



CONCEPT NOTE

# ASIA DEMOCRACY ASSEMBLY 2025

Defending Democracy, Mobilizing Movements, and New Frontiers for  
Citizen Action

*Bangkok, Thailand | November 1-3, 2025*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The **Asia Democracy Assembly (ADA)**, hosted by the Asia Democracy Network (ADN), is a regional dialogue platform for diverse democracy advocates to strengthen cooperation and engagements that promote and defend democratization in Asia. It is a space for dialogue, trust building, and knowledge sharing that aims to realize coordinated action and envisions advocacies that bring about greater freedoms, stronger democratic institutions and equitable development for the peoples of Asia. Its last iteration was held in Bangkok in 2023, which gathered around 300 of the region's pro-democracy leaders and stakeholders.

The ADA gathers various stakeholders to discuss challenges, and probe on possible ways to advance democratization in the region. This year, the ADA 2025 will be a part of a week-long gathering, which ADN will co-host with CIVICUS, called the "International Civil Society Week 2025". which highlights international solidarity, showcasing the resilience of pro-democratic movements, and sharing of practices to advance democratization and protect of democratic values.

The ADA will be an important venue to connect Asian grassroots pro-democracy movements and organized civil society organizations, with international pro-democracy networks and stakeholders. The ADA 2025 will be an important platform to highlight the situation of various pro-democracy movements and ongoing democratization efforts in Asia. ADN plans to maximize representation of various pro-democracy sectors and movements all over Asia. The topics and the format of the discussions will be designed to enable inclusive discussions, exchanges, planning, and collaboration among the region's active pro-democracy actors. The 2025 Assembly will serve as the launch point for the actions and collaborations identified during previous regional and national engagements, with the aim of making significant progress in regional pro-democracy advocacy and curbing the spread of autocracy in the region.



## II. REGIONAL SITUATION AND DISCUSSION THEMES

The ADA will be a crucial platform to discuss these challenges and find collective responses. At present, there is a growing political instability in the region, with the civil war in Myanmar remaining unresolved, the simmering territorial tensions in the South China Sea, border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia, China's aggressive influence peddling, and the Taliban's return in Afghanistan. At the same time, populist and nationalist rhetoric has become commonplace, expanding political and social divides. The prevailing funding shortage for democracy and human rights-related initiatives has also made it much more difficult for pro-democracy actors to sustain their advocacies, and placed them in an existential crisis.

The ADA, as a platform, will help in finding ways to break barriers among the stakeholders and enable frank conversations about existing programs, priority areas, and resources available that are needed to tackle regional concerns. These conversations will enable greater solidarity-building and catalyze efficient solution-making among the region's democracy stakeholders, given the plethora of issues they face.

A significant challenge to democracy in Asia is the spread of *securitized governance* and interference of armed forces in politics. Such interference undermines the democratic principles of civilian control and accountability, leading to a concentration of power in the hands of military leaders and hindering the growth of democratic institutions. Existing regional platforms must do more to prevent and negate the impact of militarized governance in Asia.

*Digital and media repression and the weaponization of disinformation* are also posing serious threats to democracy in the Asia Pacific region. Indonesia's 2024 Elections serve as a stark example, where deceptive narratives and messages contaminated the information environment, preventing citizens from making informed decisions. Repression of media outlets and attacks on freedom of expression further contribute to a shrinking space for open discourse and critical voices. The misuse of legislation to suppress dissent, as seen through strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), also adds to the erosion of democratic values.

Another concerning trend in Asia is the rise of ethnic nationalistic forces dominating party systems. These groups often employ *fundamentalist and intolerant rhetoric* to gain and consolidate power, endangering the principles of democracy and undermining the rights of minority groups. This form of politics not only threatens democratic inclusivity but also serves as a fertile ground for corruption under the guise of appealing to national or majority interests.

Despite these challenges, there is hope in the form of active youth engagement and pro-democracy efforts. Young people are increasingly emerging as a powerful force countering the negative outlook for democracy in the region. Their involvement in *youth-driven activism, climate change movements, and political leadership* showcases their growing influence and commitment to democratic values. Young individuals running for office also represent a positive



shift towards greater representation and inclusivity in politics. However, existing movements and organizations must create greater space and platforms for the youth to realize their great potential in driving democratic discourses.

Furthermore, the proliferation of repressive legislation in many Asian countries, turning the system more towards "rule by law" rather than "rule of law," presents a critical challenge to democratic freedoms. *Draconian laws and anti-democratic legislations*, such as lèse-majesté in Thailand or blasphemy laws in Pakistan and Bangladesh, are strictly enforced to suppress opposition and civil society organizations. Additionally, the imposition of stringent laws pertaining to online conduct further restricts citizens' rights and freedoms in the digital space.

In specific countries like Cambodia, Thailand, and Hong Kong, recent developments have highlighted the *fragility of democratic processes*. The barring of opposition parties from elections in Cambodia and the uncertain path to forming a new government in Thailand underscore the need for transparent and fair electoral systems. Meanwhile, the revival of security legislation in Hong Kong and the subsequent attempt to ban an unofficial anthem exemplify the shrinking space for dissent and expression under the influence of external powers.

In Afghanistan, the situation is particularly dire for women as the Taliban's restrictions on their rights have intensified since taking control of the country. *Women's rights activists, journalists, and dissenting voices are facing a perilous environment*, with arrests, closures of women-run institutions, and crackdowns on freedom of expression. This oppressive climate severely restricts women's participation in public life and poses grave risks to their safety and wellbeing.

The ADA will be crucial in addressing these themes to encourage regional cooperation and dialogue among Asian countries will facilitate knowledge sharing and collaborative efforts, contributing to more effective and sustainable solutions.

### **III. ASIA DEMOCRACY ASSEMBLY PROCESS**

This year the Asia Democracy Assembly will explore a unique approach when it comes to structure. For the Agenda, ADN plans to run the assembly with the following event components:

The ADA Main Assembly will be embedded within the program of the 4-day International Civil Society Week 2025. Building a people's movement to advance democratic promotion and defense, commemorating a decade of struggle for democracy in Asia, ADN will partner with like minded institutions to highlight challenges, successes, and opportunities for democracy promotion. The event will feature the following session formats:

Online and Pre-Assembly Sessions: These sessions will surface urgent thematic, sectoral, and country-level issues that ADN and partners wish to prioritize. These pre-assembly discussions



provide a curated space for ADN members and allies to explore deeper dialogue, coordination, and preparatory input for the main assembly discussions. Each session will be co-hosted with relevant partners and last 1 to 1.5 hours.

*Panel discussions* featuring democracy leaders and inspiring personalities. ADN aims to invite high-profile speakers to lead and facilitate conversations on the region's struggle for democracy and strategies to sustain the movements. This session is part of the plenary, providing inspiration and motivation to the audience through the lens of expert speakers related to the democracy movement. In this session, the host is expected to invite a set of selected experts to share their perspectives that can inform and support the audience's understanding of democracy. ADN aims to invite high-profile speakers to lead and facilitate conversations on the region's struggle for democracy and strategies for sustaining it.

*Thematic Discussions* are designed to foster a conducive environment for discussions and interactions among attendees, enabling collaborative efforts to defend and promote democracy through multi-stakeholder cooperation. It aims to set the agenda and produce recommendations and post assembly action points that are feasible across various sectoral issues. Furthermore, the session is expected to motivate the attendees (from different organizations) to gain awareness of different crises/challenges of democracy in Asia, and be able to motivate in taking part in solidarity actions.

*Pro-democracy Arts, Performances, and Movie Showcase*: A list of the live and few recorded art performances related to democracy and human rights are expected to be presented around the Assembly. In addition to that an exhibition will be displayed around the hall and conference venue, to enrich the audience's awareness of the democracy struggle condition and the voice of different movements in Asia through photos, music, and video display.

For more Information visit [www.adnasia.org](http://www.adnasia.org) or message us at [adn@adnasia.org](mailto:adn@adnasia.org).