



Joint Legislator-Expert Delegation on the Future of Democracy

REPORT

OCTOBER 2019

On September 17–20, 2019, a joint JCIE delegation of Japanese legislators and policy experts visited Washington DC to meet with US Congressional members, government officials, think tank experts, and NGO leaders to exchange views on the global state of democracy and on ways in which the two countries can further support democratization. The delegation members and their American counterparts expressed concern over the rise of authoritarianism and populism worldwide, as well as about the backsliding in countries that had been thought to be in a transition to democracy, sharing a sense of crisis about the future of democracy around the globe. In particular, US leaders repeatedly expressed their strong hope that Japan will play a more proactive role in supporting democratization and the rule of law in the Asia-Pacific region.

US APPROACHES TO DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

Democracy's Global Retreat

US legislators, government officials, and experts shared a deep sense of concern over democratic backsliding and rising threats to democracy around the world. In many emerging democracies, progress has been reversed and authoritarianism is resurgent as widening inequality and an increase in corruption and crime have fueled disappointment in democratic transitions. Meanwhile, economic stagnation, growing disparities, and a backlash against immigration in established democracies have driven political polarization and a broad sense of discontent with the political establishment. This, in turn, has fed populism and created a political climate that allows political leaders to neglect minority voices.

Further, the growing global influence of non-democratic states such as China and Russia adds to the sense that authoritarianism is on the rise worldwide. Against this backdrop, there is a sense of crisis and a recognition that democracy must be defended and democratic backsliding must stop.

US Institutions Involved in Democracy Promotion Overseas

Since its founding, Americans have considered democracy to be their country's guiding principle, and there is widespread support for the promotion of democracy internationally. While the Trump administration's "America first" policies do not seem to prioritize universal values such as human rights, there is strong bipartisan support for democracy promotion in the Congress, which has continued to appropriate the same level of

budget for democracy support. Thus, those engaged in the field expressed their belief that there has not been a major impact on their activities even under the current administration.

1. US Congress

The Congress plays a central role in leading and sustaining US efforts in democracy promotion. In addition to appropriating the federal government's budget for democracy-related activities, some members are involved in direct activities to support democratic governance around the world. These include the House Partnership for Democracy, a special commission that enables Congressional members to visit countries in democratic transition and work with their local counterparts in training programs that cover issues such as parliamentary operations, budgeting, and election campaign debates.

2. US Federal Government Agencies

More than \$2 billion is allocated annually from the US government's foreign assistance budget to democracy support activities.¹ The State Department uses diplomacy and economic incentives to support democratization, while it also has government-to-government grant projects. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) integrates elements related to support for democratization into its overall aid strategies and programs, linking economic development to political progress in strengthening democratic institutions. It places priority on transparency, anti-corruption measures, governance, and the protection of human rights, as being essential for a "journey to self-reliance."

3. NGOs Operating with US Government Funding

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its associated organizations—National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center), and Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)—are nonprofit organizations that have independent boards and manage their own projects. While their operations are largely funded by the

1. Activities that receive these funds include programs run by the State Department, USAID, and NED.

DELEGATION MEMBERS

JAPANESE DIET MEMBERS

Hon. Toshiko Abe, Member, House of Representatives (Liberal Democratic Party–LDP)

Hon. Shu Sakurai, Member, House of Representatives (Constitutional Democratic Party)

Hon. Hiromi Takase, Member, House of Councillors (Komeito)

Hon. Keisuke Tsumura, Member, House of Representatives (Democratic Party for the People)

Hon. Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi, Member, House of Representatives (LDP)

STUDY TEAM MEMBERS

Dr. Takako Hikotani, Professor, Columbia University

Dr. Maiko Ichihara, Associate Professor, Hitotsubashi University

Dr. Kaori Shoji, Professor in American Politics, Gakushuin University Faculty of Law

Amb. Yukio Takasu, Special Advisor on Human Security to the UN Secretary General; former UN Under-Secretary General for Management; former Japanese Ambassador to the United Nations

JCIE STAFF

Mr. James Gannon, Executive Director, JCIE/USA

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Mr. Stephen McHugh, Assistant Program Officer, JCIE/USA

US government, they also receive grants from foreign governments and private foundations and they undertake various democracy support projects worldwide, including projects designed to protect minority populations, nurture civil society (e.g., independent media), and build international networks.

4. Other Independent NGOs

Other American democracy support NGOs, such as Freedom House, operate with a range of funding, including grants from US government agencies, foreign governments, and private foundation grants, as well as corporate and individual donations. In addition to carrying out direct programming around the world, many are also engaged in advocacy and research activities, including the development of democracy-related

indexes and analyses (e.g., Freedom House's Freedom in the World report).

There is no overarching system that coordinates these actors, but there is a level of coordination thanks to meetings among organizations and information sharing at the field level.

KEY FINDINGS

Legislators Have a Critical Role to Play in Democracy Support

The meetings in DC deepened the understanding among participants of the important role that the Congress and Congressional members play in the field of democracy support in the United States. In addition to appropriating the government's budget for democracy-related activities, Congressional members are engaged in direct support projects on a bipartisan basis through parliamentary exchanges designed to share experiences and support capacity building for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in countries in transition. They play a central role in leading and sustaining US democracy support.

The Diversity of Actors in the Field Is a Source of US Strength

In the United States, a wide range of institutions, organizations, and individuals are involved in activities related to support for democratization, and that diversity is considered one of the country's strengths in the field. Reflecting the diversity of actors, a wide range of activities is also taking place. In addition to direct measures, such as dispatching election observation missions, the activities considered within the framework of democratization support include civic education, human resource development, technical support for administrative functions, and women's empowerment.

Even US Democracy Support Tends to Defer to Host Governments

Those involved in democratization support repeatedly stressed that their assistance is not about imposing the American style of democracy or political system on others. To be effective, the principle should be to undertake projects with the intention of extending support where it is requested and sharing experiences, including

mistakes. While some programs provide direct support to civil society organizations or media outlets that may be working in opposition to the government, the vast majority of projects are undertaken with the understanding of host country governments, and often at their request.

There Are Strong Hopes for Japan to Be More Active in Supporting Democratization

The consistent message from those with whom the delegation met—regardless of whether they were government officials, politicians, or experts from NGOs or think tanks—was a strong hope that Japan would expand its work in the field. US government officials expressed their hope for greater US-Japan coordination and cooperation in affirming universal values—including the rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance—as a core element of the Open and Free Indo-Pacific Vision, alongside the economic development and security that the vision also entails.

US leaders also pointed out that Japan is seen by many in Asia as a model since it is the region's most established and stable democracy, and that there is a growing trust in and hope for the Japanese approach to international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, which respects the ownership and priorities of recipient countries and supports those countries' efforts at self-help. Think tank experts also noted that there is a greater appreciation for Japan's leadership in Asia in recent years, including for its role in championing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the US withdrawal.

While there are growing expectations of Japan, Congressional members pointed out during their meeting with the delegation that Japan's presence often seems to be lacking in international democracy forums as well as on the ground. They expressed their hope to strengthen coordination and to expand political exchange on this issue between Japan and the United States. While most of the US participants in the meetings stressed that Japan will have to formulate its own approach, they expressed their hope that Japan will expand its contributions in a wide range of areas leading to democratization. Some examples discussed included technical support for parliamentary operations and government administration, women's empowerment, media support, and the development of cyber-security technology. Some also

suggested that Japan consider establishing an institution specializing in the support of democratization.

There Is Debate Over What Japanese-Style “Democratization Support” Would Entail

During the program, two key questions were discussed: What is the significance for Japan of its efforts to protect democracy around the world? And how can the government and politicians gain the understanding of the Japanese people for expanded support for democratization efforts?

There is some hesitancy to discuss “democracy promotion” in Japan, as seen in foreign policy documents—for example, the Development Cooperation Charter uses the term “support for democratization” instead. However, while Japan has not been directly engaged in explicit efforts to promote democracy, it has supported the building of democratic institutions with an assumption that “high quality and inclusive growth” can only be achieved when human rights are respected, people can engage in economic activities without fear, social foundations are operated fairly, and the rule of law is respected. It has provided support to developing countries for election administration, the development of judicial systems, law enforcement training, anti-corruption initiatives, financial management training, administrative capacity building (including human resource development), women’s empowerment, and efforts to strengthen independent journalism at the request of the recipient governments. (It should also be noted, though, that the average share of Japan’s ODA for government and civil society support over the past 10 years remained at only 2.1 percent, which is still considerably lower than other DAC countries, and most of Japan’s support went to recipient countries’ governments.)

Given that democracies where human rights and freedom of speech are protected are less likely to go to war, support for democratization should be viewed as part of the country’s international cooperation for peace. Furthermore, expanding support for democratization can make a crucial contribution to achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 16, which calls for the promotion of “just, peaceful and inclusive societies.”

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

Reaffirming and Elucidating Japan’s Support for Democratization Support

Japan came to enjoy peace and prosperity following World War II thanks largely to its embrace of democratic principles, such as a free and open economic and trade system, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region and strengthening democratization support will be essential for Japan if it wishes to continue to enjoy peace and prosperity. At the same time, Japan’s foreign policy and ODA approaches have differed from that of the United States and other developed countries in important ways. While learning from the experiences of other countries, Japan needs to think more deeply about which institutional structures, approaches, and priority areas are best suited for a distinctly Japanese form of democratization support—one that is based on its own unique historical experience, institutions and norms, past practices, and geopolitical considerations.

Reevaluating Japan’s Past Approaches and Reflecting in Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation

In order to better equip Japan to effectively support the strengthening of democratic institutions, it is important to undertake an evaluation of the efficacy and impact of the activities in the field that Japan is already undertaking. In light of the challenges to democracy around the world as well as the importance of achieving SDG 16, Japan should consider how to give greater priority to activities connected to support for democratization in the future revision of its National Security Strategy, Development Cooperation Charter, and the JICA Mid-Term Plan.

Strengthening Parliamentary Exchanges

As leaders in an established Asian democracy, Japanese Diet members have much experience that they can share with parliamentarians and others in emerging democracies, especially considering the important role that the Diet and its members play in sustaining Japan’s support for democratic institution building. They can share their expertise and can strengthen coordination with parliamentarians from other countries through parliamentary

exchanges, participating in international site visits and workshops, and inviting parliamentarians from other Asian countries to visit Japan. (Ideally, such delegations would reflect gender balance, with at least one third of the delegates being women parliamentarians.)

Providing Greater Support for Civil Society Activities

It will be helpful for Japan to become more engaged in civil society dialogues and networks with other Asian countries as one step to strengthen its support for democratization efforts. Also, Japan’s traditional approach of providing ODA only at the request of recipient governments can be problematic when it comes to support for democratization, even though it generally has many benefits as well. Therefore, it is worthwhile



examining ways to expand grantmaking to Japanese and non-Japanese civil society organizations engaged in activities related to democratization.

JCIE was able to carry out this program thanks to the generous support of the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnyslans, the MRA House, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Yoshio Okawara Memorial Fund for US-Japan Relations, as well as JCIE’s many corporate and individual supporters.

KEY MEETINGS

US Congress

- Bill Flores, Member, House of Representatives (R-TX)
- Robin Kelly, Member, House of Representatives (D-IL)
- David Price, Member, Member, House of Representatives (D-NC); Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development; Co-chair, House Democracy Partnership
- Adrian Smith, Member, Member, House of Representatives (R-NE); Co-chair, US-Japan Congressional Caucus
- Norma Torres, Member, House of Representatives (D-CA)
- Raul Ruiz, Member, House of Representatives (D-CA)
- Cory Gardner, Member, US Senate (R-CO); Chairman, US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity

US Government

- US Department of State
- USAID

Think Tanks and NGOs

- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Brookings Institution
- Center for Strategic & International Studies
- Council on Foreign Relations
- Annenberg Family Trust at Sunnyslans
- National Endowment for Democracy
- National Democratic Institute
- International Republican Institute
- Freedom House