



12th BALI DEMOCRACY FORUM

Nusa Dua, Bali, 5-6 December 2019

KEY ELEMENTS

Panel B

“Rising Exclusivity and Declining Democracy”

Info:

Inclusivity lies at the core of democracy and its underpinning principle of equal participation for all. The principle foundation of democracy is that all who are affected by a decision should have the right to participate in making that decision, either directly or through their chosen representatives. This assertion is consistent with the UN’s SDGs goal (number 16 targets 16.7):

‘...ensuring inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels...’ and ‘...ensuring full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making of women in political, economic and public life...’. This assertion implies the inclusion of all unique groupings in a particular society.

In order to guarantee inclusive democratic process in any society, that particular country/government must invest a great amount of resources, including financial, human, material or otherwise, in order to establish the right conditions necessary for fostering inclusive democracy which ensures peace, political stability and economic prosperity.

Inequality of opportunity persists worldwide. Not all citizens in society feel represented in decision making nor the same rights to access the benefit of democracy, some experience marginalization and exclusion. Democratic institutions are viewed as failing to be inclusive thus lead to the erosion of public trust in governments. Have democracy and its benefit not been inclusive enough? What to do to enable inclusive democracy?

Current conditions & Challenges:

On the Issue of “Rising Exclusivity and Declining Democracy”:

- The 21st century witnessed another wave of democratization across the globe; more and more countries have been able to hold general election and experience transition of power through peaceful elections. However, democracy has been under stress; some fundamental challenges are especially hard to cope.
- The challenge to democracy nowadays is the rising exclusivity and the question of social justice, and the failure of authorities’ to put inclusivity forward.
- Global State of Democracy 2019 Study conducted by International IDEA, revealed an alarming trend of declining democracy index in both old and young democracies. Young

democracies are often weak, ineffective, and fragile, while old democracies struggle to deliver promised sustainable economic development and besieged by populist policies.

- The rising of narrow nationalism and populism has hindered the existing democracy in advanced countries across Europe as well as in the United States. The problem lies in the lack of leadership in the promotion of democracy.
- The embracing of capitalism and internationalization of economies may increase the chance of cooperation between countries but as the competition grows stronger, issues such as inviting investment and securing social political stability have undermined inclusive democracy.
- Populist policies threaten the integrity of a democratic society by advocating for the achievement of short-term political agendas and maintaining political power as opposed to overall development of society as a whole.
- Rising exclusivity in growing democracy such as in Latin America and also in some Asian countries is further aggravated by the problem of corruption and economic inequality. In this regard, inclusivity is a key factor in determining success of democracy.

On the Issue of Exclusion in Digital Space:

- The panel noted that the rise of social media has created three types of exclusion, namely exclusion by state actors, exclusion among citizen groups, and exclusion by technology companies. The exclusion by state actors is the act of limiting citizens' access to social media; the exclusion among citizen groups is limiting minority voices; and exclusion by technology companies is limiting certain individual or people access to the social media platform that the company owns. This exclusion leads to the creation of echo chamber, where 70 – 80% of the people in said echo chamber express similar opinion. People who have same ideas can gather easily in social media, benefitting by anonymity can share their same ideas – and eventually believe that the ideas that they have are absolute. This phenomenon, it is very bad for democracy because democracy can operate nicely when we hear diverse views and opinion, and echo chamber disrupts this process. It created a dilemma, between how to protect the privacy and regulate undesirable disinformation while maintaining freedom of expression.
- The panel acknowledges Indonesia's experience in 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections, where hoaxes on issues of religion, race, and ethnicity were being used. Hoaxes are not only targeted towards one candidate, but both of them. The hoaxes were used to create echo chamber among the loyal supporters of both candidates, thus is bad for democracy. In Indonesia's experience, Hoaxes could only affect the loyal supporters while the undecided or the 'soft' supporter are not affected. In Indonesia's experience, while hoaxes are more easily spread on social media, people still look on mass media to check the true information. Thus, mass media still hold relevance in today's society.
- The panel noted that Facebook was made to create an open community where people can share their experiences, connect with friends and family across the globe, and build the community together. However, the internet creates new and increased opportunities to abuse. Facebook still face challenges in enforcing the community standard, including the limitation in identifying potential violations from hate speech that can change rapidly, also its limit as a non-regulatory platform. Facebook also has self-limitation as a fact-checking platform. What Facebook usually does on hate speech content is just removing

them from the platform.

Way Forward:

On the Issue of “Rising Exclusivity and Declining Democracy”:

- The panel acknowledged that transition process to democracy is dynamic and not an overnight process. Public faith in democracy must be nurtured and maintained during the transition process through comprehensive civic education and continuous transparent performance of democratic institutions. Policymakers must be careful against short term populist policies and focus on the long-term development of society as a whole. In this regard, civil society and media play key roles: they must remain vocal and independent and they need to take bold initiative in promoting inclusive democracy.
- The panel noted that there must be an awareness when the conditions of declining democracy manifest themselves: weakened press freedom, authorities’ declining to protect and listen to marginalized voices, misuse of power from elected authorities, polarization of society, competitive politics, etc.
- In light of the challenge we face in terms of rising economic inequality and competition, the panel stressed the importance of exploring the linkage between democracy and capitalism. It is necessary to develop a comprehensive narrative of investing in democracy and inclusivity in the economic sector.
- The panel underlined the importance of investing in education and women’s participation as well as ensuring that democracy is home-grown. Tunisia, for example, is the only successful participant of Arab Spring to emerge and sustain a democratic society. Investment in education and advocating women’s rights resulted in a strong Tunisian civil society, openness to reform, and resilience, which help in weathering the political turmoil following the transition from decades old dictatorship to a democratic society. Therefore, investment towards nurturing a strong civil society is key element to keeping democracy healthy.

On the Issue of Exclusion in Digital Space:

- Eco-chamber, hoaxes, and disinformation particularly through social media has become an increasing problem for democratic institution. Disinformation impacts the way voters struggle to make sense of all the sources of information they use to make political decisions, regardless of their level of expertise and education. There is also a real danger that hostile actors use online disinformation to undermine democratic values and principles as it happens in the experience of Indonesian elections in 2014 and 2019.
- The need for information has become essential to help voice the unheard, and to help bring justice to the people and to remind the government to be fully transparent, accountable, and inclusive.
- Ongoing disinformation, echo-chamber, and hoaxes should not be tolerated, as it would bring grave consequences for democratic processes. The risks to democracy increase with the rapid growth of social media use.
- There should be reassurance within the discourse in social media that the false and the genuine are distinguished. Public trust and confidence in professional mass media need to be restored and maintained. Freedom of expression for professional journalists should be guaranteed and protected to ensure that they remain objective to the truth. On the other hand, the press needs to improve the quality of the information they deliver, as quality information becomes the utmost condition for the people to be objective.
- The forum also discussed how social media could be a partner to democracy instead of

a factor that suppresses the conventional media. As a platform, companies, such as Facebook, cannot remain neutral let alone distance from critical issues such as inclusion in democracies.

Conclusion & Recommendation:

On the Issue of “Rising Exclusivity and Declining Democracy”:

- To address the problems on the declining democracy, the panel proposed that we need to explore ways to balance political and economic aspect of democracy.
- In the process of promoting democracy as well as mitigating conflict, the panel, based on the Middle East and Northern African experiences, encourage countries to move towards regional integration and cooperation. Regional integration allows countries to develop cooperation as well as collective stability and wealth, which are beneficial in promoting democracy. Reflecting the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), regional integration is feasible since common denominators is already present: they face similar challenges and opportunities.
- The panel noted that social class equality can be used to measure inclusivity in democracies. Strengthening social group equality, creation of equitable policies, and delivering economic prosperity are identified as key factors to restore public confidence in democracy, which in turn, concluding that social group equality relates to checks on government institutions.
- The panel also described that India’s model of inclusion for the minorities and how it can be used as a best practice reference in improving inclusivity in democratic processes. The model emphasizes 4 elements: law (e.g. ensuring fundamental rights), institution (e.g. creating institutions dedicated to address minorities’ issues), policy (e.g. subsidy and protection for minorities), and financial support. There were several key takeaways from India’s experiences, namely that we must (1) recognize that we live in a plural society; (2) respond and address to minorities’ claims; (3) ensure political participations from the minorities; (4) formulate and implement accommodation strategies; and (5) create policies that are equal to everyone.

On the Issue of Exclusion in Digital Space:

- To maintain and improve quality information, governments need to ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of press is being protected by the law.
- Freedom of expression is not enough, and efforts are needed to improve the quality press freedom, including the improvement of journalists competence from time to time to ensure that they can produce quality information. In this regard, media businesses also need to adapt to the digital era. Regional cooperation is also needed to guard the democracy.
- To tackle ongoing disinformation, eco-chamber, and hoaxes, states must take more responsibility, working in collaboration with civil society to create clear regulation and standard to eliminate the spread of fake news. Government should also guarantee the freedom of expression to ensure the objectivity of mass media. While the extent of international standards and good practice for professional mass media has already been well-established, there is a need to develop international convention on the use of social media that can be applied globally.