

Democracy nation to  
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his



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## **Democracy in Indonesia**

It wasn't until the year 1998 that Indonesia saw actual democratic rule, even if it had attained independence years back. This country began experiencing the democratic rule after General Suhart stepped down following threats to overthrow his government. In a period starting from the year 1998 up to 2003, this country went through “ the slow transition to democracy”.

However, as Ward notes, “ contrary to countries where popular uprising has led to the natural formation of political parties and a ‘ grassroots’ democracy taking shape, democracy in Indonesia was imposed from the top-down by its political elite” (Par. 5). In the year 2004, the country's first “ direct presidential elections” enabled Susilo Bambang to take over leadership of the country.

This leader was formerly an army general. From the time Susilo took over power, he has been seeking to make the democracy of the nation to be stronger. Following his popularity among the Indonesian people, he has been able to go for the second term, which started in the year 2009. In considering the indicators of how strong the democracy of this country is, voter turnout can be one of these indicators. However, even if ‘ voter turnout’ is indicative of a particular level of lack of interest in a nation's “ political system”, this indicator can not be considered as being one that can be relied upon for indicating the ‘ democracy strength’ of Indonesia. The Wolrd Bank makes use of a number of other indicators to measure the strengths of democracies in various countries all over the world. Basing on these indicators, beginning from the year 1998, the country has shown quite

a number of improvements is such issues as “ guarantee of personal freedoms....

anti-corruption measures and the regime’s own accountability, but only because it began from such a low level ...it still ranks below most of other East Asia democracies” (Ward, Par. 7). In regard to the strength of the rule of law in Indonesia, Indonesia ranks lower than the rest of the Asian democracies. However, Under the current president, Yudhoyono, this country has gone on to realize improvements on a gradual basis in, as Ward points out, “ all aspects of the World Bank’s democratic indicator’s, and his second term will therefore be closely watched for indications that the fledging democracy is becoming more firmly entrenched in all levels of Indonesian society” (Ward, Par. 8). In general terms, Indonesia enjoys freedom of press, and there is guarantee of citizen’s civil rights among others.

## **Democracy in Thailand**

Considering the case in Thailand, the differences that exist among the “ political ideologies” go on to have a destructive impact on the stability of the country. Claims are presented by the “ Red Shirts Movement” that it has been engaging in a fight to have “ real democracy” and that Abhisit’s government should surrender power because this leader ascended to power just through “ a backroom deal shaped by powerful military rather than a popular mandate” (Chachavalpongpun, Par.

1). In response to this, Abhisit presents an argument that he has intentions to save the country’s democracy from “ the irrational demonstrators”. This leader directs accusations towards the “ Red Shirts” of just being a

replacement of the Prime Minister, Thaksin, who was earlier on in power but later overthrown.

At the center of all these arguments creating a crisis lies, “ the deep-seated conundrum in Thai politics: that is, the widening gap between the Thai poor in the remote regions represented by the Red Shirts and the Bangkok elites whose power position has been guarded by the current royalist government” (Chachavalpongpun, Par. 2). Democracy in Thailand, as it might be looked at from anywhere in the world, still stands to be a concept that is manipulated. This democracy has turned out to be a “ victim of elite interests”.

For about fifty years, Thailand has gone through several kinds of tyrannical rule. “ The holy trinity of the established forces consisting of the monarchy, the military and the bureaucracy, has long called the shots.... even under a civilian regime, the elite in Bangkok oversee every move in political life” (Chachavalpongpun, Par.

5). While this has gone on, the poor people in Thailand have been neglected. When Thaksin came in to power in the year 2001, he opened the political space in the country. He employed his “ political skills” to take advantage of the gap that exists in the society in order to be backed up those living in poverty. He did this by “ challenging the dominance of power by the established forces” (Chachavalpongpun, Par.

12). He uplifted the living standards of the poor people. As a consequence, this leader became popular among the have-nots but a threat to the elites in Bangkok. Mean while, as Chachavalpongpun points out, “ Thaksin’s tilt towards authoritarianism while serving in office and even becoming a despot

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before he was overthrown allow the Bangkok elite to claim some kind of justification for the 2006 coup and its continuing aftermath”

(Chachavalpongpun, Par.

13). The effort to adjust again the “ political equation” has resulted in to the current clash between the two opposite forces in Thailand. The political leaders work tirelessly to make their regimes stronger and to protect their wealth but at the same time making claims that they are protecting democracy. However, in the case of Thailand, the truth is that, democratization has not actually paid attention of the citizen’s real needs.

The aspiration of the “ Red Shirts” has been to “ to reverse democratization so that it becomes a bottom-up process” (Chachavalpongpun, Par. 13). In Thailand, generally, there are no guarantees of the citizens’ civil rights, there is no enjoying of free press and also, there are no free and fair elections.

## **Democracy in Vietnam**

The present “ socialist democratic regime” in Vietnam is “ the first ever democratic regime in the country’s political history” (“ The evolution of democracy in Vietnam” Par.

1). The country’s very start of the first democratic regime was marked by the “ Declaration of the Independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945” (“ The evolution of democracy in Vietnam” Par. 2). Earlier on, “ the economic and socio-political life was controlled by such systems as the colonial system, feudal and semi-feudal systems” (“ The evolution of democracy in Vietnam” Par. 2).

The well-known aspect associated with these systems was that the citizens did not possess any right to take part in whatever political life of the nation. This implies that, there existed a very minimal number or no mechanisms for setting up implementation of democracy. The rights and fate of an individual in the nation rested in the hands of the society or the crowd. This country's "first democratic regime" came in to existence in the course of the "national liberation revolution" and this regime resulted from "entire people's struggle for liberation under the leadership of a communist party" ("The evolution of democracy in Vietnam", Par. 7).

The regime brought the basic rights to the people, including the right to life. Under this regime, the people acquired the right to be citizens of a liberated and self-governing nation and the right to take part in the "political life" of the nation, among other rights. However, basing on the historical background where this country commenced on the journey of setting up and developing democracy, it can be realized that this country must continue working hard to completely understand "the nature of socialist democracy" so that it can be able to identify the incomplete features of the present democracy ("The evolution of democracy in Vietnam", Par. 9). It is true that, "Vietnam has been undertaking the building of the socialist democratic regime in the context of a tiny, underdeveloped economy after enduring wars to defend national independence and reunification for dozens of years of dealing with several socio-economic structural upheavals" ("The evolution of democracy in Vietnam" Par. 10).

Under such conditions, it is quite obvious that this country has not yet set up a democracy that is perfect and therefore should consider taking appropriate

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measures to make the gap between the goals the country has set and reality to be narrower. However, it can be clearly seen that, even if the socialist democratic regime in Vietnam is still undergoing construction, “ this regime has brought in to full play its pre-eminent characteristics” (“ The evolution of democracy in Vietnam” Par. 12). The socialist democratic regime in Vietnam has moved along with the nation in the course of fighting for independence and freedom and has made a contribution, at a significant level, to “ socio-economic development’. The people of the “ Socialist Republic of Vietnam” are assured of all “ fundamental rights to freedom, including the rights to equality before the law, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, complaints and denouncements”(“ The evolution of democracy in Vietnam” Par.

33).

### **Comparing and ranking the states of democracy in Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam**

The Indonesia’s state of democracy is seen to be higher than that of the other two countries. This country is “ stable and tolerant under a mature president, with better growth prospects in the region” (Hartcher, Par. 10). Hartcher further points out that the United States “ think tank Freedom House” has described this country as “ the only free and democratic country in South-Asia” (Par.

10). According to Hartcher, this point is also emphasized by Andrew MacIntyre and Douglas Ramage where they give a description that “ Indonesia in 2008 is stable, competitive electoral democracy, with a highly

decentralized system of governance, achieving solid rates of economic growth, under competent national leadership, and playing a constructive role in the regional and broader international community” (Par. 11). More so, Indonesia enjoys freedom of the media and a judicial system that is uneven, but currently undergoing improvements.

Democracy in this country has turned out to be concretely legitimate, having “ generals and mutifs” battling it out through the ballot box and not fighting in the streets. This whole situation is contrary to what is happening in Thailand. In Thailand, the poor people have been neglected. There is a crisis in this state where we are having two opposing forces. The urban elites are against the protection of the poor in remote areas. “ Thailand is now suffering a constitutional crisis, emergency rule and an investment strike”(Hartcher, Par. 9). In essence, the basic difference between the two countries is that the “ Indonesian power elites” have a universal respect for the “ legitimizing power of democracy” while those elites in Thailand do not.

More so, Thailand does not enjoy free media the way Indonesia do. On the other hand, looking at Vietnam, this country is making the necessary efforts to perfect its democracy. Unlike in Thailand where we have a strong conflict between two forces, here every concerned party is determined to ensure people enjoy freedom in the country. However, Indonesia seems to be ahead of this country in regard to the state of democracy. Vietnam is in the process of improving its democracy after going through a long history. Considering these three countries, according to my personal judgment, Indonesia stands in the first position, followed by Vietnam and Thailand comes last. Indonesia has done all its best to improve democracy in the country and it is even seen <https://assignbuster.com/democracy-nation-to-be-stronger-following-his/>



to stand above all the countries in the region. Vietnam, despite the long journey it has travelled, will soon also realize great improvement in the state of democracy, especially when it will be offered adequate support from friends.

On the other hand, the wrangles that are seen in Thailand where by some sections of the society are neglected makes it to be less democratic compared to the other two countries. This country has a long way to go and it has to learn from Indonesia in order for it to improve the state of its democracy.

### **Prospects for further democratization in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam**

In each of the three countries, there are prospects for further democratization.

Starting with Thailand, in order for the state of democracy to be improved, there should be institutionalizing of the democratic structures and the democratic process in the country is supposed to be designed to be more relevant to the large majority of the people of Thailand. “ The legacy of past authoritarian regimes can only be overcome by greater popular participation and community mobilization” (Muntarhorn and Taylor, Par. 2). It must be ensured that the state does not go beyond the boundaries of its powers. It is the duty of such parties as the civil society and the NGOs to carry out this. A balance should not just be established between the state organs but also between the state and the “ non-state actors”. The state organs refer to such organs as parliament, the executive, the military, and the judiciary.

On the other hand, the non-state organs may include the NGOs, the business sector and the community as a whole. By taking these steps, Thailand will be able to take its state of democracy to a whole new level. On the other hand, Vietnam is making an effort to improve its democracy state. This shows a move towards a positive direction. What this country needs is to obtain understanding and support from friends regionally and internationally in order for it to realize its goals. In the case of Indonesia, even if this country has a better state of democracy, it needs to carry out further improvements in such areas as the rule of law in order for it to climb to even a higher state.

### **Works Cited**

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15 March 2011.