THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

DEMOCRACY IN ASIA:

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

INTRODUCTION:

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PANEL 1: OVERVIEW OF KEY CHALLENGES

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Suzanne Maloney [00:13:47] Good afternoon and good evening to those of you who are viewing this event from other parts of the world. My apologies for our late start due to technical difficulties, but I promise you what we're here to do today is going to make up for any wait and delay that you may have had. I'm Suzanne Maloney, I'm vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution, and I'm delighted to welcome you to today's very important event, where my colleagues will be sharing their analyses and recommendations from phase two of Brookings's Democracy in Asia Project.

Democratic institutions around the world are increasingly under pressure as a result of growing polarization, nationalism and public distrust, as well as the continuing fallout of the global pandemic. Brookings Foreign Policy launched our Democracy in Asia Project in 2020, bringing together experts from and on Asia to identify trends, challenges and opportunities for democratic governance across the region. Phase two of the Democracy in Asia Project continues this work of Brookings scholars and outside experts now shifting the focus from diagnosis and assessment to policy prescription. An array of Asia experts from the U.S. and the region contributed to our newly compiled volume of policy briefs, with tailored recommendations for managing four of the most acute challenges to democratic governance in the region: corruption, disinformation, inequality and public health. If you haven't already done so, please take a copy of the volume on your way out or download it from the Brookings website.

With the second Summit for Democracy announced to take place in late March 2023, it's our hope that this research and the recommendations that our experts have offered can inform the planning and the outcomes of that summit. I'm so pleased to have the working group leads and some of our American-based contributors to this compiled volume to join our discussion today. Ryan Hass, who is our Chen-Fu and Cecilia Yen Koo Chair in Taiwan Studies at Brookings, will moderate the first panel that will give an overview of some of the key challenges. And Patricia Kim, the David Rubenstein Fellow at Brookings, will moderate the second panel, which will be a deep dive in some of the respective memos and areas of expertise of our contributors. Both moderators will conclude their panels with opportunities for questions and answers. So just a quick reminder that we're livestreaming and on the record. If viewers who are not here in the audience would like to submit questions, please do so via the email address events at Brookings dot edu or via Twitter using the hashtag Democracy in Asia. Ryan, the floor is now yours.

Ryan Hass [00:16:21] Thank you so much, Suzanne, for, for that warm introduction and welcome to you all. My name is Ryan Hass, and I have the privilege of moderating this panel. Our goal in this panel is to identify some of the key challenges to democratic resilience in Asia and also key lessons from Asia for addressing those challenges. And even though this conversation is taking place in Washington, it's not intended as an exercise in identifying American solutions to challenges that the Asian governments are facing. In order to get straight into the dialogue, I'm going to be ruthlessly efficient in my introduction of these panelists. They all have long, distinguished titles and affiliations.

Thomas Pepinsky is a professor of government at Cornell University and also a nonresident senior fellow here at Brookings. He led the Corruption Working Group for this project. Nuurrianti Jalli is an assistant professor in communication studies at Northern State University and was a key contributor to the Disinformation Working Group. Andrew Yeo is a senior fellow and the Korea Chair at the Brookings Institution and also a professor at Catholic University. He led the Inequality Working Group for this project. And Syaru Lin is the chair for the Center for Asia Pacific Resilience and Innovation, Capri, and also a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings. She led the Public Health Working Group for this project. In terms of format, we're going to drill down into some of the key lessons and findings from each of these four working groups and then preserve some time at the end for a conversation with members of the audience. But before we drill into each, each of the working groups, I want to ask just a, a quick question of the four of you. How, in a few words, would you describe the state of democracy in Asia right now? Tom, let's start with you and we'll work our way down.

Thomas Pepinsky [00:18:04] I would describe the state of democracy in Asia right now as mixed, and I'd remember that I like to look up, but when I look up, I like to keep my feet on the ground.

Ryan Hass [00:18:13] Yeah.

Nuurrianti Jalli [00:18:14] I share the same sentiment. I mean, it depends on which country we're talking about. If you're talking about countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar is of course, this -- either is remained the same or declining even worse. But if you're talking about country like, say, Malaysia, we recently had our elections, so we're not so sure about what's going on in the next few years. So I say it's mixed as well.

Andrew Yeo [00:18:36] Right, I guess we share similar views because on the aggregate, actually, Asia is doing better. There is a study by Larry Diamond that looked at democracy in the aggregate from 20 -- from 2006 to 2019. And Asia was the only region— so this is Southeast Asia and East Asia— where the democracy index scores had gone up. But if you drill down and look at specific countries, you mentioned Malaysia. Look at India, the Philippines and Thailand, there are definitely problems. So it would be mixed even if on the whole it looks like democracy's doing a little bit better in Asia than in other regions.

Syaru Shirley Lin [00:19:09] I think that because of working on this project on public health, what I can say is the pandemic has been an enormous challenge to democracies around the world in this fight for reducing threats to health. It's not very clear to me that democracy is the best system to deal with health, but certainly it is the best system to deal with the trade-offs and values that all citizens would like to see preserved. And I think that living in the past year in Taiwan, starting this thinktank that is focused on Asia Pacific, has really given me a chance to work with experts around Asia to see that democracies go two steps forward, one step back. And I think that all the metrics tell you something different, Taiwan just had a mid-term election, Malaysia's just had a big election. There are many more elections to watch. And I think that the pandemic keep us on our feet.

Ryan Hass [00:20:01] Wonderful. Well, Tom, let's, let's start with you and talk about corruption for a minute. You and members of your group discuss trend lines of corruption in three of the countries that you evaluated: the Philippines, Malaysia and South Korea. And the overall trend lines of the papers read somewhat positive, but not necessarily linear. What are some of the big takeaways about corruption in Asia right now?

Thomas Pepinsky [00:20:24] So I think the description of the trend lines is running positive, but not linear is exactly right. I think one central takeaway from the, from the papers is that when we think about the relationship between democracy and corruption in Asia and probably elsewhere as well, it's not a story of just, add democracy and corruption goes down, it's not a simple 1 to 1 relationship between political form and level of corruption. However, I remain fairly optimistic and fairly confident that democracy is better or more appropriate or more capable for addressing some of the main challenges of corruption in the region and elsewhere.

So the takeaways I think from our essays are three. One is that rooting out corruption is hard because in democracies it is very clear that politicians may politicize the anti-corruption efforts

themselves. This is something that appears in each of the three essays. You can't name, I don't think three more dissimilar countries in Asia. So, great for comparative lists. But in each of these countries, we see efforts by politicians who are going to be the subject of corruption investigations to politicize the agencies that are to investigate them. And this is just the main challenge. This certainly happens in non-democratic contexts as well, but it's obviously a lot harder to know about it.

Second big, big lesson I think is, from the three case studies, is just how multifaceted corruption problems are. I think this is true in these three countries and also generally. But you can think about corruption at the level of politicians stealing votes, buying votes, using clients, holistic means to secure support. You can think about unelected bureaucrats using their unelected position to direct resources in particular ways. And you can think about frontline service providers who are the ones who are responsible for delivering public services to ordinary, ordinary citizens. And they may be facing challenges of corruption as well. And so to handle, to get a handle on corruption is first to break it down into its parts. I think the essays do a very good job of doing that.

The third thing that I want to say— and this really came out in the discussion of Malaysia in Francis Hutchinson's essay— is just how important that bottom-up civil society orientation towards anti-corruption efforts are going to be. What he, in Malaysia -- so for those of you who haven't paid close attention over the past decade or so, the long standing Barisan Nasional regime was eventually pushed out of office on the heels of a very, very obvious, serious, major corruption scandal. This wasn't the first, but it was certainly the biggest and most consequential. And Francis argues that the benefits of, of the political, the new political winds that emerged in this in this moment were wasted because the government that followed wasn't sufficiently attentive to the concerns of ordinary citizens. And so you -- to sustain this push for greater corruption efforts, you really do need the participation of civil society. This isn't something that's just a nice thing to have. This is like a first order requirement.

Ryan Hass [00:23:32] And in Washington, we often associate corruption with elite capture, with foreign financing. How do you think about the distribution of sort of source problems between domestic sources as well as foreign sources of corruption?

Thomas Pepinsky [00:23:46] So I don't -- I, I think that we would be missing the core feature of how corruption operates in practice if we didn't pay attention to global connections and foreign sources of financing. The case of Malaysia that I just described is very, very plainly enmeshed in global, global financial flows and partnerships between states. That said, I don't think that that's a

feature that is changeable about how the countries in Asia interact with the world around them. And so I think that, that while we need to be attentive to the specifics of how these global connections make corruption work, I think the core focus will remain domestic. Right. I think it's the actors and the institutions and the incentives that they face within the country that are the thing that we -- that, that we can offer counsel about. And that's the source of the mechanisms for change, because simply cutting off foreign sources, I don't think is feasible.

Ryan Hass [00:24:48] And in the papers, there's a suggestion that democracies have certain inherent advantages for addressing corruption. Can you help us understand that?

Thomas Pepinsky [00:24:56] So as I said, to begin with, it's not a simple case of add democracy, corruption goes down. That's certainly not true. It's not true in any of the three countries that we -- that, that my working group addressed. And it's not true anywhere else in the world. But I do think that nevertheless, there are two main features of democratic political systems that are uniquely beneficial for at least addressing or at least confronting corruption.

The first is it really matters if your press can talk about what is happening. So the freedom of expression as, as seen through traditional print and broadcast media and also new media as well, is just essential. And democracies in the region are struggling mightily to understand how to balance the needs of human security with the needs of free flows of information. But nevertheless, when you cut off the ability of reporters to report and citizens to complain, you lose the ability to even understand for ordinary people that the nature, the depth of challenges of corruption. So democracies do that in ways that non democracies do not.

The second is, it is really nice to have ordinary people periodically choose whether or not they want to keep the government in office. And, and that seems like that's like the very baseline feature of democracy is you have to have elections every once in a while. And non-democratic governments often allege that that's where corruption comes from, the need to please voters. But at the same time, the ability to confront politicians with the threat of sanction for their deeds in office retrospectively, or to incentivize them prospectively to behave in ways that are more aligned with the interests of ordinary people. That is a powerful tool for encouraging people to act in the way that you want. Democratic theory will tell you that that's not perfect. And I'm the first one to, to tell you that that is not perfect, but it is something that only democracies can do.

Ryan Hass [00:26:58] Thank you. Nuurrianti can we turn to you and talk for a minute about disinformation? And let's just start by setting the stage. What, what are you referring to when you're thinking about disinformation and how does it threaten democratic institutions?

Nuurrianti Jalli [00:27:09] Okay. So I want to start answering this question by giving you proper definitions of disinformation. Disinformation is when you try to share false information to somebody with intent to deceive them, with intent to deceive the receivers. So how it works— at least in the current climate based on these case studies where my colleague and, and myself wrote— is one, of course, technological advancements. Right. We're talking about the affordability of having mobile devices and everybody can create content and upload it on the Internet. So there's a lot of information out there so everybody can share something, say something. And also on top of that, there are also a lot of companies across the world that offers technology for you to share information in large numbers. So we can see here, like bots, we're talking about A.I., we're talking about all this new stuff that you can use and pay and use it for political gain. So that's number one.

And secondly, that I really want to highlight, it's the same theme across all this case studies that were written by all of us is the fact that in Asia, we still have lack of awareness on media and information literacy skills. So which means that our people are vulnerable to information that is not accurate, if you get what I'm saying Like say for example, you have somebody from rural Malaysia and are exposed to content that, that are written in their local language and they easily, you know, they feel that it's somebody close to them that shared this, so therefore that, hey, you know what? It might be true because this person speaks my language. And then therefore you, because we don't have that critical thinking to kind of, like evaluate that information, you trust it. So what happens with this is that, you know -- this is not just Malaysia. We're talking about what happens in Japan. Professor Ishihara also said that, you know, content written from foreign, what we call it, actors were written in Japanese. Russia, Pro-Russia, what we call it, narrative shared and written in Japanese. So using language, local language, plus with the lack ability to critically evaluate that information, we're easily fooled by information that we have out there. So that's number two, media literacy.

And three, I think this also interesting for us to kind of like evaluate how foreign investment in local media agencies affect disinformation as well. So this is happening in Thailand. Professor Simpson, highlight this in her article. There's increased investment in media in Thailand from Chinese investors. And that creates pro-Chinese propaganda in Thailand. So how does that affect Thailand, as

what we call it, as a country? So how your second question, how this affect democracy? Of course, it affects democracy negatively because, you know, democracy will not be able to flourish in -- for, informational environment. So if people fool you, then you will not be able, you know, if you trust something that is not accurate, you will not be able to vote right. You will not be able to make right political decision. And therefore, you going to elect somebody that might not be, you know, as good as in terms of leadership and then you -- that affect democracy negatively. So that's my answer to your first question.

Ryan Hass [00:30:36] Well, thank you. I have one follow up question. The papers do a pretty persuasive job of distinguishing between domestic sources of disinformation and foreign sources of disinformation. Why is it important to separate those two out and treat each of them, respond to each of them differently?

Nuurrianti Jalli [00:30:52] So here a lot of time we talk about like disinformation, we tend to focus on domestic disinformation and, you know, last discussion on foreign influence through disinformation, I think that is also critical for us to highlight that, you know, when, when it comes to foreign disinformation, why we need to distinguish this and try to improve how we in -- how we identify them, because of course, obviously, it's going to undermine our democracy. And this can open doors for foreign actors to have better, right, political grip in local politics. And this I've been seeing, like, you know, we're talking about political giants. If we're talking about China, we're talking about Russia, in Southeast Asia, pro-Russian and pro-Chinese narrative are rampant.

So why is this happening? Right. So this is, this kind of makes like, you know, other countries is going to affect international relations as well. Not going to affect us, you as a democracy, but also potentially neighboring countries. We're talking about like, you know, if, say example, if someone attacked us from outside, neighboring states it's going to affect that, too. So it's something that for us to kind of like really think about. But sadly, based on our investigation, at least in the Asian context, we still lack in terms of like framework on how to detect foreign influence, foreign disinformation due to the fact that there are a lot of different ways for such disinformation to come in. So I think it's for, it's important for researchers, for all of us to kind of like step up our game, to kind of like, you know, focus on that, that component to disinformation.

Ryan Hass [00:32:39] Thank you. I'm sure there will be many more questions for you coming forward. But Andrew, I'd like to turn to you for a second if we can. When we think about inequality, it's

often in terms of economic inequality. But the papers that your team commissioned talk about upstream sources that contribute to economic inequality. Can you help us understand what some of those are and how they impact democratic governance?

Andrew Yeo [00:33:03] So our working group was chiefly interested in economic inequality, but there indeed was recognition among our group members that other related dimensions of inequality included limited or uneven access to education and government services, racial and ethnic inequality and unequal access to the political process could also be equally problematic. So, for instance, in Malaysia, what's it mean when there is economic policies favoring a particular ethnic group, or in the Philippines when there are political family dynasties? So a lot of these are historical in nature, but they do have this upstream effect of effecting inequality. Corruption was actually another one as well, too, and so we had several members, you know, in the Philippines case, in the Korean case saying, well, corruption and inequality are really, you know, go hand in hand. So, again, we see these intricacies between inequality and other factors.

Ryan Hass [00:33:55] Another theme that really comes through in the papers is the importance of decentralization of policymaking. Can you help us understand why that's so critical to tackling inequality?

Andrew Yeo [00:34:04] So decentralization, it means giving authority and decision-making power to the lowest administrative unit. So it's really about local empowerment in contrast to a national, policies being made all by the national government. And several of our papers talked about advocating or pushing to have policies decentralized where political and economic processes are made at the regional and local levels. And just as a personal anecdote, I lived in the Philippines during COVID-19, and, you know, in the Philippines there's been a big push among academics and scholars and policymakers to push for greater decentralization. And this became really clear during the pandemic when in the absence of immediate help or relief from, from Manila, from the capital, that the lower the, the LGUs, the Barangays, they had to figure out how they could procure PPE or how they could, you know, figure out logistics with, with aid coming in. So, again, I think decentralization means giving, being able to empower people on the ground to know best how to how to resolve certain problems of governance.

Ryan Hass [00:35:14] Thank you, Shirley, in your opening comments, you made a reference to regime type in terms of responses to public health emergencies. I want to pick up where you left off

because there was an argument in Washington that authoritarian regimes had advantages in responding to massive events like COVID because they could deploy tight social controls to, to sort of address the issue. And that argument always felt a bit tenuous to me. South Korea, Taiwan, other democracies perform very well in terms of responding to COVID. But how are you thinking about regime type as you factor in in public health issues?

Syaru Shirley Lin [00:35:53] I feel like I have the most daunting task here because the pandemic is still with us. And, and as a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings, there were so many international commissions and organizations, I wanted to know more about the Asia-Pacific experience, because in 2020, of course, Taiwan did a brilliant job of keeping mortality very low, keeping exports very healthy. And South Korea and Japan, if you remember it, had ups and downs. South Korea with the church cluster and then immediately was rectified and became a model country in terms of how it dealt with vaccination rollout and Japan similarly with the Olympics seems like it's ten years ago, but it just happened the last three years. And these challenges are very interesting to pit democracy against sort of non-democracies. But our group— and this was a true learning experience, Ryan— because our group decided we wanted to recruit primarily Asia-Pacific based experts who are living the experience, writing about it. And so we have five wonderful expert, experts with the same prompt who decided to write about totally different things. And in this process, we learned that actually democracies are resilient but very challenged.

And, and so I think it's important to remember, for a non-democratic country, perhaps it's easy to say, let's just look at mortality. Are we doing well? And we just focus on it. And the feedback loop is very, very long. However, in democracies where there's still elections during the pandemic, I think many countries needed to depend on trust. So Dr. Katsuma in our group wrote about trust in government in Japan with Non-Pharmaceutical intervention. Dr. Tsai wrote about how in Taiwan individuals were upset that the government was using their data in order to fight public health. And this is similar to the questions we have in this country, in the United States about big tech. And then we have a feminist scholar, Rashika Krishnan, who actually wrote about how women were hurt in India by the collection of data and restricting them during times of COVID in specific areas in India.

And similarly in Australia, Stephen Duckett wrote about governance in the state of Victoria, about how there is a lack of accountability and how it improved during this time. So I think the important thing about all of these lessons is that democracy's in one big D with everybody

homogeneous in terms of governance and that trust is not entirely related to the regime type. But trust in government turned out to be the most important reason why countries do well in fighting COVID-19. I'll just stop here.

Ryan Hass [00:38:37] And what lessons did you learn about effectiveness and developing public trust in terms of government institutions responses to public health crises, that could be applicable to other governments in Asia.

Syaru Shirley Lin [00:38:50] So one of my experts is here to speak at the next panel, and Dr. Park will talk about a very important lead that the world, of course, has issues with data governance, that basically Europe, the United States, China, many parts of the world now have their own legal system. And this is really very important because it impedes our ability to work across borders, collecting data and harnessing data for the benefit of citizens not actually taking away their rights. And this is to back up a bit, when Ryan asked us to inform a public health group, we thought, what can we write about that everybody in the world today is a public health expert? We recognize that in the last three years, we've all turned into. So we're not going to write anything new that other public health experts are now writing.

So we said we want to talk about how do you balance the priorities of public health with other democratic values, such as privacy? And so we decided to ask the five writers, which we selected from a very, very long list of experts to— and they had expertise in law, in gender studies and in public health— to write about how to harness the power of innovation in the sense of technological innovation and innovative, innovative public policy to fight COVID-19 while protecting privacy. So this turned out to be a really amazing exercise. And the long and short is I think it is the most interdisciplinary study I have ever been involved with, because I think historical sort of governance legacy turned out to be much more important. How do you build trust? You cannot build trust during an emergency like COVID-19. The trust needed to have been there. And how do you do that? And that is the lesson of a democratic governance. You need to build institutions night and day, especially when there's no emergency. You need to invest in public health. And most importantly, you need to invest in a legal system that allows you to basically pick up when there's an emergency.

So in the case of Taiwan, for example, Dr. Tsai wrote about how citizens sued the government because it was overreaching during COVID 19. The constitutional system, the legal system in Taiwan is quite amazing because doing SARS is in 2003 it already transformed to allow for

a public health emergency. Yet it, 20 years ago, how could you imagine mobile sharing? How can you imagine the Internet being developed the way it is? And so that framework was not current enough to deal with the citizen's concern. And so a non-answer to your question, Ryan, is it takes much more than to deal with something in an emergency. And it's, it's working very hard, diligently to ensure accountability, transparency that will make democratic governance sustainable.

Ryan Hass [00:41:40] Well, it's very wise. I want to make sure that our audience has an opportunity to take advantage of the expertise that's assembled on, on the stage. If anyone has a question, please feel free to raise your hand.

Audience Member [00:41:57] Let me introduce myself. I think my voice is quite good. Hello? Okay. All right. Good morning to all of you. Excellent presentation. I'm in, I should say that I'm very much rewarded by the new dimensions that you have taken in terms of understanding the democracy in Asia. Let me introduce myself. I'm a former director of the Center for International Studies at Goa University, former dean and the president of two universities in India. My area of interest is international relations by and large, Latin America and South Asia, with a focus on how the United States looks at these two regions, compare and contrast. Sometimes they converge, sometimes they diverge. But that is something that we had worked on. I also worked on Kashmir. So that seems to be a kind that's going round like, like a COVID virus. Everyone will talk of failure, they should talk of Kashmir. Kashmir, as far as I'm concerned, I've worked on that, is a non-issue. So I don't want to discuss on that. Okay. I'm going to take on that beautiful presentation. Thank you so much. To the point that I would like to present to you for your kind consideration, very humbly, is culture of democracy. Has South Asia or any other region, have they developed a culture of democracy. What is this culture of democracy all about and how do you develop that? It's not political system that we're talking about, it's not multiparty system that we talk about.

You can, for example, let me take India. Surprisingly, nobody talked about India. So let me talk about India. In India, we had poverty. We had, like you said, health problems. We had all kinds of problems that you can think of. But still, right from its independence in 1947 till today, that the fabric of democracy is not tarnished, it still survives. Yeah, we have a position like in Bangladesh, you have two parties and going fighting each other and then parliament is closed and then in Myanmar. And then you have few other examples that I can give in Sri Lanka for example and all these areas that you look at even Nepal and I've only exception I find is Bhutan which is ruled by the king so we'll

forget that heavenly country. It's a beautiful country to go. I've been there for two years as a Colombo Plan expert. So it's apart from this, if you look at the fabric of democracy and the culture of democracy that remains in India, so long as good as in the United States, but true democracy can come back.

Now, the other second point that I want you to consider, I submit, what about the influence of China in Southeast Asia? You just I mean, we talk about Asia Pacific region, blah, blah. But the fact is, today, China has made inroads in Africa and has made great inroads in Latin America, which is your backyard. And of course, it is making the greatest inroads in Asia, South Asia. Let's not forget, one of the problems that Sri Lanka has today is because of the Chinese intrusion there and Maldives. And yet take it I mean, we're at—.

Ryan Hass [00:45:32] The tyranny of time. We only have three minutes left, and I think you've put two very important questions on the table for us, what is the culture of democracy? Has it taken root in South Asia? And second, the influence of—

Audience Member [00:45:46] [inaudible – off mic]

Ryan Hass [00:45:51] And the influence—

Audience Member [00:45:53] [inaudible – off mic]

Ryan Hass [00:46:09] Thank you very much for your contribution. So the two questions are the culture of democracy in South Asia, has it taken root and also the influence of China in Southeast Asia? China is looming in all of these issues. To what degree do you weight China as a factor? Why don't we address this first and we'll try to take one more question. Feel free to jump in any where you'd like on that time, and then we'll just go down the line.

Thomas Pepinsky [00:46:35] So I'll address just briefly the question of the culture of democracy. I, I'm no expert in South Asia, so I'll speak generally about Asia more broadly. I'm a great skeptic of cultural explanations for anything. I tend to believe that cultural explanations, they're often sort of retrofitted to answer the question that they're posed for. But one exception I will make, and I think this is important, is when I think about political culture and I think about a culture of democracy, what I really believe is a culture of tolerance for disagreement. And I do not believe that that is something that societies possess or lack. I don't think this is something that that, you know, comes from your, your great books or does, or comes from your religious or cultural traditions. But it is something that is a practice that has to be inculcated and that it -- it can be -- it can be anywhere. But it is what the culture of democracy is at root about.

Andrew Yeo [00:47:41] Can I can I jump in, Ryan, on this? And I'm glad that you asked this question of culture, because I'm working on some papers that try to bring back in culture in the study of democracy. I know it's been maligned. It's kind of disappeared, Great scholars, just like Tom, have -- have good arguments looking at institutions. But I do think this point about tolerance or forbearance, that is a culture. So when we say culture, it's not because of Asian culture per se. I think that's what we're moving away from. But there's certain other types of cultures that you cultivate. These are practices or norms, and I think that those are lacking. And so the paper that I mentioned, it's with Autumn Hirb [phonetic] at the University of Missouri, and we're actually looking at Taiwan and South Korea, which are supposed to be fantastic democracies, they rate quite high, but we're saying there are problems underneath. And I'm not an India expert either, but I suspect that it's similar there as well too, you think of India as the largest democracy in the world, it's been a democracy for a long time, yet there are these problems. And because some of these cultures of forbearance and tolerance, not so much the institutions, but the culture hasn't been really, really ingrained within society at large.

Syaru Shirley Lin [00:48:46] Right, in our working group, the India paper was one of the most exceptional papers and I learn a lot from it. And our Center for Asian Pacific Resilience and Innovation is based at UVA, the home of Thomas Jefferson, and Taiwan, doing work on Asia Pacific culture is very important because that is what Thomas Jefferson also wanted to see America develop. But how do you do that in a place like Taiwan and a place like South Korea and a place like India where our authors, sticking to my Public Health stream, working group, I think that authors pointed out that there's differences at the individual community and national level.

And so our paper, the author really focus on the state of Kerala and how data was used and how individuals dealt with it, especially marginalized groups. And this dealt with equality, misinformation and corruption. All aspects of my fellow panelists here and I think that it's quite important to look at it not as Asia-Pacific, because that's an imaginary community. There are so many diverse, so much diversity and public policy and governance is such a really a grind, a day-to-day work that you need to show improvement, you need to correct yourself. It's not about some— and I agree with Tom— it's not about some culture that is just foreign. It is about individuals willing to work with community and the government focusing on delivering the most amount of benefit.

So to come to your second question, China. It's very important that in a large part of Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia, the question is do we deliver outcome or process? And I

think there is something cultural about it. Many people during COVID-19 wanted to see outcome: lower death, lower infection and more vaccination, perhaps, maybe not the anti-vaxxers, and that's another cultural aspect that we, our group is going to write a paper on 2023. But to really focus on the outcome is one difference, I think, between Asia Pacific at large, then the West. And that's something that, of course, China's narrative is very powerful. We deliver outcome, never mind the process. And that's one of the questions that we as a group need to address.

Nuurrianti Jalli [00:50:53] I want to add on that a little bit. I'm just suggesting, I'm just going to suggest to you, my two colleagues wrote about influence of China in the media in Taiwan and also Thailand. So I suggest that you get like a one of the, you know, one copy and you can read through that. Yeah, I'm a promoter of that. Yeah, we wrote about it. But because I do, to the interest of time, I could, I can't elaborate on it too much, but I will be happy to have that conversation with you afterwards.

Ryan Hass [00:51:21] Well, thank you. You guys have done a brilliant job in laying out the theory of the case on all four of these very difficult issues. We could extend this conversation for another 2 hours, but we want to make sure that we give adequate time to the next group of experts. And I see that there's a hand up, but please save it for, for the next panel. And if not, well, we'll talk after the event. But Pattie Kim is a co-leader of the Democracies in Asia project. She will moderate the second panel. Over to you.

Patricia M. Kim [00:52:24] All right. Good morning, everyone. My name is Pattie Kim, and I'm the Rubenstein fellow here at the China Center and the Center for East Asia Policy Studies and a co-lead with Ryan Hass on this Democracy in Asia project. It's a real privilege for me to be hosting the second panel where we're going to do a deeper dive on two of the issues that we covered in this project. And those are inequality and public health. And we're very privileged to have three top experts with us and contributors to this volume for this discussion. And so starting first from my left, we have Byunghwan Son, who is an associate professor of the Global Affairs Program and director of the Asia Pacific and Northeast Asian Studies at George Mason University. Byunghwan's research interests lie in the intersection of political behaviors and economic conditions, and he's written widely on democratization, public confidence in governments and global economies, among other topics.

Meredith Weiss is a professor of political science at the University of Albany, where she also serves as the director of graduate studies and the director of the Semester in Washington program.

She's an expert on social mobilization and civil society, the politics of identity and development, electoral politics and parties, institutional reform and many other issues, as well as looking at Southeast Asia as a region.

And June Park, last but not least, is a political economist and the current Fung Global Fellow at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies at Princeton University…Sorry? Oh, and also a fellow at the Asia Forum. Is that correct? My apologies. As she works on trade, energy and tech conflicts. In it, she examines how governance structures shape the policy formation process.

So let me open up first by turning to Byunghwan to give us a deeper look on the South Korea case on inequality, which you did for this volume. So South Korea, Byunghwan, as you write, presents a very unique case in the, in the sense that the objective measures of inequality are actually relatively low, while democratic governance and political freedoms in the country are generally high. And yet, at the same time, there's this deep narrative of economic injustice in the country, and you only need to look at popular media like Squid Game or Parasite, where these are central themes, inequality and lack of access to housing and such. And so it's really interesting to see this, and of course, not just in media, but also in politics, in elections, inequality features as a heavy theme as well. And you write that fairness was a key buzzword in the most recent national elections, presidential elections in South Korea. So can you just walk us through for those who aren't as familiar with the South Korean case, sort of why this is the case and what challenges this poses for the functioning of the democratic system in South Korea.

Byunghwan Son [00:55:36] Sure. Thanks, Pattie. That's a great question. Let me kind of start by saying I'm kind of overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the first panel. But, you know, to answer the question as to how the issue of fairness took the center stage of South Korean politics—particularly electoral politics— I think it all started in the early 2010s, although distributional issues are always important subjects in any political system. It really took the center stage around that time in South Korea. What kind of proceeded that time was a series of financial crisis, the 1998 Asian financial crisis, and 2008 global recession, during which time South Korean labor market became very, very flexible, kind of the traditional lifetime guarantee employment was pretty much gone and a lot of people came to be in on a non-full-time kind of irregular, a single contract-based job.

And surprisingly, during this time, that kind of income level of the median voters didn't really go down very much because of financialization, financial liberalization, I have to say, and other

opportunities that arose, which explains why the income inequality didn't increase, although despite the, you know, flexible labor market, but uncertainty did increase now, because the labor market is highly, highly flexible because of that, how household debt ballooned up pretty significantly. So with the anxiety uncertainty, people kind of turned to social safety net or welfare policies, all those things. And those are, those became very, very important around the 20, early 2010s. Definitely the issue of fairness took the center stage in it because everybody kind of portrayed their policies as some solution addressing the fairness issue.

So for example, the Park Geun-hye government who took the power in 2012 election, their economic policy slogan was economic democratization, it's kind of, it's kind of amazing to see how a traditional conservative political party kind of put forth the platform of economic democratization, which basically, you know, indicates how everybody cared about, suddenly started caring about fairness despite the kind of campaign platform that the government actually didn't live up to their kind of promise. In fact, the government basically failed due to all these corruption scandals, which basically highlighted how it was actually very unfair the society was and public anger that basically led to the impeachment. Moon Jae-in government, which came out next, the hallmark of the economic policy is the fairness in the outcome, right? So the Moon Jae-in government did actually pursue quite a few series of policies that were intended to directly address the fairness issues. The problem was the housing prices ran up precipitously during this time, basically, all the while the entire, the entire discourse on fairness. So that's how that, the issue of fairness kind of took the center stage of South Korean politics starting from the early 2010s.

So does this kind of bode ill for South Korean democracy? Not yet, I have to say, because if that, that kind of, you know, all the discussions of the inequality crisis or a fairness crisis is was that sort of the source of a crisis, people should really feel, you know, there should be a spike in public sentiment that, okay, "the society is becoming increasingly more unfair, so we have to do something about it." Right. "So democracy may not be the way to solve this problem," if indeed the South Korean public actually come to that conclusion, if you look at the long-term public survey data, that's really not the case. In fact, people's sense of general social sort of fairness is very, very stable, no matter how many different ways you cut it. If you look at only young people data, if you look at only female data, if you look at only lower income people data, that is persistently and very surprisingly stable.

So at least we're not at the cusp of democratic collapse because of the exploding, you know, unfairness issues. Nonetheless, we've seen some of the warning symptoms in the latest presidential election where the talks of sort of the generally negative reactions to distributed, distributive policies towards marginalized social actors, basically the words of hatred that kind of made actually inroads to the formal politic during the latest presidential election. And we are seeing that kind of tendency kind of going up in the public sphere. So that's actually bad news down the road. So if in the next election we are going this way, we are actually pretty doomed. So crisis not yet, but it's not all rainbow and sunshine in South Korean democracy.

Patricia M. Kim [01:01:23] That's very interesting. I mean, you started to get into housing prices and housing inequality and you, and you use this as a case study or this particular issue in your paper for this volume. And I was wondering if you could just, you know, kind of talk us through what, you know, housing and inequality is often flashpoints in South Korean elections and central drivers about the wealth gap question in the country. And while there have been long concerns about skyrocketing prices in real estate, actually, I think the reverse is happening now, there's the sharpest decline in decades, I believe. And so, you know, this poses an interesting question for what this means for housing inequality. Of course, housing inequality isn't just unique to South Korea. It's, it's a problem that countries across the political spectrum deal within the world. And so I just wonder if, can you give us some context in the South Korean case first, including measures that the South Korean government has taken to address these issues and then broaden us out to talk about what are the unique challenges as well as opportunities that democratic systems face when dealing with housing and inequality and other fundamental needs.

Byunghwan Son [01:02:35] Right. Very interesting questions. So housing and housing costs are very combustible issues in Korean politics. Speculation on properties have been traditionally basically the way to reach super wealth in South Korea, at least that is kind of the public understanding of it, because there hasn't been until very recently, no other way of investment, no other way of accumulating wealth in South Korea because the financial market was heavily, heavily regulated by the state. Right. That's what developments, the developmental state of South Korea has been until, say, 2010-ish time. So everybody understands, okay, this is the only conduit to, conduit to wealth.

So, you know, if I want to be rich, so let's all just jump into it. So speculation has been rampant and there is a great deal of sort of interest in the housing market, in part because much of the opportunities, economic and social opportunities are all concentrated in just one city, Seoul. And, and a lot of there's a large population, but just one city is the land of dream. So it basically structures that inherent shortage of housing supply. And that became politically very, very, you know, salient. On top of that, even within Seoul, you have more desirable neighborhoods in part because of the kind of education situation, the kind of topic that South Koreans deeply, deeply care about. So all those things really hit the core of the South Korean public. And so that became the very important problem in South Korean politics. And South Korean government actually sort of tried a lot of different things, ranging from taxation and increasing the supply of house and mortgage regulation, a series of series of kind of presidential decrees and legislations. I kind of basically lost a track of it, but to no avail, to no avail. You know, increases in supply basically sort of ramped up the speculative, speculative pressure and taxation, regulation, strengthening those things basically invited political backlash.

So politicians, while recognizing this is political, a very important issue, in essence, try to stay away from it at the same time because that kind of a dualism is going on. So and -- but then the recent price hike, the ups and downs and so in between, say, 2019 and the earlier part of the pandemic, the housing prices went skyrocket, right. A triple, prices tripling over the course of a month, it was rare. And then it came down pretty significantly this year, earlier this year, all that that actually is really the function of interest rates, which is basically influenced by the Federal Reserve's decisions over here. So in that sense, the changes in South Korean property market is linked up to the global economic situation, which actually exposes a general vulnerability of any emerging democracy, because domestic, that means domestic government cannot really address this important, important domestic kind of social, economic, political issue by themselves and essentially opening up, opening up to external factors. And that's, in essence, democratic accountability issue, that democratic accountability crisis.

So in other words, what's the implication of the situation in South Korea to like emerging democracies in the world? Basically, emerging democracies are generally vulnerable to all these external factors. And we see a similar logic, similar tendency in the energy crisis in other countries with a war going on in Ukraine, you see energy prices going up and down and people are getting

angry, right. Accordingly, emerging democracies and a lot of developing emerging democracies have very limited sort of toolbox to deal with it. So that can actually lead to Democratic crisis. Yeah.

Patricia M. Kim [01:07:22] Great. Thank you. I'm going to turn to Meredith now. So, Meredith, your paper points out that Malaysia, while it's made rapid economic progress in the last two decades and absolute poverty, has declined, reducing inequality has been a challenge due to, in your words, the tight interweaving of political stratification, racial identity and economic interests in Malaysia. So can you describe for us the socioeconomic landscape in Malaysia and the unique challenges around inequality in the country?

Meredith Weiss [01:08:09] Sure. [mic cuts out] start by tearing apart the concept and saying, you know, we can't look at economic inequality without talking about politics and identity and these other dimensions of inequality that helped to structure that order. And yet in Malaysia, these issues are especially fraught because so much of the post-independence— and even before that— but primarily since around the 1970s, so much of the governing agenda has been structured around combating inequality, the inequality that was structured partly and substantially, though not exclusively, as a result of British colonial policies along ethnic lines, but that dovetailed with a regional inequality as well as really sharp and persistent economic lines. So all of those things mean that it's impossible to separate out issues of political entitlement or equality from ethnic identity, from the economic implications thereof.

And then we have as well these compounded issues of development strategies that, for instance, tend to favor particular economic quarters in a geographic sense that make what were initially, you know, a rural urban divide that you have in so many places that was simply ethnically magnified in Malaysia. Now we also find geographic dimensions that make this in many ways even more challenging to address. I will say, though, that you mentioned that there have been some real gains in Malaysia. So the incidence of absolute poverty has really been brought down dramatically, depending on the indicators used, sometimes you can say to zero or at least close to that. The COVID-19 pandemic, of course, hit very hard. So there was a noticeable uptick in poverty, hope temporarily, and there have been these other issues of inclusivity of growth. So we do find that some have benefited more than others, but that is the case anywhere. That some importantly in Malaysia includes not just the wealthiest who have, as in many places seen increasing gains, but also the lower 50% of the population.

So growth has been more inclusive in Malaysia than in most places. What makes this again complex to read, though, is the economic lines that overlap with ethnic lines so that lower 50% of the population is also overwhelmingly Bumiputra or Malays and other indigenous groups. That said, a number of these policies that have been structured largely in racial terms to combat inequality in economic terms, have had unexpected or perhaps unanticipated, unintended, unwanted externalities.

So for instance, we have things like educational access, loan facilities, housing access, government contracts that are structured substantially in ethnic terms in order to combat, again, this really important and undesirable ethnic inequality that resulted from colonial era policies and other patterns. But even though we've seen, for instance, decline in the Gini coefficient fairly consistently over the last couple of decades, and even though we have seen a decline in absolute poverty, some of the gains of these ethnically structured patterns of access have not been quite what we would have wanted. So in other words, government scholarships, for instance, have rarely gone to the poorest of families.

Instead, especially since the 1980s, only a minority of those who are accessing some of the best of the scholarships are actually from poor families. That's not as intended. It rather suggests that there are ways in which these policies could be refined to make them better achieve their targets of combating intra, inter-ethnic inequality without exacerbating intra-ethnic inequality, and while still focusing on ways to address the population as a whole. I will also note— this is something that arose in the first panel as well— again, one of the issues that's arisen more in recent years has been the severity of the geographic disparities in growth and development. Part of that has been compounded by anomalies in fiscal centralization versus decentralization. This arose also, especially in, for instance, the Philippines paper where you have had decentralization. So Malaysia has one of the most, if not the most fiscally centralized federal systems in the world.

And there are some very odd systems that remain at the federal level rather than the state or city level, which could really help to address some persistent issues. So for instance, things like public transport are maintained from the federal level. That is, busses in Penang are run from, from Kuala Lumpur, for instance. Issues of flood management, which is a key concern for Malaysia, especially in a lot of the areas that are persistently underdeveloped, those are also handled at the federal level. So some parts are state, but riverine management, for instance, is federal.

And then there are limited revenues available for state governments to meet the needs of their specific populations because land and extractable resources on that land is a state level matter. That means that we have some perhaps suboptimal allocation of resources at the state level, selling off land, selling off timber, investing overly much in things like palm oil contracts, because those are things states can do. Those policies may not particularly benefit the masses in the long term to the extent that might be preferred. And there are ways in which structural changes such as decentralization of fiscal policy might actually help states better target their policy remedies to address persistent aspects of inequality.

Patricia M. Kim [01:13:43] Thank you, it's fascinating. So, Meredith, your memo was written before the general elections that just took place in Malaysia. And in the memo, you wrote that the Malaysian national elections would provide a window of opportunity to recalibrate efforts to mitigate inequality. And the November elections in Malaysia resulted in a hung parliament for the first time in the country's history. Ultimately, this led to the appointment of the Prime Minister by the King. And I understand you were just in Malaysia until last night and you joined us here this morning. So we're very grateful. But this is perfect for us to hear from you, sort of -- can you explain the context around this unprecedented election, some of the challenging, challenges that are ahead for the new prime minister, particularly when it comes to addressing these socioeconomic inequalities that you just laid out for us, and inter-related issues like race and corruption?

Meredith Weiss [01:14:35] So Malaysian politics has been dramatic enough over the last decade or so that every election is the election. But this one really was. So economics was really the overwhelming issue for the election, but that meant different things for different people: cost of living, social mobility, jobs, corruption and so forth. And so all of this happens in the context of what I would identify as three key things: one, corruption, so Tom mention the 1MDB scandal in Malaysia, that is one of many issues of corruption. It's the big one. But at the same time, this is really a problem, and the population recognizes it as such.

The second is the economic pinch. So again, there were already issues of social mobility. Economics is always the number one issue on surveys that people say they're voting for. Now, that was even more the case, especially because of the COVID-induced, supply chain induced, etc. induced recession that seems to be in train.

And then the third is political instability, which is not normally an issue in Malaysia. But the past four years since the last election in 2018 has seen three different governments. This has never happened before in Malaysia, like the hung parliament and also a dramatic expansion in the electorate with the enfranchisement of 18- to 21-year-olds and with automatic registration of voters. So that added this element of rank uncertainty. The electorate increased from about 14.1 million to about 21.2 million, with a lot of those individuals having no clear partisan affiliation, especially, you know, most of those who were enfranchised, about 5 million were simply those who are now automatically registered. The fact that they hadn't registered before probably indicates not keenly interested in politics or tied to a particular party. All right.

So anti-corruption was a galvanizing, galvanizing force. There's been a lot of attention to the rise of the green wave of Perikatan Nasional, of PAS, the Islamist party BERSATU, which is basically Malay rights party. For many, this coalition did well because of a concern for political Islam, which is inseparable from also, in the Malaysian context, a concern for a less corrupt governance. And yet a lot of it was because the Barisan Nasional and UMNO was seen as corrupt because of the fact that it's headed by somebody, Zahid Hamidi, who still faces corruption charges. So there's what's called the court cluster within UMNO. So Perikatan could sell itself as the clean alternative to UMNO, and that itself helped to shape a lot of the electoral dynamic. That said, a second dimension I would raise is especially important. Because of this economic focus, we saw a clear shift in the discourse of inequality, in approaches to inequality in the election, most importantly, the B in the Barisan Nasional, that's the governing coalition since independence except until 2018, that brief moment when it wasn't, adopted in its manifesto essentially a race blind approach. So there's, you know, things like a basic income scheme for everyone earning below about a 500 U.S. there's a tax cut for the middle 40%, the word Bumiputra, that term for the, the ethnic core, the Malays and other indigenous peoples, it does not appear in the Barisan Nasional manifesto, which is itself really unusual.

And indeed the policy says explicitly that they are transitioning from a race-based policy to needs-based policy. Now, that said, because of that long term structuring of the economy, of higher access to higher education, to government contracts, to loans and so forth, in ethnic terms, this does not mean that policies would not still favor the Bumiputra, in part because they do constitute the majority of the B40, the lower 40%. And yet this is itself an important shift.

And then the third thing I'll note is this distressingly sharp rhetoric of political inequality, which suggests, again, the ways in which these, these problems are intertwined and persistent. And most important there— so we heard about the rise of social media and polarization, disinformation, polarization and so forth in the last panel— so there was a heightened rhetoric of racial tension recalling of the May 13th ethnic riots from 1969, which will never die, it seems, in Malaysia, and just real questions of whether all Chinese Malaysians are communist, for instance, whether they are anti-Islam, whether there can be a coalition government and so forth.

So points of likely improvement, though, that can come from this. First and foremost, we have this very odd coalition in government now that includes Anwar Ibrahim, the Pakatan Harapan, this reformist progressive coalition, and the Barisan Nasional, including Zahid Hamidi. So, so much of the campaign rhetoric on all sides was a vote for X is a vote for Zahid Hamidi, for having this person who is still facing live corruption charges as Prime Minister, which was a possible outcome should the BN have won. The BN did not win. They performed very poorly. And yet he is, he's there, you know, writing the government, as the deputy. So, so that that does suggest that there might be a clear effort to address some of the levels of polarization, if only because the BN is now governing in coalition with the Chinese based DAP. So this is— for those who don't know Malaysian politics— the summary version of this is two sworn enemies along sort of ethnic framing of their demands and their claims now are governing together. That could lead to a tamping down of some of that polarizing rhetoric.

Secondly, there are, as I said, regional patterns to inequality. And East Malaysia, the two states of Sabah and Sarawak, are now definite kingmakers. So their share of the seats is about equal to that of the BN. Pakatan did the best but needed those two coalitions to join. And so now we see a, an East Malaysian deputy prime minister, an unprecedentedly high level of representation of east Malaysians in the cabinet and a set of promises, especially in the Pakatan Manifesto, more seriously to address those issues of inequality that have continued to plague East Malaysia in particular.

Third, we will likely see better targeting of benefits, such as to ensure that those educational and other benefits reach those who need them. So things like government scholarships, housing access, rural loan facilities and other, other things that can really help those who need them.

Fourth, one might hope that we might see as a result of some of the electoral dimensions, some of the, the claims made and some of the complaints framed, higher investment in public

institutions such as schools and universities. I will say, though, that the direction here is a little less clear.

And then lastly, because of the really strong concern for corruption that we saw, especially among voters in the last two elections now, not just the last one, we might see more of a professionalization of GLCs, government-led corporations and measures such as political financing legislation which is near absent in Malaysia up until now to reduce the temptation for inefficiencies for political purposes, for these other pathologies that really help to, to bring politics down to a less than optimal level in terms of the sorts of claims made, the extent to which patronage still governs so much of the political process and the ways in which Malaysia might be able to work in a more economically efficient manner, pull itself out of the middle income trap if some of these functions were made less political and able to work better.

Patricia M. Kim [01:21:54] Wonderful. So certainly a lot to keep our eye on. So, June, I'm going to turn to you. And, you know, we talked about this a bit already in the first panel, but the pandemic obviously posed incredible challenges to all states, regardless of their political system. And democracies in particular had to rapidly develop policies and technologies to both protect the health of their populations while at the same time guarding individual freedoms. And for instance, we had the use of pandemic management mobile applications and quarantine requirements, which are often in tension with data privacy concerns and freedom of movement. And South Korea, as a place where they really collected and deployed an extraordinary amount of data during the pandemic in the name of safeguarding public health. So can you outline for us how the South Korean government managed these efforts, how it balanced the concerns that are intentioned, what steps it took to address privacy concerns and data protection and, and the general response of South Korean citizens.

June Park [01:22:59] So I think this question is sort of a repeated question for us to pose with regard to data protection, data privacy-related issues across the Atlantic, across the Pacific, because each country has a different dynamic, different kind of jurisdictional mandate or legislations with regard to data protection. And in the South Korean case, I believe in the first panel, Dr. Lin pointed out how this is linked to democratic values. But in terms of democratic values, she mentioned trust.

But in the South Korean case, I think there is one additional element in addition to trust that had to happen before the pandemic, in order for the smart management system by the South Korean government to activate, which is the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, which happened in 2015,

2016, I believe, because compared to the Taiwanese experience of SARS, of course in Korea there was also— because the border is very, very adjacent to China and Hong Kong— there was a acute response to SARS in Korea as well, but not as much shock as it had as MERS. And during MERS, the Infectious Disease Control and Prevention Act was revised in order to accommodate data collection because, first of all, the hospitals did not want to share data about the tests. And the only place where you could actually do solid tests was KDCA at the time, which is basically the CDC here and parallel to the CDC here. And at the time, I think that hospitals, patients had a hard time trying to get solid test results or they also had a hard time trying to enter facilities with, with, without caution.

So these kinds of issues that sparked public unrest during MERS compel the laws to change. And those changed laws of the IDCPA compelled this time around during the pandemic to, you know, for the government to actually take, take some necessary measures toward data collection, which are now embedded in the IDCPA. So when in the first stage of the pandemic in 2020, when there were lots of coverages regarding South Korea being dystopian or something, something very, not very democratic in terms of data management, it started to cover most of the contact tracing methods in such a way that South Korea has been going the authoritarian route in some way, but it's because of the IDCPA that was revised as people had to relinquish their data in some ways without the will to actually, voluntary will to actually do so.

Of course, people had the societal agreement to actually protect the public health in in in general. But I think without the law, it would have been unlawful. So it's one of the misunderstandings that we have in explaining the South Korean case that South Korea went ahead and did this, it did that. But in actuality, it's the precedents of a previous sickness or— I can't call it a pandemic because the WHO never called MERS a pandemic— it's an over widespread disease that compelled this to happen. And in your question regarding how this was done, step by step, I think there was a big, big sense of emergency among the government officials in the MOHW. And at the time what was already existing in place was South Korea's development towards smart cities.

So the smart city-related grids in terms of operations, in terms of data trafficking and collection that, that was already in place. And you just had to insert certain other kinds of ingredients, certain other kinds of data into the system on a conditional basis so that people, if they were, if they thought, found themselves sick and they, they tested positive, then tracing methods could happen, not just manually, but also with the help of data. This is the effective way to explain this because when you're

crunched with so many people trying to run to these test centers and then trying to get tests, contact tracing done by manual contact tracing, there was no way humans could address all of that. And that, that's when the smart management system came in.

And one of the officials who was, who was working on the smart management system suggested if you added GPS data from cell phones, credit card data from transactions and partially very limited CCTV footages, then you could combine the tracing methods, you could combine the traces of a person to contribute to contact tracing. So these things had to do with the financial authorities giving consent to allowing for data to be accessed by MOHW, and the smart management system. Those things are, and GPS data, for one, is not something that in, say, democratic societies in general— I'm speaking in terms of the GDPR jurisdictions in the EU— it's something that is not, it's a nonstarter because GPS data, traces of your body are supposed to be considered your body, your, your own right to, to keep and to preserve without any kind of interruption by another entity.

But in this certain case, GPS data in the South Korean smart management system, it was used as a utility to track and trace where the person has been and who has been contacted by, contacted, yes, contacted by a certain person. And credit card data for the, for the most part, I think that was the most controversial part of this, this whole phenomenon. But it was allowed because the IDCPA allowed for it. And then later on, as I mentioned in the essay, three different laws were revised in order to accommodate changes for, for a more subtle yet towards scientific research, to use data toward increasing public health effectiveness. And those were the laws also in the Personal Information Protection Act and then credit law and also the, the communications-related laws.

Those three laws were revised. And in revising those laws, I think South Korea went through a moment of thinking about to what extent collection of data, control of data and processing of data would be allowed by their citizens. And when they went through, there were a series of hackathons by experts, by professors, by the normal citizens that participated in the hackathons to address their concerns, to address what they thought about data in general in South Korea. And when those laws were passed, I think the concept of self-integration of data, which is to combine different pieces, pieces of an individual's data by a third party that is authorized by the government, those questions came into being.

And right now, South Korea is in between trying to protect the public good in terms of data protection, at the same time, trying to use it to toward scientific research. And Cancer Act, the Cancer

Act was also revised to allow for big data related research on cancer. So these kinds of developments tell us that countries have taken on their, their, their roles, their own decisions by their own jurisdictional laws to go ahead and go about their data, data management. And it's not something that you could deal with in terms of digital trade or any kind of a market access-related, related negotiations, because now countries are so different in terms of going about their data.

Patricia M. Kim [01:31:50] So that's fascinating. And surely this isn't the end of the conversation in terms of data governance and privacy. I mean, these are the questions that will stay with us for in the decades ahead. And you started to get at how there are challenges and sort of different regulations at the international and national and even local levels, perhaps. And so as we, as we look towards sort of more and more data governance or data collection and governance in the future, what are some sort of key lessons that we can take away from the South Korean case or from your broader research on international and, and regional level governance on sort of how you can harmonize standards in this era where governments are increasingly deploying data collection in a way that they align with democratic norms as well. So if you could quickly touch on that and then we'll try to squeeze in a question before we close up the panel.

June Park [01:32:44] So I think that given that we have different levels of data protection or regulatory mechanisms across jurisdictions, we have to start from there. There are societies, countries where there is no data law at all. So bridging that gap comes from trying to see what other countries are doing and what kinds of issues are most critical to each society. Each society, each country has to make that decision toward data protection. Which areas am I going to protect? So it's not something that you could just put a blanket over and say, this is data protection. Each country has to decide what kind of democratic values in terms of data privacy they want to protect.

At the same time, I think that from the U.S. standpoint, there is no blanket law covering data privacy in, in America. There is a consumer-related act in California, which compels some, some data collection, some at the same time protection, even, these kinds of different approaches across the U.S it's also hindering the U.S. from being able to exert some data-related issues in a Indo-Pacific sort of mechanism. So I think within the US, there has to be something, not something, a strict base, strict law such as the GDPR, but at least an internal conversation about, you know, if it's going to be state-based, state-based, if it's going to be federal, then federal. There has to be this kind of a movement within the US. for us to sense as partners where the US is headed next on data protection.

Patricia M. Kim [01:34:26] Thank you. I think we could get one question from the audience. And so while we, while the microphone is go over, going over to, yes. Mark in the back. I just wanted to leave one question for the panelists, and you can feel free to address whichever one you'd like in these final minutes. And so a key takeaway from our series is the fact that there is no one size fits all solution to any of these challenges. And all of the cases and the diversity of recommendations in this volume speak to that. But if there's one key recommendation that you want to leave for us on the table today and where Asian democracies might learn from each other or the United States might learn from Asia, I would love to hear that. And then, Mark, we'll hear your question.

Audience Member [01:35:14] Okay. Thank you. Mark Tocolo, KEI. I I'm just trying to understand the relationship between democracy and the four challenges. So is your conclusion having looked at it that you need more democracy to deal with the challenges? Or is it sometimes you have to deviate from democratic norms to save democracy? Or is it that the system's neutral, that the question is a quality policy prescription rather than form of government?

Byunghwan Son [01:35:43] Let me start because I'm sitting right next to Pattie, so I can basically address two questions at the same time. I think the four areas that we're talking about here in my case the inequality really is connecting sort of the democratic system as a way of governance and the society as at where the effect of the governance is found. And traditionally, you know, politicized literature actually kind of pointed out that it doesn't really matter that much for the survival of a democratic, democracy as a way of governance, whether or not people are happy because it is really the coordination that determines the survival of democracy. But over time, I think we're learning the importance of democratic accountability, right? Can a democratic government can deliver what they promised to deliver to the people? And the recent sort of democratic crisis we have been seeing in the past four or five, six years in various regions in the world, is that the decline in democratic accountability poses a direct challenge to the survival of democracy, or, you know, at least kind of, is kind of the way in which the decay in democracy actually occurs.

So I guess that's where it is, that's why it is important that we look at these four policy areas that are actually fundamentally important for that kind of delivery of democratic accountability. So what's, what can we learn? Right. So in terms of that, more it not kind of leaving aside the simple dichotomy of like, you know, active government and more government spending or less government spending, I think in all these four challenges— but particularly in the areas of inequality— it is really

where government initiative becomes very, very important. Right? Primarily because much of the things that are determining the public sentiment towards democracy is not strictly under the control of the national government. It's the traditional ways that democratic governors cannot solve, cannot address many of these issues. So government has to then be more active and kind of prioritize some of the issues in solving the problems.

So in the matter of inequality, what I suggest in the paper, which I think can be translated to other national contexts too, is further decentralization, economic and social decentralization, such that it doesn't, all the resources are not concentrated in a certain area, which basically kind of lays out all the roots of the problems and fiscal expansionism if it is available for the national government in countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia, Malaysia to a certain extent can actually afford further fiscal expansion as of now. So if that, that can address some of the problems and that's kind of the takeaway for other countries, too.

Meredith Weiss [01:39:09] Okay. So I also would point not necessarily to democracy as a set of institutions, but rather I think we can answer these questions together by— at risk of taking sides between Tom and Andrew from the last panel— by suggesting that there are certain norms or attributes of a democratic culture that themselves are useful in terms of addressing these issues. So and I'll say that in terms of the things that I think are the most useful things to extrapolate as takeaways.

So one, in terms of understanding something like the extent of inequality or how to combat it, a key aspect is transparency, is having reliable access to reliable information, and that itself is a highlight more of democratic systems and more of, of authoritarian systems. You know, just one specific way in which this would help in Malaysia, that category Bumiputra it's, you know, two thirds of the population. Disaggregating that category, which government statistics generally do not, would help dramatically in being able to target solutions better to address those who most suffer from the system. So those would be, for instance, the Orang Asli or Orang Asal, these indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, East Malaysia and the peninsula who are lumped in with this much larger category but who really need specific targeted policies.

Second, migrant workers. Migrant workers, if you look at COVID, they are the worst hit of all populations, especially in a place like Southeast Asia, where you have both countries of origin that suddenly received back a lot of workers and countries of destination that were left with either dealing

with these populations in hostels, for instance, in Singapore, or having to figure out what to do in terms of their economic recovery afterwards and so forth. Democracy does not, in any of these states capture this population. They are disenfranchized fully. And so this is where the institutions of democracy aren't so necessarily helpful. But the norms of understanding what, what are the ways, for instance, to ensure that there's not a race to the bottom in salaries, such that the appeal of migrant workers is you can pay them less, that that that's really less of an issue. Okay.

Third, food security. So this was for the first time I've seen it in Malaysia, a huge campaign issue. But it gets at an underlying concern for everyone, including in the U.S., where we see rising food prices, concerns during the pandemic of sub supply chains of access and so forth. So again, there are ways in which we can understand democratic norms of creating a national identity, creating a function of self-sufficiency and so forth can be really useful in being, in having that resilience in terms of crisis.

And then lastly, higher social spending overall. So one of the benefits of an electoral system is that to some extent it means the interest needs, desires of the mass are given space for articulation and hopefully for redress. And this is one area in which we certainly see the need for better social safety nets or floors across the region or across anywhere which may not come through in a system with a fully top down policymaking process without some space for articulation. So again, not necessarily something that democratic institutions are necessary for, but for which that culture or ability to accommodate the range of perspectives may really be quite helpful.

June Park [01:42:20] And from my perspective, it seems that, you know, it's not just democracies, but autocracies as well that went through vaccine inequality in the past, in the past three years. And at the WTO, so foreign policy wise, we don't seem to have a clear indication as of yet on how we're going to disseminate high quality vaccines to the rest of the world. Korea, for instance, from where I come from, there was luckily a provision of vaccines that deterred, well there were side effects arising from deaths or people who suffered illnesses from the vaccines, but what I want to point to is had it not been for an effective vaccination drive, South Korea could not have reopened or regained their activities as we do now, because in some parts of the world we still don't have those kinds of reactivation and foreign policy. For all it's worth, some of the things that we think about in terms of global public goods or global health, public health in general, some of the things that we think about that are supposed to be a given when, when we think about the access to these

goods, they were not promised. They were not a given for us during the pandemic. And I think that's one of the reasons why it may prompt the difficulties of interaction among democracies or autocracies, depending on how they receive their vaccines.

Patricia M. Kim [01:43:55] Okay. Well, thank you. This has been such a rich and substantive discussion, and I'm just so grateful to our three speakers who are here with us today. I encourage, if you haven't yet, grab a hard copy. And for those who are tuning in online, we have PDFs online they're available that you could download to read up more on the cases that are here in this Democracy in Asia volume. Would you please join me in thanking all of the speakers for today.