



DAY I - 4 SEPTEMBER 2026

**CALD CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRATIC
RESILIENCE IN SOUTHEAST AND EAST ASIA**

OPENING SESSION

Time: 09:00–10:45

Venue: Conference Hall — Karaton Ballroom, 8th Floor

Emcee

Angelina Dewi, PDI Perjuangan

Opening Remarks

Cintya Amanda Labetta Arie Seno, PDI Perjuangan

Key Points:

- Democratic resilience requires continuous protection and practice; formal rights are not sufficient when citizens' voices remain unheard.
- Disinformation, manipulation of public discourse, intimidation, and unequal representation undermine meaningful participation, particularly among women and young people.
- Political parties should provide women and youth with meaningful responsibilities while strengthening sustained regional cooperation to defend democracy.

Video Message

Florencio “Butch” Abad

Key Points:

- Liberal democracy weakens when it fails to deliver shared prosperity and meaningful participation, or to prevent the concentration of power.
- Drawing on Daron Acemoglu, the message emphasized the importance of good jobs, effective public services, reduced inequality, community and self-government, and a shared narrative.

Opening Remarks

Moritz Kleine-Brockhoff

Key Points:

- Democratic progress cannot be taken for granted; democratic backsliding and populist threats affect Asia as well as established democracies such as Germany.
- Political parties and democrats have a central responsibility to defend democratic values rather than assuming that past democratic gains will sustain themselves.
- “Democracies need democrats” became a central framing for the conference.

Keynote Address

Hasto Kristiyanto, PDI Perjuangan

Key Points:

- Authoritarian populism exploits declining public trust, weakens checks and balances, and can present a trade-off between freedom and order.
- Hasto identified strategic leadership, ideology, and party institutionalization as three key foundations of party resilience.
- He called for a stronger rule of law, democratic internal party institutions, cadre development, orderly succession, a vibrant civil society, reliable public information, and meaningful participation.
- Democracy must also deliver social justice in both political and economic life; institutionalized parties should outlast individuals through stable, predictable, and rule-based processes.

Overall Opening Takeaway

- Democratic resilience requires institutions that constrain power, political parties that enable meaningful participation, and citizens who experience freedom alongside economic security and social justice.
- The opening connected democratic resilience with youth and women's participation, socioeconomic delivery, the rule of law, party institutionalization, and regional cooperation.

SESSION I

Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding in Southeast Asia

Time: 11:15–12:30

Venue: Conference Hall — Karaton Ballroom, 8th Floor

Moderator

Trinity Pham

Key Points / Framing of Discussion:

- The session examined how democratic backsliding can emerge through the interaction of courts, parliaments, budgets, and political parties, often through gradual steps that appear legal or normal.
- The discussion connected institutional erosion with electoral incentives, patronage, disinformation, political polarization, international pressures, and citizens' demands for stability and economic security.

Speaker 1

Andi Widjajanto, PDI Perjuangan

Key Points:

- Great-power competition can alter national incentives and put democracy at risk when strategic loyalty is prioritized over democratic principles.
- External pressure matters, but domestic political actors remain responsible for institutional choices, including security policy, legislation, and political appointments.
- Technology and AI-enabled surveillance and censorship can lower the cost of repression, while international ties can reduce the consequences of violating democratic norms.
- Democratic resilience therefore requires domestic political will, social strength, and meaningful participation, including stronger roles for women.

Speaker 2

Lorenzo “Erin” Tanada

Key Points:

- Democratic backsliding can hollow out institutions from within through the weaponization of law, weakened checks and balances, populist polarization, and disinformation.
- Weak, personality-centered parties create openings for illiberal leaders; political parties therefore need year-round organization, internal democracy, policy capacity, and clear leadership pathways for women and youth.
- Strong civil-society coalitions, independent media, economic justice, and regional solidarity are necessary to resist the normalization of authoritarianism.

Speaker 3

Isra Sunthornvut

Key Points:

- Democracy can be undermined through “institutional coups,” constitutional loopholes, and the exploitation of legal procedures—not only through military coups.
- Thailand illustrates the tension between the letter and spirit of constitutional rules, including the mechanisms for Senate selection and appointment.
- Democratic parties must consider whether their messages resonate with voters who prioritize stability, jobs, household finances, and material security.



Key Takeaway

Democratic backsliding often occurs through existing institutions; resilience therefore requires effective constraints on power and an organized democratic constituency capable of connecting democratic principles with everyday needs.



Q&A SESSION — SESSION I

Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding in Southeast Asia

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: Setting aside the legal merits, how does the possibility of court-ordered dissolution affect a political party's campaigning and conduct?

Answer: Isra Sunthornvut emphasized that constitutional courts have an important accountability function. He argued that parties should operate under common rules and that evidence of violations may emerge through watchdogs or whistleblowers. He also stressed the importance of applying judicial standards consistently and cautioned against blanket attacks on the courts.

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: Can procedural rulings themselves become a mechanism of democratic backsliding, or are courts simply performing their judicial function?

Answer: Lorenzo "Erin" Tanada argued that judicial independence must be assessed case by case. He highlighted the danger of procedural loopholes and, more broadly, the weaponization of law through weakly supported cases used to intimidate citizens, political parties, legislators, and critics.

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: Has Congress been unable to enact anti-dynasty legislation, or unwilling to do so, particularly given lawmakers' own political interests?

Answer: Erin attributed the lack of progress largely to political self-interest, noting that lawmakers from political dynasties have little incentive to restrict their own families. He also warned that legislative loopholes could allow dynasties to continue under different forms. As an alternative, he pointed to civil-society and church support for citizen-led initiatives.

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: Is the problem with Thailand's Senate how it exercises its powers, how senators are selected, or both?

Answer: Isra argued that both the selection process and the exercise of power are problematic. He highlighted the Senate's influence over the appointment of independent institutions and constitutional change, as well as loopholes in the indirect selection system that can enable political allies to enter the institution.

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: When legislators depend on presidential funding for local projects, how can the legislature effectively check the executive?

Answer: Erin explained that legislators may align themselves with the president because they depend on government resources and benefits for their constituencies and electoral survival. This dependence makes effective legislative accountability difficult.

Questioner: Trinity Pham, Moderator

Question: How does Indonesia's broad governing coalition, or "party cartel," operate when ministries also control budgets, appointments, and contracts?

Answer: Andi Widjajanto described Indonesian governing coalitions as highly fluid, particularly across presidential and local elections. He noted that a broad governing coalition does not necessarily translate into stable public approval, and that new political contenders may still emerge from within the broader governing political environment.



Questioner: Antonius Havik Indradi, FISIPOL UGM

Question: Can republican or citizenship education strengthen internal democratic resilience, the rule of law, and meaningful legislation? How can political parties build citizenship literacy among Indonesians?

Answer: Andi connected citizenship literacy with new forms of democratic contestation. He highlighted social-media satire as a possible means of resisting attempts to control political discourse, while noting that global markets, reputational pressure, and artificial intelligence can influence both democratic expression and repression.

Questioner: Suzie Xuven Dona, Viet Tan

Question: How can democratic movements address psychological wounds and mistrust that make people vulnerable to populist and authoritarian messaging?

Answer: Erin emphasized the importance of strong civil-society participation, coalition-building, and active responses to disinformation. He warned that when repeated falsehoods go unanswered, authoritarian populists can gradually dominate political discourse and turn repetition into accepted belief.



SESSION II

Holding the Line: Democratic Resilience and Institutional Safeguards in Asia

Time: 14:00–15:30

Venue: Conference Hall — Karaton Ballroom, 8th Floor

Moderator

Samady Ou

Key Points / Framing of Discussion:

- The session explored how democracies respond under pressure, emphasizing the gap between seemingly healthy elections and weakened courts, political parties, media, and constitutional safeguards.
- Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan provided comparative cases of institutional resilience under different forms of democratic pressure.

Speaker 1

Putra Nababan, PDI Perjuangan

Key Points:

- Putra identified executive dominance, institutional vulnerability, patronage and political dynasties, money politics, weakened party functions, and shrinking civic space as major indicators of democratic decline.
- At the same time, free and competitive elections, an active civil society, press and digital oversight, institutional checks, and a Pancasila-based civic culture remain important sources of resilience.
- He emphasized the need for party institutional reform, stronger oversight bodies, and the protection of civic space through multi-actor collaboration.

Speaker 2

Byoungyoon Kim

Key Points:

- South Korea's response to the December 2024 martial-law crisis was presented as "Democracy at Work," demonstrating how constitutional safeguards, legislative action, and citizen mobilization can operate under pressure.
- Article 77, impeachment, judicial review, and citizen mobilization helped reverse executive overreach, while the transition to a special election demonstrated institutional continuity.
- Remaining vulnerabilities include political polarization, youth disengagement, the erosion of constitutional norms, and the risk of major parties absorbing independent civil society.

Speaker 3

Shu Sakurai

Key Points:

- Japan was presented as a case of gradual democratic erosion, in which voter resilience, political morality, media quality, and active citizenship serve as critical safeguards.
- Politically neutral security institutions and trusted elections and courts remain strengths, while declining press freedom, political disengagement, and weakening democratic restraint pose risks.
- AI-enabled disinformation can intensify political apathy and cynicism; a strong opposition, independent journalism, civic education, and fact-based reporting can help break this cycle.

Speaker 4
Alysa Chiu

Key Points:

- Taiwan's resilience rests on institutional checks and balances, a vibrant civil society, and collective confidence and mutual trust.
- Political gridlock and external hybrid pressure create vulnerabilities, while recall movements, youth participation, transparent elections, media literacy, and civil-defense preparedness strengthen civic resilience.
- Transparency, international networks, and international recognition are important in countering disinformation, isolation, and external pressure.



Key Takeaway

Institutional safeguards are effective only when political actors respect democratic norms and citizens remain organized, informed, and willing to activate those safeguards.



Q&A SESSION — SESSION II

Holding the Line: Democratic Resilience and Institutional Safeguards in Asia

Questioner: Samady Ou, Moderator

Question: How can different democracies withstand and respond to pressures on their democratic institutions, and what institutional safeguards can prevent democratic backsliding?

Answer: The session examined four comparative experiences—Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The discussion highlighted constitutional checks and balances, legislative oversight, independent courts, credible elections, politically neutral security institutions, independent journalism, civil-society mobilization, and informed citizen participation as key safeguards. The speakers also emphasized that formal institutions alone are insufficient; their effectiveness depends on political actors respecting democratic norms and citizens remaining engaged.

Questioner: Mr. Wijaya, Indonesia

Question: How is democracy in Taiwan different from democracy in Indonesia today?

Answer: Taiwan faces a particularly difficult challenge because its democracy operates under significant external political, economic, information, and military pressure from the People's Republic of China. Alysia Chiu emphasized that Taiwan is not a perfect democracy but possesses democratic resilience, which must come from informed and engaged citizens and a strong civil society.

For Indonesia, the lesson is that democracy should not only be understood as holding elections every five years. It also requires strong institutions, transparency, freedom of information, independent civil society, political participation, respect for human rights, and the ability of citizens to hold government accountable.

Taiwan has also developed mechanisms for democratic participation and parliamentary accountability, including constitutional mechanisms, digital monitoring, and popular participation such as recall elections and social mobilization. Indonesia can learn from Taiwan's use of digital technology, civil society, and citizen participation, while Taiwan can also learn from Indonesia's experience as a large, pluralistic democracy managing differences in religion, ethnicity, geography, and political interests.

Questioner: Mr. Wijaya, Indonesia

Question: What is the relationship between democracy in Taiwan and China today, and what could happen tomorrow?

Answer: Alysia Chiu explained that the relationship between Taiwan and China is complicated because it involves not only political systems, but also history, national identity, sovereignty, security, economics, and the future of peace in the Indo-Pacific.

Taiwan's experience provides an important lesson for Indonesia: democracy must be protected not only during elections, but every day through strong institutions, an informed society, freedom of expression, political participation, transparency, and respect for human rights. At the same time, Indonesia's experience shows that democracy can survive and develop in a country with extraordinary cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity—an experience Indonesia can share with Taiwan and other democratic societies in Asia.

SESSION III

Fortifying Democracy: From Backsliding to Resilience

Time: 15:45–17:00

Venue: Conference Hall — Karaton Ballroom, 8th Floor

Moderator

Rahma Nur Agnitya Charliyan, PDI Perjuangan

Key Points / Framing of Discussion:

- The session moved beyond diagnosing democratic erosion to identifying how political parties and civil society can rebuild democratic resilience.
- The moderator emphasized that institutions alone are insufficient; democratic resilience also depends on democratic values, participation, civic courage, and the people who sustain those institutions.

Speaker 1

Sukidi, Ph.D.

Key Points:

- Sukidi described Indonesia as experiencing democratic backsliding through executive overreach, selective and weaponized law enforcement, divisive politics, economic inequality, and exclusion from policy and economic decision-making.
- He argued for restoring power to the people and re-anchoring democracy in Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, social justice, checks and balances, the rule of law, and inclusive participation.
- He called for civil resistance and the courage to speak truth to power, particularly in confronting militarism and exclusionary politics.

Speaker 2

Chee Soon Juan

Key Points:

- Chee argued that democratic resilience must address economic insecurity, social mobility, and people's aspirations for their families alongside strong institutions.
- He distinguished development from GDP growth alone and emphasized citizens' everyday concerns, including jobs, opportunities for advancement, family security, and the ability to improve their circumstances.
- Political parties should understand citizens' psychology and anxieties and connect democratic governance with tangible socioeconomic opportunities, particularly amid AI-driven and geopolitical uncertainty.



Key Takeaway

Democratic resilience is built by continuously strengthening institutions, democratic values, and the people and civic organizations that give those institutions life.



Q&A SESSION — SESSION III

Fortifying Democracy: From Backsliding to Resilience

Questioner: Angie Natesha Goenadi Go

Question: How can civil society, especially women and the younger generation, strengthen solidarity and courage across Southeast Asia to protect democracy and encourage people to speak up without fear of intimidation?

Answer: Dr. Sukidi emphasized the importance of civil resistance, courage to speak truth to power, and active civic engagement. He argued that civil society must have the courage to resist authoritarianism and militarism, particularly in times of crisis when remaining silent can amount to surrender.

Questioner: Angie Natesha Goenadi Go

Question: For political parties committed to democratic values, how can we work together across borders to strengthen democratic resilience and ensure that democracy remains rooted in people's interests and participation?

Answer: The discussion emphasized the importance of cross-border solidarity and cooperation among democratic actors. Political parties should work together while maintaining meaningful participation by citizens and preserving an active role for civil society.

Questioner: Angie Natesha Goenadi Go

Question: How can we counter the rise of militarism, particularly when military dominance risks undermining humanism, human rights, social justice, and Pancasila?

Answer: Dr. Sukidi argued that civil society must reject militarism and that the military's role should be limited to national defense. He stressed the importance of civic courage, speaking truth to power, and peaceful civil resistance against authoritarianism.

Questioner: Tara Fong, Singapore

Question: Many people view Singapore as a gold standard or blueprint for development. How would you respond to this perception, and what is the other side of the Singapore story?

Answer: Dr. Chee Soon Juan challenged the perception of Singapore as an uncomplicated success model. He highlighted issues related to economic inequality, social mobility, financial secrecy, and the broader relationship between economic security and political stability. He also emphasized that democratic parties need to understand citizens' everyday concerns, aspirations, and economic anxieties rather than focusing only on constitutional and institutional issues.

CLOSING REMARKS

Time: 17:00

Speaker: Lito Arlegue

Venue: Conference Hall — Karaton Ballroom, 8th Floor

Key Points

- Asia faces serious democratic backsliding—from authoritarian populism and low political efficacy to institutional constraints, political dynasties, and increasingly authoritarian trajectories—but democracy is not finished.
- Taiwan and South Korea were highlighted as examples showing that strong institutions, public support, and committed citizens can counter democratic regression.

Closing Message

Liberals and democrats were called to “reform, revive, and reimagine democracy” so that it delivers shared prosperity, shared power, dignity, and meaningful participation.

WELCOME DINNER

Time: 18:30

Venue: Pendopo Krido Manunggal Budaya

Highlights

The Welcome Dinner provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere for participants to connect and strengthen team bonding. The evening also offered an opportunity to experience local culture through a traditional dance performance, while enjoying the warm hospitality extended by the host.

Key Conversations / Statements

The dinner was primarily a social and networking occasion, allowing participants from different countries and delegations to engage in informal conversations and get to know one another beyond the conference sessions.

Networking / Engagement

Participants engaged in informal networking and team bonding throughout the evening. The traditional dance performance and warm welcome from the host provided a meaningful introduction to the local culture and fostered a warm, friendly, and collegial atmosphere among participants.