

# Asian Schools

## Working Papers

### *Series*



## *Ethical AI Framework for Inclusive Democracy in Southeast Asia*

Catherine Setiawan

AI Researcher at the Digital Futures Lab. The views expressed  
in this paper are her own: [catherine.setiawan@gmail.com](mailto:catherine.setiawan@gmail.com)

Working  
Paper **#9**

## Ethical AI Framework for Inclusive Democracy in Southeast Asia

**Author:** Catherine Setiawan

### Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a powerful tool. It has changed so many aspects of society, including democracy and the systems of governance that surround it. AI can be useful to democracy and will improve democratic processes, especially it could help in giving better understanding of politics to citizens and make them engage more easily in democratic processes. AI could also promote and strengthen democracy in an efficient way. Despite the positive AI prospect for democracy, there are also some risks that AI could generate false information, or spread a bias or opinions that lead to disinformation and misinformation. It is imperative to apply proper standards and safeguards, so that AI could provide an opportunity to improve the democratic process, and by eliminating its risks. The Southeast Asia governments just published a guideline for AI standards and safeguards for AI governance and ethics. It is the right timing to promote the use of trustworthy, transparent and accountable AI systems, especially for a better and inclusive democracy in the region. With that consideration, this paper will analyze further the relation of AI and Democracy, and whether the ASEAN AI Ethical Framework promotes inclusive democracy in the region.

### Keywords:

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Democracy, Ethical, Southeast Asia, Inclusive Society

## INTRODUCTION

The speedy expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is paving the way for economic development and societal progress in Southeast Asia. Across the region, there's a noticeable increase in AI-driven innovation, with governments, businesses, and civil society increasingly investing in AI to enhance efficiency, productivity, and innovation. According to AT Kearney, by 2025, a majority of ASEAN's population will be digital natives proficient in utilizing advanced technology, particularly AI, to enhance various aspects of their lives. Predictions indicate that AI will play a pivotal role in shaping Southeast Asia's future, with its overall impact expected to reach nearly 1 trillion USD across the region by 2030 (See Graph. 1 in the Appendix).<sup>1</sup>

Not only in economic conditions, AI has also transformed various other aspects of society, including democracy and its governance systems.<sup>2</sup> AI tools and platforms play a crucial role in enhancing democratic processes by increasing government transparency, improving public service delivery, encouraging citizen engagement, and ensuring accountability. Through tasks like data analysis, decision-making support, and personalized service delivery, governments can streamline operations, boost efficiency, and better cater to citizen needs. Moreover, public AI initiatives empower citizens by providing access to information, enabling informed decision-making, facilitating participation in governance processes, and ensuring leaders are held accountable. In essence, by transparently and inclusively harnessing AI's capabilities, governments can foster greater trust, participation, and responsiveness within democratic systems.

Despite the positive AI prospect for democracy, concerns are growing that AI could undermine democracy. Critics fear that AI will eliminate jobs, disrupt the economy, and exacerbate income inequality,<sup>3</sup> which could further centralize power within a small group of technology companies and erode the effectiveness of government regulations designed to oversee them. Additionally, there are also some risks that AI could generate false information, or spread a bias or opinions that lead to disinformation and misinformation. It is imperative to apply proper standards and safeguards, so that AI could provide an opportunity to improve the democratic process, and by eliminating its risks.

Ensuring that AI benefits all, requires a focus on the ethical use of AI. This paper examines how ethical AI contributes to inclusive democracy in the region, highlighting the importance of ethical governance for fostering inclusivity. This paper overviews ethical AI in Southeast Asia, namely the newly published

---

1 Chua, Soon Ghee, and Dobberstein, Nikolai, "Racing Toward the Future: Artificial Intelligence in Southeast Asia." Kearney Middle East (October 7, 2020) <https://www.middle-east.kearney.com/digital-transformation/article/-/insights/racing-toward-the-future-artificial-intelligence-in-southeast-asia/> (Accessed on March 20, 2024).

2 Sanders, Nathan, Schneier, Bruce and Eisen, Norman, "How Public AI Can Strengthen Democracy", Brookings Institution (March 4, 2024), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-public-ai-can-strengthen-democracy/> (Accessed on April 3, 2024).

3 Giorgieva, Kristalina, "AI Will Transform the Global Economy. Let's Make Sure It Benefits Humanity," IMF Blog, (January 14, 2024) <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity> (Accessed on March 2, 2024).

ASEAN ethical framework for AI and its elements. Ethical AI frameworks prioritize upholding fundamental human rights such as privacy, nondiscrimination, and autonomy. By integrating principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness into the development and deployment of AI, policymakers can reduce potential harms and build trust among stakeholders. It's also essential to address biases and inequalities inherent in AI systems to promote inclusivity in democracy. It is hoped that the newly published ASEAN ethical framework is sufficient enough to guide inclusive democracy in the region.

The methodology used in this paper entails a comprehensive approach that includes literature review, case study and policy analysis. The main methods used in this paper is a desk review of ASEAN AI ethical framework and some literature related on ethical AI and inclusive democracy. These methods will provide a foundational understanding of the key concepts, debates, and challenges in the field, also a holistic understanding of the ethical considerations surrounding AI deployment and its implications for inclusive democracy in Southeast Asia. This paper also utilizes data, such as surveys or statistical reports, to assess the current state of AI economic development in Southeast Asia and democracy index. Lastly, this paper also evaluates existing AI policies and frameworks in Southeast Asia to assess their alignment with ethical principles. At the end, this paper expects policymakers to prioritize the integration of ethical principles into AI governance frameworks, as it would ultimately be beneficial to the creation of an enabling environment that drives inclusive democracy in Southeast Asia.

## BACKGROUND

### AI Policy in Southeast Asia

Before going deeply into the ethical AI aspect, it is important to firstly define AI. We know that AI is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. The International Telecommunication Union<sup>4</sup> further mentioned that *"AI comprises a rich set of methods and disciplines, including vision, perception, speech and dialogue, decisions and planning, problem-solving, robotics and other applications that enable self-learning. AI is best viewed as a set of technologies and techniques used to complement traditional human attributes, such as intelligence, analytical ability and other capabilities. AI, Machine Learning (ML) and modern data techniques have been greatly enabled by recent advances in computer processing, power and speed, and advances in AI depend in turn on advances in data techniques."*

---

4 ITU, Artificial Intelligence for Good (2023), <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/artificial-intelligence-for-good.aspx>. (Accessed on March 20, 2024)

*Table 1. Various approaches to defining AI*

In terms of..	Examples
Technologies, techniques and/ or approaches	A neural network approach to machine translation
<i>Purpose</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Facial Recognition</i></li> <li>• <i>Image Recognition</i></li> </ul>
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to understand language</li> <li>• Recognize pictures</li> <li>• Solve problem</li> <li>• Learning according to Cambridge Dictionary</li> </ul>
Agents or machines or algorithms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Robots</i></li> <li>• <i>Self-driving car</i></li> </ul>

Source: ITU (2023)

Most ASEAN member states have launched or are in the process of developing national AI strategies and governance frameworks. Singapore launched its National Artificial Intelligence Strategy in November 2019,<sup>5</sup> with the vision of becoming a leading global AI player by 2030. Thailand’s Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry has drafted the country’s first AI ethics guideline.<sup>6</sup> Indonesia released its national AI strategy in mid-2020, which emphasizes on the importance of ethics as one of key components of a well-functioning AI ecosystem.<sup>7</sup> Malaysia<sup>8</sup> and the Philippines had launched their AI roadmap in 2021.<sup>9</sup> But so far, only Singapore<sup>10</sup> Thailand<sup>11</sup> and Indonesia<sup>12</sup> that already have their own specific AI ethical guideline.

5 Smart Nation Singapore, National AI Strategy (2019) <https://www.smartnation.gov.sg/files/publications/national-ai-strategy.pdf>

6 Thailand Digital Economy and Society Ministry, Thailand AI Ethics Guideline (2019) <https://www.etda.or.th/getattachment/9d370f25-f37a-4b7c-b661-48d2d730651d/Digital-Thailand-AI-Ethics-Principle-and-Guideline.pdf.aspx?lang=th-TH>

7 BPPT, Indonesia National Strategy on AI (2020), <https://ai-innovation.id/server/static/ebook/stranas-ka.pdf>

8 Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Malaysia, Malaysia AI Roadmap, 2021 <https://ai-innovation.id/server/static/ebook/stranas-ka.pdf>

9 Department Trade and Industry Philippines, National AI Roadmap (2021), <https://innovate.dti.gov.ph/resources/roadmaps/artificial-intelligence/>

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Informatics (MOCI), Circular Letter No. 9 of 2023 on AI Ethical Guidelines, issued on December 19, 2023.

Southeast Asia as a region just recently published its own AI Ethical Framework.<sup>13</sup> The Framework define AI<sup>14</sup> as an engineered or machine-based system that can, for a given set of objectives, generate outputs such as predictions, recommendations, or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. The framework further mentioned seven guiding principles to ensure trust in AI and the design, development, and deployment of ethical AI systems in ways which consider the broader societal impact, namely principle of transparency and explainability; fairness and equity; security and safety; human centricity; privacy and data governance; accountability and integrity; and robustness and reliability. Details can be seen in table 2 below.

*Table 2. Guiding Principles for Ethical AI*

Guiding Principles	Explanation
Transparency and Explainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency refers to providing disclosure on when an AI system is being used and the involvement of an AI system in decision-making, what kind of data it uses, and its purpose. By disclosing to individuals that AI is used in the system, individuals will become aware and can make an informed choice of whether to use the AI enabled system.</li> <li>• Explainability refers to the capacity to clarify the rationale behind the decision made by an AI system in a manner that is comprehensible to various individuals. Often, it's not evident how an AI system has reached a specific conclusion. Ensuring explainability enables people to understand the factors influencing the AI system's recommendation.</li> </ul>
Fairness and Equity	<p>Deployers should have safeguards in place to ensure that algorithmic decisions do not further exacerbate or amplify existing discriminatory or unjust impacts across different demographics and the design, development, and deployment of AI systems should not result in unfair biasness or discrimination. An example of such safeguards would include human interventions and checks on the algorithms and its outputs. Deployers of AI systems should conduct regular testing of such systems to confirm if there is bias and where bias is confirmed, make the necessary adjustments to rectify imbalances to ensure equity.</p>



13 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics (2024), [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ASEAN-Guide-on-AI-Governance-and-Ethics\\_beautified\\_201223\\_v2.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ASEAN-Guide-on-AI-Governance-and-Ethics_beautified_201223_v2.pdf)

14 Ibid, page 9.



<p>Security and Safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security refers to ensuring the cybersecurity of AI systems, which includes mechanisms against malicious attacks specific to AI such as data poisoning, model inversion, the tampering of datasets, byzantine attacks in federated learning, as well as other attacks designed to reverse engineer personal data used to train the AI.</li> <li>• Safety refers to ensuring the safety of developers, deployers, and users of AI systems by conducting impact or risk assessments and ensuring that known risks have been identified and mitigated. A risk prevention approach should be adopted, and precautions should be put in place so that humans can intervene to prevent harm, or the system can safely disengage itself in the event an AI system makes unsafe decisions - autonomous vehicles that cause injury to pedestrians are an illustration of this. Ensuring that AI systems are safe is essential to fostering public trust in AI.</li> </ul>
<p>Human Centricity</p>	<p>AI systems should respect human-centered values and pursue benefits for human society, including human beings' well-being, nutrition, happiness, etc.</p>
<p>Privacy and Data Governance</p>	<p>Data privacy and protection should be respected and upheld during the design, development, and deployment of AI systems. The way data is collected, stored, generated, and deleted throughout the AI system lifecycle must comply with applicable data protection laws, data governance legislation, and ethical principles. Some data protection and privacy laws in ASEAN include Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act 2010, the Philippines' Data Privacy Act of 2012, Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act 2012, Thailand's Personal Data Protection Act 2019, Indonesia's Personal Data Protection Law 2022, and Vietnam's Personal Data Protection Decree 2023.</p>
<p>Accountability and Integrity</p>	<p>There needs to be human accountability and control in the design, development, and deployment of AI systems. Deployers should be accountable for decisions made by AI systems and for the compliance with applicable laws and respect for AI ethics and principles. AI actors should act with integrity throughout the AI system lifecycle when designing, developing, and deploying AI systems.</p>
<p>Robustness and Reliability</p>	<p>AI systems should be sufficiently robust to cope with errors during execution and unexpected or erroneous input, or cope with stressful environmental conditions. It should also perform consistently. AI systems should, where possible, work reliably and have consistent results for a range of inputs and situations.</p>

Source: ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics (2024)

## Democracy in Southeast Asia: Is it Inclusive?

The term “democracy” was notably absent when the United Nations Charter was crafted in 1945. At that time, numerous UN Member States neither endorsed nor practiced democracy. Nevertheless, the Charter’s opening phrase, *“We the People,”* inherently embodies a core democratic principle that the legitimacy of sovereign states, and by extension the United Nations itself, stems from the collective will of the people.<sup>15</sup> Further, in a democratic system, human rights and fundamental freedoms are upheld, fostering an environment where the will of the people is freely expressed. Citizens actively participate in decision-making processes and have the power to hold leaders accountable. Democracy ensures gender equality, prohibiting discrimination and ensuring that both women and men enjoy equal rights. There are some essential elements of democracy according to the Commission on the human rights<sup>16</sup> included *“respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, freedom of association, freedom of expression and opinion, access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people, a pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, transparency and accountability in public administration, and a free, independent and pluralistic media.”*

A robust democracy plays a pivotal role in nurturing inclusive growth and development. Unfortunately, it is not easy to measure a countries’ level of democracy just by looking through the definition above. For clarity’s sake, this paper uses the degree of democracy, coming from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index.<sup>17</sup> This index classifies states as full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes to define the level of democracy in one’s countries. Details in the table below.

---

15 United Nations, “Democracy” <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy#:~:text=Democracy%20provides%20an%20environment%20that,people%20are%20free%20from%20discrimination> (accessed April 25, 2024).

16 OHCHR, “Commission on Human Rights Adopts Measures on Civil and Political Rights, Economic Rights, Rights of Women, and Children” Press Release (April 23, 2002), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2009/10/commission-human-rights-adopts-measures-civil-and-political-rights-economic> (Accessed April 23, 2024).

17 Economist Intelligence, Democracy Index 2023 (UK: The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2024).



*Table 3. The Economist Intelligence Unit: Level of Democracy*

Level of Democracy	Explanation
Full Democracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Countries in which not only basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected, but which also tend to be underpinned by a political culture conducive to the flourishing of democracy.</li> <li>• The functioning of the government is satisfactory.</li> <li>• Media are independent and diverse.</li> <li>• There is an effective system of checks and balances.</li> <li>• The judiciary is independent and judicial decisions are enforced.</li> <li>• There are only limited problems in the functioning of democracies</li> </ul>
Flawed Democracies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected.</li> <li>• However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.</li> </ul>
Hybrid Regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair.</li> <li>• Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common.</li> <li>• Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation.</li> <li>• Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak.</li> <li>• Civil society is weak.</li> <li>• Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.</li> </ul>
Authoritarian Regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In these states, state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed.</li> <li>• Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships.</li> <li>• Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance.</li> <li>• Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair.</li> <li>• There is disregard for abuses and infringements of civil liberties.</li> <li>• Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime.</li> <li>• There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship.</li> <li>• There is no independent judiciary.</li> </ul>

*Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2024)*

The democracy index measurement, as described above, stems from five categories: “i) *electoral process and pluralism*, ii) *functioning of government*, iii) *political participation*, iv) *political culture*, and v) *civil liberties*.” These categories are interconnected and together constitute a unified measurement for democracy. In the first category, an electoral process and pluralism must be characterized by freedom and fairness, ensuring political freedom is upheld. The electoral process, by its nature, periodically divides the population into winners and losers. A healthy democracy requires losers to gracefully accept outcomes and ensure peaceful transitions of power. A thriving democratic political culture entails that losing parties and their supporters acknowledge the voters’ judgment and facilitate the peaceful transfer of power. The second category focuses on the function of Government that is supposed to be well function, where elected representatives have freedom to shape policies, supremacy in legislative processes, and operate under effective checks and balances to oversee government authority.

Furthermore, the third category emphasizes political participation, encompassing a significant portion of the population, including ethnic, religious, gender (particularly women), and other minorities, having a meaningful degree of autonomy and influence in the political arena. This involvement extends to non-governmental organizations as well. Some other key aspects, such as: citizen engagement, literacy, and interest in political affairs are also evaluated within this category. Participation stands as a vital component, as apathy and abstention pose threats to democracy. In a democratic system, government is just one facet among numerous institutions, political groups, and associations within society. Citizens cannot be obligated to engage in politics, and they have the liberty to express objection through abstention. Nevertheless, a robust democracy thrives on active, voluntary citizen engagement in public affairs. Democracies flourish when citizens willingly engage in public discourse, exercise their voting rights, and participate in political organizations. Without widespread and sustained participation, democracy risks decline and may become the domain of exclusive, privileged groups.

The fourth category, political culture, encapsulates the societal agreement that is crucial for upholding a resilient democracy. This encompasses how the public perceives various leadership models within democracy, spanning from strong leadership to military intervention or technocratic or expert governance, along with its impact on public order and the economic framework. Finally, civil liberties constitute a fundamental aspect of what is commonly referred to as “liberal democracy,” embracing media availability and freedoms of expression and protest. The principle of safeguarding basic human rights, such as freedom of speech, press, and religion, along with the freedoms of assembly and association, as well as the right to fair judicial proceedings, enjoys widespread acceptance.

In Southeast Asia, the region does not have an official, single, formal definition of democracy that it uses collectively. Despite the absence of the official definition, the regional organization does emphasize the intention to strengthen democracy,<sup>18</sup> respected to the rights and responsibilities of the ASEAN Member States. Countries in Southeast Asia derive advantages from the framework of political security cooper-

---

18 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN Charter (Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2007), Art. 1 (7).

ation within ASEAN,<sup>19</sup> which embraces the principle of democracy as a fundamental aspect of human rights.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, despite the intention to strengthen democracy, the majority of countries in the region do not adhere to a full democratic system, see the table below for more details.

*Table 4. Southeast Asia Countries Democracy Index in 2023*

Countries	Democracy Index: Category*					TOTAL Democracy Index**	Regime
	electoral process and pluralism	functioning of government	political participation	political culture	civil liberties		
Brunei Darussalam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	<b>N/A</b>	N/A
Cambodia	0	3.21	5	5	2.06	<b>3.05</b>	Authoritarian
Indonesia	7.92	7,86	7,22	4,38	5,29	<b>6.53</b>	Flawed Democracy
Laos	0	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.29	<b>1.71</b>	Authoritarian
Malaysia	9.58	7.50	7.22	6.25	5.88	<b>7.29</b>	Flawed Democracy
Myanmar	0	0.07	0	1.25	0	<b>0.85</b>	Authoritarian
Philippines	9.17	4.64	7.78	4.38	7.35	<b>6.66</b>	Flawed Democracy
Singapore	5.33	7.14	4.44	7.50	6.47	<b>6.18</b>	Flawed Democracy
Thailand	7.00	6.07	7.78	5.00	5.88	<b>6.35</b>	Flawed Democracy
Timor Leste	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35	<b>7.06</b>	Flawed Democracy
Viet Nam	0	3.93	2.78	3.75	2.65	<b>2.62</b>	Authoritarian

*Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (2024)*

\* The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy, on a 0 to 10 scale, is based on the ratings for 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; the functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties. Each category has a rating on a 0 to 10 scale, and the overall Index is the simple average of the five category indexes. The category indexes are based on the sum of the indicator scores in the category, converted to a 0 to 10 scale. Adjustments to the category scores are made if countries do not score a 1 in the following critical areas for democracy: 1. Whether national elections are free and fair. 2. The security of voters. 3. The influence of foreign powers on the government. 4. The capability of the civil service to implement policies.

19 Association of Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint. ASEAN Secretariat, 2009.

20 Raharja, Dinna Prapto, Democracy and Inclusivity (Indonesia: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), 2020).

\*\* The index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regime: i) Full democracies: scores greater than 8; ii) Flawed democracies: scores greater than 6, and less than or equal to 8; iii) Hybrid regimes: scores greater than 4, and less than or equal to 6; iv) Authoritarian regimes: scores less than or equal to 4.

From the EIU index, we can see that the eleven countries in Southeast Asia do not adhere to the full democracy system. Only six countries could attain the status of “flawed democracy”, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, The Philippines and Timor Leste; with Malaysia, Timor Leste and the Philippines as the top three countries with the least flaw in democracy. Indonesia and Malaysia score the lowest in the political culture, civil liberty, and political participation categories; and Malaysia has a full democracy rating in the election process and pluralism category. Singapore scores lowest in the political participation, election process and civil liberty, while Thailand has the lowest score in political culture and civil liberties categories. Timor Leste as the newest member has the highest total score, the closest to the full democracy rating, but still scores low in political participation and functioning of the government categories. Unfortunately, the other four countries still fall under authoritarian regimes like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. The four countries score zero in the first category of election process and pluralism, and below four for the rest of categories (with exception to Cambodia).

## Inclusivity Element

Democracy is a system where citizens freely determine political outcomes through majority rule. However, it needs to take into account that mere majority rule doesn't inherently constitute democracy. In a true democracy, majority decisions must be safeguarded by protections for individual human rights and minority rights. Additionally, most evaluations incorporate criteria for the effective functioning of government. If democratic assumed decisions aren't put into action, the concept of democracy is no longer meaningful. That is why the definition of democracy itself is supposed to cover the element of inclusiveness.

When democratic process and mechanism is provided by inequitable access, the resulting governmental policies and initiatives often fail to align with the needs of the majority. A flourishing democracy is essential for promoting inclusive growth and development. However, when access to democratic processes and mechanisms is unequal, the resulting government policies and initiatives may not adequately address the needs of the majority. Inclusive democracy encompasses the foundational principles of traditional democracy while acknowledging the ongoing journey toward achieving its full potential. At the heart of inclusive democracy lies an acknowledgment and celebration of diversity as indispensable to its evolution.<sup>21</sup>

---

21 Barker, Derek, “What is Inclusive Democracy?”, Charles F Kettering Foundation (April 12, 2023), <https://www.kettering.org/news/what-is-inclusive-democracy/> (Accessed on April 3, 2024).

For the sake of this paper, it is important to find a suitable definition for the inclusivity element in democracy. Democracy ensures that the power is exercised by the people, of the people, for the people.<sup>22</sup> In this context, inclusive democracy recognizes “the people” not as a singular, homogenous entity, but rather as individuals representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives, which could be seen from the basis of class, caste, religion, gender and economical status.<sup>23</sup> Inclusive democracy provides an open opportunity for all individuals, including the underprivileged, marginalized, and excluded, to participate fully in the democratic process.<sup>24</sup> The opposite of inclusivity is exclusivity, including the elements of multidimensional, dynamic, relational, and contextual. We can see the details in the table below.

*Table 5. Elements of Exclusivity*

Elements	Explanation	Example
Multidimensional	Exclusion concept that comprises social, civic, political, cultural, and economic dimensions. In other words, it examines <b>social services, economic life, and social networks</b> and participation as a way to see the in/exclusivity of such a country.	A person may face exclusion based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender identity all at once. Each dimension adds complexity to their experience of exclusion.
Dynamic	Exclusion isn't a fixed condition endured by identical groups in a uniform manner over time. Instead, exclusionary dynamics manifest diversely, varying in <b>degree, intensity, and social</b> scope.	A marginalized community may experience changes in their level of exclusion based on changing political climates or economic conditions.
Relational	It considers <b>power relations between people</b> and the society resulting in disadvantage and/or the inability to enjoy shared opportunities that are available to others as the product of unequal social relationships by differential power.	An example of relational exclusivity could be discrimination in hiring practices or unequal treatment from people from dominant social groups.
Contextual	Exclusion is often understood as the <b>inability to participate and enjoy economic, social and civic opportunities</b> that are considered “normal” in a given society. Such shared opportunities vary across countries and time being shaped by cultural, institutional and socio-economic factors.	Exclusion experienced by a minority group in one country may differ significantly from that experienced by the same group in another country with different cultural norms and historical legacies.

*Source: Thamchumpon, Naruemon (2020)*

22 Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address,” speech delivered at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, November 19, 1863.

23 Kusum Lata, “Inclusive Democracy: People, Power, Progress” International Journal of Scientific Development and Research (IJS DR) Volume 1, Issue 2 (2016): 86-91.

24 Thamchumpon, Naruemon, Exclusivity and Democracy Decline in Southeast Asia (Indonesia: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) , 2020).

In Southeast Asia, the politics of exclusion is evident in the state's decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of citizens and minority groups. The challenges of political inclusion, which are characterized by unequal power relations based on factors such as gender, wealth, ability, location, ethnicity, language, and agency.<sup>25</sup> To achieve democratic inclusion, it's imperative to rebalance power relations, diminish disparities, and ensure equal rights, opportunities, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their political, economic, and social identities.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the inclusivity definition, the EIU Democracy index has sufficiently incorporated the element of inclusivity in some categories, emphasizing the term "all citizens" in some questions. The second category for the index, namely political participation, has included the majority percentage of population in the survey questions, with consideration to ethnicity, religious, gender (women) and other minorities to have a reasonable degree of autonomy and voice in the political process. Also participation from non-government organizations. Not to mention that this category also measures citizen engagement, literacy and interest in political news and process. That said, the term 'democracy' has sufficiently incorporated the inclusivity element.

Following that, we need to remember that Southeast Asian regions are not fully democratic, meaning that even the process of politics is democratic, there might be the possibility of media freedom being curtailed, or where the political culture itself is underdeveloped. However, for the specific inclusivity element, let us focus on the second category of the EIU Democracy Index, namely 'political participation.' From the table above, we can see that all countries in Southeast Asia score below 8 (falls under the category of flawed democracies, hybrid regime, and authoritarian) in defining public participation, meaning that the inclusivity element in the region's democracy still not fully catered and there is much room for improvement.

The reasons on why political participation is low<sup>27</sup> in Southeast Asia could be many reasons. Firstly, it is partly due to the region's historical legacies<sup>28</sup>, such as authoritarian rule and the prevalence of patronage politics, which have limited opportunities for genuine citizen engagement. Additionally, the impact of structural barriers, including socioeconomic inequalities, weak civil society organizations, and restrictive legal frameworks also hinder meaningful participation. Furthermore, the role of cultural factors, such as attentiveness to authority and societal norms that discourage dissent and activism.

---

25 R. U. Mendoza, E. L. Beja Jr, J. C. Teehankee, A. G. M. La Vina, and M. F. Villamejor-Mendoza, eds., *Building Inclusive Democracies In ASEAN* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2019).

26 Teh, G. J. D. (2016). Building inclusive democracies in ASEAN. *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 37(1), 77–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01154451.2016.1147639> (accessed April 25, 2024).

27 FUNNELL, V. C. "Problems of Political Participation in an Asian Context." *Community Development Journal* 7, no. 3 (1972): 183–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44255540>.

28 Bunte, M., and M. L. Weiss. 2023. "Civil Society and Democratic Decline in Southeast Asia." *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 42, no. 3: 297–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034231212488>.

Another reason for low political participation in urban Southeast Asia centers around how politics is influenced by economic matters, infrastructure, sanitation, and social services such as health, education, and welfare.<sup>29</sup> The patronage politics even worsened the situation, resulting in intense competition within the political system, which is frequently overshadowed by corruption and dishonest practices. Consequently, political conflicts often appear to focus less on addressing pressing developmental challenges and more on building political support, navigating personal conflicts, managing patronage, and dealing with corruption.

Patriarchal culture<sup>30</sup> also has a significant impact in hindering women's political participation<sup>31</sup> by institutionalizing barriers through several mechanisms: (i) political party practices, (ii) traditional, religious, and customary laws, and (iii) societal gender segregation. This culture adversely impacts the concept of "active citizenship," by assigning women an inferior status in society, where they are expected to be subordinate to men. Due to these patriarchal barriers, women's political participation is also restricted, perpetuating their marginalization and limiting their access to equal power and resources necessary for engaging in active citizenship, causing women not to have any vocal advocacy to influence government action.

Young people low political participation can be attributed to lacking of interest and knowledge<sup>32</sup>, due to the absence of political socialization experiences, particularly from family and educational institutions, narrow understanding of politics associating it mainly with selfish political players and institutions. The young non- participants also lack social networks or links to the activist community, including political parties. However, despite their disinterest in formal politics, young people participate in low-risk unconventional activism, such as online activism, driven by their desire to influence political decisions. Additionally, a small circle of politically active youth exists, driven by greater exposure to political information and support from socializing agents like family and educational institutions. These youth activists demonstrate higher levels of political self-efficacy and trust, leading them to engage in active political activism despite mounting discontent with the political system and politicians.

---

29 Rüländ, Jürgen. "Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia: Political Participation in Three Intermediate Cities." *Asian Survey* 30, no. 5 (1990): 461-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644839>.

30 Intentilia, Anak Agung Mia. "Analyzing Patriarchy, Political Participation, and Active Citizenship in ASEAN." *Intermestic: Journal of International Studies* 5, no. 1 (November 2020): 12-30. doi:10.24198/intermestic.v5n1.2.

31 Welsh, Bridget. "Promoting Inclusion: Women's Political Participation in Southeast Asia." In *Women, Policy and Political Leadership*, 9-25. Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014.

32 Mohd Hed, Norhafiza. "The Dynamics of Youth Political Participation in Southeast Asia: The Case of Malaysia." PhD diss., The University of Sheffield, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Politics, 2017.



## ANALYSIS

### The Relation of AI and Democracy: Potential and Threat

Before answering the question on how ethical AI can enhance inclusive democracy, or whether the ethical AI standard could support more inclusiveness in Southeast Asia's democracy, it is important to firstly get an understanding of the relation of AI and democracy. AI does have potential for democracy, as well as some possible threats.

The UNESCO Recommendation on AI Ethics<sup>33</sup> consider that *"AI technologies can be of great service to humanity and all countries can benefit from them, but also raise fundamental ethical concerns, for instance regarding the biases they can embed and exacerbate, potentially resulting in discrimination, inequality, digital divides, exclusion and a threat to cultural, social and biological diversity and social or economic divides; the need for transparency and understandability of the workings of algorithms and the data with which they have been trained; and their potential impact on, including but not limited to, human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, gender equality, **democracy**, social, economic, **political and cultural processes**."* The document mentioned that the AI system can be beneficial but also raise new ethical concerns surrounding democracy, especially in relation to human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, privacy and non discrimination.

Democracy relies on the idea that power should be shared among the majority, not concentrated in the hands of an exclusive few. For it to work well, we need strong institutions that people trust, and citizens who are engaged, informed, and committed to the democratic process. Unfortunately, modern democracies are facing serious challenges. People are losing faith in institutions, false information is spreading rapidly, and societies are becoming more divided. This is where new technologies like AI come in.<sup>34</sup> On one hand, AI can be a powerful tool for strengthening democracy, especially targeting inclusiveness. It can help make governments more transparent and accountable, and it can empower citizens to participate more directly in decision-making.<sup>35</sup> The low participation and all reasons surrounding it can actually be compensated through AI technology. AI has many roles in encouraging political participation with the role of an educator, informant, political assistance, supervisor, and others. Details can be seen in the table below.

---

33 UNESCO, Recommendation on The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (Paris, 2021).

34 Ramos, Gabriela, "Ethics of AI and Democracy: UNESCO Recommendation's Insights", Turkish Policy (March 4,2022), <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/1091/ethics-of-ai-and-democracy-unesco-recommendations-insights> (accessed on April 15, 2024).

35 Adam, Michael and Hocquard, Clotilde, "Artificial Intelligence, Democracy and Elections", European Union (2023), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751478/EPRS\\_BRI\(2023\)751478\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751478/EPRS_BRI(2023)751478_EN.pdf) (accessed on April 9, 2024).



*Table 6. Examples of AI Applications Relates to Democracy*

AI Role	E.g	Application for Democracy	Potential Benefit	Potential Threat
AI as a source of information or educator <sup>36</sup>	Chat GPT <sup>37</sup>	Chatbots integrated into messaging platforms or dedicated apps can engage with voters, providing information on candidates, political parties, and voting procedures. They can answer questions, offer guidance, and encourage voter turnout.	Citizens can educate themselves on political issues easily, especially in identifying the candidate whose views align most closely with their own.	Question on accuracy. The information might be wrong and not correct, as candidates might incorporate information for their own benefits.
Personalize Political Update	Flipboard <sup>38</sup>	AI-driven news aggregators can curate personalized news feeds based on users' political preferences and interests. By delivering tailored content, these platforms help users stay informed about political developments relevant to them.	Citizens can educate themselves regularly especially news on political update	Question on accuracy, especially the news provided
Constituent Feedback Analysis	Monkey Learn <sup>39</sup>	AI algorithms can analyze large volumes of constituent feedback, such as emails, letters, and survey responses, to identify key issues and sentiments within the electorate. This data can inform policymakers' decision-making processes and priorities.	Citizens can convey their political aspiration easily, and politician and governments can also get feedbacks easily and quickly.	Question on accuracy Privacy concern
Predictive Analytics for Election Outcomes	Predictwise <sup>40</sup>	AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data, including social media activity, polling data, and demographic information, to predict election outcomes with greater accuracy. These insights can inform campaign strategies and mobilization efforts.	Efficiency	Question on accuracy



36 Scheiner, Bruce, "Ten Ways AI Will Change Democracy", Harvard Kennedy School (November 6, 2023), <https://ash.harvard.edu/articles/ten-ways-ai-will-change-democracy/> (Accessed on April 12, 2024).

37 Chat GPT <<https://chat.openai.com/>>

38 Flipboard <<https://about.flipboard.com/>> Flipboard is a popular news aggregation platform that uses AI algorithms to curate personalized news feeds based on user interests, including politics. Users can customize their feed by selecting political topics, specific news sources, and preferred publishers. The app employs machine learning to analyze user interactions and preferences, delivering relevant political news articles and updates tailored to individual users.

39 Monkey Learn <<https://monkeylearn.com/>> MonkeyLearn is a text analysis platform that offers a range of AI-powered tools for sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and keyword extraction. Using machine learning algorithms, MonkeyLearn can process large volumes of text data from emails, letters, survey responses, social media posts, and other sources to identify key themes, sentiments, and opinions.

40 Predictwise <<https://www.predictwise.com/>> PredictWise utilize AI-driven predictive analytics models to forecast election outcomes based on a wide range of data inputs.



Social Media Monitoring Tools	Perspective API <sup>41</sup> by Jigsaw	AI-powered tools can monitor social media platforms for misinformation, hate speech, and foreign interference in elections. By identifying and flagging problematic content, these tools help maintain a healthy online environment for political discourse.	Encouraging healthy environment for political discourse	It could be used to worsen the condition.
-------------------------------	---	--	---	---

Source: Multiple

We can see from the above about AI's potential to transform political culture and influence more participation. But on the other hand, AI also has the potential to be misused. For example, it can be used to manipulate public opinion or control information, especially on social media platforms. So while AI holds promise for improving democracy and making it more inclusive, we must also be mindful of its risks and use it responsibly to ensure that democracy remains strong and accessible to all. The same technology does have the same threat to produce disinformation and misinformation at scale, threatens to interfere with democratic representation, undermine democratic accountability, and corrode social and political trust.<sup>42</sup> Establishing ethical guidelines for AI is crucial to mitigate potential risks and maximize its benefits for democracy. By emphasizing the potential advantages and outlining strategies to optimize AI's contributions, such guidelines can help navigate the complexities associated with AI implementation in democratic processes.

41 Perspective API <<https://perspectiveapi.com/>> Perspective API uses machine learning models to identify and flag toxic language, including hate speech, harassment, and abusive content, in online conversations. It provides a toxicity score for text inputs, helping platforms moderate discussions more effectively.

42 Kreps, Sarah, and Doug Kriner. "How AI Threatens Democracy". *Journal of Democracy* 34, no. 4 (October 2023): 122-31.

### *Box 1. Case Study: AI and Democracy in Indonesia*

In the previous Indonesia's presidential election in February 2024, generative AI technology played a significant role in political campaigning. One notable example was the use of an AI-generated cartoon version of General Prabowo Subianto, a former special forces commander and the previous defense minister. This cartoon avatar, created using generative AI, was prominently featured on billboards, clothing, and social media platforms, particularly targeting younger voters. Prabowo's campaign, along with other candidates, utilized generative AI tools to create campaign art, track social media sentiment, build interactive chatbots, and target voters effectively. While the impact of AI technology on the election was yet to be fully understood, it represented a significant shift in political campaigning.

Another example was the Pemilu.AI app, developed by Indonesian political consultant Yose Rizal, which utilized OpenAI's GPT-4 and 3.5 software to generate hyper-local campaign strategies and speeches for legislative candidates. The app gathered demographic data and analyzed social media and news websites to tailor content to specific constituencies. While Rizal maintained that Pemilu.AI did not directly engage in creating political campaigns, it served as a communication tool to support candidates' decision-making processes. Overall, the use of AI in Indonesia's election marked a significant development in political campaigning, raising questions about regulation, transparency, and the ethical use of AI technology in democratic processes.

*Source: Reuters (2024).<sup>43</sup>*

## **Is Ethical AI Standard in Southeast Asia Inclusive for Democracy?**

AI holds promise in fostering a more inclusive, participatory, and deliberative model of democracy. However, AI threat for democracy lies in inaccuracy to produce disinformation and misinformation at scale, threatens to interfere with democratic representation, undermine democratic accountability, and corrode social and political trust.<sup>44</sup> The ASEAN AI Ethical Framework outlines principles and guidelines that aim to ensure the responsible development and use of artificial intelligence technologies within the ASEAN region. The seven guiding principles, especially on transparency and explainability, security and safety, privacy and data governance; accountability and integrity; and robustness and reliability, could ensure trust in AI and the design, development, and deployment of ethical AI systems in ways which consider the broader societal impact.

By adhering to these ethical standards, AI systems can be designed and implemented in a way that promotes inclusivity in democracy. For example, the framework includes principles of transparency and explainability that could ensure transparency in decision-making processes; the principle of fairness and

<sup>43</sup> Lamb, Kate, Potkin, Fanny, and Teresia, Ananda, "Generative AI May Change Elections This Year, Indonesia Shows How" Reuters (February 8, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/technology/generative-ai-faces-major-test-indonesia-holds-largest-election-since-boom-2024-02-08/> (Accessed on March 1, 2024).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

equity might prevent algorithmic biases; and the principle of security and safety, could protect individuals' privacy and human rights.<sup>45</sup> By following these guidelines, the utilization of AI technologies could enhance democratic processes, such as encouraging greater citizen participation, enhancing transparency in governance, and facilitating informed decision-making across diverse demographics. Hence, the ASEAN AI Ethical Framework serves as a theoretical foundation for guiding AI development and deployment in a manner that prioritizes inclusivity and democracy.

However, effective AI governance requires not only expertise and regulations but also greater citizen involvement and input.<sup>46</sup> By adopting a multi-stakeholder approach, incorporating cultural sensitivity, prioritizing transparency and accountability, addressing biases, upholding human rights and democratic principles, investing in capacity building, and fostering cross-border collaboration, Southeast Asia ethical AI standard will ensure to promote inclusivity and strengthens democracy in the region and must prioritize democratic engagement at all levels. While the ASEAN AI Ethical Framework is a significant step towards ensuring ethical AI standards in the region, there is still room for improvement to make these standards more inclusive and conducive to democracy. Continued efforts to refine and implement ethical AI principles will be essential for safeguarding democracy in the face of advancing technological developments.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze i) the relation between AI and democracy, and whether ii) the ASEAN AI Ethical Framework promotes inclusive democracy and how to improve it?

The relation between AI and democracy is multidimensional, with both potential and threat. Democracy survives on shared power and engaged citizenship, but faces challenges like lacking information, the spread of misinformation and declining trust in institutions. AI offers opportunities to strengthen democracy by promoting inclusiveness and transparency, empowering citizens, and facilitating political participation. However, it also poses risks, such as the potential for manipulation and control of information. Having ethical guidelines for AI is essential to harness its benefits while mitigating its risks. By emphasizing the potential advantages and outlining strategies to optimize AI's contributions, these guidelines can help navigate the complexities associated with AI implementation in democratic processes, ensuring that democracy remains strong and accessible to all.

The ASEAN AI Ethical Framework serves as a theoretical foundation for guiding AI development and deployment in a manner that upholds the principles of inclusivity and democracy. It sets out guidelines

---

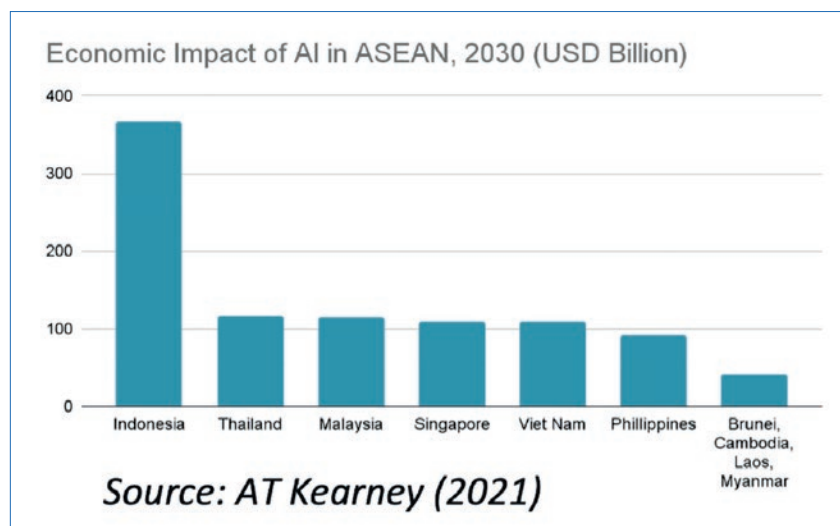
45 Ibid.

46 Landemore, Helene, "Fostering More Inclusive Democracy with AI", IMF (December 2023), <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2023/12/POV-Fostering-more-inclusive-democracy-with-AI-Landemore> (Accessed on April 6, 2024).

to ensure responsible development and use of AI in Southeast Asia. It emphasizes principles like transparency and explainability that could ensure transparency in decision-making processes; the principle of fairness and equity might prevent algorithmic biases; and the principle of security and safety, could protect individuals' privacy and human rights. By following these principles, AI systems can be designed to enhance democracy. The guideline is a significant step acting as a theoretical foundation for AI development that promotes inclusivity and democracy. However, effective governance requires not only guidelines, but also citizen involvement, cultural sensitivity, and cross-border collaboration. While the framework is a significant step, ongoing efforts to refine and implement ethical AI principles are needed to strengthen democracy and ensure inclusivity in Southeast Asia.

## Appendix

*Graph 1. AI is expected to provide uplift in ASEAN GDP in 2030*



*Source: AT Kearney (2021)*

## PARTNERS

