

Asia Global Democracy Coalition Regional Forum 2025

Final Report

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1. Project Overview

Project Name	GDC Asia-Pacific Regional Forum 2025
Lead Organisation	Asia Centre
Project Duration	20 December 2024 – 30 April 2025

2. Executive Summary

The Global Democracy Coalition Asia-Pacific Regional Forum 2025 builds on dynamic discussions from the Asia Centre - Global Democracy Coalition co-organised activity in 2024, themed “[Youth Voices, Strong Choices: Political Participation in the Asia-Pacific](#)”.

Asia GDC Forum 2025 – held on 4 April 2025, was a gathering of 95 persons in a hybrid format, built upon the discussions of 2024, and was focused on “Youth, Democracy & Elections in Asia: Issues & Challenges and Breaking Barriers for Youth Participation in Politics”, exploring democratic challenges, opportunities, and innovations in the Asia-Pacific. By adopting a regional perspective, the forum developed a concrete democratic agenda and an action plan for youth political engagement.

The panel discussions provided an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities in fostering youth participation in politics. Panel 1 examined how political institutions and civil society organisations in Asia could create more inclusive spaces for youth participation. The panellists identified key points and challenges, such as the under-representation of youth in parliament, political dynasties, and the decline in youth voter registration. The participants attending the forum discussed potential solutions, including improving voter registration, aligning eligibility with voting age, developing a "National Youth Policy", identifying youth representation in legislation, and establishing youth caucuses and committees within parliament. Panel 2 addressed barriers to youth political participation, highlighting mentorship, digital civic engagement, and intergenerational collaboration. It identified systematic and structural barriers, new threats like disinformation, and challenges for women in leadership. Solutions included building resilience, leveraging technology, empowering women, and fostering regional collaboration.

During the forum’s group and plenary discussions, the attending participants identified key challenges hindering youth involvement in politics, governance, and civil society. Governance issues like political dynasties, generational and financial constraints, state repression, and gender barriers were expressed as ongoing concerns. Participants also highlighted that civil society was struggling with funding, cultural norms, gender-based violence, skills gaps, and generational gaps, leading to hampering youth participation or having new young talent emerge to the forefront. Action plans developed included short-term solutions like political education and training, medium-term strategies such as youth groups and policy advocacy, and long-term goals focused on policy changes, international alliances, and social enterprise development. During the Future Planning & Steps Forward session, participants prioritised three key points for future action: increasing youth representation in

CSOs, integrating youth into government policymaking via councils and wings, and forming coalitions to ensure political parties include youth. These align with the forum's themes of youth engagement and breaking barriers. The discussions offered actionable insights for political institutions, civil society organisations, and policymakers, highlighting their crucial role in fostering inclusive and participatory governance and enhancing youth engagement and trust in democratic processes.

The forum united diverse Asian youths, co-creating a multi-stage action plan addressing politics, governance, and civil society. As a safe space, it empowered youth advocates to connect, strategise, and advance inclusive, sustainable advocacy for democratic participation. The forum was able to promote cross-border collaboration with the intersection of inclusive dialogue and digital activism which can also facilitate sustainable partnerships for future concrete actionable strategies and advocacy efforts.

3. Asia GDC Regional Forum 2025

Event Name	Asia Global Democracy Coalition Regional Forum 2025: Youths, Democracy & Electoral Legitimacy in Asia
Co-hosts	Asia Centre & GDC
Event Date	4 April 2025
Location	Bangkok, Thailand
Event Format	Hybrid
Total Participants	95 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Onsite: 33 ● Online: 62
Representation	Students, academics, CSOs, Bangkok-based diplomatic representatives and research institutes.

3.1. Opening Remarks

Asia Centre's representative highlighted the current event's connection with the previous regional event held on [28 November 2024](#), which had also emphasised that the need for youth participation within the democratic structures was still important. Key points reiterated were:

- Importance of regional collaboration to strengthen democracy in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Need for youth involvement and support systems to combat systemic corruption.
- Addressing economic inequalities and fostering youth participation in democratic processes.

The GDC representative (via a video recorded message) highlighted the challenges of:

- Shrinking civic space and the disillusionment of younger generations.
- Importance of placing youth at the forefront of the GDC.
- Event to serve as a catalyst for collective action.

3.2. Panel 1: Youth, Democracy & Elections in Asia: Issues & Challenges

Composed of diverse Asian panellists from South Korea, India, Indonesia, and Thailand, the panel aimed to examine how political institutions and civil society organisations can create more inclusive spaces for youth participation and the role of education and technology in breaking down barriers. Panel presentations are available as an annex to the report.

Key points and challenges identified, along with potential solutions, included:

- Political Representation and Participation
 - Youth in the Asian region are often politically active and engaged in protests but are underrepresented in parliament, where political dynasties are on the rise.
 - Improving youth voter registration is a necessity to facilitate political participation.
 - Aligning eligibility with voting age and developing a "National Youth Policy" could increase youth participation, as youth may soon become the largest voting bloc.
 - Identifying youth representation in legislation could address the decline in youth participation and voters.
 - To address the youth deficit in parliament, measures such as party funds for youth, youth caucuses, and committees within parliament could be considered, it could also help address the issues of money influence.

- The introduction of new policies favoring youth and youth quotas would facilitate participation and engagement, strengthening inner-party democracy.
- Young people are innovative but lack access to formal political processes in parliament to shape politics for the betterment of society.
- Challenges to Democratic Space
 - Increased military presence in civilian roles in the Asian region impacts freedom of expression, assembly, and association through law enforcement, affecting civilian democracy.
 - Improving the rule of law, specifically the principle of "innocent until proven guilty," would address concerns about the impunity with which many state forces are involved in violating constitutional and human rights.
- Government Priorities and Youth Issues
 - The majority of governments give less attention to youth-related issues such as education, unemployment, and climate change, leading to decreased youth participation in elections.
- Role of Technology and Digital Platforms
 - Increased use of digital platforms and tools by youths can be tapped by increasing digital storytelling and outreach, allowing diverse perspectives to be shared online and facilitating social change. However, ensuring quality and credible information is crucial for informed decision-making.
 - Expanding digital space on social media platforms can provide alternative opinions and discussion spaces, empowering communities with credible narratives to promote youth voices.
 - Social media is becoming a relevant and important tool for information sharing and a pillar of democracy, providing alternative options to the public and should be utilised effectively.
 - Content moderation is important to address information issues, as unverified information can become misinformation/disinformation and impact public opinion.
- Collaboration and Solidarity
 - There is a need to identify a structural approach to build solidarity, learn from each other as youth, and strengthen partnerships.

3.3. Panel 2: Breaking Barriers for Youth Participation in Politics

The panel, featuring representatives from Malaysia, Myanmar, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Czech Republic, aimed to: Build inclusive capacity through mentorship; Leverage technology for civic engagement; Enhance intergenerational collaboration to empower young leaders; and, Identify success stories for replication across the region.

Key barriers and potential solutions identified included:

- Systematic Barriers
 - Barriers included arrests, surveillance, travel restrictions, family constraints, moral conflicts, lack of leadership alignment, slow bureaucracy, and weak connections with grassroots movements.
 - Structural barriers such as neoliberal policies, cronyism, and monarchical interference.
- New Threats
 - Social media regulations, mis/dis-information, mal-information, and individualism impacting freedom of expression, assembly, and association.
 - Financial insecurities and cultural and religious differences making consensus difficult among youth on common issues.
- Young Women in Leadership
 - Women are increasingly taking leadership roles, including housewives actively participating in civic and political processes.
 - Challenges persist, especially for women as minorities and those imprisoned for their activism.
 - Women political leaders, especially in ASEAN, face barriers including lack of financial resources, sexism and state repression and structural barriers within political parties, such as deep-rooted gender biases.
- Impact on Advocacy and Activism
 - Many youths prioritise economic development and financial freedom over human rights issues.
 - A decline in funding in the human rights field, which actively undermines safety nets for activists.
 - Increased surveillance and control restrict civic participation.
- Emerging Trends in Activism
 - **Student-Led Activism:** Student forces remain vital for advocating democratic norms and resisting regressive amendments. Collaboration and advocacy can strengthen resilience and pave the way for a just and democratic future.
 - **Digital Activism:** Digital tools facilitate regional influence and connectivity. Emerging movements such as the “Milk Tea Alliance” can facilitate promotion of solidarity, mutual communication, and collaboration across borders.
 - Quality communications and networking can develop solidarity and actionable political and economic reforms.

- Potential Solutions for Breaking Barriers
 - **Building Resilience and Capacity:** Human rights education fosters critical discussions and youth participation in addressing real-life challenges.
 - **Leveraging Technology:** Social media alliances can facilitate in controlling content and positively impact freedom of expression for youth for efficient use of digital tools that enhance activism and reform efforts.
 - **Empowering Women:** Undertaking affirmative actions to address barriers for women in politics:
 - Gender-sensitive policies within political parties.
 - Dedicated bodies to monitor and address Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence (TFGBV).
 - Partnerships with social media and media agencies to tackle online harassment, violence, and misuse of AI-generated deepfakes.
 - Regional and International Collaboration
 - Cross-Border Communication: Strengthen regional networks to enhance collaboration beyond national boundaries. Create opportunities for young civil society leaders to exchange practices and knowledge.
 - Institutional Support: Governments should establish institutions to monitor online violence against women politicians. Leadership development programs, such as the Emerging Leaders Fellowship, foster capacity building.
 - Promoting Security and Sustainability: Focus on risk assessment and security infrastructure for activists. Address migration challenges and ensure protection for activists fleeing persecution.

3.4. Group Discussions & Plenary

3.4.1. Youth & Politics: Key Challenges & Solutions

As per the group, three main issues hinder youth involvement in politics:

- Limited Access: Lack of political education, information, resources, and networks.
- Under-representation: High voting age limits (e.g., up to 26) and age barriers for parliamentary membership.
- Frustration and Trust Deficit: Political advocacy often yields no results, leading to disillusionment and a lack of trust.

Action plans include the following:

- Short-Term Solutions (6 Months)

- Improve political access, media advocacy, and education.
- Generate ideas through public forums and similar platforms.
- Medium-Term Solutions (2-3 Years)
 - Form youth groups within political parties to amplify youth voices and drive change.
 - Revise school curriculums to include more civic education.
 - Implement policy changes to protect young people from political retaliation.
 - Introduce proportional representation, where the representation strategies could be:
 - Use petitions to raise awareness and engage stakeholders (e.g., ambassadors listening to youth groups).
 - Establish quotas for younger people in political positions.
 - Pursue policy changes in the short, medium, and long term.
 - Address lasting apathy by creating reports and documenting youth perspectives.
 - Create dedicated sections within parties for young politicians.
- Long-Term Goal(s)
 - Achieve policy change and increase youth visibility in politics.

3.4.2. Youth & Governance: Key Challenges & Solutions

As per the group, the challenges identified were:

- Political Dynasties: Entrenched political families limit opportunities for new youth leaders.
- Generational Constraints: Traditional values and seniority norms restrict youth involvement and leadership.
- Financial Constraints: Lack of funding hinders youth participation and initiatives.
- Repressive States: Governments that suppress dissent (e.g., accusations of propaganda in Vietnam) stifle youth voices.
- Gender Barriers: Discrimination and inequality impede young women's participation.

Action plans include the following:

- Short-Term Solutions (6 Months)
 - Implement 4-6 month training programs for activist groups.

- Provide skills development and capacity building to help activists sustain their movements.
- Medium-Term Solutions (2-3 Years)
 - Disseminate research findings to wider audiences.
 - Advocate for representation quotas for young people in governance.
 - Establish youth wings within political parties.
- Long-Term Goal(s)
 - Forge international alliances to support youth governance.
 - Implement comprehensive political and social reforms.
 - Increase government transparency and data accessibility for public scrutiny.

3.4.3. Youth & Civil Society: Key Challenges & Solutions

As per the group, the challenges identified were:

- Financial Constraints: Lack of funding limits youth-led initiatives and civil society organisations (CSOs).
- Cultural Mindset Norms: Traditional values and social hierarchies hinder youth participation and leadership.
- Gender-Based Violence: Violence and discrimination disproportionately affect young women's involvement.
- Lack of Skills and Information: Insufficient training and access to information limit youth effectiveness.
- Generational Gaps: Disconnect and differing perspectives between younger and older generations.

Action plans include the following:

- Short-Term Solutions (6 Months)
 - Address Financial Issues: Seek funding through partnerships and mutually beneficial relationships with other entities.
 - Provide Youth Leadership Training: Offer courses and training to develop leadership skills.
- Medium-Term Solutions (2-3 Years)
 - Launch Legal Campaigns: Advocate for legal protections and safety for civil society organisations.

- Improve CSO Environment: Increase salaries and improve working conditions within CSOs.
- Long-Term Goal(s)
 - Stimulate Social Enterprise Development: Encourage and support the creation of new social enterprises, such as women-led industries, to generate income and sustainability.

3.5. Future Planning & Steps Forward

The participants were asked to identify one key point they wanted to focus on that was shared by all the groups during the plenary session.

- Increase youth proportion in CSOs. The point directly addresses youth engagement and participation, which is a core theme of the Asia GDC Forum 2025.
- Youth councils, wings, and increasing youth proportions should be included in government policymaking. The point focuses on structural change and policy influence, which is crucial for long-term impact and linked to the core theme of breaking barriers discussed during the Asia GDC Forum 2025.
- Coalitions in making political parties include youth. The point tackles the core of political participation and representation, which is also a core theme of the breaking barriers discussed during the Asia GDC Forum 2025.

3.6. Conclusions

The Asia Centre team concluded the session by identifying the following key points of action:

- Prioritise Collaboration over Competition: Especially during turbulent times, it's crucial to focus on working together rather than competing for resources.
- Leverage Diverse Resources: Acknowledge that some countries have more resources than others and explore how north-south and south-south collaboration can be strengthened to share and distribute those resources effectively.
- Collective Action: The next steps should involve active collaboration, strategic resource engagement, and building strong political, academic, and social networks in the region.
- Sustain the Coalition: To build and maintain a successful coalition, commitment and consistency are essential. These will help overcome challenges and effectively counter pushback.

4. Key Achievements and Impacts

- The forum created a space for shared learning and solidarity among youths, youth leaders, activists, and speakers from the Asian countries present.
- Through dialogue and the exchange of strategies – from digital activism to intersectional resistance movements – the event fostered cross-border partnerships and reinforced the idea that regional cooperation is vital for strengthening democratic participation.
- Development of a concrete, multi-stage action plan for youth engagement. The forum brought together diverse youth voices from across Asia and facilitated the co-creation of structured short-, mid-, and long-term action plans. These were discussed and covered during the group discussion focused on the key points related to: A.) Politics (Increasing access to education, youth representation, and reforming electoral systems); B.) Governance (building youth leadership, challenging legal barriers, and fostering international collaboration); and, C.) Civil Society (supporting financial sustainability, inclusive participation, and safe activism).
- The forum also served as a safe space, providing youth advocates with a meaningful platform to not only connect with like-minded individuals but also explore inclusive partnerships for future advocacy works.

5. Challenges

- Asia Centre was able to reach out within its network and find replacement of some panellists who had cancelled at the last-minute, and ensure their presentation topics, presentation deck and logistical details were updated in time for the event.
- The changed domestic political landscape in some Asian countries impacted the participation of youth political leaders from the region.
- Some of the in-person and online participants impacted by the post-earthquake situation were unable to attend despite their prior confirmation as per the follow-up leading to the event.

6. Lessons Learnt

The Asia Global Democracy Coalition Regional Forum 2025 offered two key lessons:

- First, meaningful youth engagement in politics, governance, and civil society cannot rely solely on motivation or individual interest—it requires dismantling systemic barriers such as generational hierarchies, restrictive laws, and a lack of representation or civic education. Without structural reforms and long-term sustainable resources, youth participation will remain limited in all spheres of political spaces, including digital political space.
- Second, the forum emphasised the importance of cross-sector and cross-regional

collaboration. By creating spaces for dialogue and sharing strategies, youth movements can learn from one another, build solidarity, and develop more effective national and regional approaches to advance democratic engagement and social change, which needs to go beyond physical collaboration into digital-regional collaboration.

7. Consolidated Participant Feedback

7.1. Participants' Impression

Participants expressed appreciation for the space and dialogue facilitated by the event, noting that the activity was both enjoyable and conducive to networking and relationship-building. Several attendees described the experience as educational, nuanced, and intellectually engaging. The event was widely regarded by the participants as thought-provoking and inspiring, offering a valuable opportunity to engage directly with young activists from diverse countries, exchange ideas, and forge meaningful connections centered on democracy and electoral legitimacy in Asia. For many participants, it served as an excellent learning experience. The event was well-organised and effectively executed, with some participants highlighting how it deepened their understanding of the critical role youth play in shaping democratic processes and advancing electoral legitimacy across the region.

7.2. Key Takeaways from Panel 1

As per feedback received, the following key information from the panel discussion stayed with the participants:

- **Youth Under-representation:** The significant issue of youth in Asia being under-represented in politics despite a large young population was highlighted.
- **Political Participation:** Discussions about the various ways youth are involved in political activities and the challenges they face in doing so.
- **Gender and Age Diversity:** There is an urgent need to increase gender and age diversity, including reserving seats for youth and women in legislatures.
- **Role of Social Media:** Social media is a crucial platform for democratic movements.
- **Judicial Independence:** Concerns about the lack of an independent judiciary and how democracy battles are increasingly fought in courts.
- **Limited Access to Political Platforms:** The shared concern about limited access to political platforms for youth across Asia, hindering their participation in democratic processes.
- **Critical State of Democracy:** The critical condition of democracy in Asia and the high hurdles faced by young citizens.
- **Youth's Crucial Role:** The crucial role youth play in shaping democratic futures, especially in regions with electoral challenges like misinformation and lack of transparency.

- South Korea's Experience: The impactful presentation on South Korea's political and civic participation, including its challenges and way forward.

7.3. Key Takeaways from Panel 2

As per feedback received, the following key information from the panel discussion stayed with the participants:

- Collaboration: The critical need for collaboration among youth and organisations.
- Barriers for Women: The specific limitations faced by young women in political participation.
- Systemic Barriers: The realisation of many deep-seated barriers hindering youth from accessing positions of political influence.
- Multiple Methods of Engagement: The various ways youth can stand up and transfer power.
- Hope and Youth Activism: The recognition of youth's active role and the hope they bring.
- Specific Barriers: The variety of barriers youth encounter, including financial constraints, sexism, institutional hurdles, and cultural norms.
- Importance of Solidarity and Coalitions: The significance of media independence, regional and international solidarity, and coalition building for successful democracy movements.
- Lack of Education and Unity: The identification of education gaps and lack of unity as challenges.
- Civic Education's Importance: The emphasis on civic education as a key factor.
- Age Restrictions and Funding Issues: The recognition of age restrictions, lack of funding, and exclusion from party leadership as obstacles.
- Empowerment through Education and Policies: The importance of empowering youth through civic education and inclusive policies to overcome structural and cultural barriers.
- Inspiration from the Myanmar Speaker: The particular impact of the young speaker from Myanmar's sharing.

7.4. Other Feedback

- The event was rated high by the participants in helping them gain a better understanding of the thematic issue being discussed.
- The invited panellists and their content were rated good by the participants, this extended to the MC and session moderators too.

- The event and the quality of discussion was rated high by the participants in linking the diverse issues to be addressed under the overall theme.
- Participants are expecting to see more followup activities in the future and have more in-person interaction opportunities for implementing activities.

8. Dissemination of GDC Event Promotion on Social Media

A total of 74 posts were published across five social media platforms of Asia Centre: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Website](#). Please refer to the attached Annex for details. These posts have attracted over 49,106 “engagements” (views, likes, shares, impressions, and others). Please refer to Table 1 below.


Table 1: Social Media Engagements

Platform	Engagements (as of 11 April 2025)
Facebook	17,022
Instagram	6,854
X (Twitter)	<i>[Information not provided by the platform]</i>
LinkedIn	10,858
Other (TikTok & YouTube Shorts)	380
Mailing Sent	13,992
Website	439
TOTAL	49,545

9. Audiovisual Content Creation

Asia Centre produced the following to be shared across its and GDC partners' social media accounts as part of the campaign. See Table 2 below.

Table 2: Audiovisual Content

No.	Platform & Title	Publishing Date	Link/s
1	TikTok Asia Centre in partnership with Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) in the campaign of "hashtag#ThankYouDemocracy", invites you to join the regional dialogue on "Youths Democracy & Electoral Legitimacy in Asia 2025" on 4 April 2025. More details soon.	21 February 2025	<u>Asia GDC Forum 2025: Youths Democracy & Electoral Legitimacy in Asia 2025 - Details here</u>
2	YouTube Asia GDC Forum 2025: Panel 1 & 2 Live Broadcast	4 April 2025	 Global Democra...
3	TikTok GDC Asia Forum 2025 Reflection from Participants #ThankYouDemocracy	9 April 2025	<u>https://www.tiktok.com/@asiacentre/video/7491201762435648786</u>

10. Annexes Attached

- 10.1. Event PPT – Opening Remarks, Short Bio, Panellists PPTs
- 10.2. Confirmed Registered & Signed Onsite Participants
- 10.3. GDC 2025 Social Media Event Promotion
