders, has a great role to play in ensuring that the essence of democracy is possessed and experienced by all generations. Any capacity-building programme that promotes democracy in Asia will benefit from infusing in its training a leadership approach that is appropriate to nurturing democratic values and to ensuring that societal results guaranteed by democratic governance are achieved. In pursuit of a leadership model which is responsive to current realities, this paper examines a perceived weakness in democratic governance and suggests a contemporary leadership paradigm for social transformation through multi-stakeholder engagement. This leadership model has been widely utilised by non-government organisations, the academe, people’s organisations and government agencies.

## LEADERSHIP FOR A DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

People are increasingly becoming unconvinced about the ability of democratic governments to act effectively. Among several reasons for this are: unqualified

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<sup>1</sup> Beller claims that complacency (not giving much thought to democratic institutions by which their lives are governed) seems to be a prevailing attitude among people living in democracies. Beller, Steven. 2013. *Democracy: All that matters*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

leaders, uninformed voters, short-termism<sup>2</sup>, public dissatisfaction with politics and perceived inability to influence political processes, and elites and interest groups distorting democratic institutions.<sup>3</sup> After examining data on autocratisation in the world since the 1900s culled from the Varieties of Democracy Project, scholars say that a third wave of autocratisation is happening. However, they say panic is not warranted as the proportion of democratic countries globally is still near an all-time high. Democratic breakdown is still a risk though and this occurs now not as an abrupt event but as a gradual regression under a legal facade.<sup>4</sup>

Democracy has been said to be a *more-or-less* rather than an *either/or* affair. A spectral feature of democracy is raised where countries or states function more or less democratically along these dimensions: breadth, depth, range, and control.<sup>5</sup> Oscillations in these dimensions influence the procedural part of democracy: rule of law, electoral accountability, inter-institutional accountability, political participation, and political competition. These processes shape the substance, content and outcome of democracy which are freedom, equality and responsiveness. Political liberalisation and democratisation have ushered in the advancement and deepening of many procedural dimensions of democracy in the Asia-Pacific but have been remarkably less successful in securing adequate implementation of these procedures.<sup>6</sup> Social justice indeed results not only from the presence of institutional forms (democratic rules and regulations), but also from effective practice.<sup>7</sup> In places where there is perceived successful implementation of the democratic procedures, the people lament that they do not experience its outcome. There is a promise overload and a performance deficit with the political parties in Asia.<sup>8</sup> This observation is critical as the outcomes of democracy are important to the youth. In the Asian Barometer Survey on East Asia and Southeast Asia, it was observed that the youth

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<sup>2</sup> Moyo, Dambisa. 2018. "Why Democracy Doesn't Deliver" *Foreign Policy*, 26 April. Accessed 8 April 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/26/why-democracy-doesnt-deliver/>.

<sup>3</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Dressel, Bjorn, and Pelizzo, Riccardo. 2016. "The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings" *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>4</sup> Lührmann, Anna and Lindberg, Staffan. 2019. "A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?" *Democratization*. Accessed 1 June 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Crocker, David. 2008. *Ethics in global development: Agency, capability and deliberative democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Dressel, Bjorn, and Pelizzo, Riccardo. 2016. "The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings" *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>7</sup> Sen, Amartya. 2000. *Development as freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Shastri, Sandeep. 2020. Understanding Political Ideology, Political Parties and Party Systems in Asia. KASYP Program Phnom Penh, Cambodia. 17-21 February 2020.

tend to value the outcomes of political systems (good governance, social equity) a bit more than they do the basic normative principles (norms and procedures, freedom and liberty).<sup>9</sup> When the democratic outcome is not felt, public confidence and trust in the procedure (political accountability and participation) drop. An analysis of the quality of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region in 2016 has also brought up the issue of emptied democracies: governments that retain the formal aspects of democracy but not its substance.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that overcoming democratic deficits requires strong political leadership from the branches of the government and the collective political will of the citizens.<sup>11</sup> Experiences from the past also affirm that democratic declines can be upturned by focusing on a more microscopic approach or on local initiatives – a strategy that has been shown to be effective at promoting political reform.<sup>12</sup> Shaping the leader’s agency to work for genuine democracy is a starting point. By investing in micro political leadership and the mobilisation of the people, stronger ripples can be formed to blunt waves of autocratisation.

In its role of influencing young Asian leaders to foster democratic leadership, the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) will benefit from a strong leadership framework that supports democracy and reliably produces the desired outcomes. A fitting model is an approach that embraces the immense diversity in Asia and induces partnerships out of divides. The Bridging Leadership approach is suggested as an input to the KASYP curriculum.

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP: ROOTS AND APPROACH

Synergos, a global non-government organisation, initiated the Bridging Leadership programme in 1999 with partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Synergos founder and chair Peggy Dulany contended then that there was a dearth in leadership literature and research on leadership models that bridge divides. The programme was developed in response to what she sensed as the emerging global

<sup>9</sup> UNDP. 2014. Youth and Democratic Citizenship in East and South-East Asia Exploring political attitudes of East and South-East Asian Youth through the Asian Barometer Survey.

<sup>10</sup> Morlino, Leonardo, Bjorn Dressel, and Riccardo Pelizzo. 2016. “The Quality of Democracy in Asia-Pacific: Issues and Findings” *International Political Science Review* 32(5): 391-511.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos, Clarita R., Dennis M. Lalata, Dianne C. Despi, and Portia R. Carlos. 2010. *Democratic deficits in the Philippines: What is to be done?* Manila: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> Kurlantzick, Joshua. 2019. “Saving Asia’s Democracies.” *The Diplomat*, 10 July 10. Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/saving-asias-democracies/>.



environment – “more complex yet interdependent – full of conflicts and potential conflicts coming from inequities in structures and systems.”<sup>13</sup> To date, Synergos has had engagements in more than 15 countries.

Bridging Leadership (BL) is a style of leadership practised by both individuals and organisations that is effective in building trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders to address systemic challenges.<sup>14</sup> It is characterised by the capacity to engender trust and maximise the potential and contributions of diverse stakeholders, helping them to unite, overcome divides and converge in transformative partnership especially in addressing social inequities. This leadership approach entails inner work for self-awareness and personal or organisational mastery, analytical skills to understand complex social issues, and openness to collaboration as a norm.

Diverging from conventional notions on leadership, Bridging Leadership subscribes to shared power and collective problem-solving. The leader is reliably more of a facilitator, enabler, convener, and co-owner of the problem, processes, and solution.

**Figure 1. Roles of the Bridging Leader.**



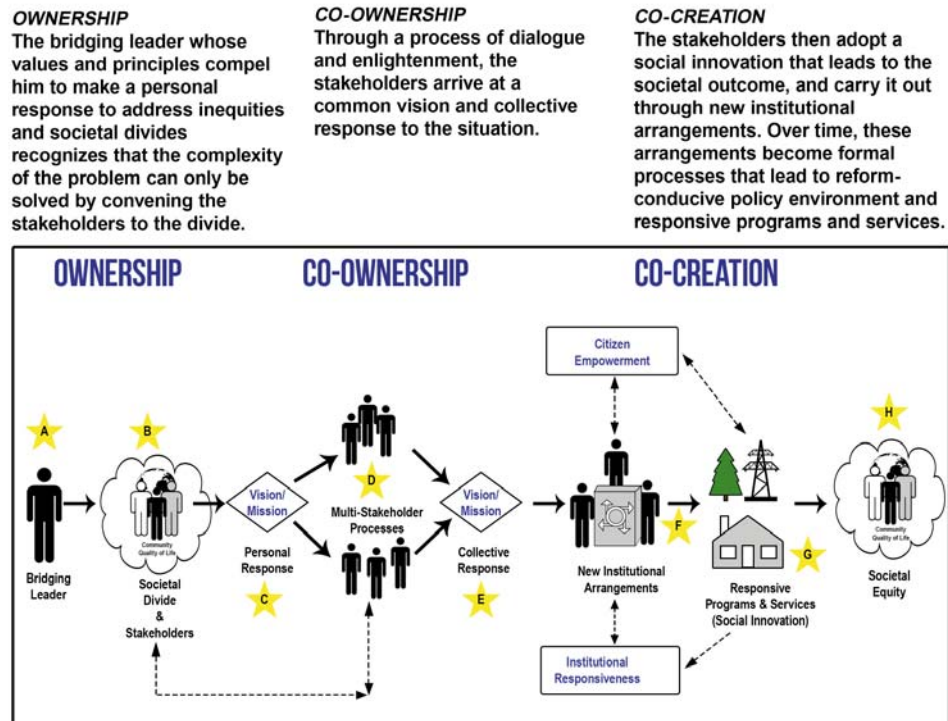
Reference: Dulany, Peggy. 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Garilao, Ernesto. 2007. “Bridging Leadership at Synergos: Experience and Learnings.” <https://www.synergos.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/bridging-leadership-at-synergos.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.synergos.org/about/approach>. Accessed 1 June 2020.

Three processes unfold in operationalising this leadership approach according to the Asian Institute of Management Team Energy Center (AIM TEC) for Bridging Leadership, the pioneer incubator of BL in the Philippines. These processes are ownership, co-ownership and co-creation (Figure 2). AIM has been utilising BL in transforming political, government, military, business, and civil society leaders so as to enable them to effectively address problems on peace, education, health, land conflicts, poverty, and poor local governance, among others.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2. The Bridging Leadership Framework.**



Source: AIM-TEC, 2006.

The Zuellig Family Foundation (ZFF) further explored the leadership competencies in each of the three BL processes. Various leadership concepts have also been incorporated in implementing and putting BL into practice. The ZFF is an institution that has been keen on ameliorating the health conditions of Filipinos. It aims to

<sup>15</sup> Asian Institute of Management Team Energy Center for Bridging Leadership. <https://aim.edu/research-centers/team-energy-center-bridging-leadership>. Accessed 1 June 2020.

spur better health outcomes through its Health Change Model. This model capitalises on responsive leadership and governance (through Bridging Leadership) that will drive a robust local health system defined by effective services and heightened community participation. For the past eleven years, the Foundation has grown BL as a leadership practice in the public health system of the Philippines. More than 3,300 health and government leaders (referred to as BL fellows after completing a programme) from the village level to national departments have been trained by the ZFF.<sup>16</sup> Concepts and lessons from the AIM and the ZFF are the main bases for this discussion.

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP: PROCESS AND COMPETENCIES

### Ownership

In the ownership phase, a bridging leader is compelled to initiate a personal response to a societal challenge. Internally, this response reflects the leader's values and principles and externally, there is the recognition that multiple stakeholders have to be convened relative to the challenge.

The ZFF tracks the progress of its leadership fellows in three ownership competencies: modeling personal mastery, thinking strategically on inequities, and problem-solving and decision-making on challenges.

A vital foundation in this BL process is modeling personal mastery. The leader is expected to be self-directed and motivated. Integrity is paramount as the leader is aware of and consistently nurtures personal and organisational core values. This deep loyalty to core values allows the leader to muster the courage to act in the right way even in ambiguous and difficult situations. A personal vision embodies one's purpose, which is attained through the manifestation of democratic values.

Ownership of self speaks of authenticity. It is about exemplifying a deepened self-awareness, practising values and constantly being aligned with and guided by an avowed mission. Bridging leaders are perceived as authentic. Authentic leaders are those "guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, and by qualities of the mind and who genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership driven by purpose, meaning, and values".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> ZFF. 2018. Annual and Sustainability Report.

<sup>17</sup> George, Bill. 2003. *Authentic leadership rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value*. Jossey-Bass.

Ownership also entails owning (being accountable for) and truly understanding the challenge. The leaders should be able to think strategically about the challenge or the social inequities and manifest strategic agility. The leaders who construe challenges not in a myopic view but as events embedded in a system show these competencies. They employ the Theory U, an awareness-based method for changing systems that capitalises on inner knowing to co-sense and co-shape preferred realities.<sup>18</sup> Systems thinking allows the leaders to grasp an issue in its overall context, interrelations, and consequences over time. They may then act responsively, focusing on strategic knobs that swiftly diffuse the challenge.

Decision-making based on sufficient analysis of facts is essential in this responsive action. Self-motivation prompts the leaders to a personal response that harnesses their capital (experience, training/education, connections, resources, and values).

Ownership is anchored to the idea of self-leadership: having the developed sense of “who you are, what you can do and where you’re going”.<sup>19</sup> The concept of emotional intelligence is heavily embedded too in the BL ownership modules. Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of superior self-leadership.<sup>20</sup> Business guru Dee Hock’s insight supports this focus when he stated that leaders should invest at least 50 percent of their leadership amperage in self-leadership.

One municipal mayor described his experience of ownership as an exercise of introspection and reflective awareness. Despite his past failures and circumstances, including a futile bid in his first mayoralty attempt, he did not waver from his resolve to serve his community. He succeeded in his next try and was able to lead his municipality for the maximum three terms. He joined the BL programme in his final term and his profound appreciation of the BL framework made him decide to have all employees of the local government unit trained in this leadership approach. With members of the bureaucracy all having a common mindset, wicked problems were confronted with ease and the municipality was recognised in the region for being responsive and innovative.

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<sup>18</sup> Scharmer, C. Otto. 2018. *The essentials of Theory U: Core principles and applications*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

<sup>19</sup> Browning, Michelle. 2018. “Self-leadership: Why It Matters”. *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 9(2): 14-18.

<sup>20</sup> Goleman, Daniel. 2005. *Emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.

## Co-ownership

A bridging leader is humble and acknowledges that being fully committed to addressing a complex challenge with one's values and resources will never be adequate. Leveraging on the wisdom and resources of other stakeholders is compulsory when confronting wicked problems. Co-ownership is about arriving at a collective vision and response through democratic and participatory mechanisms – dialogue and engagement.

The ZFF identified three competencies in this process: leading change, leading multiple stakeholders and coaching and mentoring for results. Leading change is about one's ability to generate commitment among partners and to sustain this for organisational or community reforms. It entails working through resistance through dialogue, valuing everyone's competence as a building block in interventions, and rallying stakeholders to the shared vision.

Multiple stakeholders bring in various perspectives and egos. To effectively realise a collective change agenda, trust and shared accountability in working relationships across the spectrum of partners are important. In leading stakeholders, there are needed inversions or shifts in perspective: from *me* to *we* (personal) and from *ego* to *eco-system* (relational). These suggest that leaders view themselves "through the eyes of others and of the whole."<sup>21</sup> In particular, the voice of the marginalised and those most affected by the challenges should be heard and become part of the "whole" and of the necessary conversations.

Coaching and mentoring are indispensable skills for leaders in supporting a leadership ecosystem that performs or delivers. Coaching is about unravelling the potential of people for them to maximise their own performance.<sup>22</sup> Looking around, disruptive change is the new norm as situations are volatile (much like democracy at present and the threats to it). In such a context, traditional command-and-control management will not thrive as leaders do not possess a monopoly on answers or solutions. Coaching conversations are more appropriate than instructions.<sup>23</sup>

A mentor is said to guide and advise a mentee. There is often a perceived hierarchy of power (more senior, higher position) or information (also wisdom from

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<sup>21</sup> Scharmer, Otto, and Katrin Kaeufer. 2013. *Leading from the emerging future from ego-system to eco-system economies*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

<sup>22</sup> Whitmore, John. 2009. *Coaching for performance GROWing human potential and purpose*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

<sup>23</sup> Ibarra, Herminia and Anne Scoular. 2019. "The Leader as Coach." Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-leader-as-coach>.

experience) between the mentor and the mentee, with the mentor being older and wiser. Coaching, however, may transpire between a manager and his subordinates (in both directions) and also between peers.<sup>24</sup> Evidence on the benefits of coaching and mentoring has been unequivocal: people who are guided by mentors perform better and experience more work-life satisfaction.<sup>25</sup> It has been reported that 70 to 80 percent of people who are coached improve their self-confidence, relationships and work performance while developing their communication and interpersonal skills too.<sup>26</sup> Leadership coaching and mentoring shape the supportive learning environment that nurtures the high performance of stakeholders.

A director of a regional department of health who was a BL fellow demonstrated co-ownership by forming her guiding coalition. The coalition was composed of trusted key people from both senior managers and subordinates of the office and field units. These key people were, for the director, the right people and the right team – individuals with the appropriate skills, the leadership capacity, organisational credibility and social capital<sup>27</sup> to co-own a vision. The members of this support coalition, with whom she regularly met, committed to supporting her goal of better maternal and child health in the region. The guiding team was also trained on BL and on coaching such that they were able to coach and mentor their rank and file and officials of the local government health units.

The director acknowledged that her management approach changed as she practised Bridging Leadership. From being autocratic and intolerant, she became more open to others. Consciously, she practised dialogue and active listening more.

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<sup>24</sup> Zenger, John and Kathleen Stinnett. 2010. *The extraordinary coach How the best leaders help others grow*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

<sup>25</sup> Horoszowski, Mark. 2020. "How to Build a Great Relationship with a Mentor." *Harvard Business Review*. 21 January. Accessed 1 June 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/01/how-to-build-a-great-relationship-with-a-mentor>.

<sup>26</sup> International Coaching Federation. 2009. "Global Coaching Client Study Executive Summary." Accessed 1 June 2020. <http://www.gos-coaching.ch/pdf/2009-ICF%20Global%20survey.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Kotter, John and Dan Cohen. 2002. *The heart of change. Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

## Co-creation

In co-creation, the collective vision of stakeholders results in innovative strategies that engender the desired societal outcome of equity. These innovations address both the technical and adaptive features of the challenge. Technical challenges are those that can be solved by the organisation's existing expertise, structures, procedures, and ways of doing things while adaptive challenges are those that can only be tackled through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.<sup>28</sup> The bridging leader and the stakeholders are accountable for tracking the progress of the interventions and for ensuring that the programmes and services are responsive to the marginalised sectors and are focused on the goal. The new arrangements are espoused and create a new norm for the transformed organisation and the empowered stakeholders.

The ZFF recognises a competency on championing and sustaining social innovations in co-creation. The bridging leader and the stakeholders enhance conventional approaches that work and employ emergent and creative thinking to co-create innovative solutions. These strategies are reviewed and modified as needed with the goal of reducing societal inequities.

An example of a new arrangement that addressed both the technical and adaptive aspects of a challenge was seen in the adaptive work of a municipal mayor in an indigenous peoples' community. Confronted with a high maternal mortality rate of indigenous women during birthing, the mayor and the municipal health officer introduced a policy on facility-based deliveries. Customarily, indigenous women give birth at home, with the assistance of the traditional birth attendant. The mayor and the health officer, as bridging leaders, actively dialogued with the indigenous community's leaders, elders and women to thresh out the best way to address this maternal health inequity. The indigenous leaders agreed to advocate to the women to deliver in health facilities. The mayor and the health officer also approved the appeal by the indigenous peoples for their ritualists to perform some rites in the health facility and for the traditional birth attendants to accompany the women. The doctor, nurse or midwife would still deliver the baby. The mayor authorised arrangements for transportation to the birthing centers especially for those women residing in distant areas. The health officer ensured that the services of the safe motherhood programme were made culturally sensitive. This intercultural

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<sup>28</sup> Heifetz, Ronald, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow. 2009. *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

co-creation was institutionalised in a modified policy and through a well-disseminated programme. From nine maternal deaths in the previous year, this number dropped to zero after just one year of the policy's implementation.<sup>29</sup>

## BRIDGING LEADERSHIP FOR RESULTS

Aside from the many public narratives of the fellows on how Bridging Leadership has modified their leadership style to be more democratic and collaborative despite complex societal divides and diverse stakeholders, local empirical studies have supported its impact on social inequities. In an evaluation study of a Bridging Leadership programme for local chief executives and health officers, the course was seen as instrumental in the drastic improvement of the health outcomes in the municipalities. In the study's linear regression modeling, leadership was established to have the biggest influence in the local health system.<sup>30</sup> Governance through bridging leadership was associated with better health financing, capable health human resource, more accessible medicines and technology, adequate health information system and responsive health service delivery. Leadership then was not simply one component among many; it was the key driver in a process that made people experience the collective vision as a reality. This bridge-building approach has been recognised as a tool for social transformation and an initiative with an enormous potential to tackle intractable societal problems.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In combining contemporary and emerging theories on effective agency, engaging diversity, leading participatory change and results-orientation, the Bridging Leadership in practice supports democracy that delivers. The Bridging Leadership experiences have promoted essential elements of democracy: respect for rights especially of victims of social inequities, the freedom of stakeholders to express their opinions and to be heard through dialogues, the opportunity for civic participation that influences government policies and programmes, proactive rule of law for the

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<sup>29</sup> ZFF. 2017. Municipal Leadership and Governance Program Module 2.

<sup>30</sup> Labarda, Meredith. 2019. *Transformative leadership and governance as a development process: Building equitable health systems and Filipino well-being*. Doctor of Social Development Dissertation. University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, L. David. 2015. *Bridge-Building for Social Transformation*. Stanford Social Innovation Review.



common good, transparency and accountability, and the engagement of the pluralistic society to move away from societal divides. From these, the responsiveness of systems was made possible and the procedures and substance of democracy were fulfilled and experienced. The Bridging Leadership process may be a timely and pertinent addition to capacity-building initiatives for enabling democratic politicians.

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# Working Democracy Amidst Continued Inequality: Does South Asia Represent a Paradox?<sup>1</sup>

*Sandeep Shastri*

## A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The workings of democracy and the fact of inequality has been a recurring theme of academic and popular debate over the second half of the 20th century and the first two decades of the present 21st century. The narratives on this important relationship have made an attempt to encompass multi-track perspectives reflecting on diverse socio-economic, historical and political contexts. South Asia represents an important site at which political systems have sought to deepen democratic processes even as they attempt to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor and to usher in greater socio-economic equity and justice. This paper attempts to explore the experience of South Asia in charting a course of ensuring that democratic practices take firm root even as efforts are made to usher in economic equality.

Even before commencing the analysis, a few caveats need to be added to contextualise the discussion. Firstly, this paper seeks to privilege the voice of the “common citizen” as against expert opinion. In doing so, one draws heavily from survey data. Survey research has brought to the dialogue table a fascinating and stirring different dimension to the conversations on democracy and economic

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<sup>1</sup> This paper flows from a presentation made at the Panel Discussion on “Inequality as the Greatest Threat to Democracy” at the KASYP Grand Alumni meeting held at Penang, Malaysia on 9 and 10 August 2019. The paper writer benefited from the views of co-panellists and the reflections during the Panel Discussion. The paper writer, of course, takes full responsibility for the analysis and conclusions drawn.

equality<sup>2</sup> both globally and in the specific South Asian context. The concepts of democracy and equality are increasingly being re-worked keeping in mind the “vision” of citizens who constitute the core of any experiment with democracy. This allows for a citizen’s perspective on equality to be reflected rather than a mere theoretical analysis of the concept from a purely academic perspective. Much of the data discussed in this paper flows from the State of Democracy in South Asia Study (SDSA).<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, this analysis is consciously grounded in an appreciation of the socio-economic environment and political conditions that permeate South Asia. The paper compares the popular perceptions of democracy and the satisfaction with democracy on the one hand with the fact of the visible presence of poverty and inequality on the other.

Thirdly, the paper draws heavily on the SDSA data. This survey has been done in the five countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The analysis thus limits itself to these five countries of the South Asia region.

## CONTEXTUALISING DEMOCRACY AND INEQUALITY

The fight against inequality in the context of democracy and democratisation has led, in recent years, to an increasing focus on the emergence of the “rest of the world” (as against the Global North) as an important site for the practice of democracy,

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<sup>2</sup> See for details Ronald Inglehart. 1997. *Modernization and post modernization: Cultural, economic and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Ronald Inglehart. 2003. *Human values and social change: Findings from the values survey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan; Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel. 2005. *Modernization, cultural change and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes. 2007. “Learning About Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance and Experience”. *American Journal of Political Science* 51:1: 192-217; Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes. 2001. “Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?”. *British Journal of Political Science* 31:3: 447-74; Dieter Fuchs and Edeltrand Roller. 2006. “Learned Democracy? Support for Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe”. *International Journal of Sociology* 36:3: 70-96; David Denemark, Robert Mattes and Richard G Niemi. eds. 2016. *Growing up democratic: Does it make a difference*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner; State of Democracy in South Asia. 2008. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. *State of Democracy in South Asia II*. Bengaluru: Jain University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter referred to as the SDSA study. Data drawn from the State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA) studies are an integral part of the Global Barometer Surveys ([www.globalbarometer.net](http://www.globalbarometer.net)). SDSA is also known as the South Asia Barometer and the same is coordinated by Lokniti-CSDS ([www.lokniti.org](http://www.lokniti.org)).

development and governance.<sup>4</sup> Many contemporary studies on democracy prefer to make a distinction (and search for the distinctive features or similarities) between “old” and “new” democracies. The onus often was on the “new” democracies to fall in line with the ways in which democracy is viewed, understood and practised in established democratic polities. Thus, for a long period of time, the conversations on democracy (and of course inequality) privileged the procedural dimensions of democracy as being the core of the “idea” of democracy. The newer studies of democracy allow one to look at possible ways in which the idea of democracy itself can be democratised and pluralised. This attempt consciously avoids the temptation of essentialising or overemphasising the differences in values as the main explanatory factor for understanding the different perceptions and conceptions of democracy. This attempt to “democratise the understanding of democracy”<sup>5</sup> implies that substance-based ideas of democracy and equality are now increasingly occupying the centre stage. The focus on “outcomes”, as against (or alongside?) the “processes”, has the potential of enriching the quality and content of contemporary debates on what constitutes democracy and the search for equality.

In the first SDSA Report it was highlighted that:

...democracy has come to stand for a substantive promise of rule by equal communities of citizens, and the well-being of all in terms of dignity and freedom from fear as well as want. This version pays less attention to some of the procedural aspects of democracy seen to be central to liberal, western democracies such as equal access to rule of law and to guard against the tyranny of the majority or a powerful minority.<sup>6</sup>

By seeking to go beyond the established “prism” of the Global North, the SDSA studies attempted to reflect on both the “idea” of democracy and development on the one hand and its “imagination” on the other and this has been a key focus of

<sup>4</sup> See for details State of Democracy in South Asia. 2008. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press.

<sup>5</sup> See Suhas Palshikar and Sandeep Shastri. 2010. *Democratizing the meaning of democracy: Voices from south asia*. Paper presented at the Global Barometer Surveys Conference on “How People View and Value Democracy” held at Taipei, 15-16 October; Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press; Sandeep Shastri. “India’s Development Path: Prospects, Challenges and Implications for the Emerging World Order” in *From the western-centric to a post-western world: In search of an emerging global order in the 21st century*. Routledge. Forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> SDSA. 2008. State of Democracy in South Asia. Delhi: Oxford University Press: 8.

analysis. The second SDSA report underscored the importance of the core concerns of countries in South Asia which are attempting to:

...achieve substantive outcomes (reduction of wealth inequality and provision of basic economic goods and services) while maintaining procedural institutions (regular elections based on universal adult suffrage, political participation and contestation) to produce an electorally legitimate government.<sup>7</sup>

The five countries of South Asia covered as part of this study do not fare very well in the global Human Development Index. In comparative terms, very limited improvement is recorded in the status and positions of these countries in global rankings. This is clear from the data outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Human Development Index – South Asia.**

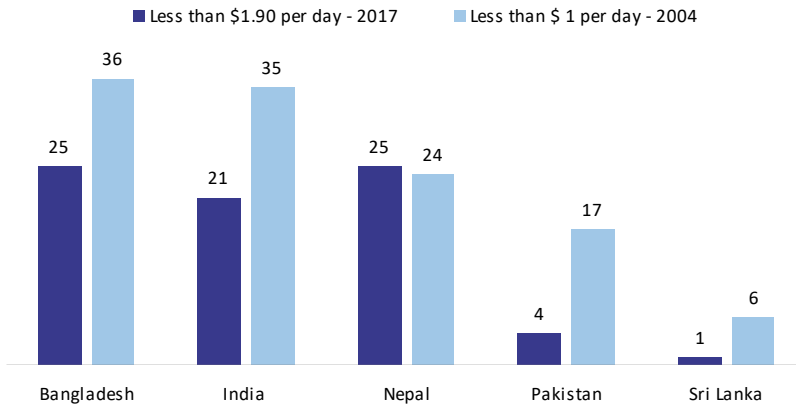
	2019	2017	2006
Bangladesh	135	135	137
India	129	130	126
Nepal	147	149	138
Pakistan	152	150	134
Sri Lanka	71	76	93

Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI/>.

Further, the data also indicates that in the countries of South Asia, the efforts in the first decade and a half of the 21st century have led to visible results in the fight against poverty. The percentage of the population living below the poverty line in Bangladesh and India has fallen from just over one-third of the population (2004), to less than one fourth of the population (2017). Similarly Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have seen a fall in the percentage of the population living below the poverty line (See Chart 1).

<sup>7</sup> Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press: 16.

## Chart 1 : Estimating Poverty



Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/overview>.

The fact of economic inequality was clearly articulated by citizens of South Asia in the way they defined democracy.<sup>8</sup> In the second round of the SDSA study, close to four out of every ten respondents defined democracy in the language of justice and welfare (See Table 2). Another one in every five highlighted the procedural dimensions of democracy and just over three out of every ten defined democracy in the language of rights and freedom.<sup>9</sup> This finding was in line with what was reported in the first SDSA study.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2: Defining Democracy – South Asia (figures in percentage).**

<b>Welfare and Justice</b>	38
<b>Rights and Freedom</b>	31
<b>Procedural</b>	22
<b>Peace and Security</b>	4
<b>Other</b>	5

Source: (SDSA 2017: 20).

In this sense, when over one-third of the respondents in South Asia privilege justice and welfare as representing the idea of democracy, this brings to the discourse

<sup>8</sup> This analysis is based on the findings of an open-ended question asked in both rounds of SDSA: “According to you, what is democracy?”.

<sup>9</sup> Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press: 20.

<sup>10</sup> SDSA. State of Democracy in South Asia. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.

on equality a specific focus. It is clear that the appreciation of democracy is shaped by the context of poverty and asymmetries of well-being. Hence, democracy is seen as a harbinger of welfare and fair distribution of resources. This expectation derives not so much from the procedural and “rule of law” dimensions of democracy but rather originates from the idea that democracy mandates that those in power use the instrumentality of governmental power for a positive intervention in the socio-economic dimensions of life in a given society. This understanding posits an interventionist and transformatory character in democracy.

The privileging of the welfare and justice dimensions of democracy needs to be seen against the backdrop of the fact of economic backwardness and poverty, high rates of unemployment and relatively poor performance on key social indicators like education, healthcare and life expectancy in the South Asia region. The popular perceptions of democracy are intrinsically linked to the citizens’ expectations of the state. The centrality of the process of democratic governance merits elaboration as it appears to be at the core of both the successes and challenges of the developmental process. The SDSA Report highlighted that:

...a large segment of the society increasingly looks to the state as both a provider as well as a facilitator. For many, accessing the state for basic needs constitute the only choice and not one among a set of different options. In these circumstances, the responsiveness of the democratic state is critical to giving empirical meaning to the justice and welfare dimensions of democracy that citizens ... uphold and cherish. South Asia’s democracy would surely face greater challenges of governance as (one) ... moves from mere welfare to expectations of well-being.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the analysis of survey data, this paper assesses the dynamics of democracy and inequality in South Asia. This region faces multiple challenges and striking the right balance between the multi-track expectations seems to be the biggest challenge to policy makers. The “principle” of democracy is often put to the test by the stark realities of the “fact” of inequality. Given the privileging of the welfare and justice dimensions of democracy, the corollary expectation of the state and its institutions is that they should ensure an element of sensitivity towards the aspirations of the people relating to their basic needs and well-being. The development strategies adopted by the state to give meaning to this popular aspiration lies at the core of the democracy-inequality debate in the South Asia region.

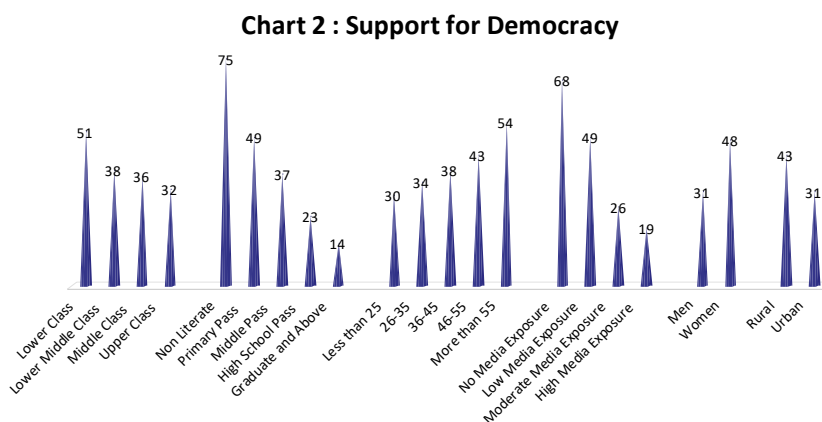
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<sup>11</sup> Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press: 10.

## INSTITUTIONALISING DEMOCRACY EVEN AS THE FIGHT FOR INEQUALITY CONTINUES

The South Asia region is witness to a co-existence of the strengthening of “electoral democracy” and the “visible presence of inequality” in the social and economic spheres. While political freedoms are increasingly being asserted, the desire of sections of society to be given “freedom from want” continues to be unevenly met. South Asia has witnessed concerted efforts towards the institutionalising of democracy even as the “state inspired” and “society driven” fight against inequality continues. The question has often been raised as to whether the platform of democracy is perceived as the “ideal framework” for ensuring freedom from want and reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. Data from South Asia presents interesting insights on popular perceptions of democracy and support for democracy.

If one were to look at the support for democracy across the South Asia region, one notices significant variation in support for democracy across different socio-economic categories. The economic status of the respondent had a clear impact on the intensity of their support for democracy.<sup>12</sup> The lower a person’s economic status was, the more intense their support to democracy was likely to be. Chart 2 indicates that more than half the respondents from the poorer sections of society endorsed democracy while a little less than one-third of the affluent segments from among the respondents took such a stand. As one moves from the poorer segments of society to the more affluent, the intensity of support for democracy witnesses a decline, as is evidenced in Chart 2.



All figures in percentage.

Source: SDSA Data set, Lokniti-CSDS.

<sup>12</sup> The Class Index was prepared on the basis of the ownership of a combination of assets, self-declared economic status and education levels.



A similar trend is noticed when one assesses the response of people based on their access to education. Those who did not have access to formal education and did not know how to read and write were more likely to support democracy as compared to those who had secured a college degree. While three-quarters of the illiterate segments of the respondents supported democracy, the numbers plummeted to less than one-seventh of the respondents when those who had a college degree were taken into account. In Chart 2, it is evident that as one accessed higher levels of education, support for democracy becomes more lukewarm.

Media exposure<sup>13</sup> too appeared to play an important role in shaping common people's attitude towards democracy. As people accessed the media more, they were less likely to support democracy. Chart 2 indicates that close to seven out of every ten of those who had no access to media were more likely to supported democracy. Only two out of every ten of those who had high access to media were strong advocates of democracy.

The above narration is indicative of the fact that discontent with democracy is linked to greater access to information and higher levels of awareness. Those with limited opportunities for formal education and exposure to the media were also likely to be lower on the economic ladder. The response of the more educated, the economically better off and those with higher media exposure could well be a reflection of their higher levels of expectations of democracy. The greater cynicism with democracy appears to be more on account of their greater access to information. This is also evident from the higher levels of support for democracy among rural respondents as compared to their urban counterparts. Chart 2 also indicates that the younger generations were much more restrained in their support for democracy as compared to the older segments of the population. As the age of respondents increases, the intensity of support for democracy correspondingly increases. This too could be explained by the high levels of expectations and increasing access to information among the younger segments of society.

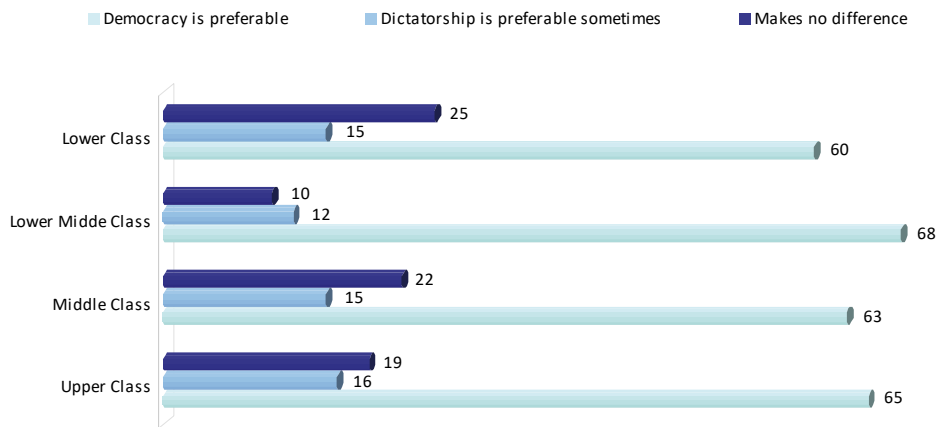
The data on support for democracy and the economic background of the respondents were analysed from yet another perspective. The SDSA study also asked respondents whether they preferred democracy in all circumstances or was dictatorship sometimes preferable and also whether it did not make a difference whether the system was a democracy or a dictatorship. The data was analysed keeping in mind the economic profile of the respondents. It was found that more

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<sup>13</sup> The Media Exposure Index was prepared on the basis of frequency of access to television, radio and newspapers.

than six out of every ten respondents across economic groups endorsed democracy unequivocally. Close to seven out of every ten endorsed it among the Lower Middle Class while close to two-thirds took the same stand among the Upper Class. Yet the cynicism with regard to democracy that it did not make a difference whether it was a democracy or a dictatorship was highest among the Lower Class and the Middle Class. One fourth of those in the Lower Class felt that it made no difference whether the country was a democracy or dictatorship and over two out of every ten from among the Middle Class took that stand. Data outlined in Chart 3 clearly indicates that besides awareness and media exposure, the cynicism with democracy could well also be linked to the common people's real-life experience with the workings of democracy.

**Chart 3 : Support for Democracy across Economic Class**

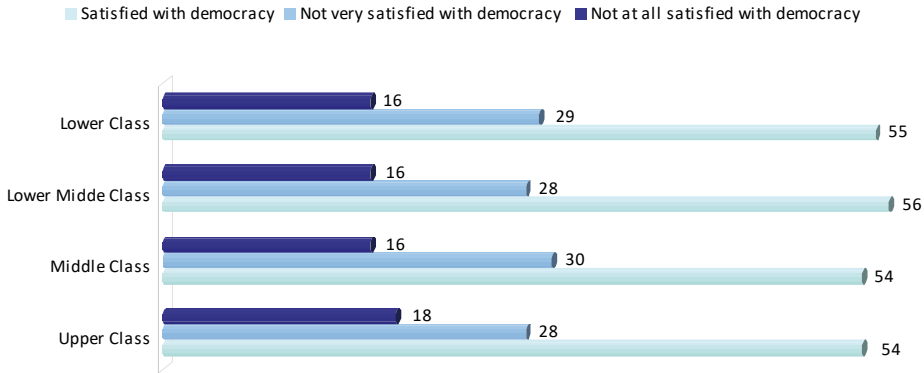


All figures in percentage.

Source: SDSA Data Set, Lokniti-CSDS.

A final analysis of support for democracy and its linkages to the economic status of respondents was attempted by comparing responses with regard to their intensity of satisfaction with the workings of democracy. Those satisfied with the workings of democracy, those not satisfied with the way democracy was functioning and those not at all satisfied with the way democracy was functioning were assessed from an economic class perspective. The analysis found that there was very little variation in the intensity of satisfaction with the workings of democracy across economic groups. Chart 4 indicates that there was a marginally higher level of extreme unhappiness with the functioning of democracy among the Upper Class, but the difference was to the tune of just two percentage points.

## Chart 4 : Satisfaction with Democracy



All figures in percentage.

Source: SDSA Data Set, Lokniti-CSDS.

## EMERGING ISSUES

In the first State of Democracy in South Asia study, it was reported:

The experience of South Asia has shown that democracy can be built in societies that have not attained a high level of economic growth or well being; at the same time it also shows that democracies can continue to evade the issue of poverty and destitution even when the poor constitute a majority. A mismatch between the objective and subjective economic conditions creates space for democratic contestation as well as subterfuge.<sup>14</sup>

Less than a decade later, in its second study on State of Democracy in South Asia, the above stand was endorsed and expanded upon:

...democracy occupies a place of certainty in the affective map of citizens, but its position in the cognitive map is still hazy.... The idea to “contest”, is... quite well established, but the imagination of institutionalizing democracy remains weak. This gap – between the idea and its imagination constitutes a key challenge for democracy in the region despite its endorsement by large numbers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> SDSA. 2008. State of Democracy in South Asia. Delhi: Oxford University Press: 149.

<sup>15</sup> Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar and Sanjay Kumar. 2017. State of Democracy in South Asia II. Bengaluru: Jain University Press: 35-6.

The above narration highlights two important dimensions in the workings of democracy in South Asia. Firstly, there is visible and sustained proof of the continued faith of citizens in the region in the democratic process. The economic marginalisation of a large segment of society has not resulted in these segments choosing to opt out of the democratic political process. There continues to be robust endorsement and participation among the economically marginalised in the workings of democracy.

Secondly, the citizens' own economic status does not seem to have emerged as a vital category of political mobilisation. In a sense, the fact that economic inequality has not been articulated effectively in the public domain is clearly visible across South Asia. While the marginalised are disappointed with the inability of the democratic political system to improve their economic conditions, they continue to invest faith and hope in the democratic process. This is seen both in terms of their active participation as voters and in their continuing to nurture the hope that the state and its attendant institutions would help deal with their economic deprivation and alleviate their economic conditions.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that South Asia provides an example of how a working democracy within a framework of continued inequality does not necessarily represent a paradox. While there is visible discontent with the practice of democracy, this has not led to any abandonment of the faith in democracy. While there is a clear mismatch between expectations and experience, promise and performance, rhetoric and reality with regard to the workings of democracy in South Asia, the hope of a "democratic dividend" in the future, especially among the economically marginalised, is evident.

It is beyond the shadow of doubt that "context" often defines and decides people's approach to issues. While democratic political systems have a mandate to usher in socio-economic transformation, the political, social and economic context in which democracies operate often explain this hiatus between an "expectation overload" and a "performance deficit". This becomes even more relevant in South Asia, where the government is seen not merely as a facilitator but as a provider of economic benefits.

South Asia is witness to the support for the "principle" of democracy meeting a challenge when confronted by the realities of the practice of democracy and democratic governance. An abiding attribute of the democratic culture in South Asia is that citizens in this region are not willing to abandon their aspirations for

democracy in spite of the democratic process not living up to their expectations. This continued investment in the “future” of democracy appears to be its greatest strength in the South Asia region.

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# Reframing Inequality to Promote Inclusive Democracy

*Segundo Joaquin E. Romero, Jr*

## INTRODUCTION

The human effort to understand the link between inequality and democracy has been unceasing, yet the world continues to be deeply troubled by the intractability of inequality and the seemingly Sisyphean pursuit of more meaningful democracy.

There has been an observed trend in recent years of democracy retreating or contracting in many countries in the world. In Southeast Asia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Philippines, in particular, have experienced declines in democracy.

The Philippines is a particularly disappointing case because of the way the 1986 People Power Revolution, which overthrew the Marcos dictatorship, has backslid into an elite-dominated and distorted democracy despite the formulation and adoption of the 1987 Constitution, which specifically sought to decentralise power and install various safeguards against a return to dictatorship and political dynasties.

The Philippines today remains “partly democratic,” in the reckoning of international and foreign organisations that provide comparative metrics on democracy and freedom.<sup>1</sup> Much political energy in the Philippines today is spent on a highly partisan struggle between the supporters of Duterte extolling his bold reformist rhetoric and action, and those who have been appalled by his rough and often anti-democratic style of governance.

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<sup>1</sup> *Esquire*. “Democracy in the Philippines Didn’t Worsen in 2018, But It Didn’t Improve Either”, <https://www.esquiremag.ph/politics/opinion/democracy-philippines-state-a00200-20190109>; *The Economist*. “Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy”, [https://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy2018](https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy2018).

## REDUCING INEQUALITY UNDER IMPERFECT DEMOCRACY

Neither extreme inequality nor perfect equality is a desirable outcome of democracy. But where democracy is in retreat, the question is, is it possible to expect greater equality among citizens in a society?

This article proposes that even with the imperfections of democracy, and even with the much-observed retreat of democracy, a reframing of how inequality is understood and acted upon by the people at the bottom or base of the pyramid (BoP) and by development agents who support them, can dramatically reduce inequality and enhance democracy. That is, one way of reducing inequality and enhancing democracy is to wear new lenses.

This insight comes from over a decade of work on development programme implementation with national development agencies (the “supply side”) as well as social innovations work with local communities (the “demand side”) in the Philippines over several decades. The main insight is that there are a lot of programmes undertaken by national government agencies that potentially could reduce inequality at the local level if only local governments and communities were sufficiently primed to take full advantage of these opportunities.

## DILEMMAS OF EQUITY AND GROWTH IN THE ASEAN CONTEXT

One may think of three levels of inequality in the ASEAN region that policymakers are concerned with: (1) inequality among the ASEAN member states, (2) inequality within member states, and (3) inequality particularly experienced by disadvantaged groups or sectors within member states.<sup>2</sup>

The third level of inequality refers to conditions at the BoP in each of the ASEAN member countries. The BoP generally refers to those groups that are poor (lacking in assets), vulnerable (exposed to extreme risks), marginalised (geographically isolated), voiceless (lacking in influence in public policy), and disadvantaged (suffering exclusion due to identity, gender, age, and physical abilities). The disadvantaged sectors, more specifically, refer to four groups: (1) the youth, (2) women, (3) persons with disabilities (PWDs), and (4) ethnic minorities.

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<sup>2</sup> OECD. “Inclusive Asean Selected Outputs of the Southeast Asia Regional Programme”. Tokyo Ministerial Conference 8-9 March 2018, [https://www.oecd.org/southeast-asia/events/regional-forum/Inclusive\\_ASEAN\\_Tokyo\\_Ministerial\\_March\\_2018.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/southeast-asia/events/regional-forum/Inclusive_ASEAN_Tokyo_Ministerial_March_2018.pdf).

The BoP has traditionally been seen largely as a problem to be solved by humanity. Recently, a shift in perspective among entrepreneurs now enables them to see the BoP as a vast market instead. Entrepreneurs now agree there is money to be made in and with the BoP.<sup>3</sup>

From the public sector side, the main shift in perspective has been to identify new policy approaches to make economic growth “inclusive” of the BoP. Such BoP-oriented innovations in public policy among ASEAN countries include:<sup>4</sup>

1. Level the playing field to increase inclusion of the BoP through special and dedicated programmes for youth, women, PWDs, and ethnic minorities, taking their special circumstances into consideration. These targeted policies could include subsidised credit, tax exemptions, social benefits, and streamlined business registration procedures.
2. Create a “conducive ecosystem” of development agents for these target groups. This involves engaging the private sector and civil society organisations in promoting inclusive enterprises for the base of the pyramid.
3. Provide outright income supports such as conditional or unconditional cash transfers, as a way of shifting the BoP upwards into the middle class, in effect converting the socio-economic pyramid into a diamond.<sup>5</sup>

Inequality is a “wicked problem”. The drive to resolve inequalities at one level (across countries) induces inequalities within countries. The process of industrialisation that emphasises export-orientation tends to develop selected geographic areas, e.g., special economic zones, and selected sectors, e.g., garments, electronics, and shoes. Emerging entrepreneurs and professionals widen the income gap between urban and rural areas. The influx into urban areas translates into the abandonment of agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

Extreme inequality hinders the workings of democracy. Economic inequality translates into differential abilities of citizens to inform themselves and attain the capacity for rational and critical thinking. In the Philippines, political dynasties that are the vanguard of the rapacious elite have tremendous influence over Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court. Transparency and accountability institu-

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<sup>3</sup> C. K. Prahalad (2010). *The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid, revised and updated 5th anniversary edition*. Pearson Education.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Prahalad (2010).

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO (2014). *Policies and processes for social inclusion, volume 1: Possibilities from south-east asia*, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000231615>.



tions and laws fail to curb the corruption associated with the elite. On the other hand, the people sell their votes and public officers are beholden to politicians.

Extreme inequality is dangerous to a democracy. A society with a large segment of poor people is clearly a precarious, revolution-baiting one. Keeping inequality manageable promotes public trust, reducing the sense that society is unfair, which too often translates into demands for a radical redistribution of wealth through revolution or autocracy.

Various regional conferences and summits will continue to generate innovative policy initiatives for reducing inequality and enhancing democracy within the ASEAN region and in member countries. The reality, however, is that it will take time before these policies gain much traction in reversing the conditions at the BoP, where inequality and lack of democratic practice is endemic.

## **THE BOP AS THE SPACE FOR REDUCING INEQUALITY AND ENHANCING DEMOCRACY**

To reframe is to use a different conceptual framework or viewpoint with which to give a more relevant meaning to the same issue, problem, or situation. Inequality and democracy are themselves extremely important but complex phenomena for any society.

Such a reframe is critical because the people at the BoP are socially excluded and therefore unable to act, under current frameworks and dynamics, to reduce inequality and enhance democracy, even in societies that boast of being formal democracies. While this reframe is directed at the supply-side, this is more important for the BoP, which suffers from a lack of confidence in their ability to change their lives for the better, given their poverty of resources, capabilities, and opportunities. A new way of seeing their world may give them the motivation and the confidence to make use of underutilised resources – self-help, mutual help, and institutional help – that can be released by a change in their political and administrative ecosystem.

In efforts to reduce inequality among countries in Southeast Asia, countries trying to catch up develop a single-minded drive to increase economic growth, which oftentimes leaves their respective BoP further behind. It is often blithely assumed that over the long run, the benefits of the leaps in economic growth that is achieved will trickle down to the BoP.

It is now increasingly understood that “inclusive development” requires that the BoP develop faster than the rest of society, and not that they stay where they are in relation to the upper and middle classes. Inclusive development will not happen

without purposive action by national and local governments to formulate strategies and policies that will significantly increase social inclusion.

The middle class itself often competes with the BoP for reforms in society. The clamour for more and better university education can lead to the reduction of government funds for the implementation of universal primary and high school education, which benefits the BoP more. The middle class may have a greater influence on policymakers than the BoP.

Eventually, the answer to inequality is the shift of large segments of the BoP into the middle class through resource transfers, capability-building, and provision of relevant opportunities for income generation. This is like transforming the socio-economic pyramid into a diamond-shaped society where the bulk of the citizenry is in the middle class segment. This is precisely what Prahalad proposes. This kind of shift requires the active participation of the private sector, in their own interest, to promote inclusive businesses that increase the participation of the BoP in the creation of wealth.

It is widely accepted that a large middle class promotes democracy in several ways. It moderates the often polarised conception, advocacy, and clash of the interests of the very rich and the very poor. It also raises the average socio-economic status and educational attainment of the population, which enables more citizens to be capable of competent and responsible citizenship. A large middle class also reduces the people at the base of the pyramid where the struggle for survival prevents the people from pursuing and achieving the higher-level social and political goals in the hierarchy of needs of humans. More importantly, democracy performs best when not all citizens are active partisans in each and every issue like unemployment, education, environment, and the economy. A large middle class ensures there is a large pool of uninvolved and inattentive citizens who, once reached by the policy debate, will swing their majority weight either way on an issue.

## **REFRAME 1: USING SOCIAL AUDIT TO SECURE TRANSFERS FROM NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO THE BOP**

One action space for reducing inequality while increasing inclusive political participation at the local government level is through the use of social audit by target beneficiaries at the BoP to secure benefits due to themselves from the national as well as local governments. This approach will result in a net increase in the flows of resources – products and services – to the poor, vulnerable, and disadvantaged

sectors of society by organising and deploying them to perform simple but effective social audit processes.

Social audit, in its broadest sense, is a measure of institutional responsiveness to society: finding out whether the functions, obligations, and commitments of societal institutions – government, private sector, civil society organisations, church, media, and academe – have been fulfilled from the point of view of the needs and expectations of the people.<sup>7</sup>

The national and local governments are fair targets of social audits. National governments hog an inordinate share of the government budget, even when officially they have granted decentralisation and local autonomy. Local governments are directed to perform centrally formulated policies that are to be implemented with local funds. Local governments in the Philippines call these central directives “unfunded mandates”.

In a country where the government is as highly centralised as it is in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and to a lesser extent in Indonesia, the national government provides the primary framework for national policies, including the interpretation and implementation of “inclusive development” programmes. Local governments can only provide tactical relief to make inclusive development happen in their localities when these national programmes are deficient in strategy, programme implementation, local flexibility, and performance management.

Shifting the ecosystem from primarily the national policy and development arena to the local arena can stimulate complementary civic engagement that can directly and dramatically reduce inequality and enhance the process and outcomes of democracy at local levels.

The shortfall in the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes can also be seen as a failure of communities to ensure that what is due to them is received by them. The state of information and communications technology is such that information on the effectiveness of public service delivery can now be crowdsourced, enabling

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<sup>7</sup> A survey of organisations and their social audit programmes and methods in the Philippines is presented in Segundo E. Romero (2010), “A Social Audit Toolbox for Philippine Civil Society. Transparency and Accountability Network”, available at <http://www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Social-Accountability-Toolbox.pdf>. See <http://www.ansa-eap.net/> for a regional NGO that undertakes training, promotion, and action projects for social accountability, the Affiliated Network for Social Responsibility in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP). The network’s emblematic social audit projects include the “Citizen Participatory Audit” (CPA) and “Check My School” (CMS).

the target-beneficiary communities to perform the task of monitoring and evaluating the impact of service delivery.

Increased attention to measurement at the national level has masked the relative neglect of local metrics – in the case of the Philippines at the regional, provincial, city, municipal, and *barangay*<sup>8</sup> levels. This is a problem of the lack of social accountability and social audit mechanisms.

What are the areas where social audits can lead to a net increase in transfers to the BoP? These areas are the provision of health, education, and social services, infrastructure for mobility and connectivity, livelihood generation, and safety nets against natural adversities (typhoons, flooding, fires), which together increase the attainment of human development in the BoP beyond mere survival.

Communities can do social audits of government agencies that are supposed to provide them with public services. In the Philippines, communities participate in *Bayanihang Eskwela* (School Convergence) to monitor the construction of public school buildings. Communities may also do social audits of private sector organisations that harm their environment (chemical companies dumping wastewater into rivers, or private enterprises in residential zones emitting toxic smoke).

Public infrastructure projects have always been considered a major source of corruption in the Philippines. These include the construction of roads and bridges, and public buildings such as schools and offices. A maverick non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), said enough was enough and took on the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and contractors who built a critical bridge in their province that led to nowhere, as it did not connect with the other side. This was either too blatant an ineptitude or too gross a corruption for decent citizens to allow to go unchallenged. A decade later, the CCAGG has become a worldwide sensation, a shining example of ordinary citizens conducting a social audit and enforcing social accountability. The CCAGG powerfully demonstrated that Filipinos could also develop innovative tools for curbing corruption.<sup>9</sup>

Social audit tools help reduce inequality and promote democracy because they help the BoP ensure that they get what they deserve. It gives them a venue for exercising vigilance in facing up to authority and the psychic satisfaction of civic action.

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<sup>8</sup> The *barangay* is the smallest political and administrative unit in the Philippines, into which municipalities and cities are divided. There are about 42,000 *barangays*.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Social-Accountability-Toolbox.pdf>.

## REFRAME 2: MOTIVATING AND MOBILISING THE BOP THROUGH THE “PEOPLE’S PLAN”

It takes a formal democracy to open the doors for social inclusion. In the case of developing countries like the Philippines, it is democracy that can make the dream of reduced inequality possible.

“Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society – improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.”<sup>10</sup> Social exclusion is a reality in every country. Various mechanisms work to prevent the full participation of certain groups of people in the political, economic, and social arenas. These mechanisms include laws and policies, ownership of land and resources, opportunities for income and livelihood. They also include discriminatory attitudes and practices that are based on social identity, often an amalgam of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, disability, and location. Exclusion often means a poor quality of life – loss of dignity, security, and opportunity.

Under what condition or level of democracy could social inclusion be actively pursued, especially at the local level where policies and actions have greater traction?

One suggested approach is to use the “Social Inclusion Assessment Tool”, which is “a four-question methodology to help policymakers and development practitioners assess how social inclusion can be addressed in projects, programmes, policies or in analysis”.<sup>11</sup> Another approach is to foster alliances with local authorities to produce socially inclusive municipal policies. An example is how municipalities in India are assisted to address exclusion against internal migrants through articulation and operationalisation of policy briefs, training modules, and toolkits.<sup>12</sup>

Other approaches would include fostering innovative or creative cities, promoting deeper decentralisation, mainstreaming of the “technology of participation”, increasing public support and confidence through evidence-based inclusion policy, maximising and demonstrating the socio-economic dividends of social inclusion, and bringing science and technology to drive transformation in the BoP.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank. “Social Inclusion”, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank. “The Social Inclusion Assessment Tool”, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/478071540591164260/SIAT-Logo-web.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO. Social Inclusion, Social Transformations, Social Innovation. Available at [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media\\_services/Director-General/ConceptNoteSocialInclusionSocialTransformationsSocialInnovationEN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BPI/EPA/images/media_services/Director-General/ConceptNoteSocialInclusionSocialTransformationsSocialInnovationEN.pdf).

A good way of integrating all of these mechanisms is to promote and deploy the use of “People’s Plans” in communities, not only for resettlement problems but for other complex community problems as well.

A People’s Plan<sup>13</sup>, as used in the Philippines, refers to a modality of resettling informal settler families residing in flood-prone waterways and other danger zones or in project areas of government infrastructure projects in the Philippines. The People’s Plan is an integrated legal, administrative, financial, and infrastructural framework by which informal settler communities are organised, mobilised, and empowered to design their own resettlement plans, locate suitable relocation sites, engage contractors, and work with government agencies, in effecting a resettlement process that responds to their specific needs and circumstances. This modality has been successful in enabling in-city relocation that engenders immensely greater satisfaction than off-city relocation.

A recent study of this modality sums up: “The People’s Plan framework unleashed energy and dynamics among stakeholders to address practical matters and open up public and institutional spaces to forge new roles and rules that fit changed circumstances. The People’s Plan as a process raised awareness and harnessed the self-initiative, self-responsibility and self-reliance of communities, which are important elements for community resilience. Essentially, the People’s Plan is a transformation of the poor and marginalised from ‘informal’ to active citizenship”.<sup>14</sup>

The People’s Plan is a mechanism for reducing inequality and enhancing democracy at the community level. But it has met with various pushbacks, among which are the complicated administrative paperwork and multisectoral negotiations it requires, which the informal settler beneficiaries lack capabilities and resources for. But the policy framework has sought to create a conducive ecosystem for the effective use of the People’s Plan, including the formal engagement of civil society organisations that will help the informal settler communities come up with and implement the People’s Plan.

The People’s Plan is an idea about capturing the imagination of the BoP communities through a combination of inclusive people empowerment policies that is given traction at the local community level. It is contrasted against the engagement

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<sup>13</sup> Shelter Development for Informal Settler Families (PH0054), <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/members/philippines/commitments/PH0054/>.

<sup>14</sup> “International Institute for Environment and Development. Building resilient and safe communities against poverty and disaster”, 9 Feb 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/building-resilient-and-safe-communities-against-poverty-and-disaster>.

of the BoP in piecemeal, commodity-oriented slices. It is giving them the power to conjure up and build their own “cathedral”.

### **REFRAME 3: ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS FOR “COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING”**

A Greek proverb states that “a civilisation flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit.” In the hierarchy of political engagement that sustains democracy, volunteerism for the long-term common good is among the highest citizens can show, higher than political awareness and arguably higher than political behaviour like discussion, attending political rallies, voting, and contributing to and joining political interest groups and political parties. Volunteers who serve at the community level increase social capital and become ready and mobilisable for contributions at the higher and broader national level. Volunteers also demonstrate higher levels of awareness of community issues and problems, which in turn creates a higher sense of political efficacy. Democracy is more robust when the people practise self-help and mutual help, and feel habitually empowered to do so. Political alienation, cynicism, and nihilism are the absence of the civic spirit that powers democracy.

This critical nature of volunteerism is true even in traditional mature democracies like Great Britain. Martin Lewis notes that the weaknesses of political democracy are being increasingly exposed, but he counters,

And yet the best form of democracy, I would submit, is in front of our very noses in the shape of a formidable constituency of over 15 million people – that’s 50 times more than the combined membership of our main political parties. They are the people who volunteer at least once a month to help others in society – who have identified a problem, a need or an issue in their local community and have got together with friends, colleagues and neighbours to do something about it.<sup>15</sup>

One reason why local-level democracy is impaired is that people in communities, especially those at the BoP, do not have a strong problem-solving orientation apart from being low in political resources and efficacy. Communities exist, but they are often merely primarily an amalgam of families. Community problems are

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<sup>15</sup> “Volunteering – the best form of democracy”, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/lend-a-hand/10869043/Volunteering-the-best-form-of-democracy.html>.

not as well recognised and diagnosed as family or individual problems. There are no systems and capability for community problem-solving.

Another reason is the lack of a conscious effort to create mutual-help relationships among individuals and families, among neighbourhoods, among villages, and among *barangays* and higher levels of local government. These mutual-help arrangements need to be constantly activated, in order that they do not deteriorate and fade away.

The People Power Revolution of 1986 gave the Philippines a vigorous decentralisation push. The Local Government Code of 1991 provides the strategy, systems, and structure by which local governments are able to function with more local autonomy. This has opened up a large space for local communities to actively participate in discussions, decision-making, and implementation of community-problem-solving initiatives.

However, the inertia of poverty and lack of efficacy have prevented local communities from taking advantage of this participatory space. There has been a lack of a complementary source of skilled human resources to help jumpstart community engagement.

Over the years, since the People Power Revolution of 1986, there has been a surge not only in the number of non-governmental organisations and people's organisations, but also a revitalised local government system. That vitality and creativity has increased institutionally inspired local participation in development, captured in the annual Galing Pook Awards. Since 1993, the Awards programme has promoted innovation and resonance in local governance through the heralding, documentation and replication of best practices at the local level through partnership among civil society, government, and the private sector.

A more expansive local participation and volunteer mobilisation effort is required. A highly successful project that shows how skilled volunteers can be harnessed for local social inclusion is the Filipino Patriot Scholars Project,<sup>16</sup> which the Science Education Institute (SEI) of the Department of Science and Technology has been implementing over the last two years. The Philippine government provides science and technology scholarships at the secondary, college, and graduate levels. SEI college-level scholarships provide a monthly stipend of US\$140, among other

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<sup>16</sup> SEI. "The Filipino-Patriot Scholars' Project", <https://www.facebook.com/FilipinoPatriotProject/>.



benefits.<sup>17</sup> There are over 30,000 scholars nationwide, primarily from poor but deserving families.

Over the past two years, the Patriot Scholars Project has undertaken over 25 two-and-a-half-day orientation workshops in different regions of the country, participated in by 150 to 250 scholars at a time. The programme instils the values of servant leadership, social responsibility, and professional excellence through various engaging lectures and exercises. The highlight of the programme is the hands-on, team-based learning of community problem-solving skills, preparatory to travelling to five to ten poor communities to engage in parallel group-to-group conversations with the community residents, who have been grouped into six socio-demographic groups – women, youth, senior citizens, men, PWD, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied (LGBTQIA) or indigenous groups, whichever is present in the community. Interviews with local officials and an observation tour of the community are conducted by other designated student groups. Back in the workshop, the students share, synthesise, and reflect on the learnings, using community profiles and maps they draw, and solution tree analyses they perform.

The students are deeply affected by their encounter with the poor communities, sharing in the end-of-programme reflection sessions how selfish and guilty they now feel about thinking only about their own family's escape from poverty. They do some sharing on their likely "pathways to patriotism". The programme emphasises that the starting point is volunteerism – if they do not learn and practise volunteerism at the local community level now, they will never be able to do it when they are already successful professionals, entrepreneurs, scientists, and leaders.

A Phase Two of the orientation workshop runs scholars who have taken Phase One through a two-day course together with *barangay* officials from a selected set of five or more *barangays*. The workshop ends with project plans and schedules to be pursued by the joint teams.

The idea of engaging Patriot Scholars to provide poor communities with the knowledge and skills required for effective problem-solving can have parallels in many ASEAN societies. There are already existing initiatives in these countries. What needs to be done is to scale up these initiatives across the BoP in each country.

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<sup>17</sup> SEI. "DOST-SEI Scholarships hit new record with 9,852 S&T qualifiers", <http://www.sei.dost.gov.ph/index.php/news-archive/258-dost-sei-scholarships-hit-new-record-with-9-852-s-t-qualifiers>.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

One of the most powerful attempts at reframing governance is the book *Reinventing Government*<sup>18</sup> by Osborne and Gaebler (1999). The book emphasises that the goal of a democratic enterprise is to make governments reach deeper to engage and respond to the needs of local communities. Apart from the salutary benefits arising from democratic practice, it is also the way to achieve immediate levels of inclusive development.

There will always be national-level strategies, policies, programmes, and projects to enhance equality in society. Many of these are introduced by national governments, regardless of whether they are democratic or autocratic. Inequality breeds distrust and dissatisfaction, and in extremes, could evolve into revolutionary movements and consequences. Inequality is undesirable under both democratic and autocratic constitutions. Democracies should do better in reducing inequality because participation is key to acquiring the resources, capabilities, and opportunities required for holistic human development.

The big picture in the ASEAN region consists of three nested levels of inequality. The most compelling inequality to address is the inequality that separates the powerful elites and the base of the pyramid. Three orientational reframes, illustrated through Philippine examples, can create space for greater social inclusion through civic engagement: (1) Using social audits to secure transfers from National and Local Governments to the BoP; (2) Motivating and mobilising the BoP through the “People’s Plan”; and (3) Engaging patriot-scholar volunteers for “community problem-solving”. Reducing inequality is best understood as promoting social inclusion, and promoting democracy is best understood as promoting participatory community problem-solving. This ensures that the BoP will be the main drivers of their own transformation.

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<sup>18</sup> David Osborne and Ted Gaebler. *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector*. 1993.

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# CONTENTS

Preface

The Ambiguous Story of Democracy

- *Wilhelm Hofmeister*

Globalisation of Risks and the Crisis of Democracy in Asia

- *Maiko Ichihara*

Managing Democratic Leadership in Undemocratic Times:  
Challenges in Southeast Asia

- *Bridget Welsh*

The COVID-19 Pandemic, the “War on Drugs,” and Duterte’s  
Brute Force Governance in the Philippines

- *Mark R. Thompson*

Capacity development in International Party Assistance

– The Case of KASYP

- *Isabel Urrutia*

Bridging leadership: A Framework for Democratic Leadership  
Capacity-Building

- *Ryan Camado Guinaran*

Working Democracy Amidst Continued Inequality:  
Does South Asia Represent a Paradox?

- *Sandeep Shastri*

Reframing Inequality to Promote Inclusive Democracy

- *Segundo Joaquin E. Romero, Jr*