STOCKHOLM CENTER FOR GLOBAL ASIA

Stockholm University

Contesting Law, Transforming Rights

Constitutional Change and Legal Mobilization in East and Southeast Asia

Conference at Stockholm University | 20–21 May 2027



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Across East and Southeast Asia, judicial systems are in flux and under strain. These systems have never been uniform across the region, nor have they remained static—past rounds of constitutional or other institutional reform have added, eliminated, or revamped the set of courts available, the scope of judicial authority, and the potential for citizens to pursue and protect their rights and seek redress for grievances. In recent years, in some of these states, courts have stood firm against democratic backsliding; in others, institutional redesign has either embedded or undercut judicial review. Meanwhile, in most states in the region, activists and advocates have continued to pursue claims through legal channels, even as the space available to pursue such suits shifts. All the while, academic attention has focused more heavily on elections, legislatures, and executive leadership as arbiters and indicators of relative liberalism and democratic (dys)function, notwithstanding the pivotal role of laws and courts in all aspects of democratic praxis.

This conference will explore these dimensions, seeking comparative insight into the performance, potential, and constraints of legal activism, judicial accountability, and constitutional reform. How has the place of law and courts changed in politics, in an era of both widespread judicialization of politics and executive centralization? To what extent is legal mobilization effective as a strategy for codifying and enforcing rights? Where are codified laws at odds with informal practices or norms, or where does actual exercise of power indicate contested jurisdiction? And where constitutional change is under discussion or underway, whose interests drive that process and with what likely consequences for rights, accountability, and political (il)liberalization?

We welcome proposals for papers on these and related topics, with reference to one or more state(s) in East and Southeast Asia:

- Constitutional change and judicial reform
- Legal activism and mobilization
- Judicial independence and constraint
- Horizontal accountability via courts
- Lawyers, legal aid associations, and other support structures
- Authoritarian legalism and conservative countermobilizaton
- Codifying and claiming rights through law and courts

To apply, please submit a robust abstract (300–500 words; use of generative AI is not permitted), by 25 November 2026. Partial funding may be available for those presenting papers. We will notify accepted applicants by 30 November 2026. Full draft papers (6–8,000 words) must be submitted for circulation among conference participants by Monday, 3 May 2027. Participants will be expected to review papers in advance of the conference and may be asked to serve as discussants.

Questions? Please contact Eva Hansson (eva.hansson@statsvet.su.se) or Meredith Weiss (mweiss@albany.edu).

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