

**AI and Governance in Asia:
Civil Society, Democracy, and Media**

21–22 August 2025

Bangkok, Thailand

1. Background

Asia Centre's 10th Annual International Conference will explore the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on governance, in particular its impact on civil society, democracy and media in Asia. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to become the next transformative technology, with significant implications for governance across the region. Various stakeholders in the region have adopted AI strategies to maximise its opportunities. However, there are significant disparities in AI adoption across countries, as reflected in the Government AI Readiness Index (2023). This index, which measures readiness on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 indicates the highest level of preparedness, shows that Singapore leads with a score of 82, followed by South Korea at 76 and Japan at 75. In contrast, several countries are lagging far behind, with Cambodia scoring 32, Myanmar and Nepal both at 31 and Timor-Leste at 30. These disparities underscore the uneven pace of AI integration in governance and highlight the challenges faced by lower-scoring nations in harnessing AI's potential.

While the Government AI Readiness Index shows governmental preparedness for AI, it is essential to assess AI's impact on civil society, democracy, and media. Since indices for these areas are still developing, a qualitative assessment is needed initially before creating a comprehensive AI and Democracy Index. This will help ensure AI integration supports democratic processes, civil society, and media freedom in Asia.

For example, AI can strengthen civil society organisations' ability to call for public accountability. By harnessing AI, organisations can enhance their research capabilities, enabling more effective monitoring and analysis of issues impacting public policy and governance. AI tools facilitate comprehensive data analysis, streamline capacity building through targeted training and resource management, and support advocacy efforts by amplifying voices and mobilising support. This technological advancement allows civil society to speak up more effectively, ensuring transparency and accountability while addressing critical issues with greater precision and efficiency.

In terms of democracy, electoral bodies can enhance operations by deploying AI throughout the electoral cycle. Pre-election, AI can improve voter list management, streamline voter registration processes, predict voter turnout for better resource allocation, and monitor campaign compliance. During the election, AI can aid in voter verification through biometrics, accelerate ballot counting with greater accuracy, and bolster election security by detecting potential threats. Post-election, AI can assist with comprehensive audits, cross-referencing data to identify discrepancies, and analysing voting patterns to generate detailed reports. This holistic application of AI ensures a more efficient, transparent, and secure electoral process.

As a further extension of democracy, AI can contribute to the efficient functioning of parliaments in different ways. For example, by automating routine tasks and streamlining legislative processes. AI can also promote transparency by providing real-time data visualisations, automating document publication, and improving public access to records. Additionally, it ensures accountability through accurate data use, compliance monitoring, and tracking parliamentary actions' outcomes.

Democracy components such as political parties are also beginning to benefit from AI. The use of generative AI in political campaigning significantly enhances visibility and message customisation, thereby boosting public engagement and strengthening democratic processes thanks to platforms that can analyse public sentiment and, enable tailored political messages that resonate with diverse audiences. Generative AI visualisation tools also ensure a wider reach, extending politicians' public engagement into rural areas and stimulating youth involvement.

Finally, when it comes to the media, the sector is already utilising AI to transform its operations as content consumption and production patterns evolve. In this regard, AI technology enables media organisations to streamline news production and dissemination, with tools for automated content creation, fact-checking and personalised news delivery. By improving efficiency, they can continue to operate sustainably while scrutinising public affairs. This includes continuing with investigative journalism and combating misinformation.

While AI offers significant benefits, it also presents challenges, notably in the realm of disinformation. The capability of AI to generate highly convincing fake news and deep fakes has intensified the spread of false information, severely undermining public trust both in elections and media. The rapid proliferation of misleading content can distort public opinion, influence elections, and incite social unrest, posing a serious threat to societal stability and informed decision-making. Addressing this challenge requires robust measures to detect, counteract, and regulate AI-driven disinformation effectively.

AI also raises significant concerns regarding privacy and surveillance. The deployment of AI technologies in monitoring and data collection by governments can lead to intrusive surveillance practices potentially infringing on individuals' privacy rights. Advanced AI systems can analyse vast amounts of personal data, often without adequate consent or transparency, raising fears of misuse and erosion of personal freedoms. This heightened capability for surveillance creates a climate of fear where individuals feel their every move is being tracked.

Addressing these issues requires stringent privacy protections, clear regulatory frameworks, and robust oversight to ensure that AI is used ethically and that individuals' privacy is safeguarded. However, these frameworks are inexistent or at an inception stage. This regulatory gap can lead to ethical concerns, such as bias in AI algorithms, privacy violations, and the misuse of AI for surveillance.

To respond effectively to the aforementioned challenges, civil society needs to be toolled in AI. Yet, civil society actors have systematically been left out of AI discussions, which have been dominated by governments and technology companies. This exclusion has resulted in a lack of diverse perspectives and a disconnect between AI development and the needs of the broader society. Including civil society organisations, advocacy groups, and ordinary citizens

in AI discussions is crucial to ensuring that AI technologies are aligned with public interest and social good. This inclusive approach can help address societal concerns, promote transparency and build public trust in AI initiatives.

In this context, the conference will explore both the challenges and opportunities presented by AI in the effort to strengthen civil society, democracy and the media in Asia. By fostering dialogue and collaboration among a range of stakeholders, the conference aims to develop actionable insights and solutions for advancing the responsible and equitable use of AI. This is particularly important given the current contraction of democratic spaces and the increasing restrictions on freedoms in the region. The goal is to address these issues and promote AI's role in supporting and enhancing good governance. It is hoped that following the conference, the analysis can also move AI and Democracy from a qualitative to a quantitative assessment.

2. Conference Themes

The conference will examine the following sub-themes:

- AI and Democracy in Asia: Opportunities and Challenges
- AI and Electoral Integrity
- AI and Parliaments
- AI-Driven Election Campaigns
- The Role of AI in Strengthening Civil Society
- AI and Human Rights
- AI, Gender and Inclusion
- AI and its Impact on Civic Spaces
- Building Public Trust in AI-generated Media
- AI's Role in Shaping Public Opinion
- AI and Media Sustainability
- AI and Disinformation
- AI Regulatory Frameworks
- Data Privacy and Security in AI-Enhanced Governance
- Ethical Implications of AI in Politics

Note: The above sub-themes are a preliminary guide. Flexibility is encouraged, and partners may propose additional topics aligned with their expertise under the overarching theme of AI and Governance, to ensure contextual relevance and innovation.

3. Objectives

The conference aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Convene stakeholders interested in how AI intersects with democracy in Asia.
2. Examine the impact of AI on democracy, civil society, and media in Asia.
3. Evaluate the challenges and opportunities to harness AI for democracy in Asia.

4. Conference Structure

The conference will consist of short opening remarks, keynote speeches, plenary sessions, and breakout sessions arranged according to themes and/or region and country-specific discussions.

5. Conference Participants

Registration is open to participants from national, regional, and global organisations, including civil society groups, international NGOs, media outlets, journalists' associations, private sector companies, political parties, parliaments, technology firms, government agencies, intergovernmental organisations, and academic institutions. The participation fee is USD 350 per person. This inclusive approach seeks to foster knowledge sharing and networking among a wide range of stakeholders.

6. Programme Outline

Day 1, Thursday, 21 August 2025

09:00 – 17:00 Morning & Afternoon Panels

Day 2, Friday, 22 August 2025

09:00 – 17:00 Morning & Afternoon Panels

17:00 – 20:00 Networking Hour

7. Conference Partnership

This conference is currently open for title partnerships at Tier 1 and Tier 2 to lead the shaping of the conference programme. Fees from the title partnerships will be utilised to cover the expenses associated with the venue, equipment and logistics, coffee breaks and meals throughout the event, certificates for participants, conference communications, and staff. Once the key title partnership lineups are confirmed, the conference will be open to participants.

8. Convener

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