



**Committee: ASEAN**

**Topic: Preventing the rise of authoritarianism**

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations was founded on 8 August 1967 in Thailand. It has as an objective to promote peace, social success, cultural progress, quicken economic growth, cooperation in the main use of agriculture and industry, and improve communication and transport infrastructure, among others. ASEAN's first members were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Currently, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam are also part of this committee.

It breaks down into three main pillars; The Political Community (APSC), The Economic Community (AEC), The Sociocultural Community (ASCC), and a General Secretary takes place in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Political Community (APSC) intends to guarantee harmony between the countries, in a democratic environment. Its components shall be political development, forming and supplying norms, conflict avoidance, and implementing procedures.

The Economic Community (AEC) seeks economic integration in order to become a competitive region, with impartial economic development entirely integrated into the global economy.

The Sociocultural Community (ASCC) is a Cooperative and proactive community in charge of gaining interest and profit for ASEAN people. A universal community that encourages a good quality of life, gives fair access to everyone for the same opportunities, protecting human rights.

Authoritarianism is a form of government that centralizes power, minimizes political pluralism, and suppresses civil society. It is often done in the name of confronting a perceived 'enemy', both internal and external. An authoritarian government doesn't respect elections, this form of government has an absence of freedom of religion, as well as a slight political mobilization and suppression of anti-regime activities. Authoritarianism is committed to distinctive support that gives the means for authoritarians to stay in power, this includes, but is not limited to governmental institutions, reliability, paramilitary groups, and financial support.

Authoritarianism is very similar compared to totalitarianism, the two forms of government take away the freedom of conscience and action effort of their citizens. The main difference is that authoritarianism seeks blind subjugation of its residents while totalitarianism seeks for commanding position over the lives of its residents.

Authoritarian governments are populists and use propaganda to bait and lure people with phrases easy to remember, simplistic solutions, blaming other groups for the country's problems, and to mobilize masses of people to vote in their favor. In countries without elections, politicians influence the educational system to construct a favorable and even heroic image of mandataries and enforce strict legislation that prevents people from questioning governmental actions.

This kind of system is spreading throughout Southeast Asian Countries, even though democracy still has the majority power among these nations (Barber, 2018) .

China has an immense influence around ASEAN countries, increasing day by day. It is one of its interests to build an authoritarian center of gravity, exporting authoritarian forms of government to neighboring countries. This has startled young democracies including Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Authoritarian countries in ASEAN seem to carry some repeated conditions:

- Oppression upon citizens
- Repression
- Violence to reach goals
- Suppression of freedoms
- Use of mass force

The benefits and advantages of authoritarianism were doubted because of an economic crisis in Asia that originated in Thailand. At the beginning of 1995, Minxin Pei stated that governments like Singapore, and Malaysia, never showed real or concrete facts about their forms of government being superior. Subsequently, Jose Maria Maravall, pointed out that this presented more disadvantages such as repressiveness, and limited access to information due to the lack of electoral activities.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Southeast Asian countries, except for the Philippines, acquired a similar soft-authoritarian regime that East and Northeast Asian countries had. As a consequence, they all experienced rapid economic growth and industrialization. Some of these countries were under democratic systems, but unambiguously authoritarian (Crouch, 1998).

Singapore's transformation, among other ones, was made by a democratic government but with authoritarian measures, in order not to be overthrown in elections.

Nevertheless, not all transitions produced rapid economic growth or development. An example of this would be the case of the Philippines, which experienced a negative economic development and started to grow under a democracy only about a decade later. This era was named "The Marcos Era" (Crouch, 1998).

North Korea is a great example of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, but they are considered by the constitution as a "dictatorship of people's democracy" even though North Korea has been led under the dictatorship of the Kim family for 70 years, North Korea a one-party dictatorship, dynastic, and a totalitarian state. Punishments such as imprisonment, torture, forced labor, etc. are widespread and severe. There is little growth in the private sector and some economic changes, but they are still very inhumane measures, most of which violate a lot of human rights (*North Korea: Country Profile*, n.d.).

China is another distinct example because they have become an authoritarian country. The constitution considers it an authoritarian state because there are no freely elected heads of state, which is tantamount to a dictatorship. China has cases of torture, mass surveillance, family separation, suppression of religion, and physical abuse, among others. China believes that authoritarianism is a way to grow a faster and more stable economy (*North Korea: Country Profile*, n.d.). China has lately shown signs of a decline in its economy, but it is clear that the type of its government has not influenced this.

ASEAN states practicing authoritarianism do not compose the required factor of rights treaty ratification behavior, which means human rights are not respected. The implementation of authoritarian measures is very problematic and reflects the true nature of the political system in these regimes.

As demonstrated in "The Spectra of Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia" (Hairpins, n.d.), the state of human rights in some regions are:

Brunei in April 2019 adopted a penal code in order to punish adultery, sodomy, and rape with death, while theft is penalized with amputation.

In Cambodia, in September 2019, social groups came together to urge the UN to address the current human rights crisis, and despite the previous demand, Cambodia has shown no intent to look up to the commitments reached.

Even though Indonesia was elected to the UN Human Rights Council for 2020-2022, it has failed to protect human rights. Religious and gender minorities suffer from harassment.

Laos lacks freedom of expression, experiences enforced disappearances, and the right to information is limited. This constitutes serious human rights issues.

Malaysia has improved in terms of human rights protection. However, it is burdened with death under custody, disadvantages of people with disabilities, and exploitation of migrants, among a series of more violations.

Myanmar has been in the spotlight since 2017 when the UN General Assembly approved a resolution to stop committing genocide of religious and ethnic minorities. It

is also responsible for bringing armed forces back into power by arresting opposing leaders and disallowing protest. This resulted in more than 750 civilian deaths.

The Philippines has one of the most serious concerns regarding human rights. The country had been under preliminary examination because of its killings due to the war on drugs.

In Singapore LGBTQ+ rights are not respected, there is no legal protection against discrimination, and sexual relations between men are still a criminal offense.

Thailand enforced censorship and punished opinions from critics of the monarchic government.

Vietnam has a minute tolerance for freedom of expression.

As stated by the Freedom in the World Assessment (Davies, 2021), a severe acceleration in the global decline of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism is affecting Southeast Asian countries.

Economic indicators such as GDP per capita and inflation can provide a picture of the economic consequences of different government systems.

The real question, however, is why is it important to prevent the rise of authoritarianism. Lack of freedom easily evolves into human rights violations. An example of this is the case of Myanmar and its humanitarian crisis.

Measures must be taken to ensure that fundamental freedoms and human rights are not violated or abolished. The information below will help clarify the pros and cons of this rise.

Some of the possible solutions to implement in this situation are:

- Build up tools to fight disinformation by authoritarian regimes.
- Elevate human rights in relation to authoritarian regimes.
- OGP (Open Government Partnership) leaders to take action and push back from influences.
- Promote critical thinking in the education systems of democratic countries, for the next generations to be able to detect propaganda and disinformation.
- Strengthen young democracies.

Their future is not yet known, but to have a viable solution, it is important to understand the regime and rules that each country relies on and the willingness of these countries to care about their people's rights and interests. The road will not be easy, but changes can be done and efficient solutions can be found through this discussion to expect a brighter future.

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