



TALKING POINTS

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In many ways, democracy in Southeast Asia is interesting. Most of all, we can find such a variety of democracy or authoritarianism in this part of the world, ranging from one-party system, pseudo-absolute monarchy, military rule (until recently), one party dominance, semi-democracies, to democracies. True to ‘unity in diversity,’ an ASEAN slogan, the region contains such diverse forms. Malaysia and Singapore provide one of the most interesting cases – enduring semi-democracies, one defying full democratic transition despite substantial economic development. Of course there are ups and downs in these regimes, which invite debates for enduring, particular types of democracy or for the prevalence of universal democracy, depending on current regime’s electoral performances, without a clear-cut conclusion.

Meanwhile, democracies Indonesia and the Philippines are another interesting case. Both democracies, at least at the moment, are not quite satisfactory in a few ways and invite a question – why? In the case of the Philippines, we have to consider the underlying socio-economic contradiction in the Philippines society. Indonesia is still a new democracy, born some 10 years ago. Given the size (geographical, population), level of development (especially economic) and the depth of authoritarian penetration into the society before, we have to wait more to see fuller democracy in Indonesia. A new rising star, Myanmar, is the most interesting case at the moment. Still the political liberalisation in Myanmar is fragile, but the progress in the past two years is substantial. However, a word of caution is needed here. Myanmar has more obstacles ahead than behind to enter into democratisation, beyond liberalisation.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.