

# 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.



Christian Echle  
Director  
Political Dialogue Asia, Singapore

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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.