



## Call for Abstracts

### ‘Taiwan: A Frontline of Democracy under Threat?’

According to the ‘Democracy Index’ published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, in 2020 the average global score for democracy fell from 5.44 in 2019 to 5.37: this represents the worst average global score since the index was first published in 2006. Despite this significant decline was driven by a sharp regression in some regions, namely the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, the regression affected every continent throughout 2020. In this scenario, however, the Republic of China (ROC) has been valued as ‘the year’s biggest winner’, upgrading its status from that of a *flawed democracy* to a *full democracy* ‘after rising 20 places in the global ranking from 31st place to 11<sup>th</sup>’.

In the late 1980s, Taiwan embarked on a democratic transition, nurtured by impressive political activism, social participation and highly performative economic growth. A relatively cold diplomatic environment and significantly constraining regional order notwithstanding, the ROC proved successful in consolidating its newly-established democratic regime between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. Taipei achieved sound and widespread reliability as one of the most successful democratic regimes in the global arena, looming as a dazzling ‘third wave’ democracy flagship. It has become a world-class model, maintaining a successfully persistent focus on economic development, resulting in the creation of one of the richest markets in Asia and the entire world.

However, a number of international surveys contributed to highlight the many and relevant challenges the democratic regime in Taiwan constantly has to overcome in order to maintain and consolidate its stability. Such challenges include both *general-global* processes and *typical-domestic* political and social factors. The former comprises the rise of populism, freedom and independence of the media, environmental protection and sustainable development, gender equality and the independence and fairness of the judiciary. The latter encompasses the role of national identity and its interplay with the democratic system, Beijing-Taipei relations and mutual perception, and the influence of the authoritarian past on the current political landscape and social perception of politics at the national level. Similarly, challenges to Taiwan’s democracy reveal both a *general character* and a *local flavour*, as the party system and institutional structure, and corruption-related scandals have repeatedly surfaced.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 provided yet one more opportunity for the Taiwanese political regime to test its efficiency, its capability to mobilise citizens and resources in order to safeguard people’s health, and the solidity of its legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the society. From a global perspective, the little international attention reserved to the ROC (which, it needs to be highlighted, entertains formal diplomatic relations with only 15 countries in the world) strongly prevented its successful experience in containing the pandemic to be openly discussed, shared and possibly endorsed by other countries and international organisations, especially the World Health Organization (WHO). However, Taiwan’s attitude to rely exclusively on itself—therefore, in this specific case, the impossibility to wait for the WHO or other countries’ guidance—has helped it to respond faster and more punctually than anybody else.

Looking at Taiwan as a *peculiar* case, with its own characteristics, factors and challenges, and a democratic regime to be assumed as a general theoretical model, this topical section for the *International Journal of Taiwan Studies* (IJTS) aims to shed light on the key processes that have influenced—and still influence—the development of Taipei’s democracy in contemporary times. We welcome contributions from political scientists, sociologists, law specialists, social movement scholars, policy makers and practitioners focusing on the ongoing trends of Taiwan’s political system, civil society, economic performances and the relationship with Beijing. Far from aiming at providing the full spectrum of the challenges ahead, this topical section will try to examine their relevance as key factors in determining the *quality* of Taiwan’s democracy, as well as its resilience *vis-à-vis* the rise and spread of anti-democracy political sentiments and tendencies. As it is the case with several other democratic regimes, Taipei’s capability to handle, overcome, and reverse such processes looms as a crucial factor for safeguarding its own democratic model and provides an opportunity for promoting democracy as a resilient and just political regime globally.

This topical section welcomes contributions addressing a number of multi-faceted topics, including (but not limited to) institutional building, social movements practices and their influence on the political system, civil society participation, democratic backsliding and recession, the democratic regime-health policies enforcement nexus. More broadly, we expect this topical section to fill the increasing need for scholarly research and policy enforcement to systematise the wide range of political, social and economic dimensions representing key analytical means to understand current trends and prospective developments of the Taiwanese democracy.

To signal your intent to write an article in this topical section please email an abstract of no more than 300 words, including paper title and author(s)’s name, by 13 June 2021 to the guest editors, Dr. Alessandro Albana and Professor Antonio Fiori (both University of Bologna) at [alessandro.albana2@unibo.it](mailto:alessandro.albana2@unibo.it) and [antonio.fiori@unibo.it](mailto:antonio.fiori@unibo.it). Please send along a short bio describing each author’s titles, institutional affiliations, and research interests.

## **Timeline**

By 13 June 2021: Submission of abstract

By 30 June 2021: Decision by guest editors on invitations for manuscript submission

By 30 November 2021: Submit manuscript (6000-8000 words) to Dr. Alessandro Albana and Professor Dr. Antonio Fiori for review by editors

By 31 January 2022: Submit manuscript online to the IJTS for double-blind peer review