



Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum 2024

June 9-12, 2024

JCIE Democracy for the Future Project hosted the Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum 2024 from June 9 to 12, 2024, in Tokyo, Japan, brought together an inspiring group of young leaders and activists from the Indo-Pacific region and Japan. The forum's theme was "The Role of Asian Youth in Achieving a Healthy Society: Democracy and the Digital Frontier," and its primary objective was to explore how youth can contribute to fostering a healthy society through democratic engagement and innovative use of digital tools. Through four days of intense discussions, the participants identified key findings and developed an action plan, capturing the dynamic and collaborative spirit of the event.

Background

The Retreat of Democracy and the Power of Youth

In recent years, the global decline of democracy has become a prominent concern. The V-Dem Institute's "Democracy Report 2023" indicated that 72% of the world's population (5.7 billion people) live under authoritarian regimes. The Indo-Pacific region, in particular, has seen a resurgence of authoritarianism, constraining civic space for democracy advocates.

In the face of this challenge, we can place hope in young people, who have historically led social change, especially in Asia's democratic movements of the 1980s. The future of democracy depends on empowering this generation of young leaders by strengthening their knowledge, integrating their voices into politics, and supporting their movements.

In an era of rapidly advancing technology, digital platforms are critical for advancing democratic ideals among youth. These platforms enable young people to connect, collaborate, and mobilize across borders. Leveraging digital technology to amplify youth voices, promote inclusive dialogue, and enhance transparency in governance is essential for fostering a participatory and responsive democracy.

The Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum aimed to explore strategies at the intersection of digital technology, youth empowerment, and democracy, empowering youth to drive positive change and uphold democratic principles for a brighter future.

Plenary Session (June 10)

The Forum began with a morning group discussion on the following topics:

What constitutes a Healthy Society for Youth

Participants from various countries and region shared their perspectives on what constitutes a healthy society for youth. These presentations underscored the common themes of strengthening civic education, promoting political participation, and improving access to information as essential components of a healthy society for youth across different regions.

Youth Political Awareness and Action in Asia

The Forum also introduced findings from JCIE's 2023 survey on "Interests and Attitudes Toward Politics amongst the Younger Generation in 10 Asian Countries and Region," which illustrated the varying levels of political engagement among youth across the region.

The survey highlighted both challenges and opportunities for increasing youth participation. While some countries exhibited high levels of political interest and activism among young people, others faced significant barriers such as political apathy, lack of access to information, and restrictive political environments.

These presentations and survey findings provided valuable context for subsequent discussions and underscored the need for unique-to-youth strategies to enhance youth engagement in different contexts.

Workshop Discussions (June 10)

Participants then divided into three thematic working groups to dive deeper into specific issues as summarized below.



"Civic Education in the Digital Age"

This group emphasized the need for comprehensive civic education programs that include digital literacy components. Participants discussed expanding civic education to educate citizens about the responsible use of digital spaces and the importance of digital rights. The discussions highlighted the role of civic education in fostering informed and engaged citizens who can participate meaningfully in democratic processes.

"Youth Voices and Political Responses – The Role of Digital Tools"

This group explored how digital tools can amplify youth voices and facilitate political responses. The discussions covered the benefits and challenges of digital engagement, including how digital platforms can make political participation more accessible and inclusive. Participants also noted the risks of digital surveillance, misinformation, and echo chambers that reinforce existing biases. The group called for strategies to mitigate these risks while maximizing the potential of digital tools to enhance democratic engagement.

"How Youth Cope with Information Overload in the Digital Age"

This group examined the phenomenon of information overload and its implications for youth engagement. They identified key stakeholders, including government bodies, individuals, the private sector, traditional media, and NGOs, and discussed their roles in managing information overload. They emphasized the importance of promoting digital literacy, encouraging critical thinking, and developing tools and policies to help individuals navigate the vast amount of information available online.

Dialogue with the Milk Tea Alliance Japan and Developing an Action Plan (June 11)

On June 11, the youth leaders met with members of the Milk Tea Alliance Japan at the Global Governance Research Center, Hitotsubashi University. This MTA project involves democracy and human rights activists from Myanmar, Thailand, Hong Kong, and other countries opposing oppressive governments. The MTA Japan participants presented on human rights violations, challenges, and goals in the Indo-Pacific region. The discussion highlighted that human rights violations are international threats, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among activists, especially young people, to improve democracy and human rights in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the afternoon, workshop discussion leaders synthesized their findings and developed a concrete action plan for forum participants.

International Symposium (June 12)

On June 12, JCIE Democracy for the Future Project hosted an international symposium at the International Conference Hall Diet Members' Building to present the findings of the three working groups and youth action plans.

The public symposium highlighted the crucial role of young leaders in politics and policymaking, highlighting that the future of democracy relies on the active participation of young people. The importance of fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to address contemporary challenges was emphasized, along with the potential of digital tools to enhance civic participation and democratize access to information. The symposium also recognized the energy and creativity necessary to drive progressive reforms and tackle pressing social issues as key attributes of youth. The discussions further stressed the importance of incorporating young voices into political discourse and acknowledged the challenges faced by young activists, such as political marginalization and limited access to decision-making platforms.



Action Plan

As an outcome of the Forum, participants presented the following action plan, focusing on the two key areas, to ensure that they will be able to carry forward the results of the discussion and continue to have an impact in the future.

Building Solidarity through Developing a Cross Border Youth Democracy Network

Participants proposed formalizing their network to connect stakeholders across borders through the following:

- Establishing a regular forum like the Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum, either digitally or non-digitally, where young people can regularly communicate, share updates, and collaborate on projects. This platform will serve as a central hub for ongoing engagement and support, ensuring that the relationships established during the forum continue to flourish.
- Organizing regular virtual meetings or check-ins to discuss ongoing initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. These meetings will help maintain momentum and ensure continuous progress.
- Developing a mechanism to report back to the larger group on further collaboration that takes place in the aftermath of the forum. Such reporting will help motivate participants to continue working together.
- Exploring avenues for expanding the youth network in the future by connecting with participants in any future activities. We will also consider carrying out a mapping survey, if funding allows, to identify further youth networks in the region, which can be connected to our work.

Strengthening Civic Education through Sharing Lessons Across the Region

As a concrete first step, participants called for creating a task force aimed at sharing lessons from across the region on developing civic education, which achieves the following:

- Informing young people of their rights, including those outlined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, and those enumerated in the constitutions of their respective countries and regions, and encouraging young people to hold their government accountable in respecting and protecting those rights.
- Expanding beyond explaining the structure and function of a country's institutions of government, to also provide a path towards civic engagement. For example, through explaining to young people how to become civic actors, whether through detailing how they might become involved in a political party or by suggesting other avenues for making their political voices heard.
- Extending beyond the classroom to be practiced at a grassroots level so that in situations where a government is not upholding its commitments to protect the rights of its citizens there are alternative public spaces where civic education can take place.

Conclusion

The Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum 2024 marked a significant milestone in promoting youth engagement and democracy across the Indo-Pacific region. The event fostered meaningful discussions, developed actionable plans, and established a foundation for ongoing collaboration. As participants return to their countries and region, the connections and collaborations formed at the forum will drive their efforts to create positive change. This event vividly demonstrated the potential of youth to lead and shape the future of democracy. The forum's success lay in its ability to bring together a diverse and passionate group of young leaders committed to advancing democracy and creating healthy societies. The spirit of cooperation and commitment to positive change fostered at the forum will continue to inspire and drive these young leaders as they work to build a brighter and more democratic future.

Participants

Participants are representing a diverse array of countries and region, including Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan and the United States.

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