



## The Asia Foundation



Welcome to The Asia Foundation's Washington, D.C. May newsletter. This latest issue highlights four of our recent events: **a roundtable on the Foundation's women's empowerment and gender equality program**, a **book talk with Ambassador Scot Marciel**, a **panel showcasing the work of female Indonesian forest defenders**, and a **panel on conflict trends in Asia**. The May newsletter also contains InAsia blog posts and podcast episodes on **religious freedom in Bangladesh**, **the decline in public optimism in Nepal**, and **understanding the care economy**, as well as recent **publications on digital skilling in Asia and the Pacific** and **Mongolian elections from 1992 to 2021**.

# Events

**Recent In-Person Event** - Advancing Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the Indo-Pacific

*April 20, 2023* – [Jane Sloane](#), The Asia Foundation's Senior Director of the [Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Program](#), sat down for a roundtable discussion on trends, promising approaches, and imperatives regarding women's rights, opportunities, and security in the Indo-Pacific. Her focus areas included girls' and women's climate leadership, advancing the women, peace, and security agenda, combating trafficking and GBV, strengthening girls' leadership and educational attainment, fostering women's labor force participation, and applying a gender equality and social inclusion lens in closing gender gaps, including through an emphasis on the care economy.

**Recent Virtual Event** - [Virtual Book Talk Discussing Imperfect Partners: The United States and Southeast Asia with Ambassador Scot Marciel](#)



*April 25, 2023* – The Asia Foundation's [John Brandon](#) joined Ambassador Scot Marciel to discuss his new book, *Imperfect Partners: The United States and Southeast Asia*. In *Imperfect*

*Partners*, Ambassador Marciel looks back on his own experience as a diplomat in Asia and provides insights on U.S. relations with Southeast Asia from a foreign policy perspective. Ambassador Marciel retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in April 2022 after a 37-year career that included assignments as Ambassador to Myanmar, Ambassador to Indonesia, and Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs. He also served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Click [here](#) for the video recording. Learn more about the Foundation's [international relations](#) programs.

**Recent In-Person Event - [Indonesia's Success in Environmental Governance: Engaging Women Climate Leaders and Forest Defenders](#)**



*April 28, 2023* – Between 2001 and 2021, Indonesia lost more than 28 million hectares of forest (an area larger than New Zealand), according to Global Forest Watch. This impacts traditional communities and falls particularly hard on women, who suffer disproportionately from displacement, disempowerment, and loss of land and livelihoods. Fostering women's climate leadership is critical to addressing the climate crisis. The Asia Foundation's [environmental governance program](#) in [Indonesia](#) invests in providing women with the tools and resources to assume forest defender roles traditionally given to men and facilitating communities' governance and protection of their forests. Panelists discussed environmental governance,

social forestry, and the work of the Foundation's local partners, HAKA and the Aceh Women Forest Defenders Movement, in Indonesia. Click [here](#) for the event recording.

### Recent Hybrid Event - [Conflict in the Indo-Pacific Region: Rising Risks and Local Solutions](#)



May 3, 2023 – With conflict risks on the rise across the Indo-Pacific and geopolitical tensions mounting, the region has witnessed rising authoritarianism amid receding democratic norms in recent years. Adding to an already difficult situation, the costs and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and recent inflation have fueled mass frustrations with apparent economic inequalities, while the complicated impacts of online media and the growing effects of climate change further fuel volatility. Despite these destabilizing trends, data presented in The Asia Foundation's [The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia 2021](#) report shows that fatalities from civil wars and organized violence have declined significantly in recent decades. Click [here](#) to watch Azeema Cheema from a Pakistani policy analysis consulting firm, Sidney Jones from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict and NYU, and [Adam Burke](#) and Kathline Tolosa from The Asia Foundation discuss these regional trends and provide case studies from Pakistan and the Philippines. Learn more about the Foundation's [conflict and fragility](#) programs.

## Voices from the Field



## [Religious Freedom Gets an Early Warning System in Bangladesh](#)

In South Asia, with its great tapestry of religions, cultures, and ethnicities, the last two decades have witnessed threats to coexistence where intolerance descends into violence against religious minorities and other disfavored groups. [This episode of the InAsia podcast](#) dives into the topic of religious freedom in Bangladesh and features Mahmuda Sultana, Program Officer for the Foundation's Bangladesh office, and Sadat Shibli, director of the five-year project, *Community-Driven Early Warning Systems to Reduce Religious Freedom Violations in Bangladesh*. Learn more about the Foundation's work in [Bangladesh](#).



## [Seven Years into Federalism, Is Nepal's Glass Half Empty or Half Full?](#)

For the first time since 2017, public optimism about the overall direction of Nepal has turned negative. The [2022 edition](#) of the Foundation's ongoing public opinion poll, *A Survey of the Nepali People*, found that just 41 percent of Nepalis thought the country was going in the right direction, down from 66 percent in 2020. Corruption, inflation, deteriorating economic conditions, and trouble finding work are the issues weighing most heavily on Nepalis. [This InAsia blog post](#) explores the factors leading to the decline in public optimism in Nepal. Learn more about the Foundation's work in [Nepal](#).

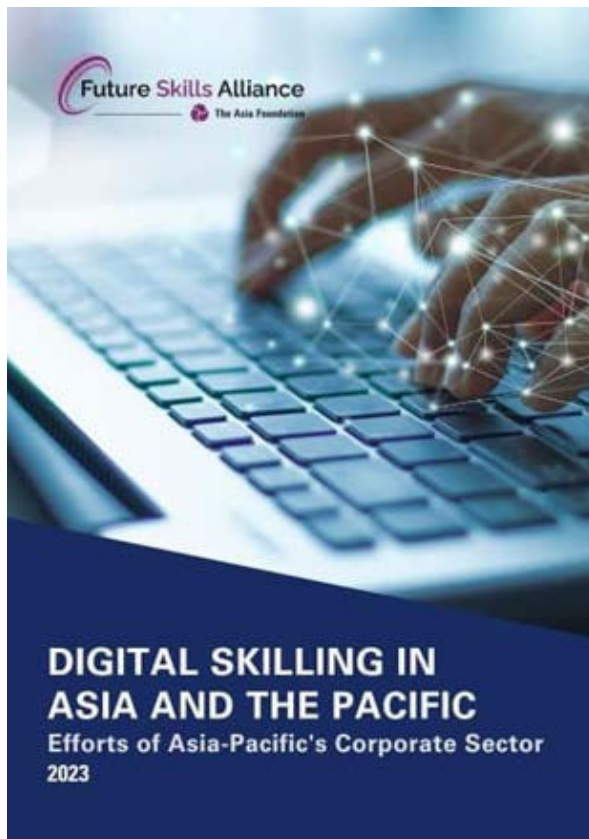


## [Understanding the "Care Economy"](#)

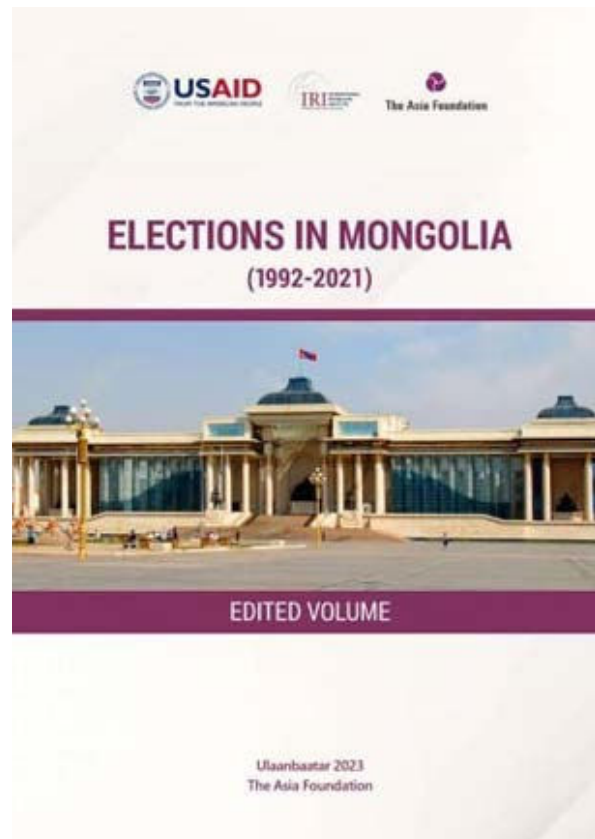
If all the world's care workers were one national economy, it would be among the largest, in hours worked, in the world. It would also consist mostly of women, and they would be largely unpaid. In Asia and the Pacific, as in much of the world, tradition consigns

the care of children, the sick, and the elderly to mothers, wives, and daughters, and these unpaid obligations perpetuate inequalities in work, society, and the home, depriving women of options and opportunities, and their countries of a big chunk of potential GDP. In [this episode of the InAsia podcast](#), the Foundation's Ankita Panda and Ikram Abdullah discuss the tangle of cultural and economic issues that define the "care economy." Learn more about the Foundation's [women empowerment and gender equality](#) program.

## Recent Publications



[Digital Skilling in Asia and the Pacific: Efforts of Asia-Pacific's Corporate Sector](#)



[Elections in Mongolia \(1992-2021\)](#)

Mongolia's transition to democracy has been cemented over eight democratic election

Over the past decade, public and private sector institutions have implemented a wide range of digital skilling programs. A plethora of digital skilling programs are beneficial to the Asia-Pacific population, but due to a lack of information on the digital skilling landscape, there is a tendency to duplicate existing efforts. This report seeks to address the gaps in digital skills initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region driven by Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and South Korean companies. It is critical to understand what and how companies contribute to addressing the gaps in digital skilling regionally. Along with market demand, this report also examines government policies to see how private sector contributions align with these efforts. Learn more about the Foundation's [inclusive economic growth](#) programs.

cycles, each of which has featured multi-party competition, led to peaceful transitions of power, and been deemed free and fair by most observers. Despite a positive overarching narrative, Mongolia's democracy and its elections face challenges. Declining voter turnout is occurring at all three levels of elections (parliamentary, local, and presidential), a trend that corresponds with growing mistrust of the government and elected officials. This edited volume organizes and presents basic data and analysis on elections in Mongolia covering the period of 1992 to 2021. The report aims to make data more accessible and available while also providing analysis on how the Mongolian electoral system's design impacts the country's politics and governance. Learn more about the Foundation's work in [Mongolia](#).



## The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our work across the region addresses five overarching goals—strengthen governance, empower women, expand economic opportunity, increase environmental resilience, and promote regional cooperation