



South Korea's Leadership in Democratic Governance of Digital Technology in the Indo-Pacific

Date: October 27, Monday, 2025 9:30 AM – 5:15 PM

Venue: Plaza Hotel

9:30 – 10:00 Opening Remarks

KF (President, Korea Foundation)

Brian Joseph, *Vice President, National Endowment for Democracy*

Sook Jong Lee, *Representative, Indo-Pacific Democracy Forum*

10:00 - 11:30 Session 1 – Democratic Accountability in the Age of Everyday AI

AI tools are no longer confined to labs or tech companies—they are embedded in the everyday work of civil society, SMEs, and government agencies across the Asia-Pacific. These systems are being used to draft policy documents, translate sensitive communications, generate advocacy content, manage customer engagement, and even support social movements. Yet this rapid adoption has outpaced the development of norms, safeguards, and accountability mechanisms. Most of the foundational models being deployed were built outside the region, often by a handful of corporate actors operating with limited transparency or public oversight.

Open-source AI models are often presented as a democratizing alternative—but they, too, carry risks. A growing number of popular open-source models in use across the region originate from authoritarian contexts and may include baked-in censorship or value constraints, often without disclosure. For SMEs and civil society organizations with limited capacity to evaluate technical provenance, these tools can silently introduce norms antithetical to democratic values. Meanwhile, platform dependence—especially by smaller actors—raises hard questions about autonomy, redress, and consent in digital governance.

This session will surface concrete risks and dilemmas around AI adoption at the ground level and examine how democratic actors can shape practical norms for responsible use. What kinds of transparency, auditability, and oversight are needed to prevent the erosion of civic agency and democratic space? What distinguishes acceptable uses of AI in democratic settings from those that risk harm? And how can actors across the region coordinate to build standards of accountability before those norms are defined elsewhere?

Guiding Questions

- What risks emerge when civic groups or even governments rely on AI models they cannot interrogate or influence?
- How do we distinguish between AI use that enhances democratic agency versus AI use that undermines it?
- What mechanisms—technical, legal, or civic—can help detect and prevent embedded censorship or manipulation in widely used AI systems?



- How can Asia-Pacific actors collaborate to define regional norms and accountability standards?

Moderator: **Daniel O'Maley**, *Director for Technology and Democracy, NED*

Presenters:

Keita Nishiyama, *Institute for Future, University of Tokyo*

Kyung-Shin Park, *Open Net Korea*

Julia Novrita, *Habibie Center, Indonesia*

Prateek Waghre, *Tech Global Institute, India*

11:30 – 11:40 Break

11:40 – 12:30 Roundtable Session with ROK government official on South Korea's leadership in AI policy (TBA)

moderated by **Dan Twining**, *President, International Republican Institute (TBC)*

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00 Session 2 – Civic Power and Public Purpose in the Age of AI

Across the Asia-Pacific, civic actors are not waiting for governments to define the future of AI—they are actively shaping it. From Taiwan's civic tech communities that have pioneered participatory tools and open data infrastructure, to Japan's digital civil society initiatives exploring localized AI applications, to South Korean organizations building policy engagement platforms and transparency tools, civil society is innovating in ways that embed democratic values into the technologies and processes reshaping public life. These efforts are not just about participation—they are about governance: determining how decisions are made, who gets to shape them, and what principles underpin their legitimacy.

As generative AI becomes more deeply integrated into how citizens organize, advocate, and interface with power, the stakes for democratic oversight are growing. Civic groups are often the first to experiment with these tools in politically meaningful ways—and also the first to encounter their limitations, biases, and harms. Yet civil society also has the potential to set new norms: on transparency, consent, representation, and the democratic use of data. Unlike many government-led efforts or corporate R&D, these innovations tend to emerge from grounded practice—closer to real needs, lived experience, and democratic purpose.

This session explores how civic actors across Asia-Pacific democracies are building democratic infrastructure for the AI era: not just tools, but values, practices, and community-led standards. It asks what lessons this region's civic innovations hold for others—and what kinds of support, networks, and protections are needed to ensure that civil society remains not just a user of AI, but a shaper of its trajectory. The session will also consider how new legislative frameworks like South Korea's Basic Act on AI (2024) and Japan's Act on Promotion of Research and



Development and Utilization of Artificial Intelligence-Related Technologies (2025) bills may impact civil society's ability to operate freely and equitably in digital spaces.

Guiding Questions

- How are civic actors in the region using AI to support democratic participation, transparency, or oversight?
- What values or governance practices are emerging from grassroots experimentation with AI?
- What regional models of civic tech innovation might inform global debates on AI governance?
- How do national legislative frameworks (e.g., digital security laws, AI policy) constrain or enable civic innovation?

Moderator: **Seonhee Kim**, *Senior Research Fellow, Seoul National University Asia Center*

Presenters:

Isabel Hou, *Secretary General, AI Academy Foundation, Taiwan*

Nao Myoshu, *Code for Japan*

Thanisara Ruangdej, *WeVis, Co-founder and CEO, WeVis, Thailand*

Rossine Fallorina, *Sigla Research Center, Managing Director, Philippines*

15:00 – 15:15 Coffee Break

15:15 – 16:45 Session 3 -Aligning Asia-Pacific Democratic Leadership in AI Governance

The global debate over AI governance is accelerating, but democratic actors from the Asia-Pacific region remain underrepresented in many of the most influential international processes. While Europe has taken the lead on regulatory design, and the U.S. continues to dominate frontier model development, countries like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have distinct assets and experiences that could anchor more regionally grounded, democratic approaches to AI. Japan, for instance, has championed open-source development as a competitive strategy and was a key architect of the G7 Hiroshima Principles. South Korea has invested in AI-adjacent legislation through its economic security agenda and is exploring new institutional frameworks for digital governance. Taiwan, as a global semiconductor hub, plays an outsized role in the hardware supply chain that underpins AI—and brings a globally recognized civic tech ecosystem shaped by its democratic resilience.

Despite these strengths, coordination among the region's democracies remains limited. Without shared standards or joint advocacy, global governance frameworks risk being shaped by interests and values that do not reflect the region's democratic traditions. Moreover, less digitally advanced democracies across South and Southeast Asia often find themselves excluded from rule-setting processes and overdependent on tools and infrastructure developed elsewhere. If Asia-Pacific democracies want to shape the future of AI in a way that reflects transparency, rights, and accountability, stronger regional alignment will be essential.

This session will explore the possibilities for coordinated leadership among democratic actors in the region. What areas—technical, institutional, diplomatic—offer the greatest potential for alignment? How can democracies provide inclusive digital assistance to others in the region



without reinforcing dependency or extractive models? And how might a more strategic coalition of Asia-Pacific democracies influence global norms and mitigate authoritarian influence in the digital sphere?

Guiding Questions

- What strategic assets—technological, diplomatic, or normative—can Asia-Pacific democracies leverage to shape global AI governance?
- How can democratic actors coordinate more effectively across borders, while still reflecting local contexts and strengths?
- What role can civic actors play in ensuring international rulemaking reflects democratic values?
- How do we support meaningful inclusion of less digitally advanced democracies in global AI conversations?

Moderator: *Lynn Lee, Senior Director for East Asia and Strategic Partnerships, NED*

Presenters:

Hyung Du Choi, Member of ROK National Assembly

Takahiro Anno, Member of Japanese House of Councilors

Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Cyber Ambassador at Large

Soonmin Bae, KT AI2X Lab, Korea

16:45 – 17:15 Wrap up

This closing session will bring all participants together to reflect on the insights, questions, and tensions that emerged throughout the day. The discussion will provide space to articulate shared concerns, regional opportunities, and areas where further collaboration or inquiry is needed.

Moderator: **Shanthi Kalathil**, *Senior Fellow, University of Southern California*