

Crossing Democracies in Asia

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For scholars of the transition paradigm like Guillermo O'Donnell, Juan Linz, and Samuel Huntington, post-authoritarian regimes have no other alternative but to democratize first and to consolidate later. For a time being, these regimes enter a stage of transition before eventually reaching the threshold of democracy. The transitory realm is transcended with the institutionalization of free, fair, and competitive elections and the institutionalization of the rule of law that allows for the regular functioning of democracy and its processes. Democracy must necessarily be achieved through elections at a “minimum,” and substantively through imbibing it as “the only game in town” at the most.¹ All these imply that regimes move in a “democratic direction.”²

Unfortunately, Asian democracies often fall short of these Western expectations. As Mark Beeson maintains, democracies in some parts of Asia are either “yet to arrive” or are “partially realized.”³ As a result, Asian democracies are sometimes called by different names: new democracies, semi-democracies, electoral democracies or delegative democracies, to cite a few. Fareed Zakaria (1997) referred to a democracy that falls short of the Western liberal democratic prescription as an “illiberal democracy” that is, democracy sans entrenched constitutional freedoms.⁴ On the other hand, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2002) have coined the term “competitive authoritarianism” to refer to regimes that “fall short of democracy” and “also fall short of full-scale authoritarianism.”⁵ This recent conceptualization basically ends the illusion of hybrid regimes ever becoming democratic at all—a notion which is outside of the purview of this journal. Whether or not these regimes actually find their way to establishing more mature forms of democracy will not preclude other researchers from finding ways of characterizing degrees and qualities of democracies.

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Many of these Asian regimes blend democratic and authoritarian techniques in the way they govern. Hence, the value of studying different cases cannot be overemphasized. Attempts to test the validity of measures that strive to approximate democratic realities in different Asian countries must therefore be developed, continued, and sustained.

The first issue of the *Asian Democracy Review*, which was published in 2012, has seen the debut of yet another alternative to the resolute way of looking at Asian democracy and of measuring its quality of democratization. The Asian Democracy Index (ADI) was the device developed by the Consortium for the Asian Development Index (CADI) to measure the quality of democracy in Asia.

The ADI provides a systematic way of looking at the Asian world. The ADI was created with the aim of establishing a benchmark that can aid scholars in their comparison and analysis of democracies, primarily in Asia.⁶ But as stated in the ADI guidebook, the index was not made for Asia alone. It would later on be interesting to see its applicability to and usefulness in other democratic countries even outside of Asia.

Based on the CADI framework, democracy is defined as a “continuing process toward an ideal—that is, a process of demopolization.”⁷ Hence democracy, seen from this framework, is dynamic. As such, it cannot assume any definite form. It is a variable phenomenon.

In his article entitled “Democracy of the Desired: Everyday Politics and Political Aspiration of Contemporary Thai Countryside,” Jakkrit Sangkhamanee brings to fore the value of “everyday politics.” The article shows how praxis can change the theoretical landscape of rural political dynamics “by looking at dynamics of everyday politics and the emerging forms of desires that transcend the rural-urban and local-national divides” (Jakkrit, p.6). Jakkrit presents the “new” perspective that in consideration of the improved economic status and the knowledge base of rural voters, vote buying may not necessarily be a cultural aberration or a consequence of poverty and of patronage politics.

In this issue, the validity of the ADI as an instrument to measure Asian democracy is tested a second time in Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea. The results of the ADI pilot test in Malaysia are also included herein. With new developments and challenges in 2012, would the studies reap the same results as the 2011 surveys?

“Democracy in South Korea 2012,” by Junghoon Kim, Hyungchul Kim, Seungwon Lee, Yooseok Oh, Dongchoon Kim, Youngpyo Seo, Sangchul Yoon, Kyunghee Choi, Hyunyun Cho, and Heeyeon Cho, reaffirms the findings of the 2011 South Korean report. Their study further

shows the observations that equalization continues to lag behind progress in liberalization and that there are persisting gaps in the spheres of politics, economy, and civil society. This study also indicates continued improvement in the area of procedural institutionalization. The authors, however, noted the existence of a “democratic deficit” that exists in Korea due to exclusive and monopolistic tendencies that continue to permeate the said spheres.

In “Asian Democracy Index 2012 – Indonesia: Liberalization Minus Equality,” Anton Pradjasto, Anna Margret, Dirga Ardiansa, Christina Dwi Susanti, Irwansyah, Ingggrid Silitonga, Mia Novitasari, Sri Budi Eko Wardani, Wawan Ichwanuddin, and Yolanda Panjaitan report an increase in the Asian Democracy Index from 4.99 in 2011 to 5.27 in 2012. However, the authors do not find any significant change in the “condition of democratization/de-monopolization” in Indonesia (p.68). Like the other cases in this volume, the index score of liberalization is higher compared to the index score of equalization. These findings may be attributed to the low extent of de-monopolization in the economic sphere.

In their country report, entitled “The Asian Democracy Index for Malaysia 2012: Authoritarian and Ineffectual Government despite Formal Democratic Institutions,” Andrew Aeria and Tan Seng Keat express their reservation that their pilot study might have produced inconclusive results due to the limited sample size. Their study, however, shows that in 2012, democracy in Malaysia continued to be monopolized by a powerful elite.

Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, Clarinda Lusterio-Berja, and Erika M. Rey-Saturay, in their study entitled “Regressing, Stagnant, or Progressing? The 2012 CADI Asian Democracy Index Survey in the Philippines,” state that despite the nearly-doubled (p.126) sample size, the team experienced a 44 percent refusal rate (p.128). Findings show that in 2012, the Philippines scored an ADI of 4.84 (p.129). Their study also includes a gamut of insights on a number of contextual factors that can add color to democracy in the country and that can explain the said ADI score. These include insights on violence—state-related or otherwise—and general dissatisfaction with the performance of government, among other things.

Finally, Clarinda Lusterio Berja’s “Methodological Achievements and Limits of the Asian Democracy Index (ADI)” talks about the upside and downside of using the ADI as a measure of the quality of democracy. According to the author, the challenge of democratization in Asia is its persisting instability; Berja notes that “even countries that were considered ‘success’ cases of democratic consolidation [in Asia] experience conflict and crises” (Berja, p.159). The author discusses methodological shortcomings in analyzing moving targets like Asian democracies, presents improvements

to address these weaknesses, and provides further recommendations to maximize the use of the ADI.

Notes

1. Having elections as a “minimal definition” of democracy was taken from the work of Samuel Huntington (1991, 9). The famous phrase when “democracy becomes the only game in town” was taken from Przeworski 1991, 26.
2. Levitsky and Way 2002, 52.
3. Beeson 2014.
4. Zakaria 1997.
5. Levitsky and Way 2002, 53.
6. CADI 2012, 36.
7. CADI 2012, 39.

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